

NOTE:

Different parts of this case study have been used in two different chapters (2 and 4) of the book, *Strategies for Sustainable Open and Distance Learning* (www.col.org/worldreview/volume6.htm)

The case study has not been subjected to an editorial process.
The views and opinions expressed therein are those of the author.

Strategies for Sustainable Open and Distance Learning
From Policy to Practice
A Case Study of the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning
(BOCODOL)

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Background

Botswana is a landlocked country at the centre of Southern Africa. The country covers an area of 582 000 square kilometres and has a population is about 1.7 million (CSO 2001). Most people speak Setswana as their indigenous language. However, English, as the other official language, is widely used in Government and business as well as in all post-primary education.

Botswana has, since independence in 1966, maintained a stable democracy. A stable government and an expanding economy have made possible a steady growth in the education system. As a result of the adoption of the National Policy on Education, 1977, educational development has been characterised by the massive expansion of school places. For example between 1979 and 1991, enrolments in primary, secondary and the University of Botswana rose by 91%, 342% and 315% respectively.

As part of the Ministry of Education policy to increase access into post primary education, a ten-year basic education is being implemented, which consists of seven years of primary and three years of junior secondary schooling. After the latter three years students sit the Junior Certificate Examinations and depending on the availability of places, successful pupils proceed to senior secondary education, which last for two years. In 2004 a total of 52% of students who completed Junior Certificate gained admission into Senior Secondary Schools. The transition rate is expected to increase to 100% by the year 2016 (as per the National Vision 2016) when Botswana will have been independent for 50 years.

Education is currently free in Botswana up to the Senior Secondary level, with Government meeting the full costs of tuition, books, feeding as well as boarding in some remote rural secondary schools.

Policy Initiatives within Education

Educational Developments in Botswana are attributed to two landmark policies, which are premised on the findings of Presidential Commissions of 1976 and 1993. The commissions, guided by their terms of reference, consulted widely as they reviewed the educational system. The first National Policy on Education, whose

emphasis revolved around access, mainly to basic education and to a lesser extent other levels, was adopted in 1977. Following its adoption, educational opportunities were substantially expanded as exemplified by the increase in enrolment between 1979 and 1991. The number of primary schools reached 700 from about 500 whilst secondary schools increased from 23 to 230 during the same period. Teacher Training Colleges increased three fold from two whilst vocational institutions were introduced in most of the major population centres.

The second policy, commonly referred to as the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE), was adopted in 1994 based on the recommendations of a National Commission on Education appointed by the President in 1993. Unlike the first policy, which focused on quantitative expansion of the education system, the second policy calls for qualitative improvement of the system. Through the latter policy, Government has identified seven key issues that are considered vital to the development of education into the future.

The issues are as follows:

- (i) Access and equity, given the prevailing imbalances between regions and genders in terms of access to educational opportunity.
- (ii) Effective preparation of students for life, citizenship and world of work.
- (iii) Development of training responsive and relevant to needs of economic development.
- (iv) Improvement and maintenance of quality of the education system.
- (v) Enhancement of the performance and status of the teaching profession.
- (vi) Effective management of the education system.
- (vii) Cost effective/cost sharing in financing of education.

These issues are supposed to form the focus of education policy and development for a period of 25 years effective from 1994.

Distance Education Provision

The first traces of formal distance education date back to before independence, when an Elementary Teachers' Training project of 1960 to 1965, facilitated by colonial masters, was undertaken. By the time the project came to an end, it had demonstrated the viability of distance education as an alternative method of training teachers. Hence, Government attempts to overcome severe shortages of trained teachers due to post independence (1966) demographic pressure for primary education should be considered against the backdrop of the success of the 1960 – 1965 project. A repeat project that aimed to upgrade qualifications of primary school teachers was undertaken between 1968 and 1973, through which a total of 700 teachers were trained. The success of this project influenced Government to set up the Botswana Extension College (BEC) in 1973 with the assistance of the International Extension College (UK) and the former became the first government secondary level correspondence education school. BEC in collaboration with UNESCO and the Department of Extra Mural Services (DEMS) of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, which later became the Institute of Adult Education, initiated consultations for a functional literacy training programme that targeted about 250 000 adults and youth. A literacy project by BEC was consequently implemented from 1977 to 1978.

