



United Nations  
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Cultural Organization

## **Baseline Situational Analysis on Open Distance Learning (ODL) in Southern African Development Community (SADC) Member States**

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

CEMBA/MPA	Commonwealth Executive Masters of Business Administration/ Masters of Public Administration (CEMBA/MPA)
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
HCI	Human Capital Index
HEI	higher education institution
ICT	information and communications technology
LMS	learning management system
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MOOC	massive online open course
ODFL	open, distance and flexible learning
ODL	open and distance learning
OER	open education resources
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

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## **1. Introduction**

Open and distance learning (ODL) has a long and complex history in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Region (Mays and Makoe, 2017). ODL emerged in response to the need to expand equitable access to quality learning opportunities, resources and qualifications to millions of youth and adults who wanted to further their studies. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 catalysed the largest disruption of education systems in history. By May 2020, the forced closure of education institutions affected an estimated 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries across all continents. As of mid-July 2020, over one billion learners were still affected, representing 61% of the world's total enrolment. Some countries have opened schools and colleges, only to close them again after a resurgence of the coronavirus (United Nations, 2020). These conditions marked a pivotal moment towards the worldwide adoption of remote and digital learning, including ODL, as part of attempts to promote learning continuity under home-confined lockdown conditions.

At the time of writing in December 2020, it is anticipated that the COVID-19 pandemic will continue until the end of 2021 (The Economist, 2020), which potentially exacerbates deepening poverty, inequality, declining human development, and the widespread loss of learning, skills and livelihood. The latter manifests not only in the falling behind of curriculum learning by millions of learners across the world, including sub-Saharan Africa and the SADC region, but also as a rise in the number of children and youth dropping out of schools and learning institutions; a rise in teenage pregnancies; and increased risk for women and girls, as they are more vulnerable to multiple types of abuse, such as domestic violence, transactional sex, and early and forced marriages (United Nations, 2020). These anticipated developments

reinforce further the necessity for the adoption, promotion and support of ODL in order to sustain learning continuity and its concomitant knock-on effects on the economy and society. At the same time, the COVID-19 moment has also provoked the search for new, creative and imaginative ways to enable learning continuity for all, thereby presenting a further opportunity for the expansion of ODL in the SADC Region.

In response, the SADC Secretariat and UNESCO have committed to support the learning continuity strategies of Member States through a *#LearningNeverStops* campaign. The support involves mobilizing resources and implementing innovative, context-appropriate remote learning and ODL strategies; leveraging hi-tech, low-tech, and no-tech approaches that can curtail drop-out rates and enable gains in learning and livelihoods in the SADC Member States. The centrality of ODL in the *#LearningNeverStops* campaign in the Region necessitates a shared understanding of the status of ODL among Member States. Thus, this document is intended to offer a baseline report on the status of ODL in Member States in the SADC. It presents the ODL experience with policy and implementation at a country level and to some extent at institutional level, and it considers the pre-COVID-19 and current COVID-19 conditions and how Member States have responded to enable learning continuity.

The purpose of the report is to provide an illustrative overview of the state of ODL in the SADC Region based on current practices in each of the 16 SADC Member States. It also draws on four institutional case studies of successful ODL practice in the Region, covering secondary education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education. The findings from the baseline results are intended to inform a harmonized SADC-wide regional plan for the promotion of ODL, based on the realities of each of the Member States.

The unit of analysis for this report are the national governments (Member States) of the SADC Region who provide the mandate for policy, planning and implementation of ODL (Minnaar, 2013). Member States enable the governance of ODL and the provision of ODL licences and establish quality assurance frameworks and initial and continuing teacher professional development in ODL through ministries of education, dedicated ODL agencies and public and private ODL institutions and organizations. The latter includes an increasingly diverse range of institutions and organizations, such as universities, TVET colleges, community colleges, non-government organizations and community-based organizations and their wide-ranging partnerships with donor aid and development agencies and private companies. Thus, while the unit of analysis of this baseline situational analysis is on the status of ODL at Member State level, it nonetheless recognizes that the delivery of ODL in each of the Member States involves a complex and diverse ecosystem of institutions, partners and role-players. Moreover, it also recognizes that the ODL ecosystems across the Region are in a state of flux and under the influence of: technological change and integration; the rise of private institutional delivery; and, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift towards online learning.

