Connections

Learning for Development

LEFT: SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN KENYA REVIEW VISUAL AIDS TO TEACH STUDENTS ABOUT ICTS **RIGHT:** A YOUNG MAN AND HIS GRANDMOTHER IN INGOTSE-SHIKOTI VILLAGE IN KAKAMEGA DISTRICT, KENYA ARE AMONG THE FARMERS LEARNING TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVELIHOODS THROUGH SUGARCANE FARMING TECHNIQUES TAUGHT BY KENYATTA UNIVERSITY

NEW COL-PROTEIN PROJECTS ADDRESS POVERTY

COL has announced awards for six projects under its Poverty Reduction Outcomes through Education Innovations and Networks (COL-PROTEIN) programme. The projects, selected from applications received earlier this year, use open and distance learning (ODL) to alleviate poverty in developing countries. COL provides expertise in ODL and financial support of up to CDN $20,000 for each.

ICTS FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

Kenyatta University is a government-sponsored university in Kenya with more than 21,000 students. Through this project, the university seeks to reduce poverty among peasant farmers in Kakamega District in Western Kenya. Some 75 percent of farmers in this area live below the poverty line. The main reasons are lack of knowledge and information. The university is working with local partners to develop an agricultural knowledge ICT centre that will use computers, television, telephones and radio to deliver agricultural information to farmers and their families, enhancing their ability to access better markets and prices for their produce. Poor farmers and young women will benefit from the market information centres, access to jobs and income-generating activities.

TEACHERS TALKING: COMPUTER LITERACY TRAINING FOR TEACHERS IN KENYA

Charity for African Welfare and Development (CAWD) is charity based in Kenya, Nigeria and the UK, which promotes the use of ICTs in rural Africa. "Teachers Talking" is an introduction to ICTs designed specifically, but not exclusively, for rural teachers. It promotes alternatives to rote learning and encourages teachers to see themselves as members of a worldwide connected community. The ultimate objective is to enable teachers to enter into informed debate and influence policy regarding ICTs in education in rural Africa. The project uses ICTs to provide train-the-trainer sessions to teachers, who can then share their knowledge about ICTs with colleagues, pupils and local communities. This project is building the capacity of teachers to become productive citizens and to compete in the computerised global marketplace.

FUNCTIONAL LITERACY FOR LIVELIHOODS IN RURAL BANGLADESH

The Centre for Urban Studies (CUS) is an independent research and training organisation that conducts

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PCF5 ISSUES CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

COL's Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF5), which will be held from 13-17 July 2008 at the University of London, UK, has issued a Call for Proposals for contributions to the conference. Proposals can cover a wide range of activities including workshops, round table discussions, formal academic papers, presentations, poster sessions, group work and networking. All proposals must be related to the conference themes, which are:

1. Health,
2. Livelihoods,
3. Provision for children and young people, and
4. Governance, conflict and social justice.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

COL PROTEIN CONTINUED FROM COVER

TEACHERS TAKE PART IN THE "TEACHERS TALKING" COURSE AT HOLY ROSARY COLLEGE, TALA, KENYA

poverty research in Bangladesh. Working with the Centre for Development through ODL, Publishing and Communication and Pimedia, a technology service provider, CUS is establishing a Learning Centre that will use information and communications technologies (ICTs) to provide education and skills training in one of the least developed areas of Bangladesh. This is one of the first initiatives in Bangladesh to use technology-mediated learning to teach adult literacy. By providing learners – primarily rural girls and women – with functional literacy and skills development, this project will help families generate income, which will substantially improve livelihoods.

STRENGTHENING DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES IN BANGLADESH

Masjid Council for Community Advancement (MACCA) is a faith-based development and humanitarian organisation in Bangladesh. While government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are working to address significant social development issues in Bangladesh, a major challenge in reducing poverty is changing people's beliefs, misconceptions and behaviour. This project seeks to develop the capacity of different religious leaders to support and strengthen development initiatives. MACCA is developing a curriculum and self-instructional training modules using ODL to train religious leaders so they can work as "Faith Ambassadors" to complement ongoing efforts to achieve social development goals and poverty reduction.

MACCA HOSTS A WORKSHOP FOR "FATIH AMBASSADORS" IN BANGLADESH

FUNCTIONAL LITERACY AND SKILLS-BASED EDUCATION FOR YOUTH IN EARTHQUAKE AREAS OF PAKISTAN

Established in 1974, Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) was the first open university in Asia. It is a distance education institution that provides basic to doctoral level programmes. This project seeks to provide functional literacy, health education, psychological rehabilitation and skills-based training to the youth of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province and the Jammu and Kashmir region. As many teachers have lost their lives and schools have been damaged, the project will use multi-media ODL to provide a second chance at education and the opportunity to learn livelihood skills for the garment-making industry. All the materials will also be available online through AIOU's website. This will help bring out-of-school youth back into the stream of educational development and economic activity.

WINNEBA OPEN DIGITAL VILLAGE, GHANA

oneVillage Foundation-Ghana is an all-volunteer NGO in Ghana that works to increase access to ICTs in under-served communities to address the digital divide and increase economic opportunity. This project is focussed on ICT capacity building and community development. It involves developing ODL modules to teach the rural poor ways to get balanced nutrition from locally available foods, providing low-cost wireless access to the general community and strengthening ICT capacity in major training institutions. It also includes developing and broadcasting radio programmes through local community radio stations. By providing educational, governmental and health care institutions with increased access to ICTs, this project will enhance education, health care, economic development and livelihoods.

www.col.org/protein

PCF5 CONTINUED FROM COVER

PCF5's goal is to stimulate as much discussion and learning as possible. The style of sessions will be varied to reflect the different approaches used in various educational sectors for knowledge-sharing and the development of ideas. Proposal guidelines can be found at www.col.org/pcf5. The deadline for abstracts, which can be submitted online, is 30 November 2007.

Registration for PCF5 is also available online. The early bird rate of £275 applies until 30 April 2008, and conference fees can be paid online by credit card (through PayPal). Conference organisers have made reservations for accommodations at several venues in the Bloomsbury area for PCF5 delegates. Rooms must be booked directly with the hotels. More information is available on the website.

PCF5 is being hosted by COL in partnership with the University of London, forming a part of the University's celebration of the 150th anniversary of the establishment of its External Degrees initiative. Support for delegate participation from developing countries is being provided by COL, the U.K. Open University, University of London External Programme and UNESCO. Conference Co-Chairs are Sir Graeme Davies, Vice-Chancellor of the University of London, and Sir John Daniel, President and CEO of COL.

www.col.org/pcf5

COLLABORATION WITH UNESCO

Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, and Sir John Daniel, President and CEO of COL, signed in July a new Work Plan Agreement aimed at strengthening co-operation between the two organisations in the field of education. The agreement covers such priority areas as expanding access to universal primary education, teacher training and education for sustainable development. UNESCO and COL are collaborating in activities related to open, distance and eLearning, and in the development of open source software. Another important area for collaboration is in strengthening South-South co-operation in open schooling, particularly for girls, women and other disadvantaged groups.

"The original Memorandum of Understanding between COL and UNESCO goes back to 1994," said COL President Sir John Daniel. "I am delighted that we have updated it and I sense real enthusiasm amongst the colleagues in both organisations who will liaise on the various areas. The mandates of COL and UNESCO are complementary and we can do important things together."

www.col.org/col-unesco

LIFELONG LEARNING FOR FARMERS IN SRI LANKA

FARMERS ARE IMPROVING BANANA FARMING PRODUCTIVITY IN THE HAMBANTOTA REGION OF SRI LANKA

COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme has been launched in Sri Lanka. This follows the innovative initiative's success in two rural areas in South India over the past three years. The official launch of the programme, held in Hambantota in southern Sri Lanka in April 2007, was attended by the Honourable Chamal Rajapakse, Sri Lanka's Minister of Irrigation and Water Resources, several senior representatives from government, universities and financial institutions, and 35 rural farmers.

