OPEN LEARNING FOR DEVELOPMENT, EMPOWERMENT AND TRANSFORMATION
The 7th Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF7)

Open Learning for Development: Towards Empowerment and Transformation

Keynote Address delivered by Professor Olugbemiro Jegede
Secretary to the Government of Kogi State, Nigeria

Welcome to the 7th Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF7)

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The keynote address of the 7th Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF7) was delivered by Professor Olugbemiro Jegede, Secretary to the Government of Kogi State, Nigeria. Professor Jegede authored an essay for the Open Learning for Development: Towards Empowerment and Transformation publication. The keynote address was delivered at the 7th Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF7) taking place in Accra, Ghana.

The 7th Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF7) was convened by the Commonwealth Secretariat to focus on the theme of "Open Learning for Development: Towards Empowerment and Transformation." The Forum aimed to bring together delegates, policymakers, educators, and practitioners to discuss the role of open learning in promoting social and economic transformation. The keynote address by Professor Jegede highlighted the potential of open learning to empower individuals and societies, particularly in the context of Nigeria and the Commonwealth as a whole.

Professor Jegede emphasized the importance of open learning in providing access to education and training, especially for marginalized groups and in remote areas. He discussed the challenges and opportunities in implementing open learning strategies, particularly in the context of the Commonwealth. Professor Jegede also underscored the role of government and international organizations in supporting open learning initiatives.

The forum provided a platform for sharing experiences, best practices, and innovative solutions in the field of open learning. It aimed to foster collaboration among stakeholders to advance the principles of open learning and its potential to drive social and economic transformation.

The event was supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat and hosted by the government of Ghana. It brought together representatives from various sectors, including education, technology, and policy, to discuss how open learning could contribute to the development of a more inclusive and sustainable future.
The continuing global educational and economic realities have also forced changes in the way nations view education. For instance, the emerging concepts of:
- changed from an elitist-based mass higher education
- required the application of global knowledge
- emphasized the shift from an individual-based to a national-oriented global economy
- accepted the emergence and consequent effect on education for all in a postmodern view of knowledge generation.

These changes have pointed to the need for a comprehensive search for educational solutions, which include open and distance learning as a central focus. As a result, all nations, especially in the developing countries, have one effective, constant, convenient and efficient way to educate all citizens. This comprehensive approach to education has enabled open and distance learning. Open learning has become a mainstream activity and has no clear borders but is instead worldwide, incorporating economic needs, and all current development indicators. The versatility of ODL allows it to cater for a diverse range of learning environments addressing all time and mixed modes which can be undergraduate, post graduate, work place and professional training or ordinary education. Any of all of these can be piloted at the primary, secondary, tertiary and university levels.

ODL accommodates diverse learning styles, provides access to remote and normally inaccessible under-represented groups (such as women in out of poverty, persons in rural and remote locations, low-income families, and nomadic cattle herds) and tailors to meet the specific and special needs of a variety of learners (including those in employment, family responsibilities, older and or disabled people) wishing to embark on professions, and leisure or personal hobbies.

The growing demand for ODL in many countries of the Commonwealth has necessitated the use of multidisciplinary subjects which include Open University, Open Polytechnic and Open School and other specialized or targeted ODL organizations, producers and schools. The United Kingdom’s Britain’s Open University brought a new dimension to ODL and played a major role in the development of mass distance learning. The UK experience, which is regarded as the most innovative tertiary ODL educational organization in the world, brought the needed respect and credibility in promoting the worldwide world. The tremendous success of Britain’s Open University was the major catalyst for the establishment of open and distance learning in Commonwealth countries. We now have hundreds of universities in the world.

