

2005 Education for All Global Monitoring Report

Out of School Provision for Children and Adolescents



Distance Education in Somalia: The SOMDEL project

**Study undertaken by IRFOL
Dr Alicia Fentiman**

**Distance Learning
and
Improving the Quality of Education**

Contents

	Page
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Minorities and Socially Excluded Groups	1
1.2 Orphans and Vulnerable Children	1
1.3 Distance Education for Basic Learning Needs	2
2.0 Examples of Effective and Long Term Responses	2
2.1 The Andhra Pradesh State Open School Society	3
2.2 The National Institute of Open School, India	6
2.3 IRI for Out of School Audiences: Dominican Republic	7
2.4 Nomadic Populations	7
3.0 Advantages of Distance Learning in Conflict	7
3.1 Distance Education in Conflict Situations	8
3.2 The SOMDEL Project: a Case Study	10
4.0 Potential for Distance Education for Severely Marginalised and Disadvantaged Groups	11
4.1 The Potential for Distance Education for Minorities	11
4.2 The Potential for Distance Education in Conflict Situations	11
4.3 AIDs Orphans and Distance Education	12
4.4 Radio: An Inclusive Mode of Delivery	14
4.5 Distance Education and the Future	14
References	16
Tables	
Table 1 Rural and Urban Literacy Rates in Andhra Pradesh	3
Table 2 Number of Learners in AP by Programme and Year	5
Table 3 Distance Education Programmes in Conflict	9
Figures	
Figure 1 APOSS results	5
Figure 2 IRI learners by Gender and Grade	13

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AET	Africa Educational Trust
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AP	Andhra Pradesh
APOSS	Andhra Pradesh State Open School Society
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
COVA	Confederation of Voluntary Associations
DE	Distance Education
EBS	Educational Broadcasting
EDC	Education Development Center
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IDP	Internally Displaced Populations
IRFOL	International Research Foundation for Open Learning
IRI	Interactive Radio Instruction
ITDA	Integrated Tribal Development Agency
NIOS	National Institute of Open Schooling
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OBE	Open Basic Education
ODE	Open and Distance Learning
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
SOMDEL	Somalia Distance Education and Literacy Project

Out of School Provision for Children and Adolescents

1.0 Introduction

It is estimated that over 104 million children of school-age are out of school (UNESCO, 2003), subsequently because they never enrolled or dropped out. The reasons for exclusion from primary education are well documented and include economic, social and cultural barriers, ill health, religion, inaccessibility, political conflict and gender discrimination. Conventional models of school-based education are insufficient to meet the demand for basic education for certain categories of “out-of-school children”.¹

Although we would argue that any child of school age who is not in school is disadvantaged, there are certain categories of socially excluded groups and minorities who are defined as severely disadvantaged and vulnerable. In the report some words are used which may have different meanings within different contexts. The following descriptors help to clarify how these terms are used throughout.

1.1 Minorities and socially excluded groups

Exclusion from primary education² takes many forms. Children may be disadvantaged due to their class or caste or because they belong to an ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious minority. Migrant families and nomadic communities face specific difficulties. In multi-language societies, the choice of language for initial instruction may privilege more numerous or more powerful groups and discriminate against minorities.

1.2 Orphans and vulnerable children (ovcs)

Vulnerable children are those who belong to high-risk groups who lack access to basic social amenities or facilities (Subbarao et al 2001). Major sources of vulnerability include HIV/AIDS and conflict.

HIV/AIDS has increased the group of vulnerable children which includes: AIDS orphans, children infected with HIV, pre-orphans caring for terminally sick parents with AIDS, children in households fostering orphans, and children with disabilities. It is estimated that 15.6 million children under 15 have already lost their mother or both parents to AIDS or other causes. It is estimated that by 2010, there will be 24.3 million maternal and double orphans. If children who have lost their father are also included, the global total will be 44 million by 2010 (UNAIDS, 2003).

¹ Out-of-school children are defined here as children in the official school-age range who are not enrolled in school.

