

Connections



Open and Distance Learning for Development



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VUSSC MOVES AHEAD WITH COURSE DEVELOPMENT

COL and the Commonwealth's small states have agreed on the education and training needs that need to be addressed by the proposed Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). The next step is to begin planning for course development to meet these needs. To facilitate this process, COL and the Government of Singapore hosted an orientation and planning meeting in Singapore in September with the representatives from the Ministries of Education in the 21 small states of the Commonwealth.

The Singapore meeting focused on four objectives:

- Introduce the small states' contact people to eLearning, its application to post secondary education and training, and the use of Reusable Learning Objects for course creation and development,
- Provide participants with hands-on experience using Learning Objects to construct components of a course,
- Develop plans for constructing courses that are needed by small states and that can be delivered by national/regional institutions, and.
- Identify the roles of the VUSSC, individual countries and COL in executing these activities and sign a Letter of Intent in this regard.

In his keynote speech at the Singapore meeting, the President of COL, Sir John Daniel, shared his vision for the VUSSC.

"I suggest that it will be a network rather than an institution – a network with multiple nodes of activity," Sir John told representatives from the small states. "We are not trying to create a new institution with its own brand name but to find ways to reinforce the institutions and the developments that are already taking place in your countries."

The 25 participants at the VUSSC meeting agreed to form a consortium to develop capacity, develop and share learning content and courses, and work toward establishing a standards and credit transfer mechanism.



VUSSC MEETING DELEGATES IN SINGAPORE

PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM TO FOCUS ON DEVELOPMENT GOALS

COL's fourth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, to be held in Jamaica next year, will focus on "Achieving Development Goals: Innovation, Learning, Collaboration and Foundations".

The biennial conference, taking place from 30 October to 3 November 2006 in Ocho Rios, will bring together COL's partners and stakeholders from governments and institutions around the Commonwealth to set an agenda for using open and distance learning to advance international development and to examine how new developments in connecting technology to teaching and learning can help the world's poor.

The Forum is being organised by COL and University of the West Indies' Distance Education Centre (UWIDEC) in co-operation with local partners including the Caribbean Association for Distance and Open Learning; the Jamaican Association for Distance and Open Learning; the Trinidad & Tobago Distance Learning Association and the Office of Continuing Education and Distance Learning at the University of Technology, Jamaica.

Further programme details, a call for papers and registration information will soon be available at www.col.org/pcf4



DO MORE TO ACHIEVE MDGs, NATIONS URGED

The limited success in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) five years after the Millennium Declaration should shock into action nations that can do more to bring about greater progress, said Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon to the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the 60th United Nations General Assembly in New York in September.

“Those with the means must be more committed and more generous to those in the statistical spotlight,” he stated in a speech delivered on his behalf by the Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General Florence Mugasha.

The Secretary-General applauded the initiatives of G8 states who pledged increased aid and debt cancellation for low-income countries during their summit meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland in July this year.

“This is the sort of concrete action required. It was of a level of ambition and scale that needs to be repeated again and again until the MDGs are securely and sustainably achieved,” he said. “We need to go beyond the target of halving income poverty and reach the Goal – the total eradication of extreme poverty and hunger – and to ensure that the funds made available are spent with wisdom, responsibility, accountability and effectiveness.”

Mr. McKinnon said the Commonwealth not only has an interest in achieving the MDGs but also a responsibility to do so. He noted with concern that only 11 of the Commonwealth’s 53 member countries have recorded significant progress on the MDGs, with 31 countries making slow progress while some are going backwards. The Secretary-General stressed that the Commonwealth will have to redouble its efforts to achieve the MDGs.

NEW TRAINING FOR SENIOR ODL MANAGERS

The U.K. Open University (UKOU), in collaboration with COL, is developing a programme for senior managers implementing open and distance learning (ODL). Senior staff from the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), the ACIPOL Police Academy in Mozambique and one other African institution are being invited to attend the programme at the UKOU.

In addition to learning about the critical functions of ODL, participants will be able to see firsthand how the UKOU functions. An additional benefit is that this core group of staff will have the opportunity to discuss ODL for their institution off-site, away from day-to-day issues. Through this programme, COL and the UKOU are working to share best practices and build a community of practice for ODL.

UKOU GETS HIGHEST GRADES

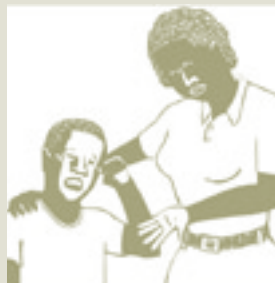


Students at the U.K. Open University (UKOU) have the highest rates of satisfaction, according to a recent survey by the Higher Education Funding Council for England of 170,000 final year students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Overall satisfaction ranges from 4.5 (on a scale of 1 to 5) at the Open University down to 3.5 at the University of the Arts London. UKOU students also rated their institution highest for teaching quality at 4.3. The UKOU is one of the world’s largest universities, with 150,000 undergraduate and 30,000 post-graduate students – nearly all are studying part-time. It is the United Kingdom’s only university dedicated to distance learning.

www.hefce.ac.uk

SUPPORTING VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN AFRICA

COL recently released a learning series for caregivers of orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) in Africa. The first draft module, developed by a pan-Africa group of writers in 2004, helps caregivers improve their knowledge and skills in the area of counselling. COL provided instructional design expertise during the writing process, oversaw the editing and desktop publishing of the materials and has now sent it to pilot sites in Zambia. The goal is to provide the materials to publicly funded institutions working with OVCs, such as day-care centres, orphanages and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) after the pilot phase.



AFRICA: EXPLORING

COL President Sir John Daniel recently completed a three-week trip to eight Commonwealth countries in southern Africa. This tour included several speeches at open and distance learning (ODL) conferences, including the African Council of Distance Education Conference (see “Two new African DE organisations launched”). Sir John also met with ministers of education or deputy/acting ministers in Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia. He reports that good progress is being made in the development of ODL in those countries:

“It was particularly rewarding to be able to visit the eight Commonwealth countries of southern Africa on the same trip because I could observe the developing regional consciousness and appreciate the special links between countries. Botswana and Lesotho are united by a common language, whilst Lesotho and Swaziland both have monarchs. There is great potential – a role for COL – in sharing know-how between countries. Namibia, for example, does an admirable job of co-ordinating ODL nationally through NOLNET, the Namibian Open Learning Network, a body that other countries should emulate. I was impressed by the rapid and energetic start that has been made by SARDEC, the Southern African Regional Distance Education Centre based at the Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL) in Botswana. Throughout the region I found great interest in working with SARDEC and taking advantage of its services.

“My lasting impression is that ministers of education in all countries are convinced that the greater use of technology, whether ICTs or ODL, is the answer to several of their major challenges. There are many institutions, some with a long history, engaged in distance education. What is needed, and this is another area where COL can help, is to articulate the aspirations for ODL in national policy and to develop organisational frameworks for making the whole greater than the sum of the parts.

“I thank the many African colleagues that I met for the warm welcome they gave me and I commend them on their enthusiasm and dedication in improving the lives of their compatriots by giving them greater opportunities to learn.”

Sir John also delivered six speeches at events that took place in Southern Africa while he was there. They are available on COL’s web site.

www.col.org/speeches

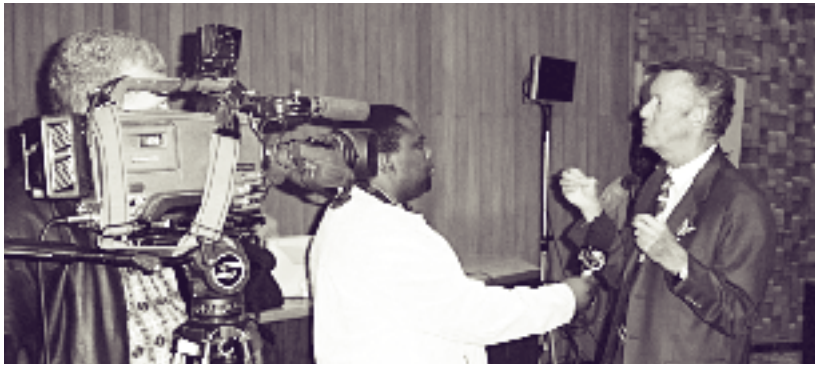
ODL OPPORTUNITIES

TWO NEW AFRICAN DE ORGANISATIONS LAUNCHED

COL supported the establishment of two new African distance education organisations, which held inaugural international meetings in Tshwane (Pretoria), South Africa in August.

Over 200 delegates from over 20 countries participated at the first African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) conference, which was held at the University of South Africa (UNISA). "The Mobilisation of African Leadership – Policies, Strategies and Partnerships" was the conference theme.