The Defining Role of Technology in ODL

It is interesting to note that the experimental use of the print technology in 1873 by Sir Rowland Hancocks has become the strategy for empowering and transformation in all areas related to ODL. From Moses (as recorded in the Holy Bible), who is widely regarded as the first-known ODL student when he received God’s message via tablets of stone as the medium of instruction, to today’s millions of students who now readily use the emerging sophisticated technologies, including social media, for learning, technology development, and commerce and commerce is now a major source of income. The range of technologies that have gained entry into ODL include print, broadcast television and radio, audios, videocassettes, computer-based learning packages, interactive video (CD and DVD), audio-teleconferencing, audio-teleconferencing, audio-teleconferencing systems (e.g. Smart, 2010 video conferencing and The Web, enhanced by computer communications networks. Since correspondence education through print and postal service became the dominant means of education and public education systems, the society lost over the years the main and every technology as medium of instruction. Indeed, technology cannot be separated from ODL even though as we always say in ODL technology is only medium. The message/ content is the main point. James Taylor (1995) has identified the various communication technologies, which are now known as multimedia, as follows:

- Audio-Video/Videocassette/Video (VCD, TV, VCD, DVD, Video conference, Audio-teleconferencing)
- Data & Computing (File Transfer/Storage, Start-date PC, Electronic Mail, ODL, WWW Computer Conference, Audio-teleconferencing)
- Image (Electronic Whiteboard, Facsimile, Imaging),
- Telematics Knowledge (Cable Network – Local, Cable-Network Wide area, Cable-Network International, Satellite), and

Taylor (1995, 2005) has neatly categorized the presence and use of these technologies in ODL into generational models as shown in Table 1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational Model</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Generation</td>
<td>Print-based learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd Generation</td>
<td>Audio-Visual Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>3rd Generation</td>
<td>Interactive Multimedia Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>4th Generation</td>
<td>Web-based Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>5th Generation</td>
<td>Mobile and Social Learning</td>
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There is now a Global Directory with a comprehensive list of worldwide ODL initiatives. There are over 400 entries at the moment and as the NG Platform is available in 7 languages, learners and teachers from more than 50 countries can easily search for, or add new ODL initiatives in the different categories.

The transformative and empowering features of ODL rest very much in the desire to capture the community of knowledge and massively provide information to students especially those who cannot afford the astronomical prices of learning materials. The ODL in the market. The features of ODL, which make it attractive to the world include the fact that:

1. It is available at a very low cost.
2. It provides open access to knowledge.
3. It can be accessed, adopted and shared without the charges of copyright or intellectual property rights.
4. It promotes peer collaboration.
5. It accepts all types of learning environments.
6. It provides an access gateway universally through the Internet.
7. It has been a major project and launched in 2003.

Afrilink’s participation in the global movement of OER has largely been through two organizations. South Africa Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), through OER Africa has massively promoted OER across all education sectors on the African continent. More, instead of just a few institutions to gain awareness and to make their OER models freely available for use. In 2009, the OER Africa has developed the OER Registry which has contributed to increased number of OER on their list, such as, bridges, personal access, and social recognition in terms that it is being spread and accepted on the world’s digital and academic community.

Although, Professor Taylor has since updated his chronogical groupings of technologies in ODL, what is emerging indicates that the ubiquity and versatility of technologies and its use in ODL are becoming boundless and impossible to control.

While the social media, e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Tumblr, Pinterest, Google+, Instagram, LinkedIn may now constitute the 8th or 9th generation of models of technology in ODL, technologies for instruction which have significantly changed the face and practice of ODL over time are the Open Educational Resources (OERs) and the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) (see Figure 2). It would be interesting to see the impact of MOOCs and the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) (see Figure 3).

The Paris Declaration of OER at UNESCO, Paris in 2012

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The OER Community, now with over 56,000 members, tools and training facilities, has emerged as a worldwide learning network of shared teaching and learning materials freely available across a range of subject areas, grade level and type. OER Commons began in 2009 as a project to develop a research repository on the effects of open education content practices, as a way to aggregate, share, and promote open educational resources to educators, administrators, parents, and students. What is commendable about this massive open education is the fact that it is being spread and accepted on the world’s digital and academic community.

Issues of concern about OER

Like every other innovation activity, the OER has come under criticism with regard to a number of issues. These include accusations and doubts on the above-mentioned criteria. The imperceptible lack of interest on the part of OER in a few years and in line with common international criteria.