² Primary education is sometimes called elementary education. Refers to educational programmes normally designed on a unit or project basis to give pupils a basic education in reading, writing, and mathematics and an elementary understanding of subjects such as history, geography, natural science, social science, art and music. In some cases religious instruction is also featured.

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Conflict has also had a devastating impact on children's education. As a result of conflict, it is estimated that more than 60 million children and adolescents have been displaced in the past decade by humanitarian emergencies, and that at any one time 6 million children worldwide are refugees from conflict.

Also included amongst the most vulnerable and seriously disadvantaged are the internationally recognised categories of street children, children exposed to strenuous labour, commercial sex workers and child soldiers.

1.3 Distance education for Basic Learning Needs

Distance education is an educational process in which a significant proportion of teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner. From the outset, we would argue that distance education cannot be a full substitute or replacement for formal primary education. The number of years of primary education varies from country to country but the norm is usually six to eight years of schooling. There are few examples of the use of distance education at the primary level for out-of-school children because the standard view is that "young children need some type of formal institution like school if they are to learn an orthodox basic curriculum effectively" (Perraton 1982: 10). However, as described above, certain populations of severely disadvantaged and vulnerable children are not being served by conventional schooling. This report illustrates some promising examples of the current use of distance education catering to specific groups in developing countries; it does not include alternative models of basic education which do **not** use a distance education component nor does it include programmes of adult literacy. It attempts to show the best applications of distance education to provide basic learning needs in difficult situations.

Through selected illustrative examples we show that distance education may be an effective mode in reaching out to some of the most marginalised and excluded, but that a key factor is the careful tailoring of the distance education approach to fit the specific context under consideration.

2.0 Citing examples, explore the circumstances in which distance education is proving to be an effective and long term response to meeting the basic learning needs of severely disadvantaged children and adolescents who have failed to benefit from a full primary school education.

Promising examples of the use of distance education to reach some of the most the marginalised and severely disadvantaged are described below in the following case studies.

2.1 The Andhra Pradesh State Open School Society, India

India has a very large number of out-of-school children. The out-of-school strategies focus on two distinct groups:

- Children and adolescents who dropped out of primary school and did not complete a full primary education. It is estimated that nearly half the children who enrol in Grade 1 drop out before reaching Grade 5 and two-thirds of the children drop out before reaching Grade 8 (Mukhopadhyay, 1995, p.29). High drop out rates compound the problem of illiteracy.
- Children and adolescents who never enrolled in primary school.

One of the longest running programmes is found in the state of Andhra Pradesh (AP). Andhra Pradesh is fifth largest state in southern India with a population over 75 million, and it is comprised of 23 districts. The literacy rates have increased steadily over the past four decades, but AP still lags behind as an “educationally backward state with 44.09% literacy (1991 Census). The low rate of increase in adult literacy and the high number of un-enrolled children in primary school are growing concerns for the state Educational statistics estimate that 1,447,907 (13.72% of the total population) children aged 6-11 are not in school and that 2,055,418 (51.18 %) aged 11-13 are not in school (Punetha, 2000).

The Andhra Pradesh State Open School Society (APOSS) provides primary equivalence education to drop outs, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, prisoners, Muslim girls, and the disabled. Significantly, it caters to both drop-outs and those who never enrolled. The APOSS was originally established to cope with the alarming number of children who dropped out of primary school especially those from minority groups such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

In efforts to provide a second chance of education to drop-out children an alternative open learning system was devised. The scheme was opened to all but with preference for minority groups and rural villagers (Krishnamacharyulu, 1994). The following table illustrates the literacy rates in AP and highlights the most disadvantaged.

