

MDE-411
Growth and Philosophy
of Distance Education

Block

4**DISTANCE EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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MDE-411: Growth and Philosophy of Distance Education

(New Course in place of ES-311: Growth and Philosophy of Distance Education)

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**MDE-411 GROWTH AND PHILOSOPHY OF
DISTANCE EDUCATION**

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BLOCK

The ICDL database (2002) (2010) listed some 150 institutions in Africa that offer open learning and distance education programmes of one kind or another. A World Bank Report refers to a survey that found over 140 public and private institutions that provide tertiary distance education services in sub-Saharan Africa. These are spread across all African countries; there are, nevertheless, wide variations across regions in terms of penetration, nature of provision and levels of education. The significant point, however, is that all regions in Africa are experimenting with some form of distance education.

Distance education programmes have been on offer in Africa for over half a century. The University of South Africa (UNISA), currently one of the 20 Mega Universities worldwide was established in 1946. The post-colonial nation-building efforts saw most countries making major efforts to expand educational provision, and many among them also initiated open learning and distance education approaches and methods to reach out to as many people as possible, and to bridge the gaps between available provision and the continuously rising demand for more educational opportunities.

At the turn of the 21st century, the record of educational provision in sub-Saharan Africa was far behind the rest of the world. For instance, according to the MINEDAF VIII Statistical Document (2002):

- The gross enrolment ratio for primary education was 81.2%;
- The average gross enrolment ratio in secondary education was 26.2%;
- The gross enrolment ratio in higher education was 3.9%.

Quite obviously, most African nations have a long way to go at least to catch up with most of the developing countries in Asia and Latin America.

According to the World Bank's World Development database, the primary education completion rate in Sub-Saharan Africa was 60% in 2006, and yet, in most countries, not enough places were available for enrolment at the lower secondary level.

Before moving further, it would be useful to have some idea about the continent and its people to understand the current status of education in Africa. It is a vast continent of nearly one billion people, spread across 53 countries. Countries along the Mediterranean coast constitute the North African region and the rest of the continent is the sub-Saharan Africa. About two-thirds of African countries are classified as low-income countries and half of them record negative economic growth. Only Algeria and South Africa are reckoned as middle-income countries (This classification was made by Jeffrey D. Sachs in his book "The End of Poverty", based on World Bank data for 2004. Countries with a population of less than 2 million were excluded from this classification.)

Of the 53 countries, Nigeria is the largest with a population of over 120 million people. Ethiopia and Egypt follow with about 80 million each while Congo (Kinshasa) has over 60 million and South Africa over 40 million. Some six countries fall in the population count of 30 to 40 million and two others in the 20 to 30 range. About 12 countries have population ranging from 10 to 20 million while another 15 have a population strength ranging from 2 to 10 million. 13 countries come in the low population category of which 7 have a population of less than 1 million.

According to the World Development Indicators (WDI), 2009 of the World Bank, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) had a population of 800 million in 2007. 50% of the population in 2005, 388 million in absolute terms, were extremely poor living on less than \$1.25 a day. 5% of the population was infected by HIV/AIDS, and life expectancy at birth was 51.

Linguistically, Africa is divided into four major groups: countries in the North belonging to the Arab group of languages, and those in the Sub-Saharan region inheriting the linguistic legacy of their colonial past. All of them fall into three major European language categories; English, French and Portuguese/Spanish. There are a number of local languages too, but they are still being developed and for all practical purposes, the European languages are the media of education and official business.

Almost all the countries listed under the category of low human development in the Human Development Report for 2008 of the United Nations are from Africa. About a third of all African countries fall in the medium human development category. Countries that lag behind in human development are those that make the least investment in health and education. These data show the enormity of the tasks involved in stepping up educational provision in the African continent.

With its dismal record of educational progress, and still worse performance in the reduction of poverty and disease, what hope lies ahead of Africa? The answer is yes, they can do it. They need to learn to depend on themselves; the African people need to become informed citizens; they need to know how to improve their agriculture, they need to know what it is to live in clean and healthy environments, they need to acquire the skills and knowledge to turn their abundant natural resources to better their life styles, and they need to know how to improve their own standards of governance. There is only one way to do all this: invest in their own people. Expand the opportunities for people to learn. It does not require the establishment of so many more schools and colleges; distance education programmes show the way.

In this Block, we shall explore what the status of distance education in the continent is, how it is taking root in the education landscape of Africa, what it can do to accelerate the pace of progress, reduce poverty as well as contain the disastrous consequences of HIV/AIDS pandemic. In doing so, we shall also explore the current status of technology applications in Africa, and consider what the new technologies can do to provide to large numbers of its young people good quality education at an affordable cost.

We shall discuss each of these issues in the following five units that comprise this Block. Unit 1 is about promoting a better understanding of the concepts, practices and the role of technologies in distance education and how they impact the policies and plans for the development of education in Africa; Unit 2 examines the role of distance education in the expansion of educational and training opportunities in critical areas like teacher education, tertiary education, open schooling and community development. Unit 3 deals with the challenges in realising the full potential of open learning and distance education in the context of the continent's diversity and the need for developing strong leadership and management, while Unit 4 attempts to analyse the impact of access on quality and costs, and how a balance can be established among all the three in sustaining distance education initiatives and in Unit 5, we take a look at some of the Regional issues.

Mail us

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Your feedback pertaining to this block will be very useful for maintenance and revision of this block. Wish you best of luck.



UNIT 1 UNDERSTANDING DISTANCE EDUCATION IN AFRICA

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- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- discuss and elaborate the basic concepts and practices that are widely used by distance education practitioners across the world;
- examine how and why most of these concepts and practices are relevant to the African continent and its people, and to their human capital development strategies;
- analyse and argue how the good practices that can make distance education systems effective and sustainable in the African context; and
- explain the role that Information and communication technologies can play in promoting distance education systems.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

While discussing various aspects of distance education throughout this course, we come back again and again to the definition of various concepts in distance education. At the risk of being repetitive, we do so

with the purpose of placing these concepts in the context of the issues and situations under discussion. Redundancy is a critical element in didactic practice and we hope that repetition will help you capture the nuances and subtleties of the usage of various terms in distance education.

All forms of education have certain universality in their structures, processes and practices. Distance education is no exception. Nevertheless, the manner in which a particular form of education finds its place within a national system and the ways in which it influences the policies and practices that particular governments follow for the development of their educational systems do vary from country to country, and from continent to continent. Europe as a continent has several developed countries that have their own independent systems of education, each with its own unique character and style. Africa, on the other hand, is a continent of over 50 countries, most of which have a common legacy; all of them were colonies with no significant educational infrastructure and systems. All of them needed to build their education systems from scratch, and in doing so, they had to adopt and adapt what suited them best and fairly quickly. In the process, African countries have a mix of everything, ranging from the best of the European models to the more practical native variations. It is in this milieu that we have to place distance education theories and practices to understand what they mean to Africa and its people. In the following sections of this Unit, we shall try to explore the content and meaning of the nature of distance education in the African context.

1.2 THE NATURE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION– SOME KEY CONCEPTS

Early distance education endeavours in Africa covered a range of applications, from formal degree programmes offered by University of South Africa (UNISA) from 1946 onwards to a broadly based adult education campaign conducted by the Institute of Adult Education (University of Tanzania) during the 1960's. Initially, UNISA relied mainly on printed materials issued in the “correspondence” model with minimal contact, while the Tanzanian project used a combination of radio, printed pamphlets and community-based group work.

Community and Adult Education programmes through distance education using radio were very common in several countries in Africa. The INADES Foundation, established in 1962 in Cote d'Ivoire as a private initiative was later extended to Burkina Faso, Togo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Burundi, Chad, Rwanda and Zaire (this was initially confined to French speaking Africa), and to Ethiopia and Kenya. The programmes offered by this institution were mainly in Agriculture and allied fields. It also helped local communities engage in development initiatives through project formulation, etc.

More recent projects covered a similar range of target audiences and programme types, with one of the most significant changes over the last fifty years being the increasing range and complexity of delivery modes, as more and more ICT options became available. Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) and community radio were the major instruments that helped this growth.

There are some individual case studies that provide interesting information about the early days of distance education in Africa, but there are not enough rigorous comparative studies. Policy makers and

those who take decisions require empirically based knowledge of what works (Gourley 2004). This clearly points to a need for a research plan as a foundation for the realization of the potential of open learning and distance education in Africa. Such research would enable the development of the necessary critical mass to address the common development challenges of Africa (Asmal 2004). Although at present there is little evidence of such research, the material presented at conferences and other occasional papers and articles help to deepen our understanding of distance education in Africa, some good practice in its provision, and its relevance to Africa.

1.2.1 What is Open Learning in the African Context?

The distinction drawn between open learning and distance education is fundamental to our understanding of the African context. While open learning refers to a philosophy of educational practice, distance education refers to the methodology. The **Issue Paper** for the Conference of African Education Ministers on Open and Distance Learning held at Cape Town, South Africa in February 2004 (All-Africa Ministers' Conference on Open Learning and Distance Education (AAMCOLDE) , (2004, February1): (<http://www.africaodl.org./conference/odl.htm>) defined the two concepts in the following terms:

“Open learning can be defined as ‘an approach or philosophy’ which combines the principles of learner-centeredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, removal of barriers to access learning, recognition of prior learning experience, provision of learning support, construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems. Open learning is applicable to all education practice. We know that conventional education practices are marked by certain definite characteristics. Nearly all of them require well defined educational attainments at the level of entry to each stage; they have a pre-determined duration; the curricula are determined in advance and generally do not permit any combinations that students might prefer; they require the physical presence of students at prescribed hours for specified periods; and most of the programmes are teacher-centric. In other words, the formal system has over a period of time acquired certain rigidities with regard to its structures and processes; access was limited to the extent that physical infrastructure permitted; and it had the attributes associated with selectivity and elitism. Open learning marked a decisive break from these rigidities, and it literally opened the doors of formal education to all irrespective of their previous educational attainments, their physical location, the choice of programmes one wished to pursue, and the rigidities of timelines in the completion of studies. The learners moved centre stage, and programmes of education were built around their choices and expectations.

1.2.2 What is Distance Education for Africa?

Distance education is used to describe learning activities in which the characteristics listed above are important. In distance education there is a separation of teacher and learner, and such learning usually involves the use of mixed media courseware with different modalities for learner support. Distance education is unique as it encourages a more flexible learner-centric approach and provides opportunities for learning anywhere and anytime.”

Africa's diversity is evident in the ways in which the principles of open learning and distance education are applied. It would be unwise to suggest that any single model for distance education will work on this continent. Models need to be designed to meet local needs. However, it would be worthwhile to identify certain essentials that deserve closer consideration by those concerned with policy making, the design and development of distance education projects, and their funding and effective implementation. We shall try to take a look at some of these issues in this Block.

1.2.3 Open and Distance Education: Implications for Africa

One of the core issues concerning the changing nature of distance education has to do with the increasing emphasis being given to face-to-face tuition and mentoring in the design of distance education programmes. This is an essential characteristic of distance education techniques as applied to technical and vocational education and training, and to adult education in a community context. At the same time, contact students are making more extensive use of ICT's to access information without a teacher having to be physically present. Different views on this apparent convergence of distance and face-to-face (contact) education are reflected in the recent distance education discourse.

According to Robert Ensor of the Institute for Social Studies (Netherlands), "in formulating ICT policy, it is perhaps best to break with the dualism of distance and regular contact education and regard methods of education delivery as a continuum from purely independent study, through guided collaborative online independent study at a distance (with occasional face-to-face support) to extensive face-to-face tuition where immediate interaction is essential". Prof. Saleem Badat of the Council on Higher Education (South Africa) provides another perspective: "The continuum of education provision can be used to describe a range of educational practice in which educational provision can be located based on its mix of methods. The greater use there is of educational methods that assume temporal and/or spatial separation between students and educators, the more this provision will tend towards the distance education pole of the continuum. The more direct contact between educators and learners, the more it will tend towards the face-to-face pole. The reality is that all educational provision exists somewhere on this continuum, but cannot be placed strictly at either pole."

What does it signify for the African countries? As we noted earlier, the population strength of most countries is not very large. Most of them will not be able to sustain dedicated open learning and distance education institutions. The choice will necessarily be to promote a mixed mode of educational provision in which conventional face-to-face programmes for a small number of students coexist with distance education programmes that can enrol large numbers. We shall have occasion to come back to this issue later in this Block.

1.2.4 Convergence, Flexible Learning and Other Concepts

Convergence is a term that we hear a great deal about these days. As we have just noted, convergence of modes of delivery, that is, mixed use of distance delivery techniques and face-to-face instruction in all education is one type. The other is the convergence of technologies in which multimedia instructional packages that combine text, voice and image make a powerful tool in the delivery of education. These tools are

being used increasingly in conventional education too. It would be useful to keep this distinction between the two concepts of convergence in view. As distance education systems evolve and widen their range of delivery technologies, policy makers at the national level in most countries will have to address the issue of convergence, in order to determine the place of distance education in their overall educational systems, and the allocation of resources for distance education institutions and projects on the one hand, and to the entire education system for technology applications, on the other.

We had discussed elsewhere in this course a major global paradigm shift in educational theory and practice that began in the 1960s. Emergence of education as a development indicator and transformation of higher education into mass education were two major features of the new paradigm. These global changes also coincided with the liberation era in Africa. Perhaps, it was a sign of the times, and the emergence of democracy in Africa, that the more authoritarian teacher-dominated transmission models of education began to move towards models where teacher and student jointly constructed meaning and understanding. That was the beginning of the process of **learner-centred education** that placed African learners and their needs at the centre of the educational process. Learner-centeredness tries to build the real needs of the learner into the design of course and the provision of face-to-face support at the learning centres through study groups, discussion groups and other techniques. Successful examples of learner-centred practices across the educational spectrum are reported from Nigeria (Mohammed & Ismaila); Kenya (Limozi); Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania Uganda, Zambia(Siaciwena) and South Africa (Pityana). Effective implementation of this approach requires new ways of thinking about the physical location of resources needed to provide quality distance education, as well as about the educational process itself. The key to self-sufficiency and sustainability in distance education, as in many other endeavours, is control and possession of the necessary material and human resources.

Flexibility is another concept that is often used in all discussions on education. Apparently, it has to do with the transformation that we have just noted. Over centuries, the formal system had acquired rigidities of all kinds. Course combinations, entry qualifications, age and other admission requirements, all got frozen in time. Higher education became an almost exclusive privilege. Democratisation of education which, in fact, is inclusive education required that the system opened up. That marked the beginning of building flexibilities into the system itself. The open learning approach, supported by distance education techniques, allowed for a new flexibility in the learning experience that responded to the needs of non-traditional learners. And distance education systems began to evolve from its initial postal education version to the present **flexible learning model**. The major features of this model are:

- It applies to teaching and learning wherever they occur on-campus, off-campus and cross-campus;
- It frees up the place, time and methods as well as the pace of teaching and learning;
- It is learner-centred rather than teacher-centred;
- It helps students to become independent lifelong learners;
- It changes the role of the teacher who becomes a mentor and facilitator of learning.

Prof. Gajraj Dhanarajan, the former CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning had referred to the recent tendency for many learners to enter university later in their lives. These new students are most likely to be employed: although not on campus they are seeking to enhance their vocational skills. They require flexibility with regard to place, time, mode and pace of learning, as well as a curriculum that will meet their lifelong needs. But flexibility is not just about the providers loosening up a bit. Together with the freedom created by such flexibility goes the responsibility for students to take charge of their own learning.

The discussion so far leads us to the conclusion that flexibility is the core of open learning and distance education; it is also the nexus between the two. It creates significant opportunities as most African governments strive towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. African distance education systems are poised to take on these challenges, become more flexible, and even more innovative in customizing good distance education practices to meet the needs of their countries.

Check Your Progress 1

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answers.

b) Check your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- i) Comment on the different models of Distance Education in operation today. (Answer in about 100 words.)

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- ii) What are the features that distinguish open learning from distance education? (Answer in about 100 words.)

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1.3 THE RELEVANCE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Africa has a long way to go to catch up with most of the developing countries. Most countries in the continent are always at the bottom of the Human Development Index brought out by the UNDP every year. In fulfilling the goals of Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), African countries have a long way to go. They continue to suffer from acute shortages of trained teachers to expand and sustain their primary education systems. The drop out ratios from primary education is very high. The transition to secondary education

stage is therefore very low. Tertiary education systems in many countries are in very bad shape. How is Africa going to fill these enormous gaps in their educational provision? What are the policy options available to them? We shall examine some of these crucial issues in the sections that follow.

1.3.1 Education and Development

It is all too often said that education is the means for development. The Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000 at the General Assembly of all Heads of State and Government list eight goals:

- End poverty and hunger
- Universal education
- Gender equality
- Child health
- Maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS
- Environmental sustainability
- Global partnership

The development campaign focuses on poverty reduction, education, health, women's equality and environment. These are interrelated goals; each one of them depends on each other.

Well, these are the elements of the campaign for development. But what is development? Is it simply reducing poverty and improving health and environment? Or, has it a deeper meaning? Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen provides a new way of thinking about development. For him, development is about freedom. What measures development is the degree by which people's freedom is enhanced. There are many kinds of freedom: freedom from hunger; freedom from poverty; freedom of expression and freedom of religion; freedom of choice and freedom of political participation. Without freedom, there is no development. It is only the free agency of people that can lead to development. It is people who develop families, communities, societies and nations. Free people acting as free agents develop better. Development enhances freedom of people and people enhance development; development and freedom thus feed on each other.

Amartya Sen argues that while classical economic theories of development focused on human capital, the human capability argument places freedom of people at the centre of development. The human capital argument favoured education, learning and skill formation as means for people to become more productive, and contributing more to the process of economic expansion. The perspective of human capability focuses, on the one hand, on the ability – the substantive freedom – of people to lead the lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have. While economic prosperity helps people to have wider options and to lead more fulfilling lives, so do more education, better health care, finer medical attention, and other factors that causally influence the effective freedom that people actually enjoy. These “social developments” must directly count as “developmental”, since they help us to lead loner, freer and more fruitful lives (Development as Freedom, Amartya Sen, Oxford University Press, 2000).

1.3.2 Policies and Politics

In his keynote address to the Education Ministers' Conference on ODL at Cape Town in 2004, titled *"Prospects, possibilities and perils: Distance Education responds to Africa's development needs"*, Prof. Kader Asmal, South Africa's Minister of Education at that time offered a different perspective while listing the promises of ODL in the following terms:

- It enhances access to education
- It is cost-efficient in that increased enrolment does not necessarily mean an increase in staff or physical infrastructure
- It promotes quality through the development and provision of learning resources.
- It facilitates lifelong learning of under-qualified and unqualified teachers.

