Parallel Session 5B

**Distance Education
and Open Learning**

The Potential of Open Schooling in Africa:

A Case Study of India's National Institute of Open Schooling

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Introduction

While there is much talk about 'the tragedy of education in Africa', exciting opportunities now exist for governments across sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) who are prepared to embrace the full potential of open and distance learning (ODL), in helping to expand access to secondary education. To help shed light on these emerging opportunities, this paper will examine India's National Institute of Open Schooling and identify its key strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats. A brief overview of previous developments in ODL across SSA will then be provided, followed by a discussion about the lessons to be learnt from the NIOS experience.

India's National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)

> A paradigm shift has therefore been operationalised, from institution led learning to own time self-learning at a distance, with flexibility and openness as the new main features of education (Sharma, 2005).

The history of ODL in India can be traced back to the mid 1960s and the introduction of correspondence programmes, which opened up new opportunities for own-time education - where a student learns in their own time and space without having to attend a particular institution. At the secondary level, the Board of Secondary Education, Madhya Pradesh was the first to start correspondence courses in 1965, followed by Patrachar Vidyalaya Delhi in 1968. The Boards of Secondary Education of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa followed the example and offered correspondence education to students of Class X-XII. While correspondence education helped to improve access to secondary education, the lack of any human contact was seen as having a negative impact on the overall quality of education being provided. Something more was therefore required and it was this realisation which prompted a shift from institution learning to self-paced learning. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) started the "Open School" as a project in 1979 and building upon the success of other ODL projects around the world, India soon began to consider ODL as an alternative to supplement and complement the existing formal system of education. The importance of ODL in India was formally recognized in the Indian National Policy on Education (1986):

> the future emphasis shall be on Distance and Open learning systems to provide opportunities and access to all the major target groups, especially the disadvantaged viz women, scheduled cast and tribes, the adult working class, people serving in the far-flung remote areas.

The success of the initial open school project, prompted the National Policy on Education to suggest the strengthening and extending of open learning facilities at the secondary level in all parts of the country. In November 1989, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, set up the National Open School

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(NOS) as an autonomous organisation under the Department of Education. The pilot project of CBSE on Open School was amalgamated with NOS. Through a Resolution (No. F.5-24/90 Sch.3, published in the Gazette of India on 20 October 1990), the National Open School (NOS) was vested with the authority to examine and certify students registered with it up to pre-degree level courses. In July 2002, the Ministry of Human Resource Development amended the institutions title from the National Open School (NOS) to the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), and identified its main objectives as follows:

- To provide opportunities for continuing and developmental education at the school stage;
- To provide consultancy services to the Government of India and different States of India;
- To serve as an agency for effective dissemination of information related to distance education and open learning;
- To identify and promote standards of learning in distance education system and state open schools; and
- To exercise normative and coordinating functions while promoting standards in distance and open learning system in the country.

NIOS organizes educational programmes through the medium of English, Hindi and Urdu and in a few regional languages at the secondary level and currently has a cumulative enrolment of more than 13.5 million students which makes it the largest open schooling system in the world. Promoted by the success of NIOS, 10 State governments have also established State Open Schools (SOS) during the 1990s and eight more States are in the process of following suite. While NIOS courses are delivered in Hindi and English the State Open Schools aim to meet the educational needs of those who would like to pursue their studies through regional mediums.

NIOS offers the following courses:- a. Open Basic Education Programme, Which includes following three levels courses OBE 'A' Level Course -Equivalent to class III OBE 'B' Level Course -Equivalent to class OBE 'C' Level Course -Equivalent to class VIII b. Secondary Course-Equivalent to class X c. Sr. Secondary Course-Equivalent to class XII d. Vocational Education Courses e. Life Enrichment Programmes.

Yes. The Secondary/Sr.Secondary certificate obtained form NIOS have the same recognition as certificates issued by other Boards. NIOS is vested with the authority to conduct Public Examinations at Secondary and Sr. Secondary level vide Govt. Of India's resolution dated 14 September 1990. NIOS thus act as another National Board.

Looking into the available infrastructure and resources, each State has adopted different models of SOS.

Unique and special features

Open entry with respect to age limit and entry qualifications.

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The minimum age for entry to secondary courses is 14 years and unlike formal education there is no upper age limit. As a result there is a wide variation in the age profile as shown in Fig 1 below.

Figure 1: Age Profile of NIOS Students in 2005 and 2006
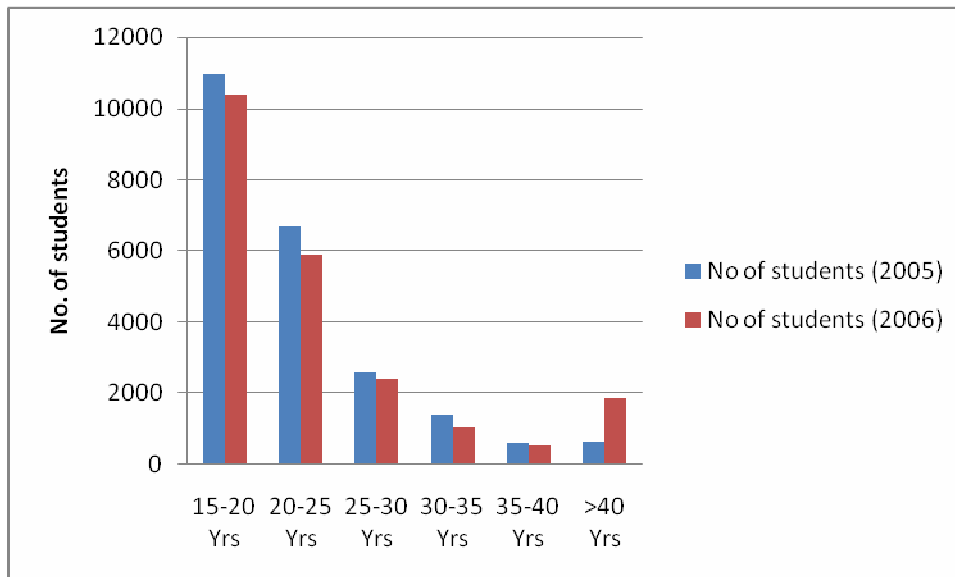
For admission to the secondary level, evidence of attending primary school is all that is required and those Those who have not attended or completed primary school, but who are literate, having ability in reading writing and numeracy and they provide a self certificate to this fact. For admission to the senior secondary level, a Secondary School Certificate from a recognized Board is required.

Open choice of both academic and vocational courses

At NIOS there are no prescribed courses or subjects of study. Instead the choice of courses/subjects lies with the student who selects according to his/her needs and requirements. Students have to select a minimum of five subjects of which one has to be a language subject at the Secondary and Sr. Secondary level and pass the same in order to get a certificate. Also, anybody who is a school graduate but needs to learn a particular subject because of a job requirement or any other need can take part admission and register for that subject.

Fig 2 shows the number of enrolments at Secondary and Senior Secondary courses for the year 2006 and 2005 which has been the trend and it indicates that every year the number of learners at Secondary level is always more than that at Senior Secondary level.