Experiences of BEC resulted in the creation of the Department of Non-formal Education in 1978 following recommendations of the National Commission on Education of 1977. The Department in turn created a unit, among others, to specifically look after distance education. The Unit developed printed materials for its programmes and engaged serving secondary school teachers as part-time support staff at its learning centres.

However, the Department experienced several problems in the implementation of its distance education programmes; among them were the following; as identified by the 2nd National Commission on Education (1993):

- Lack of resources – personnel, space, budget etc..
- Understaffing and lack of expertise in distance education.
- Lack of institutional and professional status.
- Lack of relevant learning materials.
- Inability to promptly respond to learners needs

On the basis of these constraints, the Commission recommended the establishment of a semi-autonomous distance education college that would take over the activities of the distance education unit of the Department of Non-formal Education. Consequently the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) was created by an act of parliament in 1998. In accordance with the provisions of the RNPE, the College was charged with the mandate of **expanding education and training opportunities to out-of-school youth and adults, through the use of distance education methodologies**. To qualify this mandate, and based on the shortcomings mentioned *supra*, the RNPE identified the following key tasks for the College:

- To improve access to learning opportunities on a nationwide – wide scale to reach out-of-school young people and adults who need knowledge and skills to improve their quality of life;
- To broaden the type of courses on offer to include vocational, professional, management and other programmes in addition to the Junior Certificate (JC) and General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) courses already provided;
- To improve the effectiveness of the teaching materials and learner support by introducing new instructional design skills, multi media approaches and the use of new information and communication technology;
- To improve the efficiency of the distance education service and introduce cost recovery strategies in order to achieve increasing financial autonomy.

