

Building Capacity for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in West Africa Sub-region: The Pivotal Role of RETRIDAL

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Abstract

The paper posits the Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDAL) as an institution established for the purpose of enhancing Open and Distance Learning in the West African sub-region. The institute has pursued this mandate with an unparalleled vigour since its establishment in 2003—a partnership of the Commonwealth of Learning and the National Open University of Nigeria. It is the opinion of this paper that enhancing the Open and Distance Learning mode of education in the West African sub-region will require building capacity. Consequently, RETRIDAL has championed this cause through workshops and training sessions as well as commissioning research studies in Nigeria and other West African countries. The objective is to produce suitably qualified manpower that is able to utilise ODL to mitigate the exploding demand for access to education in the sub-region. The paper also foresees a future of ODL and RETRIDAL for West Africa, as many universities are keying into the distance education paradigm.

Keywords: Capacity Building; Access to Education; Distance Education; Open Education; Educational Demand

Introduction

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as a mode of delivering tertiary education is relatively new in the West African sub-region. Its purpose is to increase access to tertiary education in a situation worsened by an increasing population, limited places at conventional ‘brick and mortar’ universities coupled with a stagnant socio-economic climate (Gulati, 2008). The premise behind ODL is simple: teachers and students are in different places for all or most of the time that teaching and learning occurs with interaction dependent on the available communication medium (Moore & Kearsley, 2011). However, to realize the benefits, there is a need to increase the capacity of the stakeholders involved.

It is against this backdrop that the *Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning* (RETRIDAL) was established in 2003. A partnership between the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), RETRIDAL is mandated to develop capacity for the providers of Open and Distance Learning in the West African sub-region, and anywhere in Africa when the need arises.

It is pertinent to draw attention to the main thrust of this study. It is the desire of the authors to:

- Establish the need for the introduction of the ODL system in the West African sub-region.
- Establish the need for capacity building for ODL.
- Take a swipe at the world education demand outlook, which will include sub-Saharan Africa in which the West African sub-region is prominent.
- Examine the role of RETRIDAL in building capacity for ODL in West Africa.
- Suggest future partnership for greater capacity building for ODL intervention and innovations.

Definition of terms and concepts

ODL – What's in the name?

It is pertinent to acquaint readers with a definition of Open and Distance Learning. Terms that are commonly used to describe Open and Distance Learning include: correspondence education, home study, independent study, external study, continuing education, distance teaching, self-instruction, adult education, technology-based or mediated education, learner-centred, open learning, e-learning, online education. Whilst these terms describe aspects of Open and Distance Learning, they do not provide an encompassing definition of what it entails. The South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) (2002) describes *Distance Education* as a mode of education delivery that involves independent learning at a distance through the means of self-study text and non-contiguous communication. They also describe *Open Learning* to include the notions of both openness and flexibility whereby students have personal autonomy over their studies and access restrictions have been removed. There are five identifiable elements of distance education, as listed by Keegan (1996) including:

- The separation of teacher and learner,
- The influence of educational organisation in planning and preparation of learning materials and provision of student support,
- The use of technical media to unite the teacher and learner and to provide educational content,
- The provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue, and
- The individuality of the teaching/learning process with the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialisation purposes.

The philosophy of Open and Distance Learning emphasises giving learners choices about their medium or media of instruction –either print, online, television (audio-visual) video–; place of study –either home, workplace, or on-campus–; pace of study –either structured or unstructured–; support mechanisms –either tutors-on-demand, audio conferencing or computer assisted learning– as well as self-determined entry and exit points.

Similarly, *Open Learning* is a system of education that does not operate through conventional means of education that places restriction in its operation. Open learning is characterised by the absence of restrictions on admission, attendance to classes, candidature on examinations, period of time to be devoted to coursework, number of examinations given and taken in a year, subject combinations for a particular degree, mode of didactic communication and tasks (Tanglang, 2013).

Closely tied to the issue of openness is the cardinal issue of accessibility. The promoters of Open and Distance Learning are committed to making training and education accessible to all persons without discrimination on the basis of age, location, disability, etc. These persons may be those who cannot attend regular classes due to personal situations, political displacements and the less privileged.