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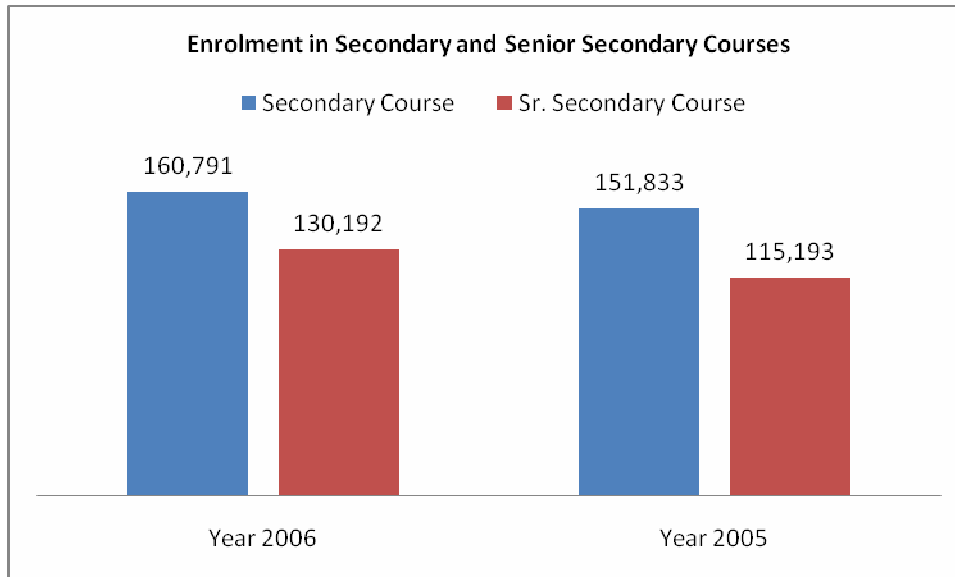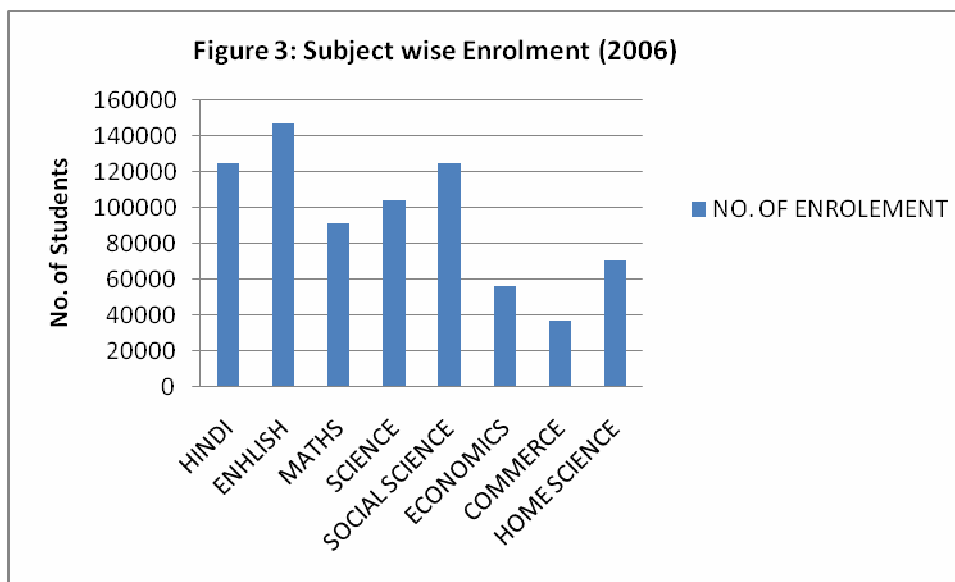A Case Study of India's National Institute of Open Schooling

Fig 3 shows the number of students in different major subjects at the secondary level, indicating that students choose subjects of their choice and requirement.

An important and interesting opportunity which NIOS provides is that it allows students to enrol on a combination of academic and vocational courses at the same time. In order to make the NIOS courses more relevant to everyday working life, a number of Vocational Courses are offered in combination with academic subjects at the Secondary and Senior Secondary level for which the learner has to also take admission in an Accredited Vocational Institutions (AVIs) of NIOS. The pass credit obtained in this subject can be transferred, on request, and considered along with other the pass credits of four academic subjects for a certification in the Secondary/Senior Secondary level.

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NIOS believes that an education system which provides students with basic literacy skills and helps them to prepare for the world of work has enormous future potential.

Box1: List of vocational course offered in combination of academic courses:

Secondary Level	
Jute Production	Laundry Services
Carpentry	Baker & Confectionery
Solar Energy Technician	Welding Technology
Sr. Secondary Level	
Plant Protection	Food Processing
Water Management for Crop Production	Play Centre Management
Oyster Mushroom Production	Hotel Front Office Operation
Furniture and Cabinet Making	Poultry Farming
Electroplating	Soil and Fertiliser Management
House Keeping	Preservation of Fruits and Vegetables
Catering Management	

Open choice of medium of instruction

Students are free to choose the medium of instruction for studying a course, which can be in Hindi or English or Urdu or Marathi or Telugu or Gujarati at secondary level and only in Hindi or English or Urdu at Senior Secondary level. In both courses the majority opt for Hindi medium as the presence of NIOS is prevalent in the Hindi belt of India. However, English medium gets an upper hand at Sr. Secondary level, which maybe due to the fact that in India, higher education is mostly in English medium and many learners feel that it would be in their benefit if they pursued the course in English medium particularly in science subjects and mathematics.

Flexible scheme of examination

Public examinations are conducted twice a year and students may appear in one or more subjects at one time depending on their readiness and preparedness. Students get nine chances to fulfil the requirement for a certification. Flexibility is increased even further through the *On-Demand Examination System (ODES)* at the Secondary level, where assessment takes place when the individual student considers himself or herself to be ready to take it. Students register to be tested through ODES and the examination is taken at the regional offices of NIOS or at the national office in Delphi. Not only is ODES time independent but it also allows the learners to improve their performance until they are satisfied. Therefore, ODES adds another dimension of openness to the open schooling system, where examinations are self paced and the degree of performance is controlled by the student. A student in NIOS at the secondary level can therefore choose between:

- ODES for all subjects
- ODES in some subjects and public examination in some other subjects

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- Public examinations in all subjects held twice a year.

As of July 2007, 9031 students had taken advantage of the ODES with only 142 students fulfilling the criteria for certification at secondary level using this opportunity. These flexibilities provided by NIOS in its scheme of examinations undoubtedly attempts to remove the stress and strain of examinations that are faced by the students of formal system of schooling:

> The stress in NIOS is to bring out the best in you. Every subject is not equally difficult for you. You can learn some subjects very well, may be in six months, whereas some requires more than a year. Keeping this in mind, NIOS allows you to appear in or two subjects, so to build confidence in you of doing well in the examination. You can take some more subjects in the next examination, but do well in each. As soon as you complete the required number of subjects, you get your certificate (NIOS website).

Credit accumulation and transfer

NIOS allows credit accumulation and so each time a student passes in a subject the credit is kept until she/he fulfils eligibility conditions for certification within the prescribed period of 5 years (9 chances for public examinations). The ability to accumulate credit over a period of five years encourages a more open and self-directed pace of learning. The credits of subjects completed at other institutions are also recognized and accepted for accumulation i.e. NIOS allows the facility of Transfer of Credit (TOC), from the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and other formal Boards of School Education, limited to 2 subjects only. Such acknowledgement of prior knowledge of the student increases their motivation to go back to education as it eases economics of expending money more than once for the same subject domain. Box 2 shows the number of learners appearing in the April 2006 examination at secondary level or at senior secondary level subjects and the consequent number of students who were certified having fulfilled the criteria of certification.

Box 2: NIOS examination results, April 2006

	APPEARED		CERTIFIED	
	Sr. Sec.	Secondary	Sr. Sec.	Secondary
TOTAL	148883	175699	47521	56489
MALE	101921	119660	31130	37459
FEMALE	46962	56039	16391	19030

It is found that the percent of total students certified after an examination is approximately the same every year. Because of the features (iv) and (v), it is not necessary that a learner appears in all subjects in an examination. Some of these learners may have completed just one subject at this examination, some two, some three and some all the five required for certification. As such subject wise pass percentage really gives a better picture of the performance of the learners. However, since 1991, the total

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number of learners certified by NIOS at Secondary, Senior Secondary and Vocational courses is 1,283,798. The visible impact of these features in the system is evident from the enrolment trend over the years as shown which has been growing exponentially.

Figure 4: Enrolment trend in NIOS - 1990-91 - 2005-06
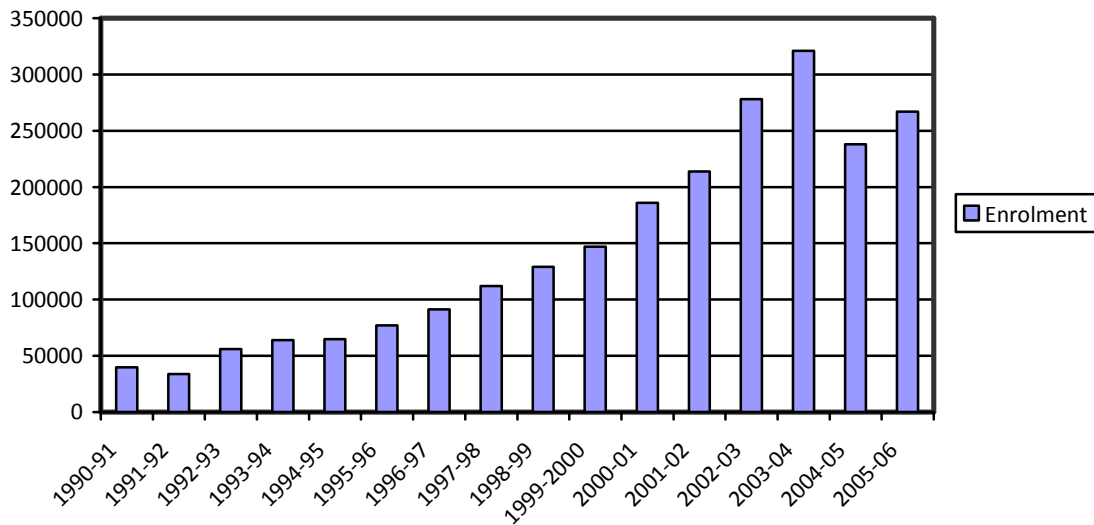
The Learning System of NIOS

The diagram below shows the learning system of NIOS, which is a dynamic system where the delivery mechanism is not constant but is based on the available resources accessible to the learner. While printed material remains to be the main medium of instruction, additional support systems over the years which are ICT based are included as and when availability and access could be ensured.