There were 170 delegates from 23 countries at the first meeting of Distance Education and Teachers' Training in Africa (DETA), held at the University of Pretoria's Groenkloof Campus (Faculty of Education/Teacher Training) Campus. They discussed the role of distance education and open learning in teacher training in Africa and means of building capacity for the delivery of teacher training



SIR JOHN DANIEL IS INTERVIEWED BY THE SOUTH AFRICA BROADCASTING CORPORATION FOLLOWING HIS CLOSING KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT THE AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION MEETING IN TSHWANE, SOUTH AFRICA IN AUGUST

ing programmes through open and distance learning in Africa.

While the DETA conference specifically focussed on teacher education and featured small group workshops and discussions, the ACDE conference focussed on broader macro strategic policy issues within distance education in Africa.

ACDE participants broke into groups that discussed and prepared statements on sub-themes such as teacher education, health and HIV/AIDS, governance and civil society, economic development, capacity building for open and distance learning, and mobilisation of African leadership.

Professor Mohan Menon, COL's Education Specialist, School Development, was a panellist at DETA. Sir John Daniel, COL's President and Chief Executive Officer, delivered a keynote address at ACDE entitled

"Open and Distance Education for Africans and by Africans".

In his speech, Sir John suggested that Africans should not be "mesmerised by technologies that are not available to you."

"Africa can innovate too," he said. "Africans can and must take the lead in applying ODL and ICTs to the challenges of African development." Addressing the theme of the conference, he also added that, "*Mobilising African leadership* must include mobilising the huge African Diaspora by inspiring some of them to return to Africa and others to contribute to Africa's development from their new homes. Open and distance learning – most particularly the creation of open educational resources – provides excellent vehicles for doing that."

www.unisa.ac.za/acde www.deta.up.ac.za
www.col.org/speeches

COPYRIGHT IN EDUCATION

COL is working with experts in copyright to help Commonwealth countries implement education-friendly legislation that makes learning content more accessible and affordable. A group of experts in law, education and technology from Botswana, Canada, South Africa and the U.S. met in Johannesburg, South Africa in May and drafted a "Document for Commonwealth Countries on Copyright Matters in Education". This paper outlines issues with copyright laws and education, and makes several recommendations.

While countries need to ensure learning content is available across the broadest possible base of their population, they are under pressure to adopt stricter copyright laws. It is important that governments take advantage of flexibilities in international agreements to safeguard and enhance access to learning content. The "Document for Commonwealth Countries on Copyright Matters in Education" lists exceptions and limitations to copyright that are permitted by international agreements and that are necessary for a fair education policy.

COL has sent this document to the Ministers of Education in Commonwealth countries, en-

couraging them to audit their copyright legislation to ensure adequate access to educational content in their country. COL will continue to communicate with Ministries of Education regarding copyright matters affecting education.

Also in Africa, the Africa Copyright Forum Conference, organised by the Uganda Library and Information Association and the National Library of Uganda, has been scheduled for 28-30 November in Kampala, Uganda. The first pan-African event of its kind, this conference aims to establish a network of copyright advocates in the areas of education, training, libraries, publishing and the creative arts. The conference is sponsored by COL and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions Action for Development through Libraries Programme (IFLA ALP). There will also be a copyright workshop at the fourth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in Ochos Rios, Jamaica from 30 October to 3 November 2006.

www.col.org/copyright



PARTICIPANTS AT THE COPYRIGHT EXPERTS MEETING IN JOHANNESBURG

PATENTLY ABSURD ☹️

A couple of recent articles illustrate both the seriousness and the absurdity of patent issues. Microsoft is taken to task for attempting to patent custom emoticons – computer graphics such as the smiley face (<http://news.zdnet.co.uk/business/legal/0,39020651,39210396,00.htm>). And patent laws are put in an interesting context when writer Richard Stallman examines what would happen if Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables* was subject to a literary patent (www.guardian.co.uk/online/comment/story/0,12449,1510566,00.html).

NEW PLAN TAKES SHAPE

The first phase of COL's planning exercise for its Three-year Plan 2006-2009 is drawing to a close. In April, a group of experts who were engaged to assist with planning met at COL's offices in Vancouver to share their views with staff. COL's Board of Governors held a planning retreat at their June Board Meeting. Next, COL's Education Specialists met with the President of COL, Sir John Daniel, to reflect upon the messages being transmitted including those in the regional consultations.

The issue under discussion is what content the plan should include and how the programme side will be organised in the new plan. A major conclusion is that COL should continue to work towards achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals and adopt a programme structure that reflects this emphasis while still concentrating on open and distance learning Policy, Systems and Applications.

The next steps include a meeting to specifically focus on the particular needs of Africa, within the context of the U.K. Government's Commission for Africa focus. This will take place in Tunisia at the African Development Bank in December. We will also consult with funding organisations such as the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Indian, Jamaican, Kiribati, New Zealand, Nigerian and South African governments and representatives on the Board of Governors from Sri Lanka, Africa and the United Kingdom. Other international organisations that might partner with COL in the new plan will also be consulted.

There does come a time, of course, when thinking has to stop and action must begin! The plan is now being drafted and will be made available for consultation. There will then be a series of re-drafts until the final version is ready to submit to the Board of Governors at an early 2006 meeting. Following comment and approval, the plan will be submitted to the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CEEM) in Cape Town, South Africa in December 2006 for endorsement by the Ministers and funding pledges. The fourth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, being held in Jamaica in October/November 2006, will also consider the plan and its implementation.

COL would like to thank all who have contributed towards the planning process. Your contribution has shaped our thinking and will re-focus our efforts in the new planning period. We hope that you will continue to contribute by commenting on drafts of the plan when they are posted on the COL website.

www.col.org/programmes/reporting/3year_plan.htm



EXPLORING THE UNDERACHIEVEMENT OF BOYS

COL is undertaking extensive research into why some boys underachieve in developing countries. This research is a follow-up to a request from Commonwealth Education Ministers when they met in Edinburgh in October 2003. Education ministers identified the elimination of gender disparity as one of the meeting's resulting six action areas. Recognising that gender disparity encompasses the poor achievement of both girls and boys, education ministers asked the Commonwealth Secretariat to work in partnership with other Commonwealth agencies such as COL to assist member countries faced with the challenge of boys' underachievement. They suggested that a close review of policies, cultural practices and curricula in Commonwealth countries would assist in addressing all gender-related areas.

Dr. C.A. Sewell, working as a COL consultant, will provide a "road map" of the nature and extent of the problem of underachievement of boys in Commonwealth countries. An educator who specialises in race and education, Dr. Sewell is a former senior lecturer at the University of Leeds School of Education. Working with researchers in Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific, the industrialised North and Asia, Dr. Sewell has now completed a literature review and field work in several countries, including Jamaica, Lesotho and Trinidad and Tobago.

His preliminary findings are that countries are recognising the underachievement of boys and that curriculum may be a large part of

the problem. Each country has an issue about boys in a different way, according to Dr. Sewell. In Jamaica, many boys are becoming disaffected with school at an early age, dropping out and becoming involved in violence. In the small kingdom of Lesotho in southern Africa, there is evidence that boys are being discriminated against in the education system. It's the girls who are pursuing higher education and moving to South Africa to take good jobs. In many rural areas, families keep their boys at home to help with the farming.

The importance of the underachievement of boys is stressed by Senator, the Honourable Burchell Whiteman, Minister of Information for Jamaica and a member of COL's Board of Governors.

"We're losing boys from school very early in the Caribbean," Senator Whiteman explained. "Studies suggest that the attitude and the interests of the boys are at variance with what formal schooling is all about. They want to be equipped very early to be able to earn for a variety of reasons, and they don't see much of what is in the curriculum taking them along that road. These issues in the Caribbean need urgently to be addressed."

Dr. Sewell will present his final report in early 2006. In addition to sharing research findings on the issue, this report will identify possible solutions including the opportunities to apply open, distance and technology-mediated learning.

"We're losing boys from school very early in the Caribbean"

THE GROWTH OF OPEN SCHOOLING

The success of Education for All (EFA) initiatives has created a new educational challenge – the need for more secondary schooling and technical-vocational training. In many developing countries there are now large numbers of primary school graduates that have limited opportunities to continue their education. As this group of neo-literates and post-primary students grows, alternative methods to conventional education must be found so that people can acquire skill training or continue on with their education.

