

# BANGLADESH

## COL activities in 2003-2006

### BACKGROUND

COL has a long history of involvement in open and distance learning (ODL) in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Open University (BOU) was established on the basis of a consultancy carried out by COL in the early 1990s. Subsequently, COL has worked with BOU to provide critical support for institutional capacity building. COL's work in Bangladesh has been varied. It ranges from providing institutional consultancies, capacity building, and support for wider exposure to Bangladesh professionals, to support for non formal poverty reduction and education initiatives.

### SUMMARY

In the triennium 2003-2006, COL engaged with NGOs in Bangladesh to develop partnerships and networks and to expand the role of ODL in non formal education, in alternative schooling (through the Open School); advanced professional development and in the area of poverty reduction programmes. Some of these engagements have been showcased as examples of successful interventions in bringing together the use of ODL and technology with the needs of the development agenda of the country. COL has continued its support to professional development activities with BOU; while also working with NGOs like The Dhaka Asahiya Mission, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), to expand open schooling success.

## POLICY AND SYSTEMS ENHANCEMENT

### COL-Poverty Reduction Outcomes Through Education Innovations and Networks (PROTEIN)

This programme facilitates the implementation of innovative projects that adopt ODL and information and communications technologies (ICT) for poverty reduction in the developing Commonwealth ([www.col.org/protein](http://www.col.org/protein)). COL offers expertise in ODL and start-up, limited-term financial support to qualifying projects that help build human capacity to gain knowledge and skills in contributing to food security, environmental protection, rural development, nutritional education and micro-enterprise. Successful projects have a high level of inter-institutional collaboration, significant and innovative ODL and ICT use, and well-researched content and learning design to support contextually relevant rural and peri-urban capacity building for poverty reduction.

The Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha (SSS) ([www.interconnection.org/ssb](http://www.interconnection.org/ssb)), Bangladesh was awarded to implement “Mobile Internet Educational Unit in a Boat: Integrated Environmental Support to the Farmers of Atrai River Watershed”. SSS introduced Mobile Boat Schools with classrooms and Boat Libraries with computer labs that bring education and information resources to rural villages, docking at the riverside for specified times every day. The schools provide basic primary education with a focus on environment and human rights.

This COL-PROTEIN initiative has resulted in Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha receiving several International Awards and recognitions, including:

- Access to Learning Award 2005 of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for the pioneering approach to bridging the digital divide and commitment to providing free public access to computers and the Internet.
- Global Social Benefit Incubator 2005 of Santa Clara University (US) for the innovative work to humanity and possible impacts to the global community.
- Recognition Award of the World Bank’s Development Marketplace 2005 global competition for Mobile Internet Educational Unit on Boats project.
- Global Junior Challenge Award 2004 of the Municipality of Rome (Italy) for boat-based innovative distance learning initiatives.
- Tech Museum Award 2004 in the Intel Environment category of the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank Institute and Santa Clara University for using technology on boats to educate riverside communities on environment and sustainable farming.
- Nominated as a Member of the Governing Body of the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council by the Prime Minister’s Office of Bangladesh Government for the contribution in the distance learning and sustainable agricultural developments in Bangladesh.
- Runners-up prize in the “Environment” category in the information technology-focused Stockholm Challenge Award 2003/2004.

## **Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration/Master of Public Administration (CEMBA/MPA)**

Three hundred thirty-three students from Bangladesh have enrolled in the CEMBA/MPA Programme in 2003-2004, developed by COL, in close collaboration with the national open universities of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, to complement the existing MBA/MPA programmes in meeting the growing demands for postgraduate-level education in business and public administration in Commonwealth countries.

## **Open Schooling**

COL has been exploring ways to help Bangladesh provide education at the Grade Seven through Nine level for those now taking Grade One to Six with the help of NGOs, but unable to enrol in Grade Ten through Twelve that are available through the BOU Open School. The NGOs wish to offer these years of schooling through open and distance learning and the Open School would be prepared to develop the materials and accredit the programme so that students could move into BOU's senior secondary courses.

COL worked with the Open School located at the Bangladesh Open University and with CAMPE to develop a proposal to produce flexible, open learning materials covering the Grade Seven through Nine curriculums. The proposal has been partially funded, and once the materials have been developed, the plan is to deliver junior secondary school education to students that have completed basic education through programmes offered by NGOs but are unable to enrol in junior secondary school due to the unavailability of places, or because they are not able to attend full-time.

## **Preparation and use of learning materials**

Bangladesh is one of the countries which CEMCA covers as the South Asia node for the Global Distance Education Network, which searches and provides knowledge resources for use by distance educators in the region and globally.

Good practices and case studies from Bangladesh are regularly highlighted in CEMCA's quarterly publication, *EduComm Asia* in its sections Spotlight, Case Studies, and Country Focus.

Bangladeshi scholars have contributed to publications that CEMCA has brought out (2003-2006), especially to a publication entitled *Educational Media in Asia*.

CEMCA has collaborated with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Bangkok office to produce a multimedia training package on Gender and Rural Development. The kit is targeted to academics, researchers and extension agencies in agriculture and rural development in South Asian countries with an objective to sensitise them to the various aspects of gender related issues, and to provide them with a resource tool kit to enable more effective research and work in the region. Bangladesh is one of the countries covered in this activity. This activity has been completed and the kit is distributed through the FAO offices in Bangkok for all countries in the region (2004).

Bangladesh took part in a consultative meeting organised by COL in Dhaka in 2005, for the South Asia Region on the promotion of literacy and skills training using ODL methods.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Bangladesh has taken part in a wide range of COL organised regional and international activities, including:

- participation of the Vice Chancellor and seven academics from BOU at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Pan-Commonwealth Forum in Dunedin, New Zealand, in 2004;
- involvement in the South Asian Consortium for Teacher Education (SACTED) in November 2004;
- the Round Table on Quality Assurance in Teacher Education, March 2003;
- participation in the International Conference on Technical and Vocational Education through Open Schooling, in India in February 2005;
- the “International Literacy and Livelihoods Experts Meeting: Learning for Life in a Changing World” which was held in Vancouver from 15-17 November 2004;
- Institute for education/government officials from Commonwealth developing countries for the purpose of providing them with a first-hand view and experience of an operational open school, National Institute of Open Schooling, New Delhi, India, September 2005.

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

The period 2003-2006 saw some significant achievements in ODL in Bangladesh and these will form the basis of further progress in 2006-2009. Open schooling, regional partnership and expanding access to higher education will remain major themes.