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| Curriculum Planning and Design | Identification of Needs of Groups | | Certification |

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Production of Multi
Media Material (MM)
and Self Instructional
Material (SIM)
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Delivery System

Printed material

Face-to-face counselling

Lab practicals/ training

A.V. Cassettes

Radio Broadcast

Telecast

Internet based delivery

Teleconferencing

Learner

Exam. & Evaluation

Feedback

A public-private partnership

NIOS's operational strategy is based upon the following three premises:

- Functions and tasks to follow a decentralized approach;

- Better access by utilizing available resources for optimization;

- Building partnership model.

NIOS functions at three different levels – the national level, regional offices and the local level accredited institutions. By 2007, NIOS had established 11 regional offices in different parts of the country to manage the functions and tasks of NIOS. Under each regional office there are a number of institutions accredited by NIOS which become partners and function as study centres. There are now more than 3000 Accredited Institutions (AIs) operating across the country. These AIs are usually recognized formal

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schools or other reputed agencies involved in social or educational activities. As of February 2007 there were 1923 Academic (AIs), 999 Vocational (AVIs) and Open Basic Education (AAs) 341. As shown in Box 3, a variety of different organizations have become AI's:

Box 3: Variety of AI organisations

Nature of AIs for Academic course	Nature of AIs for Vocational course	Nature of AIs for Special groups (SAIED)
• Government schools • Private schools	• Community centres • Private institutions • Government institutions • NGOs	• Special schools • Network of NGOs dealing with disadvantaged groups

Whilst operating as an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Education, NIOS can best be described as a public-public partnership. The public-private mix of AIs differs in each region with some regions having a larger percentage of private school partners. For example, in the Regional Office (Kolkata) which covers Sikkim, West Bengal, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Orissa, only 18.75% of AIs are government schools while 79.46% AIs are private schools. NIOS has found that private schools have been much more willing and interested in becoming an official AI, than government schools, which first have to ask permission from the various different government authorities.

However, it is mandatory for all private schools to be affiliated to a State or Central Board of School Education to be an AI of NIOS. This criterion is in place to ensure that school resources are there for NIOS learners to use and the institution is genuine in imparting educational services. A number of reputed chains of private schools have also become NIOS partners, such as the Delhi Public School, which has schools all over the country. Business organisations such as Living Media Inc have also become a partner.

The public private partnership is of particular importance for the provision of vocational courses, which is probably due to the fact vocational education has not find a legitimate place in formal school education. Hence, formal schools are neither equipped to provide relevant skill development in a vocation nor are interested in doing so. In contrast the private organizations, have invested in equipments and resources to provide trade specific training to those who wanted in the locality….for them it was educational activity and social work for community development.

By partnering with these private organizations, NIOS can implement vocational education in different streams without having to invest in the infrastructure and still maintain the quality and standards accepted by employing agencies and the community at large. All partnering institutions however, have to fulfil the norms and criteria laid down by NIOS to function as an Accredited Vocational Institute of NIOS.

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Undoubtedly this is a win-win situation where both parties benefit….NIOS utilizes the available resources without waiting for investments on infrastructure and private institutions/organisations get recognition, accreditation as a partner by a national level institution which help to establish their institutional status. In this model the major functions undertaken at the three levels are shown in Box 4.

Box 4: NIOS major functions

At NIOS level	At Regional Level	At the AIs
Formulation of policy decisions	Establishing AIs	Admission
Management of Information System	Consolidating AI wise student data	Distribution of learning materials
Development of courses and materials	Liaison with HQ and AIs	Conducting personal contact programmes on weekends and holidays
R & D activities	Monitoring and co-ordination	Preparing learners for examination
Policy on use of ICT and implementation	Conducting public examinations	Distribution of certificates
Monitoring and networking Related Activities	Advocating NIOS Need analysis	Information dissemination and publicity at local level.

This indicates that a strong monitoring system must be in place at all levels to overcome the disadvantages. At the Field level NIOS envisaged the concept of academic facilitation to be carried out by personnel having experiences and expertise in education administration and resides in and around a few AI's. These personnel are known as Academic Facilitators (AFs). There are about 700 such AFs all over the country who visit allotted two/three AIs seven times during an academic session. They monitor admission, contact programmes held and examination preparations in an AI and send in their reports for each visit to the regional office. They provide guidance and support not only to the AI's functioning as study centres but also to the learners visiting the AI. Undoubtedly this promotes greater interaction between the provider and the user.

As evident instead of establishing study centres having full time Tutors/Academic Facilitators, available resources and expertise are utilised keeping the following advantages in mind:

- Shared workload;
- Activities at locations nearer to the learner;
- Avoiding duplication and hence cost saving;
- Time and funds available for further enhancement of resources like introduction of resources for ICT interventions at the study centres which can trade off with the conventional system.

In other words, the model not only supplements and compliments the existing formal system of school education but also helps to create a more collaborative environment.

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Financial management

While the government provides the majority of revenue for schooling in the formal education sector, this has not been the case for NIOS, even though it is recognised as an organisation established by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India. Previous research by Sujatha (2002) has shown that out of the total educational budget of the central government , only 0.10% was allocated to NIOS (then NOS -1997-98) and the budget allocation for NIOS formed only 0.6% of the total budget for secondary education. Also the government's share of funding towards recurring expenditure (non plan) had been very insignificant to the tune of 0.02% of the total educational budget and 0.06% of secondary education budget. Over the years the government's funding pattern for NIOS which indicates that the non plan (recurring expenditure) allocation has been declining and reached NIL status from the year 1999-2000.

Figure 5: Budgetary Support to NIOS by MHRD, Government of India from 1990/91 to 2005/06
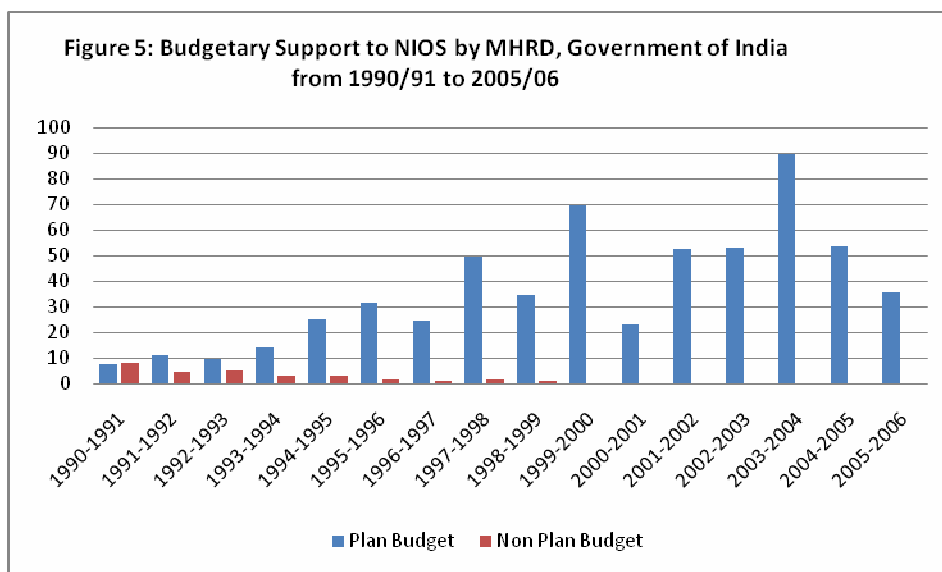
Looking into the income and expenditure pattern of NIOS for the period 1989-90 till 2005-06 i.e. for the last sixteen years (Fig 6), it is seen that there has been striking rate of growth of the total income. The source of income of NIOS is largely from the learners enrolling in the form of tuition fees and examination fees and partly from the sale of priced publications and prospectus and miscellaneous fees i.e. the income is from private sources. This is evident from Fig 6 where it can be seen that the income was steep in 2003-04 which dipped in 2004-05 due to reduction in enrolment number from 321 thousands to 236 thousands. This was due to some affirmative actions taken to curb creeping in malpractices and maintaining quality.

