

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

COL activities in 2003-2006

BACKGROUND

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is the largest of the Pacific Island countries and although its population is just over 4 million it is grouped among the small states of the Commonwealth. As a nation, it faces a number of pressing challenges. A recent report published by World Vision, Australia's biggest non-government aid organisation, assesses PNG as not likely to achieve any of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. AIDS/HIV infection is a serious problem as is access to clean water. PNG also has the lowest rate of primary school completion in the region (under 60%). PNG is heavily dependent on Australian aid and the Australian government has deemed it a priority country and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) has set up an office in Port Moresby. Most sectors in PNG would benefit from assistance and distance education is becoming an important feature.

SUMMARY

2003-2006 was a period of expansion for PNG's distance and technology enhanced learning systems. Two important projects are underway: one in environmental policy and the other in AIDS awareness and prevention. There have also been significant advances on the institutional front with PNG participating in the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), establishing the Papua New Guinea Association of Distance Education (PNGADE) and also being part of the Pacific Islands Regional Association of Distance Education (PIRADE). COL has worked closely with the PNG authorities throughout the period sending delegates to a number of meetings with the aim of furthering professional development and forging closer links with other Commonwealth countries. The President and other COL staff have visited the country recently and established important points of contact.

POLICY AND SYSTEMS ENHANCEMENT

The Environment

An environmental scan was completed for PNG with a special focus on the current Literacy and Livelihoods infrastructure and its potential application to the education and training system in four Pacific Island countries of which PNG is one. Following the scan COL held a meeting with representatives of the University Open College (UOC). This gave COL an understanding of the role and needs of UOC, which included aid with multi-media support for its print-based materials and training to convert print information and instruction into a multi-media platform delivered on CDs.

AIDS Awareness and Prevention

In March 2005, the Permanent Secretaries of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health were briefed on the health-based work of COL and addressed the MDGs. COL has partnered with the World Health Organization and the locally based Anglicare. As a result of this partnership the Anglicare STOP AIDS Health Media Unit was set up in March 2006. Anglicare is now better equipped to reach the remote and linguistically diverse parts of the country with customised health-based information. The drama troupe at Anglicare, which produces skits and dramas for presentation at roadsides and village events, has been trained in media production. Their work concerning HIV stigma and prevention have been produced onto video and used at village cinema events in remotes parts of the country.

Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

PNG is a strong supporter of the VUSSC (see section on Pan-Commonwealth initiatives for further details of VUSSC).

COL support for PNG Initiatives

COL supported the establishment of the Papua New Guinea Association of Distance Education (PNGADE) and the Pacific Islands Regional Association of Distance Education (PIRADE). In April 2006 the President of COL gave the inaugural keynote address on “Learning for Development: The Role of Distance Education” at the symposium of the PNGADE held to re-launch the association. He also met with the new Minister of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology, the Minister of Education, and the Minister of Community Affairs to discuss COL’s role in the development of education in the Country.

COL held a meeting in March 2005 with the Data Unit, Ministry of Education to gain an understanding of the Ministry’s plan for the education content and connectivity via VSAT to remote parts of the country once the links are established.

Preparation and Use of Learning Materials

The COL/Commonwealth Secretariat distance education training programme for legislative drafters has been adapted by the University of the South Pacific for use throughout the region, and also by the University of Papua New Guinea.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A representative from PNG attended the two-week long Institute in August 2004, which was hosted by the National Institute for Open Schooling, India, on the establishment of an open schooling system.

COL provided support to a delegate from PNG to participate in the 3rd Pan-Commonwealth Forum held in New Zealand.

The Head of the Teacher Education Unit at the Ministry of Education was briefed in March 2005 on COL's work in PNG. The discussion included the subject of a Microsoft grant that would fund teacher education in the country.

LOOKING FORWARD

A more sustainable environmental policy and better AIDS awareness will continue to be important themes as PNG develops its open, distance and technology enhanced learning systems. Following the environmental scan a review of natural resource management programmes related to food and environment is now planned. PNG's commitment to distance education will be furthered via its participation in VUSSC and in the newly established PNGADE and PIRADE. PNG is reviewing the Commonwealth Executive Masters in Business Administration and Masters in Public Administration programmes for possible adoption.