The focus of this baseline situational analysis is on the extent to which Member States have developed national government policies and strategies that provide an enabling environment for ODL institutional delivery. It further explores the establishment of national ODL quality assurance frameworks, the nature and extent of ODL infrastructure development, and the continuous professional development and training of ODL teachers and lecturers. It also explores the national ODL initiatives that have emerged in Member States before and in response

to the COVID-19 pandemic. The report concludes with recommendations on the promulgation of ODL in the Region.

## 2. Background

This study is framed by the SADC Regional Open and Distance Learning Policy Framework (SADC, 2012), which is linked to a Regional ODL Strategy Plan adopted in 2013 and a Regional Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (2009) and a Regional Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework adopted in 2011. The main objectives of the Regional ODL Policy Framework are to:

- Contribute to the development of appropriate ODL policies in the SADC MS;
- Support Member States with the deployment of effective, harmonized open and distance learning;
- Increase access to quality education and training in MEMBER STATES; and
- Support regional integration of ODL across SADC.

The development of the Regional ODL Policy Framework and accompanying instruments was funded by the African Development Bank in support of capacity building in ODL in the Region.

The SADC ODL Policy Framework followed an evidence-based policy development process, involving extensive consultations with stakeholders. It was focused on meeting two overall policy objectives, namely to:

- Promote sustainable ODL development for all citizens of the SADC region; and
- Increase access and success through quality, gender-sensitive and inclusive ODL programmes and services across the SADC region.

The Framework comprises 14 key policy focus areas that seek to address the issues and challenges that Member States face, namely:

1. National ODL policy frameworks, governance and management;
2. ODL staffing, training and development;
3. Public perception of ODL;
4. Institutional capacity;
5. Learner support;
6. Quality assurance;
7. Monitoring and evaluation;
8. Collaboration;
9. Networking;
10. Funding;
11. Inclusive education;
12. Curriculum development;
13. Application of information and communications technology (ICT) in ODL; and
14. Research and development.

Following the adoption of this Framework, a regional ODL Strategic Plan and Implementation Framework was developed by the SADC Secretariat to operationalize the SADC ODL Policy Framework. Again, this exercise was carried out in consultation with all Member States to ensure consistency and buy-in. The resulting document, for 2013–2017, serves as a guide for the Region in the harmonization of education and training systems of Member States to provide quality ODL. An essential component was the identification of effective implementation mechanisms and the roles of national committees, project steering committees and coordination committees to drive the ODL agenda forward. It also included a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework, detailing all specific activities, indicators and responsibilities of all parties. The M&E Framework serves as a guideline for the effective implementation of ODL in Member States by adopting a common indicator framework and periodic reporting on progress achieved.

This situational analysis is based on the range of issues and challenges highlighted in the SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework (SADC, 2012) and will serve as a foundation against which progress in each of these areas can be monitored and evaluated in the Region.

### 3. Working definitions

The study applied the following working definitions.

**Open and distance learning (ODL)** refers to an approach to planned learning that requires a well-defined system of delivery, teaching techniques, modes of communication and structured administration and management. ODL also frees learners from the constraints of time, space and place while offering flexible learning opportunities (Moor and Kearsley, 1996; SADC, 2012).

**Open distance and flexible learning (ODFL)** refers to the flexible broadening and expansion of learning opportunities that include and transcend the boundaries of formal structured learning so that all communities can participate, especially communities who are socially, educationally and economically marginalized and excluded. The affordances of rapidly changing information and communications technology (ICT) can enable the design and implementation of ODFL, under appropriate conditions.

**Information and communications technology (ICT)** refers the convergence of information and communications technology. ICT incorporates a widening range of digital technologies – and the rapid changes in their design, affordances and functionalities – that when appropriated and applied in context, under certain conditions, can enable equitable access to quality learning and teaching for all.

**Learning technologies** encompass a broad range of digital and non-digital technologies that enable access to learning resources, learning opportunities and learning processes. They range from print media to educational television and radio to the use of cloud-based online learning platforms.

**Remote learning** is a concept that emerged more prominently in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. It refers to learning remotely from the physical school and classroom environment when the learner and instructor are separated by time and place and do not meet face-to-face in a traditional classroom setting. It is often referred to as distance learning. Remote learning can take place ‘offline’ and online.

**Emergency remote learning** refers to a mode of educational delivery through which contact and face-to-face delivery has either been supplemented or replaced through the enabling support of remote, non-digital and digital technology platforms under emergency conditions.