The Emergence of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

If OERs have opened the gate of open education to the world, the recently burgeoning of and ambivalent role in the proliferation of open pedagogy through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) has got the potential to transform higher education and empower the learner in a way the world has never seen before. The concept of MOOCs has been first explored by Professor Stephen Downes in the early 2000s. Since then, MOOCs have been the fastest-growing types of online courses where a few hundred thousand participants are available and MOOCs environments through instruction-driven and -generated materials, and instructor-participant and peer-to-peer communication. MOOCs got the world’s media to think through the launch of Stanford University’s, a set of online courses when Satheen Hirn, one of the MOOC pioneers at Stanford, created the first MOOC that attracted more than 160,000 students. Stanford has now uploaded 20 MOOCs, all of which MOOCs start-up has got the goal of making an entire university classroom available to everyone.

Thrun’s Stanford colleagues, Daphne Koller and Andrew Ng, also participated in the first round of Stanford MOOCs and subsequently established Flapjack, another for profit startup, which aims to provide a platform for other universities to host similar online courses. The emergence of MOOCs, enhanced by the publicity by major internationally respected educational periodicals, has caught on quite rapidly until it is estimated that MOOCs have now over 200 universities, over 300 MOOCs startups with the goal of making an entire university classroom available to everyone.

MOOCs, which is a type of OER, is also labeled as mDiBipod Open Online (CODI), which offers many and all essentials, free of charge, from anywhere to anywhere. Two of the most known and popular MOOC platforms are the Stanford University, Daphne Koller and Andrew Ng, with the leading feature being the ability to capture massive free participation online by thousands and millions of learners.

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PHOTOS FROM THE 7TH PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM (PCF7)
The Chief Executive Officer and President of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Professor Asha Kanwar, has described Open Educational Resources (OER) movement and models as having great potentials to transform education and create access at all levels.

Professor Kanwar opined this at the plenary on Tuesday, during which she sensitized participants on the theme descriptions. She explained that the work of Commonwealth of Learning is directed towards achieving the framework of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) including education for all (EFA) which relates to peace, democracy, equality and good governance.

Professor Kanwar identified the following five priority areas as sub themes: **Girls and Women’s Education; Innovation and Technology; Institutional Development; Promoting Open Education; and Skills Development.**

The theme on the Girls and Women’s education focuses on the socio-economic, political, socio-cultural, systemic and curricula constraints that engender and reinforce gender disparities in education and how the use of Open Distance Learning helps address them.

It has to do with perspectives, methodologies and options presented by open learning for broadening access to education and strengthening girls education and women’s learning leading to empowerment, transformation and development; identifying policies and strategies that promote ICT opportunities for women and girls and create an enabling environment to support their self-determination and economic empowerment.

The theme also addresses the cost effective use of Open Distance Learning to tackle girls and women’s lack of equitable access to education, particularly vocational training and apprenticeship.

The theme also presents methods in which Open Distance Learning and ICT are used to address gender disparities in formal education and non-formal learning.

On the issue of innovation and technology, Professor Kanwar explained that new ideas and tools are critical in learning if society must meet the challenges of development. Technology is seen as a strategy to enhance access in education and learning, particularly to reach the unenrolled, such as the semi-literate and illiterate socially disadvantaged groups and communities.

According to Professor Kanwar, “Technology is a central feature of Open Distance Learning; however technology by itself will not help in empowerment and transformation. It requires innovation that places technology amidst social and institutional processes and facilitates the stakeholders to domesticate and use technology.”

The president of COL said “Institutional capacity is an important determinant of the quality, access and learner success in Open Distance Learning. Resources invested in institution al development especially in governance structures, quality systems and leadership can create a long term and sustainable impact on Open Distance Learning growth in a given region and help enhance the credibility of Open Distance Learning systems.”

According to her, the “theme will cover a vast array of issues including the emerging challenges and resulting developmental imperatives facing Open Distance Learning institutions and development organizations including civil society organizations; institutional capacity to manage and drive charge; adoption and use of technology for institution building; design management of systems responsive to learners, employers and society; government and stakeholder relations including accountability and sources of institutional relative advantage; and attracting and retaining talent in institutions making Open Distance Learning institution the preferred employed finance models for institutions and development.

