



SRI LANKA

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Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in Sri Lanka: Country paper

1.0 Introduction

The COL has been involved in education and development in Sri Lanka through several initiatives in three sectors: education, learning for livelihoods and human environment. This would mean working in learning for education sector development, quality assurance, teacher training and development, capacity building in open and distance learning (ODL) and testing new models of community engagement with media.

Having this background, the COL has been very instrumental and has extended support in ODL programmes in Sri Lanka. COL's support is hereby acknowledged and appreciated by the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL). With regard to the ODL activities, this has included dual model system at the higher education sector and working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as community-based organizations. Among them, the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), University of Colombo (UoC), National Institute of Education (NIE), University of Ruhuna (UoR), and number of NGOs are champions in running ODL programmes extensively.

2.0 Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in Sri Lanka

2.1 Teacher education and quality assurance

Aforementioned public and private institutions and agencies are conducting a number of teacher education programmes especially, ODL in collaboration with COL. This includes development of quality assurance systems and related professional development of staff/personnel at all levels in line with the ODL and technology-mediated approaches.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) also working towards expanding teacher education through combinations of ODL and classroom-focussed trainings in Sri Lanka through increasing opportunities and capacity of developing and delivering quality professional development of teachers and other education sector personnel. As a result, ODL programmes adopted e-learning and classroom-focussed training.

Further, it has developed a toolkit on 'quality assurance for teacher education and development'. Policymakers and teacher educators share their experiences on quality assurance in teacher education at regional level and Sri Lankan experts are contributing to this. Higher education institutions have developed and adopted 'quality assurance guidelines' for national assessments

and accreditation according to the guidelines issued by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in Sri Lanka. Indeed, it has used contents given in 'handbook for quality assurance in higher education'. Beside, with the co-sponsoring of COL, the Distance Education Modernization Project (DEMP) has produced 'performance indicators for quality assurance in distance higher education'.

Moreover, Sri Lankan experts on respective personnel contributed in the field of teacher education and quality assurance programmes in different ways.

2.2 *Open distance learning*

The OUSL conducted a number of ODL programme and is making steady progress. In addition, NIE implemented 'Open School' and is paying special attention to children who are out-of-schools and adults. In relation to the school education, the GoSL is working at a significant level to increase access and participation to basic and secondary education in line with the education sector development framework and programme (ESDFP) which is in operation in the system from 2006 - 2010. The forthcoming education sector development framework and programme-II: 2012-2016 have planned a number of projects/activities to increase access and participation in primary and secondary education as well as strengthening non-formal and special education programmes. Particular attention has been paid on marginalised areas in the country.

Further, several Sri Lankan universities and NIE have been involved in developing/preparing learning materials especially in e-learning and media education.

2.3 *Higher education*

External degree programmes in the country are being implemented by the UGC of Sri Lanka with the collaboration of COL's technical assistance. Further, action has been taken to strengthen the higher education system especially developing models and materials for higher education through OUSL and dual-mode operations.

2.4 *Rural community development*

Further, COL has supported the OUSL to establish a rural research unit in identifying rural community needs in technologies that are appropriate for their development and capabilities in Sri Lanka.

The University of Colombo with the assistance of COL has initiated a programme on 'life-long learning for farmers (L3 Framers)'. This programme empowers the vulnerable rural women and their families to: gain knowledge, create their own self-directed learning process, organise themselves to solve problems by making their products and food security, improve their living conditions, and increase their freedom and independence from government support and subsidies. Following key partners are directly involved in implementation of L3 Farmers programme on a pilot basis: farmers, a consortium of learning institutions (i.e. OUSL, UoC,

Eastern University, Export Development Board (EDB), and Irrigation Department), 'Vidhatha' centres¹, and Rural Cooperative Bank (i.e. through providing loans to farmers).

Moreover, the UoC has started an online agro-technology degree programme for rural farmers, with a pilot project already showing spectacular results. The university had started a pilot programme in the village of Weligatte in Hambantota in the deep south of the island teaching farmers tissue culture, agro-technology, farm management techniques and marketing. Indeed, a laboratory has been set up, staffed with young girls from the areas, who are now getting higher yields and revenue. These farmers' incomes have increased ten fold and can definitely see the difference, over the past five years. Farming has to be approached in a scientific manner to increase yields, improve quality and win markets. Most Sri Lankan farmers were still using traditional methods, but a scientific grounding in farming can transform their lives. The university will first start a certificate level course leading to a diploma and eventually a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree. Each level of the programme will take one academic year. Sri Lanka's university system can only absorb about three per cent of students who complete secondary education. The new agriculture course will use a combination of e-learning, printed materials sent through post, compact discs, face-to-face teaching and lab work. But most of the course work will be conducted through e-learning. Farmer will access e-learning modules through a network of internet communications kiosks, known as 'Nanasela's, promoted by the ICTA, Sri Lanka. The programme is a part of the DEMP, funded by the ADB, initially funded with five million rupees. Students are expected to contribute a part of the costs, though it is subsidized.

The Department of Agricultural Economics of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna has initiated a programme on 'life-long learning for farmers (L3 Framers). This programme empowers the vulnerable rural farmers and their families to: gain knowledge, create their own self-directed learning process, organise themselves to solve problems by making their products and food security, improve their living conditions, and increase their freedom and independence from government support and subsidies.

2.5 Professional development

COL also supported to counterpart universities and agencies for professional development in different disciplines in order to explore and share local, regional and international experience especially in line with the ODL programmes. COL provided assistance to OUSL to transform and implement their existing diploma/certificate programmes on 'good governance and leadership' into ODL format for delivery through OUSL's regional centres.

3.0 Way forward

Concluding, these initiatives shows that the ODL programmes in Sri Lanka way forward to improve the quality of education both school education and higher education as well as ensuring economic efficiency and equity of education investment in Sri Lanka. Having these social,

¹'Vidhatha' Centers which are equipped with computers, internet and other ICT facilities are establishing in 300 villages under the Ministry of Science and Technology. These centers will facilities the transfer of information from scientific and research institutions to rural framers.

economic and educational experiences, the policymakers are working towards to implement several initiatives with collaboration of COL.

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