Focus on Asia
Delhi Symposium on Reforms in Higher Education—
with particular reference to distance education

Highlights

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Heads of University Grants Commissions and higher-education funding and policy bodies from around the Commonwealth were brought together for the first time by The Commonwealth of Learning. They met in Delhi, India from August 17 to 21 to discuss reforms in higher education. The symposium, sponsored and hosted jointly by The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the University Grants Commission of India, provided participants from various Commonwealth countries an opportunity to discuss the feasibility of integrating distance education techniques more fully in the programmes offered by universities and how, in the process, resources can be shared. Ten case studies, commissioned by COL, were examined.
Agreement Reached on Cooperation in Higher Education in Asia

A key side-benefit of the New Delhi symposium was the opportunity it provided COL, and its President, to engender closer cooperation among higher education institutions in Asia. Under the aegis of COL, the chairs of the University Grants Commissions of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka met for the first time, together with Prof. Maraj, and pledged themselves to intensifying and expanding cooperation, supported the call for closer integration between the conventional universities and institutions offering distance learning programmes, and agreed to facilitate the exchange of learning materials and promote the movement of academics and practitioners among their countries leading to joint projects intended to result in strengthening institutional capacity. Specialised training, research and continuing professional education activities were highlighted as areas of initial focus.

COL will support these initiatives which will build on programmes that are currently in place under the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) umbrella and will include the region’s smaller states, where the development of higher education is still at an incipient stage.

The four UGC chairs – Prof. M. Shamshul Huq (Bangladesh), Prof. G. Ram Reddy (India), Prof. G.J. Pareshan Khattak (Pakistan), and Prof. A.P.R. Aluwihare (Sri Lanka) – publicly commended the efforts of The Commonwealth of Learning for its work in the region. They declared that such a meeting and its encouraging outcomes – and the symposium itself – would not have been possible without the leadership of COL and its President.

SYMPOSIUM SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Participants at the Delhi symposium agreed on the following:

1. The use of distance education offers significant potential in higher education, especially in addressing concerns for increasing access and improving quality.
2. While there are resource constraints, the implementation of distance education methods can be cost effective and productive over time, providing that initial investments are well conceived and employed and resources are shared among institutions.
3. A “systems approach” should be adopted, in that all aspects of higher-education and higher-education institutions need to be considered in the furthering of the application of distance education.
4. There is a strong case for the complete integration of distance education methods throughout higher education, providing the flexibility and adaptability that will enable institutions to address many of the problems that they currently face.

There is a strong case for the complete integration of distance education methods throughout higher education...
5. There is a need for better informed politicians, bureaucrats, academicians, and members of the public as to the potential for distance education. The management and administration of distance education systems needs more training and improvement. International cooperation is key.

6. Continuing professional education, women’s programmes, and other specific areas also need support.

7. There is a need for further research in all aspects of distance education, including that of the application of technology.

8. Participants also agreed on a general framework for the development and management of distance education programmes within the context of a dual-mode higher education institution.

PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

Meeting participants and the President of The Commonwealth of Learning also agreed on the following proposals for action:

1. COL will provide tools for participants and higher-education systems in Commonwealth member countries. These include acting as a catalyst for change, advocacy, research, information, assisting in the transfer of materials and expertise, the development of Commonwealth-wide standards for accreditation and credit transfer, and an expanding bursary scheme for distance education students throughout the Commonwealth.

2. COL will work through Commonwealth educational institutions and other international organisations, such as the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) and the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE), to strengthen the capacity for distance education by applying methods that are specifically tailored for individual needs. (The Chairman of ACU and the President-elect of ICDE were present at the Symposium.)

3. COL will develop detailed guidelines that could be used by Commonwealth institutions to provide a starting point for increased integration of distance education methods. In addition, COL will provide the services of an international team of experts for any institution that would like assistance in the integration of distance education. The University of Guyana is the first Commonwealth institution to avail itself of this service.

4. Symposium participants are committed to the advancement of a movement to include distance education techniques as a prominent feature in the provision of higher education and, as individuals with considerable influence, will undertake efforts toward this goal in their home countries.

5. COL expects to designate India’s Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) as its first Centre of Excellence for the training of Commonwealth distance educators.

6. COL has and will support regional cooperation. The Symposium provided an opportunity for the chairs of the University Grants Commissions of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to meet and, under the aegis of The Commonwealth of Learning, pledged themselves to intensifying and expanding cooperation among the higher education institutions in the region.