To address issues relating to the culture of quality, Professor Kanwar explained that these issues will be examined through best practices and case studies of approaches applied and lessons drawn as well as through the proposed strategies for addressing the challenges for institutional development in times to come.

The theme also aims at promoting Open Educational Resources (OER). Professor Kanwar said that learning materials published as OER are widely available and the momentum for developing none OER has never been greater. The learner community now drives OER through the use of social media. She however noted that “use and access alone are insufficient. We need to focus on quality and the costs of producing quality OER.” She as well indicated that some of the important dimensions of OER to be covered at the conference include, the potentials of OER in promoting access to and enhancing the quality of education both formal and non-formal; the digital divide and the gender gap in the development and use of OER; the political economy of OER development; dissemination and Utilisation of institutional and national contexts and how they impede or promote OER development, adaptation and utilization; and the business case for OER.

The theme also addresses skills development. She noted that skills developing countries cover a wide spectrum from high level skills for poverty reduction. The role of skills development in individual empowerment and national transformation is being increasingly recognized. This theme explores the challenges and solutions of supporting skills developments through Open Distance and Flexible Learning ODFL.

Academics, practitioners and policy makers will share case studies and evaluations of innovative approaches of both formal and non formal skills development which contribute to improving access, quality and equity. The theme features sessions on agriculture and the informal sector which remains a key source of work for the poor in developing countries as well as youth unemployment. To explore how innovation and the use of educational media and technology in flexible and blended approaches can transform the provision of relevant skills development.

Professor Kanwar while giving her plenary remarks explained that Commonwealth of Learning comprises of 54 developing countries around the world but 40 to 49 are members of the Commonwealth. “We are back in Africa which is an opportunity to come and explore.” She said, explaining that Commonwealth understands development as freedom to be and to do. In her words, “Learning must enable people to be and to do.”

The 25th anniversary of the Commonwealth of Learning coincided with the hosting of the PCF which commenced from 2nd December 2013. Commonwealth of Learning use technology in many ways to close the digital divide, enabling learners to access materials using hand-held tablets.

She revealed that key questions over the next four days will include, improving the quality of Learning through ODL and ICT in support of development, as well as innovations for social inclusion and impact how learning can lead to empowerment.

Also speaking during the first plenary session was the minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training in Trinidad and Tobago, Senator the Honourable Farai Karim.

The minister thanked the president and chief executive officer of the Commonwealth of Learning, Professor Asha Kanwar, for giving him the opportunity to address the “this august assembly of the 7th Pan-Commonwealth Forum holding in Abuja-Nigeria.” He was particularly pleased to be in Nigeria for the first time and praised Nigeria’s unparalleled hospitality. The minister also used the occasion to harp on the good relationship between Nigeria and Trinidad and Tobago, noting especially the visit of Nigeria’s president to his country in March, 2013.

Taking a cue from Professor Asha Kanwar, Senator Farai Karim said that all nations have a duty to care for citizens of the world.

He noted that empowerment and transformation evokes a sense of connection - connection of family, communities, nations and the world. He, therefore, charged all nations to empower ‘our most precious heritage-human potential’, noting that it is these potentials that unlock and solve societal problems. The minister also suggested that while caring for human potentials, nations must of necessity give human creativity the same status with the sciences. “This is because of the fact that all great scientists have something to do with creativity.” He said. The minister thereafter wished all participants and the Commonwealth of Learning fruitful conference deliberations.
Parallel Sessions

Five parallel sessions were held in five different halls, catering for different sub-themes of the conference as follows:

- **Benue Hall**: Girls and Women Education
- **Executive Hall**: Skills Development
- **Executive Hall**: Innovation and Technology
- **Lake Chad Hall**: Promoting Educational Resources OER
- **Tara Hall**: Institutional Development

Various papers were presented in these parallel sessions by different presenters including:

- Women and Girls' Education through Open and Distance Learning
- Study on Predicting 'at risk' female Learners in CBSE Schools: Who succeeds and why?
- Reaching the Unreached through Open and Distance Education: Creating awareness via TV
- The Role of TVET in Developing Skills for Kenyan Rural Women Through Open Learning: The Case of Samburu Women at Coastal Region.
- Bridging the Gender Gap Through the Use of Open Distance Learning: ODL and ICT
- Early Experiences with a Community driven Open Education Management System
- What Next? Progressing Learning Innovations in a Regional University
- The Use of Technology in Online orientation: Bridging the Gap
- Investigating Technological Support at the Institute of Extra Mural Studies of the National University of Lesotho
- Reworking the quality puzzle in Open and Distance Learning for Sustainable Development.
- Open Schools and Open Colleges: an International Historical Perspective on their Institutional Development and a Case Study of Such Development in Pakistan.
- Improving Exam Performance Amongst Third Year B.A (Hum) Programme offered by Institute of Distance Education of University of Sialkot.
- Appraisal of Open and Distance Learning Education in Nigeria.
- Skills for Development: A Study of Vocational Education in Fisheries through Open and Distance Learning
- Developing Vocational Skills with Embedded Literacy and Numeracy in Second-Chance Adult Learners
- RPL and Skill Deficit: The Role of ODL
- Designing TVET Courses for the First Time Adult Students at the University of South Pacific
- Gender Stereotypes and Girl-Child Education in Nigeria
- Open School and Girl's Education in Hill Districts of Bangladesh
- Educating and Re-integrating Former Girl Soldiers of the Northern Uganda War: Opportunities and Limitations for Community Media.
- Considering the Plausibility of Attaining Universal Secondary School Education for the Girl Child in Nigeria Through ODL
- Unlocking the Potential of Open Learning: A Shared Story of Education with Livelihood as a Force for Change for Mainstreaming Marginalized Women.
- ODL to Reinforce Gender Disparities at Secondary Level Education: Opportunities, Challenges and Strategies.
- Cloud Computing for Regional Services in Open Schooling
- Introducing TALEEM-A system of ICT Supported Course Management for Quality Education in CBSE Schools.
- Fostering the use of ICT in Pedagogic Practices in Nigerian Universities
- MOOCs in Developing Countries: A Case Study of India
- Change, Discontinuity and Re-Architecture at an ODL-Mega University
- Quality Education to Underprivileged Through Change Management in Open Distance Learning ODL within a Dual Mode University: A Story of School of Open Learning (SOL), University of Delhi (DU)
- Institutional Development – Institutional Capacity to Drive and Manage Change (A Case Study of Mombasa Technical Training Institute)
- Coaching for Change Management and Institutional Development: The case of the Programme Delivery Department (PDD) in the University of the West Indies, Open Campus (UWOC)
- Leading Organizational Changes for Distance Learning at the University of Technology, Jamaica.
- Criteria's for Quality Assurance in Designing and Developing Open Educational Resources for Schools
- Open Educational Resources OER: A Leading Force In Enhancing Access to Quality Education and Training
- Positioning for use of OERs in Online Course Development-Best Practice and Quality Assurance
- The Utech CommUniversity Initiative for Developing Vocational Literacy Skills and Core Values Through Flexible Learning.
- Learning for Life: The Outcome of an Educational and Motivational Program for At-Risk Youth
- Skill for Employment: Breaking the Cage: Challenges for Open and Distance Learning
- Leadership Strategy to Curb Graduate Unemployment in Nigeria
- Skill Gap Analysis and Intervention for Junior High School-Leavers in Ghana
- TVET Through Distance Learning – A Panacea for Youth Unemployment
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Skills Development Through ODL
- Risk and Resilience at Female Learners Transitions to ODL: A Study on Open School of Bangladesh Open University.
- Promoting Gender Inclusion in a Distance Learning Course to Increase Female Recruitment to Teaching.
- Bridging the Gender Gap in Education through Open and Distance Learning: The Case of Doctorate Students in Some Cameroonian Universities.
- Open Distance Learning: An Imperative to Women's Educational Status and National Development: a Study of Bende Local Government Area of Abia State Nigeria
- Param University: Meta University with New Education and Social Development
- Strategic Concepts for Skill Refinement and Development Amongst Educationally Less Privileged: A Focus on Efik Community of Edo State, Nigeria
- Barrier to the Effective Use of Information and Communication Technologies in Distance Education
- Interactive West African Education Satellite Model WASat
- Effects of Mathematics Innovation and Technology on Students Academic Performance in Open and Distance Learning ODL
- Leadership Empowerment and Effective Management of Nigeria Universities
- Technology Leadership and ICT Use: Strategies of Capacity Building for ICT Integration
- Empowering Communities for Transformation
- The Jeffery Town Model for Community Development
- ODL and the Global Education Policy Shifts
- UNESCO/COL/ICDE Chairs Programme
- Open Educational Resources and Access to Knowledge: Action For Libraries in Nigeria
- Development and Delivery of an OER Based University Course: Wawasan Open University Experience
- Flexible Skills Development and Entrepreneurship
- eLearning to Increase Access for the Informal Sector
- Training more TVET Teachers Through ODL
- New Organizational Structures and Opportunities for Learning: The Institute for ODL
About Radio(inter)active:

Radio(inter)active is a group of campus/community radio professionals and advocates attending the PCF7 Conference, experimenting with new interactive tools and techniques such as online socialmedia tools and enhanced broadcast applications to enable better interaction between radio stations and their listeners within their host communities.

The Radio(inter)active Team is made up of the following local partners:

- NOUN 105.9 FM
- Unilagradio 103.1 FM
- Search 92.3 FM
- Lion FM 91.1
- African Radio Drama Association (ARDA)
- Farm Radio International
- Institute for Media and Society
- Commonwealth of Learning
- BUK FM 98.9 FM
- ICE 96.1 FM
- Hope 89.1 FM, (Babcock University)
- Unizik 94.1 FM
- Diamond 101.1FM
- Mentors Assistance For Youths and Entrepreneurs Initiative (MAYEIN)

Flash2Vote
This is a mobile-based technology used to aggregate opinion polls from listeners and local audience groups on diverse polling questions at no cost for the listener.

The Flash2vote technology is being used by the radio(inter)active team during the PCF7 Conference to sample participants’ opinions on a range of important questions. To join other Flash2vote Radio listeners in participating in our opinion poll tomorrow, participants at this Conference should please answer the following question:

“Non formal education is a better route to achieving learning for development than formal education. Agree or disagree?”

Flash2Vote: +234 70-50-52-53-68 = Agree
Flash2Vote: +234 70-50-52-53-69 = Disagree

Highlight from the Parallel Session on “Girls and Women’s Education”

Open and Distance Learning seems to be the only alternative for educating the disadvantaged girl child. This appears to be the consensus of the presenters during the Session. It was also observed at the Session that most parents are afraid to send their daughters to school due to some security reasons. It was concluded that Open and Distance Learning offers the advantage of allowing girls and women to learn from home.

Profiles of some of our Partner Stations:

BUK FM 98.9 Kano, Nigeria is a campus community radio station situated at Bayero University, Kano state. It serves the campus community of the university as well as the larger audience with educational and informative programmes. The BUK FM is partnering with Radio(inter)active to give updates about the PCF7 Conference and engage their audience in partaking in the Flash-2-Vote debate. Vote results from the stations will be featured alongside updates.

#PCF7 tweet snapshot from Tuesday:

PCF7 Exchange
Sign up for a table in PCF7’s marketplace of models, materials and technologies. Delegates will be milling about in the Exchange space in the Executive hall during the dedicated session. It takes place on Thursday morning between 11 and 12.30. Sign up for a table just behind the main poster display in the Abuja Hall.

PCF7 Roundtable
Sign up to host a roundtable on a particular topic and or a particular group of delegates if you think others at PCF7 will be interested to share ideas and have a discussion over lunch. Roundtables are delegate organized events. PCF7 will provide you a table in the area close to the main poster display for you to network and discuss with like-minded delegates.