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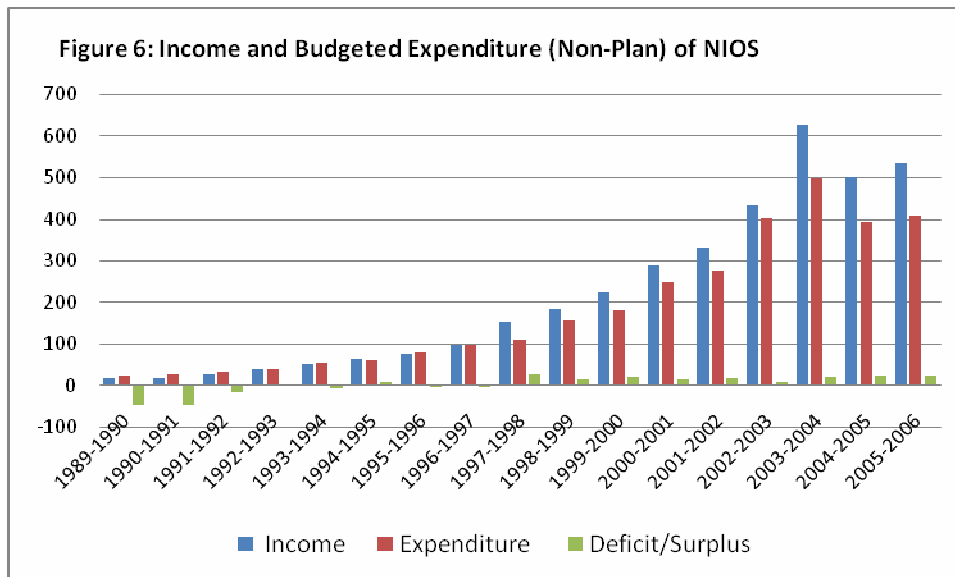Figure 6: Income and Budgeted Expenditure (Non-Plan) of NIOS

Figure 6 also shows that in the initial years, like any newly established institution NIOS had a deficit budget because enrolment was low and the initial costs for both developmental and operational activities were higher. But as the income has grown the budget deficit has reduced significantly since 1992-93. Further, it is seen that with increase in income the percent of expenditure reduced leading to surplus income. With this trend, although the government funding started reducing, NIOS could not only sustain with self generated income but also subsidise the education of weaker sections of the society comprising of girls/women, scheduled caste, scheduled tribes, ex-servicemen and differently able learners by providing fee concession (Refer to Box 5).

Box 5: Fee Structure for Admission & Public examinations **(**1U$= Rs 40).

Course	General category of Learners		Exempted category
	Male	**Female**	**SC/ST, Ex-servicemen,**
Admission to Secondary Course for 5 subjects for each additional subject	Rs 1000 Rs 150	Rs 750 Rs 150	Rs 550 Rs 150
Senior Secondary Course for 5 subjects for each additional subject	Rs1150 Rs 180	Rs 900 Rs 180	Rs 625 Rs 180
Public examination fees for Secondary and Senior Secondary course Additional fees for subjects with Practical	Rs 100 Per subject Rs 95 Per subject when paid with admission fees Rs 50 per subject Rs 45 per subject when paid with admission fees		

During 2005-06 with an increase of 6.28% in the revenue, a subsidy aggregating to 43.39 million rupees was given in the form of fee concession to 119,669 students and this was

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met from NIOS generated funds. Category wise the number of beneficiaries availing the subsidy during the year is as given below.

Type of learners	Number benefited
Scheduled Caste (SC)	37,875
Scheduled Tribe (ST)	18,407
Ex-Serviceman	343
Differently Able	1,983
Girls/women(excluding SC/ST women)	61,061

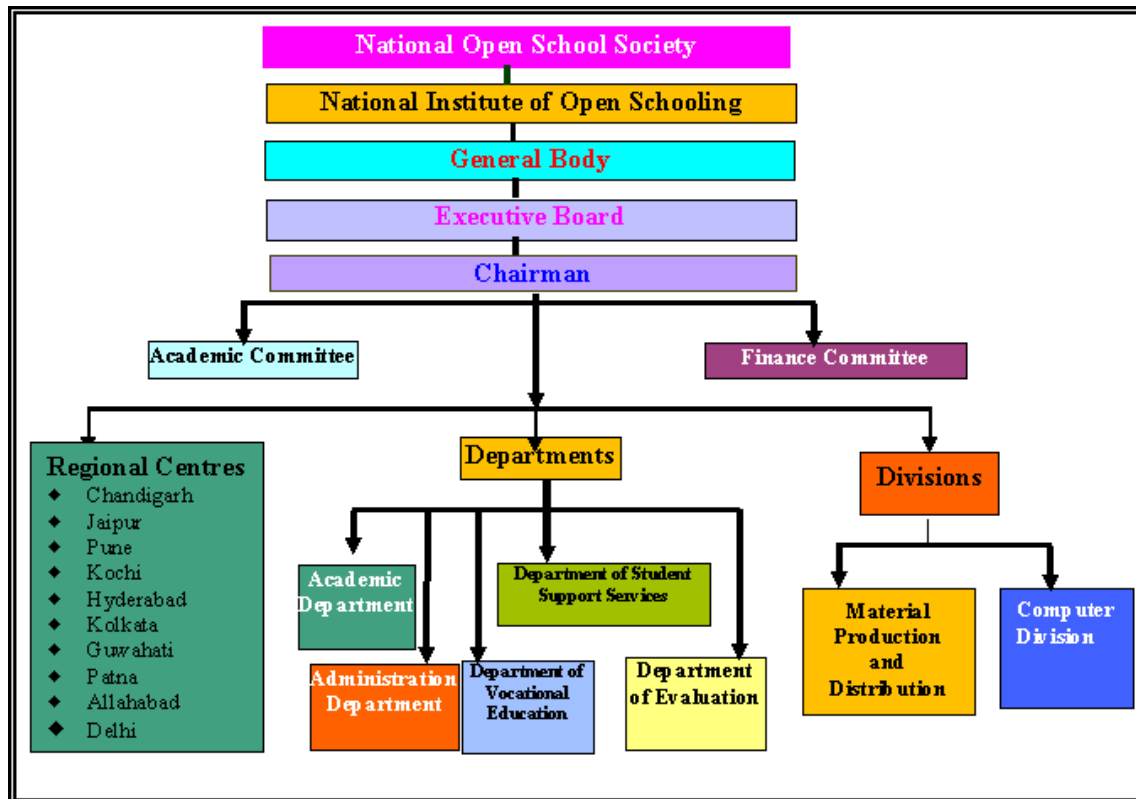## Management and organisational structure

The National Institute of Open schooling (NIOS) was established by the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, in 1989 as an autonomous organisation and registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. The authorities specified for the management of the National Open school society are the following;

The General Body provides strategic direction, professional advice, and helps to ensure that NIOS remains publicly accountable. The Union Minister for Human Resource Development is the President and the Minister of State for Human Resource Development is the Vice President of the Society. The other members are Vice Chancellors of different Universities, Secretaries and Joint Secretaries of different ministries, Directors of other national institutions along with the NIOS Chairman and Head of Departments.

The Executive Body is responsible for the day to day management of NIOS and for the implementation of new programmes and initiatives. The Chairman, NIOS is the Chairperson of this Body, while the Secretary, NIOS is the Member secretary. Other members include Heads of Departments of NIOS, nominees of the Department of Education, MHRD and its integrated Finance division and one specialist, each in the area of Distance Education, developmental education, industry, media, technology, and vocational education.

The Finance Committee scrutinizes the accounts and budget estimates and makes recommendations on proposals for new financial outlays and other financial matters. The Chairman, NIOS is the Chairperson of this committee, while the Secretary, NIOS is the Member secretary. Other members include Heads of Departments of NIOS, nominees of the Department of Education, MHRD and its integrated Finance division, and other management and finance experts.

An overview of NIOS's organisational structure is shown below:

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NIOS Strengths

NIOS's special and unique features outlined above can all be defined as strengths, with each playing an important role in NIOS's success to date. However there are three key strengths which are worth highlighting and which are all interrelated:

Autonomous: while NIOS may now take its status as an autonomous organisation for granted, it is important to recognise that the lack of political interference and its accompanying bureaucracy have been a key strength for NIOS, especially during its initial start up period. The ability of NIOS to make its own decisions and to take immediate action continues to be a key strength.

Public-private partnership/franchise: without any political bias or interference, NIOS has been free to develop partnerships with organisations which are best suited to help NIOS expand access to ODL. Thousands of relationships have therefore been developed with a variety of private organisations which already have the skills, resources and expertise to help increase access to ODL. The ability to utilise the resources of the private sector is therefore one of NIOS's key strengths. As well as a public-private partnership, NIOS can also be described as a public-private franchise, which is a model of 'expanding a business whereby a company (franchisor) grants a license to an independent business owner (franchisee) to sell its products or render its services' (Encyclopaedia of Business, 2nd ed).