Table 1. Rural and Urban Literacy Rates in Andhra Pradesh (1991 Census)

	Rural Literacy Rates			Urban Literacy Rates			All		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
All	47.28	23.92	35.74	75.81	56.41	66.32	55.13	32.72	44.09
SC	37.02	16.18	26.79	64.87	43.03	54.09	41.88	20.91	31.58
ST	23.26	7.29	15.44	48.18	26.64	37.48	25.25	8.67	17.15

(sc= scheduled castes; st=scheduled tribes)

The Andhra Pradesh State Open School was founded in 1991 as an autonomous organisation with a pilot scheme of 500 centres in 5 districts. Currently, there are 4,700 centres in all 23 districts of the state and over 100,000 learners. The objectives of the APOSS are threefold:

1. To provide sound, relevant education at the school age stage through an open learning system, to prioritised groups.
2. To provide opportunities to drop-out children at the school stage, to rejoin the main stream of education and to equip them with competencies and qualifications to become competent and successful citizens.
3. To identify and promote standards of learning in the distance education system and open school system which will maintain standards of equivalence (minimum learning outcomes) with the formal system of education while retaining its own distinct character.

Special Features of the APOSS include:

- Study at one's own pace
- Trimester system of learning (9 modules)
- Condensed curriculum offering 3 courses: Language, Mathematics, and Environmental Studies in
- Open to learners 12 years +³
- Flexible face-to-face instruction 2-3 times per week depending on the learners availability (i.e. night classes for those who are working)
- Contact classes (compulsory teaching by teacher counsellors three times per year) followed by examinations
- Instruction through a regional language – the choice is between Telugu or Urdu
- Fees paid by AP State government (except for exam entry fee of 10 rupees)
- Teacher counsellors are local community members and trained in teaching
- Remuneration paid to the teacher counsellors based on the number of students who take the examination.

Currently, there are four programmes offered. They are described as follows:

1. Open Basic Education – equivalent to Class III and IV of Primary School

Those who have completed non-formal literacy classes
Drop-outs of Primary Classes III and IV

2. Stage II – equivalent to Class VI

Those who passed Class V and not continuing formal education
Dropouts of Class VI
Those who passed Phase I of Non-formal Education

3. Stage III – equivalent to Class VII ⁴

³ APOSS learners have to be twelve years or more to enrol.

⁴ Students enrolled in the formal school take a common board exam which is compulsory; many fail the exam and Stage III of APOSS offers a second chance to these students.

Those who passed Class VI and not continuing formal education
 Dropouts of Class VII
 Those who Passed Stage I of APOSS or Phase II of NFE

4. Stage IV- equivalent to Class VIII

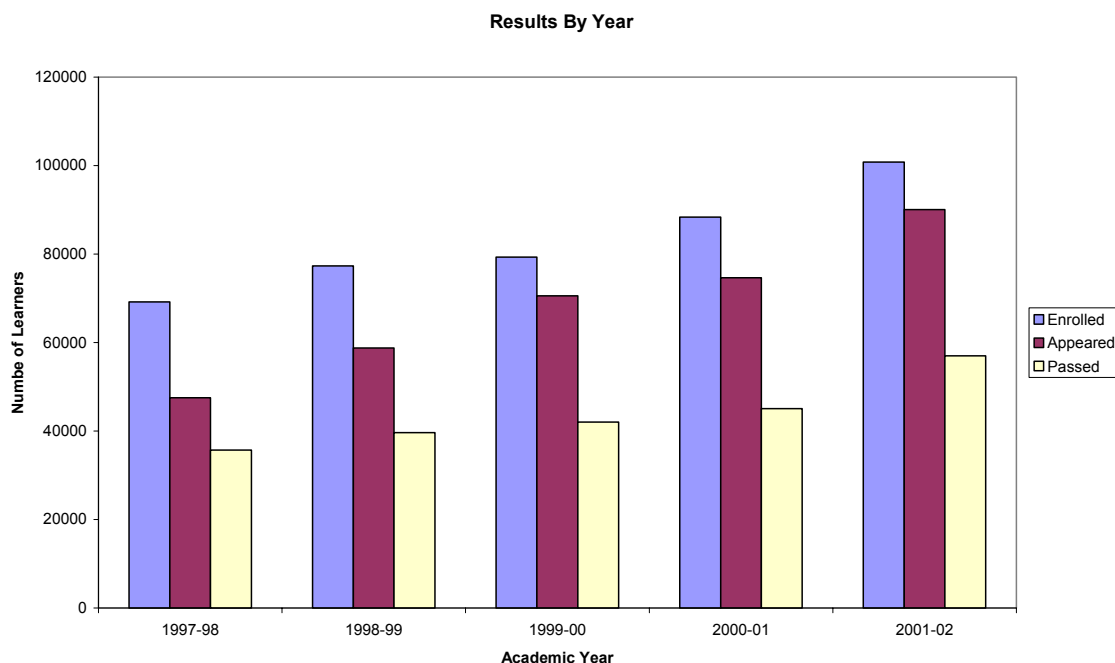
Those who passed Class VII and not continue formal education
 Drop-outs of Class VIII