**Distance education** is an organized, planned learning process that is delivered and supported by a clearly defined system of education delivery with modified teaching techniques and a system of administration and management which supports learners being taught by teachers who are geographically removed and who engage and communicate via electronic or print media (SADC, 2012).

**Open education resources (OER)** are teaching, learning and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open licence that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions (Butcher, 2015).

**Open education practice (OEP)** refers to teaching and learning practices that are made possible and practical through the creation and use of OER. They include in the context of the reusing, revising, remixing, redistributing and retaining permissions that are characteristic of OER (Huang et al., 2020).

**Open learning** is an approach that seeks to remove all barriers to learning while aiming to provide learners with a reasonable chance of success in an education and training system that provides a range of learning entry points centred on their specific needs and located in multiple areas of learning (Butcher, 2015).

## **4. Methodology**

This baseline situational analysis applied a qualitative research methodology employing telephonic interviews to gather primary data on the current state of ODL in the SADC Member States. A structured questionnaire, available at Appendix A, was developed in English and translated into Portuguese to guide these interviews. Translation of the questionnaire in French was not considered because one of the researchers was fluent in reading, writing and speaking in French.

Officials from all Member States were identified as key interview respondents. UNESCO ROSA also provided names of officials in Member States who could be contacted for interviews. A number of attempts were made to set up telephonic interviews with key respondents in each of the 16 Member States. Official representatives were contacted formally via email by the SADC Secretariat. A few Member State officials responded to the request for interviews.

On the whole, the responses were minimal. Reasons for the limited responsiveness could be that the timeframe was short; that the team relied heavily on email communication to consult Member State representatives. Because most Member State officials have very busy schedules, they may not have seen the email requests sent to them. As a result, most of the interviews with Member State officials did not materialize.

Because the interviews were limited, the methodology shifted focus towards the review of relevant documents and literature on ODL in each of the SADC Member States. Here, more data were available in some countries compared to others.

The baseline also included a case study methodology (Yin, 2013) to research four purposefully selected ODL institutions as baseline case studies.

The study encountered additional challenges. Language barriers proved to be a significant limitation in the attempts at conducting interviews. The two researchers involved in this study were not conversant in Portuguese. While the questionnaire was translated into Portuguese, the Portuguese-speaking respondents were challenged with providing their responses to the questionnaire. Thus, the literature review was based primarily on a review of the literature available in English and French.

A baseline situational analysis on ODL policy and practice in the Region also relies on the availability of accurate, reliable and comparable data within and across the 16 Member States in the Region. However, the research was not able to uncover relevant comparable data based on document reviews. Accurate, timely data were unobtainable on:

- The number of ODL institutions and organizations involved in formal and non-formal ODL delivery;
- The nature and extent of ODL infrastructure;
- The range of courseware on offer across the ODL institutional landscape in each country;
- The number of teachers/lecturers, whether part-time, full-time, or on contract within and across the ODL institutional landscape in Member States; and
- Assessment results based on quality assurance systems and standards in Member States.

The absence or lack of such data and the relative accuracy of existing data have unfortunately undermined attempts at systematically assessing and developing ODL systems in each of the respective Member States and the Region as a whole.

## 5. Educational overview of the region

The education and training systems in the SADC Region are characterized by relatively low human capacity and skills when measured by the World Bank's Human Capital Index (HCI). While recognizing the limitations of global indices on human capacity, this report uses the HCI for purposes of comparison among countries in the Region, in view also of the limited alternative comparative datasets available. On average, the 16 SADC Member States have an HCI of 0.4, which suggests that a child born in 2017 is likely to achieve 40% of his or her potential if the child reaches adulthood. Seychelles is the outlier in the Region from an HCI perspective, boasting the highest HCI of 0.68.

Table 1 provides a snapshot of the human capacity status in each of the countries in the Region, based on a few key development indicators produced by the World Bank (2017) and UNESCO (UIS, 2018). It shows the diversity of the Region in terms of population size, ranging from under one million in Comoros in 2020 to the largest country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), with a population of just under 90 million. With reference to the gross enrolment ratio for secondary education, it also shows that South Africa, Seychelles, Mauritius and Eswatini have among the highest scores, with Tanzania, Mozambique and Madagascar recording among the lowest scores. Even though the recorded year of secondary enrolment varies from country to country, they provide some comparative indication of the estimated ratio for gross secondary enrolment.