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Financially self-sustainable: finally, due to its autonomous status and its growth and development as a public-private partnership and franchise, NIOS is now becoming financially self sustainable. For any organisation to reach this special status it must aim to achieve one simple goal – its costs must not exceed its revenues. In other words the organisation must aim at generating a surplus, or a profit. NIOS's greatest strength therefore is that after an initial set up period of approximately 10 years, it has developed into an organisation which is no longer dependent on public funds. Perhaps one of the most remarkable strengths of the NIOS model, is that its ability to generate a profit also allows NIOS to provide subsidies to the poor. Therefore the more profitable that NIOS becomes, the more subsidised education it can afford to deliver.

NIOS Weaknesses

Quality control: expanding access to NIOS courses through franchising comes with certain risks. For example, the success or failure of a franchise may well depend on the kind of organisation which NIOS chooses to partner itself with.   Expanding too quickly may therefore lead to undesirable organisations being accredited which are then in a position to damage NIOS's name and reputation by providing an inferior service. It is also inevitable that with thousands of different organizations becoming partners, the quality of facilities and services may vary between institutions. Infrastructure related to the learning environment in the study centers like classrooms, sitting arrangements, audio/video facilities, library facilities etc. varies widely. Quality of teachers acting as facilitators for NIOS learners is also a major issue.

Capability to expand: despite NIOS's success to date, there still appears to be lack of incentive or the capability to expand it services on a much larger scale. There doesn't appear to be any long term growth strategy outlining how NIOS intends to expand access to ODL to all students across India. We therefore end up with problem which is common when dealing with ODL – that there is always excess demand for ODL services which is, more often than not, combined with an inability to expand the supply of ODL. For example, in India it is not too difficult to believe that there are millions of more students across India who would be interested in paying to enrol on an NIOS course, but are unable to because of NIOS's inability to expand. Previously, the failure to expand access to ODL and other educational services across SSA, has been blamed on the lack of public funds or international aid. However, as NIOS is not dependent on public funds or international aid, this highlights a different problem. For example, any private for-profit organisation in NIOS's position (a market leader, generating a profit in a market with enormous potential for future growth), would be in a very strong position to attract private investment funds from around the world, develop strategic partnerships with world class IT companies, or simply to borrow funds to help expand, develop and invest in new services. However, NIOS status as a public organisation, may prove to be a major weakness, restricting its ability to gain access to private finance and therefore from expanding and achieving its full potential.

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NIOS Opportunities

The fact that NIOS has shown that it has the potential of generating a profit, and that there is the need to dramatically increase access to ODL across India, opens up some exciting new opportunities which could transform NIOS and the future of ODL in India. For example, NIOS current position as one of the largest ODL operations in the world, means that it should already be viewed as an attractive partner to many private for-profit organizations, with an interest in education and technology. NIOS is therefore currently in a good position to develop numerous strategic partnerships and alliances with other organisations which could help it expand across India and perhaps even abroad. Finally, if the Indian government could be persuaded to privatise NIOS (the government could even maintain a small stake), then this would allow NIOS either to attract private investment and expand by itself or to develop numerous strategic partnerships as mentioned above. The transfer of NIOS from the nonprofit public sector to the for-profit private sector would also help begin to attract entrepreneurial talent to the ODL sector, where the opportunities for innovation are clear for all to see.

NIOS Threats

Ironically, NIOS's greatest long term threat may come from international agencies such as UNESCO who continue to preach the mantra of free education and its extension from primary to secondary education. If the government of India were to follow UNESCO's advice and demand that all school fees be abolished in secondary education, then NIOS would not be able to survive as an autonomous and financially self sustainable organisation. NIOS could also face further threats to its autonomous status, if a new government is elected into power which, for whatever reason, believes that NIOS would benefit from an increase in government control and less involvement with the private sector.

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Open and Distance Learning in sub Sahara Africa

While Adekanmbi (1991) has previously referred to open and distance learning in sub-Sahara Africa as a 'rejected stone', it is clear from the following list of associations that ODL has already taken root and become established across SSA:

- Distance Education Association of Tanzania (DEATA)
- Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA)
- Association Africaine Francophone de Formation à Distance (ASSAFAD)
- East African Distance Education Association (EADEA),
- Zimbabwe National Association of Distance and Open Learning (ZINADOL)
- Zambia Association for Distance Education (ZADE)
- The West African Distance Education Association (WADEA)
- Open and Distance Education Association of Malawi (ODEAMA)
- National Association of Distance Education in South Africa (NADEOSA)
- Ghanaian Distance Education Association (GHADEA
- The African Council for Distance Education (ACDE).

The development and growth of ODL across SSA has followed a similar pattern to the developments occurring in India. In Africa ODL started with correspondence education at the secondary level and was initially provided by private colleges based in the home of the colonial authority. Such courses initially attracted adults who were interested in a career in politics or in the rapidly expanding civil service. However, a lack of human contact, a failure to adapt and update the curriculum and increasing drop out and failure rates, led to a search for different ways of organising and managing ODL at the secondary level, which subsequently led to the setting up of institutions such as the Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE), the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) and the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL). Dodds (2003) identifies NAMCOL and BOCODOL as 'parastatal institutions' which he describes as 'a semi autonomous organisation set up by legislation, under the ultimate policy control of a government ministry, but with a large degree of autonomy in its day to day management'. On the early development of ODL across SSA, Dodds continues:

> The new independent governments of African countries recognised the advantages of being able to offer increased educational opportunities in this way. As early as 1964-65 by Malawi and Zambia, set up government correspondence schools delivering courses leading to secondary level qualifications. The next 10 years saw a rapid expansion of similar initiatives in the east, central and southern African sub region. Most were government of university initiatives, and aimed to provide adult with opportunities to obtain secondary level qualifications. By 1975 such programmes existed in Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Swaziland, Tanzania and Uganda. In addition to the correspondence courses on which they were founded, many began to use additional media such as radio and audio cassettes, as well as occasional face to face tutorials (Dodds, 2003).

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Due to the economic decline across the region during the 1980s, many national education budgets were unable to keep up with the increasing demand for ODL, resulting in resources being stretched and a decline in the quality of services. By the mid 1990s, the general state of ODL across SSA had still not improved. John (1996), has previously identified some of the key problems:

> The scenario in distance education within Africa may suggest growth but its impact is hardly far reaching. Except for a handful, the institutions using distance teaching are still small and poorly funded. Many receive assistance from an external agency. If this help stops, they often struggle or often fail for lack of adequate local financial support. Failure of these small scale distance education systems reflects the dire state of the economies of these countries. Infrastructural deficiencies, too, result in operational difficulties for effective institutional support services (John, 1996 p.52).

John's comments concerning the problems of ODL being dependent on either public funds or international aid, helps to reinforce the importance of the example of NIOS and its ability to become financially self sustainable. Towards the end of the 1990s attention within the internal community again began to focus on the importance of ODL for SSA and in particular, its role in helping to expand access to secondary education. According to the Commonwealth of Learning, by 2002 there had been an explosion of interest in distance learning across SSA. With hindsight, this renewed interest in ODL at the secondary level was hardly surprising, as Dr Alicia Fentimans' (2004) recalls:

> The success in increasing completion of primary schooling is leading to a significant pressure on the places in junior and senior secondary schools. As a direct result of this, another hurdle emerges - *how do we cope with this demand and provide secondary education to those who have completed primary school?* As educational statistics show, in most countries access to secondary education remains the preserve of a selected minority. . . . Can open schooling at the secondary level respond to the need created by the EFA and MDG targets? (Fentimans, 2004).

As a result of this renewed interest, an increasing amount of research has been sponsored, carried out and published, by organisations such as UNESCO, The Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the International Research Foundation for Open Learning (IRFOL) and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA).[1] Following a 2004 Forum on Open Schooling for Secondary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa, the following findings were published:

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[1] Reports relevant to this paper include the following: Distance Education in the E-9 Countries – The Development and Future of Distance Education Programmes in the Nine High-Population Countries, Paris, UNESCO, 2001; Open and Distance Learning – Trends, Policy and Strategy Considerations, UNESCO, 2002; Distance Education and Open Learning In Sub-Saharan Africa - A Literature Survey On Policy And Practice, The Commonwealth of Learning, April 2002; Distance education and open learning in Sub-Saharan Africa: Criteria and conditions for quality and critical success factors South

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- Open Schooling is working effectively as shown by the excellent presentations by BOCODOL, NAMCOL and NIOS.

- The highest priority educational needs are: education for all, reduce illiteracy rate, reduce drop-out, increase investment in secondary education and widen the access to secondary education.

- The main factors which prevent students from continuing their education from primary to secondary school include: economic constraints, HIV/Aids, shortage of places, cultural practices (such as early marriage) and distance to schools (esp. in rural areas).