A complete report of the Delhi Symposium on Reforms in Higher Education — with particular reference to distance education, which includes copies of the commissioned case studies, is available by request from The Commonwealth of Learning. Nominal charges may apply.

Bangladesh Open University Launched

Bangladesh, the second most populous country in the Commonwealth, has now established an open university. Although the university has been in operation from early this year, the Bangladesh Open University (BOU) formally came into existence in October with the passing by Parliament of the bill to establish it. COL welcomes this new member to the distance education fraternity.

Last year, in cooperation with the Asian Development Bank, COL provided the services of then Vice President, Prof. G. Ram Reddy (formerly Vice Chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University and now Chairman of India’s University Grants Commission) as team leader for the feasibility study on the establishment of the open university.

The University is itself the logical culmination of the growing recognition all over the globe, and especially in the Third World, of distance education as an alternative delivery mode. Apart from the increasing demand for higher education, it was the challenge of access to primary and secondary education (in a country with a literacy rate around 30 percent) that stimulated Bangladesh to establish its Institute of Distance Education. The Institute has catered to the needs of primary
and secondary schools and incorporates radio and television broadcasting as an integral part of its distance education programmes. The addition later of a degree course in education provided the impetus toward establishing an open university with a more comprehensive range of educational programmes. Because of its continuing commitment to education at primary and secondary levels, the BOU is unique in addressing the needs of the entire spectrum of education — including teacher education. Non-formal educational programmes will include agricultural extension, community health, and nursing. Programmes targeted at socially disadvantaged groups, such as rural youth and women, also receive high priority in the university's plans.

In recognition of the importance of the non-formal segment and aware of the range of opportunities that new educational technologies offer, BOU plans to acquire state-of-the-art electronic communications capability. It has been assured time (one half hour per day) on the national television service — a significant achievement indeed, given the financial constraints that usually beset such services in a developing country.

The newly appointed BOU Vice Chancellor, Professor Shamsher Ali (a nuclear physicist by training) visited COL’s Vancouver headquarters in October during a COL-sponsored study tour of Canadian institutions. Prof. Ali had extensive discussions with Prof. James Maraj, President of COL, other members of COL’s professional staff, and offices of Alberta’s Athabasca University, British Columbia’s Open Learning Agency, and Simon Fraser University. Prof. Maraj assured this latest member of the COL community of the organisation’s ongoing support and advice. Coincidentally, Professor V.C. Kuldalal Swamy, Vice Chancellor of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (India) was in Canada at the same time and the two Vice Chancellors had an opportunity to confer on several occasions.

**COL in Brunei**

The Government of Brunei Darussalam and the COL/Brunei Centre for Professional and Continuing Education hosted the seventh meeting of COL’s Board of Governors in Bandar Seri Begawan from November 16 – 18, 1992.

The Centre’s new video-teleconferencing facility was also launched at this time with a demonstration for the Board.

COL and Brunei’s Ministry of Education established the Centre for Professional and Continuing Education in February 1991 with the appointment of Senior Programme Officer, Mr. John Tayless, former Director of Programmes at North Island College (British Columbia, Canada). The College has been a pioneer in the development of a network approach to the delivery of its distance education programmes, providing a large number of local access learning centres for the dispersed population of coastal British Columbia. It is this same approach which has guided COL’s development of its Centre in Brunei as an anchor for activities throughout the region.

The video-teleconferencing facility in Brunei further equips the Centre for Professional and Continuing Education to serve the varying needs of Brunei and the surrounding Southeast Asia region.

The evolution of the COL/Brunei Centre and its programmes of study will provide a model for the development of local area delivery systems, and related student support methods, in other regions.

"Prof. Maraj assured this latest member of the COL community of the organisation’s ongoing support and advice."

**New COL Director of Asian Programmes and Training**

Professor R.V.R. Chandrasekhar Rao, MA (Benares), PhD (London) commenced duties as COL’s Director of Asian Programmes and Training on October 1, 1992. Prof. Rao comes to COL after three years as Vice Chancellor of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (formerly Andhra Pradesh Open University, Hyderabad), India’s first open university. A political scientist and lawyer, Prof. Rao has specialised in the areas of comparative government, constitutional law, and international relations. For three decades he has taught and conducted research at Andhra University (Vizianagaram, India) and the Indian Institute of Public Administration (Hyderabad, India). He has been a visiting professor at the University of Wisconsin (Madison, USA) and Illinois University (Urbana, USA), and has lectured internationally.

