

The education imperative

What is being done to place knowledge and learning, the keys to economic and social development, in the hands of those who need it most?

In a concerted drive to educate our planet, international development targets such as the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) [www.developmentgoals.org] and Education for All (EFA) [www.unesco.org/education/efa] include this clear imperative: **educate more people, more efficiently.**

Conventional education methods, particularly in the developing world, are hard-pressed to meet the learning and training needs of millions of children, women and men. Open and distance learning (ODL) – inherently learner-centred and cost-effective, with considerable collaborative potential – is a viable and attractive education option.

One of four brochures that outline COL's programmes

SYSTEMS

POLICY

APPLICATIONS

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT



Some ODL APPLICATIONS initiatives: 2003-2006

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS/ALLIANCES/NETWORKING

COL has developed strategic initiatives, and added value through ODL, by partnering with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) institutions. For example, COL has assisted the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) on conceptualising and developing ICRISAT's Virtual Academy for Semi-Arid Tropics (VASAT). COL is also collaborating with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) on developing a working model for delivering agriculture degree programmes through its Global Open Agriculture and Food University (GO-AFU).

DEVELOPING MODELS/MATERIALS/INNOVATIVE PROPOSALS

Providing expertise and modest start-up funding through its Poverty Reduction Outcomes Through Education, Innovation and Networks programme (COL-PROTEIN) [www.col.org/protein]. COL supports qualified, innovative, grassroots-level education and development projects and, through this, helps to develop innovative ODL models. COL helped Shidhulai Swaniirvar Sangstha (SSS) in Bangladesh to develop its "Mobile Internet Educational Units on Boats: Integrated Environmental Support to the Farmers of Atrai River Watershed Project" that has now received wide international recognition. Other initiatives include a print-based ODL agricultural extension programme for officials in Sub-Saharan Africa and developing a basic skills training programme for small island states.

TEACHER TRAINING AND ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLING

Training and leadership development for heads of institutions to better equip them to implement and/or enhance ODL offerings. Hosting management development institutes for teacher education administrators from Sub-Saharan Africa. Providing training workshops and ODL systems-building expertise to the National Teachers' Institute (NTI), Nigeria; the Centre for Environment Education (CEE), India; and Mico College, Jamaica. Providing ODL support materials and media to train staff of the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), India, stationed in remote areas.

HEALTH AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Joining global efforts to combat diseases through education. Providing ODL-based training on communicable diseases in Malawi, the Solomon Islands, Sierra Leone and Nigeria. Partnering with the World Health Organization and The Valley Trust NGO to deliver HIV/AIDS training and information to rural villages in in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa, through instructional videos. Exploring how ODL can help foster good governance practices, such as training election observers and providing basic civic rights information.



contacts

ODL APPLICATIONS INITIATIVES:
MOHAN MENON, EDUCATION SPECIALIST, TEACHER TRAINING, MMENON@COL.ORG
GENERAL INFORMATION AND ENQUIRIES:
THE COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING (COL)
1056 WEST HASTINGS STREET, SUITE 1200, VANCOUVER, BC V6E 2E9 CANADA
TEL: +1 604 775 8200 | FAX: +1 604 775 8210 | E-MAIL: INFO@COL.ORG | WWW.COL.ORG

OPEN &
DISTANCE LEARNING
Applications

COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING
OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING FOR DEVELOPMENT

Open and distance learning and the Commonwealth of Learning

What is ODL, how can it be used, and what specific options exist?

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) helps countries and organisations deal with these fundamental issues, and to realise ODL's long term, sustainable potential.

COL is the world's only intergovernmental organisation dedicated solely to ODL advancement. It was formed by the Commonwealth – a voluntary association of countries committed to international consultation, co-operation and development – to help its members achieve their education goals.

A provider of ODL development expertise and knowledge, COL fosters the ongoing, shared growth of quality ODL resources and technologies in the Commonwealth and elsewhere, particularly among developing countries. Based in Vancouver, Canada and effectively operational since 1989, COL's core multinational team of education specialists and consultants collaborate on international, regional and local development initiatives with governments, development and professional organisations, education providers, and industry. COL also provides fee-for-service consulting, knowledge management services and resourcing solutions.

In 2002, a COL-commissioned independent evaluation panel noted that "COL has touched nearly all of the nations of the Commonwealth and has had a positive impact on the lives of many thousands of people."

Financially supported by Commonwealth Governments on a voluntary, renewable basis, COL's major contributors have included Australia, Britain, British Columbia, Brunei, Canada, India, New Zealand and Nigeria.

COL directs resources into three key ODL areas – policy, systems and applications – as well as the rapidly developing knowledge management and information and communications technology (ICT) fields.

www.col.org/about
www.col.org/programmes/reporting/eval02.htm
www.thecommonwealth.org

APPLYING ODL Effectively

ODL may be a useful way to educate and to train, but how can you apply its concepts and programmes most effectively?

COL's pan-Commonwealth ODL Applications programme emphasises using ODL methods and information and communications technologies (ICTs) to help developing countries achieve Millennium Development Goals. These include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases and developing global partnerships. In addition, COL addresses Commonwealth priorities, such as good governance and the needs of small states.

COL collaborates with governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to develop working models and to provide education and training to policy makers, administrators and practitioners, galvanising and empowering them to implement appropriate development plans and programmes; to use ODL in gender and culturally-sensitive ways; and to address educational and training priorities.

Specific focus areas include poverty reduction programmes addressing communities at risk, rural development, environmental sustainability and food security; basic education initiatives such as teacher training and alternative schooling methods; health initiatives on HIV/AIDS, communicable diseases, nutrition, public health and hygiene; and good governance initiatives such as public administration programmes.



Developing ODL APPLICATIONS

COL has a "four pillars" approach to poverty reduction. This emphasises building capacity and strategic partnerships; networking; developing and pilot-testing ODL programmes; and promoting innovative methods and self-educational materials – including using ICTs in agricultural extension – to improve the skills and knowledge of people in rural communities, including farmers and smallholders, women, and orphans/vulnerable children and youth.

Teacher training initiatives focus on fostering in-service training and professional development; inter-institutional and regional collaboration; electronic networking, including "schoolnets"; and quality assurance guidelines for teacher education and training. COL also contributes ODL expertise to countries and institutions interested in providing academic and vocational education to out-of-school and school-going children and youth.

COL collaborates with the World Health Organization (WHO) on its health outreach and training activities, and provides ODL-related assistance to Commonwealth governments on civic awareness and other good governance programmes.

See overleaf for more about COL's ODL applications initiatives.

Building capacity responsibly

COL is committed to building the reach and influence of its programming and focuses its work through an action-oriented Three-year Plan, revised triennially in consultation with Commonwealth governments, funding and development organisations and education institutions.

The *Three-year Plan 2003-2006: Building Capacity in Open and Distance Learning* goes further than any previous framework to define how COL focuses and manages its human, knowledge and technology resources. The Plan's pro-active Results Based Management (RBM) approach identifies three main programmes – ODL systems development, policy and applications – categorised into sub-programmes of more specific development goals, methods and outcomes.

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

Better business, as usual

With the Results Based Management approach, COL responds to development needs and issues more cohesively. It can more efficiently evaluate proposed and ongoing programmes, and can more effectively harmonise its work with international development goals. COL's knowledge management systems, including databases, information-sharing and communications efforts, are increasingly co-ordinated with specific initiatives – enabling a more targeted response to building programme and project awareness, providing information and promoting activities.