Also germane to the centrality of accessibility is flexibility as a feature of Open and Distance Learning. This refers to the times and places of instructional delivery that suits the learners. The learners reserve the choice of studying subjects, courses and programmes in an order and manner appropriate to their needs. COL (2000) suggests that flexibility should also be manifested in admission requirements and restructuring programme to meet specific needs of learners such as specialised training for professionals and material delivery, work assessments and tutor interactions.

Open and Distance Learning delivery has also achieved some modicum of learner centeredness, enabling learners to pursue their studies in a way that is appropriate for their circumstances, learning goals and styles. For educational institutions, this means providing good quality learning materials in an appropriate, accessible media as well as giving support to ensure that learners have a good chance of successful completion of their programme (O'Rourke, 2003). Also central to the success of any Open and Distance Learning System are the support services. This means providing administrative and academic support that enhances student success. This is done by:

- Providing information about the educational institutions' admission and registration processes,
- Maintenance of academic records,
- Providing systems that enable learners to investigate courses and programmes that meet their needs,
- Providing tutoring and assessment during the course,
- Providing guidance and counselling to learners on future courses or path of study.

This foray into what Open and Distance Learning means, and the highlights of its characteristics, is meant to guide us into what the outlook is like and help to grasp the need for capacity building for ODL. The reason is that ODL needs an enormous array of staff as its tasks are also enormous—different categories of staff ranging from academic staff to administrative, script writers, graphic designers, editors, etc. (Sherry, 1995). In most cases, the demands on these categories of staff are significantly different from what obtains in the conventional system; hence the need for capacity building.

What is capacity, capacity building?

Over the years, various organisations have been able to define *Capacity* within the context of their activities. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines capacity as “the ability of individuals, institutions, and societies to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner” (UNDP, 2008). This definition comes from years of experience in carrying out development work in various countries. The World Health Organisation defines it as “the ability to perform defined functions effectively, efficiently and sustainably and so that the functions contribute to the mission, policies and strategic objectives of the team, organisation and the health system” (Milén, 2001). The European Commission defines it as “an attribute of people, individual organisations, and group or organisations; shaped by, adapting to and reacting to external factors and actors” (European Commission, 2011). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines capacity for the education sector “as a process through which stakeholders in the delivery of education develop, maintain and apply various capacities to achieve their targets” (UNESCO, 2013).

Furthermore, Morgan (1998) gives a more expansive definition as the abilities, skills, understandings, attitudes, values, relationships, behaviours, motivations, resources and conditions that enable individuals, organizations, networks/sectors and broader social systems to carry out functions and achieve their development objectives over time. Although this definition is broad, it allows for the labelling as ‘capacity’ any skill, proficiency or talent needed to actualise a job successfully; and extends it to the capital, assets or properties including any system of governance necessary to manage these skills and resources.

A common theme running through these definitions is that capacity is an intrinsic quality possessed by people, organisations and systems. Bringing it to the context of ODL, this definition can be streamlined down to specific tasks. These include capacities such as: the capacity to fix objectives, the capacity to draw up comprehensive strategies and plans and implement them, the capacity to

create and sustain a climate of change. This allows the evaluation of capacity as either strong, efficient, weak, lacking or even dysfunctional (Faccini & Salzano, 2011).

In light of these definitions, *Capacity Building* can be said to be concerned with how to improve the capacity of people, organizations and systems to effectively achieve their set objectives (Faccini & Salzano, 2011; OECD, 2006; Wing, 2004). Faccini and Salzano (2011) argue that it is not only a case of addressing deficiencies or a lack of capacity. It is often more complex in that capacity more often than not exists, but is used ineffectively. This could be the case where a teacher from a traditional educational system is co-opted into an ODL system without additional training. He/she knows the subject matter (i.e. has capacity) but might not be able to present it effectively using the communication medium chosen for ODL delivery.

Additionally, Bolger (2000) states the objective of Capacity Building as:

- To enhance, or more effectively utilise skills, abilities and resources
- To strengthen understandings and relationships
- To address issues of values, attitudes, motivations and conditions in order to support sustainable development.