Table two shows the number of learners enrolled for the three of the programmes⁵ and the figure below shows the overall completion figures by year.

Table 2: Number of Learners by Programme and Year

	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-2002
Open Basic	10921	12008	13342	11054	14871
Stage II	40925	42322	42045	57801	56156
Stage III	28250	35002	37252	38552	44662

Figure 1



The APOSS works with volunteer organisations and non governmental organisations to target specific, cultural groups. For example, APOSS set up a partnership with the COVA Foundation, which is a network of community based organisations and voluntary associations. In this particular example, a network was established to provide access and education for Muslims. State educational statistics have shown that a significant number

⁵ We do not have data on the results from Stage IV.

of Muslim girls drop out of school. As a result, APOSS and the COVA foundation have established 56 Urdu schools to assist in the education of Muslim females. Many of the targeted learners did not complete their primary education, so community volunteers assist with the programme to encourage them to continue. This is based on an open schooling methodology.

The COVA foundation in conjunction with the APOSS developed a bridge course which aims to get girls of school-age back into the mainstream. Those females who are over-age are encouraged to continue their education through open and distance learning. The programme is taught in Urdu. Most of the Urdu centres are located in Hyderabad.

APOSS also works with the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) to target tribal children. They use the open school curriculum and set up residential schools to encourage children from the remote forest areas to become educated. The accommodation, food and teaching are funded by the State. In addition, there are special schools to educate child labourers, the disabled, and prisoners.

Dependent on the age of the learner the APOSS has two potential types of learners – Firstly, those who dropped out of formal primary school and use the course as a “bridge course”, as a route back into formal/conventional education and secondly, as a course for those who will never go to the formal school because of accessibility, age, disability, and cultural obstacles. The APOSS is one of the few examples in distance education to offer primary equivalence education within four programmes.

2.2 The National Institute of Open Schooling: A Case Study

Another example of a distance education institution is the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) previously known as the National Open School (NOS). It is an autonomous institution which was established in 1989 to extend education to adults and children out of school using distance education methodology. It creates its own syllabus and conducts its own examinations. It charges fees to its learners. Initially, it started offering courses at secondary, senior secondary and vocational courses, and recently started an open basic education course in collaboration with the National Literacy Mission. This course is offered in Hindi and English medium. Enrolment data show that over 500,000 learners are registered with NIOS.

NIOS works in collaboration with APOSS. For example, the regional office of NIOS in Andhra Pradesh offers secondary and senior secondary courses which provide a continuation of education through a distance education methodology. NIOS is very proactive and is currently exploring the potential use of open schooling methodologies for working with some of India’s most vulnerable and disadvantaged children such as street children, child labourers, and the disabled.⁶

⁶ See: *Educating Street Children through Open Schooling Methodologies: Report of the International Conference on Models for Educating Street Children using Open Schooling Methodologies* (2000) National Open School and Commonwealth of Learning.

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The APOSS and the National Open School illustrate two long term programmes to address specific target populations. Increasing enrolments and growing demand are indicators of their success.

Although India has one of the largest elementary (primary) educational systems in the world, it also possesses the world's largest number of out-of-school children (22% of the global total) and adult illiterates (30% of the global total). The government of India has been very proactive to acknowledge the significant number of out-of-school children and adults and has been very proactive in supporting strategies to decrease the numbers.

