

SOUTH AFRICA

COL activities in 2003-2006

BACKGROUND

South Africa has a longstanding commitment to distance education. The University of South Africa (UNISA) was the world's first large-scale distance-teaching university, pre-dating the world's other open universities by two decades. The new, post-apartheid era began a few years after the creation of COL, which has worked closely with South Africa and its institutions in bringing new approaches to education and training in support of the country's transition to democracy. The close link between COL and South Africa was symbolised by the holding of the 2nd Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in Durban in 2002. At that event the Adult Basic Education and Training Practitioner Training Programme (Certificate and Diploma), a training programme for adult basic education tutors of the Institute for Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), University of South Africa won the COL award for Excellence in Distance Education Materials. COL and UNESCO organised the "All-Africa Ministers" Conference on Open Learning and Distance Education" that was held in Cape Town in 2004.

Having raised its voluntary contribution to COL to the level of a major donor in 2005, South Africa is now a member of the Board of Governors where its representative chairs the Audit Committee. Three members of COL's staff have South African nationality.

SUMMARY

COL's work in South Africa in 2003-2006 reflected the diversity of the country's technology-mediated learning systems. COL has contributed to the development of radio and information and communications technologies (ICT) in the schools; to the training of teachers, particularly in Science, Technology and Mathematics; and to combating HIV/AIDS through media empowerment. Many South African specialists have benefited from the extensive professional development opportunities offered by COL – both in the country and internationally. COL has also drawn on the acknowledged expertise of institutions such as the Council on Higher Education, South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), UNISA and other South African Universities in its work around the Commonwealth. In implementing its commitment to South-South collaboration COL frequently involves South African experts in its work in other countries.

POLICY AND SYSTEMS ENHANCEMENT

Regional Initiatives

SADC-CDE Regional Centre

Following requests from a number of countries in Southern Africa, COL facilitated the creation of the Southern African Regional Distance Education Centre (SARDEC) to which it provides some programme funding. Ministers suggested that SARDEC be sited in one of the smaller countries of the region, hence its location in Botswana. Recently SARDEC has been brought into the ambit of the Southern African Development Community and has changed its name to SADC-Centre for Distance Education. SADC-CDE conducted a needs survey in the region in 2005 which will provide the basis for its work in 2006-2009. A member of UNISA staff helped to develop the SADC-CDE programme with SAIDE and other South Africans also contributing.

DEASA Regional Association

COL has supported DEASA, the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa, for many years. At a regional advocacy roundtable in 2005 permanent secretaries and senior officials from nine countries, including South Africa, were briefed on the uses of ODL and regional mechanisms to support it. COL funds 40 learners per year (75% of fees) in DEASA member countries on the UNISA Certificate Course for Distance Education Practitioners.

Advocacy

All-Africa Ministers' Conference

Despite its lengthening track record of success and relevance, some Commonwealth governments still need to be convinced that ODL can deliver both access and quality. To extend the use of ODL in Africa the South African Ministry of Education, COL and UNESCO hosted the All-Africa Ministers' Conference on Open Learning and Distance Education in Cape Town in 2004.

Consultation on Future Developments in Higher Education in Africa

In 2005 the Report of the UK's Commission for Africa generated momentum for the renewal of African Universities. COL, in collaboration with the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the African Association of Universities and other partners took advantage of the publication of the Report to hold a consultation just before the G8 Summit at Gleneagles. Three South African representatives joined delegates from other Commonwealth African countries at the University of Abertay, Dundee to develop agreement on the implementation of a renewal programme.

African Council for Distance Education

COL supported the inaugural conference of the African Council for Distance Education, held at UNISA in 2005, where COL President Sir John Daniel gave the closing address. In the same period COL

supported the participation of five delegates from elsewhere in Africa to the first Distance Education and Teacher Training in Africa (DETA) conference held in Pretoria in 2005.

COL's Use of South African Expertise

Evaluating the CEMBA/CEMPA Programmes

COL retained UNISA to evaluate the distance learning Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Administration Programmes (CEMBA/CEMPA) that were developed with COL by the four open universities of South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka). The courses are now being revised in the light of UNISA's findings as the programmes begin to be offered in other Commonwealth regions beyond South Asia.

Quality in Teacher Education

The University of Pretoria was involved in COL's collaboration with the National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India and international partners to develop Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Teacher Education. These guidelines are suitable for teacher education through both distance learning and face-to-face teaching.

eLearning and Knowledge Management

The MindSet Network and Blue Matrix organisations are collaborating with COL in the establishment of a new learning object repository for COL's learning resources. This follows successful hosting of the GDEnet repository (www.gdenet.org) which was a joint effort by the South African Institute for Distance Education and Blue Matrix.

Staff members of the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Cape Town have been actively involved with COL in the creation of a guideline document on copyright which was circulated to all Ministers of Education (www.col.org/copyright).

Legislative Drafting

COL drew on South African expertise in developing a course on Legislative Drafting that is now in use in various Commonwealth countries.