Table 1 shows further that the gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education ranges from 4.0% (Tanzania) to 40.8% (Mauritius) even though here, too, the years of measurement varies. Furthermore, the available data on the status of ODL is limited, and it challenges comparability

across the region. This points to the need to further explore how the data systems can be improved at institutional, country and regional levels.

Table 1 does not provide information on the number of ODL learners per country. Data on ODL learners are often kept at institutional level and less often as aggregated data at Member State level. Collecting and monitoring national ODL learner numbers is thus an area for further engagement with officials in MS.

**Table 1: Human capacity indicators in SADC Member States**

Member State	Population 2020	Human Capital Index	Secondary education enrolment	Gross enrolment ratio, secondary*	Enrolment in tertiary education, all programmes	Tertiary education graduates	Gross enrolment ratio, tertiary**
Angola	32,866,272	0.4	2,034,150 (2016)	50.67% (2016)	253,287 (2016)	16,421 (2016)	9.34% (2016)
Botswana	2,254,000	0.42	229,743 (2016)	NA	198,890 (2016)	10,631 (2017)	24.86% (2017)
Comoros	869,601	0.41	73,695 (2018)	59.47% (2018)	6,499 (2014)	1,277 (2013)	8.99% (2013)
DRC	89,561,403	0.42	4618,895 (2015)	46.17% (2015)	464,678 (2016)	105,094 (2016)	6.6% (2016)
Eswatini	1,136,000	0.41	134,493 (2018)	82.41% (2016)	121,274 (2014)	2,525 (2013)	6.75% (2013)
Lesotho	2,108,000	0.37	217,958 (2015)	62.01% (2017)	211,705 (2016)	4,616 (2018)	10.2% (2018)
Madagascar	27,691,018	0.37	1,548,208 (2018)	36.53% (2017)	143,759 (2018)	29,763 (2018)	5.35% (2018)
Malawi	18,143,000	0.41	2,760,322 (2017)	40.28% (2018)	1,594,473 (2018)	NA	NA
Mauritius	1,267,000	0.63	125,673 (2018)	95.1% (2018)	95,699 (2018)	8,275 (2017)	40.6% (2017)
Mozambique	31,255,435	0.36	1,216,214 (2017)	35.41% (2017)	213,930 (2018)	24,205 (2018)	7.31% (2018)
Namibia	2,448,000	0.43	245,419 (2017)	NA	244,869 (2017)	9,786 (2017)	22.89% (2017)
Seychelles	97,000	0.68	9,318 (2018)	81.45% (2018)	2,693 (2016)	441 (2018)	17.08% (2018)
South Africa	59,308,690	0.41	5,052,180 (2017)	104.7% (2017)	1,116,017 (2017)	232,604 (2017)	22.37% (2017)
Tanzania	59,734,218	0.4	2,148,466 (2018)	29.44% (2018)	178,598 (2016)		4.01% (2016)
Zambia	17,352,000	0.40	2,125,074 (2016)	NA	1,467,633 (2015)	NA	4.12% (2015)
Zimbabwe	14,862,924	0.44	957,461 (2013)	52.41% (2013)	135,575 (2015)	33,255 (2015)	10.01% (2015)
Source:	Worldometer (2020)	World Bank (2017)	UIS (2018) Commonwealth of Learning <sup>1</sup>				

\*% of secondary school-age population; \*\* % of tertiary school-age population

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.col.org/member-countries/africa>

## 6. ODL policy status

This baseline study is informed by the SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework (SADC, 2012), which promotes the adoption of dedicated national ODL policies.

SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework
<p>A clear ODL policy at national level, therefore, is a necessary condition for creating an enabling environment to support the development and implementation of institutional ODL policies.</p>
<p><b>Policy Statement:</b> Member States shall create enabling policy environments that promote the development and effective implementation of Open and Distance Learning programmes.</p>
<p><b>Specific objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To integrate Open and Distance Learning (ODL) into the national education and training systems through national policies;</li><li>• To develop ODL policies that are linked to other relevant national policies and are in line with regional, continental and global commitments to education and training in general and ODL in particular.</li></ul>

Many Member States have endorsed the SADC regional frameworks and the SADC Open and Distance Learning (ODL) project (initiated in 2007) as well as the SADC Protocol on Higher Education and Training, some progress has been made with policy development at the Member State level, with a few countries still not having promulgated their national ODL policy.