We can surmise from these authors that Capacity Building is any process that results in the improved efficiency and effectiveness of any organisation; where lagging or weak capacities reach their optimum level of efficiency. This increase in the strengthened capacity and effectiveness leads to full-functioning institutions, improved education systems and sub-sectors as well as better coordination and smoother channels for delivering and providing a quality education for each learner.

Scope of Capacity Building

A closer examination of the definitions given above, along with the work of the UNESCO (2013), reveals that capacity can be viewed as residing in three levels, each separate in function but interconnected in operation (Faccini & Salzano, 2011; UNESCO, 2013). These levels are the individual level, the organisational level and the institutional level. A fourth level could be added, which is the socio-economic, political and cultural context within which all three levels operate (see figure 1).

- *Individual capacities*: This level includes individuals' technical (knowledge, competencies), functional (know-how, values, experience) and leadership (personal attitudes, psychology, motivations) skills as well as the ability to adapt to change. Each person is endowed with a mix of capacities acquired through formal training and/or experience that allow them to function either at home, at work or in society at large.
- *Organisational capacities*: This level is a collective manifestation of individual capacities under a guiding framework that allow for connections to achieve goals beyond individual capacities. It includes the practices, roles, mandate, decision-making structures, divisions of labour, methods of management and means of functioning; use of resources—intellectual, material economic and technological (UNDP, 2008).
- *Institutional capacities*: This is the encompassing level (sometimes called the enabling environment) within which individual and organisational capacities function. This is where overarching strategic planning occurs to determine policies, procedures, norms, standards, power structures, systems, environment, etc. (UNDP, 2008). This level can be considered the most important, as capacity building exercises targeted at this level trickle down to the others.

However, the objective of any capacity building exercise is to arrive at a synergy between all levels to effectively perform their goals.

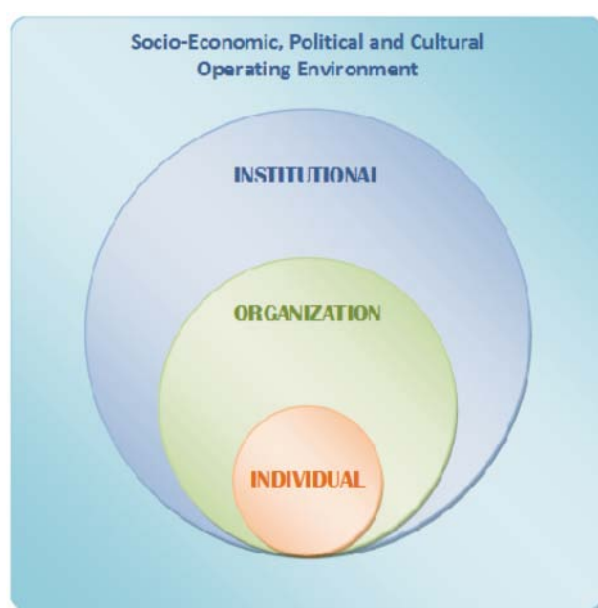


Figure 1: Interaction of the different levels of capacity. Adapted from UNDP (2008, p. 7)

Capacities Needed for Functional ODL Systems

In ODL systems, there is normally a separation of the student and teacher. This necessitates a paradigm shift in the mentality of ODL providers from that of conventional brick-and-mortar universities. Also, the delivery of educational content via ODL systems requires a pedagogical change in the way lectures are presented and assimilated by students. This introduces significant differences in the way students approach and interact with the material as well as with other students (Moore & Kearsley, 2011).

Manpower for functional ODL systems requires capacities that are unique to their operations and differ in content from the conventional universities (Trinidad, Carmo & Bidarra, 2000). These include:

- Setting specification of programme objectives and target population,
- Programme design and curriculum development,
- Content authoring,
- Instructional Design,
- Production of learning materials,
- Selection and enrolment of students,
- Distribution of informational and learning materials,
- Tutoring and student support,
- Assessment and certification,
- General and special monitoring.