He had a word of caution as well; these promises could easily be negated by bad practices. He emphasised the "need to explore and interrogate the promise and claim that open learning and distance education provide a cost-effective solution to expanding access and enhancing the quality of education". According to him, the guiding principles for this exploration should be:

- Education and the act of learning is a profoundly social act, and
- Technology is not a panacea for the challenges that confront education and training on our continent.

He advocated a critical approach: "We must guard against the uncritical introduction and adoption of distance education and the associated new technologies. Unless we do so, we are in danger of once again turning our countries and Continent into laboratories for educational experiments for external agencies, the failure of which in past decades has done untold damage to our educational systems."

Africa has been in a prolonged crisis; in the West, Africa was called a continent in chaos. Political instability, bad governance and chronic internecine conflicts had plagued many countries for several years. Poverty and malnutrition has had its toll on human life. To top it all, HIV/AIDS pandemic has been claiming the lives of many. According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the UN, about 265 million people in Africa are hungry and poor (living on less than 1800 calories per day).

As the democratic era began to collapse and the steep decline began somewhere in the 1970s, the developed countries began suggesting that Africa needed to behave itself and let the market forces take over with no interference from governments. The World Bank and the IMF virtually ran the economic policies of the debt-ridden continent, recommending regimens of budgetary belt-tightening known technically as structural adjustment programmes. All these had little or no effect on most countries. By the turn of the century, Africa was poorer than during the 1960s.

All these had thrown the promising educational systems in most countries totally devastated. As always, education took the bulk of budget cuts; there was no money to pay the salaries of teachers. Most of the bright teachers left their countries. School systems collapsed. Universities and higher education systems suffered the most.

The World Bank's prescription was to focus on primary education and reduce the budgets for universities and higher education.

World Bank, International organisations like the UNESCO and several rich countries stepped in with aid packages according to what they thought could help the sick Africa. During the 1980s and 1990s, distance education had made major contributions to development in most developing countries. Distance education methods and practices were not new to Africa. Several countries received support from aid agencies. UNESCO supported major teacher education initiatives, While World Bank sponsored several country-specific initiatives in distance education besides what came to be known as The African Virtual University (AVU). There were, in addition, a large number of bilateral aid programmes sponsored by several governments.

Despite substantial inflow of aid, the situation on the ground did not show any signs of improvement. The outcomes of the many initiatives in education did not add up. The African Virtual University was a costly experiment in sophisticated technology sponsored by the World Bank in 1997. The aim of the project was to deliver programmes of professional education developed by American universities to African students using satellite communication technology. Predictably, there were no takers for this expensive educational innovation. Several years later, the AVU project was handed over to the Africans in 2000. Located in Kenya, the AVU has in 10 years trained about 30.000 African students at the degree and diploma levels.

This is not the place to go into a detailed critique of African economic development. Yet, it helps to understand the African mindset and the scepticism about distance education and technology intervention. And that explains the frustration of African leadership with educational innovations proposed by the developed west, and the misgivings expressed by the South African Education Minister, quoted at the beginning of this section.

1.3.3 Does Africa Need Distance Education?

The question of relevance of distance education to Africa still remains. Whatever the misgivings, distance education has proved its utility and effectiveness for developing countries in Asia, Latin America as well as the countries in the Caribbean and Pacific regions.

Addressing the same conference at Cape Town, Sir John Daniel, then Additional Director General of UNESCO made a powerful plea for distance education and its relevance for Africa.

- All the names, ranging from virtual learning and multimedia education to flexible learning, refer only to the single reality of distance education that enables providers reach out to more people, at more places and at more times.
- Africa needs massive expansion of opportunities for learning by widening access to quality education at affordable cost;
- Distance education, in fact, is the outcome of the deconstruction of the education process into its component parts, namely, design, planning, implementation and evaluation and undertaken by specialists in each component through division of labour, instead of being carried out by a single teacher.

- Distance education encourages independent study, supported where necessary with interactive media. If a right balance between the two can be established, it can achieve economies of scale in providing quality education and cost-effectiveness. Interaction with part-time tutors can reduce tuition costs; the marginal cost in using interactive media like computer-assisted learning does not add to the cost with the increase in the number of learners.

How are all these relevant to Africa, one might ask. The answer, according to Sir John Daniel, is:

- Institutions like the UNISA, now made up of Technikon SA, Vista University and the old UNISA itself, has over 200,000 students on its rolls pursuing distance education programmes, the majority of all African students in higher education are also distance learners. University of Zimbabwe and the newly revived Nigerian Open University promise sufficiently large enrolments. The very low age participation ratio in higher education in Africa suggests major gaps in the higher education provision. If good quality education is provided at affordable cost, distance education provision can sustain itself.
- With the declining costs of independent learning media (computers), the cost of distribution of knowledge is dropping. The availability of course material free of cost on the Web sites (open source materials) of several well known institutions can help virtual universities like AVU and COL's VUWSC provide quality education at reasonable cost.
- One of the gravest problems that Africa faces is the acute shortage of teachers. Most African governments are left with no choice but to augment their teacher training systems by using distance education methods.
- The digital divide is no excuse for not making any effort at technology applications. Use of computers for teaching and learning is pretty rare almost any where in the world. Africa has enough time to catch up and it need not and should not give up.

The demographic changes in Africa have been quite unlike in much of the rest of the world. Due to a combination of circumstances, environmental changes, poverty, HIV/AIDs, and political and civic strife, have left Africa with a population half of which is less than 20 years of age; and the growth of population continues to rise at an alarming rate. The result is that governments are unable to build school systems fast enough to absorb the increasing numbers of primary, secondary and college level students. These young people are eager to find educational opportunities that will better equip them to compete in the increasingly globalised world, a need that can effectively be addressed by distance education systems (Zane L Berge in TJODE, April 2007).

Berge goes on to argue that the high level of inter-institutional cooperation that is necessary for the success of distance education in SSA demands common national strategies for institutions organising DE programmes and the governments and institutions that help shape them. Radio, communication, postal services, telecommunication and schools should all get orchestrated in a fluid system. As DE programmes become further dependent on ICT, both bandwidth and connectivity shift from

a question of business to a question of politics. When governments get involved, can politics be left out? Whatever be the politics of distance education, its relevance and inevitability in the African context is beyond dispute.

Check Your Progress 2

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

Is distance education relevant to Africa? Give four reasons to justify its relevance. (Answer in about 100 words.)

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1.4 ELEMENTS OF GOOD PRACTICE

Good practices are commonly accepted practices within the higher education community that enhance institutional quality. It is a positive action that must be successful, innovative, have a possible multiplying effect or transference to other institutions, and be sustainable.

1.4.1 Three Pillars of Distance Education

In broad terms, good practice in distance education in Africa rests on the three pillars of distance education - course design and development, learner support and administration. Policy makers can support distance education by creating an environment that encourages integration of these three pillars at institutional level within a comprehensive national distance education policy framework. In South Africa, for example, a Distance Education Quality Standards Framework has been in place since 1996. This framework sets out a list of criteria that a distance education institution must adhere to in its programme development and delivery. Yet, there have been instances of breaches of these practices by institutions. For instance, studies have found that too few teachers have been coordinating too many courses, the systems for appointment of, and payment to, part-time teachers had no adequate administrative support, programmes were developed with no clear idea about possible beneficiaries, there was mismatch between their levels, duration and the National Qualification Framework requirements for employment, the contents were incoherent and the learning packages were disorganised, there were delays in distribution of materials, and inadequacies in monitoring (Glennie & Welch).

Good administrative practice requires that a number of interrelated systems operate efficiently in support of teaching and learning. These include systems for marketing and recruitment, student registration, examination, administration, student records, financial administration, the management of dispersed tuition and mentoring, the management and administration of staff including decentralised and part-time staff,

the production and distribution of courseware, and the management of the underlying ICTs necessary for both administration and teaching. In order to ensure the sustainability of a distance education enterprise, these and other systems have to be carefully designed and maintained: every step in each process needs to be carefully thought through and organised. Elements of industrial practice with its division of labour need to be introduced into distance education management. Although this is not often initially acceptable to those used to traditional contact institutions, it is a prerequisite for student satisfaction and success.

Course design and development lies at the heart of the educational process. Good practice requires a high level of expertise in curriculum development, course design, courseware design and development, and assessment of learning. In order to achieve self-sufficiency these activities need to be integrated with the professional development of teaching staff.

Learner support is essential to the success of distance education programmes, whether they are formal degree offerings or community development projects with very specific objectives. Examples of learner support practices range from online chat groups and telephone support to tutorial sessions in learning centres and informal workgroups in the community or workplace. One of the most significant elements of good distance education practice that differentiates it from traditional correspondence courses is the personal contact and learning achieved through learner support. A further dimension of learner support includes access to knowledge through well functioning libraries, and the whole range of ICTs.

While these three elements are crucial from the organizational point of view, it is equally important that systems should be in place to continuously study and analyze the experiences gained, the innovations introduced and the impact that the current practices have made on the overall performance of the system. Systematic research and documentation are thus critical to the growth of distance education systems. There are several organizations in Africa that are engaged in such research. Notable among them is the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) that was established in 1992 to promote open learning principles and the quality of the distance education provision through systematic research and investigations.

1.4.2 Sustaining Distance Education Systems

The long-term sustainability of distance education enterprises can only be assured if these systems and processes are continuously evaluated and improved upon within an institutional ethos of accountability and good governance.

Having said this, it would be worthwhile to look at some of the successful distance education programmes and the practices they follow:

- The best DE programmes are those that partner with universities outside Africa, especially those in the United States, Europe and Asia that have set up campuses in Africa. This allows sharing of resources and offering high quality courses to students. For instance, students at AVU in Kenya take online classes at MIT; the FORST programme in Benin permits students to take classes at McGill University in Canada; and the RESAFAD programme in Djibouti connects teachers for training at French Universities (Darkwa, 2000);

- The most successful programmes also take advantage of the resources offered by international donor and development community, including the World Bank and UNESCO. They also partner with several agencies and Associations in Africa that support distance education programmes;
- Successful programmes primarily depend on print media supplemented with communication by radio, text and email. They do not rely heavily on e-learning systems. They do nevertheless try to induct as much of modern ICTs as they can by building digital libraries in partnership with those who run such libraries, and establishing networks of tutor-led learning centres or cybercafés. These learning centres provide access to learning materials and listening/viewing facilities as well as opportunities for interaction with tutors and peer groups; and
- In short, good practices for success in distance education are cooperation and collaboration with partner institutions, sharing resources, ensuring adequate financial support and creating and maintaining satisfactory learner support systems to sustain learner interest.

1.4.3 Technology vs Tradition

Africa now offers two fine examples of running good distance education programmes; one using traditional methods and the other using modern technologies. UNISA, using traditional methods of printed texts, correspondence and minimal contact lessons has now an enrolment of over 200,000 students, and continues to grow. The African Virtual University, after it became a really African managed enterprise has grown substantially serving all of Africa with a high level of integration of ICTs in its distance education delivery. Since 2000, it has trained 30,000 students at the degree and diploma levels. Its programmes are still not easily affordable, but it has obviously come to stay. As Berge puts it, the difference between AVU and UNISA is that while AVU uses technology to teach technology, UNISA uses traditional methods to teach traditional subjects, in addition to some IT and engineering.

Check Your Progress 3

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

What are the three major elements that constitute good practices in an effective distance education system? Explain each one of them in about 15-20 words.

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1.5 THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGIES

The South African Education Minister's remarks quoted above, concerning the social dimensions of learning and the idea that ICT is not a panacea for the challenges to distance education in Africa, provide a backdrop when considering technology applications for education delivery in Africa. It has to be admitted that application of sophisticated information and communication technologies are probably a necessary step to improve education, but it is certainly not a sufficient step.

1.5.1 Early Uses of Technologies in Africa

Africa has a long history of using communication technologies for education and development. According to a world Bank Working Paper (2002), these technologies are increasingly being used to widen access, improve the effectiveness of teaching and extend the outreach of programmes at different levels of education in sub-Saharan Africa. The Paper mentions several instances of Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI), Educational Television and use of computers at the level of primary education, and extensive use of these and other forms of more sophisticated ICTs like video technology, satellite communication and Internet in the secondary, tertiary and teacher education programmes in Africa. According to the World Bank, the cost of technology-based programmes is determined by the following aspects:

- The cost of the hardware represents about a quarter of the total cost;
- As distance education systems have higher fixed costs and lower variable costs, they can achieve economies of scale, if the numbers are high;
- Technologies with higher fixed costs and lower variable costs, such as radio, can be inexpensive if they serve large numbers of students and the recurrent costs are manageable; and
- Technologies with higher variable costs, such as personal computers that work in conjunction with conventional teachers may improve quality, but they may be prohibitive at the primary school level, where teacher supervision is a requirement.

A literature survey on policy and practice in open and distance learning commissioned by the ADEA Working Group on Distance Education and Open Learning in 2002, found that;

- Among the Anglophone countries, 96% of the institutions used print medium, about 15% used audio/video cassettes and about 5% used higher technologies like audio conferencing, satellite communication, Internet, etc.;
- Among the Francophone countries, print medium was used by 88%, audio/video cassettes by 15-30%, and satellite and Internet based communication by 18-34%;
- Among the Lusophone countries, 90% used print, 70% used radio, and 40% used audio conferencing and 20% audio cassettes.

The survey covered over 140 institutions and the finding clearly establishes the wide use of available technologies in the delivery of distance education programmes.

1.5.2 Closing the Digital Divide

We have noted elsewhere that African countries have been lagging far behind other countries in terms of access to, and use of, modern ICTs. In the 1990s, for instance, not more than a dozen countries in Africa had access to Internet. The use of personal computers was very low. Even where Internet was available, connectivity was a major problem. This divide between Africa and the rest of the developed world was described as the digital divide. For most African countries, closing this gap is an urgent issue.

At the initiative of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Heads of African governments decided to launch a united effort for Africa's development at the turn of the current century. The new initiative called New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) was launched in 2001. NEPAD is a vision and a strategy; among its major goals is the closing of the digital divide. NEPAD proposes the development of continent wide infrastructure for IT and the training of a critical mass of personnel trained in IT skills through its e-school programme. An e-Commission established by NEPAD has plans to use the African Virtual University in establishing technology-enhanced learning centres in all African state capitals, to begin with. Peter Kinyanjui, Programme Commissioner of the e-Commission told AMCOOLDE in February, 2004 that "NEPAD recognizes the significant development role and crosscutting impact that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can have on all aspects of human life. The development of the ICT sector is therefore identified as one of the priority focus areas of NEPAD aimed at defining the continent's new and aggressive effort to accelerate Africa's economic development and growth. NEPAD has established Special Task Teams for the Priority Programmes. In the ICT sector the NEPAD Task Team is known as the e-Africa Commission. The e-Africa Commission is responsible for developing policies and strategies and projects at the continental level as well as managing the structured development of the ICT sector in the context of NEPAD. The NEPAD ICT programme is intended to accelerate the development of ICT infrastructure and its use for a wide range of applications and services. Its ultimate purpose is to create an Information Society and knowledge-based economy in Africa. It is in the information and knowledge industry that jobs are created fastest".

The key priorities, according to Kinyanjui are:

- 1) To develop an ICT infrastructure across the African continent; and
- 2) To develop ICT skills in a critical mass of the African population."

1.5.3 New Technologies in Use

At this point, it would be useful to take a look at the ICTs currently in use for educational delivery in Africa. These are:

- Television and radio broadcasts, using satellite and conventional transmissions systems.
- Computer-based online: interactive courseware; access to knowledge using the Internet and e-libraries.
- Computer-based stand-alone CD-ROM material from simulations and interactive courseware to library books; writing of assignments.
- Telephone and fax using landlines and wireless technology.

As we have noted a little while ago, these are early days still, and the technology component in the delivery of the largest distance education provider in Africa (UNISA) is only nominal. It would be worthwhile to remind ourselves that it took the UKOU all of four decades to move away from broadcast delivery of its courses through BBC and focus more on DVDs and Internet and Web-based delivery systems. In Africa, a beginning has been made, and the question is, can Africa sustain it? The situation pretty much looks promising even as we need to reassure ourselves that the availability of a particular technology is not the sole determinant of a successful distance education programme.

1.5.4 Technology Integration in Distance Education

We just mentioned that no technology, by itself, can sustain or assure the success of distance education. Nor do we use technology for its own sake. If we are serious about technology-enhanced learning, we need to integrate the tools provided by technology into the teaching and learning processes. It is useful to note that:

- ICTs are seldom used without some form of printed material;
- The design decisions concerning an appropriate mix of technologies, including print, are critical for the success of any programme;
- The design and technology mix used must take the situation of the target group into account;
- The potential of a specific technology must not be judged in terms of its capability alone, but in the context of the human, economic and physical environment it serves;
- Great benefits can be realised with relatively unsophisticated technology;
- The cost, both to the learner and the institution, of using a particular technology is a major factor in its viability and sustainability;
- Partnerships with international development agencies and the private sector can help meet infrastructure and programme costs;
- Decentralised learning centres equipped with adequate ICT facilities are necessary for learner access;
- Computers sometimes create bigger problems than they solve: both staff and students have to learn to use technology and learners have to take charge of their own learning;
- Satellite technology, as an alternative to landlines and conventional broadcasting, offers viable means of reaching African learners; and
- Specific attention must be given to the quality assurance of ICT-based learning.

There are no easy answers to the complex issue of determining the suitability of any particular kind of ICTs for education delivery in Africa. Prof. Kinyanjui believes that research in Africa and elsewhere has shown that there are some technology applications that can be implemented in African countries on an affordable and sustainable scale. In support of this view, he mentions the successful projects in teacher development, Maths, Science and Technology teaching in secondary schools, quality improvement projects in primary schools through SchoolNet project,

and expansion of access to tertiary education. In his opinion, these applications offer the least risk for decision-makers and warrant further investigation into their appropriateness in specific situations.

Check Your Progress 4

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

What is the digital divide? How can countries in Africa overcome the problems faced by technology deficit and transform their education systems to meet the challenges of human capital development? (Answer in about 100 words.)

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1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have made an attempt to provide you with a synoptic view of what distance education provision means to African countries generally. Africa was one of the first countries that had set up a distance education university, the University of South Africa (UNISA). Though UNISA continues to be a major distance education provider in the world, most countries in the continent are languishing for want of adequate educational opportunities for their people. The human development record of most countries is poor; nearly all of them require massive expansion of their education systems at all levels. Conventional means of building schools and colleges, recruiting and training teachers and enrolling students are no longer an option for most countries; they have to go for innovative methods like distance education and open learning systems to catch up with the rest of the world. We have focused our attention in this Unit on providing you with an understanding of the concepts and practices followed by open learning and distance education systems across the world and the policies and practices that Africa must promote to make these innovative systems integral to their educational provision. We have also briefly touched upon the role that modern technologies can play in making that possible.