2.3 IRI for Out of School Audiences: A Case Study from Dominican Republic

IRI programmes show that they can address systemic problems such as equity, access, internal efficiency and cost-effectiveness (Leigh and Cash, 1999).

A well documented example is the IRI programme in the Dominican Republic. The aim of the programme was to provide a low cost alternative to traditional schooling (Helwig et al., 1999). The programme, named Radio Assisted Community Basic Education (RADECO) was implemented in the south-western region of the Dominican Republic in 1981, where at that time, in isolated mountains, one-fifth of the children of primary school age were deprived of education by poverty and distance. The students received non-formal short lessons in Mathematics and Spanish that raised their test scores to approximately the same level as students in formal schools.

2.4 Nomadic Populations

For other minority groups such as nomadic populations distance education has had a limited success. Despite general recognition and exhortation that DE has great potential for nomadic education, the majority of what has been implemented has been unsupported open broadcasting or face-to-face teaching. The majority of the learning environments have been fixed rather than mobile schools (Pennells and Ezemoah: 2000).

3.0 Is there evidence to suggest that distance learning offers significant educational advantages and cost benefits over more traditional teaching and learning approaches in meeting the learning needs of a diversity of groups of young people and especially those who live in conflict situations?

Most primary school-age children in war affected areas are not in school and have no realistic hope of enrolling in one. Forced migrant children in refugee camps and internally displaced population (IDP) settlements have the best chance of going to school. Of these two, support for refugee schooling is far greater than anything available for internally displaced children. Children not living in camps, whether within their own countries or in an asylum country, are not likely to be attending formal schools (Sommers, M. 2002).

3.1 Distance Education in Conflict Situations

The little evidence that we do have is summarised in Table 3 below. Although evidence is growing of the educational advantages of distance learning, data are scarce on the cost benefits over more traditional teaching modes. As Brophy illustrates, the use of distance education in conflict situations changed from the 1980s “Southern Africa Approach” which included the South African Extension Unit (SAEU), the Namibian Extension Unit (NEU) and the Mozambican Open Learning Unit (MOLU). This cluster focused on providing secondary education; placed an emphasis on English, Mathematics and Science; linked with a liberation movement and targeted beneficiaries living in settlements and camps. The 1990s approach aimed more widely at displaced populations and changed direction in the following ways:

- They place more emphasis on the use of radio
- They focus on primary and basic education rather than secondary education
- They target children in their own homes as well as those attending classes
- Most of them place little reliance on face-to-face teaching

Table 3: Distance Education Programmes in Conflict Situations

Programme	Target group	Media	Agency	Comments
REACH- Radio Education for Afghan children (2001)	Children aged 6-16 yrs	Radio Interactive radio broadcasting	BBC Afghan Education Unit	Intended for out of school children but also being used in schools in refugee camps to complement conventional classroom teaching
Children's Radio Service: (2001) Persian, Pashto, Nepali, Somali and Portuguese and Azeri.	Children in refugee camps and those unable to get to school	Radio broadcasts 10 15-minute broadcasts in each of the six languages	BBC World Service	Support materials for those attending schools.
The Albanian Children's Radio Club BBC Per Semaye 1999	Children in refugee camps in transition before moving back home from the refugee camps in Albania and Macedonia	Daily 15 minute broadcasts used a "Magazine" format	BBC World Service	
Interactive Radio Instruction for Somalis (IRIS) 2002	Multi-aged population who are at the beginning of the cycle of basic education		EDC in collaboration with the Regional Bureau of Education in Ethiopia	Targeted at children in schools
SOMDEL- Somali Distance Education for literacy	Basic education for young men and women and open to young people who cannot attend normal schools	Three way approach using radio broadcasts, print materials, and face-to-face instruction Weekly 30 minute radio programmes	Africa Educational Trust and the BBC World Service Trust	Evaluation has been completed. Over 10,000 registered learners.

(Source: Brophy, M., 2002)

Programmes aimed at refugees are often targeting both children of school age as well as over-age adolescents and adults who missed out on primary education. The following case study from Somalia illustrates the potential of distance education in addressing the educational needs for school-age children and over-age adults within conflict situations.

