

SRI LANKA

COL activities in 2003-2006

BACKGROUND

COL has supported Sri Lanka on a number of levels in its development of open and distance learning. This has included dual mode systems at the tertiary level as well as working with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and grassroots based organisations. Much of COL's work has been in the nature of capacity building and professional development. COL has contributed consistently to the development of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), and also in establishing open schooling at the National Institute of Education in Sri Lanka, and with the well known NGO, Sarvodaya. Sri Lanka has also been represented on COL's Board of Governors through Dr. Tara del Mel, an educationist and policy maker. Sri Lanka is also represented on the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) Advisory Board.

SUMMARY

The triennium 2003-2006 saw Sri Lankan institutions move from being recipients of COL support to centres of expertise as OUSL became the hub for the Master of Arts in Teacher Education (MATE) international programme and a local resource centre in eLearning for the benefit of other Sri Lankan educational institutions.

POLICY AND SYSTEMS ENHANCEMENT

Working with regional partners

Sri Lanka is one of the countries in the South Asia consortium, created by COL, which brings together institutions using distance education as a means to provide teacher education and in-service training. The first meeting of the South Asian Consortium for Teacher Education Development (SACTED) was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 3-4 November 2004. International participants from Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Pakistan also attended the workshop.

Workshops on Quality Assurance in teacher education and in course materials in higher education were held in Sri Lanka in February 2006. Teacher educators from Sri Lanka, along with six other countries of the Commonwealth participated in the two-day workshop. Participants presented best practice based on teacher education programmes in their country. Following the workshops these exchanges have continued.

Sri Lankan representatives from OUSL took part in an international symposium organised by COL on the application of multimedia to the schooling sector of the education system. The symposium was designed to bring together institutions from Africa, South and Southeast Asia that are using satellite broadcasting to support the school system.

COL worked with OUSL and the University Grants Commission (UGC) to develop Quality Assurance Guidelines for the distance education system in the country as well as a Self-Assessment manual.

Sri Lanka is one of the countries which CEMCA covers as the South Asia node for the Global Distance Education Network (GDENet), which searches and provides knowledge resources for use by distance educators in the region and globally.

Media Empowerment for Health Issues

COL worked with the World Health Organization (WHO) Sri Lanka office and Sarvodaya to address issues concerning communicable diseases. COL employed its ODL expertise to aid Sarvodaya's capacity to create malaria-based information through the creation of a Health Media Unit. The information created by Sarvodaya has been delivered via radio, television and mobile units travelling to the villages with a projector and generator. This model has proven to be especially effective given the events of the December 2004 tsunami. Since the tsunami Sarvodaya has liaised with the WHO to deliver water and food safe information to the affected eastern shore including Tamil held territory.

Open Schooling

CEMCA and COL provided consultancy support by engaging two consultants from India's National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) to assist with development of an Open School at the National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka in June 2005.

Two senior faculty members from the National Institute of Education participated in a COL-CEMCA workshop on "Instructional Design" organised in collaboration with the NIOS in March 2005.

Professionals from Sri Lanka participated in COL and NIOS supported and organised an Institute for education/government officials from Commonwealth developing countries for the purpose of providing them with first-hand views and experience of an operational open school in September 2005.

Higher education

At the request of the UGC, COL commissioned a report on the status of the External Degree programme in the country and held a retreat of Vice Chancellors to discuss the recommendations.

The pilot run of the Master of Arts in Teacher Education (MATE) international programme began in February 2005 with 15 students from Sri Lanka. A review of the first three months progress of the pilot run of the programme was done in a meeting with the Dean, Faculty of Education, Coordinators of MATE and COL consultant on 19 May 2005. The review helped in identifying the areas of concern and formulating the agenda for the three-day monitoring and evaluation workshop which was held from 25-27 May 2005.

Sri Lanka is one of the partners in the Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration/Master of Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) programme. One hundred forty-three students from Sri Lanka have enrolled in the CEMBA/MPA Programme. The programme was developed by COL, in close collaboration with the national open universities of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, to complement the existing MBA/MPA programmes in meeting the growing demands for postgraduate-level education in business and public administration in Commonwealth countries. Designed for part-time study by busy working professionals, the programme can be completed by students at their own pace. The minimum completion time for the MBA or MPA is two years.

Rural Communities

COL supported the rural research unit of OUSL in identifying rural community needs in technologies that are appropriate for their development and capabilities in Sri Lanka. These were recorded and broadcast over the national community radio service as a method of evoking awareness among rural people and to obtain feedback from them. The information, converted to video presentations and CD-ROMs, was made available at the centres with projection equipment purchased under the project. OUSL attracted the Norwegian Development Fund to further expand the programme in 2004 and take the technologies that were identified through COL's involvement to the rural people.

Preparation and use of learning materials

Through a series of multimedia and eLearning workshops in 2003 and 2005, 65 staff at OUSL and faculty from six different dual mode universities: Colombo, Peradaniya, Moratuwa, Kelaniya, Matara, and Eastern Sri Lanka were trained in the use and development of materials for on-line environments. As a consequence Sri Lanka has a cadre of academic faculty trained in the use of on-line environments to meet their educational outreach activities.

Sri Lanka is one of the countries whose scholars participated in the development of the multimedia package on Gender and Rural Development which CEMCA has produced in collaboration with FAO Bangkok office. The kit is targeted to academics, researchers and extension agencies in agriculture and rural development in South Asian countries with an objective to sensitise them to the various aspects of gender related issues, and to provide them with a resource tool kit to enable more effective research and work in the region.

Sri Lankan authors also contributed country and case studies to the CEMCA publications *Educational Media in Asia, 2005* and the *Teleconference Training Manual, 2005*.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

COL sponsored six delegates from OUSL Sri Lanka to attend the 3rd Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning which was held in partnership with DEANZ in Dunedin, New Zealand from 4-8 July 2004.

Dr. Ranjan George, Senior Lecturer in Management at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, OUSL completed a two month secondment from July to August 2005, at COL under the CEMBA/CEMPA programme.

Twenty-nine mid-career academics from OUSL were trained at a COL sponsored five day workshop on Research in Distance Education in February – March 2005. The objective of the workshop was to train a cadre of mid-career academics in sound distance education research methodology in the different regions of the Commonwealth.

In 2005, Sri Lanka attended the COL organised consultative meeting in Dhaka, Bangladesh, for the South Asia region on the promotion of literacy and skills training using ODL methods.

Sri Lankan academics from OUSL were represented at the CEMCA organised regional forum on Revisiting ODL; Planning and Management in collaboration with Wawasan Open University College, in Malaysia in February 2006. Papers from the forum were published by CEMCA in June 2006.

LOOKING FORWARD

The period 2003-2006 marked a new stage in Sri Lanka's ODL development. It became a regional leader and shared expertise with a number of partners. In the period 2006-2009 this trend will continue and Sri Lanka will expand initiatives on a number of levels.