ODL: Responding to Exploding demand for Higher Education

An attempt is made here to answer the questions: Why ODL at all? Also, why building capacity for ODL is important? The answer to those questions would be glaring when we look at the World Higher Education Demand Outlook, particularly those from Sub-Saharan Africa. Figure 2 shows a disquieting picture of global demand for higher education. Kanwar (2013) reports that the 150 million

students in tertiary education in year 2007 represent a 53% increase over year 2000. This number rises to 165 million in 2012 and is projected to reach 263 million in 2025. She asserts that to accommodate this number there would be a need to build four universities with a capacity for 30,000 students every single week.

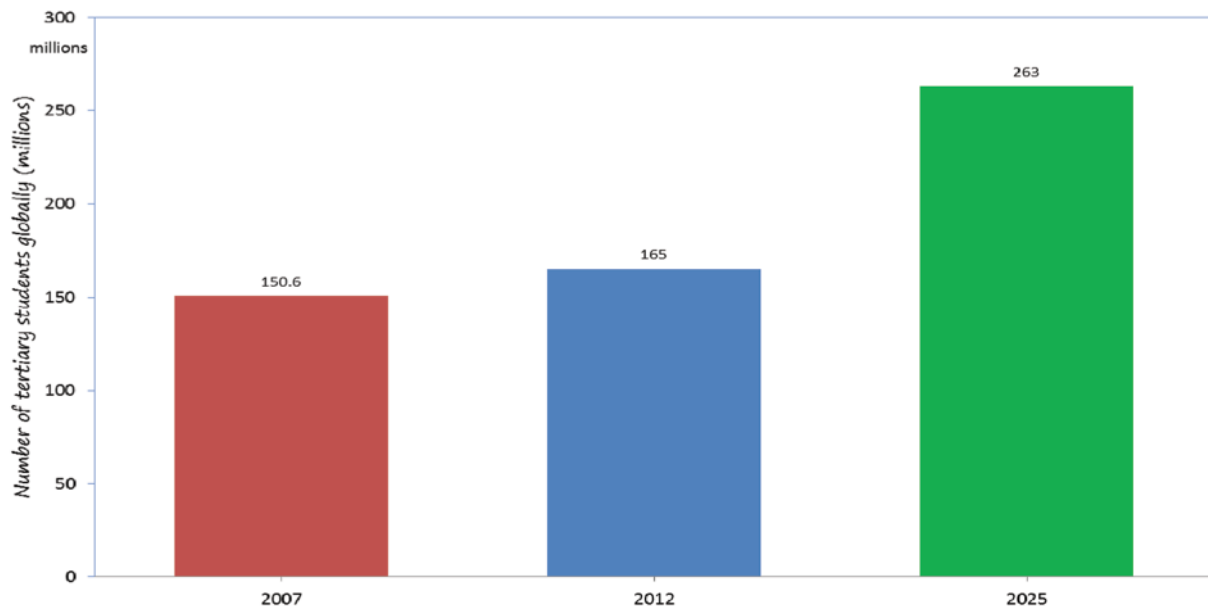


Figure 2: Global demand for higher education. Adapted from Kanwar, 2013

The global outlook is not different from that of Sub-Saharan Africa, where the West African sub region is the focus of this study. Figure 3 shows a breakdown according to regions. According to UNESCO (2010), enrolment in tertiary education grew faster in Sub-Saharan Africa than in any other region over the last four decades. While there were fewer than 200,000 tertiary education students enrolled in the region in 1970, this number soared to over 4.5 million in 2008. The report also indicated that the *Gross Enrolment Ratio* (GER) for tertiary education grew at an average rate of 8.6% each year between 1970 and 2008 compared to the global ratio of 4.6% over the same period.