One of the solutions is open schooling, where open and distance learning (ODL) is used to deliver course content at primary, junior, secondary and post-secondary levels. COL is supporting open schools in many regions. Here are a few recent initiatives:

OPEN SCHOOL INAUGURATED IN SRI LANKA

The President of Sri Lanka, Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, formally launched the Open School, Sri Lanka at a meeting in May. The one-day International Workshop on Open School in Colombo brought together open schooling experts from around the world. COL and its regional arm, Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), provided funding for Father T.V. Kunnunkal, the founder of the National Institute of Opening Schooling (NIOS) and Mrs. Gopa Biswas from the NIOS in India to visit Sri Lanka during the meeting and consult with staff at the newly-established division. As a result of the meeting, the Open School faculty has drawn up an action plan for the next few years.



THE OPEN SCHOOL PLAQUE IS UNVEILED BY HER EXCELLENCY, CHANDRIKA BANDARANAIKE KUMARATUNGA, PRESIDENT OF SRI LANKA, IN THE PRESENCE OF (BEHIND FROM LEFT) DR. TARA DE MEL, EDUCATION MINISTRY SECRETARY, MR. MANGALA SAMARAWEERA, DEPUTY MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND PROFESSOR J.W. WICKRAMASINGHE, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

OPEN TECHNICAL SCHOOL IN GHANA

COL is supporting a series of training workshops for course writers, course designers, managers and production houses in open technical schools as part of the President's Special Initiative on Distance Learning (PSI-DL) in Ghana. Initiated by the President of Ghana, His Excellency John A. Kufuor, PSI-DL is working to develop an open technical school project for youth in Ghana. Pilot learning materials are being developed for two courses – block laying and concreting, and hospitality – and are expected to be complete by the end of 2005.

Recognising how improved technical and vocational education and training (TVET) will help the private sector grow and help Ghana achieve accelerated development, PSI-DL is developing a nationwide Open Schooling Programme in Technical and Vocational Skills. A steering committee comprised of TVET practitioners and experts in the field are assessing the location of learning centres, availability of courses, staff qualifications, quality assurance and accessibility. This evaluation will include 127 TVET schools across the country.

The first in a series of open and distance learning (ODL) training workshops support-

ed by COL took place in Dodowa, Ghana from 4-9 July. Subsequent workshops are scheduled for later this year to train selected staff in writing, delivery and management of ODL for TVET.

The open technical schooling system being introduced in Ghana will use ODL and information and communications technology (ICT) to scale up entry for the youth across the country. COL will help the PSI-DL to apply the appropriate technology in course delivery during and after the pilot. The course materials being developed will be made available for adaptation by other Commonwealth countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

OPEN SCHOOL PLANNING, NIGERIA

As a result of an earlier open schooling advocacy and awareness-raising meeting held in Nigeria, COL was asked by the Universal Basic Education division at the Ministry of Education to provide a consultant to prepare a proposal for an open schooling pilot project. Stakeholders from Nigeria met in June to discuss the proposal that was subsequently prepared by Professor Tony Dodds and funded by COL. COL has also pledged ongoing support for Nigeria's Open School initiative.



COL FUNDS NEW INTERNATIONAL INTERNS

THIRTEEN NEW PARTICIPANTS ARE GAINING VALUABLE INTERNATIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE 2005/2006 YOUNG PROFESSIONALS ATTACHMENT PROGRAMME. THE YOUNG CANADIANS ARE CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN SIX- TO TWELVE-MONTH INTERNSHIPS WITH COMMONWEALTH AND INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES IN EUROPE, AFRICA, INDIA AND ASIA. THE PROGRAMME IS FUNDED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S YOUTH EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY (YES) CAREER FOCUS PROGRAM, THROUGH FOREIGN AFFAIRS CANADA. WWW.COL.ORG/INTERNSHIPS



NEW RADIO SERIES COMBATS POVERTY

Coming Together is a new initiative that uses the broad reach of radio to help fight poverty. This pilot series is designed for broadcast by local and community radio stations, or it may be heard and downloaded from the web. It has been produced by Open Learning Systems Education Trust (OLSET) and COL for use anywhere that people want to take action to help fight poverty and improve their lives, and in particular Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

Improving soil fertility, how to market goods and raising cash through micro-credit are some of the subjects featured in the radio programmes. The programmes are available in long format (15-17 minutes) or as three shorter segments (5-7 minutes) to give flexibility to broadcasters. They are all free-of-charge, including the accompanying music, and can be adapted to suit the listeners of radio stations. Versions without music and complete transcripts can be provided if there is a need to translate the presentation into a local language.

www.col.org/communitylearn

SHARING COL'S MESSAGE

Sir John Daniel has spoken at numerous events around the globe this year. These are welcome opportunities to communicate important messages about COL and about open and distance learning (ODL) for development.

Sir John spoke about technical and vocational education and training (TVET) at the Pacific Islands Forum Education Ministers Meeting in Samoa in May. He talked about TVET in the Pacific through ODL and COL's support of several initiatives.

In a keynote address to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/Canada Conference on eLearning in Post-secondary Education, Sir John focused on "International Online Learning Delivery: Can

digital dividend replace digital divide?" Co-authored by COL Education Specialist Mr. Paul West, Ms. Susan D'Antoni of UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning and Ms. Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, the Chief of UNESCO's Access, Mobility and Quality Assurance Section, this presentation focused on the potential and challenges of eLearning for developing countries.

"The Long-Awaited Breakthrough?" was the title of a speech to the Multimedia Education Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT) conference in Nashville, Tennessee in July 2005. This presentation was also co-authored by Mr. West, Ms. D'Antoni and Ms. Uvalić-Trumbić. Sir John encouraged conference attendees to "combine connectivity with open educational resources so as to create a global intellectual commons accessible to the whole of humankind."

www.col.org/speeches

TRAINING ODL EDUCATORS IN NIGERIA

Fifty open and distance learning (ODL) educators from Nigeria have enrolled in advanced training under COL's Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme. Delivered by India's Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), the programme consists of a Post-graduate Diploma in Distance Education (PGDDE) followed by a Master of Arts in Distance Education (MADE) degree.

The new programme participants are from universities, colleges and other institutions across Nigeria. Their participation has been co-ordinated by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and the COL-supported Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDAL), which opened earlier this year. Five local tutors from Nigeria are being trained by IGNOU so students can receive ongoing support.

This is the third presentation of COL's Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme. To date, more

than 100 students from 23 countries have graduated with their MADE degree from IGNOU. The programme seeks to develop and improve ODL programmes by building ODL capacity among staff at ministries of education, universities and teachers' institutes.

NEW ZEALAND, INDIA SHARE BEST PRACTICES

Two staff members from the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) in India recently made a study visit to the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand. The focus was on exploring delivery and support of technical and vocational courses, new techniques in multimedia course development and improving the quality of student support. The visit was funded by the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), a regional arm of COL. The aim of linkages like this is to help build capacity within organisations such as NIOS.

INFODEV AND COL SUPPORT NEPAD E-SCHOOLS PROJECT



In the spirit of collaboration to support the use of ICT in education in Africa, COL and InfoDev (Information for Development Programme, a World Bank Initiative) recently announced their partnership to support the monitoring and evaluation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) e-Schools Demonstration Project. In welcoming this partnership, Dr. Henry Chasia, Executive Deputy Chairperson, e-Africa Commission noted, "The NEPAD e-Africa Commission is glad to welcome the InfoDev Programme as a partner in the Monitoring and Evaluation component of the NEPAD e-Schools Demo, which is being spearheaded by the Commonwealth of Learning. InfoDev's support will ensure a more comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation implementation plan, which is critical for the rollout of the NEPAD e-Schools Initiative across the African continent."

In becoming a partner in the Monitoring and Evaluation initiative, InfoDev's Mike Trucano said, "Few ICT in education projects of this sort have made rigorous Monitoring and Evaluation an important part of their implementation plan — and strategy — from the very beginning. The NEPAD e-Schools initiative is to be commended for this, and we are pleased to be able to collaborate with COL to document the learning and challenges from this complex undertaking."

COL President Sir John Daniel is proud of the excellent work being done to support NEPAD and encouraged that InfoDev is a partner in this.

INVESTING IN WOMEN TO ASSIST HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Venkataraman Balaji, Head, Knowledge Management and Sharing, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and Ms. Helen Lentell, COL Education Specialist, Training and Materials Development

“Given the skepticism around the application of information, communication and technologies (ICTs) for development, we believe that this strong partnership for M&E will give credibility to the e-Schools initiative and provide a solid base for the future use of ICTs in African education,” Sir John said.

NEPAD has identified infrastructure, and especially ICT development, as a priority action area in order to promote sustainable development. The NEPAD e-Africa Commission is the NEPAD Task Team responsible for taking leadership in this area in cooperation with a wide range of ICT private sector organisations. The NEPAD e-Schools Initiative is the first of the Commission’s initiatives. It is a multi-country, multi-stakeholder, continental initiative, intended to impart ICT skills to young Africans in primary and secondary schools and to use ICT to improve the provision of education in schools. The goal is that, within 10 years of implementation in more than half a million schools on the continent, the African population will possess the ICT skills essential for sustainable development.