1.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) One of the core issues concerning the changing nature of distance education has to do with the increasing emphasis being given to face-to-face tuition and mentoring in the design of distance education programmes. This is an essential characteristic of distance education techniques as applied to technical and vocational education and training, and to adult education in a community context. At the same

time, contact students are making more extensive use of ICTs to access information without a teacher having to be physically present. Different views on this apparent convergence of distance and face-to-face (contact) education are reflected in the recent distance education discourse. The model emerging out of this effort can be broadly classified as convergence flexible learning models otherwise called towards blended learning approaches.

- ii) Open learning is an approach or philosophy that combines the principles of removal of barriers to access learning, recognition of prior learning experience, flexible learning provision, lifelong learning and the design of learning programmes with the learner at the centre. Distance education describes the methods of delivery of education in which there is a separation of learner and teacher, and learning usually involves the use of multiple media and different modes of learner support. While nearly all open learning provisions use distance education methods for delivery, all distance education programmes need not be open learning programmes.

Check Your Progress 2

African countries have to make extensive provision for distance education to ensure that their nationals have reasonable access to good educational provision at all levels. The matter assumes importance because:

- Most countries have still a long way to go to fulfil the goals of Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals. Most of them suffer from critical shortages in the supply of trained teachers. Augmenting teacher supply using distance education is vital.
- A large number of African countries are at the bottom of the global Human Development Index. Improved access to good quality education at all levels is important in improving the quality of their human capital;
- Provision of good quality education, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels, using conventional methods, is cost-intensive. Distance education methods, if carefully employed, can reduce the costs and ensure the quality of the education provision.
- The enrolment ratios at all levels are very low, reflecting the huge gaps in education provision. African countries need to fill these gaps. Expansion of tertiary education, especially technical and vocational education, delivered through distance mode, using modern technologies, might be the answer.

Check Your Progress 3

The three broad elements that constitute good practices in distance education are:

- Course design and Development: there should be well defined criteria that a distance education institution should adhere to in its programme development. These would include development of programmes with a clear idea about the possible beneficiaries and their needs, the mix of content that would meet the needs of the employment market, currency and coherence of content, the media mix, etc.

- Learner support: organisation of the learning packages and their timely distribution, provision for interaction with tutors and fellow students at remote locations, provision for constant monitoring of student performance and feedback, ensuring easy access to the media used in the delivery of programmes, etc.
- Management and administration: Good management practices require that all interrelated systems operate efficiently to support teaching and learning. These include systems for marketing, student registration, production and distribution of materials, recruitment of tutors and their training, conduct of examinations and maintenance of student records, management of the technology systems used for teaching-learning support as well as management of the institution including staff records and financial administration.

Check Your Progress 4

Digital divide is a term that gained currency towards the close of the 20th century. It refers to the gap between people who have access to, and use, modern information and communication technologies like computers, internet, broadband, and so on. These gaps exist among people within countries, among countries and also among regions. In terms of penetration of personal computers and internet access, Africa is way behind most countries in other continents, though thanks to the efforts of the African Union and initiatives like NEPAD, the gaps are being closed rapidly. Yet, since these technologies are highly costly, and are unaffordable for large numbers of people, their use remains confined to small pockets within countries and communities. Extensive applications of ICTs in education need huge investments. Africa is trying to mobilise the resources through international cooperation that involves international agencies like the World Bank, UNESCO and other multilateral aid agencies as well as bilateral arrangements with countries like the UK, Japan, India and others.

UNIT 2 THE ROLE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Teacher Education
- 2.3 Open Schooling
- 2.4 Tertiary Education
- 2.5 Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- 2.6 Adult Basic Education
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

2.0 OBJECTIVES

With the understanding of distance education theories and practices gained from the study of Unit 1, we are now focusing on the specific areas of education in which distance education can serve Africa's cause. After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- identify the broad areas of education and training in which Africa stands to gain by adopting distance education methods and practices to enhance its human capital development;
- highlight the importance of critical areas like teacher education, open schooling, technical and vocational education and adult basic education to the overall strategy for human development in African countries;
- analyse the experience of the development programmes undertaken in these fields in the past, identify the strengths and weaknesses and consider new initiatives to organise distance education programmes on an enduring basis; and
- narrate how successful distance education programmes have been organised at the tertiary level in some countries, and how policy initiatives and quality assurance frameworks have contributed to their success.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, our attempt was to familiarise ourselves with the core concepts that dominate current distance education discourse, and place the African continent in the context of this global debate. We discussed briefly the problems and challenges for overall developments in Africa, and took note of the conditions of life and the general status of education across the continent. We have also noted the economic, political and social contexts in Africa that deprive large number of people from leading a decent and fulfilling life. In this overall context, we have come to the conclusion that Africa needs to expand the education and training

opportunities for millions of its people and that distance education offers the hope for movement towards progress and development. As Prof. Dhanarajan said, it is hard to see how Africa could respond to the demands for more education other than by building on the experience of distance education gained over the last three or four decades all over the world in order to support the targets set in the Millennium Development Goals.

We also briefly reviewed the African experience with distance education, and examined how most of the initiatives taken in the recent decades did not add up and could not be sustained.

We briefly took notice of the essential conditions for success and sustainability and identified some success stories in an otherwise gloomy environment. We also examined the role of technologies in supporting and strengthening distance education. We have found that affordable and common technologies have continued to play a significant role in reaching out to large numbers. However, the debate continues about the levels of sophistication and complexity of the technologies used and the costs associated with them. Notwithstanding the costs, we have seen the effectiveness of technology applications and the attempts to induct these technologies in the African distance education systems.

We shall now turn to a more detailed consideration of what distance education can do to support the educational development of the continent and in which specific fields of education and training.

2.2 TEACHER EDUCATION

One of the major objectives of most distance education initiatives in the developing countries across the world was to meet the shortage of trained teachers. Africa was no exception. Of some 59 million teachers worldwide in the formal sector in 1997, Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for fewer than 2 million in its primary schools. Investments in teachers and other education personnel (principals, administrators, curriculum specialists and policy developers) are critical for the education system to stay healthy and vigorous. The Sub-Saharan countries clearly acknowledge the importance and value of education in their social and economic development. Their commitment to the global “Education for all” EFA agenda testifies to this commitment. Between 1989 and 1999, countries in the Sub-Saharan region alone provided access to primary education to an additional 15 million children, but to attain the EFA goal by 2015, they have to create an additional 88million primary school places, requiring the services of some 4 million additional teachers to serve both the new enrolments and to reduce the current teacher-pupil ratio from 1:100 to more reasonable levels.

According to a recent Report of the UNESCO Institute of Statistics published in 2006, the primary enrolment ratios in several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are less than 50%. These include Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali and Niger. The teacher-pupil ratio in 60% of the African countries is more than 40 per teacher. In many countries, more than 50% of the serving teachers are under-qualified or are untrained. Overall, Sub-Saharan Africa needs to raise its current stock of primary school teachers from about 2.4 million to 4 million by 2015. Considering the very high attrition rates obtaining in most African countries (the incidence of HIV/AIDS death among teachers is very high), the replacement needs are very substantial. The UIS data suggest that the primary school-going

population is likely to go up from 111million in 2000 to 151 million in 2015. This additional enrolment itself would account for about 1 million teachers if a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40 has to be aimed at (Teacher Supply and Demand in Sub-Saharan Africa: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2006).

To recruit, train, deploy and retain this massive number quickly and effectively is a challenge, compounded by the need to retain the large numbers who were hurriedly brought in to the system during the big expansion in the 1970s and 1980s (UNESCO-BREDA: Draft Strategic Framework for Distance Education in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2003).

Distance education has been extensively used to provide pre-service teacher preparation, upgrading academic qualifications, and continuing professional development of serving teachers in particular subjects, content areas and instructional methods. For instance, the National Teachers Institute (NTI) of Nigeria had launched large-scale distance education programmes to meet the country's demands for qualified teachers. These programmes were particularly designed to suit the needs of serving teachers who were married adults, with full-time jobs, and were living in rural areas.

We shall look at, in some detail, the ways in which NTI had organised its distance education programmes. The Institute was formally established in 1978 by the Government of Nigeria. Preparation for launching the Institute had started much earlier in 1975. UNESCO provided the services of consultants for preparing the project report, initial planning work, and some of the course development work. With the departure of the UNESCO consultants, the course development and preparation work was interrupted. At any rate, the expatriate experts had no direct experience of the Nigerian teacher training system. Recruitment of Nigerian staff and their training took time. Meanwhile, considerable preliminary work was done; curriculum design, provision of learning support and researching the specific needs of serving teachers, and were undertaken. As materials got ready, development testing was done and based on feedback, improvements were made. The first programme was eventually launched in 1984 with an enrolment of over 45,000 serving teachers. Till 1990, the NTI had fresh registrations ranging from 35,000 to 47,000 serving teachers (Catherine I Bako and Greville Rumble in Distance Education for Teacher Training, Ed. HD Perraton, Ed., Routledge, 1993).

The Institute has been continuously making improvements in its programmes and their delivery. According to A.M. Mohammed, the Director of NTI who made a presentation before the AAMCOLDE (2004), NTI provides its courseware mainly in the form of printed materials, supplemented by audio and video cassettes, suited for use in rural areas with limited infrastructure. Recent advances in infrastructural development are, however, making it possible for the Institute to move into the production of CD-ROM based materials. A total of 1425 learning centres serve students following three types of upgrading programmes. These centres have been established, by mutually beneficial arrangements, in existing institutions with adequate facilities for teacher training. Services are provided to students at a modest cost, as most of them have to pay their own way.

The major outcomes of the Institute's efforts, according to its Director, are:

- increased enrolment and output, thus narrowing the gap between teacher demand and supply, especially at primary school level;

- increased number of qualified teachers in schools;
- increased participation of female teachers in professional development, especially by those who for socio-cultural, economic and religious reasons cannot attend conventional institutions;
- increased willingness to pursue professional improvement courses in their careers by teachers who cannot leave their jobs and families in order to attend full-time courses in conventional colleges; and
- overall improvement in the country's quality of education: those teachers who receive on-the-job training are able to apply their new skills in the classroom immediately. (Mohammed, 2004).

Another interesting teacher development programme currently running in Africa is the School Net. Its multimedia approach and use of ICTs for in-service upgrading of teacher competence have been successful. Its multimedia packages consist of print, radio and TV, personal computers for CD-ROM's, email and Internet, as well as discussion groups to reach teachers and their managers. SchoolNet aims to improve governance, management and administration of schools as well as actual teaching and learning through its innovative programmes. It provides ICT resources to schools to support Maths and Science teaching, to strengthen the qualities of leadership and planning, and to encourage innovation through content creation in local languages (Safika Isaacs).

What we have presented above very clearly establishes not just the urgency for teacher education improvement in Africa, but, more importantly, how good and sustained distance education interventions and applications of technology can effectively address these concerns.

Check Your Progress 1

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

Why is teacher education important to Africa's development? How can distance education address these concerns? (Answer in about 120 words.)

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2.3 OPEN SCHOOLING

According to the UIS Global Education Digest, 2005 brought out by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Africa has the lowest primary completion ratios in the world. While most European countries have ratios in excess of 90%, only 8 of the 45 countries in Africa have achieved this level.

They are: Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia in North Africa and Botswana, Cape Verde, Mauritius, Seychelles and South Africa (of these, Cape Verde, Mauritius and Seychelles are small island nations with very low population). In 19 African countries, the ratios are 50% or lower, which means that one out of every two children drop out of school after primary education. In six countries, the completion ratios are 33% or less. These are: Niger (21%), Guinea-Bissau and Burkina Faso (27%), Chad and Burundi (32%) and Mali (33%). Not all those who complete primary education enter secondary education. In one out of every four countries, half the children in primary schools drop out on completion; in another 25% of the countries, only one in three move to secondary education after completing the primary stage; and in two countries, Burundi and Tanzania, the transition rate is as low as 20%. Five countries, Botswana, Ethiopia, Seychelles, South Africa and Sudan have transition rate as high as 90% (UIS Fact Sheet, 2005).

The UIS Report suggests that the proportion of students entering secondary schools can be influenced by a combination of policy interventions aimed at (i) increasing primary enrolments, (ii) reducing dropout rates and (iii) making more places available at the secondary stage for those making the transition. The Report estimates how the ratios of children starting secondary education during the next primary cycle (6 years) will change. According to this estimate, in some countries, the transition ratios may stagnate or fall, and in others, a slight increase could be expected. The decline in transition ratios is primarily due to the increase in dropout rates; for instance, Zimbabwe could expect a decline in transition ratio from 62% to 39%; South Africa from 80% to 60%; followed by Togo from 52% to 40%, Congo from 30% to 18% and Malawi from 53% to 43%. Among the countries where the transition rates are likely to go up due to increase in primary enrolments and reduction in the dropout rates, Madagascar could see the greatest improvement in transition from 16% to 36%, with notable increases in Tanzania (from 11% to 28%), Eritrea (from 30% to 43%), Benin (from 22% to 34%) and Morocco (from 30% to 62%).

The picture that emerges from the above projections is indeed grim. Africa would be home to a large proportion of its youth out of school, with no worthwhile education or training that could earn them even their livelihood. Can the countries in the continent sit back and feel helpless? Or should they look for bold initiatives that can arrest the current trend, and ensure that their children are in schools till they acquire just enough knowledge and skills to become productive members of the societies of which they are a part? Yes, there are ways in which they can do it. Africa itself provided some good and successful examples of open school provision. We shall take a look at them.

One such is in Botswana, the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) which was established by the Botswana government through an Act of Parliament in 1998 to provide learning opportunities for out-of-school youth on a nationwide scale. The objective was to create learning environments that seek to break all barriers to personal development through flexible learning, enabling people to study what is relevant to their needs, at a time and place convenient to them. Learners study from specially designed study materials that use a combination of different media, methods and communication technologies. Distance education methods allow them to study at their homes or workplaces at their own pace without having to leave their

families or work commitments. The College operates through a network of community study centres hosted by secondary/primary schools (there are 40 such centres) managed by 5 Regional Centres. Learner support includes besides printed materials and audio cassettes, tutorials, counselling, weekend/vacation courses and weekly Radio programmes.

BOCODOL currently offers Botswana General Certificate of secondary Education (BGCSE), Junior Certificate (JC) at the end of basic education (10 years), and some vocational courses for secondary education certificate holders (<http://www.moe.gov.bw/bocodol/>).

According to the college web site, www.bocodol.ac.bw, during the period 2002 to 2007, the cumulative enrolment had reached 33,698. The annual admission ranged from 3758 in 2002 to 8715 in 2007. The programme wise break up of the total enrolment was 21,805 in BGCSE, 7,475 in JC and 4418 in Vocational courses.

Botswana ranks 126th in the Human Development Index of the UN and is categorised as a medium income nation. A good record indeed for a small African country with an estimated population of 1.8 million in 2008, we might add.

We shall now turn to another country, Namibia, in Botswana's neighbourhood.

The Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) is, in many ways, similar to BOCODO, with an annual registration of about 25,000 students each, at the Junior Certificate and General Certificate of Education levels (this might include the same candidate registering for both). We mention this case only because it provides two options to its students; one to pursue the programme as an open (contact) student and the other as open (non-contact) student. Of the 53,000 students on roll in 2004, over 40,000 opted for the contact option. Those choosing distance education (non-contact) were provided with self-study materials, tutor-marked assignments and two contact sessions per annum, while those opting for distance education (contact) attended evening classes four times a week and purchased study materials separately (www.namcol.com.na).

The Commonwealth of Learning has helped in establishing a Consortium of Open Schools in Southern Africa (Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia) and has plans to support initiatives in planning and establishing open schools in the African Asian regions.

The reference to Botswana and Namibia does not suggest that all open schooling in Africa is confined to the Southern Region, though Southern Africa is undoubtedly better placed in educational provision than the rest of the continent. Other notable initiatives in strengthening school education in Africa include the Department for International Development (DFID) sponsored Imfundo organisation. Imfundo seeks to create partnerships to contribute to the delivery of universal primary education and gender equality in Africa through the use of ICT. It is not an educational initiative; its mission is to strengthen the resource base for distance education and the use of ICTs in Africa; and in pursuit of this objective, Imfundo engages with over 40 local partners, including governments, educational institutions, civil society and private organisations in Ghana, South Africa, Kenya, Malawi, Ethiopia, Rwanda and The Gambia. They share expertise, experience, resources and a common commitment. The Imfundo experience shows that:

- The processes in setting up and sustaining distance education ventures should be sound;
- Policy makers, project managers and educators on the ground need to realise that it takes time to achieve a satisfactory output;
- Initiatives must be demand-driven, not supply-led, and the importance of local content and building local capacity should not be underestimated;
- ICT must be used for education and not for its own sake, with its use integrated into the overall strategy; and
- If fundamental issues around costs can be resolved, there is an enormous potential for the use of multi-media in the transformation of education (Pontefact, 2004, AAMCOLDE).

Check Your Progress 2

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

How can open schooling programmes contribute to Africa's efforts to expand the secondary education provision? (Answer in about 100 words.)

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2.4 TERTIARY EDUCATION

It all started here. The first formal university in Africa and the first in the world to offer education through the distance mode (correspondence education) was established in 1873 as an examining university. It was then called the University of the Cape of Good Hope. It played a key role in the development of the university sector in South Africa. In terms of a legislation enacted in 1916, it assumed a federal role with a new name, the University of South Africa (UNISA). It started teaching through the correspondence mode in 1946 in a structured manner.

A UNESCO paper "Open and Distance Learning: Trends, Policy and Strategy Considerations" (UNESCO, 2002) provides a synoptic view of the trends of distance education in Africa at the beginning of the present century. It says:

"Correspondence education has been the main medium of instruction in the region, with radio also widely used. Radio transmitters reach over 60% of the population whereas television coverage is usually confined to major towns. Interactive technologies have been of limited value in a region in which the availability of telephone lines is about

five times lower than the average low-income country and where the telephones are concentrated in urban, relatively privileged, areas. Estimates for the number of personal computers in Africa put the average at about 3 per 1000 people in 1996. Some of the wealthier countries such as Botswana, Mauritius and South Africa had higher levels of penetration, at least 5 per 1000. Internet access has grown rapidly; while only 11 countries had local access in 1996, by April 1999, only the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Eritrea and Somalia were still without local Internet service (Economic Commission for Africa, 2002).

