



## UGANDA

Focal Point: Ms. Elizabeth K.M. Gabona

### OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN UGANDA

#### A. STATE OF THE ART

##### 1. *Open Distance Learning (ODL) in Higher Education*

Makerere University pioneered in the provision of formal ODL higher education programs in 1991 with intent to increase access to university education for working adults. Currently the university offers undergraduate programmes in education, commerce, science, palliative care, and one graduate programme in public health (<http://distance.mak.ac.ug/>). All these programmes are predominantly print-based, with minimal use of electronic media to support learners. Kyambogo is another Public University (<http://www.kyu.ac.ug/>) which offers distance learning programmes for in-service primary school teachers and special needs education teachers. The University also hosts the AVU ODeL Centre which runs a degree programme for science teachers. Uganda Management Institute, (<http://www.umi.ac.ug/>) a degree awarding tertiary institution, uses satellite video conferencing to deliver short training programmes from across the globe.

Private universities such as Uganda Martyrs University (<http://www.fiuc.org/umu/>); Kampala International University (<http://www.kiu.ac.ug/>); Nkumba University (<http://www.nkumbauniversity.ac.ug/index.php>); Uganda Christian University (<http://www.ucu.ac.ug/>); have taken distance education with greater zeal and all run distance education programmes of one form or another.

Foreign institutions offering distance education programmes to Ugandans from bases in Asia (Amity University, India), Europe (Open University UK), and South Africa (UNISA) are continuing to play a key role, especially in professional and graduate-level training. Some operate remotely from their home bases, some collaborate with local institutions as conduits, and some have attempted to set up off-shore centers in Uganda.

With support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Makerere University is in advanced stages of producing its institutional policy on ODL. We hope this will serve as a model for other institutions.

A number of academic staff in public universities are undertaking graduate-level training in ODL outside the country. This is likely to improve our national capacity to deliver quality ODL programmes.

**2. *ODL in Agriculture***

In partnership with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the Uganda National Agricultural Innovation System (UNAIS) launched a multimedia platform linking mobile phones with internet ([www.eunais.co.ug](http://www.eunais.co.ug)) in 2007. The innovation aims at improving efficiency and effectiveness of agricultural marketing processes by linking smallholder producers to consumers. The platform incorporates SMS media, news, and a discussion forum that links stakeholders in agricultural production value chain.

**3. *ODL in Health Education***

AMREF continues to provide distance learning materials and training programmes for primary health workers, nurses and laboratory staff through the Health Manpower Development Centre under the Ministry of Health.

The Infectious Diseases Institute (IDI) hosts the Joint Uganda Malaria Training Program (JUMP), collaboration between IDI, the Uganda Malaria Surveillance Project (UMSP), the Uganda National Malaria Control Program (Ministry of Health), and the Makerere University College of Health Sciences-University of California San Francisco Malaria Research Collaboration. JUMP runs a malaria training programme that propagates a team approach to strengthening management of malaria at the health facility level. The training builds capacity for proper clinical case management of fever and malaria. In order to accomplish these objectives, JUMP has developed and evaluated an exemplary malaria training programme in distance learning mode and other health training institutions have adopted these courses. The Integrated Management of Malaria (IMM) course has been adopted by the USAID-funded STOP MALARIA project and the Presidential Malaria Initiative (PMI). The training manual for Management of Fever using Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs) for Malaria has been adopted by the MOH National Malaria Control Program as the “user’s manual” for the national roll out of health worker training in management of fever using RDTs.

**B. NATIONAL PRIORITIES**

**1. *Prepare for Launch of the Open University of Uganda***

The launch of the Open University of Uganda has been in the national annual plans since 2000 when a Task Force set up by the Government of Uganda finished its work and presented a report favoring its establishment. With the products of the UPE and USE now seeking higher education opportunities in the face of overstretched capacities of conventional institutions of higher learning, we are against the wall and the Open University of Uganda has gone up the priority list of Government. Work needs to begin on the required documentation for this historic innovation.

**2. *Reactivate the National (UNADOL) and Regional (OLDEA-EA) Associations of ODL Practitioners***

Earlier efforts to establish the Uganda National Association for Distance and Open Learning (UNADOL) and the Open Learning and Distance Education Association of Eastern Africa (OLDEA-EA) started with enthusiasm but ran out of steam when the founding leaders left offices. OLDEA-EA had national associations with the following countries as members: Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius and Uganda. With the

expansion of the East African community to include Rwanda and Burundi, and possibly the soon-to-be-independent Southern Sudan, the catchment area is bigger and the potential for viability also bigger. The revival of UNADOL is key to the revival of OLDE-EA because UNADOL was at the helm of OLDEA-EA when both went to limbo.

**3. *Strengthen ODL supervisory desks at the MOES and the National Council for Higher Education***

Given the proliferation of both local and international ODL programmes in Uganda, the need for regulating ODL activities is apparent. The Ministry of Education needs to strengthen its ODL coordination desk to enhance capacity to deliver on its mandate. The same may be said of the National Council for Higher Education. While it is mandated to supervise quality in higher education institutions in the country, it needs to develop capacity to carry this out.

**4. *Promote use of ODL methods in continuing professional development of medical personnel, agricultural extension workers and farmers, teachers at all education levels, and other professional groups***

So far, lower cadre banking, agricultural and medical professionals are the only ones benefiting from locally designed ODL continuing professional development (CPD) programmes. This catchment needs to be increased and the profile of trainees enhanced to cover cadres at higher employment ladders. This will enhance professionalism among the national workforce in their fields of specialization, leading to development in this information age and will also save on the large sums spent on professional training programmes in other countries.

**5. *Encourage innovative use of ICTs in ODL provision***

With the improving internet infrastructure in Uganda and the Region, ODL practitioners are seeing the greater need to deploy e- and m-learning technologies to further enhance quality of provision as well as improve access beyond national borders. The growing interest in open educational resources could be addressed under this effort. Given the centrality of courseware in the provision of ODL programmes, the promise offered by OERs is worth exploring. In addition, ODL utilization in non-formal education is becoming a national priority.

**C. *NEEDED OF COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING'S (COL) SUPPORT***

**1. *Preparing for setting up of the Open University of Uganda***

Uganda would benefit from the extensive experience COL has had in supporting nations that have set up an Open University. Uganda will need the support of such experts in preparing the required documentation and identifying the relevant personnel to kick start the process.

**2. *Reactivating national and regional ODL associations***

Both the national and regional associations will need to hold forums that will draw stakeholders together and serve as opportunities to discuss the revival of the associations. The presence and participation of COL at these forums will add great value.

**3. *Strengthening ODL supervisory desks in Ministry of Education and Sports and National Council for Higher Education***

Personnel handling supervisory desks at these two organs of government need re-tooling and mentoring. COL's support in identifying possible trainers/mentors and study sites would go a long way in addressing this glaring need.

**4. *Supporting ODL for CPD and Non-formal Education***

Work that has been going on in this regard needs to be supported to expand to cover more beneficiaries and to reach out to other professions that have not yet taken full advantage of technology-supported ODL.

**5. *Encouraging innovative use of ICT in ODL***

Specific projects need to be developed to promote the use of ICTs in ODL programmes. Special focus should be placed on use of OERs and e- and m-learning.