The first phase of the e-Schools Initiative was launched on 1 April 2005. It involves a demonstration project focusing on six schools in each of 16 countries, the development of the NEPAD e-Schools Initiative business plan and the SATLINK project, which is intended to define the most appropriate satellite connectivity architecture. It is expected that these activities will converge into the roll-out of the broader NEPAD e-Schools Initiative in 2006. www.nepad.org

We cannot find solutions to the challenges of development without dealing with gender inequality. A gender focus is not only an issue of human rights but also a way of improving the efficiency and benefits of development. This is a very practical argument: policy attention to women and investment in women will pay off in accelerated development.

Gender inequality is the most pervasive form of inequality in the world today. While it may take different forms, it is a feature of social relations in most societies. It affects all groups and classes within society but is more severe among the poor. Gender biases are often defined by cultural and social norms, and enshrined in laws that discriminate against women. Women living in poverty are often denied access to critical resources such as credit, land and inheritance. Their labour goes unrewarded and unrecognised. Their health care and nutritional needs are not given priority, they lack sufficient access to education and support services and their participation in decision-making at home and in the community are minimal. Caught in the cycle of poverty, women lack access to resources and services to change their situation.

It is now widely accepted that gender inequality must be addressed if poverty is to be eradicated. Development initiatives must pay particular attention to the needs of poor women. There is now robust evidence that suggests that investment in women is a route to achieving other human development goals. In other words, there is a link between the well being of women and a variety of demographic, health and welfare outcomes. For example, making learning accessible to women leads to better health for the entire family which in turn leads to a stronger workforce and increased economic growth.

COL is committed to gender equality and to a strategy of mainstreaming gender in its programmes. We support UNESCO’s position that, “Mainstreaming is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experience an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes...to ensure that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.”

LEARNING FOR FEMALE FARMERS: ODL

Recurrent drought poses a serious threat to the poor rural families living in the vulnerable areas. Women are among the most affected as they need to cope with uncertain crop or animal production regimes even as they face reduced food availability for their families.

ICRISAT, in partnership with COL, has developed a project for drought preparedness among the rural poor in tropical areas. Information is the backbone of drought

preparedness, and educating the vulnerable families is the best way to improve capacity to mitigate drought.

ICRISAT’s pilot field research project combines open learning methods with rural Internet access kiosks. In the State of Andhra Pradesh, India, ICRISAT works with an all-women micro-credit federation – 4,900 members in a population of approximately 45,000, covering 37 hamlets. Learning modules on drought are available to the federation members. Ms. Sushma Reddy, a young member with high school education, acts as the facilitator



SUSHMA REDDY (LEFT) TEACHES BASIC COMPUTER LITERACY TO PICHCHIKUNTLA BALAMMA

of this programme. Having undergone basic training in information technology, Sushma provides courses on soil, weather and crop health. She supports the learners at her “hub”, located in the premises of the rural micro-credit federation, on the outskirts of a large village. Electricity is available for part of the day, and ICRISAT helped the federation obtain a low-cost satellite connection to the Internet.

The strategy for open and distance learning here was to adapt it for users who have not been in a classroom for several years. The project developed a group of facilitators who act as credible intermediaries between the experts and the rural woman who use information. A combination of CD-media and local print are used, and the facilitator often sits with a small group of learners to extend support. Sushma has used some of the modules on an open source learning management system to create simple material for local information purposes.

One significant outcome of this project has been considerably improved extension service for the women farmers. For example, Chandrakala, 30, a farmer in Janampeta village says that she was able to apply the right pesticide in a dry season with advice and knowledge acquired through this programme, saving precious money. Previously, the pesticide dealers gave advice and sold their product with very mixed results. This new channel that delivers information as well as focussed advice is changing all that, according to farmers in the area. Intelligent mediation of learning by a credible person makes a difference when the person is able to learn and work.

SUSTAINABLE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT —

By Ms. Helen Lentell, COL Education Specialist, Training and Materials Development

COL is the only international intergovernmental agency with a mandate to encourage open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies to expand the scope and scale of learning. COL's view is that learning is both *part of the process* as well as *the means* of implementing sustainable development and creating a culture of peace. We take this view because learning is an act of agency; it enables people to take control of their lives. Evidence suggests that the more people have been involved in learning, the more developed that country will become. The United Nations General Assembly captured the importance of education for development by designating the next ten years the "Decade of Education for Sustainable Development".

The harnessing of technology for learning – or open and distance learning (ODL) – is not always understood. People either have in mind an outdated view of distance education, (the old correspondence schools), or they find it hard to imagine how modern technology, the quintes-

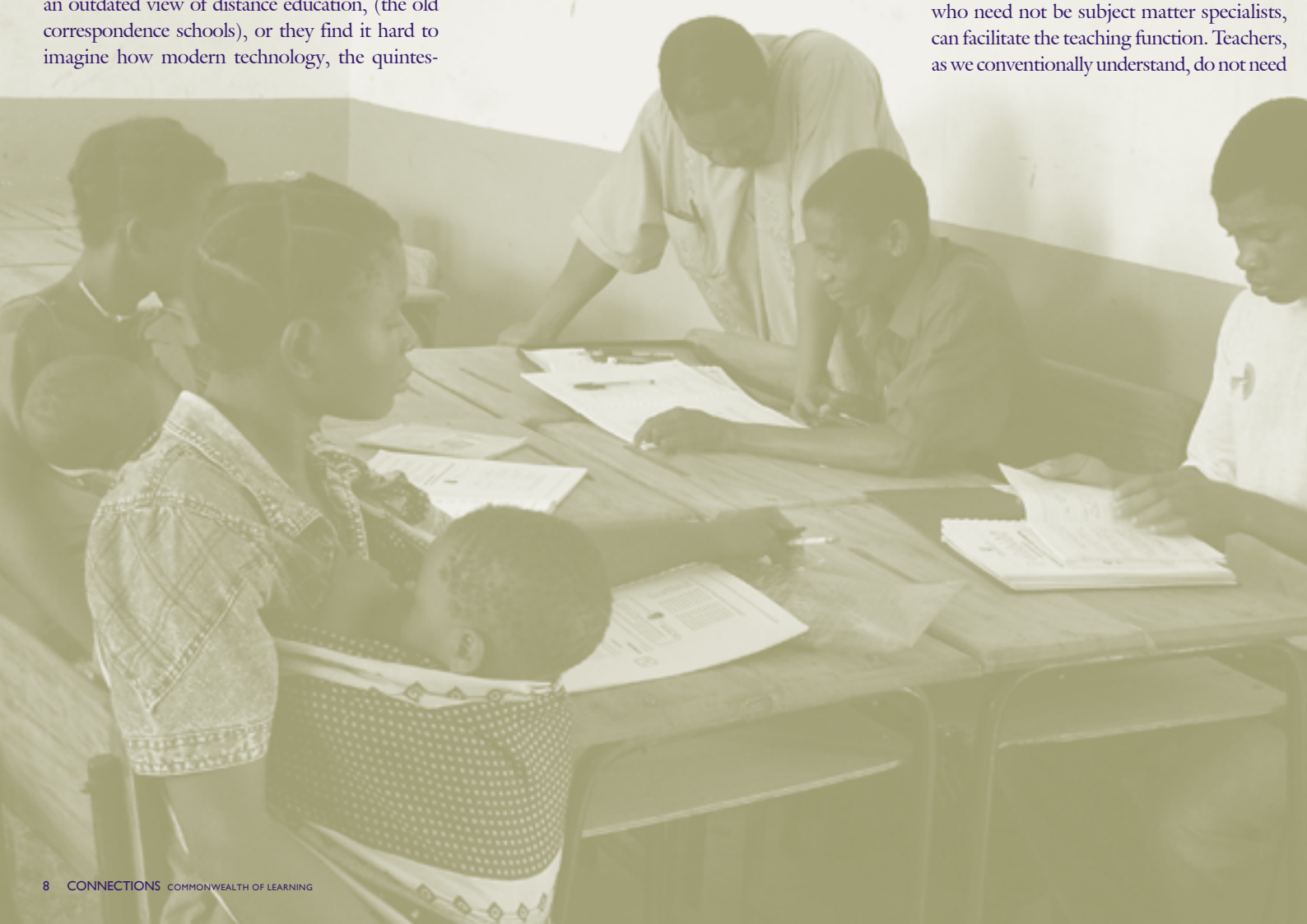
sence of modernity, can have any relevance to the reality of those in poverty in the developing world. But the unique characteristic of ODL methodology means that appropriate technology can be mediated by teachers, trainers or facilitators to solve development problems.