In the past, it seemed that open and distance learning has had a relatively low impact on education in the region. The main reasons concern not only lack of infrastructure, but also includes under-funding, lack of training of those involved, as well as the fragmented institutional base which results in both duplication of programmes and insufficient concentration of the limited resources on any one”.

The UNESCO paper goes on to say that the situation seems to have improved during the past few years, with evidence of growing commitment by African Governments to the development of ICTs and their interest in the application of these technologies for distance education. It mentions certain notable events such as the 1996 Information Society and Development Conference, held in South Africa, and the Economic Commission for Africa’s Africa Information Society Initiative (AISII). Other important initiatives in recent years include a Task Force on an African Distance Learning Programme (ADLP) convened for the Economic Commission for Africa’s First African Development Forum; the establishment of the UNESCO Institute for Capacity Building in Africa at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in May 1999, with distance education as one of its priority areas; the UNESCO International Institute of Educational Planning’s (IIEP) transformation of the existing training courses into distance learning format – including a course on “The Planning and Management of Distance Education”, and the International Institute for Communication and Development’s facilitation of “ICT roundtables” in a number of countries that include Burkina Faso, Ghana, Tanzania and Zambia. There are strong indicators that open and distance learning is becoming more central to the education policy of many countries. Among examples from particular countries can be cited South Africa’s Technology Enhanced Learning Programme and its Telematics for African Development Consortium. Also in South Africa, projects like the Shoma teacher development programme (using satellite TV and Internet technology to support in-service training of under-qualified teachers) demonstrate the potential of partnerships between private companies and national and provincial Departments of Education.

A remarkable phenomenon in South Africa in the early 1990s was the shift on the part of learners from single mode to dual mode institutions. According to South Africa’s Council of Higher Education, enrolments in the long-established single mode institutions (University of South Africa and Technikon SA) dropped by 41,000 students, or 21%, from 1995 to 1999 as a result of the growth of dual mode institutions. Most of those students are school teachers trying to upgrade their qualifications in pursuit of promotion or salary increases.

At the University of Pretoria, of the 31,000 distance learners, 25,000 were studying for a further diploma in education management taught through

distance mode. About 3500 post-graduate distance learners received study materials electronically, via e-mail, World Wide Websites, and television..... (ibid, UNESCO, 2002).

Looking beyond the Republic of South Africa, the UNESCO Report also mentions the establishment of Open Universities in Nigeria, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. As we have noted earlier, in terms of the number of institutions and organisations, there were close to 150 of them in Africa offering distance education programmes of one kind or another.

South Africa

Changes have been taking place at a rapid pace in the African Distance education landscape. South Africa, the pioneer of distance education in Africa, is itself transforming its distance education provisions. UNISA now offers degree and short courses in a wide range of programmes to more than 200,000 students per year. According to the Education Statistics for 2007, published by the Department of Education of the Government of South Africa (www.education.gov.za), of the total enrolment of 761,087 in public higher education institutions in the country, 286,481 were distance learners. In other words, nearly two in every five university students in Africa are distance learners. Of these, about 244,000 are enrolled with UNISA, that is, about 84% of all distance learners in South African higher education.

UNISA itself has, in the meanwhile, changed; Technikon SA (TSA), the South African pioneer of tertiary level vocational education and training in the public sector as well as the Vista University Distance Education Centre (VUDEC) merged with UNISA in 2004. With this merger, the range of programmes offered by UNISA has also undergone changes. It is no more a traditional distance teaching university teaching traditional courses; it is now an institution engaged in technology enhanced learning. UNISA emphasises the fundamentals of good distance education practices; its learning materials are well designed; it provides adequate student support through tutorials, customised library services, counselling and decentralised learning centres equipped with ICT facilities; and its processes include good student management practices that ensure prompt response to student enquires. All these take place within the context of careful planning and sound management of supporting systems. By offering financial assistance to students, it has made sure that its programmes are affordable and its internal and external quality assurance mechanisms ensure credibility for its programmes.

Nigeria

Let us now turn to Nigeria, by far the largest country on the continent with a population of over 120 million. In the 1960s and 1970s, Nigeria had a reasonably well developed educational infrastructure. There were over 50 universities in Nigeria. But along with most other countries of the continent, Nigeria too sank deep into political and economic turmoil. The debt-ridden country had to accept the structural adjustment conditionality imposed by World Bank/IMF, and cut back heavily on its educational expenditure. In the last two decades or so, Nigeria has taken several steps to refurbish its educational institutions and systems. We have seen how its teacher training system has been revived with massive distance education initiatives.

Nigeria has a secondary school population of over 4 million, of whom only a small percentage enters university. It established a National Open University in 1982, but was forced to close it following political and economic instability of the 1980s. The National Open University was revived in 2003, and has made rapid progress since then. Now, there is a renewed awareness of the role that ODL can play in educational development, as evidenced by the success of the NTI, Kaduna that we discussed earlier. One of the initiatives of a new 10-year plan of Nigeria is the full development of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) that is now emerging as a major player in Africa seeking to play a significant role in expanding access to university education in the most populous of African states (Jegede, 2004; AAMCOLDE). Along with NTI, NOUN has also got substantial support from the Commonwealth of Learning for its development and quality improvement. With this help, NOUN has established a Regional Training Institute in Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDAL), that is now emerging as a strong nucleus for the development of open learning and distance education in the West African Region. It has been conducting workshops and training programmes in course development and instructional design; it has also been running a Masters Degree programme in Distance Education (IGNOU, India) with scholarships provided by COL which has also sponsored a Chair in Open and Distance Learning.

NOUN presently offers 50 programmes comprising 750 courses and has a registered strength of 32,400 students (2007). Its learning packages include printed materials, audio and video tapes and CD-ROMs that are delivered by the university directly to students and are supported with radio and Television broadcasts. Multimedia materials (voice, data, graphics, video) are delivered electronically over fixed landline telephones or terrestrial and VSAT wireless communication systems (www.nou.edu.ng).

We had made a brief mention of the African Virtual University (AVU) earlier in the context of technology applications in open learning and distance education in Africa. The AVU experience clearly shows that the most cost effective option is one in which it works with African institutions to utilize existing course content and make it available to students via its technology and learning centre infrastructure. Only 20% of content is now sourced from outside the African continent. A key activity is the short courses which appeal to a wide spectrum of learners. These courses enable the AVU reach out to students who are already working and those who are unemployed who wish to increase their chances of employment by acquiring marketable skills. A major attraction is the availability of systems that link these courses to existing degree and diploma programs at leading African universities.

The range of short certificate and non-certificate courses as well as degree and diploma programmes offered by AVU are mainly in areas identified as relevant to the needs of Africa's socio-economic and political development by African Vice-Chancellors and key stakeholders. From the early days of the AVU, the focus has been on computer science and business studies. These fields of study are regarded as the best way to place Africa on a trajectory that will enable it to make the transition from a society based on natural resources to a knowledge-based economy (Dzvimbo, AAMCODE, 2004).

Check Your Progress 3

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

African higher education has some notable successes in distance education. Explain what needs to be done to replicate this success across the continent (Answer in about 120 words).

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2.5 TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) entered the policy debate in the early 1960s. UNESCO, ILO and World Bank, supported it, and provided funding for its expansion and growth. But the programme never caught on. There was a fundamental flaw in its design. Academic purists considered pursuit of TVET as opting out of the academic stream. It was called a terminal stage (in India, for example), and at any rate, the dead-end of an academic career for young people. For people in most developing countries, it did not appeal as an option; they argued that the protagonists of TVET knew that this programme was not meant for them, but for the “other people”. Those who opted for TVET in many countries were not able to find jobs (because the programmes were designed by educationists who had no idea about the job requirements in industry). Apparently because it did not take off, World Bank stopped funding the programme, and for a while, TVET was off the radar of education planners and managers.

But it is now making a comeback. It is acknowledged that skill development is integral to education and training; and that proper skill development can take place if education and training is organised at the workplace. UNESCO is again pushing the programme; it says that TVET is no more about economic planning, it is a vision for sustainable development. Today, the goal is to teach students to adapt to changing work conditions, instead of locking them into specific jobs and skills (UNESCO: Education Today, April-June, 2005). How is the flaw in the old practice corrected? Firstly, TVET is now linked to further education, in most cases it is organised within the secondary stage of education; in some cases, at the post-secondary level too. In both cases, provisions are available to go further to pursue diploma and degree programmes as well. We have noted this happening in South Africa. Organisation of TVET at the workplace is possible by a creative blend of distance teaching, contact tutoring and workplace mentoring. It has the potential to play a major role both in the initial education and training of technicians and professionals, as well as in their continuous professional development. The latter can be achieved without removing economically active workers from the workplace, making professional development more affordable to both employer and employee. This approach also

allows people with potential, but who have had no other opportunities to acquire marketable skills.

Distance education may have some limitations when used for training in hard technical skills. It is, however, suitable for teaching theoretical concepts, for the understanding of foundation skills, business applications and, with the use of information and communication technologies, learning centres can combine both theoretical and practical aspects. At the upper end of ICT applications available to TVET, well-designed technology simulations can be most effective though they are presently expensive.

In order to promote TVET, South Africa has launched what they call a 'Learnership' programme that involves a partnership between industry (employer), university or other providers and the student. The three sign an agreement under which the students are provided practical training at the workplaces for periods ranging from 30 weeks to a year. Though industry does not guarantee jobs, TVET programmes prepare real people for the real world of work. It is a departure from the supply-driven approach (take what we have) to a demand-driven approach (we will give you what you want) in the preparation of human capital (Christensen, 2004: AAMCODE). Taking this initiative further, policy makers could consider appropriate legislation to ensure provision of training places by employers of specified categories (like the Apprenticeship Act in India, for example).

Technikon SA (TSA) has shown the feasibility of providing vocational education and training through ODL. Its pioneering work over the past 25 years has allowed a range of students from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries to access over 70 degree and diploma programmes in the vocational field. The TSA experience underlines the importance of theory-practice integration in a teaching-learning process that combines face-to-face tutoring, interaction with peer groups and mentoring at the workplace. Well-designed curricula and courses, user friendly learning materials, learner support and responsive administrative services are critical to success in these areas, as they are to other ODL applications. The TSA experience confirms Sir John Daniel's assertion about the need to introduce elements of industrial practice, with its division of labour, into distance education management. Good implementation requires the co-ordination and quality assurance of the efforts of lecturer, tutor, mentor and administrator. This can only be ensured by the use of well-designed operating systems, within an enabling environment marked by good management and sound policy (Moore, D, 2004: AAMCODE).

A paper from Perive Lene, CEO of the Samoa Polytechnic, presented at the Minsters' conference in 2004 provides a novel example of the application of the ODL approach to meet a specific TVET need. Many of the Pacific Island nations face the possibility of submersion as a result of global warming. They are therefore embarking on skills development programmes to equip their citizens for worldwide employability. The Islands prefer to develop their own programmes, but are hampered by a lack of skilled distance educators. They have therefore resorted to regional cooperation, by developing knowledge products in collaboration with Australian and New Zealand providers. The responsibility for implementation and delivery is in local hands. Seen from the African perspective, this approach of using available options for the provision of learning materials is both productive and realistic.

The above examples provide evidence of the vast potential that ODL holds for the provision of lifelong learning opportunities that can empower Africa's people to continually acquire new skills and upgrade existing competencies.

Check Your Progress 4

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

Explain why technical and vocational education and training is important for the developing countries of Africa and why it has not captured the imagination of people in most countries. (Answer in about 100 words.)

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2.6 ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

We have made a mention in the Introduction to this block about the long record of Community and Adult Education in Africa using distance education methods and radio lessons. In today's world, basic education is a human right, and there are several reasons to support such basic education programmes. Adult Basic Education (ABE) is significant in terms of achieving equity goals and is an essential contributor to poverty reduction. ABE programmes succeed better than most other forms of education in reaching women. Women's education has been shown to have a significant impact on enhancing agricultural productivity and improving the health status of the family and reducing fertility. ABE is also important because it has been shown to empower the poor, build strong societies, improve governance, and strengthen democratic institutions. Further, adults who cannot read or write are excluded from all education in the broadest sense. Therefore, education and poverty reduction are closely related: poverty is a barrier to development, and educational deprivation perpetuates and reinforces poverty. Poorly educated parents are not able to assist their children with respect to education, leading to a situation in which academic underperformance becomes entrenched.

In Africa, the case for prioritising ABE is especially strong because primary school enrolments are still low, often as a result of continuous turmoil, sustained poverty, socio-cultural marginalisation, inadequacy of school provision, shortage of qualified teachers and many other barriers. The structure and content of ABE learning activities should equip not only adults, but also children and youth with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need to survive, to improve their quality of life, and to empower them to participate fully and responsibly in the life of their communities. Education should also initiate adults both to initiate and adjust to the changing conditions of their environment, and to continue learning according to their individual needs and interests.

A worldwide survey of non-formal education projects found that at least 31 projects in Africa used extensive and growing use of distance education methods to deliver non-formal adult basic education programmes. As we noted earlier, the African Institute for Economic and Social Development headquartered in Cote d'Ivoire that operates across eight Francophone and two Anglophone countries is on relatively successful project in community education. It has done much to provide education aimed at farmers, agricultural extension agents, and women, using various approaches, including distance education. There have also been reports of successful experiments in community education using Radio in Ghana, Botswana and Zambia.

Community Radio is still a powerful medium in all African countries. As they have predominantly farming population, community education has been very helpful in improving the awareness of people about weather conditions, crop patterns, availability of seeds, better farming practices, and the market conditions. An analysis of five case studies of community education through distance mode using printed materials and radio from Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia provide some interesting details:

- The Ghanaian Literacy and Functional Skills Project has a potential audience of 5.6 million illiterate adults. It uses radio to provide support to its National Functional Literacy Programme.
- A programme run in Tanzania since 1989 by the African Institute for Economic and Social Development targets farmers, extension and development workers, and management staff from rural/community and agricultural enterprises. Learning aids include generously illustrated printed material sensitive to relative vocabulary levels. This "correspondence-based" learning is supplemented with organised group sessions and occasional tutor visits.
- A health worker and paramedic training programme set up in Kenya during the 1960s by the African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF) targets a range of health care workers with various qualifications. It uses print and radio to deliver a wide range of courses.
- A programme similar to the Kenyan AMREF initiative, with regard to its target audience and delivery techniques, is offered in Uganda by its Health Manpower Development Centre.
- The Zambian Radio Farm Forum was launched in 1966 to provide technical information to small-scale farmers. Radio discussion programmes, broadcast in English and seven local languages, reach over 21,000 farmers. Listening groups, limited to 15 farmers under the guidance of a chairperson, interact with tutors by submitting written comments and questions. (Siaciwen, 2004: AAMCODE)

These experiences establish that efficient production of programmes requires well-trained and motivated staff, special equipment and co-ordination of activities driving the processes; the need to integrate such programmes with the mainstream educational system to improve their attractiveness; making the provision for Adult Basic Education in the broader context of efforts at reducing illiteracy, poverty and disease; and ensuring the participation of communities, NGOs, churches and civil society besides Government Departments. An evaluation of these programmes revealed that Adult Basic Education programmes have great

potential for dealing with poverty, illiteracy, low agricultural output and poor and inadequate health services in rural communities. It was also evident that the more successful programmes used radio in combination with print materials supplemented with study groups and discussion forums to bring about changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices (Siaciwema, 2004 : AAMCODE).

The South Africa-based Soul City Project offers another example of the co-operative application of distance education techniques to community development. Soul City, established in 1991, is an NGO that uses TV, radio and print to convey its message. It harnesses the power of mass media to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic by supporting health education and development programmes. The venture reaches 16.2 million people through its youth and adult programmes. Soul Buddies is an associated programme that uses similar multi-media multi-lingual methodology to target 8-12 year olds.

The Soul City approach is based on co-operation with African states and relies on social networks for development and capacity building. It uses easy-to-read booklets that are adapted for local use and supplement them with TV programmes sold to national broadcasters in Swaziland, Namibia, Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, and Malawi. Local partners manage and produce health communication programmes and organise social networks independently.

A comprehensive process based on audience and expert-centred research is used in developing all the programmes to assure their relevance. Evaluative research shows that Soul City is reaching 79% of its targeted population of 16-24 year olds (Perlman, 2004: AAMCODE).

In this Unit, we have discussed on the relevance of distance education in Africa further to identify the specific areas in which distance education programmes can make a significant contribution. In doing so, we have looked at some of the successful programmes that are in operation in different parts of the continent, and have made an attempt to identify their strengths and weaknesses as well. Our effort in presenting these details was to establish, on empirical evidence, what successful distance education programmes can achieve, and how. In putting together this material, we have drawn extensively on the mass of literature contributed by experts, professionals and practitioners of distance education from different parts of the African continent as well as leaders in distance education from across the world, for the All African Ministers' Conference on Open Learning and Distance Education (AAMCODE) at Cape Town, South Africa in February 2004. All these papers and presentations were put on the web site of the conference.

We have concluded that distance education is not just relevant, but imperative for Africa to reduce its poverty, improve the health of its people and to create conditions of life that ensure equity, justice and freedom from hunger. We have also seen how information and communication technologies can accelerate the pace of this process of learning for development. At this point, we need to pause for a moment and ask, it is all very well put, but can the poor countries of Africa sustain this technology-led transformation? What are the problems and challenges? What do African countries need to do to develop and sustain these initiatives? We shall focus on some of these issues in the following Units.

Check Your Progress 5

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

Explain the importance of adult basic education in the development agenda of countries that are low in the human development index. Mention two successful programmes in this area in Africa and their contributions to the national development. (Answer in about 100 words.)

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we made an extensive survey of the role and status of distance education in the African countries. Our survey covered all major sectors of education: teacher education, open schooling, tertiary education, technical and vocational education and adult basic education. We found that distance education has had a long tradition in the African continent; there are some notable successes, and there are also notable failures. We have also examined the methods and practices followed in these experiments and identified the lessons learnt from them. We have also endeavoured to analyse the issues of concern to planners and policy makers that we shall focus on in the following Unit.

2.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

Teacher shortage is very acute in most African countries. More than 50% of the serving teachers are unqualified or untrained. The teacher-pupil ratios are very high; more than 60% of the countries have more than 40 pupils per teacher. Attrition rates among teachers are very high due to HIV/AIDS deaths. Between 2000 and 2015, an additional 41 million children would have joined school requiring an additional 1 million teachers. The current stock of teachers has to increase by about 70%, from 2.4 to 4 million. Traditional teacher training institutions cannot cope with this challenge for expansion. Africa has good examples of distance education institutions and programmes to augment the supply of teachers. These have to be replicated to meet the emerging challenge.

