*FOSTERING GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT FOR OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INTERNATIONALLY*

2<sup>ND</sup> REGIONAL POLICY FORUM

AFRICA

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Sir John Daniel, Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić & Trudi van Wyk
Commonwealth of Learning


**Sir John Daniel**

Vice-Chancellor of UNISA, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here and to welcome you to the Regional Policy Forum for Africa that we are organising within our Project "*Fostering Governmental Support for Open Educational Resources Internationally",* which is being implemented by the Commonwealth of Learning and UNESCO.

In this joint address I shall present the background to the project and our Senior Consultant, Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, will describe the project itself and our hopes for this meeting.

First, I express our deep gratitude to the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr.Blade Nzimande, for supporting the organization of this conference in South Africa. He had hoped to be with us this morning but has parliamentary business in Cape Town.

South Africa is a world leader in the use of Open Educational Resources and the open licensing of educational materials generally, so this is the ideal country to hold this event.

UNISA has also played an important role in the development of the OER movement and we are most grateful to the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mandla Makhanya for agreeing to host our meeting. Three years ago UNESCO held a World Conference on Higher Education of which my co-presenter, Ms. Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, was the Executive Secretary.

For those who were present one of the memorable moments of the Conference was a robust exchange about Open Educational Resources between two South Africans. Professor Brenda Gourley, then Vice-Chancellor of the UK Open University, explained how the UKOU was making much of its course material available as OER on its OpenLearn website.

However, Professor Barney Pityana, then Principal of UNISA, asked if OER were not potentially a form of neo-colonialism, with the north pushing its intellectual products at the south.

I believe that this was one occasion when flagging a potential problem early helped the world to avoid it.

Three years later, UNISA is hosting this regional forum and under Professor Makhanya's leadership has developed a proactive institutional strategy in favour of OER. Moreover UNISA is one of the anchor partners from six countries working together to develop the concept of an Open Educational Resource University and this statement says it all:

*'Our vision to be "the African university in service of humanity", our locatedness on the African continent and our significant global footprint place us in the unique position to represent African perspectives within the OERten network while displaying local relevance and global consciousness.'*

And UNISA is not alone. The African Virtual University (AVU) has developed an Open Education Resources Portal launched in 2011 which makes available 219 open educational modules in three languages (largely in maths and sciences); developed collaboratively in 10 African countries and the resources have been downloaded by 142 countries, with significant numbers from Brazil and the USA.

May I add how proud I am to be an honorary doctor of UNISA? The ceremony coincided with one of the workshops we held on OER in 2010.

Two years ago at a forum in Cape Town, we heard about the splendid work of OER Africa, with examples of African OER in Health Sciences from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana being used at the University of Michigan in the USA,

and OER in Nursing from Malawi are being used in universities across Africa. At a workshop we held the same year in Bamako, we were delighted to see that similar developments were happening in French-speaking Africa as well.

The Commonwealth of Learning has helped to facilitate the development of OER on this continent through the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, in which eight African countries are active. And we have just finished helping five African countries and Trinidad & Tobago to develop a complete upper secondary curriculum as OER. So OER are being produced, used and re-purposed across Africa.

Moreover, two of the key political declarations on OER were signed in Africa. Over 2,000 individuals and institutions have signed the Cape Town Declaration that was developed in 2007 with support from the Shuttleworth Foundation and Open Society Foundations. In 2009 UNESCO, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophone and the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie convened a meeting which led to *'la Déclaration de Dakar sur les ressources éducatives libres'*.

All this is to say that OER are thriving on this continent. We must not be complacent but it seems clear that Barney Pityana's neo-colonialist concerns of three years ago are not today's reality.

This Regional Policy Forum on OER in Africa has particular significance.

First, it is the first full regional forum of six that will be held within this project.

We held a sub-regional policy forum for Caribbean countries in Barbados last month but that was more of a mini-forum organised in the margins of an ICT in Education Leadership Forum for the Caribbean.