Projects

Schoolnet Africa

In 2004 COL and Schoolnet Africa (SNA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding to update a previous MOU. It led to collaboration on the further development of SNA's African Education Knowledge Warehouse, a Schoolnet Champions Capacity Building Project, and further work on the integration of ICTs into teacher training and curricula, with particular attention to gender bias.

A collaborative project between COL, SNA, the German Development Agency (GTZ), Microsoft and New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), involving teacher training institutions in South Africa and five other countries, began with a workshop in Johannesburg in 2004. Schoolnet toolkits were available for a meeting on Schoolnets and e-schools convened by the Global e-Schools and Community Initiative of the UN ICT Task Force in Dublin in 2005.

NEPAD e-Schools

COL advised the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) e-Africa Commission as it developed the Demonstrator Project of the NEPAD e-Schools Initiative. This aims to impart ICT skills to young Africans in primary and secondary schools; to use ICTs to improve the provision of education in African schools; and to use ICT to improve the health of young Africans. Phase 1 is a Demonstrator Project involving six schools in each of 16 countries. South Africa's schools were: Hendrick-Makapan High School, Lomahasha Secondary School, Maripe Secondary School, Isiphosethu High School, Jamangile Secondary School and Ipetleng Secondary School.

COL has the lead role in the Monitoring and Evaluation of the e-Schools Demonstrator Project, working with InfoDev (World Bank) and Canada's International Development Research Centre. A final report is due at the end of 2006.

COL involved the African countries participating in the e-Schools Demonstrator Project in an international symposium on the application of multi-media to schooling and further meetings with country representatives were held in parallel with the eLearning conference held in Addis Ababa in 2005 (www.elearning-africa.com). The next meeting of country representatives is scheduled for September 2006 in South Africa.

NEPAD Teacher Training

COL is working with NEPAD to construct a plan for the pre-service and in-service training of teachers by distance education. Partners in implementation are the University of South Africa, the National Open University of Nigeria, and the African Virtual University.

Teacher Training in Science, Technology and Mathematics

South Africa joined seven Southern African countries and COL in a five-year distance education project to train upper primary and junior secondary teachers and administrators in Science, Technology and Mathematics (STM). The programme provides in-service skills training and upgrading. In addition to the STM subject areas, the modular courses in Science, Technology and Mathematics Programme (STAMP 2000+) also focus on general education and multi-grade teaching topics such as special educational needs, educational management and curriculum design. Forty-six modules have been prepared and, through the workshops that were part of the process, 300 educational professionals received hands-on training on materials writing, desktop publishing and instructional design. STAMP 2000+ materials are being used in Ghana and Nigeria.

Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA)

COL is one of the initial signatories to the core consortium of TESSA, which includes the University of Fort Hare, the University of Natal, the Open University of Tanzania, the UK Open University and the World Service Trust of the BBC. The focus of the project is developing a course and accompanying resources in an open source electronic environment that teacher educators can adapt and use to suit their own circumstances. The target group is unqualified and under-qualified teachers in basic education. COL's role is to promote the widening of participation in TESSA through advocacy and marketing and liaison with partner and potential partners. It will also help with the adaptation of course materials in individual institutions, particularly as regards the use of open source materials. The consortium's first meeting took place in South Africa in 2005

Fighting HIV/AIDS Stigma

In partnership with the World Health Organization, COL has focused its health work in South Africa on partnering with an NGO in KwaZulu-Natal, the Valley Trust, to combat HIV/AIDS stigma. Part of COL's Media Empowerment programme, the approach has involved equipping and training the Valley Trust to produce video and audio material on HIV/AIDS which is disseminated by a variety of means, from showings in rural communities to open air broadcasting.

Educational Radio/Media

COL has worked with the Open Learning Systems Educational Trust (OLSET) for some years. In 2003/04 OLSET was contracted to produce a radio series aimed at helping those living in poverty to gain the necessary skills to improve their standard of living. COL has also supported OLSET's broader work on radio and media in schools by equipping and training audio and video production teams. COL provides regular training updates and equipment refreshment.

Mobile Learning for Change

A South African colleague has been awarded funds from the Gender and Agriculture/Rural Development in the Information Society (GenARDIS) Small Grant Fund. This programme focuses on the innovative use of ICTs for rural women. The project which focuses on Mobile Learning for Change is one of three COL-supported projects.

Text-messaging in Distance Education

UNISA has worked with COL on a pilot study and research on the potential impact of the use of SMS (text-messaging) in improving learner retention. In South Africa few distance learners have easy access to the Internet but many can access cellular phones. Initial results are encouraging. COL is also working with UNISA on the creation of a course in online tutoring.

Lifelong Learning for Farmers

Following the success of its Lifelong Learning for Farmers initiative in India in improving rural prosperity, COL engaged the Centre for Adult Education of the University of KwaZulu Natal to conduct

an environmental scan of the agricultural development sector, in Southern Africa. The scan identified one project each in Zambia, Swaziland and South Africa for field evaluation. There was little evidence of the use of ICT or ODL in supporting small scale and subsistence farmers. The study recommended that COL could aim at developing life long learning programmes promoting the judicious use of radio for supporting agricultural extension services and farmers and linking them with well-regarded tertiary agricultural institutions and credit facilities.