Lifelong Learning for Farmers is a response to a critical need: the wealth of information resulting from agricultural research and development often fails to travel the last mile to the villages of the developing world where it is most needed. While governments face challenges in funding adequate agricultural extension, globalisation is creating increasing competition for poor rural farmers.

Lifelong Learning for Farmers addresses these issues by empowering vulnerable rural women and their families to:

- gain knowledge,
- create their own self-directed learning process,
- organise themselves to solve problems with producing and marketing their products and food security,
- improve their living conditions, and
- increase their freedoms and independence from external charity.

YOUNG WOMEN DEVELOP BANANA PLANTS IN LABORATORIES IN RURAL SRI LANKA

The pilot phase of Lifelong Learner for Farmers in Sri Lanka is taking place in four villages. In Sri Lanka, as in India, the programme involves four key partners:

1) **Farmers:** Rural farmers form an association and create their own vision of development for their community.
2) **A consortium of learning institutions:** Several organisations and Ministries are taking a keen interest in introducing Lifelong Learning for Farmers in Sri Lanka. They include the Open University of Sri Lanka, the University of Colombo, Eastern University, the Export Development Board and the Irrigation Department. They are bringing together their expertise in disciplines related to agriculture, to serve as an information resource for farmers.
3) **Information and communications technologies kiosks:** These ICT kiosks link the farmers to this consortium and also provide other useful information. In Sri Lanka, Vidhatha centres, equipped with computers, Internet and other facilities, are proposed for 300 villages. These centres could facilitate the transfer of information from scientific and research institutions to rural farmers.
4) **Banks:** Commercial banks are encouraged to provide loans to farmers who have increased their knowledge, capacity and productivity thanks to information from the consortium and ICT kiosks. In Sri Lanka, Rural Cooperative Bank is participating in the Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme.

AGRICULTURAL CHALLENGES IN SRI LANKA

While Sri Lanka has been a model for other countries with its emphasis on human development, a high adult literacy rate, high primary and secondary education enrolments, high life expectancy rate and low population growth rate, the country faces developmental issues related to agriculture.

About 40 percent of Sri Lanka's population are poor or vulnerable to poverty. Farmers cultivating small plots of land with few off-farm sources of family income account for a large share of the poor. Agricultural challenges include:

- Lack of knowledge in cultivation and in developing strong market linkages,
- Global competition,
- Micronutrient deficiency, and
- Mishandling of chemical pesticides and fertilizers.

ADDRESSING GENDER ISSUES

While agriculture is still the predominant form of employment for rural women in Sri Lanka, these women are seen as housewives, not as farmers. As a result, they receive little training or extension support. Without access to information, these women face limited economic opportunities. Lifelong Learning for Farmers has the potential to provide rural women with information and access to credit. With small, low-interest loans, women can engage in self-employment projects that generate income and improve livelihoods for families and entire communities.

Lifelong Learning for Farmers enables communities to move away from donor dependency towards a development process that is both sustainable and self-replicating. The programme is already demonstrating success in Sri Lanka. Farmers are learning to cultivate more profitable crops: one farmer in the Hambantota region saw his income rise by a factor of six when he switched from growing mixed vegetables to bananas. Local women are finding employment in a laboratory where banana plants are being produced using tissue culture technology.

After visiting Hambantota, where the programme has been introduced COL President Sir John Daniel commented, "I was inspired by the impact of Lifelong Learning for Farmers and by the quality and dedication of our Sri Lankan collaborators. Thanks to the programme, farmers are improving their livelihoods, and young local women are employed in skilled precision work in sterile laboratories right next to their village."

Lifelong Learning for Farmers is also being adapted and introduced in Jamaica, Kenya, Mauritius and Papua New Guinea.

LIFE SKILLS COURSES DEVELOPED FOR VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

VUSSC WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS IN TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Educators from 18 countries gathered at the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine, Trinidad & Tobago in June for a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) training workshop. Organised by COL in partnership with the Trinidad & Tobago Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, this was the third VUSSC "boot camp". Over three weeks, the educators worked in teams to begin the creation of course materials and to learn a range of information and communications technologies (ICTs) skills that can be applied and taught to others in their home countries.

MS. RITA PORTILLO, PERMANENT SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION, TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Using the COL-sponsored WikiEducator website, workshop participants focussed on developing course materials for Life Skills courses such as Communication, Money Management and Employability. The materials, along with others for which development began at each of the boot camps are being prepared for release as course modules (using COL's Instructional Design Template) and will be available through COL's website in multiple formats. This is free content: the learning materials carry the "Creative Commons BY-SA-3.0" license, which enables anyone to legally download the materials, customise them and use them, as long as they acknowledge the source. COL and the VUSSC member countries are encouraging other countries to follow their example of creating and sharing learning content as free and open educational resources.

Participants received USB memory devices with free portable software installed on them. Using these and almost any Windows PC, they are able to access their own programmes and carry their data with them. This "Virtual PC" concept helps to overcome the shortage of personally owned computers.

The fourth VUSSC training workshop, to be held in November 2007 in Samoa, will focus on developing course materials in the area of Disaster Management. By the end of 2007, 80 educators will have participated in VUSSC workshops. An important spin-off is substantial capacity building in ICTs and instructional design within the participating small states. After the workshops, participants continue to collaborate online, contribute to course development and share their new skills with colleagues.

COL is also working to create an agreed framework of quality assurance and unit standards to facilitate the transfer of courses and qualifications among countries. Existing structures and documents are now being assembled into a Transnational Qualifications Framework with the help of the South African Qualifications Authority.

VUSSC is helping 30 of the smallest countries in the world to build development capacity and strengthen economies through improved education. It is facilitated by COL with financial support from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. VUSSC continues to actively seek funds to support course development and future content development workshops for educators from other small states of the Commonwealth. Development agencies and others that are interested in pursuing this social investment opportunity are encouraged to contact Mr. Paul West, COL's Director of Knowledge Management and Information Technology, at pwest@col.org.

www.col.org/vussc

BOOT CAMP REFLECTIONS

COL's immersion workshops for course development for VUSSC provide educators with a unique opportunity to learn valuable skills in an emerging field while creating close links with colleagues from around the world. After three weeks of intense learning, workshop participants return home as members of a "new Diaspora", in the words of Professor Alain Senteni who assisted the Ministry of Education of Mauritius in hosting the first boot camp. Some workshop "graduates" share their thoughts about the tremendous value of this experience.

Meeting people from so many different countries and working with them towards one aim has been a great learning experience. Small countries like ours all share in a common pool of problems and needs. Leveraging technology to overcome these is good, but doing it together is great!

Mr. Philip Serracino Inglott, Malta

A few months ago, I had not thought it would be possible for me to ever learn practical, hands-on-skills on learning content development and even start to think to offer some components of Institute of Distance Education programmes and courses online. Now it's definitely all possible. I'm confident that with this great VUSSC team and a team of more colleagues back home, we shall take up this collaborative task to new heights and in the process learn many new skills.

Ms. Nokuthula Shabalala, Swaziland

Having a relatively small group of people together for three weeks made it the most coherent Commonwealth group I've worked with – people had time to get to know each other… People learned not just technical skills, but different ways of looking at things, different styles of communication, respect and understanding for others.

Ms. Jenny Williams, New Zealand

COMMUNITY RADIO TAKES FLIGHT IN INDIA

COL PRESIDENT SIR JOHN DANIEL VISITS HOLY CROSS COLLEGE TIRUCHIRAPPALLI, ONE OF THE COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS THAT IS BROADCASTING THE "SCIENCE FOR WOMEN" PROGRAMMES. SIR JOHN WENT TO A NEARBY URBAN SLUM WHERE THE RADIO BROADCASTS WERE PICKED UP BY MOBILE PHONES.

COL's regional agency, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), is helping 13 community radio stations in India to launch a year-long radio project titled "Science for Women". Various universities and institutes host and run the radio stations with support from CEMCA. The stations hope to attract 1,000 female listeners each, according to CEMCA Director, Dr. R, Sreedher.