The main focus of that meeting was using the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers and Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration in training teachers to use computers in the schools. And I might add that the Commonwealth Certificate has deep roots in South Africa.

The second reason for the importance of this Regional Policy Forum is simply that Open Educational Resources have great transformative potential and respond to a particular need in Africa.

The third reason is that, as I have said, Africa has already shown admirable leadership in bringing OER into the mainstream, which is what this is all about.

So let me recap the story so far. I take you back to 2002, when UNESCO began its involvement in OER. At the beginning of the century an important trend began to develop.

In 2001, MIT announced its OpenCourseWare programme and began putting some of its course material free of charge on the web, an initiative that sounded too good to be true, coming from such an eminent institution.

As a consequence of the enthusiasm generated by MIT's OpenCourseWare project, which declared that it will post 100 of its courses online free of charge in September 2001 and would make materials from all its courses freely available online by 2007, UNESCO organised a Forum on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries in Paris in July 2002.

The Forum brought together major partners, MIT, the Hewlett Foundation, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and HEIs from the developed and developing worlds to explore this new approach to making teaching materials available and suggest how it might help developing countries to access knowledge and educational resources of quality.

This Forum was a major milestone for the OER movement. The term Open Educational Resources was coined at that meeting to mean educational materials that may be freely accessed, reused, modified and shared.

The participants adopted a Declaration which expressed "their wish to develop together a universal educational resource for the whole of humanity, to be referred to henceforth as Open Educational Resources".

This 2002 Forum on Open Courseware and OER stimulated a series of developments and created a global movement for the open licensing of educational and creative works.

Through an internet discussion forum led by UNESCO's Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) in 2007 an OER community was developed bringing together some 500 individuals from 90 countries to chart the future of OER in education.

In 2010 UNESCO's Communication Sector developed this into the World Summit on the Information Society Platform OER Community, which now has upwards of 1,600 members.

Despite all the enthusiasm and idealism, however, the reach of the OER movement remained limited to the grassroots level. The 2002 Forum at UNESCO, building as it did on the MIT OCW experience, focussed only on higher education. By 2009 it was easy to get the impression that the Open Educational Resources community had become, paradoxically, a somewhat closed group of enthusiastic producers of OER with much less attention to their crucial value, which is their re-use, adaptation and re-purposing.

I invite Stamenka to take up the story from there.

**Ms. Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić**

In 2009 UNESCO held a World Conference on Higher Education, of which I had the honour to be Executive Secretary. It brought together close to 2,000 participants representing higher education worldwide. In its Communiqué it urged governments to give more attention to the roles of ICT and OER. As a result, later that year a resolution was presented at UNESCO's General Conference, requesting it to promote OER further, and arguing that the time was now ripe to bring OER to the attention of politicians.

UNESCO and COL took up this challenge with a project called *Taking OER Beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity for Developing Countries,* led by UNESCO's Zeynep Varoglu and COL's Trudi van Wyk. The project took us through 2010 and 2011 and achieved some useful outcomes.

We held nine workshops on OER for education leaders in Africa and Asia along with three online forums and a policy forum in Paris. The African workshops were held in Cape Town, Windhoek, Bamako and Dar es Salaam. Taken together these workshops reached hundreds of decision makers from many countries, most of whom previously had only a vague idea of OER and their potential.

Following the advice from those meetings UNESCO and COL produced two documents late last year and they are available to you: *A Basic Guide to OER* and *Guidelines for OER in Higher Education*. It is fair to say that both have considerable African input.

All this laid the foundations for the next stage.

The project has now evolved to focus primarily on governments. It is called *Fostering Governmental Support for OER Internationally* and is partially funded by a grant from the Hewlett Foundation.

Larry Lessig, in his seminal book "Free Culture" wrote in 2004: "This movement must begin in the streets. It must recruit a significant number of parents, teachers, librarians, creators, authors, musicians, filmmakers, scientists – all to tell this story in their own words…Once this movement has effect in the streets, it has some hope of having effect in Washington."  And later: "We have a long way to go before the politicians will listen to these ideas and implement these reforms. But that also means we have time to build awareness around the changes that we need."