MOVEMENT FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

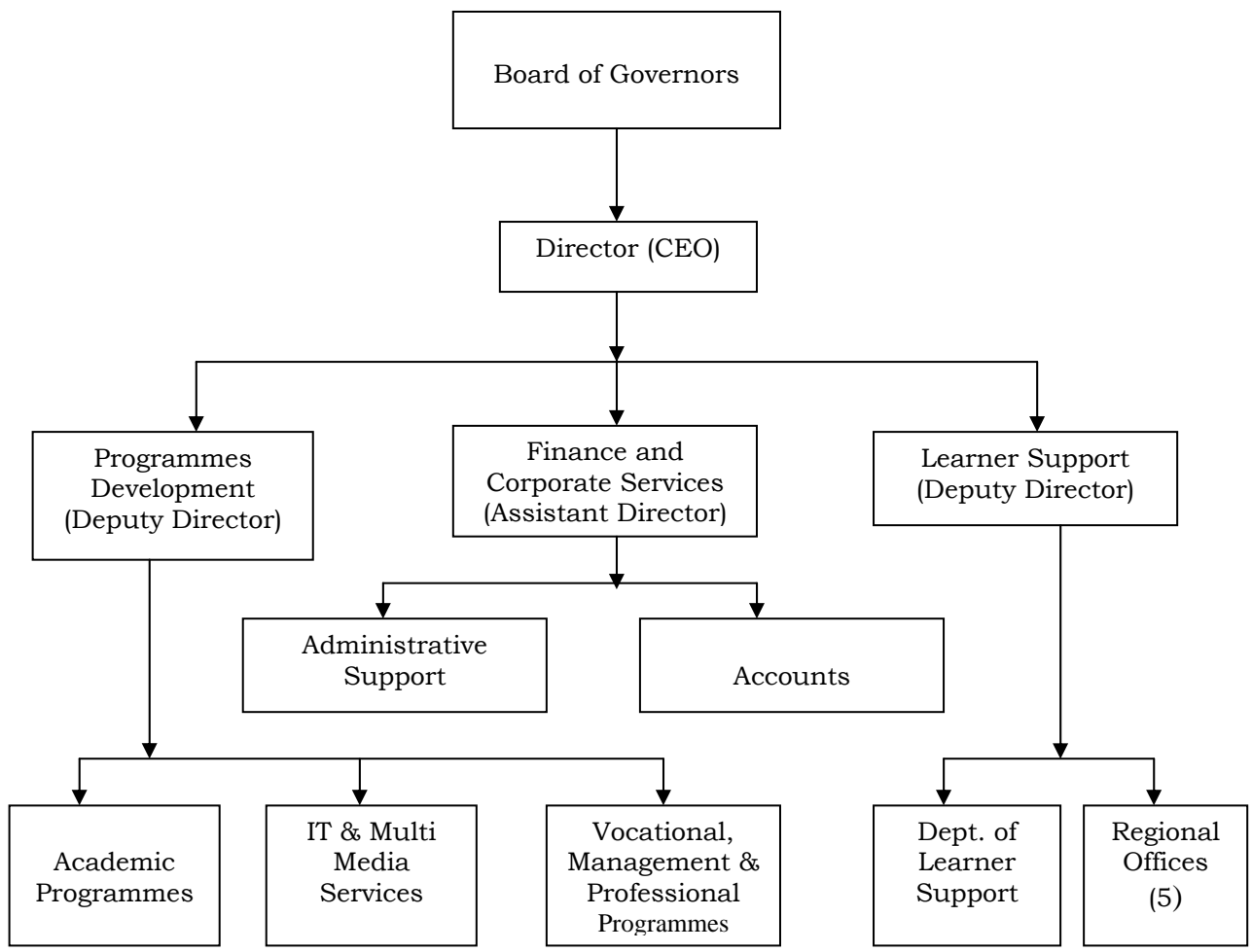
To operationalise the foregoing policy provisions, the Ministry of Education appointed a Planning Committee made up of senior education officials in January 1998. The committee developed a project memorandum that detailed costed needs of the College and drafted a legislation that later instituted BOCODOL as a semi-autonomous institution. In accordance with the provisions of the legislation (Act No. 20 of 1998) the Minister of Education replaced the Planning Committee with an Interim Management Committee (IMC) in January 1999. Meanwhile the Distance Education Unit of the Department of Non-formal Education (DNFE) had in mid 1998 moved into new temporary accommodation to form the core of the new College. The Interim Management Committee was assigned to drive the transition of the Distance Education Unit from a Government entity to form the core of a parastatal by developing staffing needs, an appropriate organisational structure, job descriptions, budget requirements, Conditions of Service, financial system and plans for the construction of a new headquarters and the regional office for Gaborone.

As part of their mandate, the IMC facilitated appointment of the College's first Director in August 1999, the first Accountant in October 2000 and Board of Governors in November 2000. The core staff from the DNFE were ultimately assimilated into the College in December 2000. The appointment of the Board

marked the end of the transition and BOCODOL started to exist as a fully-fledged parastatal institution.

Structure of the College

The organisational structure of the College is shaped to a large extent by the tenets of contemporary open and distance learning, *viz.*: programmes development, learner support and management or logistics. The structure thus consists of three divisions. Six departments and five regional offices fall under the divisions. Diagrammatically, the structure is as follows;



Whilst all the six departments are based at Headquarters in Gaborone, the five regional offices are strategically located in Gaborone (South East), Palapye (Central Botswana), Francistown (North East), Maun (North West) and Kang (Western Botswana).

Governance

The Governance of the College is vested in a Board of Governors which consist of representatives from the Ministry of Education, Labour, Finance, Public Service, University of Botswana, Private Tertiary Institutions, Industry, Labour Movement and BOCODOL. In accordance with statutory provisions, the Board reports to the Minister of Education who in turn has to provide a comprehensive report on the

activities of the College to the National Assembly at the end of each financial year. The Board is responsible for policy formulation and strategic planning whilst the College staff led by the Director (Chief Executive Officer) are responsible for implementation of the College's core business. The College is currently implementing its second strategic plan through which it endeavours to execute its mandate as encapsulated in the RNPE.

Financial Support

The College is funded by Government by way of annual subventions. An activity-based budget is submitted to government as part of the Ministry of Education's budget on an annual basis to determine funding levels. Whilst the College does not always get funds equivalent to budget, subvention levels have overtime underscored the seriousness Government attaches to open and distance learning.