The potential of ODL for sustainable learning and development is based on the following advantages:

- **Flexible:** ODL can be integrated with traditional approaches to create flexible learning. For example it can provide the study materials needed to enable teachers to manage large classes or establish asynchronous communication between learners living miles from each other.
- **Adaptable:** ODL employs a range of appropriate media and technologies, including radio, teleconferencing, video,

audio and computers to enable both the delivery of information and communication between communities of learners and learners and their teachers. For instance, radio is being used in developing countries to inform and educate communities about maternal health and HIV/AIDS.

- **Reach:** ODL can reach those groups who have been denied access to education and training either through their remoteness to places of study or through general lack of provision as a result of economic or social disadvantage, or political upheaval. The development of open universities has enabled many millions to have access to higher education where there had been insufficient supply.
- **Quality and Scale:** ODL can take educational and training to scale because scarce human resources are used to their optimum. Tutors, who need not be subject matter specialists, can facilitate the teaching function. Teachers, as we conventionally understand, do not need



THE ROLE OF ODL

to have all the knowledge, skills and resources associated with teaching before they can support learning. With ODL the functions teachers perform are broken down into their constituent parts and given to specialists – knowledge experts, curriculum designers, course writers, media experts, designers, editors and facilitators of learning. Only a few specialists need write the study materials that many thousands can use. And because these study materials are closer to being in the public domain and often subject to scrutiny by other experts, their quality is more reliably guaranteed than the teaching that takes place in the privacy of a classroom.

ODL as an approach to learning is built upon the values of widening participation, flexibility of delivery and responsiveness to social, cultural and economic needs of learners and wider society. ODL methodology puts the learner and their learning needs and contexts at the centre of ODL practice. This focus on the learner is what makes ODL methodology potentially transformative. At COL's Institute on ODL for Development, Professor Ram G. Takwale, former Vice Chancellor of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), observed that generally, primary, secondary, vocational and technical schools and universities are poorly linked to the development agenda of the countries. Institutions tend to structure programmes based on academic disciplines and not on a development approach

Participants at the Institute were of the opinion that it is not possible to achieve any of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, www.developmentgoals.org), without a massive expansion of learning and training and that this could not be achieved within the traditional system. Learning through ODL methods provides a critical role in making poverty reduction and economic development efforts – whether in agriculture, natural resource management, small enterprise development – more participant driven, cost effective and

locally self-managed and therefore more sustainable. In addition, the development and democratisation of civil society and social institutions requires the ongoing acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

The strategies for learning that are greatly facilitated by ODL are: information, communication, mediation and partnership/collaboration.

- **The provision of information:** New knowledge or information is made available to learners through well-written and designed leaflets, booklets or a well-produced radio programme. Making these resources available, accessible and adaptable for local usage, via the web (e.g., learning objects), offers the potential to massively enhance opportunities.
- **Communication:** Learning occurs through a communication process. There is more to learning than internalising externally provided information. This is because the “knowledge” may be contestable and its usefulness debatable. Indeed, there is much evidence to suggest that effective learning is predicated upon interactivity among learners and learning objects, other learners and good learning facilitators. The facilitator can contextualise and personalise the mass-produced materials of ODL. They know the learners and their needs and know how to give the feedback that will enable the learners to become actively involved in their learning and therefore to be successful and progress. Professor Veronica McKay, Director of the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Institute at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in outlining the role of ODL and adult basic learning, demonstrated at the COL Institute that training of adult literacy educators can be taken to scale. ABET has trained many thousands of adult literacy educators by “combining a mass-based industrialised model of material production with participatory and face-to-face approaches”. The development of information and communications technologies and learning management systems has massively enhanced the capacity for communication within ODL.

continued on page 10

INSTITUTE ON ODL FOR DEVELOPMENT

In May 2005, COL invited 37 experts from different countries to engage in a cross-sector dialogue on the role of open and distance learning (ODL) and the development agenda. The three-day Institute was held in Vancouver, Canada. Representatives from development agencies, non-governmental organisations, governments and the ODL field came together to identify the role of ODL in development with particular reference to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.



In preparing for the Institute, participants were asked to comment on a draft paper and to take part in presentations, panel discussions and workshops. A principle outcome for the Institute was an exploration on the potential of ODL as a tool for development. The deliberations of the Institute will result in a COL publication on “ODL for Development”.

The feedback from participants was very positive and there was throughout a very good feeling of solidarity, commitment and dedication to arriving at solutions. COL has been invited to hold a similar event in Australia by the organisers of the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia (ODLAA), with a focus on the contribution of ODL to development specifically in the Pacific region.





IGNOU CATERS TO THE DIFFERENTLY ABLED



India's Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) reports that it is making a focussed effort to serve people with disabilities. As an organisation with a mandate to provide education to large sections of the population, particularly the disadvantaged, IGNOU recognises the importance of removing disability barriers.

About 100 million people in India are "differently abled", according to UN estimates. Of these, about three-quarters live in rural areas, and less than five percent of the differently abled people in rural India benefit from any kind of special service.

IGNOU has taken several steps to provide accessible and appropriate educational and training programmes for disabled people including:

- Providing accessible course materials. For instance, the Certificate Programme in Empowering Women through Self-Help Groups is available in Braille. This has enabled several blind women to set up their own enterprise. Materials for IGNOU's MBA programme are also being developed to benefit learners with visual impairment.
- Adapting its website. The IGNOU site (www.ignou.ac.in) is being upgraded to render it more accessible to the differently abled.
- Developing extension, training and education programmes for people with disabilities. Through collaboration with leading national organisations, IGNOU is launching programmes through

selected non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for people with disabilities, their family members and community workers.

- Establishing special study centres. The university offers ten specially equipped study centres, including four for the blind, located at regional organisations for the disabled.

IGNOU plans to further advance these efforts by establishing a National Centre for Differently Abled that will co-ordinate efforts throughout the country to serve learners with disabilities.

OPEN COURSE CONTENT DISCUSSION FORUM

Open course content – course elements and materials that are freely available on the Internet – are an important resource for higher education institutions. But more awareness is required for this resource to be used effectively.

The UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) is hosting an Internet forum in October/November 2005 that will link an international group of providers, users and interested individuals from developed and developing countries to explore open course content initiatives and issues. This is one of a series of activities to improve awareness of open course content planned by IIEP and supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

ODL FOR DEVELOPMENT — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

- **Mediation:** Successful learning in ODL requires mediation and that is classically what tutors in ODL systems do. Tutors act as intermediaries between the knowledge in the study guides and the learners. They assist learners to "own" and apply and generalise the knowledge in their learning materials. But learning described thus far assumes a predefined curriculum that has to be made relevant to the learners and their needs.

However the radical expansion of this model is to turn it on its head and it is suggested by the role of Sushma Reddy supporting illiterate farmers at her learning hub, (see *Investing in Women to Assist Human Development*, page 7). This is what becomes possible using modern learning technologies. Communities define their learning needs – including illiterate farmers – and with the assistance

of skilled and trusted mediators/facilitators they access knowledge and learn through the global knowledge network. Indeed, they can even engage with the experts in the research institutions! This is called "just-in-time" learning by Dr. Ajit Maru, of the Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology in India. It can either be formalised into courses of study or on a need-to-know basis made possible by a dynamic/live environment.

- **Partnership and collaboration:** Sustainable learning for development requires participatory approaches, partnerships and collaboration. Technology-mediated ODL connects different groups, with different knowledge and skills to come together to address and research complex issues, which are implicit in the notion of sustainable

development. These new collaborations and partnerships, with a wide variety of stakeholders and client communities (such as grassroots communities, civil society, private sector groups, financial institutions and international development agencies), are captured in ideas about the "learning organisation" in which learners are involved in not only solving a problem but also investigating the origins of that problem. These models of learning are sometimes known as "connective learning" or "expanded learning" and are found in community development approaches. "The contours of these collaborations, such as networks and consortia, have begun to emerge in India as evidenced in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra States," Dr. Maru reported to the Institute. Interesting work using ODL is being carried out here and

new models of ODL for development are emerging.