Check Your Progress 2

Secondary education enrolment in Africa has been one of the lowest in the world. Of an estimated 88 million young people of school going age in Sub-Saharan Africa, only 20-25% is in schools. Out-of-school youth

number over 60 million. It is unlikely that they can be got back to schools; many among them would be engaged in some occupation. Education and training that does not involve any dislocation in their work and life can improve their knowledge, skills and productivity. Better and higher incomes can improve the quality of their life. Open schooling programmes provide the answer as illustrated by the experiments in Botswana and Namibia.

Check Your Progress 3

The enormous success of the UNISA that pioneered distance education in Africa and sustained it for over six decades establishes the case for open learning and distance education at the tertiary level in the African continent. The critical success factors that contributed to UNISA's enduring achievement included the sustained support and encouragement provided by the South African Government through a variety of policy initiatives ranging from establishing the necessary legal frameworks, quality assurance mechanisms, qualification standards and creation of the necessary monitoring and evaluation systems. More importantly, UNISA and other distance education institutions in South Africa have focused on the relevance of programmes by ensuring that they meet the needs of employment. All these are very crucial for the success of any distance education initiatives and African countries should give serious consideration to these issues to ensure that they can sustain such initiatives.

Check Your Progress 4

Knowledge is important, but it is more important to be knowledgeable about what to make of it. Application of knowledge requires skills, and in the modern context, skill is not about working with machines only. It is about creativity, problem-solving, communication of ideas, and working with people. And the new machines to work with are not in the same category as the old greasy, blue-collar shop floor plants and machinery. The new skills required for work in the knowledge economy are the ability to manage, coordinate and work together. The earlier notion that vocational education is the end of the road for those who opt for it does not hold good any more. In the context of lifelong education, anyone who wants to pursue further education has all the opportunities before him/her, and vocational education is no longer an option for "other people".

Check Your Progress 5

The illiteracy rate in Sub-Saharan Africa is an estimated 39%. About 75-80% of the youth of school going age (over 60 million in absolute terms) are out of school. No human development strategy will work if they continue to remain out of focus. An inclusive social and economic development agenda requires that illiteracy is reduced, school attendance is improved, public health awareness is enhanced, new farming practices are introduced and marketing strategies are developed and communities become the focus of development. There are several examples of purpose-built community education programmes that use simple technologies like the community radio doing exceptionally well in raising the quality of life of whole communities. Africa needs to multiply these initiatives to reduce poverty, improve healthcare and make social and economic progress.

UNIT 3 THE PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Realising the Full Potential of Distance Education
 - 3.2.1 Resource Constraints
 - 3.2.2 Infrastructural Limitations
 - 3.2.3 The Diversity of the African Continent
 - 3.2.4 The Need for Relevance
- 3.3 The Challenges and the Response
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- critically evaluate the performance of the on-going distance education initiatives in Africa and identify their strengths and weaknesses;
- analyse the factors that contributed to the success of specific interventions and identify the reasons for failures where the initiatives did not make any impact;
- discuss the role of the policy and planning environments in mobilising resources and the provision of the necessary infrastructure for sustaining distance education; and
- highlight the role of capacity building and leadership development in ensuring successful distance education interventions.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

We have looked at the nature and role of distance education in Africa in some detail. To appreciate the place of distance education, we have looked at specific instances where it has made an impact, where it has shown great potential and also cases where the efforts made so far have not yielded commensurate results. In this Unit, we propose to deal with the issues and challenges that are common across the continent. In discussing these issues, it is not our intention to pick specific cases and pass judgements on them. We shall refrain from doing that. Instead, our efforts would be to identify, in general terms, the nature and quality

of the problems as well as the challenges and consider what strategies and approaches could be adopted in facing them. While discussing the possible approaches, we are not proposing to make a set of recommendations or a possible plan of action. What we shall do instead is to consider and develop a set of ideas that could help policy makers and planners to address these problems and challenges.

Distance education, as we know it today, has a short history spanning no more than about four decades. Therefore, for most of us, the development and growth of distance education is part of contemporary life; we have lived with it, and grown with it. And almost every day, we notice very persuasive advertisements asking us to join one distance education institution or another, some very well known, others not quite so much heard about. Some of them could be in our neighbourhood; others might be in some far off land. Some are looking for more students; some might be looking only for the money that education can buy. Whatever the background, distance education has come to stay, we know it. But what we do not perhaps know is what it takes to create, develop and maintain good distance education systems of acceptable quality. And also, what are the concerns of countries in Africa, in particular.

With the understanding of the concepts and practices involved in distance education and open learning gained from the discussions in the previous two units, it would be useful to ask what lessons we have learnt from the history of application of distance education methods in the last four decades or so. The intention is to draw attention to the most pressing problems and challenges rather than to paint a picture of failures, or to make critical observations about systems or institutions. These lessons have been drawn from an exploration of distance education practices in Sub-Saharan Africa, but comparisons with experiences in other parts of the world suggests that these problems and challenges are commonly shared across continents.

We shall try to look at some of these issues in this Unit.

3.2 REALISING THE FULL POTENTIAL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

We now understand and appreciate the potential of distance education. And yet, we have seen, with marginal exceptions, a majority of countries in Africa have not made serious efforts to mainstream distance education in their national education systems. In most cases, the efforts have been externally driven; many distance education initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa were launched with the support of donor funding. The stimulus was thus provided by the availability of funds, and not necessarily driven by a coherent and well-conceived development strategy. When activities expanded, or when donor funds began to dwindle, many distance education providers found it impossible to sustain the initiative. Thus, one of the major challenges that African nations face is resource constraints. We will take a close look at this issue.

3.2.1 Resource Constraints

It is a universal phenomenon that education is the first casualty in all cases of resource constraints. Whether it is cost-cutting due to compelling reasons of austerity, or a crisis in the economy due to any unforeseen reasons, governments always find it the easiest to cut the education

budget. Governments all over the world provide the finances for education, even in the USA that has a large private sector in education, government finances are substantial. In the developing countries particularly education is considered a social service sector where the private sector is virtually absent, or is only a marginal player. It is therefore the responsibility of the governments to find the resources to develop and maintain the national education systems. Poor countries that need the most investment in education become the least benefitted from public funding.

In most of the developing countries, that include all the low income countries as well, the accumulated deficits in educational provision is indeed very high. Their Governments are in no position to allocate adequate resources to meet their education needs. The very argument in favour of distance education is that it is a method that can offer higher returns for lower investments; but the reality is that investments need to be made in the first place. Most governments are debt-ridden. They do not have the means to repay their debts; and the aid providers like the World Bank and IMF have stringent conditions requiring governments to cut down on their expenditure.

As we had occasion to mention earlier, a large number of projects in education are still funded by a variety of agencies including several governments under bilateral assistance programmes. Distance education programmes comprise a large component of most of these programmes. The Governments of UK, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, etc., do provide such assistance directly or through the instrumentality of existing international agencies like the UNESCO, COL or World Bank. However, most of these projects run for its agreed duration, and with the termination of aid, they wind up. The host governments are not able to sustain them by meeting the maintenance costs.

At a Workshop held in Mauritius in April 2008 by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), some case studies in distance education in Francophone Africa, drawn from the work entitled "Distance Learning in Sub-Saharan Francophone Africa – Comparative Studies" were presented. These included three projects for teacher training in the use of ICTs and two for education managers, both of long duration. A project in Burkina Faso, designed to improve the ICT competence of secondary school teachers was a successful initiative, and it survived though it did not achieve the gender parity test. Another in Cap Vert, designed to improve the mathematics and Portuguese teaching competence of primary teachers, implemented as a national project with funding from the Cap Vert Government, also proved to be very successful. A third project, in Guinea Conakry, launched in 2004 did not achieve the desired results because it was not fully supported by the Government. Two other projects, for the training of education managers, from five countries, also registered mixed success. The reason: the national governments were not fully behind the programme, and the incentive was the foreign funding. The findings from these case studies are interesting:

- Projects initiated by external partners relying on external funding are less likely to succeed;
- The projects, with the exception of the Cap Vert project, rarely applied to the context of the national concern;

- They did not lend themselves to general application within the framework of national policies;
- External evaluation of the projects was rare; and
- Non-recognition, or establishing the equivalence, of the qualifications awarded at the end of the long-term programmes did not meet the career aspirations of the participants (www.adeanet.org).

It is not just the governments alone that have to accept a major share of responsibility for this unfortunate situation. Most of the institutions that get external assistance are very reluctant to redeploy their own resources; staff trained under the programme is withdrawn from the projects when aid stops, and they are redeployed on tasks completely unrelated to distance education. It wouldn't be surprising to find that as and when a new distance education programme gets funded by another agency or donor government (and there are several examples of projects running concurrently, or in succession, without linking them all up and consolidating them) in the same institution, a new set of staff is deployed, rather than consolidating its own internal strength, only to please as many members of staff as possible by letting them participate in foreign-aided projects. The result is not difficult to foresee: the benefits of aid do not add up; there is no organised effort at internal capacity building and consolidation of professional competence in institutions. The end result is that distance education remains a peripheral activity for most institutions.

As part of such aid, a number of institutions have received substantial ICT equipment that includes computers, audio and video making equipment, reprographic facilities, and so on. With a few notable exceptions, these facilities have not been applied to release some existing resources to sustain the efforts already initiated. The argument that all innovations, and all reforms, should be funded by additional resources continues to dominate the discourse on education reforms. All this leads to a great deal of inefficiency in managing available resources which itself is a major reason why over-stretched budgets constrain innovations.

The simple reality is that, if additional investments in using distance education methods or educational technologies are to make a meaningful and sustainable impact, they will have to be made as part of a broader process of shifting patterns of expenditure on education, with a view to ensuring that these changes contribute more broadly to changing patterns of behaviour within the educational system as a whole. This is not a naive ideal towards which to strive; it is critical to survival and growth of effective education. Too many educational providers internationally have ignored early warning signals of inefficient use of educational resources, and, in so doing, have left themselves open to the undistinguishing, and ultimately unhealthy, vagaries of cost-cutting measures which are employed when inefficient use of resources leads to financial crisis. It is essential to stress that this financial crisis has as much to do with poor management of resources as it has with dwindling budgets. Simply adding more resources to a poorly managed environment is no way to solve any problem (UNESCO-BREDA, Dakar; Draft Strategic Framework for Distance Education in SSA, 2003).

3.2.2 Infrastructural Limitations

Infrastructural limitations exacerbate resource constraints in developing countries. For instance, students and institutions, and even governments in some cases, say that they cannot rely on their postal services to

support communication between distance education institutions and their geographically dispersed students. This is a fundamental problem for almost all distance education programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa, given the reliance of almost all of them on the supply of printed material as a delivery strategy. Non-availability of cheap, reliable and efficient postal services involve additional costs for students in collecting their materials, and certainly while returning their assignments for evaluation. The devolution of these costs on students makes distance education unaffordable for many potential learners. Inadequacy of road and transport infrastructure in rural areas in most countries places additional burden on the providers in putting dependable learner support systems in place.

As we have noted earlier, the ICT infrastructure is very limited. But hopefully, the situation is improving. More people now have access to computers, Internet and Television broadcasts. The phenomenal expansion of cellular phone services in Africa is a clear example of how technologies can penetrate even the remotest regions if access to them is provided at an affordable cost. Recent estimates show that the number of mobile phones has risen from 25 million in 2000 to 65 million in 2007. We shall discuss the issue of ICT readiness of Africa and its institutions a little later. But for now, we focus more on the basic infrastructure. It is nobody's case that education sector has to create its own infrastructure for teachers and students to travel, to communicate with each other using postal services, set up telephone services and operate them, and put up school buildings and equip them, all on its own. It is undeniably the function of any government worth its salt to make sure that these minimum infrastructural facilities are in place for all to use. This is not the place to discuss politics and political ideologies, but it needs to be reiterated that it is for the governments to keep their part of the bargain with the people.

Before we conclude this section, it would be worthwhile to list some of the specific problems that emerge from the discussion so far. These are:

- Face-to-face tutorial support is seen to be critical for learner success, but often it is too expensive to implement;
- There are no reliable and sustainable strategies for making ongoing investments in course material design and development;
- Professional development for educational and administrative staff members is sporadic and limited, resulting in insufficient skills amongst personnel to sustain distance education systems;
- Administrative systems to support students either do not exist or are highly underdeveloped;
- Even modest course fees are beyond the reach of potential learners; and
- Innovations in distance education rely heavily on unsustainable sources of funding.

Two significant lessons can be drawn from this discussion. The first is about working with legacy systems. The whole concept of open learning and distance education is seriously devalued if it is not located within the practical context of the systems that are already in place and are currently providing access to educational opportunities to the people in their environment. It would simply be unrealistic to explore strategies for

open learning and distance education without understanding the nature of the legacy systems and their impact on the learning opportunities in the environments in which they operate. Commitment to understanding and improving legacy systems is implicit in our efforts to open them up to enlarge learning opportunities. This commitment does not, however, mean maintenance of status quo; the central thrust of the open learning and distance education system is to make continuing changes and improvements in the education systems based on clear guiding principles, and not to entrench what already exists. It is no longer possible to maintain colonially inherited welfare systems without rooting them firmly in the local soil and sustaining them by local economic activity.

The second is about making rather simplistic statements about the viability of distance education in developing countries because it is cheaper. It is true that distance education can reap the benefits of economies of scale, as we have discussed earlier, but that is possible only when enrolments are large and are sustained at a high level for longer periods. It is necessary that the assumptions about costs are tempered by the awareness of the true costs of implementing effective distance education, particularly in difficult material circumstances. While it is true that unit costs may decline, it is often forgotten that large numbers push up the absolute costs, and can lead to massive losses in the quality of education, unless adequate quality assurance measures are put in place (effective learner support systems, effective management of all operations, continuous review and renewal of courses and programmes, for example). Successful models of distance education from developed countries may not be relevant to all educational environments simply because the material circumstances in each country are different.

3.2.3 The Diversity of the African Continent

Africa, as we have seen is a vast continent. Of the 53 countries of the continent, Nigeria is the only country with a population of over 120 million, followed by Egypt and Ethiopia with population in the region of 80 million. Congo follows with over 60 million and South Africa with over 40 million. Eight other countries have populations between 20 and 40 million. At the other end, there are 13 countries with populations less than 2 million, and of the rest, 15 countries have populations ranging from 2 to 10 million and the remaining 12 have populations from 10 to 20 million.

Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa fall in three major linguistic groups; the former British colonies, including those bought and sold, are known as the Anglophone countries, those similarly under French occupation are known as the Francophone countries, and those under Portuguese occupation are known as the Lusophone countries. In North Africa, Egypt has its own language while other North African countries are mainly Arab speaking. Most African countries also have their own languages with varying degrees of development, but for all practical purposes, the legacy of the colonial period dominates the region.

Africans have also different ethnicities, traditions and customs. Their culture is shaped by languages, traditions and their own forms of visual and performing arts, all of which makes for a rich and vibrant heritage. The large majority of people are farmers. Though the continent is very rich in natural resources like minerals, oil, forest products and cash crops like cotton, there are no major industries that process them. All major mining operations are controlled by big industries from outside

Africa. The absence of local industries to process this wealth has deprived Africa of economic growth and decent employment for its people. It may be noted that poor governance and pervasive corruption have only aggravated the situation.

In this bewildering variety and diversity of cultures, languages and history, it is indeed impossible to think in terms of any Pan-African system of education. And yet, there is an undercurrent of solidarity and universality about the needs of different regions and countries, and it is reflected in Pan-African initiatives that we noted earlier. Initiatives like the African Union, NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development), ADEA (Association for the Development of Education in Africa), etc., reflect these concerns as well as hopes and expectations.

While hopes and expectations unite the African people, internecine conflicts and tribal rivalries tear them apart as well. Mass conflicts leading to genocide, mass migration, civil wars and consequent displacement of millions of people impoverish the poverty-stricken people further. Refugee rehabilitation (provision of food and shelter) takes precedence over everything else. Schools turn into refugee camps; education systems get ruined. And in the midst of all this, there is concern for reviving, refurbishing and reorganising the educational provision to reduce poverty, to provide employment, to reduce conflicts and to build a new Africa. This is the context, and the reality in which Africa thinks and feels about open learning and distance education.

It is tough to plan, organise and develop innovative systems of educational provisions in these challenging situations. Happily for the continent, there are pockets in different regions that have the will and the capacity to think in terms of groups of countries in their neighbourhood. Regional associations of countries in the South, East, Central, West and North Africa have already been set up around the development agendas of these regions. Education is one of their priorities. Cooperation, collaboration and resource sharing among groups of countries is thus a distinct possibility. We have already noted some of the initiatives taken by some countries in this direction. These efforts, if pushed further by supporting regional cooperation with resource support from the international community and donor agencies and governments, can make a significant difference. But none of these can succeed in the absence of local initiative, commitment and determination. It should be the responsibility of the academic community to foster and sustain this cooperation while respecting and protecting the diversity of the people, their cultures and their needs.

3.2.4 The Need for Relevance

We discussed a short while ago the relevance of distance education methods to Africa's needs. That discussion focused mainly on the perspective of governments, planners and education providers. The issues we focused on were those of improving access, enlarging opportunities and reducing costs. We are now going to look at the relevance of programmes offered by the distance education systems in the context of learner needs and expectations. It is not as though these concerns did not surface in the earlier discussions. What we did was to draw attention to such areas as teacher education, TVET, Adult Basic Education, etc., in the larger context of areas for intervention by national policy makers and system managers.

Now, we shall briefly touch upon the issue of relevance from the perspective of the potential learners, the youth and the community in general. We took note of the resistance to TVET in its earlier years. The most important concern on which the resistance was built up was the belief that TVET led young people to a dead end in their academic career. In that context, we also mentioned that good TVET programmes need to open the way for further education and attainment of better and higher qualifications at any time later in life. We felt that good distance education programmes never close the door for any potential learner at any time.

The first principle in determining the relevance of programmes is to ensure that the choice of programme areas and their content respond to the needs of the community generally. In the context of the diversity of cultures, languages and situations obtaining in different African countries, it should be the responsibility of the national governments to assess the demand for educational opportunities and to convert those demands into needs from the point of view of the existing shortage of trained personnel, relating them to employment opportunities, and ensuring that the initiative will lead to enduring interest from the community. This is important because, all too often in the past, it was the donor agencies that determined what was good for Africa, and the absence of local involvement in programme planning and course development by the local authorities left no deep concern in sustaining those projects. In other words, only those programmes can succeed that underpin the development and growth of Africa's talents, authenticity of its march towards self-sufficiency and help Africans to take responsibility for their own development.

