

OER for Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education: From Commitment to Action



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I have prepared this presentation on ‘OER for Inclusive Quality Education: From Commitment to Action’ with my colleagues Dr Sanjaya Mishra and Dr V Balaji.

I’ll first begin by giving you some background information, then share some of the early findings of the two surveys, followed by a brief account of the regional consultation in Asia and look at the way forward to the 2nd World OER Congress and beyond.

Five years ago COL and UNESCO conducted six regional consultations as part of the joint project on ‘Fostering Governmental Support for OER Internationally’ in which governments were invited to provide information about their policies in relation to OER. The results of that exercise were captured in this publication.

This report on the results of the survey on governments’ OER policies provided the background document of the World OER Congress organised jointly in Paris in June 2012. The report concluded that ‘there appears to be great interest in OER across all regions of the world with several countries embarking on notable OER initiatives. Sir John Daniel, the former President & CEO of COL led the process.

The Congress resulted in the Paris OER Declaration which makes ten recommendations. Three of them related to fostering awareness about OER, promoting the development of OER in different languages and cultural contexts and using open licenses on content developed with public funds.

Now five years later, it is time to organise the 2nd World OER Congress to take stock of the progress made in the last five years and to make the critical shift from commitment to action.

The road to Ljubljana will pass through six regions of the globe. The first consultation for Asia was held in Kuala Lumpur in early December. After this meeting for Europe, we will travel to Doha for the consultation in the MENA region followed by an event in Mauritius for Africa. The fifth meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean will take place in early April in Sao Paulo. The sixth and final regional consultation for the Pacific will be organised in Auckland at the end of May. The objective is to include as many governments and stakeholders as possible to enlarge the existing circle.

A background paper for the regional consultations was developed by the Task Force and approved by the project Steering Committee with members from UNESCO, Slovenia, Hewlett and COL.

Here is the Task Team in Vancouver—Zeynep Varoglu and Joe Hironaka from UNESCO, Gasper Hrastelj and Davor Orlic from Slovenia, Cable Green from Creative Commons and David Porter of BCIT. This meeting was chaired by Dr Balaji, our Director of IT and KM.

The Steering Committee meeting approved the document. You can see the members in action. Members are Dr Indrajit Banerjee and David Atchoarena of UNESCO and Gasper Hrastelj and Davor Orlic who stood in for Mitja from Slovenia and our VP Dr Bala. Barbara Chow and TJ Bliss joined the meeting as Observers.

As you know we have very strong partners—UNESCO, Slovenia and Hewlett—the whole OER movement is based on the spirit of collaboration and complementarity so that there is no duplication of effort.

In 2012, our main objective was to foster governmental support for OER internationally. Today we want to involve many more stakeholders so that OER can be mainstreamed and implemented at all levels. Five years ago, the focus was on promoting policy development but as we know, that is not enough—we need strategies for implementing policies. At that time, the primary objective was to seek governmental commitment. This time we need to move beyond commitment to concrete action so that Member States can accelerate progress towards achieving their education and training goals.

The objectives of these consultations are one, to raise awareness about the importance of OER in achieving SDG4; two, identify strategies to address the barriers that prevent people from mainstreaming OER and three, identify concrete actions that different stakeholders need to undertake to optimise the use of OER. These will then be considered at the 2nd World OER Congress.

The Task Team developed questionnaire surveys to gauge the status of OER today

There was a government survey sent out to member states by COL and UNESCO. The other was a stakeholder survey that was placed online and publicised through social media.

We received 55 responses from member states by the 5th February and these will continue to be accepted until the 15th June. As you can see Africa has responded well but we need to be more proactive in the MENA and the Latin American and Caribbean regions.

As you know this is a work-in-progress and what we see today is only the tip of the iceberg. Early findings suggest that 36 of the 55 respondents believe that there are OER policies in their countries. The majority believed that there is OER policy at the national level—26 as compared to the list of 25 national and provincial policies listed in the Creative Commons website. This was followed by institutional and then project-related OER policies.

About 50% felt that they were considering policy development at the national level. Clearly all the respondents do not share the same understanding of what an OER policy is and this is an area where more needs to be done.

In response to the question on the OER activities, the majority stated that these were project-based, followed by institutional and governmental initiatives.

Officials believed that OER can provide more flexible learning opportunities for enhanced access. Improvement in learning outcomes and reduction in costs were seen as two other key benefits.

Barriers to the use of OER included: insufficient quality content, lack of capacity, and lack of appropriate policies. Officials also believed that we needed more credible business models for convincing ministers and publishers. Language continues to be a barrier to reaching the unreached.

We received 499 responses from stakeholders at 5th February. The maximum responses received were from Asia and the Pacific followed by Europe and North America. 57% male and 41% female.

What do we know about the respondents? 44% had over 20 years' experience and the majority of respondents came from teaching, administration and management and research. How can we enlarge and diversify the circle?