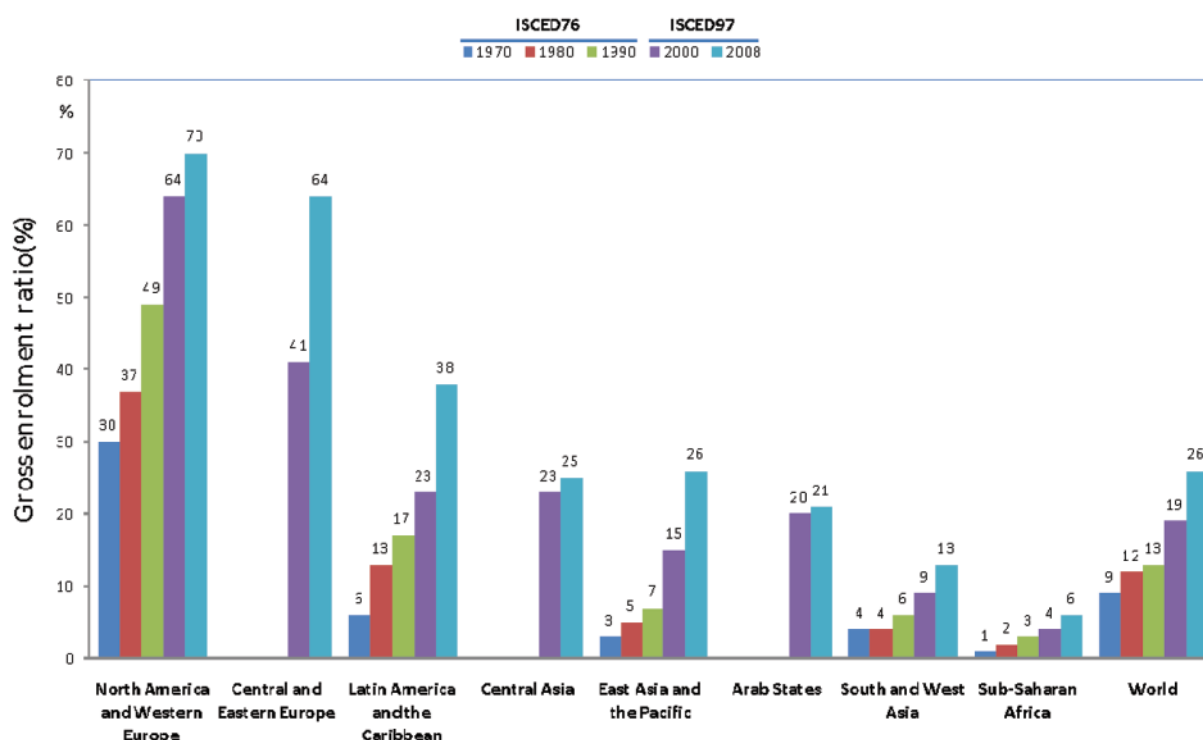


Figure 3: Tertiary Gross Enrolment Ratios by region, 1970 to 2008. Source: UNESCO (2010 p. 2)

However, there is one sad aspect of this rapid growth: only 6% of the tertiary education age cohort was enrolled in tertiary institutions in 2008. This is despite the rapid expansion over the past several decades. Tertiary education systems in Sub-Saharan Africa are still not equipped to absorb the growing demand that has resulted from broader access to secondary education.

For instance, UNESCO (2010) also reported that in 1999, the region's (Sub-Saharan Africa) GER for upper secondary school level was 19%; which was nearly five times as high as the ratio for tertiary education (4%). In 2008, the tertiary GER was 6%, compared to 27% for upper secondary education. The large gaps between the two ratios—GER for upper secondary and tertiary education—indicate that there will be many students completing upper secondary education who are eligible for higher education but will not have access to it.

This explosive demand globally and in Sub-Saharan Africa is what ODL aims to overcome, by providing access to a large number of the population who may not have access to a classroom in order to acquire an education of their choice. This has given rise to a range of new types of tertiary education providers—private, cross border, online and distance education institutions.

Thus, ODL has come to represent an intervening model to help provide access to higher education in West Africa, with the National Open University as its flagship in the region. There are also some universities which are dual mode, running both the conventional and ODL mode of educational delivery. This necessitates the building of staff capacities across the West African sub region.

Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDAL)

RETRIDAL—Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning—was established in August 2013 in response to the developmental needs of manpower for Open and Distance Learning delivery system in West Africa. RETRIDAL was established under a collaborative

agreement between the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), where it is located. NOUN is the only single-mode distance learning university in the West African sub-region.

RETRIDAL is tasked with providing training services and opportunities to emerging ODL institutions; building a regional network of ODL trainers and researchers; engaging in and supporting systematic research activities in ODL within Nigeria and across West Africa; as well as networking with other similar institutions globally.

RETRIDAL, as an academic institute, came with a vision and mission. The mission of the founding partners for the institute is to make RETRIDAL a globally acclaimed one-stop solution for ODL training, development and research needs in the West African sub-region. Its mission statement is:

To build a regional network of expertise in the West African sub-region that is highly proficient in the delivery of training, development and practice-based research in ODL.

To achieve this, RETRIDAL's workshops/capacity building exercises are organised with topics selected in line with the listed capacities needed to run functional ODL systems (see previous section on *Capacities Needed for Functional ODL Systems*). They follow a train-the-trainer model with face-to-face instruction used. Participants are given workshop materials to enable them train others in their institution. The duration of the workshops/capacity building exercises ranges from single day workshops to a whole week (table 1).

Participants are either nominated by the director of each invited institution or selected according to criteria developed to target certain profiles (e.g. young academics). Workshops with an organisational/institutional focus have participants whom are mostly senior faculty and administrative staff with the authority to implement policy changes. While those workshops focused on content development or instructional technologies (individual capacities) have mainly academics as participants.

Table 1: Breakdown of some workshops organised by RETRIDAL

Scope	No. of Workshops	Title [Location]	Date	Type of Workshop / No. of Participants		
				Local *	National	Regional
Assessment and Certification	3	National Workshop on Online Assessment and Evaluation In ODL [Lagos – Nigeria]	May-14		27	
		National Workshop on Strategic Policy and Management of Assessment [Lagos – Nigeria]	Oct-14		28	
		Sub-Regional Workshop on Strategic Policy and Management of Assessment in ODL for Cameroon, Ghana, the Gambia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria [Lagos – Nigeria]	May-08			32

Scope	No. of Workshops	Title [Location]	Date	Type of Workshop / No. of Participants		
				Local *	National	Regional
Capacity Building	5	Regional Leadership Training Workshop for Female Academics and Staff in Higher Education Institutions in West Africa [Cape Coast – Ghana]	Nov-15			25
		Regional Leadership Training Workshop for Female Academics and Staff in Higher Education Institutions in West Africa [Lagos – Nigeria]	May-12			
		Regional Leadership Training Workshop for Female Academics in West Africa [Lagos – Nigeria]	May-11			
		Regional Training Workshop on Leadership Development in ODL and Dual Mode Higher Institutions [Lagos – Nigeria]	Sep-15			24
		Workshop on New Trends in Teacher Education and Professional Development [Abuja – Nigeria]	Jul-10		25	
Content Authoring	4	National Workshop on Course Material Development for ODL Programmes for Dual Mode Higher Institutions in Nigeria [Ibadan – Nigeria]	Mar-12		30	
		Regional Workshop on Course Material Development for ODL Programmes [Lagos – Nigeria]	Jan-13			65
		Workshop on Course Writing and Logistics in Distance Education [Buea – Cameroon]	Mar-05			
		Workshop on Course Writing in Distance Education [Buea – Cameroon]	Aug-06			49
Distribution of information and learning materials	3	National Workshop on OER Popularization and Adoption in Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria [Lagos – Nigeria]	Jun-16		15	
		One Day Workshop on Copyright Law and Regulations [Lagos – Nigeria]	Oct-05		40	
		One-day Sensitization workshop on the Mounting PGDDE for NOUN staff [Lagos – Nigeria]	Jan-12			