It is all very well said. But how does one go about it? Surely, one way appears to be to build on, and not replace or duplicate the existing structures for cooperation and collaboration among countries in the region. We have referred to the existence of dozens of organisations and well wishers who are prepared to cooperate and support Africa's development. But, by far the most important structures that seem to work are the regional Economic Communities like the Arab Maghreb Union, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (CMESA), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community for Central African States (ECCAS) the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). With these regional formations taking responsibility, it might be possible to address the issues of linguistic divide, cultural and ethnic sensitivities and the overall relevance of the programmes to real needs, besides the support that such initiatives might attract from the communities in the regions.

A clear advantage of such an approach is that it can identify the specific target groups for each programme, make special provisions for the communities and groups that have been marginalised for so long (age, gender, out-of-school youth), design the curricula that are relevant to their needs and prepare materials and learning packages that will suit their learning skills and preferences, test their suitability on representative samples of target groups and produce them for use. It will also ensure the development of local talents in preparing learning packages including multimedia components and their presentation, all of which can contribute to sustaining distance education systems and methods.

Check Your Progress 1

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

What are the major constraints that the African countries face in expanding distance education programmes in a big way? (Answer in about 100 words.)

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3.3 THE CHALLENGES AND THE RESPONSE

In the previous section, we concentrated our attention on those elements in the educational environment of a country that could influence, and perhaps condition, the effect of new initiatives in educational innovations and the need to internalise them, if they are to make any lasting impact. But it is not enough to be informed about the limitations, present and potential, but we also need the strategies to overcome those limitations and move on with our efforts. We shall now look at some elements of those strategies that can help us address the environmental limitations.

3.3.1 Political Will and Policy Development

We briefly mentioned the sovereign rights of national governments to decide policies based on their assessment of what the people's needs are, prepare plans of action to implement those policies, and raise the necessary resources to do so. When we talk about governments, we are talking not about the mechanics of governments, but about the political authority that gives power and legitimacy to them. Policy making in a large sense therefore, reflects the political will of the government of the day. Governments come and go, and with them, policies also change or continue. Political commitments guide the agenda of governments, and education policies reflect those commitments. It is therefore of utmost importance that national governments commit themselves to adopt open learning and distance education practices in their national policies on education. The policy framework should spell out clearly the role of distance education in different sectors of education that we discussed earlier, namely, teacher education, tertiary education TVET, Adult Basic Education, and so on. It is not enough to define the role of distance education; it should be accompanied by a firm commitment to allocate whatever resources that are available with the government. When we talk about governments in this context, we mean the government in its entirety, and not just the Ministries of Education. It means all those responsible for essential infrastructure that includes postal services, telecommunication, broadcasting, community development, and so on.

- The elements of such national policies may include the frameworks for:
- The promotion of, and support to, collaboration among countries, institutions and development agencies;
- Cross border/transnational delivery of education subject to well considered and transparent safeguards to prevent commercial exploitation;
- Support to exchange of experience and information among countries and different agencies that promote the cause of distance education in the continent;
- Establishing mechanisms to support professional development of distance education practitioners and their retention in the system;
- Recognition of the professional status of distance educators at par with other academics and assuring them appropriate compensation packages;
- Support to research and development in distance education practices to identify and refine best practices in critical areas like course design and development, learner support systems and good management practices including materials and methods; and
- Provision of adequate resource support including funds both for initial investments in course development and for the maintenance of the system.

3.3.2 Leadership and Management

No innovation is likely to succeed if it is not backed by strong leadership with clear vision and sound management practices. Distance education is no exception. It needs, as we noted before, not just creative and imaginative leadership, but more importantly, a certain degree of sensitivity in working with the legacy systems. The attributes of such leadership would include:

- Promotion of a culture of planning and monitoring at the national and institutional levels supported by purpose-built management information systems;
- Good organising capacity based on the principles of specialisation, division of labour and teamwork;
- Continuous monitoring of performance and sharing outcomes as well as strengths and weaknesses with all stakeholders;
- Creation of a climate of broad consultation with partners and collaborating institutions and agencies based on open communication, mutual trust and respect;
- Promotion of close cooperation and collaboration among all internal systems across functional boundaries;
- Provision of strong leadership to teams of academics, distance education specialists, media professionals and managers;
- Establishment of systems for careful selection and training of personnel in all functional areas and their continuing professional development;
- Continuing engagement with identification of systems and supporting infrastructure to ensure quality and sustainability of distance education in the given environment;

- Willingness to accept and enforce the principle of accountability at all levels of leadership and management; and
- Identification of appropriate technologies and application of the same in teaching-learning process.

3.3.3 Capacity Building

Throughout this course, we have been talking about the imperatives of developing a core of well trained professional distance educators to organise, manage and maintain good distance education systems in African countries. The major functional areas in which competence will have to be created and strengthened are: course design and development, instructional system designing, media production, designing, developing and maintaining effective learner support systems and professional management of the system in its entirety. Most of these functions were not associated with the organisation and management of the traditional education system. That system has been in existence for centuries and everyone knew what it was all about, how they run, and what to expect from it. Traditionally, universities recruited highly qualified people with excellent academic records. Their value lay in their scholarship in the subjects they were expected to teach, and their own proven records of attainments were their credentials to enter the hallowed portals of the academia. While this tradition still continues with no significant changes in the traditional system, the case with open learning and distance education is very different.

It could be argued that the pioneers of open learning and distance education as we know it today did not have any training or professional preparation. Yet, they developed and established a profoundly workable system that compares well with its traditional counterpart. And, in doing so, they have also developed and created a body of knowledge about both theory and practice that made for the phenomenal success of the new system. As in every other branch of knowledge and profession, we are fortunate to be able to learn from their knowledge and experience that they have left for us. And, in the last four decades or so, an enormous body of literature has emerged across the world that distils the experience across the world in organising and running distance education programmes effectively and successfully. Around this knowledge and experience, full-fledged degree programmes have been developed by many universities (including this course of the IGNOU). There are also several programmes run as institution-based training programmes round the year or as seminars, symposia and workshops organised across the world with the participation of senior experts and professionals in distance education and several specific aspects of distance education. International organisations like the World Bank, UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning provide support to such programmes through generous funding.

Africa has been a beneficiary of such training programmes during the past several years. As we had occasion to note earlier, a large number of small distance education programmes have been running in many African institutions. Most of these programmes had a training component in a variety of specialised functional areas in distance education, ranging from designing instructional systems, course design, development and preparation and preparing media packages to establishing and running learner support systems to the applications of technology. Some of these programmes also had a component for sending African personnel to

well established institutions outside the continent for specialised training in distance education methods and practices. Africa is thus not a total stranger to distance education training and development.

Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning

About RETRIDAL

The Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDAL) is an academic arm of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) that has the specific responsibility and expertise to undertake and foster research in Open and Distance Learning with special attention to the West African sub-region. RETRIDAL was established by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) with the primary mandate of capacity building in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) within the West African sub-region through training and research. RETRIDAL is focused on providing training services and opportunities to other emerging Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Institutions, building a regional network of ODL trainers and researchers, undertaking practice-based research within and across the West African Sub-region, and networking with other similar institutions globally. Given the fact that quality is a central issue in Open and Distance Learning (ODL), the quality of the planning and implementation of the research and capacity development processes is a matter of priority. In response to the quality imperative therefore, RETRIDAL seeks to provide high quality capacity development and research activities with the ultimate aim of improving the overall practice of distance education and open learning in Africa and beyond. At the first historic international RETRIDAL Stakeholders' meeting held in Lagos, Nigeria on 6th and 7th May, 2004 the following three-point agenda were crystallized:

- sharing of information on ODL initiatives and expertise in the West African sub-region;
- identifying and prioritising activities to be conducted under the aegis of RETRIDAL, and
- framing of Action Plans.

Through funding provided by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) following that groundbreaking experience, it is worth noting that RETRIDAL has, since 2005, organized and facilitated a number of training workshops both within the West African sub-region and other countries in Africa.

Vision and Mission of RETRIDAL

- Vision** : To become a globally acclaimed one-stop solution for open and distance learning training, development and research needs in the West African sub-region and beyond.
- Mission** : To build a regional network of expertise in the West African sub-region that is highly proficient in the delivery of training, development and research.

Besides project-based training, African countries also have the benefit of institutionalised training facilities within the continent. We have taken note of the establishment of UNESCO's International Institute for

Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) at Addis Ababa in Ethiopia in 2003. The IICBA is running a number of short programmes as well as long-term academic programmes leading to Master's degree in Distance Education in collaboration with universities outside Africa, IGNOU for example. There are other African Universities too that are running the same or similar programmes. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and universities in Ghana have similar programmes. A number of African countries also participate in a COL-funded scholarship programme to train distance education personnel at advanced level by pursuing the Master's programme of IGNOU.

When we talk about capacity building in distance education, the real issue is not so much the lack of opportunities for training as the absence of coherent national policies that help consolidate professional competence within countries. We had mentioned briefly in an earlier section that the casual approach of many countries to training of distance education personnel under several ongoing donor-funded projects had tended either to dissipate professional development through non-utilisation of their services, or to the inability of most countries to develop a core competence in distance education within their boundaries.

The resolve of African countries to use open learning and distance education as an instrument for national development at the African Education Ministers' Conference in 2004 promises a revival of interest in consolidating the existing systems and expanding their role in all countries. It needs to be emphasised that building a core team of professionals is the key to the success of this renewed interest.

3.3.4 International Cooperation

We have briefly mentioned the role of a number of international organisations and agencies that support, in one way or another, the development of distance education in the African continent. External support to African distance education comes through the instrumentality of several specialised agencies. For instance, funding is provided by agencies like World Bank, African Development Bank, Donor governments like those of Japan, Norway, the European Union, the UK, and so on. Technical and professional support is provided by specialised agencies like the UNESCO, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the Consortium International Formation Francophone a Distance (CIIFFAD). Then there are a number of Non-Government agencies like the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the Association for Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) that negotiates and finalises aid programmes and also funnels funds to specific institutions or programmes. It would be useful to mention briefly the involvement of some of these organisations, especially those that are providing technical support to distance education in Africa.

UNESCO has been one of the early providers of support to education in Africa. Its involvement in the early stages was confined to supporting teacher education. During a period of more than four decades, UNESCO had supported the establishment and development of lead institutions in about 40 countries. UNESCO is not a funding agency; what it does is to provide support to programme development through professional consultancies, and facilitating resource mobilisation for programme implementation through negotiations with major fund providers. UNESCO support has since expanded to include major areas of education like EFA, capacity building, open learning and distance education

methods and practices, inter-institutional and inter-regional collaboration and support to Pan African initiatives in education like Conferences of Ministers of Education in Africa (MINEDAF). It has provided valuable support to develop professional competence in sponsoring and holding seminars and workshops in such specialised areas as distance education material preparation and development, organisation of learner support, ICTs in education, developing guidelines and handbooks on practices, and so on. UNESCO continues to play the role of a major patron of Africa's education.

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is another agency that has made substantial contributions to the development of Africa's open learning and distance education. When the British Government raised tuition fees for overseas students in the early 1980s, commonwealth student mobility became a major issue. A Committee that examined the issue felt that in the developing countries, the potential for distance education was immense and asked an expert group to investigate the possibilities. Of the several options that were on the table, the Commonwealth Governments finally chose a modest proposal to create an institution to promote cooperation in distance education. That initiative took off in 1988 as the Commonwealth of Learning with its headquarters in Vancouver, Canada.

Since its inception, COL has provided significant support to strengthen the capacity of the commonwealth countries of Sub-Saharan Africa in delivering distance education. The major focus areas of COL's interventions in Africa have been teacher development, open schooling, learning for livelihood, ODL policy development, Quality Assurance and eLearning for education sector development. COL has supported teacher development initiatives in West Africa particularly, and has assisted countries in the region in improving the professional competence of teacher educators involved in the delivery of distance education programmes. In the Southern Africa region, COL has supported open schooling programmes and has helped the creation of a Consortium of Open Schools in Southern Africa in which seven countries are involved.

While COL's support was confined only to the Anglophone countries, support has been coming to the Francophone countries as well. One of the earlier initiatives was through the Pan African INADES-Formation (African Institute for Economic and Social Development) established in 1962 with national offices in 10 countries (Unesco, 1991) that used correspondence lessons and assignments along with seminars to teach peasant farmers new farming practices and farm management techniques. The INADES-Formation was very active in the Central African countries like Cameroon. Just as the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was a response to the threat of student mobility within the Commonwealth, the Consortium International Formation Francophone a Distance (CIIFFAD) was a parallel development within the French-speaking world. Just as the COL was formally launched in 1988 with the promise of significant financial support from member countries, CIIFFAD was launched the same year and got funded too. But there was not much money, and CIIFFAD is not a lot richer (Perraton: ODL in the Developing World).

In the Francophone countries too, distance learning programmes have taken root thanks to the collaborative efforts taken by French universities and other organisations. Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Madagascar and Senegal have been running distance learning programmes in the recent past. There was also a proposal to establish a Francophone Virtual University by an organisation named

AUPELF, a network of French speaking higher education institutions by promoting cooperation in research, teaching and exchange of information. Later, the UREF (French acronym for the Francophone Virtual University) produced video discs, compact discs, data bases and knowledge resources to support its programmes delivered through several telematic centres spread across countries (ADEA- WGHE, 1997). An important point to note about distance learning initiatives in Francophone countries is the heavy reliance on ICTs for programme delivery.

Another major source of support for distance education initiatives in Africa has been the World Bank. The World Bank Group is a vital source of financial and technical assistance to developing countries. The World Bank Institute (WBI) is one of the Bank's main instruments for developing individual, organisational and institutional capacity through the exchange of knowledge among those countries. It offers several learning programmes delivered mainly through ICTs and has a Global Development Learning Network (GDLN) launched in 2000. The Network is a partnership of more than 100 learning centres that offer the use of advanced information and communication technologies to people working in development round the world. The GDLN clients include academic institutions that offer distance learning courses on development issues, development agencies that seek dialogue with key partners across the globe, government agencies discussing policy issues with their counterparts in other countries and non-government agencies coordinating their work with partners worldwide. WBI's learning programmes consist of courses and other learning products organised around several themes that include business, education, health, governance, climate change, finance, investment, poverty and growth , private public partnership, social protection, urban and local government, and water. WBI's activities cover all countries on the continent. 30% of all the participants in the WBI's programmes in 2008 were from Africa (WBI Annual Review, 2008).

What we have tried to do in the preceding paragraphs is to provide a brief overview of the major international agencies and their work in Africa in the field of distance education. This is by no means an exhaustive account; what it seeks to convey is that international cooperation is an essential element in Africa's development. Beyond these major agencies, a large number of countries from the developed and developing world are associated with Africa's education through bilateral arrangements. Can African countries put their act together and build their own capacity drawing on the support that is flowing from all over the world? That is the challenge before Africa.

Check Your Progress 2

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

What are the three essential requirements for the sustained development of distance education in the African continent? (Answer in about 150 words.)

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3.4 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have presented an overview of the major environmental factors that can contribute to the successful launch of distance education programmes in the African countries. The issues are many; most countries do not just have enough resources for investments in educational innovations. Projects initiated with external support do not survive and, in most cases, they do not add up to any strong and sustainable interventions. Most countries require strong policy environments that support distance education initiatives through political commitment; resource allocations, recognition of qualifications obtained through the distance mode, etc. Other issues that require attention are those relating to the creation and development of the infrastructure, especially for the provision of learner support, professional development of distance education practitioners including academic as well as professional and managerial personnel, and not the least, founding good distance education programmes that have local relevance rather than transplanting them from foreign soil.

The African continent is so diverse that any assumption that any single set of solutions can be applied to all countries would be unrealistic. Planning, organising and developing innovative systems of educational provisions are indeed a stupendous challenge. Nevertheless, through appropriate choice of programmes that respond to local needs, securing local involvement in the development and delivery of programmes, and above all, securing the cooperation among countries in different regions and across the continent, Africa can respond to the challenges effectively and on an enduring basis. This response has to be rooted in a strategy that is based on political commitment, capacity building and leadership development.

3.5 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

In the last three decades or so, most African countries slipped into a state of stagnation. Most of them were deeply affected by an economic crisis; they had to depend on borrowings from international agencies for survival. Deeply in debt as they were, African countries did not have any resources for education, health and other social sectors. Rescheduling debt repayments required adjustments in spending and there were deep cuts in the education budgets. There were simply not enough resources for innovative initiatives like distance education. This extraordinary situation of lack of resources was further aggravated by the absence of policy instruments that supported innovations, dependence on unstable and often ad hoc external support, absence of a strong professional support base for initiating and sustaining distance education, the choice of programmes launched with foreign support without ensuring their relevance to local needs, and, not the least, the inability or unwillingness of most African countries to address the concerns of human capital development in their countries. The cumulative effect of all these was the total neglect of the education sector in the development agenda of most countries in the recent decades.

Check Your Progress 2

The three essential pre-requisites for sustained development of distance education initiatives in the African countries are:

- Political will and government support through appropriate policy frameworks that recognise and acknowledge the place of distance education within the national education systems. It would ensure that resources are allocated; institutions are encouraged to offer their programmes through the distance mode; no artificial barriers are developed between the two modes of education; and distance education programmes at all levels are accepted as effective instruments for the provision of good quality education.
- Development of a professional cadre of distance education personnel consisting of course designers and developers, instructional design specialists, media producers, learner support providers like tutors, counsellors, student managers, material production and distribution personnel, and administrative personnel that support student registration, learner centres, examinations, student records, and so on.
- Good leadership and management that are committed to the cause of distance education and can support team work, collaborations and international cooperation. Since most African countries will need external support in the initial stages, it is important to make sure that international collaborations build internal capacity, create systems and processes that ensure quality of the provision and make an enduring impact on the national systems.

UNIT 4 ACCESS, QUALITY AND COST

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 The Iron Triangle: Access, Quality and Costs
- 4.3 Quality in the Distance Education Provision
- 4.4 Ensuring Quality in Distance Education
- 4.5 Sustainability of Distance Education
- 4.6 Is Africa Ready for Distance Education?
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

4.1 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- establish the interrelationships among the three vectors of the triangle that represent access, cost and quality;
- design systems that impact the behaviour of each of these three vectors that can contribute to expansion, affordability and good quality in the provision;
- design and develop quality assurance systems appropriate to the environment; and
- analyse the readiness of the national environment to launch and sustain distance education initiatives.

4.0 INTRODUCTION

While discussing the case for distance education, and its relevance to Africa, we had mentioned that distance education promises both cost efficiency and cost effectiveness. The reason for this optimism is the potential of distance education methods to reduce the marginal costs; in other words, the additional cost of enrolling and teaching one more student is less than the average cost per student. This is achieved not by cutting costs, nor by compromising any aspect of the quality of services provided to that particular student or students in general. It is also necessary to disabuse the popular perception that distance education is cheaper. In terms of costs, what distance education achieves are economies of scale; that is, the fixed costs get spread over larger numbers and longer periods.