That said, the College, as is the case with other public entities, is expected to implement some cost recovery mechanisms to supplement government's efforts and to allow for greater flexibility in terms of operations. To this end, the College has set itself targets as part of its current strategic plan for cost recovery. Currently it recovers 4% of its overall costs through the nominal fees levied on its school equivalency learners. The aim is to increase the cost recovery levels to 10% and 12% the mid and end of the National Development Plan 9 (2003 – 2009). To achieve this, the College is diversifying its programmes and selling associated services to individuals and institutions in Botswana. The vocational, management and professional courses are offered on a full cost recovery basis, as they do not form part of basic education, which as per Government policy, supposed to be offered freely.

Programmes of the College

The mainstream programmes offered are of secondary school equivalence examined and accredited by the Botswana Examinations Council, a semi autonomous institution under the Ministry of Education, formerly Examination Research and Testing Division of the Ministry. The College offers 10 courses and 8 courses under the junior and senior secondary programmes respectively. It has also, guided by the findings of a market research undertaken in 2002, ventured into a new family of programmes *viz*: management, professional and vocational programmes which are largely supposed to be in-service in nature. So far, the College has successfully launched an English for Professional Purposes course in partnership with the Botswana Police Services to be offered to more than 5000 police officers over a five-year period. Another course is Small Business Management, which is offered in partnership with the Botswana National Youth Council to young people across the country. The third course dubbed Interactive Communication for Industry, will shortly be offered to supervisors of various industries in Botswana. Negotiations are ongoing with the Cambridge University through the British Council and hopefully before the end of 2003 the College will be a designated centre for the University offering a variety of post secondary vocational courses in line with the manpower needs of Botswana.

Summary course information table

Junior Certificate (JC)	Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE)	Vocational/Management Courses
Setswana	Setswana	English for Professional

English Mathematics General Science Agriculture Bookkeeping /Accounts Office Procedures Religious Education Commerce Social Studies	English Mathematics Human & Social Biology Accounting Commerce Geography History	Purposes (EPP) Small Scale Business Management (SSBM) Interactive Communication for Industry
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The learning materials for the above mentioned programmes are largely print based. However, they are self-instructional and have lately been integrated with audio and video. The latter developments are meant to enhance the interactivity of the materials, promote comprehension, arouse learners' interest and hopefully lead to better learners' success and retention rates. The improving performance of learners in terminal examinations is in part attributable to the improved quality of materials developed by the College.

Development and Utilisation of ICT

The College is adequately equipped with the necessary hardware and software to carry out its daily activities both at headquarters and the five regional offices. An electronic communication network system between headquarters and the regions has been set up using own domain name '*bocodol.ac.bw.*' The College also operates a website which can be visited at <http://www.gov.bw/moe/bocodol>.

The College is currently exploring on-line learning and e-learning with the aim of using them to enhance both learner support and programme development by the end of 2006.

Information Management System (IMS) Support

The College operates an Information and Management System using its server enabling all the regions including the warehouse with the exception of Kang to log on to the system at headquarters. The Kang region uses a modem.

Learner Support

BOCODOL caters for a diverse group in terms of vast geographical distributions, age, educational background, gender, motivation and ability to access resources. In addition, the College enrolls quite a significant number of school leavers with no experience of studying by distance education mode. In response to this diversity, BOCODOL has developed a more learner centred approach based on a radically decentralised system that aims to deliver learner support services as far as possible at community level and which provides effective support at all stages from pre-enrolment to after examinations. The learner support strategy encompasses guidance and counselling whose inclusion is seen as crucial to increasing retention, participation in programmes and courses and optimising success rates. The strategy was developed following review and evaluation of the strategy that was inherited from the Department of Non-formal Education. The evaluation had revealed that the old strategy was rigid, insensitive to learners' needs and too centralised. With guidance of a consultancy, BOCODOL convened all stakeholders, including learners, to map out a new strategy. The strategy responds to the following identified needs:

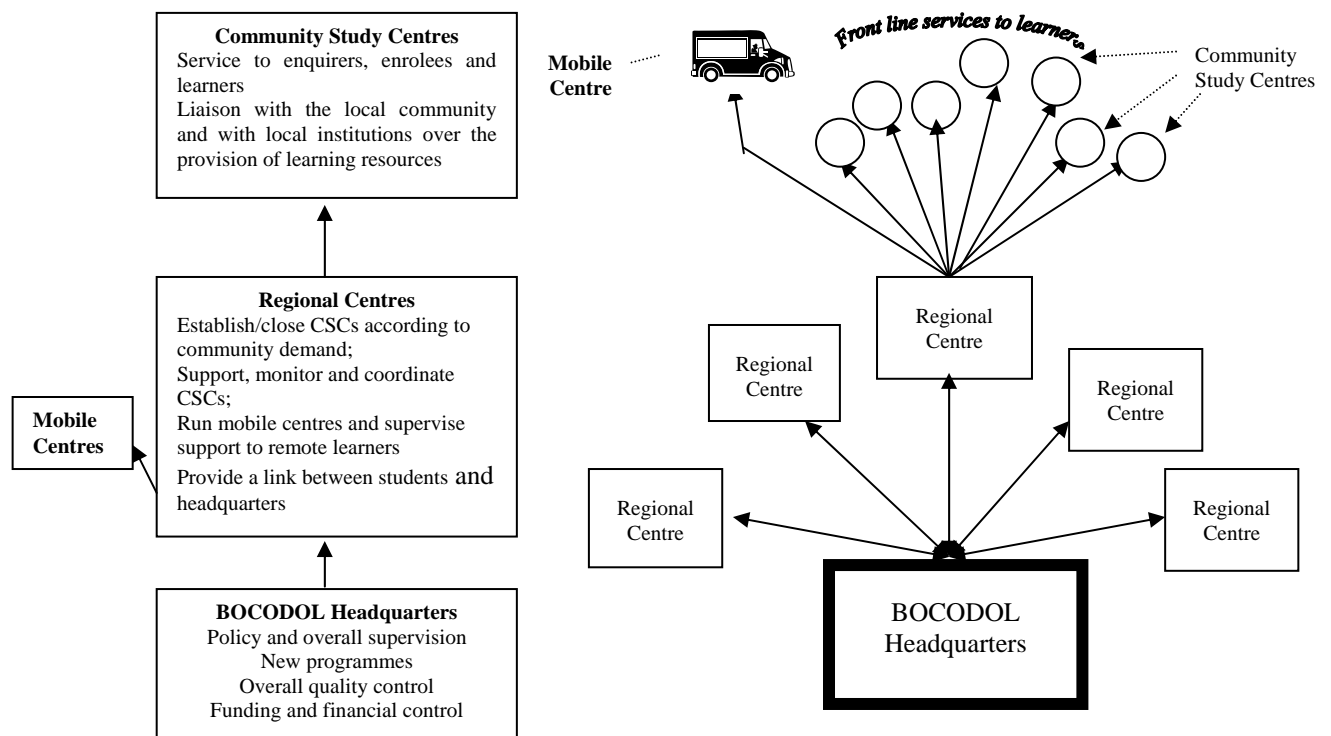
- regular, responsive and flexible tutor support
- regular contact between learners and tutors and with other learners

- tutor marking system which provides quick and effective feedback
- dealing with learner enquiries in a caring, patient , helpful and compassionate manner
- guidance and counselling through all the stages of the learning cycle
- up-to-date learner records and statistics
- suitable arrangements with relevant partner institutions in the delivery of learner support
- provision for learners in remote and rural areas.

And offers improved services in:

- enrolment
- pre and post enrolment guidance and counselling
- materials distribution
- marking of assignments and feedback
- some record keeping
- providing information about the Community Study Centre (CSC) to the regional office
- Examination advice & disseminating related information
- administering face-to-face tutorial service
- providing information about the College to the community
- liaising with regional centre and host institution

The new model for learner support



This decentralised new approach is a generic model on which other support systems are built. It offers the following benefits in terms of cutting:

- transport costs for the learners
- delays on enquiries and feedback

- red-tape and beauracratc delays by reducing the layers of offices learners initially travelled to in the quest for service
- over-dependence of learners encouraged by the old “tutoring system” which did more teaching than tutoring
- isolation of learners in the more rural and remote areas as it provides for a Remote Mobile Service
- drop-out rates while raising participation and pass rates in all courses
- costs for the institution by providing more reliable statistics and therefore plans to match demand more accurately.