Prof. Rao was a consultant in distance education to the Andhra Pradesh Open University from its inception and, along with Mr. William Renwick and Dr. Doug Shale, acted on COL’s behalf in carrying out a comprehensive appraisal of Distance Education at the University of the West Indies. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the Asian Association of Open Universities and a Committee on Distance Education constituted by the Central Advisory Board of Education (Government of India).
Strengthening COL’s ties with India

While in India in August, the President of COL, Professor James Maraj, and other COL officials, strengthened COL’s ties with India through meetings and project planning with key people within India’s Government and various educational institutions and systems. A private meeting with Prime Minister Narasimha Rao was most encouraging.

Distance Education in India: a monograph by A. Singh

Now available from The Commonwealth of Learning: Perspectives on Distance Education: Distance Education in India by Abhimanyu Singh, Director, Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, India; published by The Commonwealth of Learning in 1992. Nominal charges may apply.

The monograph has two sections. The first section traces the major developments in distance education in India at the school and the tertiary levels during the last 27 years and the recent establishment of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) as the apex body for promotion and coordination of distance education. The strengths and weaknesses of the correspondence programmes as well as the open university system are discussed and the problems being faced in the implementation of distance education in India have been highlighted.

The second section examines the scope for further expansion of distance education, both formal and non-formal, in the areas of technical/vocational training, health sciences, rural development, women’s programmes, and teacher education. Government policies and plans are also considered. The concluding part of the section outlines the efforts being made by agencies such as The Commonwealth of Learning, the Asian Development Bank, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and the Asian Association of Open Universities toward regional cooperation in distance education. Areas in which India can make a contribution in terms of expertise, resources, and facilities, have also been identified.

COL and ICDE

COL was active at the 16th World Conference of the International Council for Distance Education, which was held at Sukhthai Thammathirat Open University (Thailand) from November 8-13, 1992, and has now entered into a partnership with ICDE to organise and conduct a series of research projects relating to distance education.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed at the conference by recently elected ICDE President, Ms. Marian Croft, and the President of COL, Prof. James A. Maraj. Specific research proposals are being developed and coordinated by Dr. Ian Mugridge who has responsibility for research within ICDE’s executive. Dr. Mugridge is attached to COL on a part-time basis. Ms. Croft is Director of the Centre for Continuing Education at Laurentian University (Ontario, Canada) and Dr. Mugridge is Principal of the Open University (British Columbia, Canada).

An ICDE Conference “Crackerbarrel” session was organised and sponsored by The Commonwealth of Learning. The themes for the session were:

- Distance education in the developing world
- Research and development
- Development of distance education materials
- Applications of technology
- Planning for the future

Also, during the Thailand Conference, COL held a reception hosted by Mr. Don Hamilton, Vice Chairman of COL’s Board of Governors, and Professor James A. Maraj, President and Chief Executive Officer of COL. The occasion provided an opportunity for Commonwealth distance educators to meet and to be provided with an update on The Commonwealth of Learning’s various activities.

Taking advantage of experts gathered at the ICDE Conference, COL recorded interviews and discussions on specific topics, including:

- Educational reform with particular reference to distance education
- Applications of communications technology in distance education
- Teaching of science, maths and technology through distance education
- Increasing educational opportunities for women: the role of distance education
- Priorities in research and evaluation in distance education

The recorded material will be used to develop broadcast-quality videos for a variety of uses in distance education throughout the world.

The Commonwealth of Learning also co-sponsored a Pre-ICDE Workshop with the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong. The Workshop, Personal Interaction in Distance Education, was held in Hong Kong from November 8-9, 1992.
WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

Statistics and Indicators on Women in the South Pacific

Training Workshop —
Statistics and Indicators on Women in the Pacific Islands

Pre-Workshop Resources

BACKGROUND

Statistics are both an essential ingredient of planning and a basic tool for monitoring programmes and evaluating policies. However, it is difficult to obtain accurate data and other relevant information on some social phenomena about certain segments of national populations, particularly women. This concern was recognised by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their 1991 Meeting in Harare when, in reaffirming the Commonwealth Programme of Action on Women and Structural Adjustment, they recommended that “member governments provide training on gender issues to senior policy makers and planners, and to make the development planning process sensitive to gender considerations.”

This has become necessary because producers of national statistics have approached data collection and analysis in a very broad and general manner. Data collection processes do not, for example, reflect the striking differences in sex roles and divisions of labour within the family and society at large. Users of statistics on women, in general, lack the ability to make the best use and derive the maximum benefit from the available data. Full utilisation of data requires training to distinguish between poor and good quality data, to select the most appropriate analytical tools and methods of constructing economic and social indicators, and to interpret results accurately. As one avenue of achieving this, the Commonwealth Programme of Action endorses disaggregation by sex of national statistics, covering a full range of specific economic and social indicators, and recognition of both formal and informal “employment.”