We have also said that in the developing countries, it is the governments that are most concerned with the provision of educational opportunities. It is true that people are concerned generally, but their concern is about access to good quality education at an affordable cost. These are the same concerns for governments too, with the difference that it is for

them to make provision for education that many more people can access, ensure that the quality of what is provided is acceptable, and that the cost of accessing good education is not too high. The interplay of these dimensions is often referred to as the eternal triangle in education.

We now turn to take a more detailed look at the ways in which this triangle operates in the African context.

4.2 THE IRON TRIANGLE: ACCESS, QUALITY AND COSTS

Sir John Daniel, the President and CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning, calls it the Iron Triangle of education, the vectors of which are made up by the issues of access, quality and costs.

Access is a central issue in education. While discussing the relevance of distance education to Africa, we examined the issue of access in some detail. We need not repeat the details again except to note that nearly all governments in Africa are grappling with the problem of expanding access to educational opportunities at all levels for the African people. There is general agreement that distance education methods are the best means, and perhaps the only means, to reach out to large numbers in as short a time as possible. Faced with not much of a choice before them, most governments in Africa are preparing themselves to expand the educational provision through the application of distance education methods and practices. In making their final choice, they are confronted with two other concerns.

The first is about the quality of the provision. Can distance education methods ensure the quality of the education provided? Certain prejudices against distance education continue to persist; questions about legitimacy, and about quality. Concerns about legitimacy arise because it is generally perceived as a cheaper option and about quality because it is less costly. Both these are genuine concerns. But it needs to be emphasised that high cost does not necessarily mean high quality; nor do all those that cost less are of poor quality. In simple terms, quality is defined as fitness for purpose at minimum cost to society. By that definition, education should be of good quality if it serves the purpose for many. What could be that purpose? Getting jobs? Finding work? Earning livelihood? Improving awareness? Becoming a productive member of the society? Making better communities and societies?

According to Sir John Daniel, education has two major purposes: to build human capital, and to build social capital. Human capital means the individual knowledge and skills that make a person more autonomous, more flexible and more productive. It is the personal capital that can be invested in finding fulfilment in people's lives. But human capital by itself is not enough, we also need social capital. Social capital is trust in other people, the networks of contacts and the coming together of people for a common goal that creates communities.

The third dimension is cost. If high costs restrict access, and if quality is fitness for purpose at minimum cost to society, then high cost is bad quality. Open universities have established that their courses and programmes as well as their teaching and learning processes lead to outcomes that are as good as the best of traditional universities. For instance, the UKOU has been rated among the top five universities in

the UK. A few large open universities across the world are providing opportunities for millions of people, and have certainly widened access to large numbers. And this opening up served the purpose of building human capital as well as social capital on a massive scale at a relatively low cost. That is how the open universities and distance education programmes have helped to break the eternal triangle of access, quality and cost. The principle works like this: learning materials of high quality once produced do involve high costs. But when numbers go up (access), the cost side of the triangle shrinks. Alternately, when access is limited, the cost line that links access and quality becomes longer, and continues to shrink the access line. When a fine balance is established between access and cost, the quality advantage also is shared by many. That is what good open universities have achieved; that is what good distance education programmes can emulate.

It follows that successful open learning and distance education programmes do not compromise quality, they inspire credibility and command legitimacy. The test then is: can quality be maintained at an affordable cost, and do distance education programmes ensure learner success? We shall look at these issues as well.

Check Your Progress 1

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

There is a perception that distance education is cheap and therefore is of poor quality. Is this perception justified? (Answer in about 75 words.)

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4.3 QUALITY IN THE DISTANCE EDUCATION PROVISION

We have talked about distance education as an instrument for widening access to educational provision. But let us remind ourselves that the focus was not just on getting the numbers right, but on providing good quality education. And quality, we agreed, was fitness for purpose. That argument takes us to the question of relevance of programmes, course contents that add value to the learning experience and the virtues of independent learning leading to lifelong education. If all of these are the purposes of good education, we are also talking of processes that transform our education and making it relevant and critical to our societies and nations.

It is this transformational potential of distance education that we need to mobilise to manage the triangle of access, quality and cost. By widening access, we should be able to ensure quality at low cost. That is to say that the programmes offered by the system should be affordable for large numbers. Then it would be possible to ensure economies of scale. At the policy level, therefore, it should be possible to design funding patterns that favour relevant programmes that can attract large numbers as the top priority. But it is not enough to get a large number registered; they should stay with the programme and complete it. Completion ratios significantly impact on costs and cost efficiency. If graduate output costs go up, efficiency of the system goes down.

Funding support should go with regular and well designed systems of performance audit of institutions and accreditation of their programmes against specified criteria. Rigorous implementation of such measures on a continuing basis guarantees against slippages in the quality of programmes and prevent institutions from turning into commercial enterprises.

In 2002, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) launched what came to be known as the Open Courseware movement under which the MIT has decided to put its courses including faculty lectures and notes online for anyone to use. UKOU followed suit by placing some of its course material online. By January 2007, the movement has about 1800 potential courses of 120 universities worldwide that provide the course materials such as the syllabi, video and audio lectures, notes, assignments and homework that anyone can log into. The primary purpose of this movement is to share knowledge, and it is now known to be helping thousands of students worldwide to enhance their knowledge and improve their performance at the institutions where they are registered as formal students (<http://education.zdnet.com>). In 2006 IGNOU started its knowledge portal called “e-gyankhosh”. By 2010 almost the entire course materials of IGNOU have been put on the web as open courseware.

From Open Courseware Movement to WikiEducator, a collaborative course authoring tool on which there are hundreds of projects to create learning material that is open for all to use, it now seems that content for high quality programmes no longer presents any serious problem. Distance education programmes in the future will increasingly draw upon these sources and adopt or adapt their materials by providing a local flavour where necessary. African distance education will thus be better placed than its counterpart in several developing countries that had to struggle in the process of getting their act together in designing, developing and producing learning materials for its programmes. What is more important from Africa’s point of view is that its initial investment on course development, and therefore, the total costs, can be contained within manageable limits without compromising quality. As we said earlier, it also provides the opportunity of managing costs and still takes advantage of economies of scale.

Collaborative initiatives among countries and institutions offer very good opportunities for sharing intellectual and physical resources while improving quality and reducing costs. For instance, institutions across countries can establish joint teams for designing and developing materials for courses that are specially relevant to Africa’s needs; these materials once developed can be used by institutions in several countries. Similarly, learning centres and ICT kiosks that support learning can be used by more than one institution to support their learners without each

having to establish and maintain its own elaborate and expensive learner support systems.

We have noted earlier in this discussion that a pool of trained personnel is already available in African countries who have been initiated into the distance education system with varying degrees of intensity. It would not be a bad idea to get them all back into new initiatives, if necessary, by retraining or improving their professional competence by advanced training with the use of training materials and CD-ROMs freely available from organisations like the UNESCO and COL.

And last, but not the least, is the development and use of a costing model to continuously assess the actual costs of all ongoing distance education programmes to identify elements of costs that can be controlled or contained. Areas that could prove to be cost-intensive are engagement of full-time personnel where part-time staff is adequate, decentralisation of processes involved in learner support systems and their management, bulk purchase of equipment and stores, and so on.

4.4 ENSURING QUALITY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

This is not the place to dwell at length with the issue of quality assurance in distance education. It will be dealt with in great detail elsewhere in this course.

Having spoken about the quality issue in the specific context of access and cost and its importance in the sustainability of distance education systems in Africa, it will be worthwhile to look at the ways in which successful distance education systems in the African continent have addressed this issue and to draw lessons from their experience for the benefit of other countries in the continent. It is not our intention to engage in a general discussion on quality assurance systems and processes; what we intend to do is just to flag a few relevant points that might help distance education practitioners in Africa to develop similar systems and processes.

South Africa is one country that has addressed this issue seriously and has developed a well defined system for quality assurance. It has established a South African Quality Authority (SAQA) primarily to ensure that the quality of its educational provision is sufficiently high and that it meets the hopes and expectations of all stakeholders. On the issue of quality, South Africa does not make any distinction between face-to-face and distance education as, according to them, all education, irrespective of modes of delivery, must be of the same quality. In order to assess the quality of its provision, the SAQA has developed and notified elaborate criteria for assessing the quality of all aspects from institutional mission and policies to staff recruitment and training and student performance and satisfaction. There is a Higher Education Quality Committee that reviews and refines these criteria from time to time.

Since distance education processes are different, the criteria for quality standard in distance education have been notified separately. These criteria also range from institutional mission and policies to the processes of programme choice, development and delivery, learner support, staff policies, student management, evaluation, collaborative arrangements, and so on. This is not the place to make a critique of the South African

system of quality assurance; the purpose of referring to this system is to draw attention to the fact that quality assurance in distance education is not new to the African continent.

Countries that do not have any elaborate system of quality assurance could emulate the South African model. The starting point for developing a reasonably satisfactory quality assurance mechanism and putting it in place would involve the following steps:

- Build a common understanding on quality in distance education through broad consultation among major stakeholders;
- Develop, document and implement a national Quality Assurance Framework for education, including distance education, with the clear understanding of the relationship of distance education quality assurance mechanism to the overall quality system in education;
- Build partnerships with international and local agencies for capacity building and technical support in quality assurance processes;
- In setting the criteria, ensure a balance between government commitment and ownership by those using them;
- Promote both external and internal criteria for quality assurance that could stimulate innovation and prevent poor practice;
- Develop an institutional quality assurance framework and train staff to participate in its implementation;
- Institute continuous professional development programmes for part-time staff covering all aspects of distance education practice, including management and administration;
- Ensure recognition of qualifications by securing the participation of employers in the public and private sector in the development of programmes and their evaluation;
- Ensure the quality of the media output;
- Avoid investments in expensive technology unless it is needed;
- Ensure that development of all new distance education practices are firmly rooted in research; and
- Guard against acquiring resources that are too advanced and do not match local needs.

Check Your Progress 2

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

What are the basic components that contribute to the quality of the distance education provision? List 5 important steps that would ensure quality in distance education. (Answer in about 120 words.)

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4.5 SUSTAINABILITY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

While discussing the problems and challenges in open learning and distance education in Africa, we drew attention to the issue of sustaining distance education initiatives that have been taken in several countries. We have noted at that point that most projects started with donor funding wound up when the funding arrangements stopped. Neither the governments nor the institutions were able to continue those projects and provide the resource support needed to keep them going. This tendency needs to be reversed. What are the possibilities of providing sustained support to distance education? Some of the possible solutions that emerged from the discussions at the Conference of African Education Ministers, to which we have made several references throughout this Block, are presented below:

- Establish clear and enduring national policies that reflect political will and firm commitment to provide funding on a continuing basis for distance education provision in the national systems;
- Develop mechanisms to relate funding to programmes that have substantial demand from potential learners to ensure economies of scale, are of proven quality and have registered significant success;
- Develop awareness among leaders and managers of distance education that quality is the essence of sustainability;
- Design collaborative efforts in ways that will ensure transfer of skills from developmental agencies and other partners to African experts to foster and promote self-sufficiency and to reduce dependence;
- Make accurate assessments of the human resource needs to sustain programmes and recruit and train personnel for running them; and
- Secure the involvement of local communities in the provision of learner support services like learning centres, mentoring, monitoring, project work, etc.

4.6 IS AFRICA READY FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION?

Funding and other resource-related support do not guarantee that distance education initiatives will endure in Africa or anywhere else. There are several other factors that will influence the course that distance education provision may take in any education system in any country or continent.

The most important among these influences is the educational environment. If the environment is not receptive to new ideas and innovations, all efforts at experimenting with distance education may not lead to any positive impact. It is essential, therefore, that the environment is prepared, and got ready for trying new ways of doing things; in other words, as we said earlier, willingness to work with legacy systems is more important than any overenthusiastic reformist zeal to transplant what has succeeded elsewhere. Reforms need to be rooted in the soil where they have to grow, and what exists already in that soil must be ready to accept and internalise innovation-driven reforms.

- a) *Public Awareness:* The most essential pre-requisite for environmental preparedness is getting people to accept distance education as a viable and effective option for developing the human and social capital needed for reducing poverty, improving health, enhancing productivity and enriching the quality of life. National governments, with the help of leaders in different walks of life in the societies, in cooperation with reform-minded academics and educators, should engage themselves in broad consultation, and devise strategies to carry the message that open learning and distance education is a powerful instrument for reducing poverty and misery. Among the educated too, awareness needs to be created that the half-life of knowledge is getting shortened too soon, and that they too need opportunities to catch up with the ever-expanding world of knowledge and the ways of its applications, to participate in the productive processes in their societies. Such awareness campaigns should be built around clear definitions of the respective social and educational purposes and roles of contact and distance education. It will be useful to recall that initiatives like NEPAD have urged African countries to use the potential of distance education for teacher development, etc., to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Without preparing the soil, no plant will grow and all the promise and potential of distance education will remain just that, a promise.
- b) *Prepare the Human Capital for distance Education:* We have already mentioned it. But it is worthwhile repeating it. Awareness does not, by itself, ensure successful implementation of distance education programmes. It requires a body of experts, professionals, technicians and a much larger body of committed community workers to deliver distance education programmes. While experts, professionals and technicians can design and develop learning materials, they have to reach every learner who might also need some help and support in the form of advice, counselling, and perhaps, some tutoring as well. This is the human capital that can develop, organise and sustain distance education programmes across countries. The nucleus of this capital is available in most places in the continent, it has to be nurtured and developed. We have already discussed the ways in which this can be done. It is no exaggeration to say that, in the end, it is the dedicated human capital that can sustain such major initiatives. And when that enduring power of commitment to a cause is developed, no obstacle will be big enough to stand in the way of progress.
- c) *Give the Learners What They Need and Not What You Have:* This is again a restatement of the cardinal principle that markets are created when you have products that people need; and not just because you have something or the other to sell. Supply-driven markets seldom grow; demand-driven markets do. Again, what may have succeeded in one environment may not succeed in another. The criticality of relating programmes of education to the needs of the local communities cannot be overemphasised. On the one hand, we are talking about the potential of distance education for poverty reduction and relieving people from the miseries of their daily life, and on the other, we are trying to seek solutions to these problems with neatly packaged knowledge-loaded learning materials delivered through sophisticated technologies. Obviously, the two do not match. It is frustrating both for the providers and the learner groups. The right approach would be to develop programmes around the needs of communities,

identified with special projects like better farming practices, provision of micro-credit, new construction programmes that use new and better materials, installation and operation of solar power systems, and so on, in which local communities can be fully involved. Such programmes, if they also incorporate problem-solving skills, are most likely to sustain learner interest and acceptance. The movement for distance education, in most places in the continent, has to be built up from the grass roots level, and not from the top to the bottom.

- d) *Learner Preparedness*: Preparedness of potential learners to enrol in a distance education programme and pursue it through independent study is another critical issue. As we have noted, about half of Africa's population is young. Many among them have had no formal schooling. It would be useful to prepare them for self-study, motivate them to learn and support them to persist with their efforts. Preparation of beginners' learning kits that include useful tips on developing learning skills, the manner in which they can pursue their education and training programmes through the distance mode and make learning a lifelong endeavour with no disruption in their work and family life, etc., would be a promising start for the uninitiated. Remember also that we are not talking about the few in Africa who had the privilege of some education and want to improve on it. Potential learners though they are, their numbers do not add up for any economies of scale, and, in most African countries, the size of the population is not large enough to sustain distance education only at the higher or advanced levels. A large enough learner community in many countries has to emerge from distance education initiatives targeted on the out-of-school youth.
- e) *Technology Readiness*: We have discussed the role of technology in distance education at length in the previous Units and sections. Indeed, there can be no discussion on distance education in today's context without mentioning the role that technologies play. The essence of the processes of teaching and learning is communication that involves words, sound and images. Whether we like it or not, all these three have converged to make up what we now call multimedia communication. Even if we do not know much about how they are produced, or how they work, most of us have experienced its effect on our lives. No other development illustrates the impact of technology on the lives of common people (education or even literacy is not a criterion here) better than the spectacular growth of mobile telephony in the recent past. According to a study conducted recently, the number of mobile phone subscribers in Africa more than doubled, from 25.1 million to 51.8 million during the period from 1998 to 2003, and is still rising. The WDI database for 2009 indicates that cell phone users went up from 8% of the population in 2005 to 23% in 2007. Apparently, the reason for this phenomenal growth is the relatively low cost of handsets, the ease of use of technology and the reasonably low tariff rates. PC penetration, according to the WDI database for 2009 is only 1.8 per 1000 people and the number of Internet users is only 4.4 per 100 people. Compared to mobile phones, computers are much more costly, bandwidth availability is limited, and connectivity problems are more complex. National policies on connectivity and bandwidth as well as tariff are the major concerns in Internet services remaining the privilege of a few. Governments and Internet service providers have to make it happen if people in large numbers have to access this technology. If it becomes available at affordable costs,

people will take to it as they did in the case of with mobile phones. It may still be a distant dream, but is surely an attainable goal.

A notable event in ICT infrastructure development in Africa is a Pan African e-Network Project costing an investment of \$1 billion by India that has been launched early in 2009. The project to be implemented in cooperation with the African Union, has been in the works from 2004. The project seeks to connect India with all the 53 countries on the continent with a satellite and fibre optic network to share India's expertise in education and health care (www.panafricanenetwork.com). Surely a big beginning that augurs well for the future of distance education in Africa has been made. The launch of this project could substantially address most of the concerns that we have discussed and may pave the way for continent wide connectivity and interest in making the best use of this unique opportunity. We need to remind ourselves again that availability of technology alone is not a solution. We need to prepare the people to apply these technologies and to use them to their advantage.

Collaboration within the framework of existing organisations like the African Council for Distance Education, Association of African Universities, Commonwealth of Learning and the UNESCO could further help develop a Pan African strategy for the use of ICTs in education and for local and regional development. Equally important is the need for establishing collaborative arrangements among nations, institutions, projects and programmes to enhance the impact of distance education initiatives and to reduce costs. It would be a good idea if multinational corporations that manufacture computing equipment could consider price reductions keeping in view that large volumes of manufacture and sales could offset the notional loss from lower prices and the national governments considering lowering of import duties on such equipment. Africa certainly promises to be a big market for ICT equipment.

Check Your Progress 3

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

List four important conditions that are necessary to sustain distance education initiatives. Examine the readiness of African countries to initiate distance education programmes and sustain them. (Answer in about 100 words.)

