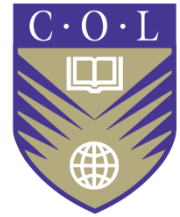


Life After the World OER Congress?



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Madam President, Hon'ble Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

As we come to the close of the 2012 World OER Congress, the next question is: where do we go from here? The adoption of the Paris Declaration is an important outcome of this Congress as Member States move from action to commitment

What role can the international organisations play to support this process? Let me outline five directions that have emerged from our discussions over the past two days.

First, when the term OER was coined here at UNESCO in 2002, the primary focus was on higher education. In the ten years that have since lapsed, the world has changed radically. There is a greater global participation in primary education, which has inevitably led to a surge in secondary schools and to a greater need for skills development. As more governments address the issue of providing secondary education for all, and skills training at scale, any discussion of OER must include these sectors as well.

This requires paying attention to OER generation that takes into account local needs, languages and cultural contexts. International organisations will need to renew their efforts to strengthen the capacity of teachers and technology developers.

Second, OER in the last decade has emerged as both a bottom-up movement premised on volunteerism, as well as a set of processes planned and directed from the top-down. This combination is unusual in international development and the future of the OER movement lies in paying concurrent attention to both these approaches that are evident globally. For example, the large scale production of published OER's in the Asian region have received sustained Government support whereas in most of the OECD countries, OER development has generally proceeded locally, at the institutional and individual levels. Future advocacy therefore will have to clearly align itself to the needs of these two complimentary approaches.

Third, recent surveys in some of the Asian countries revealed that access to the Internet for using OER is no longer a serious issue among institutions in the Higher Education sector. This is a welcome

development. The resources of the international community can be harnessed to build to capacity in the adaptation and re-use of OER rather than in building ICT support structures. However, when it comes to the primary and secondary levels, bridging the digital divide in this sector needs careful attention. One of the most popular technology platforms in the developing world today is the mobile phone. Linking the issues of access and re-use of OER with the increased availability of affordable cell telephony would be one way forward. New and sustainable alliances between different stakeholders, especially the telecom industry and OER champion institutions will be necessary.

Fourth, research on OER will be critical to the sustainability of the OER movement. Currently, such research is done in isolated pockets and will need to be scaled up to generate the evidence needed. Current availability of software tools to search for, locate and retrieve OER is a limiting factor in the wider use of OER. There is a need to foster innovation and adaptive research in this area. An alliance of international development organizations can make such global research more effective in terms of delivering value for money.

Policy makers need to know how OER adaptation brings the costs down in the delivery of learning services to a much larger constituency. There are several models available already, but research is needed to demonstrate clearly the options available.

Fifth, open licensing as an approach to foster the spread of global public goods is here to stay. Extending copyrights for wider use without compromising the moral and intellectual rights of the creators is a sensitive task that has to be relevant to specific contexts. Creative Commons appears to be the most significant licensing framework but licensing options can vary in different countries, and international development organizations can forge partnerships to develop workable solutions for the OER community.

The discussions at the Regional Policy Forums have tended to position Open Licensing as an extension of author ownership of intellectual property rather than antithetical to it. This is an important development for policy makers who can be assured that the public ownership of OER will in no way diminish the individual's rights.

Finally and more specifically what will the Commonwealth of Learning do next? COL will continue its partnership with UNESCO and other like-minded organisations to focus on three areas: one, advocacy and awareness generation regarding the benefits and availability of OER; two, policy development on OER at the national and institutional levels and three, capacity building so that more governments, institutions and individuals are able to effectively harness the potential of OER.

And on that optimistic note let me thank you for your kind attention.