"Science for Women" was conceived by Anna FM at Anna University as a pilot. Developed at the local level with support from CEMCA and the Government of India, the broadcasts help women living in resource-poor settings to use and profit from science in their everyday life. In collaboration with the Government of India's National Council for Science and Technology Communication, CEMCA is undertaking baseline studies and capacity building in the 13 radio stations that are airing these programmes.

CEMCA is helping to launch new community radio stations at Aditanar College, Tiruchendur; Sri Bhagwan Mahavir Jain College, Bangalore; the University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad; the University of Delhi; and Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, Kota. Aditanar College is the first licensed radio station in the beach area ravaged by the 2004 tsunami on the Bay of Bengal.

Community radio caters to the interests of a specific area by broadcasting material that has relevance to a local audience. In India, community radio is commonly non-profit and non-commercial. It is believed to have tremendous potential for social development and empowerment of the marginalised.

"Radio is not simply a tool for entertainment," explained CEMCA's Dr. Sreedher. "It is also a great tool for employment and a medium to develop solutions to local problems at the community level."

Many of the radio broadcasts involve interaction with listeners who call in from cell phones. This enables marginalised groups to express their views and have a voice. It is estimated that one in every two Indians will have a cell phone by 2010, opening up many opportunities for learning for development. During his visit to Tiruchirappalli COL President Sir John Daniel remarked, "I gained a new insight into the role of technology in embedding democracy. The combination of cell phones and community radio can give even the most disadvantaged people access to the media. This is tremendously powerful for fostering the Commonwealth values of peace, equality, democracy and good governance."

The Government of India has commissioned CEMCA to organise regional consultations to create awareness, popularise the concept of community radio and help educational institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to use community radio. India's ambitious target is 5,000 such radio stations. Dr. Sreedher has also been appointed to the Government's Screening Committee that will review the increasing number of community radio station license applications from NGOs and civil society organisations.

TACKLING HEALTH CHALLENGES WITH MASS MEDIA

A CAMERA PERSON TRAINED BY COLME SHOOTS A TECHNICAL/ VOCATIONAL TEACHING VIDEO IN TUVALU

COL's Media Empowerment (COLME) programme continues to empower groups in developing countries to use low-cost media applications to increase awareness and address health problems such as HIV/AIDS. COLME recently set up a media unit in Papua New Guinea in partnership with a local non-governmental organisation (NGO), Anglicare STOPAIDS. COLME provided video equipment, an editing studio and training in video production, enabling Anglicare to make videos of a drama production that encourages HIV/AIDS testing and counselling. COLME also provided a screen, projector and gas generator so that the video can be shown at village cinema events throughout the country.

In Malawi, COLME has set up a similar media unit in partnership with MACRO and the local World Health Organization country office. MACRO works specifically on HIV/AIDS prevention, stigma and testing. The media unit will produce videos that will also reach rural areas via village cinema events.

COLME has also partnered this year with the Ministry of Education in the South Pacific island state of Tuvalu to establish a media production centre. Having gained video production equipment and training from COLME, the Ministry is now able to produce radio or video programmes that teach students about issues such as global warming and provide associated training for teachers.

GUY SOBELL HARD AT WORK IN CROATIA

TUTOR ON TWO WHEELS

By Guy Sobell

For some time I have been providing online tutorial support for the *Writing Effectively* courses that COL delivers for UN agencies and other international organisations. With my learners working for the United Nations, being posted all over the world, it seemed to me appropriate that I too should be working in as many different places as I can get to on two wheels. Thus, several years ago I acquired a good Italian bicycle and an ultraportable Taiwanese laptop.

Today I am in the South of France, having ridden here from Prague. Almost everywhere along my route – which took in southern Bohemia, the Danube, Budapest, Belgrade, Venice, the Croatian island of Cres, some French Alps, Provence and Languedoc – I have been able to connect wirelessly to the Internet. A few years ago this was not possible, but most hotels offer this service now, and if they do not, there will invariably be a café on an agreeable square that does. In Limoux, a quirky little town situated just south of the World Heritage site of Carcassonne, you can for example connect to the WiFi network conveniently provided by the Grand Café on the Place de la République. If you happen to come here, all you need to know is the network key: it's *Milou,* instantly recognisable to cognoscenti as the name of Tintin's dog.

Tour riding has the advantages of discovery and adventure, but it has the disadvantages of encumbering you with the weight of your baggage, such as it is. Mine is very light: the laptop slips neatly into one of my panniers, my "evening wear" into another. What more is needed? On the other hand, the concept of "hub and dayride" is decidedly attractive: you arrive in a nice place, stay for a week or so and ride loops every day without baggage. Geneva was one such place for me. There I also had the chance to meet some of my learners at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Information technology has enabled me to work as a tutor and cycle like a madman almost anywhere in the world. Uzbekistan is looking inviting.

TUTORS AND FELLOWSHIP SCHEME STUDENTS FROM NIGERIA AT A CONTENT WORKSHOP

NEW RAJIV GANDHI FELLOWSHIP SCHEME SCHOLARSHIPS

COL is offering up to 25 new scholarships to Commonwealth citizens under its Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme (RGFS). The programme covers tuition fees for the Master of Arts in Distance Education degree, which is offered at a distance by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU).

COL invites applications from universities in developing countries of the Commonwealth that are prepared to represent and administer the RGFS scholarships. Up to two universities representing two separate regions will be selected for this purpose. Successful universities will act as RGFS "regional institutions", accepting and granting applications from staff and individuals in neighbouring institutions. These regional institutions must also provide adequate learner support for students enrolled in the RGFS. COL will provide the funds needed to administer the programme, which includes liaising directly with IGNOU on all matters.

Preference for scholarships are given to faculty members seeking professional development in open and distance learning, particularly those with conventional teaching experience who are teaching students learning by distance or who will be teaching via distance methods.

Interested universities should send an application to Ms. Ruvani Ameresekere at info@col.org outlining their interest and how they would be organised to run the scholarship.

SUPPORTING AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA

COL is working with one of Africa's largest agricultural research bodies to expand technology-mediated open and distance learning (ODL) for agricultural education in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) is a large umbrella organisation for groups involved in agriculture and development in Africa. In addition to co-ordinating agricultural research activities in Africa, FARA is increasingly involved in agricultural education, extension and development.

COL recently commissioned a report that outlines eight country case studies about the use of ODL for improving livelihoods through agriculture. The countries included were Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. The report focuses on the urgent need to use information and communications technologies (ICTs) to provide education, training, information and communication about agriculture. The report also identifies opportunities for COL to partner with FARA to enhance agricultural education and improve livelihoods.

www.fara-africa.org

FREE HANDOUT MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

The COL-sponsored WikiEducator website is spearheading a project to create a library of free learning materials for teachers. Handouts4Teachers is promoting the collaborative development of handouts used to support classroom teaching. This could include worksheets, small group projects and homework assignments that help students master new concepts.

Teachers will be able to access and download the handouts at no cost on WikiEducator. They will be free to modify the handouts to suit the needs of their students. The handouts will be a valuable resource that could save teachers considerable time and money.

WikiEducators have begun a listing of free classroom handout projects. After providing examples of good handouts, the next step will be to encourage educators to collaborate on more handouts for all grades and all subject areas. The plan is to expand this project into developing free textbooks. Teachers wanting to improve their wiki authoring skills in order to contribute to the initiative are encouraged to use the WikiEducator tutorials available on the site (www.wikieducator.org/Help:Contents).

The Free Textbooks project, which is still in its early phase, is a partnership between FreeCulture.org (an international student organisation), the Open Knowledge Foundation and WikiEducator.

www.wikieducator.org/Handouts4Teachers

http://freeculture.org

www.okfn.org

COL EDUCATION SPECIALIST DR. WILLIE CLARKE-OKAH (FAR RIGHT) WITH TWO OF THE UNISA AUDIT PANEL MEMBERS, PROFESSOR OLUGBEMIRO JEGEDE, VICE CHANCELLOR OF THE NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA (LEFT) AND PROFESSOR BERNARD KING, VICE CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ABERTAY DUNDEE

QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDITS

COL is enhancing quality assurance in higher education by conducting invitational audits of open and distance learning (ODL) institutions. Working with experts in the field, COL recently completed a Quality Assurance audit of the University of South Africa (UNISA) and a wide ranging review of the University of Ghana. The trial audit for UNISA, completed in June 2007, was aimed at helping South Africa's biggest open university prepare for an audit by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the South African Council on Higher Education in 2008. Following interviews with more than 400 staff members, the trial audit provided comprehensive advice and suggestions that will help the university improve quality assurance practices.

