INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of Open and Distance Education (ODE) in 2001, some progress has been made in terms of its adoption and expansion by several colleges in the country. The past six years have witnessed the proliferation of ODE programs, specifically in teacher development, giving rise to the urgent need of the Ministry of Education to develop appropriate policies and guidelines to ensure quality assurance.

Status of ODE in Sierra Leone - Opportunities and Challenges

**Opportunities**

- National Policy on Teacher Training and Development including implementation guidelines developed and operationalised. Policy made provisions for the management and delivery of ODE programs.
- Significant number of lecturers in colleges has been trained to develop ODE modules by COL. This has resulted in the expansion of ODE programs for teacher professional development at the basic education level. Over thousands of untrained and unqualified teachers have been trained and others assured of training opportunities.
- ODE is being supported by in-country donor partners - UNICEF, UNESCO, International Rescue Committee, PLAN-SL, Catholic Relief Services, Concern Worldwide/IBIS.

**Challenges**

- No policy document in operation for ODE. Draft policy is yet to be reviewed and finalised
- Proliferation of ODE programs without adequate student support, a national coordinating Unit/Centre and a harmonised qualifications framework.
- Lack of trained and specialised monitoring and evaluation personnel on ODE including monitoring and evaluation instrument.
Activities supported by COL

- COL in collaboration with the Ministry of Education conducted three sessions of workshops in Freetown, which were designed to train lecturers of teacher training colleges on instructional design in developing ODE modules. COL consultant, Dr. Clayton Wright served as the sole resource person and trained a total of eighty-six (86) lecturers from December 2008 to May 2010.

The trained lecturers were later commissioned by their respective colleges to develop the Higher Teachers’ Certificate (primary) modules for the commencement of a three-year ODE program. Modules one and two have been completed whilst much progress is being made in the development of modules three, four, five and six. It is expected that the program will be fully implemented by 2011/2012 academic year.

- Three participants from the teachers’ training colleges attended a training workshop in Ghana, April 2010, which was meant to review and adapt materials for training of school heads and principals in West Africa.

- Six participants attended a training workshop in the Gambia, November 2010, on the theme ‘Leadership Development for Head Teachers and Principals of Schools in the Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.’ The objective of the workshop was to train master trainers who will subsequently train head teachers and principals in their respective countries.

- One participant was trained from Njala University at a workshop on Virtual Universities for Small States Countries (VUSSC) – an international training and material production on sustainable agriculture at Diploma level.

- One participant from the University of Sierra Leone was also trained in the development of a national qualifications framework on ODE.

- Three participants from Sierra Leone attended the 6th Pan Commonwealth Forum held in Kochi, India.

TOP PRIORITIES 2012-2015

The 2010 Government White Paper on Education articulated the urgent need to address the challenges that underpin the quality of teaching and learning at all levels of the education system.

As ODE provides opportunities for teacher professional development, Government priorities would include:
1. review and finalise the existing draft national policy on ODE
2. develop a national qualifications framework that would take into consideration the various levels and types of ODE programs.
3. create a national coordinating Unit or Centre for ODE
4. introduce and train personnel on the use of ICT in ODE programs - produce audio and DVD/VCDs on existing modules
5. train teachers in life skills/livelihood skills and reproductive health including the support for study tours to share best practices.

CONCLUSION

It is important for COL to inform or copy Focal Points on all activities supported within each country, which will enable Focal Points to keep track of events that will facilitate the production of a comprehensive and timely report as and when necessary.

Let me use this opportunity to express my country’s appreciation to COL for a successful collaborative venture over the years, particularly in teacher education.