

Going the distance: Mozambique's out of school education project



THE CONCEPT OF formal education persists as a kind of ideal. Necessity, however, creates its own rules. What if, as is the case in Mozambique, large numbers of primary-educated children (two million of them, by current statistics) and out of school youth, are in need of secondary education? What if the current secondary school system is unable to support demand? And what if building enough schools and creating the necessary infrastructure is physically and financially difficult, if not impossible?

In such a situation, distance learning can be a workable alternative. A demonstration of this is the Out of School Secondary Education Pilot Project (OSSE), a co-initiative of The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and Mozambique's government through its Ministry of Education (MOE). First proposed in 1998 and with UK£800,000 in funding procured in October 1999 from Britain's Department for International Development (DFID), the pilot is in line with and reinforces Mozambique's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 1997 – 2001. The ESSP's goal is to increase universal access to education, in part through exploring open and distance learning possibilities. The OSSE is a step toward the creation of a national distance education system, recommended for Mozambique in a feasibility study concluded in 1999 by COL and other regional agencies and funded through the African Development Bank.

The COL-managed project is on schedule to enrol its first students for a projected February 2001 start. Flooding in parts of Mozambique earlier this year destroyed more than 600 school buildings, underscoring the need for an alternative to formal education delivery. The OSSE's target

groups are out of school young adults, girls and women, primary teachers without secondary education and district administrative officers. The pilot is developing a Grade 8 – 10 curriculum based on the existing MOE syllabus, although some vocational skills training is being considered in areas such as cashew and cotton production, tourism and small business skills for women and girls. Four courses are being written and an additional three are slated for completion by February 2001, to a projected total of 27 courses by the programme's end. Coursework is being designed and written for Portuguese-speaking Mozambique with the collaboration of a Portuguese instructional designer working from British Columbia, Canada, who teleconferences and visits with the MOE-sourced instructional design unit in Maputo, Mozambique to review the writing process.

About 1,000 students are expected to receive staggered enrolment into the pilot study programme, which runs through December 2004. Course delivery will be through learning centres in Moma, Meconta, Namapa, Mecubúri and Nampula City, districts in Nampula province selected by the MOE for the pilot. Print course material will be supplemented where possible by community radio broadcasts, as most of the centres are in remote areas with minimal access to electricity and to reliable telephone connections. Local tutors for on-site support are being trained, with a target ratio of one tutor to every 30 students.

The continuing support of Mozambique's Minister of Education and the efforts of the OSSE project manager, Anisio Matangal, MOE, have helped work through initial administrative and financial issues. The OSSE has secured office space and funding through the MOE, and distance education has been given a high priority within the ministry. The project is also supported by John Bartram, COL's project education specialist, a full-time administrative assistant, a secretary and an instructional designer. Later plans call for an independent evaluator to review the project and to train local evaluative personnel.

Mozambique is committed to developing a national distance education system, a resolve reflected in the recent formation of a Department of Distance Education within the MOE. The department's first order of business is the project, which should keep it busy for the next couple of years. Facing challenges one day at a time, the OSSE has, as Bartram concludes in his latest report, "grown successfully".

— Grace Chin

(The) goal is to increase universal access to education ... through open and distance learning

