

## Keynote Addresses

### **Open and Distance Learning: Tools for Small States to Meet the Challenges of the Global Economy<sup>1</sup>**

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#### **Abstract**

In order to meet the challenges in the global economy, small states need to invest in capacity building, training, knowledge creation and decision-support. Information and communication technology can be essential tools to deliver on these investments in ways that are timely and of high quality. The broad economic benefits can be expected to outweigh the investment costs. To achieve this, knowledge creation and sharing needs to be organized, planned and facilitated, as it resides in various national governments, local and global think tanks, regional organizations, as well as multinational organizations - the World Bank, IMF, the Commonwealth, regional banks, the UN system, or EU bodies. This role of connecting development stakeholders with the needed knowledge and experience could be taken on by existing knowledge institutions. In the Caribbean and the South Pacific at least two regional institutions exist with the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the University of the South Pacific (USP) that may be able to take on such a role. There are likely to be others as well.

#### **Overview**

In March 2000 a Joint Task Force on Small States of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the World Bank addressed the challenges, opportunities, policies and external assistance that show a way ahead for small states. There is urgency to put in place the work programme recommended in that report, in four key areas:

- Tackling volatility, vulnerability and natural disasters;

- Transitioning to the changing global trade regime;
- Strengthening capacity; and
- Seizing opportunities and challenges arising from globalization.

The small states themselves have most at stake in putting the work programme into action with minimum delay and the international community appears to be poised to help. Many of the actions identified in the report will require that the key

<sup>1</sup>This address was delivered as a slide presentation and has been reproduced here as a summary of that presentation.

stakeholders have access to knowledge and experience to make informed decisions. The capacity-building organizations in these states must rise to the challenge. One of the first joint steps of states and capacity building organizations could be to flesh out a capacity-strengthening component of the work programme, which can be activated quickly. The nature of small states, with their small numbers of stakeholders and limited institutional capacity, is likely to lead to the recommendation for a comprehensive open and distance learning approach, using information and communication technology (ICT) to bring together communities of learners across distances. To access these ICT-based opportunities, learning centres are the best practical solution at this time. Participants will not only have reliable communication services, but also benefit from learning with peers and tutorial support.

Regional universities that serve many of the small states, like UWI and USP, already have some of the technical and pedagogical support infrastructure in place and can build on these. With their country partners and the international community, they could build up the capacity of small states to address the challenges of the global economy. In doing so, a strong partnership with the Global Development Learning Network (GDLN) will be a useful asset. Led presently by the World Bank, GDLN is a partnership among an increasing number of distance learning centres and networks around the world. The objective of GDLN is to provide continuing professional education to development stakeholders from government, academia, civil society, NGOs, journalists, etc.

In his global analysis of virtual education, Farrell (1998) includes three key organizational models for ODL bodies: they provide facilities, they broker knowledge services and they offer a niche service. GDLN and its members are implementing these models, showing that broad international, interinstitutional cooperation can work in open

and distance learning (ODL). The Joint Task Force report gives ample evidence of common capacity building needs among the 44 small states that are developing countries. The operational models outlined by Farrell can help ODL practitioners address these needs.

## **Summary of Slide Presentation**

### ***What Makes Small States Different?***

- Indicators include population, size, gross domestic product
- Commonwealth yardstick is 1.5 million people (also includes some larger member countries as they share other characteristics of smallness)

### ***Economic Implications of Small Size***

- Remoteness and insularity (33 are islands): a number are far from major markets, accounting for difficult market access
- Limited diversification – narrow resource base, small domestic market, with limited private sector capacity
- Limited institutional capacity (small states face higher costs per person unless costs are pooled)
- Indivisibilities in provision of public service resulted in relatively large proportion of economic activity in the public sector
- Reliance on income from primary commodities, which in some countries has been replaced by income from the service sector (tourism and/or finance)
- Openness: reliance on external trade and foreign investment, which makes them vulnerable to external shocks; great stake in stable, rule-based world trade economy
- Higher income volatility: (a) large share of economic activity from exports-imports; (b)

relatively undiversified production and exports; (c) particularly prone to natural disasters (13 small island states are among the 25 most disaster-prone countries)

- Historically benefited from relatively high inflow of official development assistance
- Experienced decline in assistance of 24 percent between 1994 and 1998 (US\$ 1.6 billion in 1998)
- US\$ 2.1 billion FDI annually – 80 percent went to seven countries (for rest, limited commercial borrowing or FDI)

### ***Telephone, Internet and PC Indicators***

- Main telephone lines per 100 inhabitants in small states in:

v AFR 3 (excluding Mauritius, Seychelles)

v EAP 6

v LAC 29

and

v USA 66

v UK 56

- Internet users per 10,000 inhabitants in small states in

v AFR 38 (excluding Mauritius, Seychelles)

v EAP 103

v LAC 303

and

v USA 3,982

v UK 2,127

- Estimated PC users per 100 inhabitants in small states in

v AFR 1 (excluding Mauritius, Seychelles)

v EAP 3

v LAC 9

and

v USA 52

v UK 31

### ***Continuing Work Programme***

The report of the Joint Task Force on Small States is a stepping stone to a new partnership between small states and the international development community. It leads to four key areas for action: (a) facilitating the transition to a new trade regime; (b) capacity building; (c) responding to globalization opportunities; and (d) the development framework.