3.2 The SOMDEL Project: A Case Study

SOMDEL

One of the most innovative distance educational projects aimed at meeting the needs of a diversity of groups of young people in conflict situations is the SOMDEL project – the Somalia Distance Education and Literacy programme – Life Skills Approach. The aim of the project is to provide basic literacy, numeracy and life skills to out-of-school children and adults who missed out or were denied access to conventional schooling. Because of the political conflict, a whole generation of people has been excluded from education. The project is known locally in Somali as *Macallinka Raddiya* (Radio teacher). It consists of a three way approach which combines radio, print and face-to-face teaching. Each week on Thursday evenings at 5.30, a thirty minute broadcast is aired after the BBC World Service News. The main aims of the programme are:

- ▶ To ensure that people in difficult circumstances, particularly girls, have access to literacy, numeracy and life skills.
- ▶ To reach thousands of disadvantaged children, young men and women.
- ▶ To improve the capacity in villages and towns to deliver local literacy and numeracy skills
- ▶ To develop distance teaching and audio (broadcast) materials
- ▶ To improve the understanding, awareness and discussion of health, human rights and environmental issues.

An external evaluation of the pilot programme conducted in February 2003 revealed the following:

- 10,908 learners have enrolled in the SOMDEL programme in 351 SOMDEL classes throughout Somaliland, Puntland and southern Somalia (70% were female)
- The majority of registered learners are female and over-age (older than school age)
- SOMDEL reaches areas throughout Somaliland, Puntland and Somalia where there are no other forms of educational delivery
- SOMDEL provides a beneficial service to children of school-age who do not have access to formal schools. In Somaliland at least 2 remote villages in each region are targeted for SOMDEL classes. Data show that 363 “school-age” children are currently enrolled.
- Radio is a powerful communication and educational tool.

- SOMDEL teachers volunteer to “help their people” and see it as “their duty” to help their country become literate.
- The SOMDEL programme is an all-inclusive approach - it reaches a wide audience – not only those learners who are registered for the course but also for those listeners who can access the programmes via radio.
- The content of the life skills messages are culturally specific and transmit knowledge and information about important health, environment, and human rights issues.

(Fentiman, 2003)

4.0 From available evidence where does the greatest potential lie in utilising distance education for severely disadvantaged and marginalised groups?

4.1 The Potential for Distance Education for Minorities

The examples given show how distance education is being used in two very different situations. The APOSS model shows how distance education is used to work with minorities and excluded populations at primary level equivalence. It works because it is culturally and linguistically relevant to the local needs of distinct groups, and it is cost-effective. It targets drop-outs, child labourers, the disabled, tribal and scheduled castes and prisoners. This model could be applied in other situations where a large number of school-age children either dropped out or never enrolled in school. It offers two possibilities:

1. For those children who are still of school age, it shows great potential for distance education to aid in providing a “bridge” course, with the eventual aim of mainstreaming the children back into conventional or formal schooling.
2. For those who are over-age or for those who cannot go to conventional schools because of economic or cultural constraints, distance education provides a longer term solution to provide vocational opportunities or continuation of formal curricula through Open and Distance Learning in a flexible way, with the NIOS, India providing a strong working example. There is also a growing number of successful open school models at the junior and senior secondary level (see Fentiman et al. 2004) which provides access to those who cannot find a place in secondary school or for those who need to combine work and/or other responsibilities with their studies. It is proven to be a complementary and alternative approach.

4.2 The Potential for Distance Education in Conflict Situations

The second example is the growing potential of distance education in conflict situations. The SOMDEL case study illustrates an immediate response to provide basic learning needs by employing a flexible approach. Radio is very effective especially in the Somali case because of cultural and linguistic homogeneity.

4.3 AIDs Orphans and Distance Education

More than 40 million children in 34 developing nations will be likely to have lost one or both parents by 2010. Over the past decade, the number of African children out-of-school increased by 17% (UNESCO, 2003-4). There is a growing body of evidence which shows the negative impact of orphanhood on primary school enrolment. Recent reports reveal substantial differences in school enrolment according to the survival status of children's parents (Kelly, 2000; UNAIDS, UNICEF and USAID, 2002; Ainsworth and Filmer, 2002).