Remote learner Service

The Remote Learner Service is a special service to address the needs of the College’s remote learners. The College defines a remote learner as ‘*a learner who is studying independently without access to tutors or a CSC as a result either of her/his geographical isolation, unavailability of appropriate facilities, lack of transport, or the fact that there are too few other learners to run a viable centre.*’

The Kang Region, the first to pilot this service, is characterised by great distances between the Regional Centre and the places it services. In this region a number learners do not have easy access to the established Community Study Centres (CSCs), which are located at Community Junior Secondary Schools (CJSSs) where the learners who are able to access them are serviced by tutors, the CSC Supervisor as well as the BOCODOL Regional Office through the Learner/Tutor Coordinator (LTC).

The remote learner on the other hand, is serviced through a learning satellite, that is, a primary school based support system. This system enabled the College to enrol over 300 learners in 2002/2003 who would otherwise not have been able to enrol mainly because of the distance. In addition to the 50 CSCs, there are 18 fully-fledged learning satellites with coordinators and 7 small formal study groups, which have the potential to grow into learning satellites. In total the College services students in excess 1500 (2004 enrolment).

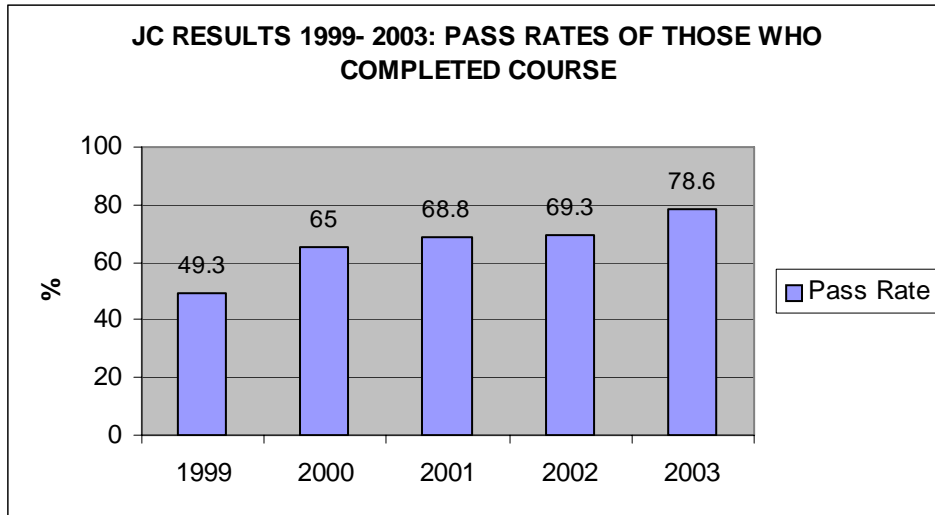
Examination Performance

Since operating as a parastatal institution, the College is witnessing some positive impact in the following areas:

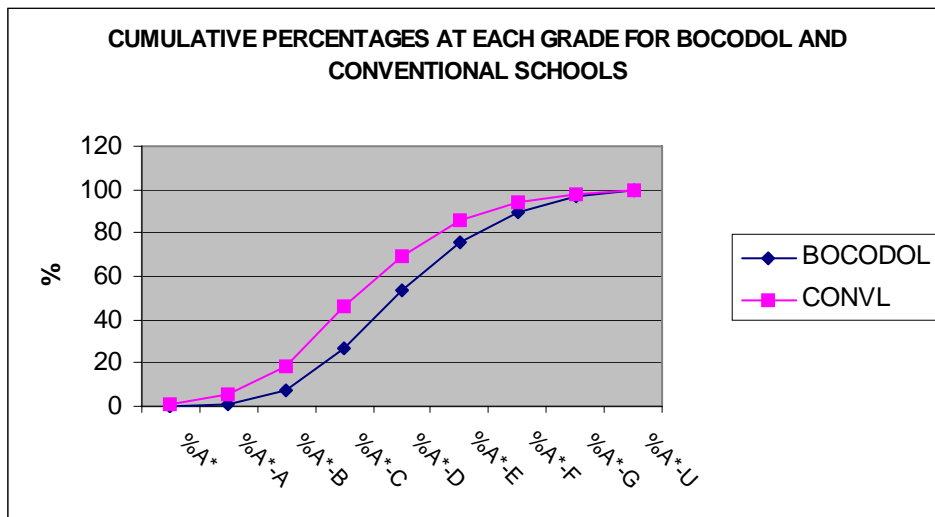
- Enrolment - has increased significantly particularly at senior secondary level
- Participation in the programmes - has grown in terms of assignment submission rate and tutorial attendances
- Examinations - more and more learners are entering for the examinations
- Pass rate - is steadily rising and more emphasis is being put on improving the quality of the grades to make them even better.

BOCODOL’s School Equivalency Examination Results

The following diagrams serve to show how students of the College perform in the final examinations of the school equivalency programmes. It is worth noting that BOCODOL students sit the same examination that conventional education students sit. The results have progressively improved and are almost at par with those of conventional schools. This is particularly so at senior secondary level where 97.2% of BOCODOL’s 2003 candidates were graded against 97.8% grading in respect of conventional senior secondary candidates.



GCSE Examination Results for 2003: Conventional Schools and BOCODOL



Project based management Approach

The College is moving towards adopting a “project based approach” to new initiatives in order to avoid stretching capacity too thinly. This has become more evident with the introduction of vocational courses where it is evident that it would be more appropriate to have each target group being addressed with its specific learner support system as necessary. The first three courses in place thus have taken this route.

Vocational Courses

Support services for the first target audience under the Second task of BOCODOL’s Mandate which is to “Broaden the types of courses on offer to include vocational, professional, management and other programmes in addition to JC and BGCSE courses already provided” has been completed. The main feature of this support system is residential tutorials taking place over the weekend. The new clientele is the Botswana Police Service officers who are enrolled. Certificate in English for Professional Purposes (EPP) course. The course has six-modules offered over a twelve months period with four hours of residential support for every module. About

400 Police officers have enrolled in the first phase in four centres located in Francistown, Palapye and two in Gaborone.

Small Scale Business Management (SSBM)

This is a certificate level course with ten stand-alone modules, on different business management topics.

The course has some in built flexibility where clients can choose whether to take the whole ten modules and end up with a full certificate, or take any number of modules in specific areas of interest and receive an attendance certificate. Issues of accreditation have been arranged with the Botswana Training Authority (BOTA), an organisation that accredits vocational institutions and courses.

The course targets small business entrepreneurs, both youth and adults. These are individuals who want to start their businesses or improve their business skills and or their chances of success at their business endeavours. The College will serve both individual and corporate clients.

Interactive Communication for Industry

The course aims to develop work-related language and communication competencies for Industry supervisors. It also aims to equip them with skills that enable them to build more effective teams towards maximisation of production of goods and services. Computer awareness has also been made an integral part of the course.

Partnerships

The College collaborates with a number of organisations at local, regional and international level. Collaboration is pursued aggressively because of the conviction that it has the potential of exposing BOCODOL to best ODL practice and reputable institutions that may be willing to partner in programme development and delivery. Some of the collaborating partners are:

Location	Partner	Area of Collaboration
Locally	Botswana National Sports Council (BNSC)	Tutorial Support provision for student athletes
	Botswana Police Service (BPS)	EPP Course
	Botswana National Youth Council (BNYC)	Small Scale Business Management (SSBM) course
	Botswana Training Authority (BOTA)	Accreditation of BOCODOL vocational education programmes
	Department of Vocational Education & Training (DVET)	Externalise using ODL the DVET's college-based Botswana Technical Education Programme (BTEP)
	Junior Achievement Botswana (JAB)	Reaching the out-of-school youths.
	Ministry of Education Departments (Secondary & Primary)	Providing facilities and human resource
	University of Botswana's Centre for Continuing Education (CCE)	Sharing ODL practices

