

The education imperative

What is being done to place knowledge and learning, the keys to economic and social development, in the hands of those who need it most?

In a concerted drive to educate our planet, international development targets such as the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) [www.developmentgoals.org] and Education for All (EFA) [www.unesco.org/education/efa] include this clear imperative: **educate more people, more efficiently.** Conventional education methods, particularly in the developing world, are hard-pressed to meet the learning and training needs of millions of children, women and men. Open and distance learning (ODL) – inherently learner-centred and cost-effective, with considerable collaborative potential – is a viable and attractive education option.

One of four brochures that outline COL's programmes

SYSTEMS

POLICY

APPLICATIONS

KNOWLEDGE
MANAGEMENT



Some ODL SYSTEMS initiatives: 2003-2006

DUAL-MODE EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Nine-month course in training and professional development in distance education in Mozambique for key government ministry and higher education institution personnel. A fundamental training component in implementation of the Mozambique Government's national, integrated distance education plan. Delivered by consortium, including the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE).

FORUMS/INSTITUTES/CONSULTANCIES

Invitational Institutes on significant and timely ODL development issues, including relevance to the Millennium Development Goals, for policy makers, senior administrators and funders throughout the developing and developed Commonwealth and international education community. Outcomes include published reports of key findings and continued networking.

REGIONAL PRESENCE

The Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDAL), Nigeria. Provides ODL training services and resources to education institutes of all levels throughout Commonwealth West Africa. In collaboration with the National Open University (NOU) in Nigeria, with funding from international development agencies including UNESCO, the World Bank and the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID). A similar regional presence established in Botswana to serve Southern Africa, in partnership with the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning.

RESEARCH

Practitioner Research and Evaluation Skills Training in Open and Distance Learning Programmes (PREST) series of self-study modules on developing practical research and support skills for ODL, in conjunction with the international Research Foundation for Open Learning (IRFOL), a COL research affiliate. www.col.org/PREST www.col.org/IRFOL

World review of open and distance learning, an annually published series of topics, best practice, and research in ODL, designed to inform and to raise the profile of ODL issues and service providers among educational decision makers. Published jointly by COL and RoutledgeFalmer Press. www.col.org/worldreview

TRAINING MATERIALS:

Handbooks:

Planning and implementing open and distance learning systems: a handbook for decision makers
- *Richard Freeman*

Tutoring in open and distance learning: a handbook for tutors - *Jennifer O'Rourke*

CD-ROM: Costing Open and Distance Learning
- *Thomas Hülsmann*

contacts



ODL SYSTEMS INITIATIVES:

HELEN LENTTEL, EDUCATION SPECIALIST, TRAINING AND MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT
henttel@col.org

GENERAL INFORMATION AND ENQUIRIES:

THE COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING (COL)
1065 WEST HASTINGS STREET, SUITE 1200, VANCOUVER, BC V6E 2E0, CANADA
TEL: +1 604 775 8200 | FAX: +1 604 775 8210 | E-MAIL: info@col.org | [WWW.COL.ORG](http://www.col.org)

OPEN & DISTANCE LEARNING Systems

COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING
OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING FOR DEVELOPMENT

Open and distance learning and the Commonwealth of Learning

What is ODL, how can it be used, and what specific options exist?

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) helps countries and organisations deal with these fundamental issues, and to realise ODL's long term, sustainable potential.

COL is the world's only intergovernmental organisation dedicated solely to ODL advancement. It was formed by the Commonwealth – a voluntary association of countries committed to international consultation, co-operation and development – to help its members achieve their education goals.

A provider of ODL development expertise and knowledge, COL fosters the ongoing, shared growth of quality ODL resources and technologies in the Commonwealth and elsewhere, particularly among developing countries. Based in Vancouver, Canada and effectively operational since 1989, COL's core multinational team of education specialists and consultants collaborate on international, regional and local development initiatives with governments, development and professional organisations, education providers, and industry. COL also provides fee-for-service consulting, knowledge management services and resourcing solutions.

In 2002, a COL-commissioned independent evaluation panel noted that "COL has touched nearly all of the nations of the Commonwealth and has had a positive impact on the lives of many thousands of people."

Financially supported by Commonwealth Governments on a voluntary, renewable basis, COL's major contributors have included Australia, Britain, British Columbia, Brunei, Canada, India, New Zealand and Nigeria.

COL directs resources into three key ODL areas – policy, systems and applications – as well as the rapidly developing knowledge management and information and communications technology (ICT) fields.

www.col.org/about
www.col.org/programmes/reporting/eval02.htm
www.thecommonwealth.org

Sound ODL SYSTEMS

What can sound ODL systems do for you?

Countries and institutions need education systems and infrastructure that work well together, to provide quality support for large numbers of learners requiring education at every level. This infrastructure includes support systems for education management, delivery, evaluation and training. In many cases, existing systems must be evaluated and retooled for ODL compatibility, new systems and technologies implemented, and personnel trained.

COL's pan-Commonwealth ODL Systems programme focuses on improving delivery systems through practitioner training and human resource development. It recognises that quality ODL systems are key to sustainable, long term growth in education delivery; that ODL systems should be an integrated, ongoing part of institutional and educational development; and that critical analysis, research and training in ODL systems-related issues are needed to design ODL management and delivery methods that work successfully.



Developing ODL SYSTEMS

COL collaborates with specific countries and institutions to advocate, research, train, and professionally develop planned or existing ODL systems, including systems related to policy, business planning, teacher and staff training, recruitment, registration, organisation, quality assurance, dual-mode delivery, and records management.

Recognising that long term, healthy ODL development requires conclusive collaboration, understanding, and empathy from the highest policy-generating levels, COL supports forums and limited-term institutional consultancies and attachments; and sponsors institutes and training programmes on ODL systems-related issues and concerns, for senior Ministry of Education, academic and administrative staff.

COL also annually publishes ODL research reports, training handbooks and modules on ODL systems, in print, on CD-ROM and online. The training materials, which apply to a wide range of off-campus as well as face-to-face education situations, are designed in collaboration with external consultants and organisations and feature regionally and locally-sourced content.

In partnership with other development organisations, COL is forming more regional ODL-oriented centres as part of a strong pan-Commonwealth ODL resource-sharing and training network, modelled after its successful Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) [www.cemca.org], established in collaboration with the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in India.

See overleaf for more about COL's ODL systems initiatives.

Building capacity responsibly

COL is committed to building the reach and influence of its programming and focuses its work through an action-oriented Three-year Plan, revised triennially in consultation with Commonwealth governments, funding and development organisations and education institutions.

The *Three-year Plan 2003-2006: Building Capacity in Open and Distance Learning* goes further than any previous framework to define how COL focuses and manages its human, knowledge and technology resources. The Plan's pro-active Results Based Management (RBM) approach identifies three main programmes – ODL systems development, policy and applications – categorised into sub-programmes of more specific development goals, methods and outcomes.

www.col.org/programmes/reporting/3year_plan.htm

Better business, as usual

With the Results Based Management approach, COL responds to development needs and issues more cohesively. It can more efficiently evaluate proposed and ongoing programmes, and can more effectively harmonise its work with international development goals. COL's knowledge management systems, including databases, information-sharing and communications efforts, are increasingly co-ordinated with specific initiatives – enabling a more targeted response to building programme and project awareness, providing information and promoting activities.