The University of Ghana visitation, also conducted by a panel of local and international experts, led by COL President Sir John Daniel, concluded in August 2007. In addition to conducting the usual interviews during two site visits, the panel introduced a self-assessment process for all units in the university. The panel's report will help the University of Ghana improve its quality practices and introduce reforms that will help it meet the challenges of the 21st century.

COL'S EXECUTIVE DEGREES PROGRAMME EXPANDS

The Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) programmes are now being offered by three more universities in developing Commonwealth nations. The University College of the Caribbean (Jamaica), the University of Guyana and the University of Papua New Guinea have recently signed agreements to receive COL's license to offer its executive degree programmes.

Designed for senior and middle managers working in developing Commonwealth countries, the courses are delivered through open and distance learning. The CEMBA/CEMPA programmes help developing nations meet the need for professionals who can contribute to economic growth and good governance.

The CEMBA/CEMPA degrees and diplomas are granted by the licensee partner universities. This consortium also includes universities in Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. There have been more than 13,000 CEMBA/CEMPA course enrolments since the programmes were launched in 2002.

www.col.org/cemba

PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR eLEARNING IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

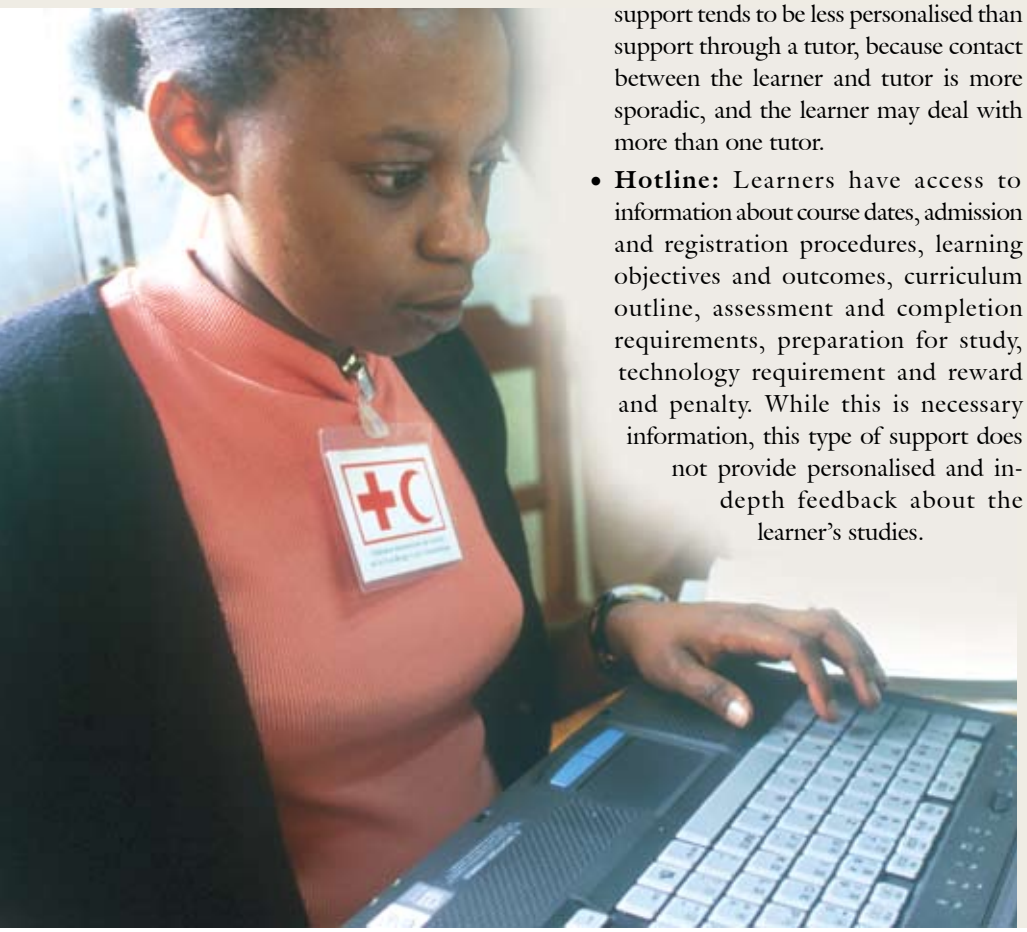
eLearning involves the application of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to enhance distance education. The use of eLearning is on the increase with the digital generation growing exponentially. However for eLearning to be relevant and learner focussed, developers and designers need to put in place all the best practices that lead to quality distance education. In addition to providing education at the primary, secondary and post-secondary levels, eLearning plays an important role in ongoing professional development for adults in the workforce. No matter what the level or what the subject matter, there is one constant: learner support is essential to the success of eLearning.

WHAT IS LEARNER SUPPORT?

Learner support can be described as the provision of individualised student support to improve learning. Learner support systems include tutoring/teaching assistance, administrative assistance, orientation, student discussion/support groups, counselling and library services. While course materials and learning resources are uniform, learner support personalises the learning experience.

There are several different forms of learner support for eLearning:

- **Tutorials:** Tutors can work with learners one-on-one or in groups, depending on the subject matter and budget. Communication can take face-to-face (e.g., in a study centre) or electronically through phone, email, videoconferencing, chat rooms or discussion boards. The type of communication is determined by the geographical spread of the learners and the access to ICTs by learners.
- **Surgeries:** While tutorials are tutor-driven, surgeries are learner-driven: learners approach tutors with their questions and problems. Like tutorials, surgeries can take place with learners singly or in groups, through face-to-face communication or electronically through the use of ICTs. This type of learner support tends to be less personalised than support through a tutor, because contact between the learner and tutor is more sporadic, and the learner may deal with more than one tutor.
- **Hotline:** Learners have access to information about course dates, admission and registration procedures, learning objectives and outcomes, curriculum outline, assessment and completion requirements, preparation for study, technology requirement and reward and penalty. While this is necessary information, this type of support does not provide personalised and in-depth feedback about the learner's studies.
- **Help Desk:** This form of learner support provides timely assistance on technical issues such as receiving and sending emails, opening and running CD-ROMs, and reading tracked changes and comments. A Help Desk can be physical or virtual, depending on how learners can access it. For instance, if learners are geographically close to the eLearning provider, a Help Desk may be an actual staffed desk. More commonly, Help Desks are accessed by telephone or Internet.
- **Student orientation:** This is an important element for eLearning, especially because this is such a new field of education that many learners have never studied this way before. They need to understand how eLearning works, what is expected of them and how their learning will be supported. This orientation can be provided through face-to-face sessions, online briefings (both live and static web content), print materials or CD-ROM.
- **Counselling/advising services:** While this can be part of the tutor's role, it can also be separate, focussing more on specific problems or the learner's overall development, rather than study of the course materials. Affordability and access will determine whether counselling services are provided individually, in groups, in person or online.
- **Library services and resources:** In addition to the course materials, many eLearning programmes give learners access to libraries, both physical and virtual. This



eLEARNING IN DIFFICULT

Ms. Najwa Qaisy, an International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies staff member in Baghdad, Iraq who completed the *Writing Effectively* course in 2006, was presented with an Excellence in Distance Education Award for "eLearning Experience in Difficult Circumstances" by COL last year. Ms. Qaisy describes how eLearning provided her with access to education and much more.

"For the past four years it has been literally impossible for me to even dare think about enrolling in a post graduate programme, attend daily classes, go to a library or even participate in a study group. The threats and hazards that one faces in cur-



depends on budget, availability of resources, geographic location of learners and what is most convenient for learners.