- Overwhelmingly, it was shown that there are not enough places in secondary school to cater to the demand.

- The consensus was that a flexible approach to learning would be beneficial to two target audiences: out-of-school youth and adults. It was unanimous that adults would be interested in pursuing secondary education on a part-time basis. An alternative and flexible mode of learning would be compatible with other duties and responsibilities. In addition, vocational courses should also be offered.

- Currently, there are promising examples of open and distance learning institutions offering secondary education in Sub Saharan Africa: Botswana (BOCODOL), Namibia (NAMCOL), Zambia (ZACODE), Swaziland (EDC), and the Malawi College of Distance Education (Fentiman 2004, p.vii)

These general findings represent an emerging consensus within the international community which highlights that ODL in SSA has the potential to play an important role in increasing access to secondary education. The research to date also suggests that national governments interested in realising the potential of ODL in secondary education, have two different models to choose from:

Model 1 - Government monopoly: the finance, design and delivery of ODL is recognised as a public service and a key responsibility of government. As a result all ODL remains a government controlled monopoly, financed from public funds and international aid. Any expansion of ODL is therefore dependent on increasing government subsidies or international aid.

Model 2 - Public-private partnership/franchise: building on the success of NIOS, the second model involves national governments establishing a central ODL organisation, but with considerable freedom, independence and autonomy. The ODL organisation will be expected to receive the majority of its revenue from tuition and examination fees and

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African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), January 2004; Costing distance education and open learning in Sub-Saharan Africa, South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), January 2004; Forum on Open Schooling for Secondary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa, Dr Alicia Fentiman(IRFOL), Report for the Commonwealth of Learning, Gaborone, Botswana, 5th- 8th October, 2004.

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utilise its independent status by developing numerous public-private partnerships. It is this partnership model and the utilisation of existing resources in the private sector which will allow the ODL organisation to become financially self sustainable after a certain period of time. Public funds or international aid will therefore only be required during the initial set up phase and to assist with long term expansion.

While there are obvious differences between the two, they both share one thing in common, which is that the ODL organisation in both models is a nonprofit public institution, albeit with varying levels of autonomy. However, based upon the NIOS experience, a third model is now emerging, which would differ from the first two models as it would include the involvement of private for-profit institutions.

After reviewing the existing literature and research on ODL, it is clear that the idea of involving the private sector in the design and delivery of ODL services, does not appear to generate as much controversy as it does in the more conventional sectors of education. For example, consider the following statement made in a 2002 UNESCO publication titled 'Open and Distance Learning - Trends Policy and Strategy Considerations':

> A developing country has to find new way methods that will dramatically improve both its children's schooling and its continuing education system. New methods will need new organisational forms, which in turn enquire re-thinking of education and training policies. Strategies that have been recommended include the diversification of the resource base by privatising some educational functions, the use of donations of private sources, and the recovery of costs from users and participants.

> Future policy will probably involve structural reform and the limitation of expenditure in the public sector. It is therefore necessary not only to look at new technologies but also alternative systematic approaches in pursuit of increasing access, improving cost effectiveness and quality, as well as learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2002 p.18).

A similar approach is also recommended by the World Bank's Secondary Education in Africa (SEIA) initiative which refers to 'severely constrained and inefficiently used, public funding' and highlights the importance of 'alternative strategies and systems, multiple delivery mechanisms; expanding private provision and emerging public private partnerships':

> It is very clear that in most countries the government will not be able to be the sole source for financing and provision of secondary education. At the school level private and public sources are already intertwined to support the delivery of education services. Governments will need to create an environment where public and private resources combine to effectively support secondary education development.

On the subject of ODL in particular, the report continues:

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> Distance education and open learning programs are increasingly important delivery mechanisms, which provide alternative pathways to learning and certification for students and teachers.

> In such a system the principal role of central government agencies will no longer be to deliver secondary schooling but rather to monitor quality, make available core financing, provide support to schools in difficulty and ensure equity in access and opportunity to learn.

Finally, the actual mention of the word 'profit' can be found in 'Costing distance education and open learning in Sub-Saharan Africa' (SAIDE, 2004), which provides a very frank and telling assessment of some of the key problems concerning the finance and delivery of ODL initiatives by public institutions across SSA:

> The most obvious problem that tends to arise is that some educational planners continue to believe that because education is theoretically an endeavour in the public interest, some amorphous entity (often vaguely referred to as "government") should cover the bill regardless of what it may be. As a result, financial analysis is frequently absent, often resulting in the spread of widespread systemic inefficiencies across both distance and contact education provision.

> At a systemic level, it is often reflected in absence of systematic financial planning templates that factor in a wide range of indirect costs and institutional and administrative overheads. Usually, these errors of omission are symptomatic of a culture of financial dependence, in which institutions that have regularly received funding from a guaranteed source (usually the government purse) have not been required to engage seriously with strategies to ensure their own financial sustainability. A related problem is that many educational planners have faced not knowing whether the courses and programmes they are designing or implementing are generating more income than expenditure. Careful analysis of all associated costs of a course or programme is the only meaningful way to find out (SAIDE, 2004 p.33).

The report continues:

> Distance education planning, however, introduces the need to project costs over time and student numbers. This is because distance education is predicated on the logic that upfront investments in design and development of courses and administrative systems will be amortised over time and large student numbers.

> It is, therefore, not unreasonable to expect a distance education programme to generate more (or at least as much) income as expense in a single year. However, such financial sustainability needs to be achieved over a cycle of a number of years. Without undertaking such calculations, it becomes impossible to establish when, if ever, new courses and programmes will break even financially, hence

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making it harder to make effective financial decisions on whether or not to make initial design and development investments - see Figure 2. (SAIDE, 2004 p.35)

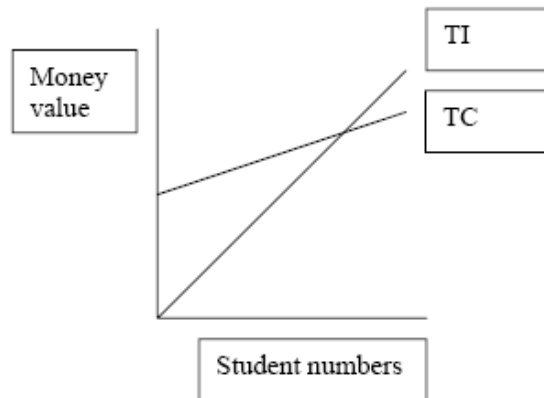*Figure 2: Breakeven point for distance education provision*

Figure 2 shows that it is important for programme managers to be able to work out the breakeven point for a course or programme: at what level of enrolment does total income (TI) meet total cost (TC)? Beyond this level of enrolment, the course can begin to generate a profit.

The report concludes that the 'educational viability of any distance education programme will definitely be undermined if income does not at least match full expenditure'. In other words, the educational viability of any distance education programme will be undermined if it does not generate a profit. While this is a controversial statement, the above comments do help to shed some light on the importance of the actual process of calculating profit and loss and the difference between private for-profit and public nonprofit organisations. The above report also confirms that the profit motive may also have an important role to play in the future growth and development of the ODL sector.

However, this discussion challenges the prevailing consensus which is based on a strong ethical and moral belief that 'education is for children and not for profit'. Henry Hazlitt (1946) suggests that '[t]he indignation shown by many people today at the mention of the very word profits indicates how little understanding there is of the vital function that profits play in our economy'. As the profit motive and for-profit institutions in general, continue to be viewed with a great deal of skepticism, Hazlitt's brief description of the function of profits is still relevant today. First, according to Hazlitt, the prospect of profits helps to decide what will be produced and in what quantities:

> If there is no profit in making an article, it is a sign that the labor and capital devoted to its production are misdirected: the value of the resources that must be used up in making the article is greater than the value of the article itself (Hazlitt, 1946).

The profit motive also helps to put constant and unremitting pressure on business managers to continuously improve and innovate:

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> In good times he does this to increase his profits further, in normal times he does it to keep ahead of his competitors, in bad times he may have to do it to survive at all. For profits may not only go to zero, they may quickly turn into losses; and a man will put forth greater efforts to save himself from ruin than he will merely to improve his position (Hazlitt, 1946).

Hazlitt also challenges a common misconception which claims that profits can be increased simply by raising prices. Instead, it is by introducing economies and efficiencies that cut costs of production:

> It seldom happens (and unless there is a monopoly it never happens over a long period) that every firm in an industry makes a profit. The price charged by all firms for the same commodity or service must be the same; those who try to charge a higher price do not find buyers. Therefore the largest profits go to the firms that have achieved the lowest costs of production. These expand at the expense of the inefficient firms with higher costs. It is thus that the consumer and the public are served (Hazlitt, 1946).