We are moving the focus to governments because we believe that since Lessig wrote those words we have built 'awareness around the changes that we need'.

The project has three interlinked activities.

First is a survey of all the world's governments, being conducted collaboratively by COL and UNESCO to find out whether they already have, or intend to develop, policies on OER. All the governments represented here will have received survey questionnaires from COL or UNESCO or both.

We have received to date replies to the Survey from 17 African countries (and more are coming in). We now have replies – in some cases from several ministries – from Botswana, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zambia.

We are most grateful to those who have already replied and invite you to send in your reply if you have not done so.

The replies from the 15 countries demonstrate that although none, with the exception of South Africa, have a distinct governmental policy on OER, the majority are active in the OER movement, mainly through institutions and individuals.

In the minds of most respondents OER are closely associated with the introduction of ICT in education or with the development of open and distance learning, or both.

In South Africa, the Department of Higher Education and Training has included the development of an Open and Distance Learning Policy Framework into its strategic plan for 2010 to 2014 which will include OER. A policy decision on sharing OER under the Creative Commons Licence is already included in its Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education Development.

Some countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Seychelles, and Malawi) report that they have joined sub-regional prospective strategies and policies on ODL such as SADC and the Distance Education Association of South Africa (DEASA).

Others mention existing or prospective national documents that mention OER within a wider ICT integration policy (Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Rwanda).

Finally, responding countries that do not have any policies or documents, believe that the government should develop those in the future (Cameroon, Namibia, Niger, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia).

Most of the countries perceive the benefits of OER because of the flexible learning opportunities they offer and their cost-efficiency.

Major obstacles to their use are copyright, sustainability and above all connectivity constraints (the latter even in the case of South Africa).

Two countries (Mozambique and Niger) report lack of active participation in the OER movement due to language problems but also connectivity issues yet express interest in becoming more active because of a growing need for quality educational resources both for students and teachers.

An important positive aspect highlighted throughout the replies is the significance of countries in the region being part of the knowledge production process, underlining the significance of this for developing countries.

The discussion here in Africa is the second of a series. We have just held a mini-forum in January in the Barbados for Caribbean countries. Between now and June we will hold Regional Policy Forums on OER in all remaining UNESCO regions: Latin America in March, Europe and Asia/Pacific in April and the Arab Region in May.

One focus for those meetings – and for the discussion here – will be the third activity, which is the drafting of a Declaration on OER that will be presented to the World OER Congress in Paris in June. A very preliminary text was developed last month after a meeting of the project's International Advisory and Liaison Group. In the Caribbean we did not have the opportunity to discuss the Outline Declaration in detail and yours is the first region to get a chance to develop the draft Declaration further.

You have a copy of the first draft of the Declaration in your packages and we look forward to your feedback in the sessions devoted to it tomorrow.

The aim of the Declaration is to get greater buy-in from governments to the promotion of OER and of open licences generally. OER have great potential for reducing the cost of expanding quality education, so we hope that governments will adopt a Declaration urging that educational materials produced with public funds be made available under open licences. Government backing for open licensing of public educational materials is essential if we are to make OER the normal way of doing business instead of a marginal, donor-driven phenomenon.

This is part of a wider campaign to ensure that the public benefits from what the public has paid for.

It will be a robust campaign and already the battle lines are being drawn. Last month Wikipedia – the huge free encyclopaedia – was shut down for a day to protest against legislation introduced into the US Congress to limit the sharing of educational material.

As Lessig has said "a technology has given us a new freedom". As educational policy makers, we must use this new freedom to expand quality education and OER are one element of that task.

We believe that this joint UNESCO – COL project will support you in getting the concept of open availability of materials into the mainstream of education.

Thank you. We look forward to discussing these ideas with you.