WHY LEARNER SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL TO eLEARNING

eLearners are usually geographically isolated from their teachers. A United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) staff member taking COL's *Writing Effectively* course in Tajikistan is half a world away from the COL office in Vancouver, Canada. If this learner merely receives written course materials, their chances of success are limited. There may not be anyone in their office who has taken this course. So if they don't understand a concept, get stuck on a study assignment or simply get overwhelmed when first faced with the course guide, they need support in order to continue. They need answers, ideas, advice and encouragement. And once they start completing assignments, they need personalised assessment of their work…and probably more advice and encouragement.

Learner support helps to replace the important educational aspects of face-to-face learning by helping learners to:

- develop their understanding of the content,
- identify and overcome areas of weakness,
- meet learning and assessment goals,
- feel connected and supported, and
- access administrative support, such as counselling.

No matter how brilliant the course materials are, learners still need support to validate their efforts. COL's experience with its *Writing Effectively* courses – delivered on behalf of UN agencies and other international organisations – has shown that frequent and regular contact with tutors and co-ordinators is necessary to the success of their learning experience. Research also shows that student retention levels and completion rates both increase when learner support is visible, accessible and responsive. With only the self-study package, a learner's ability to complete the courses would be significantly lower.

COL'S APPROACH TO LEARNER SUPPORT

COL provides eLearning programmes in subjects such as *Writing Effectively*, *Operational Data Management* and *Editorial Skills* for international organisations such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Labour Organization, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNHCR, the World Bank and the World Health Organization. For these courses, COL has developed a comprehensive learner support system that includes several elements:

- **E-tutoring:** COL has developed a talented and committed roster of tutors who provide personalised support, advice and evaluation to learners. Each learner is assigned a tutor who communicates with them one-on-one via email. The role of the tutor is to support learning

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

See also: "Tutor on two wheels," page 6

LEARNER SUPPORT IN ACTION

Mr. David Nthengwe is a Mass Information Officer with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo. He enrolled in COL's Writing Effectively programme in early 2007 and immediately received an email from his tutor in Canada, Mr. Greg Starr, asking about his job, his family, education, hobbies and interests.

"I am very eager to know about my students' lives, especially because we do not meet face to face," Mr. Starr's email read. "I would like to get to know you as a person, not just as a student." Mr. Nthengwe's extensive response launched a close personal relationship between student and tutor.

"Although we are continents apart and are linked only by information technology, we established a human feeling between us," Mr. Nthengwe explained. "The long exchanges that ensued explain how we broke through what would have been a communication barrier. In addition to his lively writing, Greg is very sensitive to situations and embodies a human touch in his interactions."

Shortly after beginning the course, Mr. Nthengwe encountered one of these "situations" when violence broke out in Kinshasa in March 2007. Some UN staff members were stranded in their offices; others were in hotels with no extra clothing for weeks on end. Then one of Mr. Nthengwe's colleagues died in a plane crash. It was a traumatic and troubling time. As a result, Mr. Nthengwe missed the deadline for submitting his first assignment.

"His whole life was interrupted, but David was determined to continue with his studies," said Mr. Starr. "I told him to take his time and arranged for an extension. By the middle of May, he submitted the assignment and went on to successfully complete the course."

"Greg always kept my spirits high when I needed him," said Mr. Nthengwe. "Simple and caring, but compelling messages like, 'Do you think you will be able to submit your assignment by Monday, 30 April? Please let me know if this is feasible for you. Take care', compelled his student to be answerable."

Having tutored some 330 students from several international organisations over the past seven years, Mr. Starr says students often have trouble getting started in a distance learning programme. That's one area where learner support is critical: after receiving a few "gentle nudges" from Mr. Starr by email, students are able to focus on their studies, submit assignments and learn from his feedback. It is a tremendously gratifying experience for both tutor and student.

CIRCUMSTANCES

rent everyday life in Iraq are beyond words.

"This learning experience kept me motivated during the worst times that my country has been through. Passing this course was the objective that put my mind off the domestic horrors that were taking place.

"A whole team was in the back stage to take care of the smallest problem that any given learner might face. This support means a lot to an isolated learner such as myself. Even emotional support was provided in my case! When my tutor occasionally sent me a message saying, 'I am sending you this message to check on you. I have been watching the news about Iraq and thought about seeing how you have been! Hang on and if you need anything you must let me know', it meant the world to me and gave me some extra energy that made me pull through!"

For more about Ms. Qaisy's eLearning experience, see "Celebrating Excellence in Distance Education" in the February 2007 edition of *Connections* (page 12). She made these comments while giving a presentation at the Third Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications, held last month in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

CONSORTIUM PROMOTES eLEARNING IN INDIA

A group of more than 20 educational institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and governments has come together to form the Indian Consortium for Educational Transformation (I-CONSENT). COL helped to form I-CONSENT, which is working to increase access to quality education through eLearning.

"Technology will help us level the playing field for all learners," said Professor Ram Takwale, a former Vice Chancellor of India's Indira Gandhi National Open University and Honorary COL Fellow, who is the head of I-CONSENT. "It's not possible for a single institution to meet the challenge of Education for All, so we need to come together – public institutions, private groups, communities and individuals – to develop solutions."

I-CONSENT is currently leading four initiatives:

- **Virtual School and Learning Homes:** a pilot programme in Maharashtra State that offers education to out-of-school children through open and distance learning.
- **Open Educational Resources:** learning materials that are freely available online for educators.
- **Nurturing Excellence and Talent Services (NETS):** a training programme that teaches teachers to use various tools and techniques to identify and nurture talent in students.
- **eTeacher Training:** an audio programme with learner support that provides teachers with knowledge and skills in information and communications technologies, open and distance learning and the development and use of open educational resources.

www.mkcl.org/iconsent

DE ASSOCIATION LAUNCHED IN SRI LANKA

The Sri Lanka Association of Distance Educators (SLADE) was formed recently with the aim of expanding educational opportunities for youth in the country. With funding from the Ministry of Higher Education and support from COL, SLADE is focussing on using technology to meet the need to massively expand access to education in Sri Lanka.

Speaking at the inauguration of SLADE, COL President Sir John Daniel identified distance education as the only way to expand educational opportunities to meet modern market demands. Vidya Jyothi Professor Dayantha Wijeyesekera, who has been a member COL's Board of Governors and a Vice Chancellor of the Open University of Sri Lanka and the University of Moratuwa, was elected founding president of SLADE.

SIR JOHN DANIEL SPEAKS AT THE LAUNCH OF SLADE

OPEN CONTENT IN NZ

Otago Polytechnic in New Zealand recently introduced a new Intellectual Property policy that encourages sharing of educational resources. Any material developed at the polytechnic will default to a Creative Commons (CC-BY) license unless specified otherwise by the creator. This enables staff and students, as the owners of Intellectual Property rights, to grant some or all of their rights to the public while retaining other rights. The result is that Otago Polytechnic's educational services and content will be more accessible, and the polytechnic will be able to collaborate in educational resource development internationally through platforms such as WikiEducator (www.WikiEducator.org).

INFOCUS: PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR eLEARNING IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

by orienting the learner to the course, answering questions, encouraging learner engagement, evaluating assignments and providing feedback. This often evolves into a close personal relationship that benefits the learner significantly.

- **Virtual system:** Learners are able to use the Internet to submit applications, register for courses, access counselling services and connect with their tutors. Course materials are available to learners through their organisation's Intranet, on a website, on a CD-ROM or in hard copy. This virtual system ensures "anywhere, anytime" access, an important convenience for eLearners, especially for those who are also employed full-time. This system has also been designed so that it uses the lowest common denominator of technology to ensure access and that it doesn't tax the information technology capacity of the organisation.
- **Just-in-time response:** To minimise costs and to be as responsive as possible to learners, course materials are produced as required, and turnaround times are very quick for tutor responses and marking of assignments. A Help Desk can be accessed by email 24/7 for information about key dates and Frequently Asked Questions. A Learner Support Hot Line connects learners directly to a learner support assistant, who will respond to administrative and related questions.
- **Recruitment, training and development of tutors:** The quality of the tutor has an enormous impact on learner success in eLearning. The tutor must have the right expertise, experience, teaching ability and commitment – it's a tall order. COL has recruited tutors through online advertisements and referrals from other tutors. Tutors are interviewed by telephone or in group face-to-face interviews. After an extensive training programme, tutors start to coach or mentor learners. Tutors are monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. Tutors take part in regular online discussions with each other to share best practices and solve problems collaboratively.