TRAINING WORKSHOP

COL was approached by the Director of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), Ms. Margaret Shields, a former New Zealand Minister of Women’s Affairs, regarding collaboration in a South Pacific training workshop to sensitise both users and producers on the issues and problems relating to statistics on women. The training workshop is intended to generate awareness among statisticians to produce data that more accurately describe socio-economic differentials. In turn, this should increase the sensitivity of planners to adopt policies to the general benefit of segments of the population and encourage greater involvement of users of statistics in the process of data compilation.

Since this approach has been strongly advocated by Commonwealth leaders, COL expressed its keen interest in participating in the undertaking. This involvement fits within COL’s Continuing Professional Education mandate which is, in part, concerned with the development of suitable stand alone training packages that utilise effective instructional design procedures. Discussions were held in May 1992, at the Wellington offices of the New Zealand Ministry of Women’s Affairs, to agree on the specific contributions to be made by COL to the collaborative effort. Taking part in these discussions were representatives of the Ministries of Women’s Affairs, Statistics, External Relations and Trade; INSTRAW; COL; and the New Zealand Open Polytechnic. The Government of the Cook Islands agreed to host the training workshop in early December 1992.
A UNIQUE APPROACH

An agreement was reached on the cooperative approach to be implemented that is not only unique in its governmental, institutional, and international agency linkages, but can also serve as an excellent prototype to be applied elsewhere. With support from COL, the New Zealand Open Polytechnic worked in conjunction with INTRAW and the Ministries of Women’s Affairs and Statistics to develop a participant-centred, learning resource package, designed for completion by participants prior to the workshop. The resource package should enable participants to contribute to and benefit from the workshop more fully.

The Commonwealth of Learning is co-sponsoring this undertaking along with INTRAW, the Governments of New Zealand and Australia, and the European Parliament. The multidimensional approach to this workshop – a distance education base used in conjunction with a regional workshop organised by a UN agency with intergovernmental and interinstitutional collaboration – provides a model that can be adapted and applied elsewhere in the Commonwealth and beyond.

USING THE WORKSHOP RESOURCE PACKAGE

Both producers and users of statistics from the Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, American and Western Samoa have been supplied with copies of the resource package. Its overall aim is to enable participants to best utilise information resources, enhancing their understanding of gender-specific statistics.

By working through the pre-workshop package, participants will be able to ascertain what information needs are critical to programme issues or their country’s policies, identify currently available information and key indicators, present data in an accessible form, and detect gaps between what is needed and what is available. Preliminary action plans for bridging information gaps will be developed in conjunction with implementation and monitoring skills. In addition, findings, conclusions and proposals will be shared with other workshop participants.

With the help of the package, users and statisticians from each country will work together to prepare a case study that identifies information available from existing statistical collections, develops key indicators, and presents data in a comprehensible form while assessing the adequacy of existing data to resolve the issues raised. The case studies will be examined at the workshop, finalised afterwards, and then made available for distribution. Altogether, the training process will extend over a period of eight months.

OUTCOME

As a result of participating in this continuing education programme, it is intended that users and producers of statistics will be sensitized, not only to the situation of women compared to that of men in the South Pacific region, but also to the necessity for collecting and compiling statistics and indicators on women in development. It is further intended that they will be able to identify and collect the most important regional statistics and indicators and present them in a user-friendly way.

Participants will then be in a position to suggest ways of improving content, concepts, methods, classification and presentation of gender-specific statistics and of improving cooperation between users and producers.

New Patterns in Education

In Australia, 40,000 students will not be able to gain admission to universities this year, while in Pakistan, the Allama Iqbal Open University has an enrollment of 128,000 students who are studying by distance – more than the number of students attending all of Pakistan’s traditional universities.

Education is one of the main instruments to develop the capabilities of nations and to harness them for their economic and social progress. Throughout history it has provided the framework and the foundations for human advancement by creating value systems, developing knowledge and building skills to enable citizens to become responsible, productive and creative members of society.

In recent times the soaring demand for education makes it impossible to satisfy the needs of people solely through traditional means which require full-time attendance at centralized locations that are costly to build and sustain. The growing shortage of university places coupled with the financial barriers created by many countries to the entry of overseas students have added to this problem.

Human experience and ingenuity have devised ways to meet this new situation, notably through distance education programmes. New patterns in education are emerging. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is one of its manifestations.