In South Africa the Kgautswane Community was identified for in-depth field research where other examples of community development exist. It appears that improving agricultural extension services by the use of radio and ODL could be a valuable contribution. In partnership with OLSET, six radio programmes addressing poverty reduction have been developed. COL plans to develop a radio-based educational programme to promote the L3 farmers concept in Southern Africa.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Literacy and Livelihoods

South Africa took part in the “International Literacy and Livelihoods Experts Meeting: Learning for Life in a Changing World”, held in Vancouver in 2004. A report is available.

ODL and Development

Three South African participants joined delegates from 15 countries at a high-level Institute in Canada in 2005 to explore the relationship between open, distance and technology-related learning (ODL) and development. A publication was produced.

Training in Leadership and Management in Higher Education

Over the 2003-2006 triennium, COL and the Association of Commonwealth Universities have organised annually, at the University of Abertay, Dundee, a strategic development programme for leaders of Commonwealth universities in Africa. Seven South African delegates took part in these events in 2003 and 2004 representing Stellenbosch University, the University of Fort Hare, the University of Port Elizabeth, the University of the Free State, Rhodes University and the Council of Higher Education. The 2005 event, at which South Africa was also represented, had a different format as reported above under “Advocacy”.

Training in the Management of Teacher Education

In the period 2003-2006 COL has held Management Development Institutes in India and Singapore for college principals and senior administrators from Teacher Training Institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa. Representatives of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, the University of Fort Hare, and UNISA participated in these events in 2004 and 2005.

ICTs in Teacher Education

OLSET took part in a roundtable on quality issues in the use of ICTs in Teacher Education organised by COL in Nigeria with the National Teachers' Institute and the National Commission of Colleges of Education.

Copyright

COL co-sponsored the Africa Copyright Forum Conference in Uganda in 2005. South Africa was one of 23 countries participating. The "Africa Copyright and Access to Information Alliance" was established and an Interim Board elected to start addressing copyright and related issues in Africa with special reference to education, libraries and people with disabilities.

Course Writing

In the development of UNISA's B.A. programme in Open and Distance Learning COL has supported UNISA's Institute for Continuing Education in organising two workshops for ODL writers in 2003 and 2004. A COL staff member is one of the external academic readers of the degree modules.

Instructional Design

COL held an instructional design workshop for UNISA staff in 2005.

Open Source Software

COL co-sponsored a Free and Open Source Software Federation of Africa meeting in Kenya and enabled key open source and copyright practitioners from South Africa to attend. The meeting helped a wide range of active players in the field to engage in debate that is helping to motivate the writing of open source programme code across Africa.

Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning

A significant South African delegation, with two of its members sponsored by COL, took an active part in the 3rd Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning held in New Zealand in 2004. A similar delegation from South Africa is anticipated at the 4th Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning to be held in Jamaica in late 2006.

Young Professionals

In the 2003-2006 period, South Africa has hosted eight interns under COL's Young Professionals Attachment Programme. They have worked at CIVICUS, British Council Southern Africa, World Alliance for Citizenship Participation; the British Council Governance Programme and Fahamu - Networks for Social Justice (an NGO).

EVALUATION

Informal

UNISA staff are complimentary about the quality of the support they have received from COL in developing the B.A. programme in ODL. However, UNISA's administration would like to be more involved in the coordination of the various COL activities taking place within the institution. This will be addressed at a joint COL/UNISA planning meeting in August 2006.

Formal

COL commissioned Dr. Patrick Spaven to conduct a formal and independent evaluation of its work in 2003-2006. Some of his scrutiny touched on COL's work in South Africa. These quotations come from his report.

SADC-CDE (formerly SARDEC)

"It is essential that good relations are established between SARDEC and important organisations like SADC, otherwise SARDEC could be sidelined. This is particularly important given that SADC is likely, within the next year or so, to be the hub for an important African Development Bank ODL capacity-building programme for which SARDEC could provide useful services." (Note: this has now been addressed as the change of name implies.)

Schoolnet Africa (SNA)

"Schoolnet Africa attributes much of its success as an organisation to COL's strategic thinking and what it regards as timely and relevant interventions. Although in money terms COL has been a minor partner – just 4% of SNA's funding over the last four years – SNA assessed COL's interventions in their area very favourably compared to much more substantially resourced donor programmes, whose interventions SNA felt were not always well-timed and appropriate."

Quality of Teacher Education

"The teacher education quality indicators have been favourably received by the organisations taking part in the process. This was made more likely by the highly participatory nature of the process. It also seems to have been an efficient process that kept to its planned timetable."

Fighting HIV/AIDS Stigma

"The (Valley Trust) acquired the capacity to create good quality videos which have been seen by a high proportion of their target groups."

LOOKING FORWARD

South Africa will continue to be one of COL's most important partners, particularly as it takes forward the Three-year Plan for 2006-2009 with its greater alignment with development goals. South Africa will be an important contributor to the success of the Plan working with COL and other countries to build on expertise in open, distance and technology enhanced learning.