The road ahead

The potential of ODL and development is clear but much has yet to be done, participants at the Institute observed:

- We need advocacy among policy makers to understand the potential of ODL. And we must get "ODL the profile it should have, and to get it included in policy as a mainstream part of education". *Ms. Myra Harrison, consultant, UK.*
- ODL implementation requires careful planning and project management – there is a general need to develop these skills in all development contexts and not just ODL. But ODL could be a means of bridging that skills gap in development contexts. *Professor Richard Siacivena, consultant, Directorate of Distance Education, University of Zambia.*
- We need to strike a balance between excessive enthusiasm that ODL can solve problems

For more information about the Internet discussion forum or to receive an application to participate in the discussion, contact Susan D'Antoni at virtual.university@iiep.unesco.org. Participation will be limited to ensure a broad representation of countries and stakeholders. Following the Internet forum, IIEP will create a website to make documentation freely available.

STOCKHOLM CHALLENGE SEEKS ENTRIES

The Stockholm Challenge Award is a prestigious international competition that recognises projects that apply information communications technologies (ICTs) to create new and better products and services that counteract the digital divide. In its ten years, the Challenge has received over 3,000 applications and has identified some 600 winners and finalists. The entry deadline for the 2006 awards is 31 December 2005.

The Stockholm Challenge is also inviting organisations to become Challenge Champions. This involves using the Challenge to raise the profile of their region. The more projects that come in from any particular region, the more opportunities the Stockholm Challenge has to highlight that regional focus on their website and in newsletters. Challenge Champions are given suggestions for promoting the Stockholm Challenge and are recognised on the Challenge website.

www.stockholmchallenge.se

of poverty and the belief that ODL is too expensive – a solution the poor cannot afford. *Dr. Chris Chinien, Director, UNEVOC-Canada.*

- “Persuading educationalists to use resources produced by others” is a major challenge. *Ms. Jenny Glennie, Director, South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE).*
- Training and professional development in the knowledge and skills for ODL development is vital. *Mrs. Thandi Alice Ngengebule, Head, Department of Student Support, UNISA, South Africa.*
- New structures and new processes that embed ODL are needed in educational institutions. There is little experience in restructuring institutions and in embedding new processes for creating learning opportunities. *Dr. Ajit Maru, Professor, Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology, India.*

- Engaging learners in the vast amount of lifelong learning experiences that are available to them, without compromising standards of excellence. *Ms. Clover Barnett, Director, Learning Management Services Department, Human Employment and Training (HEART), Jamaica National Training Authority.*
- More research and understanding of the management skills required to manage the learning models for sustainable development is needed. *Dr. Krishna Alluri, COL Education Specialist.*

The Commonwealth of Learning believes that learning is the common wealth of human kind. Whilst ODL is not a silver bullet, it can, as COL President Sir John Daniel said, “make a major contribution to the learning challenges we face because technology mediated learning can increase access, improve quality and lower cost all at the same time.”

HONORARY DOCTORATES FOR COL LEADERS

Dr. Lewis Perinbam, Chair of COL's Board of Governors, recently received an honorary Doctor of Civil Law degree from Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Saluted as “Canada's Dean of International Development”, Dr. Perinbam was recognised for his leadership and service in the field of international development.

Sir John Daniel, COL President and Chief Executive Officer, recently received two honorary degrees. In April, Netaji Subhas Open University in Kolkata, India, awarded him an honorary Doctor of Letters. In May, Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, BC, Canada, also awarded Sir John an honorary Doctor of Letters in the new university's first convocation ceremony.

COL BOARD

The Chair of COL's Board of Governors, **Dr. Lewis Perinbam**, is pleased to announce two new appointments:

- **Ms. Jennifer Glennie**, Director of the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), has been appointed to the Board as the representative for South Africa. Well known within distance education circles in South and Southern Africa, Ms. Glennie has played an important role in distance education developments within various African countries and has contributed to open and distance learning internationally. She was named an Honorary Fellow of the Commonwealth of Learning in 2002. South Africa was recently given a seat on the Board of Governors after increasing its funding to COL.
- **Mr. Sudeep K. Banerjee**, Secretary, Department of Secondary and Higher Education in India's Ministry of Human Resource Development, joins COL's Board as India's representative. He succeeds Mr. B.S. Baswan, who retired from government service earlier this year. In an administrative career spanning over three decades, Mr. Banerjee has held important national and state government posts, including Director General of the National Literacy Mission. An award-winning author of four books, three collections of poems and one play, Mr. Banerjee has also served on the boards of many institutions linked to education including the International Literacy Institute in Philadelphia.



JENNY GLENNIE

COL STAFF

Mr. Vis Naidoo, Education Specialist, Educational Technology Policy & Planning, has returned to his native South Africa after five years at COL. Mr. Naidoo has accepted the position of CEO of Mindset Network, a non-profit organisation that addresses the educational challenges of schooling, health and livelihood through the delivery of free education content via satellite networks.

While at COL, Mr. Naidoo worked with Commonwealth Governments and organisations to help them focus on educational technology policy and applications and its impact on education and training systems within an open and distance learning context. He was also active in leading the development of schoolnets.

“Vis' career is a nice example of what should be a growing trend, namely the return of African leaders to Africa after they have acquired valuable experience outside this continent,” said Sir John Daniel, President of COL, in a recent speech to the African Council of Distance Education.

www.mindset.co.za



VIS NAIDOO

ASIA

CONSORTIUM IN INDIA FOR EFFECTIVE USE OF ODL FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Centre for Environment Education (CEE) and COL held a meeting in Ahmedabad, India on 27 and 28 May 2005 to discuss the creation of a consortium for using open and distance learning (ODL) and information and communications technologies (ICTs) for attaining sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Twenty-two people from various national and state level organisations attended this national meeting, which focused on recommendations made at the International Workshop on Education for Sustainable Development earlier this year.

COL supports various initiatives related to sustainable development and the MDGs in India through institutions such as CEE, the Indian Institute of Science, Karnataka State Open University (KSOU), M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University. Participants first explored strategies for consolidating COL initiatives in India by establishing a consortium of institutions and then agreed in principle to form the consortium.

One of the immediate action items for the new consortium will be to consider the adaptation and/or translation of the CEE's new *Green Teacher* course by the state open universities of Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra and also the National Institute of Open Schooling. This reflects the interest the course has created in the country. COL will also pursue the possibility of adapting the *Green Teacher* course for use in Sub-Saharan Africa.



PARTICIPANTS AT THE ODL FOR ENABLING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT MEETING IN MAY

co-ordinates the GDENet and initiated this collaboration with UNESCO.

The two networks have a number of objectives in common, including supporting decision makers and practitioners with ready access to information and tools that will assist them in more effective policy planning, development and management of ODL in higher education programmes. Specialist staff at each site select and link the most appropriate resources for decision makers and practitioners. Following the meeting, the two networks are now working together and sharing resources, and all content is now located within a common taxonomy. Users can search the sites of both networks, free of charge, at: www.unesco.org/education/col/search_page.html www.gdenet.org www.unesco.org/odl

AFRICA

RENEWING THE AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

The University of Abertay Dundee in Scotland was the site of a meeting from 29 June to 4 July 2005 that included more than 30 leaders of African higher education institutions and invited guests from other parts of the Commonwealth. The Abertay Conversation focused on the future development of African higher education, producing a communiqué that was provided to G8 leaders at their meeting the following week in nearby Gleneagles, Scotland.

Among the recommendations of the Abertay Conversation Communiqué was a call to G8 leaders to implement the recommendations of the Commission for Africa (www.commission-forafrica.org).

The Abertay Conversation also recommended a "step-change" in the application of ICTs, pointing out the necessity to immediately enhance the telecommunications infrastructure and expand access to, and effective use of, bandwidth.

The Abertay Conversation was convened by the Association of African Universities (AAU), the Association of Commonwealth Universities

(ACU) and COL, working in partnership with the Scottish Executive, the UK Government and the University of Abertay Dundee.

www.abertay.ac.uk/avcc

AFRICA

BUILDING EARNING CAPACITY

COL is facilitating a series of workshops to provide eLearning training to policymakers, practitioners and technical support people at Commonwealth universities. The eLearning initiative began last year with a workshop in Nairobi, Kenya for policymakers and practitioners. Organised in association with the Global Distance Education Net (GDENet) and the African Virtual University (AVU), the eLearning Workshop focused on sharing knowledge about eLearning, drafting policies, converting courses for an online environment and developing action plans.

Following this session, it became clear that the institutions must have the ability to support open source learning management systems. Learning management systems are online environments where students can read study material, share information with other students, chat online with classmates and submit assignments. Due to budgetary constraints, many Commonwealth universities cannot afford expensive learning management systems. There are about 40 free open source learning management systems available, but technical staff must first be proficient with the Linux operating system before an institution can take advantage of them.

In Open Source Workshops held at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) in Nairobi and in the Seychelles, about 25 technical support people learned how to use the Linux system and manage open source learning management systems. They can now do exams to become designated a certified Linux engineer if they qualify. A workshop was also held in Nigeria in August and another is scheduled for Namibia in November 2005.