OPEN SCHOOL LAUNCHED IN TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

The new National Open School of Trinidad & Tobago enrolled its first students in June 2007. COL President Sir John Daniel attended the first orientation session for students, which was held at Waterloo High School. The National Open School uses a blend of conventional and distance education methods, allowing learners to choose how, when, where and what they will learn. A complement to the traditional school system, the National Open School emphasises skills, knowledge, abilities and competencies rather than qualifications.

A pilot programme is being conducted in nine secondary schools, targeting more than 1,200 students who received unsatisfactory grades in Math and English.

COL PRESIDENT SIR JOHN DANIEL JOINS STAFF OF THE DISTANCE EDUCATION UNIT AND CO-ORDINATORS OF THE ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAMMES AT THE LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL OPEN SCHOOL OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

COL has supported the development of the National Open School, providing expert advice and training for course writers, management and tutors. COL's work is aimed at building local capacity to ensure sustainability of this important initiative.

www.moe.gov.tt/National_Open_School.html

COL PROTEIN PROJECT WINS ASHDEN AWARD

Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha has received more international recognition for its Mobile Internet Educational Unit in a Boat project in Bangladesh. Shidhulai won an Ashden Award for Sustainable Energy in Education and Welfare. One of the first projects funded by COL's Poverty Reduction Outcomes through Education Innovations and Networks (COL-PROTEIN) programme, this innovative project uses boats to provide remote, marginalised communities with education, library access, agricultural training, health advice and access to mobile phones and the Internet. All 88 of the project's boats use solar energy; the project has also provided renewable energy supplies to more than 400,000 people. Established in 2001, the Ashden Awards recognise exemplary examples of sustainable energy use in the U.K. and the developing world.

- **Support web for tutors and learners:** COL has created a system of support for tutors and learners that includes external course advisors, the COL Course Co-ordinator and the COL Learning Manager. Each member of the COL team has specific functions and expertise for the tutors and learners to draw upon. The course advisors monitor tutoring quality and standardisation of assignment marking. The Course Co-ordinator tracks logistical issues such as registration, admission, and materials production and delivery. The Learning Manager is responsible for overall quality assurance of the eLearning materials development and delivery.
- **Focus on learning success:** COL's learners face work demands, family commitments and civil unrest (even war), which can have a significant impact on their studies and quality of work submitted. By adopting a policy of flexibility, which includes the limited granting of extensions on assignment deadlines and allowing for resubmission of work, COL encourages learning success.

The effectiveness of COL's learner support can be seen in an impressive 75 percent completion rate for students taking its eLearning programmes. As eLearning continues to improve and develop, so too will learner support. It is essential that organisations providing eLearning carefully evaluate which forms of learner support suit their learners and their distinct circumstances. By providing appropriate, responsive learner support, educators take a very important step in ensuring eLearning success.

GRAPPLING WITH COPYRIGHT AND THE FREEDOM CULTURE

The cost of buying or licensing educational material is reduced when educators use open access material, which the authors make available without charging royalties. In May 2007, COL published a paper that supported producing and using open licence material (www.col.org/copyright). Reactions to this paper led COL to return to this topic to deal with some issues in greater detail. There are some key points to consider when dealing with copyright issues.

First, although different licences lay down different conditions for how material may be used, there is nothing in principle to prevent an author from producing material that uses existing material that is subject to different licences. This can only be done, of course, if the new material respects the conditions in the original licences and acknowledges each piece of work. The new material, as a new work, will then need to be licensed with its own licence.

Second, COL encourages those who produce educational material to use open licences and make the material freely available. COL recognises, however, that some of those who produce educational material may need to receive royalties as well as recognition for the work they do. They might in rare situations even find it important to restrict derivative works from being produced, although the use of this restriction should be used most sparingly and for good reason.

Third, we understand the expression "non-commercial" in some Creative Commons and other similar licences to mean that the material is not used to generate a profit. The non-commercial (NC) restriction allows users to charge for copying and distributing the material and for the associated salaries and overhead expenses, irrespective of the nature of the business (public sector, non-profit or for-profit). Where NC materials are planned to generate a profit, the user should approach the owner of the material for permission.

For a more detailed discussion of these and other copyright issues, go to www.col.org/copyright.

AFRICA: INCREASING AWARENESS OF ODL FINANCING

Executives from open schools and policy makers from eight countries gathered in Gaborone, Botswana in July for a week-long workshop focussed on the cost and financing of open and distance learning. Organised by COL, the purpose of the workshop was to increase understanding of open school finances by bringing together people who run the open schools and government officials who often make decisions about funding for these institutions.

The workshop initiated a valuable dialogue between the two groups, helping open school executives to appreciate the issues governments face and helping those in government to gain a better appreciation of the funding needs of open schools. This dialogue will continue through online discussions, and a document summarising issues from the workshop will be available online for a broader group of open school executives and policy makers. In addition to helping to build capacity in open schools, COL is working to gain government support and an appreciation of the need to provide funding.

OPEN LEARNING IN ASIA

COL President Sir John Daniel provided the opening address at the 3rd International Conference on Open and Online Learning at the Universiti Sains Malaysia in June 2007. The use of Open Educational Resources for open and distance learning was a major theme of this international meeting. Sir John's speech, "Open Educational Resources: Help or Hindrance to Open Learning", addressed this important emerging issue.

www.col.org/speeches

MRS. FRANCES FERREIRA, COL EDUCATION SPECIALIST, BASIC EDUCATION AND OPEN SCHOOLING, VISITS A GRADE 5 CLASS AT THE ALOR BHUBAN COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRE IN DHAKA, BANGLADESH. WHEN THESE STUDENTS GRADUATE FROM THIS PRIMARY SCHOOL, THEY WILL BE READY FOR THE OPEN SCHOOL'S JUNIOR SECONDARY COURSES. ALREADY, MANY OF THESE CHILDREN ARE EMPLOYED; THEY WORK AFTER SCHOOL AND ON DAYS WHEN THERE IS NO SCHOOL.

ASIA: ENHANCINGING LEARNER SUPPORT

MR. A.K.M. RAHUL AMIN AKANDA, TREASURER OF BANGLADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY, AT THE OPENING OF THE TUTOR TRAINING WORKSHOP

COL sponsored a workshop to train tutors at the Open School of Bangladesh Open University (BOU). Twenty-five tutors took part in the workshop, which was led by Dr. Sushmita Mitra of India's National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).

This training will enhance learner support for the Open School's new Junior Secondary courses. BOU is working with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that provide primary education to many students in Bangladesh. Lacking a sufficient number of schools to provide Junior Secondary education, BOU is filling the gap. Course materials for Grade 6 were introduced earlier this year, and the tutors trained by Dr. Mitra will provide learner support for these students. A manual is also being produced so these tutors can train new tutors who subsequently join the programme.

COL is also providing BOU course writers with a training workshop this month to assist with development of materials for Grades 7 and 8. By facilitating the participation of experts from India, COL is encouraging South-South co-operation among Asia's open schools.

AFRICA: PROMOTING TVET

More than 150 people attended the 1st African UNESCO-UNEVOC TVET Summit on "Access to and Inclusion in TVET in Africa Through New ICT-based Solutions", which was held in conjunction with the eLearning Africa conference in Nairobi in May. The day-long meeting was organised by the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training in partnership with COL, the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Africa and the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training.

The TVET Summit explored the use of digital learning for technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Experts in the field, policy makers, researchers and practitioners shared experiences and discussed strategies for promoting and sustaining information and communications technologies (ICTs) in TVET.