	Centre for Academic Development (CAD) University of Botswana	Exploring e-learning
Regionally	Namibia College of Open Learning (NAMCOL)	Several through BOCODOL-NAMCOL Partnership Protocol Agreement
	University of South Africa (UNISA)	Reviewing of the Certificate for Distance Education Practitioners curriculum to upgrade into BA in Distance Education degree.
	Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA)	Sharing in ODL practices and capacity building
Internationally	Cambridge International Examinations & Career Awards	Register as a Centre for the Cambridge International Examinations & Career Awards.
	DFID	Capacity building
	COL	Capacity building, Regional JC curriculum pilot

Quality Assurance

Botswana's National Vision sets as its first ideal "An Educated and Informed Nation". This undoubtedly challenges the education sector to be responsive to the dynamic and diverse needs of Botswana and the world as well as to equip citizens with competencies to be the best producers and purveyors of services. Similarly the RNPE's central theme is "Quality Education". It is in this context that BOCODOL fulfils its mandate as a College of Open and Distance Learning charged with widening access to education and training. In this connection therefore, BOCODOL operations are guided by a Quality Assurance Policy that re-emphasizes the institution's vision of becoming an internationally recognised college of excellence in open/distance learning. The policy is also an assurance of quality standards to the College's clients and partners.

The policy states the quality standards and indicators and means of verification, which each department or region of the College sets for its work and outlines the processes for quality audit by which the standards are assured. Implementation of the policy remains a specific and high priority agenda for management. A representative Quality Advisory Committee conducts annual quality audits and advises management on the extent of adherence and deviation by the College organs, following which, corrective action is taken. The policy generally helps to facilitate appraisal of performance at individual, departmental and College level and by so doing complements the performance management system adopted by the College.

Challenges

Whilst the foregoing submission gives a rosy picture of education and training developments in Botswana, a lot still needs to be done. Currently 48% of Junior Certificate completers cannot find places in Senior Secondary Schools and 70% of senior secondary completers are unable to find places in Tertiary institutions. This

undesirable scenario, if left unattended, could very easily render the National Vision ideal of an educated and informed nation by 2016 a pipe dream. All the more reason why Botswana should intensify its efforts to develop distance education and the application of ICT's in a bid to widen access to education beyond junior secondary level.

Because of the vastness of the country, reaching remote learners is the greatest challenge for the College because failure to reach them would compromise Governments' commitment to address inequality of access to education. The College is totally dependent on Government for funding and is challenged with the mammoth task of establishing cost recovery measures. Establishing a corporate image is another challenge, de-stigmatising distance education and changing the society's mindsets are other serious challenges that the College has to contend with.

Priorities For The Future

The Colleges' desires for the future are outlined in the National Development Plan 9 (2003 – 2009), a plan that has been developed within the framework of the National Vision 2016. Through the plan the College aims to achieve the following:

- Widen Access to programmes
- Integrate ICT's to enhance quality of programmes
- Strengthen and diversify learner support strategies
- Diversify programmes and gradually move to higher education programmes that may be self sustaining
- Strengthen partnerships with other Open and Distance Learning institutions in a bid to access best practice and collaborate on programmes development and delivery.

Conclusion

Evidently what started as policy commitment way back in 1993/4 has, overtime, been translated into practice. Government played its part by following policy provisions with prudent planning and investment of adequate financial resources in the structures and programmes of the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning. The decision to make the College semi-autonomous has also worked well for it because it has been able to expeditiously but effectively establish itself. It didn't have to suffer setbacks often associated with bureaucratic red tape.

From the foregoing it is clear that the benefits derived from the programmes of the College by the people of Botswana are quite significant. Thousands of people are now able to access education and training that they would otherwise not access through the conventional education institutions. There is now more simultaneous learning and earning in the country. The net results of this is an enhanced knowledge base in the country, enhanced national competitive edge and increased possibility of achieving the ideal of an educated and informed nation by 2016.

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