A promising example which is a response to the impact of the AIDS pandemic on primary education is the use of Interactive Radio Instruction in Zambia. The situation is such that there are "schools without teachers, orphans without school fees, communities without functioning schools (Laflin, 2001)." Although IRI has been used extensively in the past (Dock and Helwig, 1999), it is now being used to expand access and equity for out-of-school Zambian audiences (especially for AIDS orphans). The Government recognises that EFA targets cannot be reached if basic education is only delivered through conventional basic schools. The following case study describes this innovative programme.

Learning at Taonga Market: Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) - Zambia

The IRI programme targets out of school children in AIDS-affected areas in Zambia. In an innovative project the Educational Broadcasting Service (EBS) of the Zambian Ministry of Education is working with the Education Development Center's Multichannel Learning Center (MCL) to develop community learning centres.

The initial programme was piloted in 2000 in twenty two centres covering Lusaka (urban), Chongwe rural and Chikuni in Southern Province. The initial enrolment was 900 school-age children. One hundred Grade One IRI programmes covering the curriculum in literacy, numeracy, and life skills were produced. The programme was extended in 2001 and has currently expanded throughout the country and has increased to 516 centres with 22,733 learners.

The key objectives of the programme are:

- ▶ To promote community participation in provision of Education
- ▶ To facilitate and provide education to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups
- ▶ To increase access to education for all Zambians (IRI allows both those of school age and over-age to access education)

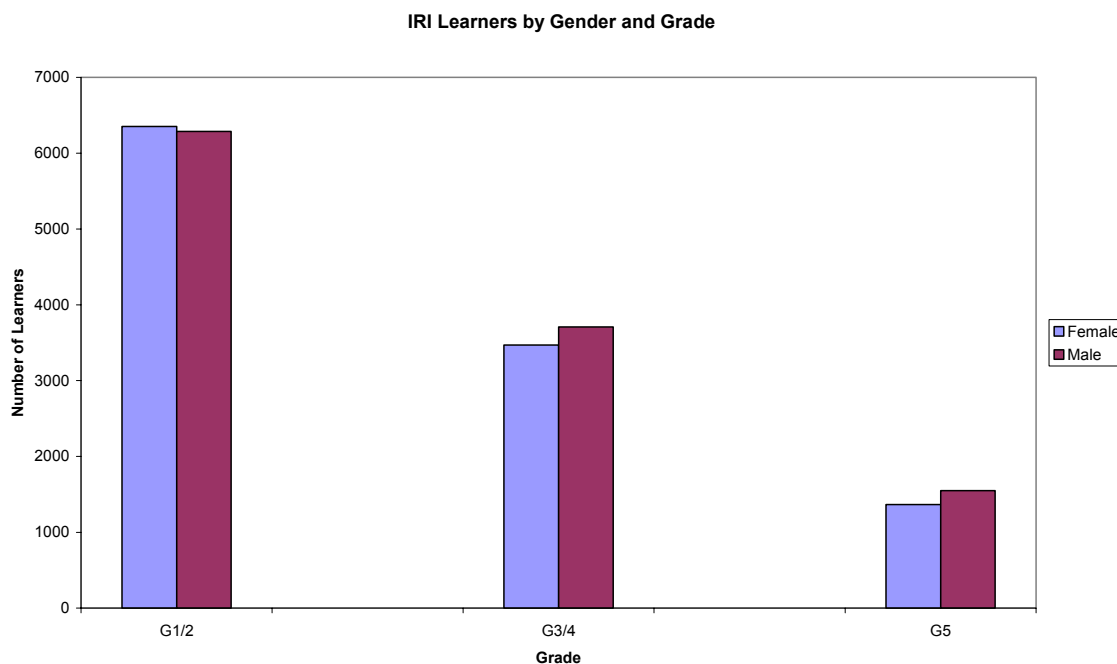
EBS has produced 855 programmes for Grades 1-5. Subjects include mathematics and language, as well as science, social studies and life skills. The programmes are based on the national curriculum but tailored for radio.