Scope	No. of Workshops	Title [Location]	Date	Type of Workshop / No. of Participants		
				Local *	National	Regional
General and Special Monitoring	6	COL – RETRIDAL Workshop on Quality Assurance in Higher Education for the Gambia [Banjul – Gambia]	Apr-09	33		
		International Conference on Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Recognition of Qualification in Africa [Nairobi – Kenya]	Feb-06			
		National Workshop Quality Assurance Mechanism in Single and Dual Mode Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria [Lagos – Nigeria]	Mar-13		23	
		Regional Training Workshop on “Quality Assurance Mechanism for ODL Programmes” [Accra – Ghana]	Mar-15			32
		RETRIDAL – COL Workshop on Quality Assurance in ODL [Winneba – Ghana]	Feb-07			23
		Validation Workshop on Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education in the Gambia [Banjul – Gambia]	Apr-12			
Instructional Design	13	Capacity Building Workshop in Flexible and Blended Approaches to Skills Development for TVET Institutional Heads [Lagos – Nigeria]	Sep-10	23		
		COL – RETRIDAL Workshop on e-content Development for e-learning Project Implementation for the Open University of Tanzania [Bagamoyo – Tanzania]	Nov-08			
		E-learning Initiatives in Sierra Leone Higher Education Institutions [Freetown – Sierra Leone]	Jul-11			35
		E-learning workshop in Ghana [Accra – Ghana]	May-11			
		Instructional Design for Distance Education [Lagos – Nigeria]	May-05			40
		Multimedia Workshop on Video and Audio scripting for ODL [Lagos – Nigeria]	Jan-05		47	
		National Workshop on Developing e-tutoring skills in ODL [Abuja – Nigeria]	Sep-13		32	
		National Workshop on Instructional System Design, Content Development and Evaluation for ODL [Abuja – Nigeria]	May-15		16	
		Regional Workshop on e-learning in Open and Distance Learning system [Lagos – Nigeria]	Aug-05			54
		RETRIDAL – COL sub-Regional Workshop on e-learning strategy and Implementation Models [Yaoundé – Cameroon]	Sep-07			20

Scope	No. of Workshops	Title [Location]	Date	Type of Workshop / No. of Participants		
				Local *	National	Regional
		Train-the-Trainers Workshop on Instructional Design and Instructional Multi-media Design [Lagos – Nigeria]	Jun-06			18
		Workshop on Instructional System Design Development and Evaluation for Open and Distance Learning [Lagos – Nigeria]	Jul-10	52		
		Workshop on Wiki-educator for staff of NOUN for Online Content Development [Lagos – Nigeria]	Aug-11			
Overview of ODL System	7	Dual Mode Induction for Katsina State University [Katsina – Nigeria]	Mar-09	32		
		Induction Workshop for Kaduna Campus and Abuja Office Staff [Lagos – Nigeria]	Jan-06	57		
		Induction Workshop for New Staff of NOUN [Lagos – Nigeria]	May-13			
		Induction Workshop for NOUN Governing Council Members [Lagos – Nigeria]	Nov-05			
		Induction Workshop for NOUN Senior Staff [Lagos – Nigeria]	Jan-05	159		
		Orientation/Induction workshop for new staff of NOUN [Lagos – Nigeria]	Nov-14	52		
		Special Induction for RETRIDAL Advisory Board Members [Lagos – Nigeria]	May-06			
Research Methods	7	National Workshop on “ODL Research Methods and Tools” [Lagos – Nigeria]	Dec-14		25	
		Regional Workshop on Developing and Writing Fundable Research Proposals [Accra – Ghana]	Mar-14			25
		Regional Workshop on Research Methodologies in ODL for Academic Staff of Higher Institutions in West Africa [Winneba – Ghana]	Nov-11			
		Regional Workshop on Research Methodology in ODL [Lagos – Nigeria]	May-05			58
		Regional Workshop on Research Methods and Tools in ODL [Accra – Ghana]	Apr-13			32
		Research Development in the Gambia [Banjul – Gambia]	Sep-11			
		Training Workshop ODL Research Methods & Tools for Academic Staff of NOUN [Lagos – Nigeria]	Jul-15	132		

