

FOSTERING GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT FOR OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INTERNATIONALLY

5th REGIONAL POLICY FORUM

ASIA-PACIFIC

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Sir John Daniel

Introduction

Representatives of the Governments of UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Region, Sponsors, OER practitioners, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here and to welcome you to the Regional Policy Forum for the Asia-Pacific Region 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. We express our warm gratitude to Dr. Molly Lee, until recently Head of Higher Education in UNESCO's Bangkok office, for allowing us to press her back into service to organise this event. We are also most grateful to all the staff of UNESCO's Bangkok office for their contribution to the excellent arrangements for the meeting.

I shall make a joint presentation with the Senior Consultant to the project, Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, who was in charge of Higher Education at UNESCO Headquarters until last year. I will begin by describing the background to the project and list its three elements. Then Stamenka will share highlights the responses we have received from countries in this region to our survey questionnaire on OER policies and tell you about the other Regional Policy Forums in this series. She will present this as background for the discussions we shall have later on the draft Declaration on OER that governments will be invited to support at the World OER Congress at Paris in June.

The focus of our project is fostering governmental support for OER. The Asia-Pacific is possibly the world's most vibrant region in terms of OER initiatives. However, if our experience in other regions is any guide, these initiatives would be more sustainable if more governments of the region had proactive policies on OER.

Stamenka has done a first analysis of Asia-Pacific Region governments' responses to our survey about OER policies which she will share. Globally we have received replies from over one hundred jurisdictions and they are being analysed in South Africa for presentation at the World OER Congress.

We realise, of course, that in a short presentation it is impossible to do justice to the diversity and richness of this, the largest of UNESCO's regions. It includes the world's largest and smallest population countries, rich countries and poor countries. It is a region that has pioneered new approaches to education.

I think particularly of the mega-universities in several countries of the region: large open universities that enrol many hundreds of thousands of students each and have been creating quality educational materials for their students for many years. This is partly why this region is a leader in the development and use of open educational resources.

Background

Let me begin by setting the stage.

Three years ago UNESCO held a World Conference on Higher Education of which Stamenka 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, the University of South Africa, asked if OER were not potentially a form of neo-colonialism, with the north pushing its intellectual products at the south.

We believe that this was one occasion when flagging a potential problem early helped the world to avoid it. At our Policy Forum on OER in Africa in February we found a vibrant culture of creation, re-use and re-purposing of OER.

Our host for the African Regional Policy Forum in February was none other than UNISA which now has a proactive institutional strategy in favour of OER. 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 downloads in Brazil and the USA.

The flow of OER is now becoming truly multi-directional and global. For example, OER created at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana are used at the University of Michigan. Similarly medical OER from Malawi have found their way into teaching in a number of other countries.

The reason that we are conducting this project and holding these Regional Policy Forums is simply that Open Educational Resources have great transformative potential for education at all levels. OER make a strong statement that education and knowledge are public goods and enable governments to maximise the benefits of their considerable investment in educational materials.

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 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 awareness of the OER movement was mostly 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 mentioned the 2009 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, which brought together close to 2,000 participants representing higher education worldwide. In its Communiqué the Conference 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 bring OER to the attention of politicians.

Taking OER Beyond the OER Community

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, both of whom are here with us today. 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. 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*. Both documents can be downloaded from the COL website.

All this laid the foundations for the next stage.

Focus on Governments

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 wrote in his book "Free Culture" 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 (on governments)" 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, by our collective efforts in using Open Educational Resources, built 'awareness around the changes that we need'.

The project has three interlinked activities.

Global Survey on OER Policies

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 of the countries represented here will have received survey questionnaires from UNESCO and/or COL.

To date have received to date replies to the Survey from 19 countries in the Asia-Pacific region as listed here. In some cases more than one reply was received, from different ministries. We are most grateful to those who have already replied and invite governments who have not replied to do so.

I now hand over to Stamenka to share some highlights from the responses that we received to our survey from this Region and tell you about the other Regional Policy Forums.

Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić

Results for Asia and the Pacific

Sir John noted that we had received responses from 19 countries in the Region.

These were Australia, including a number of Australian states, Brunei Darussalam, China, Fiji, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand (including the Cook Islands), Pakistan, Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Vietnam.

Five of those countries report that they have government policies on OER in place: Australia, China, Korea, Indonesia and Thailand. Most of them refer explicitly to the open licensing of educational materials.

Let me take these countries with policies in turn. Australia places OER in the wider context of its policy of opening up public data and resources through the Government's Open Access and Licensing Framework. In this context a number of Australian states reported on their different approaches to OER.

Moving to China, the Ministry of Education has an OER policy, within which it has developed several OER action plans. Examples involving Chinese universities are the Video Open Courseware project and Open Digital Learning Resources for Continuing Education.

Korea replied, as it had to an earlier survey by the OECD, that it has a governmental policy called the Korean Open Courseware Information Strategy Plan and an ISP for a National OER repository.

Indonesia has made a major commitment to OER as part of its strategy of serving the educational needs of a population of nearly 250 million spread over 17,000 islands and 3 time zones. At the regulatory level there is a Ministerial Regulation on OER, while at the policy level the INHERENT network was established in 2007 for resource sharing in education and research. Its development is all based on the principles of open source and open access.

In its reply Thailand reports on the Ministry of Education's OER policy and lists a number of initiatives explicitly or implicitly promoting OER. Thailand has had a Distance Learning Foundation under the Royal Patronage since 1995, which is now engaging with a strategy on Open Educational Resources (OER).