PARTICIPANTS AT THE GDENET AND UNESCO HIGHER EDUCATION ODL KNOWLEDGE BASE MEETING IN HONG KONG

ASIA

PARTNERSHIP FOR ODL RESOURCES

Representatives from the Global Distance Education Network (GDENet) and the UNESCO Higher Education ODL Knowledge Base sites from around the world met for the first time in Hong Kong in June. COL

Future eLearning workshops will run concurrent sessions for policymakers, practitioners and technical support people. The idea is that institutions will send representatives from all three groups and that after the workshop, they will return to their university and work together to make eLearning work effectively.

ASIA-PACIFIC

ROUNDTABLE ON ODL FOR MDGs

More than 40 delegates from eight Asia-Pacific countries participated in a three-day Roundtable in May about the use of open and distance learning (ODL) in attaining the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Organised by COL and the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), the Roundtable coincided with the 25th anniversary of OUSL, the second open university to be established in south Asia.

Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, former President of COL, delivered the keynote address and Dr. Tara de Mel, Education Secretary, Government of Sri Lanka made the inaugural address. Subsequent sessions focused on individual MDGs. Overviews, country experiences and case studies were used as a basis for group discussions about how to use ODL to achieve targets set for global society. COL will consider the recommendations of the Roundtable when formulating initiatives in the new Three-year Plan.

AFRICA

BUILDING CAPACITY IN WEST AFRICA

COL recently facilitated several workshops in Nigeria that will have far-reaching effects on open and distance learning (ODL) in West Africa.

Fifty-nine educators from four West African countries took part in a five-day Workshop on Research Methodology for Distance Education in May at the new COL-supported Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDAL) at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

A strong research capacity is necessary for ODL institutions to meet local socio-educational needs adequately. Workshop participants learned what research in ODL entails, why it is necessary and how it can be carried out. A secondary benefit was the many links made among participants from different institutions and the discussion of possible collaborative research projects.

Instructional Design was the focus of workshops at NOUN (Lagos) and the National Teachers' Institute (NTI) in Kaduna, Nigeria. Forty educators at NOUN and 27 educators at NTI attended the five-day workshops in May. They learned to critique and restructure ODL courses, gaining expertise in instructional design. This will help improve levels of professionalism and quality in ODL provision.

ASIA

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

COL supported a national forum on "Impact of Development in Communication Technology on Educational and Social Message Communication" in New Delhi on 17-18 May 2005. This two-day meeting brought together nearly 200 people from multi-media research centres, mass communication institutions, the Indian Institute of Technology, Indira Gandhi National Open University, the

ASIA

VIRTUAL PLATFORM FOR ELEARNING CONTENT DEVELOPMENT LAUNCHED

"The software capital of India", Bangalore is internationally known for commercial software development. However, very little work goes on in the area of eLearning, especially in the social and educational sectors. A recent meeting facilitated by COL focused on developing a viable and cost-effective model for e-content development.

Twelve experts from universities, regional institutes and non-governmental organisations attended a meeting in Bangalore in May hosted by COL and Learning Initiatives, a non-profit organisation. They discussed initiating a virtual platform for e-content development. The major obstacle in good e-content development is combining expertise in subject areas with effective instructional design and good software engineers. It is important that their knowledge, expertise and creativity related to their own areas integrate well to develop effective eLearning materials.

NATIONAL FORUM ON ODL IN THE GAMBIA

PROFESSOR ASHA KANWAR, COL EDUCATION SPECIALIST, HIGHER EDUCATION & POLICY DEVELOPMENT (LEFT) AND THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION OF THE GAMBIA, THE HONOURABLE FATOU L. FAYE, AT THE NATIONAL FORUM ON ODL. COL SUPPORTED THE THREE-DAY FORUM IN BANJUL, THE GAMBIA IN APRIL. SIXTY PARTICIPANTS FROM EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNMENT MET TO DISCUSS THE POTENTIAL AND PRACTICALITIES OF ODL AND THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL ODL CENTRE.



National Council for Educational Research and Training and State Education Institutes of Technology.

The Honourable Arjun Singh, India's Minister of Human Resource Development, inaugurated the Forum. In a message from COL President Sir John Daniel, India was urged to seize the opportunity to become a leader in the open educational resources (OER) movement. Professor Asha Kanwar, COL Education Specialist, gave presentations on eLearning Policy and Quality Assurance in Education.

As a result of the forum, participants agreed to form a consortium, move ahead with forming a professional forum, organise another meeting in the next year and continue the partnership with COL.

Learning Initiatives will bring together expert content developers to build, develop and deliver well-researched and original content to the worldwide communities of learners and trainers. The content developers will work on the latest technology platforms hosted and supported at Learning Initiatives and create content with multimedia inputs; rich animation, text and graphics; and the latest

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

UPCOMING EVENTS

COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING (CHOGM)

"NETWORKING THE COMMONWEALTH FOR DEVELOPMENT"
VALLETTA, MALTA, 25-27 NOVEMBER 2005 | WWW.CHOGM.ORG

AFRICA COPYRIGHT FORUM CONFERENCE

KAMPALA, UGANDA, 28-30 NOVEMBER 2005 | WWW.NLU.GO.UG/ACFC.HTM

PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING

OCHOS RIOS, JAMAICA, 30 OCTOBER - 3 NOVEMBER 2006
WWW.COL.ORG/PCF4

PERSPECTIVES ON DISTANCE EDUCATION: LIFELONG LEARNING & DISTANCE HIGHER EDUCATION

*Christopher McIntosh, Editor
Zeynep Varoglu, Editorial Coordinator
September 2005 254 pages*

Reflecting a common objective of ensuring quality Education for All, this book is a joint initiative of UNESCO and COL and jointly published. *Lifelong Learning and Distance Higher Education* brings together a diverse group of experts from many countries. The book provides a clear picture of the challenges, problems and potential of distance higher education at its current stage of development. It also describes successful practices for planning and implementing distance higher education and offers numerous practical insights. Aimed at planners, policy-makers and other stakeholders, the book is intended to be a practical tool for capacity building and decision-making.

Lifelong Learning and Distance Higher Education is fully available online at www.col.org/LLLinHigher or can be ordered through COL's distribution agents: Government Publication Services, Queen's Printer, Attn. COL Customer Service, PO Box 9452 Stn Prov Govt, Victoria, BC V8W 9V7 Canada; tel: 250.387.6409; fax: 250.387.1120; e-mail: QPPublications@gems5.gov.bc.ca. Orders can be placed online at www.publications.gov.bc.ca

Government agencies and institutions in developing Commonwealth countries may

receive copies at no charge. Nominal charges apply to orders from developed, newly developed and non-Commonwealth countries – usually CDN \$12.00 plus shipping. These orders must be accompanied by pre-payment or charged to VISA or MasterCard accounts.

www.col.org/LLLinHigher

THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS REPORT 2005

United Nations, New York, 2005

This report is the most comprehensive accounting to date of progress in attainment of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The UN's report is the product of extensive international collaboration to provide statistics and summaries of progress for each MDG. It contains useful new data and assessments of progress in different regions. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan calls it "a mixed scorecard".

"There has been a massive, unprecedented reduction in poverty worldwide since 1990, led by Asia," said the Secretary-General at the launch of the progress report in June. "But, at the same time, the very poorest are getting poorer in Sub-Saharan Africa."

Some of the report's findings include:

- Five developing regions are approaching universal primary school enrolment.
- The gender gap is closing in primary school enrolment in the developing world.

- While death rates in children under age five are dropping, 11 million children a year die from preventable or treatable causes.

This report preceded the UN 2005 World Summit in New York in September where world leaders assessed how far their MDG pledges have been fulfilled and decided on what further steps are needed.

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/pdf/MDG%20Book.pdf>



THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE: ISSUES OF LEARNER SUPPORT IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN LOW INCOME COUNTRIES

By Charlotte Creed, Terry Allsop, Roger Mills and Ros Morpeth, March 2005

This report, prepared for COL by the International Research Foundation for Open Learning, focuses on an important aspect of open and distance learning (ODL): tutoring. It reflects on existing approaches to learner support, with a particular focus on lower income countries. The report also provides examples of how such support is provided in a range of circumstances and offers principles on which learner support systems may be based.

www.col.org/Consultancies/05ArtOfPossible.pdf

EVENTS — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

instruction designs. The Learning Initiatives website (www.learninginitiatives.org) will offer both public domain material and also platforms for the registered users.

Meeting participants decided to work in the priority areas of Special Education, Teaching of English and Environment Education, focussing on needs of teachers and teacher educators. COL will begin to network its partners in the region with learning initiatives to try out this virtual platform for e-content

development. The hope is that the emerging model of e-content development could also be used elsewhere in the Commonwealth.