- Key actions to facilitate transition to new trade regime

- Implement sound transition processes toward global trade liberalization
- Implement comprehensive tax administration to prepare for fiscal consequences of trade liberalization

- Key actions for capacity building

- Accumulate knowledge about policies and approaches that do/not work
- Share this knowledge and experience among states within/across regions
- Develop regional approaches and assist regional organizations to carry out their work effectively
- Develop private sector capacity with information, training, networking and the establishment of regulation and competition policies
- Make existing market information available to potential investors to reduce perceived risks
- Make long-term commitment to strengthen generally weak human resources and institutional capacity
- Work in country-led partnerships to

reduce administrative burden to deal with multiple donors

- c. Key actions to respond to globalization opportunities
  - Create enabling and regulatory frameworks to encourage new activities, many in the service sector
  - Improve financial operational practices and regulatory standards in the provision of on/off-shore financial services
  - Establish public policy and regulatory frameworks to create information technology (IT) businesses and e-commerce
- d. Key actions in the area of the development framework
  - Development frameworks for small states are in place at: the World Bank, Commonwealth Secretariat, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Union (EU), World Trade Organization (WTO), UN, UNDP, UNCTAD, AfDB, ADB, IDB
  - Knowledge institutions need to make themselves part of the development frameworks

### ***The Role of Knowledge Institutions***

- Achieving key actions requires capacity building, knowledge sharing
- Key contributors to capacity building are found in the small states, in the regions and around the globe
- Someone needs to broker capacity needs and knowledge sources

### ***The Value of Connectivity is High***

- Costs of NOT implementing the key actions are high for small states
- Informed decision making is the cornerstone

to the successful implementation of the frameworks

- The right combination of information and communication technology (ICT) and knowledge will help countries and the development community to achieve the key actions above
- The small numbers of stakeholders in each country will prevent the dynamics of peer learning and shared problem solving to take place

### ***Example One***

Stakeholders across the Caribbean are meeting every two weeks to discuss issues on commodity risk management mechanisms - by video conference

Participants also work through assignments at home or at the learning centre, and use e-mail for exchanges with peers and resource people

### ***Example Two***

National teams of stakeholders in banana-dependent economies hold weekly video conferences over a period of two months with specialists from the EU and elsewhere to work out strategies of (1) improving their competitiveness in this sector, or of (2) creating new activities to diversify

Some of the training and consultations are carried out by local colleges, some by the regional university, some by specialized bodies, like the GEF, WWF

### ***Where Does the Open/Distance Learning Community Fit?***

Farrell (1998) identifies three organizational models for virtual education:

1. Information and facility provider

2. Broker
3. Niche service provider

### ***Information/Facility Provider Type***

- In many small states infrastructure is limited, costly and not robust
- Facility providers overcome these limitations with study centres that also provide learner support

### ***Broker Type***

- The knowledge required to carry out the recommendations of the task force is found around the world – in the small states themselves, think tanks or organizations, e.g., Commonwealth
- The broker identifies needs, connects them with knowledge sources and helps these to adjust to local needs

### ***Niche Type***

- Undergraduate/graduate, professional subjects increasingly are offered in the competitive market (Farrell 1998)
- The capacity-building tasks in the Task Force Report on Small States are examples of niche services that are not “taken”
- They can represent a market for ODL services

### ***Where to Go With This?***

Beyond traditional education in small states . . . how and why become

- A facility provider?
- A broker?
- A niche provider and support the key actions of the economic development agenda?

### ***Global Distance Learning Network (GDLN)***

Satellite network used for interactive

- video
  - data
  - voice
- to provide programming from
- World Bank Institute
  - Other content providers

to distance learning centres located in

- Africa
- Asia
- the Pacific
- Latin America/Caribbean
- Europe

### ***Facilities***

- Reliable telecommunication
- Multimedia room
- Library, study room
- Interaction with peers, local and global
- Self-study, tutored
- From learning → ACTION

### ***Broker Content***

Content can be provided to DL sites by organizations such as:

- World Trade Organization (WTO)
- World Health Organization (WHO)
- UNAIDS
- University of the South Pacific
- University of the West Indies

### ***GDLN Niche Service***

GDLN provides a two-track service:

1. Courses (typically self-study and live sessions delivered over several weeks)
2. Seminars (typically two hours in duration)

Stakeholders from:

- Government
- Paragovernment agencies
- NGOs
- Academia
- Civil society
- Staff

Niche services:

- 130 courses and seminars per annum, including
  - Governance and the Media
  - Curbing Corruption
  - African Majors Roundtables
  - Corporate Governance
  - Capital Flows
- over 9000 participant days
- Participants in 50 countries

### ***Investment partners***

Countries

- Denmark
- Australia
- Japan
- Germany
- France
- Switzerland

Donors:

- UNDP
- The World Bank

### ***Network partners***

In addition to the Bank's communications network, GDLN seeks partnerships with network/distribution partners:

- Monterey Institute of Technology, Mexico
- University of the West Indies
- Indira Gandhi Open University, India

### **Reference**

Farrel, Glen (1999). *The Development of Virtual Education: A Global Perspective*. Vancouver: Commonwealth of Learning.