With labour market demands constantly changing, relevant TVET is considered to be central to the effort to foster sustainable development. As conventional education is unable to address the scope and scale of bringing TVET to millions of people, educators and governments are exploring the use of open and distance learning (ODL) supported by ICTs to provide the necessary education and training. COL is supporting a number of "Learning for Livelihoods" initiatives across the Commonwealth that employ eLearning for TVET.

The next UNESCO-UNEVOC TVET Summit at eLearning Africa 2008 in Accra, Ghana, will build on the outcomes of this year's Summit to further foster the development of ICTs and ODL in TVET. It will include several workshops and present the winners of an Africa-wide competition of TVET projects.

www.unevoc.unesco.org
www.col.org/learningforlivelihoods

PACIFIC EDUCATORS AND GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES IN THE FIELDS OF AGRICULTURE AND EDUCATION AT THE ALAFUA CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH PACIFIC IN JUNE 2007. THE COL-SPONSORED MEETING EXPLORED HOW TO OFFER THE UNIVERSITY'S AGRICULTURE DEGREE PROGRAMME THROUGH OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING.

AFRICA MR. JOSHUA MALLET (LEFT), COL EDUCATION SPECIALIST, LEARNING & LIVELIHOODS, MEETS WITH DR. MOHAMED IBN CHAMBAS, FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION FOR THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS) IN ABUJA, NIGERIA. ECOWAS IS A GROUP OF 15 COUNTRIES THAT PROMOTES REGIONAL CO-OPERATION AND INTEGRATION WITHIN WEST AFRICA. COL HAS A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH ECOWAS TO WORK TOGETHER IN DEVELOPING LIVELIHOOD SKILLS IN WEST AFRICA.

AFRICA COL VICE PRESIDENT, PROFESSOR ASHA KANWAR, SPEAKS ABOUT TRENDS IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING AT A MEETING OF ODL PROVIDERS IN MAPUTO, MOZAMBIQUE. PROFESSOR KANWAR ALSO MET WITH THE HONOURABLE AIRES B.B. ALI, MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE, TO DISCUSS THE GROWTH OF ODL IN THE COUNTRY AND THE IMPACT OF COL'S INTERVENTIONS.

eLEARNING AFRICA

More than 1,400 people took part in eLearning Africa, the 2nd International Conference on ICT for Development, Education and Training, in Nairobi, Kenya in May 2007. eLearning users, providers and experts from 88 countries spanning all continents took part in the conference, which featured more than 300 speakers.

eLearning Africa provided an excellent opportunity for networking and sharing experiences in the application of information and communications technologies (ICTs) throughout the learning cycle. Some of the major themes of the conference were:

- Bringing gender balance into eLearning programmes,
- Online learning opportunities for health professionals,
- Developing sustainable models of eLearning,
- Open educational resources, and
- Supporting learners in rural Africa.

The conference saw strong representation from African Ministries of Education, including the participation of ten Ministers of Education and dozens of high level educational administrators. African governments communicated their commitment to using ICTs as a development accelerator for their national educational reform initiatives.

eLearning Africa 2008 will take place from 28 to 30 May 2008 in Accra, Ghana in partnership with the Government of Ghana.

www.elearning-Africa.com

PARTICIPANTS AT THE FLOSS4EDU WORKSHOP IN NEW ZEALAND IN AUGUST

PACIFIC: FREE LEARNING CONTENT

COL hosted a workshop in New Zealand to build capacity in the development of free content for learning and to launch Wiki Pasifika, a Pacific chapter of Free/Libre and Open Software for Education (FLOSS4Edu). Educators from nine Pacific Island nations attended the three-day meeting in Wellington, which was supported by the New Zealand Ministry of Education.

WikiEducator's FLOSS4Edu project strives to build a thriving community of teachers sharing knowledge to widen access to quality learning opportunities. This workshop helped build capacity and develop strategy so that the Pacific region can leverage the potential of relevant and accessible technologies in education. Participants learned how to develop free content on WikiEducator, which will enable them to train others in their home countries. Wiki Pasifika was also officially established, and plans were put in place to strengthen networks in the Pacific region.

www.WikiEducator.org/FLOSS4Edu

UPCOMING EVENTS

ODLAA 2007
OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

11-14 November 2007, Christchurch, New Zealand
"Open and Distance Learning in the South Pacific Region – Cultures – Collaborations – Cognitions – Communities"
www.odlaa2007.info

CHOGM 2007
COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING

23-25 November 2007, Kampala, Uganda
"Transforming Commonwealth Societies to achieve Political, Economic and Human Development"
www.thecommonwealth.org/chogm

FIFTH PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING

13-17 July 2008, University of London
"Access to Learning for Development"
www.col.org/pcf5

ICTS AND EDUCATION IN AFRICA

THE NEPAD E-SCHOOLS DEMONSTRATION PROJECT: A WORK IN PROGRESS

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) e-Schools Initiative is a multi-country, multi-stakeholder, continental project to teach information and communications technologies (ICTs) skills to young Africans in primary and secondary schools and improve the provision of education in schools through the use of ICT applications and the Internet. The first phase of the Initiative is a Demonstration Project being implemented by NEPAD through the e-Africa Commission (eAC), in partnership with private sector organisations. Six schools in each of 16 countries were selected to participate. COL managed the monitoring and evaluation of the Demo project at the request of the eAC, in partnership with *info*Dev, a multi-donor partnership housed at the World Bank.

This public report is a synthesis of the lessons learned from the Demo Project to date, based on a series of internal reports provided to the e-Africa Commission during the course of the monitoring and evaluation process. It was prepared by Glen Farrell, Shafika Isaacs and Michael Trucano and published in September 2007.

The report is available for download from COL's or *info*Dev's website (www.infodev.org).

SURVEY OF ICT AND EDUCATION IN AFRICA

*info*Dev has also released results from a landmark *Survey of ICT and Education in Africa*, which gathers the most relevant and useful information on ICTs in education activities in Africa. A research team co-ordinated by COL documented major developments in each African country, related to technology use in education, to create the first consolidated look at this fast-changing sector.

The survey addressed three questions:

1. How are ICTs currently being used in the education sector in Africa, and what are the strategies and policies related to this use?
2. What are the common challenges and constraints faced by African countries in this area?
3. What is actually happening on the ground, and to what extent are donors involved?

This publication is a first step in a larger, ongoing initiative to track developments in technology use in the education sector to help inform a variety of stakeholders as they seek solutions to educational and development challenges. It was prepared by Glen Farrell and Shafika Isaacs and published in October 2007.

The report is available for download from COL's or *info*Dev's website (www.infodev.org).

www.col.org/newsreleases
www.col.org/consultancies

SCHOOL SCIENCE PROGRAMMES ONLINE

Vega Science Trust is an online science channel that offers more than 150 science programmes through streaming video on the Internet. Backed by a British educational trust, the website provides content for students ranging from primary school to university as well as the general public. The programmes cover a wide variety of subjects such as magnetic resonance imaging, Mad Cow disease, careers in science and life in space. They are available 24 hours a day and can be viewed at no cost but can't be downloaded due to copyright restrictions. Users just need good Internet connectivity and sufficient bandwidth.

www.vega.org.uk

NEW AND IMPROVED KNOWLEDGE FINDER

COL has updated its online search service. It now has 22 specialised search fields, each catering to the need for finding information in focussed areas. If users do not find what they need on COL's web pages, they are directed to narrow sets of information from websites selected by COL specialists. Given that a term such as "open and distance learning" currently generates 36 million search results on Google, COL's search service is much more efficient than searching the whole Internet.

COL's Knowledge Finder service was on the bleeding edge of technology when it was first offered about six years ago. There were search engines for the web but certainly not of the calibre with which we are now so familiar (e.g., Google). As the web evolved, searching and finding material became easier. The downfall was that the amount of available data returned in a search became unwieldy. While the Knowledge Finder returned more relevant material compared to a general search engine, there was a need to update the hardware and improve the search capabilities through ongoing software licences.

