

SIERRA LEONE

COL activities in 2003-2006

BACKGROUND

Eleven years of war devastated the education sector in Sierra Leone but reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts are now in place. In 1995 the government adopted the New Education Policy for Sierra Leone which set out some of the ways in which school enrolments, teacher training and participation in higher education could be increased.

More than 10 years later, school enrolments have increased by 300%, but 350,000 children are still outside government-assisted schools and the number of teachers has increased by only 20%.

In order to address this, Sierra Leone turned to COL for advice on how to increase learning opportunities and, in particular, teacher training through distance education. Distance education was not new to Sierra Leone as COL had already been active in the areas of teacher training and health but a step-up in the pace of change was needed and the Honourable Dr. Alpha T. Wurie asked COL to organise a National ODL Forum. This took place in February 2005 and provided a platform for initiating discussions on the review/revision of the New Education Policy for Sierra Leone.

The New Education Policy contained the basis for developing an ODL system in Sierra Leone. It mentioned the creation of an open university and referred to “The use of distance learning” as a low cost training strategy and a mode of realising Education for All through teacher education.

The teacher upgrading programme for untrained and unqualified primary school teachers through distance learning took off in 2001 and now covers eight out of the twelve districts in the country and there is a current enrolment of 2000 students serving mostly in remote areas of the country. The students follow the same syllabus as the conventional teacher college students for the same duration. The first batch of students for the Teachers Certificate graduated in 2004.

Before the launch of this project, there was a needs assessment survey followed by a COL-sponsored workshop on instructional design and course development including editorial skills. All the modules now in use by tutors and students on the programme were produced during the workshops funded by the Sierra Leone government, Plan Sierra Leone, COL and other donor agencies. In addition to personnel of the teacher training colleges, the University of Sierra Leone staff members also benefited from the training on materials development for distance learners.

SUMMARY

During the period 2003-06, COL has continued to work in Sierra Leone in the areas of policy development, teacher training, health and peri-urban agriculture. COL's partners have included the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST), Freetown Teachers Training College (FTTC), Njala College of Agriculture and the Nova Scotia Sierra Leone Programme (NSSLP).

POLICY AND SYSTEMS ENHANCEMENT

Working in partnership with COL and regional and Commonwealth partners

An Environmental Scan on the status of education in Sierra Leone was commissioned by COL and completed in January 2005.

An Environmental Scan of Professional Development for Extension Agents in Training Vegetable Growers in the peri-urban Western Area of Sierra Leone through ICT use in ODL in Sierra Leone was submitted to COL in May 2005.

COL President Sir John Daniel led a three-member COL delegation to Sierra Leone in November 2005 as part of the 15 CCEM Mid-Term Review.

The West African Teacher Training Consortium was formed in 2002 when Ministers from Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria and The Gambia signed a Statement of Intent to support such a forum. The Principal and a staff member of the FTTC attended several training workshops for course development and the use of STAMP 2000+ Materials at National Teachers' Institute (NTI), Kaduna (February 2003); Learner Support at Winneba, Ghana (July, 2004); and Instructional Design at NTI, Kaduna (May, 2005).

The Peer Health education project in Sierra Leone replicates the Gambian model and is a partnership with the Nova Scotia Sierra Leone Program (NSSLP). In October-November 2004, the project reached 24 schools in 12 of the 14 districts in Sierra Leone. The NSSLP will include peer health training to all districts of the country in addition to training of truck drivers concerning HIV/AIDS prevention and stigma. It will also use professional footballers as role models for young Sierra Leoneans. COL has partnered with the NSSLP to aid in reaching greater numbers of people throughout the country using the models established with the NSGA in The Gambia.

Working with the Continuous Agriculture Education Project, Ghana, COL organised a workshop at the University of Ghana on 21-22 September 2004 to examine how ODL could be harnessed to enhance the effectiveness of agricultural extension agents. Sierra Leone was represented at the event.

National Commitment to ODL through consultation and legislation

A national forum on “Increasing Access to Quality Education and Training for All through ODL” was held in Freetown from 16-18 February 2005. The objectives were to:

- Bring together all the key stakeholders from the appropriate ministries, educational institutions and representatives of civil society.
- Examine the potential of open and distance education to reach out and to reach all.
- Explore the ways in which distance education methodologies can serve to fulfil the developmental needs and priorities of Sierra Leone, not just in education but also in other social and economic sectors like health and agriculture.
- Consider and make recommendations on measures needed to induct information and communication technologies (ICT) within the country’s educational infrastructure and the methods necessary for mobilising the required resources.
- Establish a consensus on the broad framework for a national policy on Open and Distance Learning (ODL).
- Identify an Action Plan and timeline for the initiatives leading towards the policy review and development.

The Freetown Declaration on ODL was signed by the Honourable Minister of Education and an Action Plan outlined by the 80+ stakeholders who participated in the Forum. The government has since passed a Bill on ODL in November 2005.

Preparation and use of learning materials

Under the COL Media Empowerment programme, a Media Unit was set up at Freetown Teachers Training College in November 2005 to develop videos for use in teacher training programmes.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A senior administrator from the University of Sierra Leone participated in the 4th Managing Change: Leadership and Strategic Change in Higher Education conference at the University of Abertay Dundee from 17-22 August 2003.

COL organised Management Development Workshops for Senior African Teacher Educators with the National Council for Educational Research and Training in India in 2003 and 2004. The Principal of Port Loko Teachers College participated in the February 2003 event.

A Regional Centre of Expertise in ODL (RETRIDAL) for Western Africa was set up with COL support at the National Open University of Nigeria. A Stakeholders Consultative meeting was held in Lagos from 6-7 May 2004 to map out the ODL needs and priorities of the sub-region at which Sierra Leone was represented by the Principal and a staff member of FTTC. At the Instructional Design workshop held in Lagos from 3-7 May 2005, the Principal of FTTC and a staff member of the University of Sierra Leone

were present. A five day workshop on Research in Distance Education was organised by RETRIDAL from 24-28 May 2005 at which two colleagues from the University of Sierra Leone participated. The Principal of FTTC and a staff member of the University of Sierra Leone participated in a Training of Trainers workshop on Instructional Design held in Lagos during 19-23 June 2006.

COL and the Economic Community of West African States secretariat held a Consultative Meeting on literacy and skills development in Abuja on 15-16 May 2006, at which the Principal of FTTC and two officials from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology participated.

In partnership with the International Extension College, UK and Kyambogo University (KYU) in Uganda, COL organised a training programme (IEC) for staff from six African institutions, including Sierra Leone. Following this, FTTC expressed an interest in using the COL-IEC materials for the training programme “Introduction to Distance Education: a course for managers and practitioners” initially developed for KYU.

LOOKING FORWARD

The period 2003-06 saw important foundations laid for the development of ODL in Sierra Leone. In the period 2006-09 these will be enhanced and expanded. For example, MOEST proposes to set up an ODL Centre which may evolve into a Distance Learning College. COL is working with the Freetown Teachers College to see how production of audio and video materials might develop in the future.