Children in Grade 1 learn to read and write in one of the seven local languages according to Ministry of Education policy.

This project provides a promising example of bringing the school to the people (community). The communities are key stakeholders and are responsible for identifying mentors and for providing a centre to conduct lessons and to keep materials and supplies safe.

The programme described above illustrates new strategies for the education of orphans, for children from AIDS affected areas and for children who are themselves HIV positive. In Zambia thousands of orphans are being reached through IRI- “where community support is strong, the model proves attractive because costs are relatively low compared to conventional school models, students learn effectively from this model of radio instruction, and attendance is sustained” (Hepburn, 2001). The following table shows the number of learners by gender and grade.

Figure 2: IRI Learners



As Kelly remarks “a critical re-examination of what education is all about and how it can best be delivered requires a new look at education and new understanding.” As of now, there is not a large body of experience that documents solutions to the problems of access for AIDS orphans to education (Bundy, 2002). The Zambia case study shows that distance education has the potential to deliver flexible teaching, but it must also ensure

high quality. More research and evaluative work are needed to measure the effectiveness. If the project proves successful, this model could be adapted in other countries.

4.4 Radio: The Most Inclusive Mode of Delivery

The above examples show that radio is the most inclusive mode of delivery in distance education programmes in developing countries. We have seen how radio is being used in a diversity of situations for a variety of marginalised and excluded populations.

For example, the SOMDEL case study illustrates how radio is successfully being used by Somalians in Somalia as well as for Somali speakers in refugee camps in neighbouring countries. A significant factors attributed to the large scale of the programme include the homogeneity of the culture and language. The radio broadcasts in form of “edutainment” make learning a fun and informative experience. They cater to a wide range of people and with different needs and aspirations. The broadcasts can reach parts of Somalia where conflict and fighting prevent other forms of educational delivery. The radio teacher is a successful initiative because it provides access to education to some of the most marginalised and excluded from society and it raises the public consciousness on very important themes that are crucial to development. Radio allows both registered learners for the distance education programme as well as the general community to listen; anyone who has a radio can tune in. (Those who have registered for the course may benefit more because they have face-to-face instruction as well as print material to accompany the broadcasts). Audio tapes are also very effective because radio broadcasts can be taped and then played at the learners’ convenience. The flexible nature of the course encourage participation by some of the most marginalised, especially women.

More generally, radios are fairly cheap, accessible and, in most cases, mobile. In situations such as conflict and amongst nomadic populations, “moveable” property is pertinent to peripatic lifestyles.

Radio can be cost-effective and enhance distance education programmes much more so than television or computers. This is especially true in many developing countries where electricity is intermittent. Radio is an inclusive mode of delivery for the masses.

4.5 Distance Education and the Future

In the past out-of-school alternatives designed for children have struggled to attain economic or social credibility (Perraton: 1999). However, as illustrated in the above examples, in certain situations and for certain marginalised and disadvantaged groups out-of-school alternatives employing distance education may be the only chance for many children and adolescents to be given the opportunity to acquire basic learning skills.

Promising examples of distance education at the primary level are scarce and many of the alternative strategies have not been evaluated. As Yates points out “...we have no confirmed body of opinion or research which unequivocally claims Open Distance

Education to be an equaliser or opener of educational opportunity, particularly for marginal groups.” (Yates 2000:244).

Many distance education programmes offering basic learning needs target not only children of school-age but also entire communities irrespective of age. This inclusive community involvement and participation allows greater support and ownership for the project. This is a key element for the sustainability of the programme.

What is known, is that alternative and flexible modes of learning have the potential to provide basic learning needs to the escalating numbers of out-of-school populations exacerbated by the AIDS pandemic and conflict situations. They may not be a long-term solution, but in the short term, they appear to be effective within limited parameters such as increasing the numbers of literate, numerate and informed children and adolescents amongst vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

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