Knowledge Finder now uses a service called Google Co-op. It indexes and searches against a limited number of sites, not the entire web. Each search field has been customised to the particular topic page on which it is found. For example, the search field on the COL copyright page (www.col.org/copyright) specifically searches trusted resources on copyright. Designed for open and distance learning practitioners, the Knowledge Finder is a powerful tool that searches well-regarded sources of information and helps users organise the information.

www.col.org/kf

BUTTERFIELD STEPS DOWN FROM COL BOARD

The longest serving member of COL's Board of Governors stepped down at the end of June. **Ms. Shona Butterfield,** former Chief Executive, The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, was first appointed to the Board in 1998 and named an Honorary Fellow of COL in 2004.

Few people have made as significant a contribution to the development and use of open and distance learning, particularly in the area of technical and vocational education, as has Shona.

With an outstanding background in nursing and nurse education, she was appointed Chief Executive of The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand in 1989. At that time The Open Polytechnic was a correspondence trade school run as part of the Department of Education. Under her leadership, The Open Polytechnic became one of the country's largest tertiary institutions with more than 62,000 annual course enrolments by over 30,000 students – all studying through distance education. Today, it is a distinct institution guiding its own destiny, which is a model not just for New Zealand but for the world.

Shona has been an extraordinarily active contributor to the community. She was a member of the Prime Minister's Enterprise Council, the Prime Ministerial Taskforce on Employment and a member of the Advisory Committee on External Aid and Development. She is a past President of the Distance Education Association of New Zealand, has chaired the New Zealand Polytechnic Chief Executive Officers' Forum and has been involved with a range of professional groups. Upon leaving the Open Polytechnic, she became a Commissioner on New Zealand's Tertiary Education Commission and chaired New Zealand's eLearning Advisory Group in 2002. She was awarded the Queen's Service Order in 1994 and named a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2005.

Ms. Butterfield served the COL Board of Governors with thoughtful enthusiasm, first as the representative of New Zealand when the country gained major donor status, then as the representative of the Secretary-General and, most recently, as New Zealand's representative again. COL was greatly privileged to have her services as a governor for nearly a decade because she brought to her work great wisdom and experience gained from leading a major ODL institution. As well as taking a particular interest in COL's activities in the Pacific she has devoted her considerable energies to improving the governance of the organisation, in particular through the preparation of a Governance Manual. We shall miss her wise counsels.

BOARD NEWS

COL Board of Governor member, **Ms. Jenny Glennie,** recently received the Chancellor's Medal at the University of Pretoria. The award salutes Ms. Glennie's contribution to the development of open and distance learning in South Africa and internationally, calling her "the most recognisable international face of distance and open learning in South Africa today". Ms. Glennie is the Founding Director of the South African Institute for Distance Education and was named an Honorary Fellow of COL in 2002.

STAFF NEWS

COL Education Specialist, **Dr. Wayne Mackintosh,** has joined the WikiMedia Foundation Advisory Board. The Advisory Board is an international network of experts who give the Foundation meaningful help on a regular basis. The Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. is a non-profit charitable organisation dedicated to encouraging the growth, development and distribution of free, multilingual content, and to providing the full content of these wiki-based projects to the public free of charge. The Wikimedia Foundation operates some of the largest collaboratively edited reference projects in the world, including Wikipedia, one of the 10 most visited websites in the world.

UNESCO NEWS

Mr. Nicholas Burnett was appointed UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Education last month. Previously the Director of UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Report, Mr. Burnett has spent his career working with developing and transition countries, much of it on Africa. In addition to working for the World Bank, he also worked at the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office as an Economic Adviser on Africa and Latin America and managed his own international consulting firm. Mr Burnett brings to the position a very broad knowledge of education, especially in developing countries, and of Education for All.

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EdTech News

PROTECT YOUR PRIVACY ONLINE

Just as one needs to be "street savvy" when walking around cities, one needs to be "Internet savvy" when using the Internet.

Having a subscription to comprehensive antivirus, anti-spyware software and a good firewall is all now essential, especially for Microsoft Windows users. Users of Mac and Linux machines should not be too smug either as there are known viruses for both these systems. It only takes one attack to make you lose your hard work.

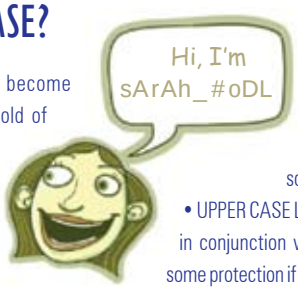
We all receive email from time to time asking us to click on a link to our bank, or some bank to update our details. ***Never*** follow one of those links if you want to protect your online banking! Close the email and go to your normal banking site, log in as you normally do and check what the bank wants. They do not send out links for you to follow – this is a clear indication of "phishing", the practice of getting you to fill in your information on a bogus but very convincing looking website. Also, check your banking and credit card statements every month or more often online. This way, you will quickly detect if someone has stolen your details and is busy spending your salary and savings for you.

If someone asks you to send money to them as part of some investment or great-deal purchase in which you will make money – it is likely a hoax. This has happened in the sale of land and goods, even cars.

If you like subscribing to e-newsletters and e-magazines, you may find your spam increasing. You could create a second email account which you use just for registrations on websites and for newsletters. This way when the spam gets to be too much, you can abandon the address and create another new one without having to change your regular address. Email hosts such as Hotmail (Microsoft), gMail (Google) and Yahoo have come a long way in catching your spam before it reaches you. It makes a lot of sense to use them these days.

The Internet is still a new frontier, and as such shady characters immediately move there to catch those who are being naïve. Take care and don't give away too much information about yourself. Keep both your PC clean of personal information and shred any printed financial statements before you drop them in the trash – you don't know who may get access to your trash can!

WHAT'S YOUR PASS PHRASE?



Creating and using effective passwords has become critical to preventing criminals from getting hold of your personal details. The risk we all run with weak passwords is finding that someone has taken money from our banking account, spent money on our credit cards or has used our email account to send emails to others we would never have sent.

There are frequent warnings about the "old" passwords we used to use (say 10 years ago or more), passwords like "janet", "tree" or, worse, "password". These are just no good today. Also, the longer you keep using the same password, the more likely it is that someone else could get access to it. Worst yet, is if you use the same password for everything; when someone gets hold of that password, they can access everything you do.

Websites often refer to passwords and sometimes "pass phrases". A pass phrase is something much longer. If you formed a short sentence of around 15 characters, it would be more secure than a four-character password. If you use a mixture of kinds of characters, this will help to make the password or pass phrase much more difficult to copy. Even if someone looks over your shoulder while you type in the password, it should be difficult to read and remember what you are typing in – it should look confusing!

HOW TO CREATE GOOD PASSWORDS

The IBM website has these tips for creating effective passwords:

The only safe place to keep a password is in your head or a locked safe, which only you know the combination to.

Effective passwords need to be fairly long, but not so long that you can't remember them. Three-character passwords are too short.

Use special characters, uppercase letters, and numerals in a logical manner. Here are some examples:

• UPPER CASE LETTERS: Using upper case letters in conjunction with lowercase letters will offer some protection if you have the functionality of "case sensitivity." You could then use the password "HeyYou" [or even, "hEYyOU], which is different from "heyyou". Adding uppercase letters adds a layer of complexity making passwords harder to crack.

- SPECIAL CHARACTERS: Using special characters such as "#", or "%" also adds to complexity. Take the word "money", add the pound sign after it (money#) and you have a fairly effective password.
- NUMERALS: Using numerals also adds complexity to the mix. If your identity number or social security number is 123-45-6789, you can use the last four digits with an easily remembered word such as "money", making your password "money6789".
- MNEMONIC PHRASES: If you're a phrase collector from movies or songs, you can take a great line and make it into a password. Let's say you're a Star Wars fan. You can take the phrase: "May the Force Be With You" and use the first character from each word to create the password "MTFBWY".
- SUBSTITUTION: You can use a number or sign in substitution for a word. If you know that the "$" sign equals the word "money," then you can tie it into a password scheme such as "Ilove$". This is a simple-to-remember password that is difficult to crack.

www.ibm.com/developerworks/library/s-pass.html