

THE GAMBIA

COL activities in 2003-2006

BACKGROUND

The Gambia is a small state of the Commonwealth with limited history of open and distance learning.

SUMMARY

During the period 2003-2006 The Gambia has worked in partnership with COL to design and implement new policies for open and distance learning (ODL) in its education system. In 2005, Sir John Daniel, paid a visit to the country as part of his first tour of West Africa following his appointment as COL's President. The Gambia also plans to be actively involved in the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC).

POLICY AND SYSTEMS ENHANCEMENT

Working in partnership with COL, UNESCO and regional partners

In 2003 COL provided The Gambia with policy support for setting up an ODL Centre for the education, health and agriculture sectors.

The Gambia attended an eLearning workshop hosted in Nairobi, Kenya in August 2004 during which the decision-makers created a statement of intent and a draft policy framework. Practitioners engaged in learning the hands-on skills of creating online study material, supporting and facilitating learners.

As a follow up to the President of COL's visit in early 2005, a National Forum on ODL was held in Banjul in April 2005, at the request of The Gambian government.

In January 2006, COL and the Economic Community of West African States signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the use of ODL in education. As part of that MOU, an initiative to offer training in

literacy and skills through the use of appropriate technology has been launched for Anglophone West Africa.

COL has also commissioned a UNESCO consultant to develop a policy document for higher education in The Gambia.

Working in Partnership with Nova Scotia, Canada for media empowerment on health

COL worked with the staff of the Nova Scotia Gambia Association (NSGA), an NGO based in both Canada and The Gambia. COL aided NSGA with both the technology and training to document NSGA's work in peer health education in The Gambia. NSGA is now using both radio and video to reach villages throughout the country. With a gas generator and a data projector, video productions produced locally by NSGA are taken upriver and shown in villages in the evening. Organised health events have large audiences view videos of skits and dramas on HIV/AIDS prevention and stigma produced by the NSGA in The Gambia. In many cases the videos are created in the regions where they are shown during village cinema events. Since 2003 village cinema events have reached over half a million people. Due to the success of the NSGA work, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has provided funding to replicate the peer health education project in Sierra Leone.

Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

The Gambia is a participating country in the VUSSC (for more details of VUSSC see section on Pan-Commonwealth initiatives).

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Seven countries in Africa (including The Gambia) and Asia attended the Roundtable held in Abuja, Nigeria from 19-22 April 2005. Experiences of institutions including NGOs in the use of a range of technologies for pre-service and in-service teacher training were presented focussing on the quality issues related to their application.

The Gambia participated in the Learner Support Workshop organised by the West African Regional Consortium which took place at the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana from 14-16 July 2004.

The Gambia participated in the Management Development Institute in India in February 2004. The institutes were organised by COL, the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs (October 2003) and the Indian National Council of Educational Research and Training to provide teacher training to college principals and administrators from Sub-Saharan Africa. It is hoped that the skills they acquired at the institutes would enable them to improve the quality and quantity of teacher training, which in turn helps to achieve "Education for All" in their own countries.

In October 2004, COL and Singapore hosted the fourth out of a series of five Management Development Institutes with participants from The Gambia attending.

Two workshops on Instructional Design were conducted in Nigeria in May 2005 for West African countries to build local capacities for revising existing print based study materials.

Preparation and use of learning materials

COL paid a Ghanaian consultant to facilitate a workshop at the Maths Science Technology Centre at The Gambia College to train local trainees to use ICT in entrepreneurship and to train in the production of poultry feed using ODL materials.

LOOKING FORWARD

The period 2003-2006 was a very successful one in terms of laying the foundations for future ODL development in The Gambia's education system. Working in partnership with COL and regional partners, The Gambia has introduced some important policies for ODL and these will continue to produce positive results in the period 2006-2009 as systems are enhanced and expanded.