ASIA — FOCUS ON TEACHER EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

"Making Teacher Education Interactive" was the subject of a seminar organised by COL and the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) under the umbrella of the South Asian Consortium for Teacher Education and Development (SACTED) on 19 May 2005 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Twenty-three teacher educators from Australia, India, Malaysia, Maldives,

Pakistan and Sri Lanka participated in the seminar. The discussion focused on the importance of human interaction in creating processes such as collaborative reflective practice in teacher development. It was emphasised that teacher training programmes by ODL that have materials and learner support which encourage interactivity will be more effective in developing teaching competence in the trainees.

Dr. Shardindu, Chairperson of the Advisory Committee of SACTED chaired the Seminar. Professor Mohan Menon, COL Education Specialist, School Development remarked that both classroom and distance mode teacher training programmes face the challenge of facilitating human interactivity through materials and learner support systems. Professor Chandra Gunawardena, Dean, Faculty of Education, OUSL welcomed all participants from different countries to the seminar.

(FROM LEFT)
PROFESSOR
CHANDRA
GUNAWARDENA, DR.
SHARDINDU AND
PROFESSOR MOHAN
MENON AT THE
SACTED SEMINAR IN
COLOMBO



EdTech News



GOING BEYOND THE KEYBOARD

Would you like to untie your fingers from your keyboard and type without tapping those keys? The non-keyboard entry methods have not yet reached the level of accuracy that keyboards have (what you type is what you get), but the technologies have moved forward considerably. There are now two main methods for inputting information into your PC without having to type – speaking and writing.

Speaking to your computer

Voice recognition has advanced a lot in the last ten years or so, and some software manufacturers report up to 99% accuracy. These programmes learn your voice pattern by listening to you reading a few prepared written passages. Once you have read to your computer for a while, it will recognise how you pronounce words and how you prefer to construct sentences.

Voice recognition does not just listen to individual words. Because so many words sound similar but are spelled differently and have different meanings, the programme needs to listen to a whole sentence or at least part of it so that it can understand the context in which each word is used. Also, it is important that you always pronounce the same word in the same way. Some programmes will “read” a few of the documents that you have written, analyse your normal writing style and take that into account when deciding what words you are saying.

You may have voice recognition software that has been pre-loaded on your computer or there are several brands to choose from if you decide to purchase. Generally, the free or very cheap packages are likely to be less accurate and more troublesome than the more expensive ones. The commercial packages rapidly escalate in price. Most people do not need to buy the most expensive versions as they are designed for specialised purposes such as for the medical or legal professions. For general dictation, standard or “Preferred” editions do the job.

It is also important to remember that this kind of software needs training, specifically in the areas of special words and abbreviations that might be common in your profession.



MICROSOFT TC4200 TABLET



USING VOICE RECOGNITION SOFTWARE

All of this needs a little patience. If you get the hang of it, it is very nice to be able to enter your words into your computer at close to the speed of normal speech, which is much faster than most people can type.

Another factor to take into account is the capacity of your computer. If the computer does not have enough memory (RAM), a good

To use handwriting recognition, you need to have a tablet PC. It's then debatable as to whether it is more efficient to type or to write. If you write, the script does not necessarily have to be converted into computer text, but can be left and saved as handwriting. The benefit of leaving your text in handwriting is that you can combine drawings and diagrams, sketches and doodles all on the same page. The disadvantage is that you cannot use search software to find information in the handwritten version that has not been converted into text.

Once you have read to your computer for a while, it will recognise how you pronounce words and how you prefer to construct sentences.

enough soundcard and fast enough CPU speed, a voice-recognition programme will simply be a drag on your machine and not help you to get your job done. Lastly, remember that this programme converts what you say into text. It does not question your grammar or ask what you meant by what you just said!

Handwriting recognition

Handwriting recognition is something that has come out along with tablet PCs. It is not entirely new as it was popularised when PDAs (personal digital assistants) became available. Like voice recognition, handwriting recognition has its difficulties. Everyone writes differently and we know that many of us have handwriting that others (and sometimes ourselves!) just cannot read. How then can the computer read our handwriting?

The handwriting recognition now available on tablet PCs using the Microsoft tablet version of Windows XP is able to read both block letters and longhand with a surprising degree of accuracy. This does not work for many other people, however, because we have simply forgotten how to write properly since leaving school.

A programme like Windows Journal is included in the tablet version of Windows XP and will enable you to get started with writing on your tablet. A programme like Windows OneNote is sometimes bundled on tablet PCs or you may need to purchase it. OneNote enables you to combine both types of text, handwriting recognition and diagrams on the same page. It helps you to construct a large filing cabinet comprising sections and dividers with documents inside the dividers. If the notes are stored in OneNote in text format the search facilities help you find your notes again. This means that if you need to refer back to a previous meeting you can quickly run a search and find your notes.

Dragon NaturallySpeaking: www.scansoft.com/naturallyspeaking/

IBM ViaVoice: www-306.ibm.com/software/voice/viavoice/

Microsoft: support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;en-us;306537

Microsoft Tablet PC: www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/tabletpc/default.mspx

OneNote: www.microsoft.com/onenote

MOBILE LEARNING

First there was correspondence learning. Then came distance learning. Now we talk about eLearning. Is mobile or mLearning next? Are these terms meaningful? Or are they just buzzwords? One could ask the question whether we will ever get back to plain old learning.

Mobile learning – learning using devices such as cell phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs) or combinations of these technologies – has the capability to revolutionise the way we think and learn about education and development. If distance learning is about providing access to education then no technology has greater potential to bring education to the people (as opposed to bringing people to education) than mobile learning. Using these technologies people can learn when and where it is convenient for them. We have reached learning on demand.

The text messaging capabilities of mobile devices seems to be particularly pow-

We have reached learning on demand.

erful with respect to mLearning. Using text messaging to transmit information from teacher to learner concerning assignments and content can vastly speed up communications. Perhaps more importantly, text messaging allows learners to communicate with each other thus creating a learning community that extends far beyond the life and confines of traditional or even computer-based learning environments.

More practically, mLearning devices allow users to literally lighten the load. PDAs and cell phones are small enough to carry around anywhere and are easier to maintain than desktop or even laptop computers. It is no longer necessary to cart kilograms of equipment in order to pursue learning and the equipment itself is far less expensive than traditional computers.



But what about the infamous digital divide? In this case the digital divide may not be as gaping as we think. According to a recent survey reported on in *The Economist*, mobile phone subscriptions in Sub-Saharan Africa rose by more than 150% last year. This growth is outpacing that in many developed nations and is, in fact, “leapfrogging” more standard technologies like fixed wire telecoms and the Internet. Perhaps in this case, for the developing world at least, mLearning will be more than just a buzz word used by the north, but will be a meaningful concept and technology with the capacity to provide learning for all.

www.developmentgateway.org

AUTHORING REUSABLE LEARNING OBJECTS WITH eXe

The eLearning XHTML editor (eXe) project is a desktop authoring environment that helps teachers and academics publish web content without the need to become proficient in HTML mark up language. You can publish eXe content as a web-ready package needing only a desktop web browser to run it or as an IMS/SCORM package export for delivery on a wide range of learning management systems.

The barriers associated with reusable learning objects are pedagogical, not technological. Each learning context is unique because learning outcomes, students and teachers differ, thus limiting reuse of content in different situations. While interoperability specifications (like IMS and SCORM) facilitate reuse of digital learning objects among different learning management systems at a technical level, we must find ways to empower teachers to customise and adapt learning content for different contexts.

In response to these challenges, the eXe project is breaking down barriers by providing a range of structural elements that describe learning content such as objectives

and reflective questions. This open source software (OSS) project is funded by the Tertiary Education Commission of New Zealand. eXe is the first in a range of tools that are planned under the umbrella of the exeLearning initiative aimed at developing OSS tools for eLearning.

eXe has huge potential for supporting eLearning in developing society contexts because you do not need Internet connectivity to author or deliver content. Download eXe, try it out and let the development team know what you think (exe@auckland.ac.nz).

<http://exelearning.org>



AUTHORING MODE

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Chairman:

Dr. Lewis Perinbam, o.c.

President & CEO:

Sir John Daniel

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Commonwealth of Learning
1055 West Hastings, Suite 1200
Vancouver, BC V6E 2E9
Canada

TEL: +1.604.775.8200 | FAX: +1.604.775.8210

E-MAIL: info@col.org | WEB: www.col.org

Editor-in-chief: Dave Wilson

Managing Editor: Karen Speirs

Contributing writer: Grace Chin

Layout: Alex Hennig