Where did the majority of stakeholders come from? 65% were from colleges and universities—how do we involve the other sectors of education, especially teachers in remote rural schools? As per a study by Harvard and the Asian Development Bank in 2010, only 6.7% of the world's population had a college degree. What about the rest of the world's population? (Jeanne H Ballantine and Floyd M Hammack, *Sociology of Education : A Unique Perspectives for Understanding Schools* (p.15) in Jeanne H Ballantine, Joan Z Spade (eds.) *Schools and Society: A Sociological Approach to Education*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2015). The 2012 survey report had found that 'in Europe and North America, most activities appears to centre around the upper secondary (ISCED 3) level, although this may be a reflection of where government support lies...' (p.8). Is this still a valid statement? If OER are to contribute to SDG4, then they must be mainstreamed along the entire spectrum of education—primary, secondary and tertiary as well as non-formal learning. 80% of the respondents were aware of OER. Are we only surveying the converted?

That said, it was surprising to note that there was very scant awareness of some of the well-known international and national repositories. MIT OCW was the best known and used.

The stakeholders believed that using OER would reduce costs and improve the quality of learning. OER were also seen as providing teachers with quality resources that would save their time.

The barriers were lack of policy, lack of quality and insufficient quality resources.

Both groups—governments and stakeholders agree that OER can lower costs, and increase access to quality materials. Similarly, both groups were concerned about lack of policies, insufficient capacity and lack of access to quality OER. COL had been recently requested to help Mozambique with the development of OER in five subjects for secondary schools. Since we had developed OER for secondary schools in 20 subjects, we looked into the possibility of adopting and adapting content in physics, chemistry and biology and discovered that only 20% could be used and the rest would have been developed to address local requirements.

Where did the governments and stakeholders differ in their priorities? Governments stressed the need for credible business models and more attention to indigenous languages and culture-specific content. Stakeholders focused on the opportunity for saving time for teachers and that OER enabled continuous quality improvement.

As you know, we've scheduled six regional consultations.

The first of these was held in Kuala Lumpur—48 participants from 24 countries participated in this meeting, including Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and Mongolia.

Some of the key practices that emerged were that Bangladesh supplies free textbooks to its school students and are in the process of developing a national OER policy, with COL support. A major project

of the Indian government —the National Mission on Education through ICTs uses the CC licence to open up its content. Malaysia has committed to opencourseware in its elearning policy. There are OER repositories in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, and Vietnam.

The Asian group raised concerns about poor connectivity, lack of capacity and unavailability of OER in local languages. They also flagged the need for more attention to developing OER for people with disabilities. While there are many emerging initiatives in Asia, there was no OER policy at the national level.

Based on the key issues, participants identified nine types of stakeholders: governments, educational institutions, content developers, QA agencies, publishers, civil society, individuals and teachers, learner and learner associations, parent-teacher associations. They then suggested the actions that each group needs to take so that OER can contribute to inclusive and equitable quality education. We will undertake a similar exercise here.

Let us share some of the developments in the Commonwealth.

COL organised its triennial Pan Commonwealth Forum in Kuala Lumpur last November. One important outcome of this was the KL Declaration adopted by the over 500 policy makers and practitioners present. One recommendation urges stakeholders to ‘mainstream the use of OER by developing strategies and policies at governmental and institutional levels to enhance quality while potentially reducing the cost of education’.

COL surveyed over 1200 stakeholders in the Commonwealth last year and the findings are presented in a report ‘OER in the Commonwealth’. The findings were not very different from the initial reports of the two global surveys. The benefits of OER were lower costs and improved quality as well as the ability to empower teachers with better tools and techniques.

The barriers identified were: lack of awareness about OER, lack of training and scarcity of OER in audio and video format.

So what then are the next steps leading to the 2nd World OER Congress and beyond?

We have two regional consultations immediately after this meeting in Qatar and Mauritius.

Two documents will be prepared for the 2nd World OER Congress. There will be a report on the Surveys of both Governments and Stakeholders which will present an analysis for each region and a global picture on the status of OER. There will also be a synthesis report of the agenda for action recommended for the different categories of stakeholders in the six regions.

As we have seen there has been considerable progress since 2012. There are more OER policies especially at the institutional level. More people are aware of the benefits of OER and the circle of champions and advocates has certainly grown. Even though there is low awareness, there are many more repositories today than there were five years ago. Another difference between 2012 and now is that many more people have access to the internet through their mobile devices and can contribute to global knowledge flows. But OER have not been adopted at the speed and scale envisaged in 2012. What can be the reasons? What can we do accelerate the process?

There is a huge opportunity for both COL and UNESCO to help Member States to take full advantage of the OER movement to effect the paradigm shift required to achieve the targets of SDG 4. We can continue with evidence-based advocacy, capacity building and targeted interventions for reaching the unreached. We will continue to strengthen collaborations.

Both the reports will suggest ways in which we can contribute to promoting the use of OER for inclusive and equitable quality education and how we can collectively move from commitment to action. Over a hundred years ago, Indian poet and Nobel laureate articulated his vision of the future and wrote of a world—‘where the mind is without fear and the head is held high, Where knowledge is free’. Can OER help us get closer to such a world?

On that profound note, let me thank you for your kind attention.