Scope	No. of Workshops	Title [Location]	Date	Type of Workshop / No. of Participants		
				Local *	National	Regional
Specification of ODL Programme Objectives	3	First Sub-Regional Stakeholders Meeting [Lagos – Nigeria]	May-04			
		Regional Workshop on Enhancing ODL Delivery through Capacity Building in Higher Institutions in West Africa [Lagos – Nigeria]	Nov-13			21
		RETRIDAL – COL National Colloquium on Effective Open and Distance Learning Dual Mode Delivery System [Lagos – Nigeria]	Jun-07		77	
Tutoring and Student Support	2	National Workshop on Tutoring and Management of Feedback in ODL [Abuja – Nigeria]	Feb-12		80	
		RETRIDAL – COL Workshop on Effective Learner Support Systems in Open and Distance Learning [Lagos – Nigeria]	Jun-07			24

Note: * Local workshops are restricted to a single institution

Workshops organised outside the West African sub region are at the request of the host institution.

Workshops in the same category are often repeated for different categories of participants.

Participants are expected to replicate the training in their own institutions with monitoring and mentoring from RETRIDAL. The impact of this is to be evaluated in a later study.

All workshops are evaluated using oral interviews and questionnaires to determine their efficacy and tweak future workshops.

Workshops are at no cost to the participants.

RETRIDAL has also sponsored researches through the Commonwealth of Learning, which are focused on aspects of Open and Distance Learning. These include:

1. Students' perception of Learner support services in the National Open University of Nigeria.
2. Assessment of competency-based learning elements in study material developed by NOUN.
3. An exploratory study of Quality Assurance Practices in Single and Dual mode Distance Learning Institutions in Nigeria.
4. Cognitive Awareness and Self-regulated Learning Situations: An Explorative Study.
5. Computer-based Learning in Open and Distance Learning Institutions in Nigeria: Implications for Online Counselling.
6. Psychosocial Stressor at Work as Determinants of Job Satisfaction among Student Counsellors in National Open University of Nigeria.

RETRIDAL and ODL's Future in West Africa

From the foregoing, RETRIDAL is undoubtedly the epicentre of ODL capacity building in the West African sub-region. All indices point to the pivotal role of the ODL systems as the panacea for mass education in Nigeria and in West Africa. Amini and Ndunagu (2014) painted a graphic picture of the

usefulness of the ODL system in meeting the Education for All (EFA) developmental goals in Nigeria and in Africa. However, this requires building the capacity of relevant manpower to effectively manage the ODL systems in order to achieve these important goals.

The question is how much impact RETRIDAL will make in the region given its efforts and what the effects of RETRIDAL's capacity building initiatives will be. It can be argued that the activities of RETRIDAL in West Africa are leading higher education institutions to properly utilise the concept and practice of Open and Distance Learning. Some universities in Nigeria are in their various stages of going dual mode:

1. Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos
2. University of Port Harcourt
3. Federal University of Technology, Minna
4. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
5. University of Ilorin
6. University of Nigeria, Nsukka
7. University of Benin, Benin City
8. Osun State University, Osogbo
9. Enugu State University of Science & Tech
10. Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso
11. Babcock University, Ilishan Remo, Ogun State

The *Workshop on Tutoring and Management of Feedback in ODL* held at Abuja, Nigeria on February 2012 was especially encouraging for Universities like Port Harcourt and Modibbo Adama, who have set up a Directorate for Distance and e-Learning in their respective institutions as a direct result of the training.

RETRIDAL has enhanced the true meaning and practice of the ODL system, which is vastly different from the practice of part-time programmes in most universities in Nigeria. Outside the shores of Nigeria, the University of Ghana, Legon, the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, have indicated interest in streamlining their ODL system to conform to international best practices. The Gambia Distance Learning draft policy was midwived by COL through RETRIDAL. It may not be easy to assess the success of the implementation of that policy as Gambia has pulled out of the Commonwealth. All these are evidences of RETRIDAL's effort at capacity building for ODL in the Region.

The future indeed is bright for ODL fruition in the sub-region. With the National Open University of Nigeria graduating students in large numbers every year, there is a surge in students demand for admission. That means more hands are needed to handle various aspects of ODL administration and faculty delivery. Therein lies the central role of RETRIDAL –an institution for training and research in Open and Distance Learning.

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