These are the most established policies and strategies on OER in the region.

However, many other countries have government policies or strategies on OER on the drawing board. Often these strategies are related to wider goals that include the greater use of OER and expanding the availability of textbooks.

Let me give some examples which show how both the motivation and also the strategies for adopting OER differ across the region.

Brunei Darussalam has an OER strategy under a project called e-Hirjah to create digital curriculum resources and wishes to take active part of the knowledge creation process rather than be spoon-fed by others. This resonated with the responses we received from Africa and Latin America where countries cited OERs as an opportunity to be involved in the knowledge society as creators, not merely consumers.

Malaysia is well advanced in its ambitions to become a educational hub and centre of excellence for higher education. A ministerial working group is being set up to develop an OER strategy in that context.

In Iran the leadership in OER is being taken by Payame Noor University, the country's Open University. Mongolia also links its strategy to the establishment of an Open University with UNESCO support, while Sri Lanka's strategy is motivated by the provision of free textbooks.

New Zealand, through its Open Education Resource Foundation, is well known as the hub of planning for the Open Educational Resource University that has brought together, in a consortium, universities from a number of countries. This project is in contact with the Ministry of Education through the tertiary eLearning reference group.

On the other hand Vietnam, like many countries around the world, has a number of OER projects running and is active in the Open CourseWare Consortium. The time is ripe for a government OER plan to make these activities more coherent.

In Uzbekistan an education portal has been set up by the Ministry under a presidential decree and universities are providing access to open digital libraries through their websites. Policy documents that relate to ICTs generally may be extended to embrace OER in future.

Another varied group of countries in Asia and the Pacific see great potential in OER and believe they could be beneficial. They consider, however, that a government plan would be required to make OER part of the educational landscape. This is the case for Kazakhstan, which sees innovative potential in OER but would need government action to exploit that potential. Pakistan also has no strategy yet but sees benefits in making learning materials available to students as OER so that they can modify them according to their needs.

The Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Pacific are a special group of countries in this region. They have no strategies or policy for OER but express a great need for OER because many of them, such as Vanuatu, are made up of scattered islands and need learning materials to expand education.

Samoa reported that the Virtual University of Small States of the Commonwealth has been a major factor in bringing the concept of OER to the Pacific Islands. And Fiji mentioned the Transnational Qualifications Framework that has been developed by the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth as a positive development that may help use of OER in

future. The Cook Islands stress the need for funds to develop OER and the University of the South Pacific is playing a positive role in this regard.

A number of countries cite various obstacles to the use of OER. For some it is connectivity but a larger number consider sustainability, copyright, quality concerns and resistance from publishers to be some of the challenges prevented OER from joining the main stream of education.

The Philippines reports that it is not active in OER because of strong interest groups and weak political support. However, the position of the Philippines is unusual. The majority of countries invest significant amounts of money in producing textbooks for their schools. They are encouraging the creation and dissemination of digital versions of educational materials and, for this reason are interested in OER and positive about the difference they could make.

These varied responses from this Asia and Pacific region resonate strongly with the responses we got from Africa, and Latin America. You could summarise it by saying that although there is a sincere desire to create and share digital resources, relatively few countries have formalised it into an OER policy or initiated systems for the open licensing of educational material that clarify who may use it and how.

The second element of this project is a series of regional policy forums like this one.

Regional Policy Forums

This meeting in Bangkok is the fifth in the series. We held a mini-forum in January in the Barbados for Caribbean countries and a Regional Policy Forum for Africa in February in Pretoria, South Africa.

At the end of last month there was a similar meeting in Rio de Janeiro for Latin American countries. Last week we held a mini-forum for the Europe Region in Cambridge, England as part of the Open CourseWare Consortium Conference. Next month we will hold the last Regional Policy Forums on OER in the series. That will be in Oman for the Arab States.

The Paris Declaration

One focus for those meetings – and for the discussion here in a moment – 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 late last year 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. However, after the Regional Policy Forum in Africa, a second version of the Declaration was produced, incorporating inputs from Africa.

This was substantially revised and simplified at the Regional Forum for Latin America in Rio, which then received minor revisions at the Europe Forum in Cambridge last week. You have this fourth version in your packages.

Following this meeting, inspired by your inputs here and in the next seven days, version 5 of the Declaration will be created and further refined to reflect input from the Arab States at the remaining regional forum in Oman.

The International Advisory and Liaison Group will then make any further revisions before the draft Declaration is presented to governments at the June Congress. The IALG will also act as the Drafting Committee during the Congress.

The World OER Congress

Let me conclude with a word about the World Congress on OER.

The culmination of our project to alert governments to the significance of OER is the World OER Congress in Paris in June. You will hear more about it from Zeynep Varoglu in her presentation tomorrow. It will bring together ministers, officials and experts to assess the state of play with regard to OER.

One important aim is that governments endorse a Declaration encouraging them to support OER and to make educational materials developed with public funds freely available to everyone. There will also be a parallel event where non-governmental bodies can showcase their OER initiatives.

As I noted earlier, there is now an iterative process of refinement of the Declaration. You can comment on the current draft on the Weebly indicated here and in a week's time we shall do a new draft for Oman taking your comments into account.

We also invite you to register for the Congress and its parallel event.

Conclusion

I shall stop there. The aim of this project is to encourage governments to promote OER and the use of open licences. We hope that this project will help both governments and practitioners in the OER movement to integrate the concept of open availability of materials into the mainstream of education. Thank you