COL’s programmes and activities are carried out in collaboration with governments, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations. Its President and Chief Executive Officer is Professor James A. Maraj of Trinidad, a distinguished educator and diplomat. He is supported by a staff from over ten Commonwealth countries. COL is unique in that three developing countries – Brunei, Nigeria and India – are among its major financial contributors, the others being Canada, the Province of British Columbia, Australia and Britain. Of the Commonwealth’s fifty member countries twenty-eight contribute financially to its support.

The main thrusts of COL programming are staff training in the techniques and management of distance education, the acquisition and delivery of teaching materials and facilitating access to them, building institutional capability and establishing the communications infrastructure for distance education.

COL ACTIVITIES

COL’s activities are as varied as they are innovative. In Guyana, COL is enabling the Ministry of Education and the University of Guyana to develop jointly a distance education program for upgrading school leavers and unqualified teachers to university or college entrance standard. It is also setting up an audio teleconferencing system to enable students in the region to communicate with tutors in the capital. A similar teleconferencing system is being developed in the Solomon Islands. In Nigeria the National Teachers’ Institute (NTI), with COL’s help, is developing the first regional educational satellite network in Africa.

COL assists Commonwealth institutions to acquire and develop distance education materials and facilitates access to them. Through COL, 100 courses from Laurentian University were made available to the...
University of Mauritius while the Correspondence College of New Zealand provided 40 courses to the University of Papua New Guinea. Materials from the University of Nairobi (Kenya) were made available to Makerere University (Uganda); Nigeria’s National Teachers’ Institute courses are being used in Guyana and The Gambia; accounting materials from the Chartered Association of Certified Accountants in Britain are being used in Uganda; and materials from the Indira Gandhi National Open University (India) have been made available to several Commonwealth countries. Most recently COL has acquired the licences which will enable institutions in developing countries to reproduce and use 17 first year university courses in Science, Mathematics and Business from the Open Learning Agency in B.C. and two computer courses from the University of Victoria.

In India a mobile training unit as a precursor to a staff college for distance educators is being established for those using distance education to train middle level and senior public servants – all under COL sponsorship. COL has placed a staff member in Brunei Darussalam to help in setting up a professional centre and has enabled the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College in St. Lucia to establish an outreach programme with professional help from North Island College in B.C.

COL places women in development among its priorities. It aims to improve the status of women by widening their access to education. Priority is being given to education for groups such as those who must acquire skills to support families and to those who wish to re-enter the work force. A Directory of Women’s Studies in India was published jointly with the Association of Indian Universities.

In the environmental sector COL has responded to the need for materials by commissioning and programming, in collaboration with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the production of a video on sustainable development, and by cooperating with UNESCO in the production of multi media learning materials in environmental engineering at the post graduate level. The video highlights ways in which individuals and governments can contribute to environmental protection and draws on examples of innovative practices in Commonwealth countries. COL is also conducting a survey of public attitudes to the environment in India, Jamaica and Malaysia to guide it in its future planning of public education programmes on environmental issues.

An innovative initiative in which COL is engaged is in a Fellowships Programme financed by the Government of British Columbia. Each year, COL’s Fellowships Programme enables ten educators from developing countries to study the educational institutions involved in distance education in B.C. and to exchange knowledge and experience with their B.C. colleagues. A similar number of B.C. educators are enabled to gain experience in international education overseas and to establish or strengthen linkages with their counterparts in developing countries. A similar programme on a smaller scale was organised between the Province of Ontario and the Caribbean. It enabled ten educators from nine Caribbean countries to spend three weeks studying in Ontario institutions that offer distance education programmes.

COL AND THE CANADIAN BUREAU FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

These examples of initiatives in education provided the setting for a panel discussion on “New Patterns in Education” which COL organised at the Annual Conference of the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), held from October 15-17 in Saskatoon, Canada. The panel consisted of Professor V.C. Kulandai Swamy, President and Vice-Chancellor of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (New Delhi, India); Prof. Peter Kinyanjui, former Principal of the College of Education and External Studies at the University of Nairobi in Kenya and now attached to COL’s Africa Division; and Mr. John Quigley, Assistant Deputy Minister (Policy Management), Department of Communications (Canada) and Former Director of COL’s Telecommunications & Technologies Division. The panel was chaired by Mr. Art Wright, Vice President, Multilateral Programmes, Canadian International Development Agency.

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Staff members of The Commonwealth of Learning covering Fellows from various Commonwealth countries on a Saturday morning mountain bike trip in Vancouver.