In short, profits 'resulting from the relationships of costs to prices, not only tell us which goods it is most economical to make, but which are the most economical ways to make them'. Hazlitt then concludes with the following comment:

> I have been putting my emphasis on the tendency to reduce costs of production because this is the function of profit-and-loss that seems to be least appreciated. Greater profit goes, of course, to the man who makes a *better* mousetrap than his neighbor as well as to the man who makes one more efficiently. But the function of profit in rewarding and stimulating superior quality and innovation has always been recognized (Hazlitt, 1946).

A more recent description of the function of profits is provided by Gwartney, Stroup & Lee (2005), who identify the profit motive as one of the ten key elements of economics. They highlight that as resources are limited it is basic 'common sense' that we will be better off if they are used efficiently to produce goods and services that we all want. An entrepreneur will therefore invest in raw materials, transform them into a product or service, and then sell it to the customer. If the revenue from sales exceeds the costs incurred, a profit is generated. However this will only occur when products and services are produced which customers value more than the cost of the resources used in their production. While some entrepreneurs will succeed in increasing the value of resources by transforming them into products and services which customers want, other entrepreneurs are not as successful and will reduce the economic value of resources. Profit can therefore be defined as a 'reward for transforming resources into something of greater value', while losses are a 'penalty imposed on business that uses up resources without converting them into something more valuable. The losses indicate that the resources would have been better used producing other things' (p.18). Gwartney, Stroup & Lee therefore conclude:

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> If we are going to get the best out of the available resources, projects that increase value must be encouraged, while those that use resources less productively must be discouraged. This is precisely what profit and losses do. . . . Profit and losses direct business investment towards projects that promote economic progress and away from those that squander scarce resources. This is a vitally important function. Economies that fail to perform this function well will almost surely experience stagnation or worse (Gwartney, 2005 p.17-19).

The above comments suggest that while there has been much debate about the ethics of the profit motive itself, less attention has perhaps been given to the actual process of calculating profit and loss, and the benefits which come from doing this. It is clear that if an organization is driven by profits, then there is an inbuilt incentive to record and monitor all of its costs. If costs and revenues cannot be compared then the calculation of profit obviously becomes impossible. If an organisation is driven by profits, then there is also an inbuilt incentive to continuously reduce costs, as any reduction in costs will help to increase profits. This continuing focus on costs, also helps to drive the process of innovation which is continually looking for new and improved methods and techniques. Finally, the calculation of profit and loss also seems to continuously feed information from the customer into the organisation, thereby providing an essential link between what the customers want and what the organization produces. However, with reference to the future development of ODL, perhaps the most important characteristic of for-profit organisations, is that when a particular business model has proven to be a success, there are enormous incentives and opportunities to expand. At the very least the challenge and potential of dramatically increasing the number of customers is not viewed as a problem but an exciting opportunity.

Amalgamated Bean Coffee Trading Company Ltd (ABCTCL), the name behind Café Coffee Day, is one of the largest producers & exporters of coffee in India, with over 5000 acres of coffee plantations and state-of-the-art curing capacity of 70,000 tons. Café Coffee Day's mission is to be the best cafe chain in the country, by offering a world class coffee experience at affordable prices:

> Café Coffee Day (CCD) pioneered the café concept in India in 1996 by opening its first café at Brigade Road in Bangalore. Till about the late 1990's coffee drinking in India was restricted to the intellectual, the South Indian traditionalist and the five star coffee shop visitor. As the pure (as opposed to instant coffee) coffee café culture in neighboring international markets grew, the need for a relaxed and fun "hangout" for the emerging urban youth in the country was clearly seen.

> Recognizing the potential that lay ahead on the horizon, Café Coffee Day embarked on a dynamic journey to become a large organized retail café chain with a distinct brand identity of its own. From a handful of cafés in six cites in the first 5 years, CCD has become India's largest and premier retail chain of cafes with 483 cafes in 84 cities around the country.

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> Enthused by the success of offering a world-class coffee experience, CCD has opened a Café in Vienna, Austria and is planning to open other Cafes in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Eurasia, Egypt and South East Asia in the coming months (Café Coffee Day website).

Café Coffee Day is now aiming to expand to 18 more tier-II and tier-III towns in India by the end of 2007. It will be present in 100 towns and cities with 700 outlets. The company has also earmarked INR 150 million ($3,772,873) for expansion overseas during the year. Obviously, delivering a world class coffee experience is not the same as delivering a world class ODL experience. However, this is just one example of thousands of for-profit organisations in India, which have already developed a successful track record in capacity building over a short period of time. Just like NIOS, Cafe Coffee Day, have also used a franchising model to help them expand, without having to make large investments in new property, equipment and personnel. After establishing a successful business model ABCTCL is now actively seeking to expand further. The major difference between the two organizations however is the fact that ABCTCL has the ability to raise finance to help fund its expansion, while NIOS is severely restricted. As a privately owned for-profit company, ABCTCL will look to fund its expansion by reinvesting profits, borrowing money from the bank or by attracting further investment from elsewhere. The following news story is from July 2006:

> *India: Sequoia Capital Invests $20 Mln in Amalgamated Bean Coffee Trading Company.* Amalgamated Bean Coffee Trading Company Ltd (ABCTCL), which owns the popular retail chain, Café Coffee Day, has announced an equity investment of $20 million in ABCTCL by Sequoia Capital India, a leading venture capital firm.
>
> The investment represents ABCTCL's strategic intent to expand and consolidate its position in the fast growing coffee industry, where it already enjoys a strong position thanks to its various brand extensions under the umbrella brand `Coffee Day'. ABCTCL will use the funds to supplement its business with a fast growing high margin line of products and services and will work on developing a larger international and national footprint for itself. The funding from Sequoia is in line with ABCTCL's strategy of consolidating its position as a leader in the coffee industry, the company said in a statement. Mr K.P. Balaraj, Managing Director, Sequoia Capital India, will be joining the company's board (Flexnews.com).

As a for-profit organisation therefore, ABCTCL is in a position to attract private investment to help it expand, a source of finance which NIOS and other public non-profit organisations are unable to access. The example of ABCTCL is also interesting as they have also received financial support from the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The IFC's website states the following:

> The company currently enjoys a clear leadership position in the modern café and coffee vending segments in India. Over the next three years (financial years 2007 to 2009), the company proposes to implement an investment program to finance

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a further expansion of its cafes and kiosks. The key components of the project are:

- expansion of Café Coffee Day chain;
- expansion of kiosks and freshly ground coffee outlets
- other capital expenditure and
- incremental working capital requirement.

ABC is seeking an investment from IFC of up to $15 million to assist in funding its strategic expansion program over the 2007-2009 period. It is proposed that the IFC investment be provided as a loan of up to $10 million and an equity/quasi-equity investment of up to $5 million. This investment would be IFC's first investment with ABC and IFC's first in the foodservice sector in India (IFC website).

Therefore while international aid is often associated with being used to help public and charitable organisations, the above example shows that those for-profit organisations who want to expand in developing countries can also gain access to aid from the IFC[2].

NIIT is another example of a world class Indian company, which has developed and expanded rapidly over the previous two decades. Since being set up in 1981, NIIT now defines itself as a global IT Learning Solutions Corporation, which is recognised for its pioneering work in the field of IT education and training:

Our strong research orientation has helped us continuously innovate in the areas of instructional design methodologies, and curricula development that is cutting-edge. NIIT's vast education delivery network spread over 30 countries in the Americas, Europe, Asia, Middle East, Africa and Australia/Oceania, blends classroom and on-line learning. The company provides a comprehensive education environment to individuals and enterprises, offerings training that is customized to the varied needs of audiences with diverse backgrounds (NIIT website).

NIIT provides another capacity building success story, which again makes use of the franchising model. However, an interesting feature of the NIIT story is that in 2007 approximately 42% of the total number of NIIT shares were owned by foreign institutional investors, suggesting that foreign investment played its part in helping NIIT to gain world class status. Therefore while ABCTCL succeeded in attracting private finance from an Indian institution, NIIT shows that it is also possible to attract private finance from abroad. Again, the international private finance market is a source of income which public nonprofit institutions simply cannot access.

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[2] With hindsight, coffee and ODL may have more in common than originally thought. For example, would it not be possible for Café Coffee Day outlets to double up as NIOS Accredited Institutions? This would help NIOS expand and provide increased access to the internet and it would also help to increase custom for Café Coffee Day whilst transforming their corporate image.

