Concept Paper

Forum on
The Potential of Flexible Education: Reaching Nomadic Populations
Nairobi, June 2006

Background:

In June 1994, a workshop was organized by the National Commission for Nomadic Education, Nigeria, to exchange ideas on developing distance education programmes for nomads. Following the workshop, a book was published that contained papers discussed during the workshop and which covered topics such as the development of curriculum, appropriate means of distance education delivery, the challenge of developing and delivering distance education, all with respect to nomadic populations.

More than ten years have passed since the workshop, and during this time a number of studies and research activities have been carried out on the provision of education through non-conventional means to nomadic populations. The aim of this workshop is to bring together researchers, education practitioners working with nomadic groups and nomadic people - the recipients themselves, with a view to synthesizing the research, determining successful practices and sharing lessons learnt, all of which will be useful to those working in this area. Within each theme, the potential for, and use of innovative ways of using Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) to further education and training opportunities will also be discussed, with best practices enunciated. The collective knowledge and experience amassed during the workshop should assist towards the realization of EFA and the MDGs.

Nomads in Africa roughly constitute about 6 per cent of the population and are found in about 20 African countries. They are roughly categorized into three major groups based on their mobile lifestyle: the pastoralists, predominant in the twenty African countries and the main focus of nomadic education; the migrant fishermen and the hunter-food gatherers. The education system appears to have failed the nomadic communities. All the education indicators reveal that they are at the bottom of national statistics in enrolment, participation, class-room performance, gender balance, achievement, progression to the next level of education and training and in mortality rates. There is a growing awareness that significant progress has to be made in the provision of services to nomadic people if national targets of the EFA and MDGs are to be met.

Low education levels have contributed to denying nomadic communities the ability to participate in determining their own educational, social and developmental activities, resulting in not having sufficient control over their livelihood. This situation is further compounded because of their mobile lifestyle. For most communities their migration routes cross through various countries and consequently, governments are reluctant to make available scarce resources because they are difficult to reach and govern. The symposium gives decision makers and practitioners a chance to examine the kind of education that would be compatible to nomadic people.
Purpose and Themes:

This symposium will bring together those who work in government departments, international development agencies, NGOs, UN agencies and CBOs that have a special interest or mandate in increasing and improving access to education within nomadic populations. The overarching theme will be to examine the use of non-conventional delivery systems to enhance the provision of education to nomadic populations.

The following themes will be examined with respect to using flexible learning and innovative curriculum:

1. Basic Education
Successful school practices in increasing participation through conventional (boarding and day), and non-conventional schools (mobile schools, Koranic schools, Madrassas and the dugsi). The suitability of current practices in retaining children at school, the language of instruction and the type of facilitator/teachers. Effective adult literacy will also be discussed here.

2. Women and Girls
Design of educational programmes and curriculum suitable for girls, bearing in mind the cultural issues and status of women and girls in nomadic groups (early marriage, fear of being ‘spoilt’, security, etc). Challenges in increasing access to education and training opportunities for nomadic women and girls and the part that ODL can bring to it.

3. Curriculum
Sharing innovative experience in adapting curriculum which is more user-friendly and relevant, solutions in the use of ODL and ICTs to develop appropriate curriculum to achieve the EFA goals.

4. Skill Training
The development and relevance of skill training for nomads for example, practices such as animal management, agricultural science, pasture regeneration, ‘cultural adjustment’ in mathematics, among others. The life skills necessary to live in an ever increasing hostile environment through degradation, encroachment of traditional lands and insecurity.

5. Teacher Education
Innovative teacher education practices for effective delivery of education, the recruitment and training of teachers from nomadic communities and incentives to motivate teachers to stay with mobile nomadic communities. The challenges in harnessing ODL to assist teachers being trained and its usefulness for teaching nomadic communities.

6. Health and Nutrition
Determining health and nutrition needs of nomadic communities and translating these into policy and practice in line with the social and cultural lifestyle of the people and acceptable to them. Understanding the exposure of nomadic groups to HIV/AIDS and the type of assistance given to them.
7. Government Policy
The extent to which government policy can be made to be more supportive towards the nomadic people and significant initiatives which have worked to assist nomads in participating in local decision making which directly affects them.

Outputs/Outcomes
Prior to the symposium, a background paper will be produced and circulated that synthesises some of the current research in each of the five areas indicated above and its effect on education provision to nomadic groups.

Following the symposium, a document will be available which will include the pre-symposium synthesis paper, the papers presented and plenary speeches, and the proceedings including the main points and recommendations arising from discussion groups.

Outcomes from the symposium should include the establishment of some form of networking so that those involved in nomadic education can communicate about, and work together on initiatives targeting these groups.

Results
It is anticipated that long term results that occur because of this symposium will include increased access and retention to education and training opportunities by nomadic populations, and especially women and children. It is envisaged that this will happen through a variety of ways.

For example, it is hoped that through the papers presented and the experiences shared, that viable alternatives to conventional education will emerge that can be adapted and used in similar situations and circumstances. Similarly, it is hoped that materials developed, best practices and lessons learned through earlier initiatives can save time and effort on the parts of those exploring new and innovative approaches to the delivery of education.

Finally, new areas for research studies and collaborative activities should emerge during the proceedings and the implementation of these will assist in the furtherance of improving access to quality education and training activities through non-conventional means.

Logistics
The symposium will span approximately four days during which a variety of activities will take place such as plenary sessions, presentations on research findings, small group deliberations and discussions, demonstration/poster sessions, and networking. It is the intention to limit the number of participants to about fifty. The proceedings, including the papers, will be in English only and no facilities will be provided for translations.