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The Millennium Development Goals; Education and ICT

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**The Millennium Development Goals; Education and ICT**

Dr. Chris Smith & Dr. Maria Rodriguez-Yborra

**Abstract**

As part of the UK government’s strategy to contribute to achieving the Millenium Development Goals, MDGs, a range of initiatives were launched, largely in the wake of the G8 summit at Gleneagles in 2005. One specific area which the UK was keen to develop, was establishing meaningful partnerships between UK educational institutions (mainly in HE) and equivalent institutions in developing countries. One such initiative, Developing Partnerships in Higher Education (DelPHE), provides funding to establish such partnerships.

*The overall goal of DelPHE is to enable HEIs to act as catalysts for poverty reduction and sustainable development. DelPHE aims to achieve this by building and strengthening the capacity of HEIs to contribute towards the MDGs and promote science and technology related knowledge and skills.*

[www.britishcouncil.org/learning-delphe.htm](http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-delphe.htm)

Few people could argue the logic that puts education in the forefront against the fight for poverty reduction, however, the rhetoric is not always matched by sound educational initiatives. There are also differences in opinion as to exactly how education can contribute. For example Bhola (2006 p242) argues: “While formal education – ultimately – contributes to both the modernization and democratization of societies, its effects on poverty reduction are indirect, diffused, and distant.” This may be because education can rarely be seen to offer a quick fix. He goes on to state: “For poverty reduction now, priority must be given to adult education (Ibid).” Whilst the DelPHE initiative targets Africa and Asia, a separate initiative, England Africa Partnerships (EAP), as the name suggests, concentrates on Africa. The main focus is on Southern African countries, and in particular South Africa.

*The aim of the scheme is to help strengthen capacity in higher education in Africa, by funding partnership and collaboration between England and sub-Saharan Africa.*

[www.britishcouncil.org-eap.htm](http://www.britishcouncil.org-eap.htm)

With both of these initiatives grounded in HE, this may give scope to support Bhola’s stance. However this paper is not solely concerned with the target learners, nor necessarily with the projects themselves – it is also concerned with the project delivery mechanisms and application of the technologies used. Whilst the above initiatives have attracted a number of bids related to ICT, including various eLearning applications, they are not exclusively focused on such projects. Indeed we submitted a bid ourselves for a project in Botswana but it was rejected. However, yet another
initiative, and central to this paper, is very much focused on such technology. Towards the end of 2006, The Commonwealth Scholarships Commission (CSC) invited bids for funding distance learning scholarships, at Masters level, in developing countries. It had always been the UoB’s intention to offer a Masters programme in Zambia, but more or less based on our B.Ed. model. The question was whether such a programme could be classed as a ‘distance’ programme to qualify? In any event, as Daniel, (in Harry, 2000 p292) states: “there is a conceptual fuzziness that is endemic in open and distance learning...” In the interests of programme development and making effective use of ICTs, a ‘mixed economy’ model where a combination of approaches would be used was decided upon.

Preliminary enquiries with the CSC indicated that such a ‘blended’ approach could be considered under these proposals. Thus Bolton submitted a proposal which was accepted by the commission. Under the proposal the CSC have funded a cohort of 18 distance learning scholarships in Zambia for Bolton’s M.Ed (TVE). With the programme now up and running, this paper traces some of the issues and implications involved in mounting such an ambitious programme.

References:


Developing Partnerships in Higher Education (DelPHE) http://www.acu.ac.uk/key_strengths/delphe/about


The British Council and DelPHE www.britishcouncil.org/learning-delphe.htm

The British Council and Sub-Saharan Africa www.britishcouncil.org-eap.htm


UNESCO / WSIS (2005), World Summit on the Information Society, C4, Capacity Building www.unesco.org/wsisdirectory