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While the idea that private investment could be used to help fund the expansion of education in developing countries will have been treated with a certain amount of caution only a decade ago, it is surprising how quickly attitudes are now changing. A clear indication of this change in attitude occurred in 2006 when the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Financial Times (FT) sponsored their first private sector development competition, "Business and Development: The Private Path to Prosperity". The competition was designed to encourage new and innovative thinking in the ongoing dialogue on the role of business in development, and attracted over 500 submissions from over 70 countries. The gold award was given to Professor James Tooley's essay 'Educating Amaretch: Private Schools for the Poor and the New Frontier for Investors'[3], which highlights the potential of private investment and private for-profit schools at the primary level in developing countries. On the day after the award was announced, the Financial Times published the following editorial comment, which is worth quoting in full as the FT remains one of the most widely read and respected financial newspapers in the world:

> *Editorial - Educating the poorest.*
>
> Without literacy and numeracy, people are doomed to a life of poverty. Development experts know that. So, too, do parents. Disgusted by corrupt and incompetent public sector provision, many of the world's poorest people are turning to private sector alternatives. This is a fascinating development, on which the world should now build.
>
> Almost everybody knows that governments cannot run factories, farms or shops. But many people still expect them to do a first-rate job of delivering education. They are deluded. Poor parents have realised this already. They have also done something about it, as James Tooley of the university of Newcastle upon Tyne has discovered. He has found that 75 per cent of the schoolchildren in poor urban and peri-urban areas of Lagos State were in private schools, while the proportion in the slums of Hyderabad was not much lower, at 65 per cent.
>
> Last September, Professor Tooley's Educating Amaretch won first prize in an essay competition on "business and development", sponsored by the International Finance Corporation and the Financial Times. The essay, subsequently published in abbreviated form in the FT (September 17 2006), won deserved attention. This week, in response, the charitable arm of Orient Global, a Singapore-based investment manager, announced that it had asked Prof Tooley to act as special adviser on how to invest $100m in low-cost private schools for the developing world's poorest children. This is a commendable and exciting initiative.

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[3] http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/essaycompetition.nsf/Content/2006WinningEssays

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Prof Tooley has already found that private schools for the poor perform far better than their public counterparts, to the chagrin of fond believers in the honesty and devotion of public sector bureaucracies. He has shown that private schools have lower teacher absenteeism, lower costs and better results than public competitors. This superiority is, without doubt, because they are accountable to parents, not idle functionaries and indifferent politicians.

Yet, as Prof Tooley has also argued, huge potential also exists for further development of this dynamic sector. Investment, he suggests, could go into improved infrastructure, into small-scale research and development, and into the development of branded schools. Brands are a way for business people to establish - and then benefit - from a reputation for quality, including also in the provision of education.

Consider this: in today's economically dynamic India almost a third of females between the ages of 15 and 24 are illiterate. This is a scandal and a blight. Education is not, as has long been believed, too important to be left to the private sector. It is, instead, too important to be left to failing public monopolies. The private-sector revolution empowers the one group of people that cares about the education of children: their parents. Outsiders - both official and private - must build on the initiative the poor have shown (FT, 2007)

As noted above, winning the gold award resulted in Prof Tooley being asked to become a special advisor to the charitable arm of Orient Global, a Singapore-based investment manager. What appealed to Orient Global was that they could now help to educate the poor by investing in chains of financially self sustainable for-profit schools, instead of having to depend on bureaucratic government agencies and inefficient nonprofit charities. The setting up of the Google foundation in 2007 as a for-profit charity, also reflects this growing recognition of some of the fundamental differences between unsustainable nonprofit institutions and sustainable for-profit institutions. This new generation of philanthropists and their charitable foundations and trusts, therefore represents yet another source of finance which public nonprofit institutions will be unable to access.

Recommendations and policy guidelines

In his opening address on September 10th 2001, at the second meeting of EFA's Working Group, Koichiro Matsuura (Director-General of UNESCO), concludes his presentation with the following statement:

In the third and concluding part of my presentation, I would briefly consider some dimensions of EFA that merit further attention. I hope that, during the days ahead, the Working Group will cover these issues and concerns in its deliberations. First, the role within EFA of the private or corporate sector and private foundations is a subject that is long overdue. In particular, what kind of

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partnership arrangements might be developed and implemented? I would to propose that a task team be set up under the auspices of the Working Group to review this area and report at its next meeting. It may be useful for proposition papers to be generated and workshops convened so that our thinking on these matters may advance (Matsuura, 2001)

It remains unclear how much progress UNESCO has been made in increasing the involvement of the corporate sector in the EFA project. Was a task team set up under the auspices of the Working Group to review this area, as recommended by the Director-General of UNESCO, back in 2001? If not, why not and what is preventing progress in this critically important area? Thankfully, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) has taken a lead in promoting research and development in this area and an organisation called EdInvest has been established which provides information for making private investment in education possible on a global scale. EdInvest have also published online a Handbook on Public Private Partnerships[4] which was created as a guide to facilitate public private partnerships in education and contains various case studies and models. Also available on the EdInvest website is a presentation by Latham (2002) which includes the following recommendations and policy guidelines for *A For-Profit Public-Private Partnership*:

Approach to Regulating Private Education

Weaknesses

- Inflexible, prescriptive and input-focused regulation (command and control).
- Inconsistent and ad-hoc application of regulations at the local level.
- Over-zealous and uneven treatment of different schools.
- Regulatory mindset toward private provision.

Possible Solutions

- Adopt light-handed, flexible approach to regulating private schools.
- Reduce extent of current regulations.
- Provide greater certainty as to the 'rules of the game' (eg permitted uses).
- New school licensing system (eg possible tier system).

Access to Resources

Weaknesses

- Lack of access to capital at affordable rates to finance school construction and expansion.

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[4] http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/edinvest.nsf/Content/PublicPrivatePartnerships

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- Lack of access to land in suitable locations.
- Restrictive and uncertain land zoning regulations.
- Lack of access to staff trained in relevant content areas and methodologies.

Possible Solutions

- Make investment in education more attractive by improving the regulatory environment and relaxation of foreign ownership limits on private schools.
- Release government land for use by private education providers.
- Allow private sector to enter teacher training market - pre-service, in-service and school improvement.
- Provide soft-loans to private schools through an education finance facility

School Funding Arrangements

Weaknesses

- Funding to private schools not targeted.
- Funding to private schools delivered in-kind, not in-cash - implications for flexibility and quality.
- School funding system not neutral between public and private school sector.
- Funding does not follow students who shift from public to private education sector.

Possible Solutions

- Target private school funding on basis of student characteristics.
- Introduce per-capita formula-based funding system across public and private schools.
- Contract private management of public schools under MoE tender process.
- Purchase private school places for public school students where public school is inadequate.

Coordination and Partnership

Weaknesses

- Lack of trust between public and private sectors and lack of mechanisms to encourage trust.
- Absence of comprehensive private sector coordinating body.

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- Lack of coordinating body among government departments with responsibility for private education.
- Lack of instruments to assess performance

Possible Solutions

- Establish a National Task Force comprising selected personnel from both sectors.
- Establish a Private Education Association.
- Establish a coordinating committee within the Ministries.
- Establish an independent National Assessment and/or Examination Board.

Reasons for delays

Legal issues
- develop from scratch the framework that allows the Ministry to enter into a contract with non public operators.
- ownership of the land on which schools and classrooms would be built.

Ideological debate
- for instance, public funds paying for private classrooms

Commitment
- limited understanding and commitment at the Ministry level to PPP initiatives.

Lessons learnt
- Need for strong support from govt. officials for promoting private sector;
- effective regulatory and legal framework;
- strong project management;
- time commitment;
- strong current or potential private sector organization

Conclusion

In July 2007, Sir John Daniel (UNESCO's former Assistant Director-General for Education), stated the following:

> A choice must be made between inadequate provision of higher education by a public sector monopoly or meeting the demand by a combination of public and private institutions. This is a political dilemma for many developing country governments (Daniel, 2007)

The same choices now need to be made concerning the future of ODL in SSA, and this will also remain a political dilemma for many developing country governments.

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However, international agencies must not underestimate the influence which they have on national governments across SSA, either by actively promoting one option instead of the other or by simply refusing to engage in the debate. The costs of maintaining the status quo are now becoming increasingly clear to see. However, despite the politics involved in this debate, exciting opportunities still exist for those national governments who are prepared to think the unthinkable and blaze new trails by creating a regulatory environment which encourages and attracts world class for-profit companies to come and invest in their ODL sectors[5]. When you combine the profit motive, open and distance learning and information technology, then anything is possible.

Further research

- What could companies such as Microsoft or foundations such as Google.com contribute to the task of achieving universal access to open and distance learning across SSA?

- If world class companies are allowed to contribute to increasing access to ODL, what kind of regulatory environment will help these organisations deliver ODL services?

- How can national governments across SSA help to attract and encourage world class companies to invest in their ODL?

- How can UNESCO and IFC do more to involve more world class companies in the EFA project?

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[5] Those who are interested should contact the IFC for advice on how to proceed immediately.

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