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4.7 LET US SUM UP

We have discussed the critical success factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the distance education provision in Africa. As we have noted, many African countries are small; the size of their population is not

very big. And yet, all of them need to augment their education provision. It means that they will have to find ways to expand opportunities for the education of their nationals in ways that do not compromise quality and are affordable. Distance education planners and managers have to understand the criticality of these three attributes in preparing for the launch of distance education initiatives. Further, they have to make an assessment of the readiness of each environment before taking the plunge, lest they find their initiatives unsustainable.

4.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

There are certain concerns about distance education provision; its legitimacy and effectiveness. Concerns about legitimacy persist because it is a cheaper option, and about quality because it is less costly. It has to be understood that high costs do not always ensure high quality; nor does low cost mean poor quality. What is important is to ensure that the provision meets its purpose. Generally, education and training serve two purposes; building human capital and social capital. Education and training serve a purpose if it enhances the personal capital through improved knowledge and skills that people can invest more productively and for better returns; and social capital is about teams of people coming together to achieve common objectives. If these two purposes are served, and at a relatively low cost, the quality of education is assured. When good quality education reaches larger numbers, the total cost is shared by that many, and the per capita cost is less. The larger the number, the less is the cost and the quality remains high.

Check Your Progress 2

The three pillars on which good distance education provision is based are; course design and development, learner support and good management. It is possible to develop performance criteria for each of these three basic components and assess the actual performance of institutions and programmes against those criteria to determine their quality. Five major steps for the development of an effective quality assurance system are:

- Reaching a common understanding among all stakeholders about what constitutes good quality distance education;
- Develop, document and implement a national quality assurance framework that applies to all education provision, including distance education, with clear relationship established between distance education quality assurance mechanism and the overall quality system;
- Establish and promote external and internal criteria for quality assurance that strengthen innovation and prevent poor practice;
- Ensure recognition of qualifications by securing participation of employers in the development of programmes and their evaluation;
- Ensure the quality of the media output while avoiding expensive technology and ensure all distance education practices are rooted in research.

Four important conditions that can sustain distance education initiatives are:

- Establishment of clear and enduring policies that reflect political will and government commitment to provide funding on a continuing basis;
- Choice of programmes and courses that can attract adequate number of learners to secure economies of scale;
- Recruit and train adequate number of people to create a body of professional staff to run programmes;
- Secure collaboration among countries and regions as well as with international agencies for transfer of skills and competence and also the involvement of local communities for provision of learner support.
- The readiness of African countries for distance education depends on acceptance of distance education by people as a means to reduce poverty, improve health, enhance productivity and enrich the quality of life. It also involves the preparation of human capital for distance education in the form of a body of professionals, ensuring the relevance of the programmes and courses by developing them around the needs of communities, and finally preparing potential learners for self-study through development of learning skills. Technology applications in distance education are important too, but it has to be ensured that the technologies used are easily accessible and affordable.

UNIT 5 REGIONAL ISSUES

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
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- 5.2 North Africa
- 5.3 Southern Africa
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- 5.5 West Africa
- 5.6 Central Africa
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5.1 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the variety and diversity of the education systems that prevail generally across a group of states that comprise each of the five major regional formations designed to foster cooperation in economic and social development;
- explain how the legacy systems influence the linguistic and cultural environments that are so crucial to the development of education; and
- analyse the common issues and challenges before the countries in all the regions and examine how Pan-African cooperation and collaboration can lead to significant growth and development in education.

5.0 INTRODUCTION

While discussing the problems and challenges in distance education in Africa, we did draw attention to the diversity of cultures, languages and the historical inheritance of the countries that comprise the continent and how these variations could influence their policies, programmes and indeed their development itself. The African Union and the African Economic Community have created Regional Economic Communities for North, West, South, Central and East Africa to promote cooperation and collaboration among them. These efforts extend to all development sectors including education. The linguistic diversity, reflected mainly by three major European language groups, namely, English, French and Portuguese/Spanish can be found across the regional formations and add a complex dimension to regional development initiatives, particularly in education and training.

It is not our intention to discuss the regional issues in great detail or to focus on the problems and concerns in each country in each region. What we intend to do is to make a broad survey of the regional situation in the context of the present provision for distance education, and what the

future holds for them. In doing so, we shall not go into the micro level details, and shall exclude specific cases that have been discussed already.

We shall try to focus our discussion on regional issues around the following broad issues:

- A brief survey of the existing provisions for distance education in the region;
- The nature of the existing collaborative projects in the region and the ways in which cooperation and collaboration can strengthen the distance education provision in the region; and
- The strategies for the future.

The discussion in the previous Units on the nature, role, challenges and strategies pertaining to distance education in Africa, in fact, reflects in general terms the position across all the regions. Therefore, we now turn to some issues that are specific to each region.

5.2 NORTH AFRICA

The six countries on the Mediterranean coast on the continent are influenced more by their Arab neighbours across the Gulf in language, customs and ways of life. Thanks to the impact of the oil economy, there is no noticeable evidence of poverty though the rural areas of Egypt and Morocco are not as good as the rest of the region. The region as a whole has better completion ratios in primary education than the rest of Africa, close to 70%, and the transition rates from primary to secondary education is about 50%. Secondary enrolments have not caught up with the primary school output, leaving major gaps in some cases. Egypt and Algeria have better higher education systems as well though they are still way behind in the age participation ratios among the developing countries. There are many universities too though the age participation ratios vary significantly.

Education systems in the region comprise both modern education as well as religious education. Modern education is patterned mainly after the European model, with the French influence more noticeable than any other.

There is no major institutional presence of distance education in this region. Nevertheless, distance education is practiced in isolated pockets, mainly focusing on higher education and teacher development in rural areas. There are cases of limited use of the mass media. United by a common language, the Arab countries across the Mediterranean are working together and sharing expertise. Formal collaborative initiatives have been limited to the development of a “Joint Arab Plan of Action” for the use of ICT in education, including distance education. The Pan African e-Network Project is likely to join the countries in the region with the rest of Africa, and might draw them into a potentially powerful distance education network as well.

Under a recent initiative jointly taken by the European Union and the UNESCO in 2002, a large project called Avicenna Virtual Campus (AVC) was launched in the Mediterranean region to create capacity for open distance learning delivery. In four years, the eLearning knowledge network in the region has emerged as a model for quality teacher training and education, in general, for students. Under this project, Avicenna learning centres were set up in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and

Egypt. Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia (UNED), the National Public Distance University in Spain played a key role in the project by providing its expertise in blended learning methodologies and developing pilot online courses. The UNED pedagogical experts designed the Avicenna pedagogic model and its software experts provided the leadership in developing the software for creating the web course catalogue and Avicenna virtual library.

The project has facilitated the development of online courses, involving the development of curricula in an innovative form for a multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment. During the four years of the project (2002-06), 80 seminars were organised to train 981 teachers and tutors in online course production technology. 206 online modules (each teaching 20 hours) were produced to teach over 140,000 students. On termination of the project, Algeria, Egypt and Morocco took over the responsibility of running the learning centres as they turned out to be self-supporting. Egypt has added 27 more centres for training secondary school teachers, Algeria established its own network for secondary and higher education and Morocco has shown how these innovative approaches could help integration of students with disabilities into mainstream education (Morocco trained 1000 blind students under the project).

The success of the project has prompted UNESCO to replicate the model for the entire continent. UNESCO is now leading the establishment of an African Virtual Campus (AVC) as an extension of the Avicenna model. The new project aims to increase the capacity of all 54 member states of the African Union to train teachers of science, engineering and technology through eLearning by implementing sub-regional integrated scientific and technological programmes through an African Virtual Campus Network or an eLearning network. The project aims at building sub-regional and regional capacities and developing human resources in the Regional Economic Communities and specialised regional institutions (Rodrigo, Covadonga: 2009; ICDE 2009 papers).

5.3 SOUTHERN AFRICA

The southern region of the continent is way ahead in educational attainments. We had discussed in different contexts how the region has pioneered several new initiatives and established models of distance education theory and practices that could become models for others. Open schooling in Botswana and Namibia, TVET in South Africa and community education in Zimbabwe are all lessons for others to emulate.

Within the region, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) provides a political umbrella for collaboration throughout the region. The Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA) is a long-standing vehicle for collaboration in the SADC region. The South African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE), an Educational Trust established in 1992 with support from the European Union, has emerged as a rich resource centre for capacity building, sharing information and mobilising learning programmes in the region. The SAIDE is also deeply involved in research and studies in distance education theories and practices, as well as in the quality assurance systems in distance education.

There are a number of collaborative ventures across borders and between institutions. For instance, UNESCO and the Ford Foundation had supported a project for the development of materials to be utilised

by DEASA members; another supported by DFID (UK) for sharing of materials, expertise and research between NAMCOL and its counterpart in Botswana; and an arrangement by which students doing UNISA courses are supported by the University of Namibia.

Southern Africa provides a major source for expertise, materials and study opportunities within the region that has developed as a viable alternative to looking beyond African shores for partners. UNISA (after merger of Technikon SA and Vista) and NAMCOL are two other major resource institutions. The reorganised UNISA drawing on its own pioneering experience in distance education and the expertise of TSA in the vocational education and training sector is quite a formidable presence. Quite a few other institutions based in Southern Africa are also active in the rest of Africa. More importantly, South Africa has emerged as a reliable provider of good education to African nationals in both forms, contact and distance. Small countries like Seychelles with a population of about 80,000, and cannot afford the luxury of establishing and running its own universities (because it will not have a viable student strength to sustain its own university though Seychelles ranks higher than Saudi Arabia in the Human Development Index, 2008).

5.4 EAST AFRICA

The East African Community comprises the pre-independent colonies of Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda. Ethiopia is also a part of this Community. All of them had reasonably good record of educational provision till the collapse of their economies in the 1970s. Efforts at economic revival and educational reconstruction in the 1980s and later witnessed vigorous initiatives in rebuilding institutions, strengthening and sustaining school systems including teacher and tertiary education sectors. The region has a good record of application of distance education modes and tools like radio, audio and video cassettes along with print in teacher education and adult basic education and community education. At the higher education level, Makerere University in Uganda is a dual mode institution and Tanzania has its own open university. Kenya is the new home of the African Virtual University that uses ICTs for delivery of its programmes across the continent.

There are numerous examples of collaborative ventures functioning across the region and the continent. These include:

- The African Virtual University draws almost 75% of its content from universities within the continent and has collaboration with several universities in the continent to deliver its programmes;
- Joint development of materials both within the sub-region by the University of Nairobi, the OU of Tanzania; and the International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA)) and beyond (e.g. with UNISA);
- The collaborative training of staff for distance education, with an emphasis on materials design and development (e.g. The IICBA)
- The Virtual Institute for Higher Education in Africa supported by UNESCO in association with several specialised agencies in Africa is an example of cross-regional collaboration in which 12 countries from all regions (excluding the North) are participating primarily to promote initiatives for prevention and eradication of HIV/AIDS through education.

There have been suggestions coming from various forums in the region and outside for transforming the Open University of Tanzania into a central facility for coordination and development of distance education delivery in the region, and to expand the role of IICBA in the development of human capital for distance education in the region. Other areas of possible cooperation among countries within the region that are often talked about are mapping of resources for distance education in the region including ICT facilities, expansion of TVET programmes through distance education and a regional qualifications framework for recognition of qualifications within the region.

5.5 WEST AFRICA

The West Africa region, in many ways, reflects the diversity of the continent. It comprises all the major linguistic formations, the English, French and Portuguese speaking countries. It is home to some of the poorest countries in Africa; Mali and Niger, for example. The region's education systems are also as varied in structures and patterns of organisation as their linguistic background. The region is home to the largest country on the continent (Nigeria) with a large system of education comprising schools and universities. It has a very large teacher education programme (we discussed it in the section on 'Teacher Education') and a major open university that also has a regional resource centre for training in distance education (discussed in the section on 'Tertiary Education'). We have also taken note of the efforts to organise and develop distance learning programmes in the French speaking countries in West Africa.

Cooperation among countries in this region is focused on capacity building. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has set up a Regional Training Institute in Distance and Open Learning, as we had noted earlier, with support from the Commonwealth of Learning. COL has been supporting teacher development initiatives in West Africa (Cameroon, The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) by organising training programmes in course design and curriculum development, eLearning, situated learning design, learner support and audio and video script writing and production. It has been conducting workshops and training programmes for distance education personnel in course writing, instructional design and such other specialised areas.

Similarly, the National Teachers' Institute is a major resource centre for teacher education in the region. The NTI trains teachers from the neighbouring countries like The Gambia, for example, and also offers its reasonably equipped media production facilities both for training and production of media packages for use in other countries in the region.

Another project led by Nigeria and supported by UNESCO-BREDA focuses on teacher training in which other Anglophone countries in the region, namely, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Cameroon are also involved. The training resources for this project are provided by the NTI, Kaduna in Nigeria. Another project, also supported by UNESCO, facilitates exchange of teachers and training materials between The Gambia and Nigeria for the development of capacity of teachers in The Gambia. UNESCO has established a Chair in ODL at the Open University of Nigeria for the benefit of all West Africa.

A major impediment to collaboration in this region is its linguistic diversity. They use one of the three languages; English, French or

Portuguese. The countries need to adopt measures to overcome the language barriers to establish meaningful cooperation. An instrument to bring the countries together in addressing the problems in distance education was the establishment of the West African Distance Education Association (WADEA) in 1998. However, it remained dormant for several years. Efforts have been initiated in the recent past to revive the Association with the Francophone countries also joining them. Meanwhile, the Portuguese speaking countries aligned themselves with Mozambique and Angola.

5.6 CENTRAL AFRICA

The Central Africa region presents a picture of recurring political instability, civil strife, poverty and poor education. The language barriers add to the problems of the countries in the region. Though there is a growing awareness that distance education would be of immense value to the region, the political leadership is yet to address this issue with any degree of seriousness. As late as in early 2004, when the All African Education Ministers met in South Africa to consider how the potential of open learning and distance education could be harnessed to address Africa's development concerns, the Central African leaders were thinking of getting together in 2005 to consider a complete survey of the current distance learning provisions in their countries to assess the availability of learning materials, human resources and infrastructure for distance education. Apparently, the region and its member states lack the political will and leadership to commit themselves to the use of distance education methods to address the grave deficits in their educational provision.

The African Virtual Campus Project of the UNESCO that we discussed earlier in this Unit will be the platform for launching sustainable development of science and technology in 10 member states of this region comprising Burundi, Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sao Tom and Principe and Chad. The principal aim of the AVC project is to train teachers especially in science and hopefully it would provide the necessary impetus to the region to use distance education methods in a big way.

Check Your Progress 1

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

The African Union hopes to develop Africa, reduce poverty, improve health and enhance the quality of life of people on the continent. It has launched initiatives like NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development). Education and ICT development are major components of this initiative. Please describe what distance education can do to further this objective. (Answer in about 150 words.)

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5.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Block, we have made a broad overview of the current status of open learning and distance education in the African continent, the problems and challenges that all the nations in the continent confront and the ways in which they should respond to meet the challenges effectively. We have discussed in detail the many constraints and limitations that stifle the whole continent's efforts to move forward and ensure for its people a life free from hunger and disease. There is a broad measure of consensus that education is the key to economic and social development and the provision of educational opportunities to the impoverished millions in the continent is the only way to make them earn their livelihood, improve their health, reduce poverty and make them responsible citizens in their countries.

Given the enormity of the problem and the urgency of addressing them effectively and quickly, we have come to the conclusion that distance education methods provide the best means to meet the challenges posed by the accumulated deficits in educational provision in every country in the continent. In this context, we have briefly surveyed the efforts that have been made so far, and have also examined why some attempts succeeded while many did not. In this context, we have looked at the initiatives taken by several international agencies and organisations including governments and other agencies at some length, to establish and develop distance education systems in many countries.

As we said during the course of our discussion, it is not our intention to prescribe or recommend a set of measures for the countries to follow. Our purpose is to draw attention to the many problems and challenges that distance education planners and managers in the African continent will have to grapple with, and to help you think about the manner in which you, as a potential distance educator in Africa, would go about in responding to them.

We do hope that what we have presented here will help deepen your understanding of the African situation and will help you meet those challenges substantially, if not fully.

5.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

The only answer to the problems of the African people is the development of their human and social capital without which they cannot participate in the creation and sharing of their national wealth. Centuries of exploitation have left them impoverished; most countries do not still have the social infrastructure on which new development initiatives can be built. Schools, universities and hospitals are not adequate to serve the needs of all the people. Since education is the basic building block on which all social development initiatives have to be built, nearly every country in the continent has to augment opportunities for education at all levels. Conventional means of educational provision cannot meet this challenge. Massive distance education on massive scales is the answer. Africa has to adopt and deploy modern technologies on a large scale to meet this challenge. There is considerable experience within Africa in open learning and distance education methods and practices. This experience

has to be shared and applied across the continent and strengthened with such international collaboration and cooperation that are now available. Ultimately, it is for the national governments to make a decisive beginning and move on the path of development quickly and resolutely.

Acknowledgements

In the preparation of this Block, we have drawn heavily from the several papers presented at the All African Ministers' Conference on Open Learning and Distance Education (AAMCOLDE), held at Cape Town, South Africa on February 1-4, 2004. These papers were posted in the website of the conference www.africaodl.org/conference. Some of the materials we have used were taken from the following presentations:

Asmal, Kader. Prospects, possibilities and perils. Distance education responds to Africa's development.

Christensen, Phil. Is technical and vocational education possible through distance education?

Daniel, John. Distance Education: Is it still relevant in 2004?

Dhanarajan, Gajaraj. Distance Education for Development.

Dzvimbo, Peter. The challenges and potential of distance teaching and Open learning in Africa: Experiences from the African Virtual University
Ensor, Robert. Government information and communication technologies policy to facilitate the development of open, distance and flexible learning.

Glennie, Jenny and Welch, Tessa. Beyond the wish list: strategies for assuring the quality of distance education in South Africa.

Gourley, Brenda. Will bridging the digital divide resolve our education needs?

Isaacs, Shafika. Information and communication technologies applications: What is new and what is working in Africa?

Jegede, O. The National Open University of Nigeria.

Kinyanjui, Peter. NEPAD initiatives in information and communication technologies and associated capacity building.

Limozi, John. Teacher education in Kenya: Improving teaching and learning through open and distance education.

Mohammed, A. Modibbo and Ismaila, Unwaha Y. Training teachers through distance education: The Nigerian Experience.

Moore, Dermot. Sustainability, quality and balance – an integrated systems approach to the delivery of vocational education and training through open and distance learning.

Perlman, Harriet. Challenges in AIDS communication and distance education work across eight countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Lessons from Soul City Regional Project.

Pityana, Barney. Open distance education in Africa: Quality, access and success.

Pontefract, Caroline. Teacher education in Kenya: Improving teaching and learning through open and distance education.

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