The study recognizes that policies are multi-faceted, interconnected and complex. ODL policy prescriptions are not only reflected in dedicated ODL policies but, in most countries, are also reflected in related policies, laws and regulations, such as policies on:

- Higher education
- Post-schooling
- TVET
- Skills development

- Open schooling
- National ICT policy
- ICT in education or digital learning
- Open education resources (OER)
- Non-formal education
- Curriculum and assessment
- Language education
- Inclusive education
- Quality assurance.

More recently, Member States have promulgated national responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, including educational responses that have incorporated ODL adoption. COVID-19 can be perceived as a catalytic moment for ODL in many Member States. For this report as a baseline study, however, while noting that ODL features across a range of policy promulgations, the focus is on dedicated specified ODL policy. In this respect, four Member States do not yet have dedicated national government policy statements on ODL, as shown in Table 2. The table also shows that five Member States have a formally adopted national ODL policy or strategy in place, and seven have a draft national policy in place. Based on the understanding that specified ODL policy provides an enabling environment and mandate for the institutional adoption of ODL, the results in the table point to the continuing need for ODL policy support among Member States.

**Table 2:** ODL policy status in SADC Member States

No dedicated ODL policy yet	Draft ODL policy	Adopted ODL policy or national strategy
Angola DRC Madagascar Union of Comoros	Botswana Lesotho Mauritius Tanzania Zambia Zimbabwe	Malawi (2020) Mozambique (2014) Namibia (2016) Seychelles (2015) South Africa (2014) Eswatini (2020)

Table 2 identifies the four countries that do not yet have dedicated ODL policies. However, references to ODL may prevail in existing policies on basic education, higher education and training, labour market policies and national ICT policies in each of the countries. These will need to be verified by officials in the four Member States. A brief overview of dedicated ODL policy in the draft or officially endorsed form for each Member State is the focus of the next section.

### ***Angola***

While a dedicated ODL policy may not yet prevail in Angola, it has witnessed a significant rise in the number of learners participating in secondary and post-secondary vocational colleges. The number of universities increased from two in 1998 to 17 in 2009 and a total of 44 higher education institutions (HEIs) were recorded in 2012 (Fongwa, 2012).

### ***Botswana***

A draft national ODL policy was developed in 2016 but has not yet been approved by Cabinet. The ODL draft policy is linked to the Education Act, the 1994 Revised National Policy on Education and the national ICT policy. The Botswana Ministry of Education also has a national OER policy currently under development. The objectives of the draft ODL policy are to:

- Increase access to quality education and training across Botswana;
- Promote sustainable ODL development for all citizens in Botswana; and
- Increase access and success through quality, gender-sensitive and inclusive ODL programmes and services across the country.

The coordinating ODL structures are mainly the Botswana Open University (BOU) as the lead agency for ODL in Botswana. The Botswana Ministry of Education relies on BOU for technical advice and the implementation of ODL tools.

### ***Eswatini***

A draft national ODL policy was developed in 2019 and was approved in September 2020. The overall policy objectives are to:

- Promote sustainable ODL development for all citizens in Eswatini; and
- Increase access and success through quality, gender-sensitive and inclusive programmes and services across the country, delivered through ODL.

The policy serves to harness ICT in education and the use of OERs and massive open online courses (MOOCs) to promote and enable ODL across all education institutions. The policy also provides for an implementation mechanism, including the involvement and inclusions of different role-players to ensure wider access to quality education. A high level of political support at national, ministerial and institutional levels and a need to strengthen all structures that deal with ODL has become of paramount importance.

### ***Lesotho***

A draft national ODL policy has been developed but is not yet operational. The next step is for it to be presented to stakeholders for finalization and submission to Cabinet. The ODL draft policy draws its legitimacy from several other Ministry of Education and Training policies such as the Non-Formal Education (NFE) Policy that was approved by Cabinet in October 2018. It is yet to be fully disseminated in preparation for implementation. The aim is to develop an Act of Parliament to operationalize the NFE policy. The objectives are to:

- Provide educational programmes that are relevant, accessible and of good quality at all levels;
- Provide opportunities for continuous professional development and lifelong learning for improved livelihoods;
- Enhance the use of ICTs and multimedia to increase access to quality ODL programmes; and
- Promote a culture of lifelong learning.

Coordinating structures will form part of the implementation plan but they are yet to be developed.

### ***Malawi***

The national ODL policy was adopted in August 2020. It is linked to the Malawi National Education Sector Plan (2008–2017) and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (2017–2022), which recognizes ODL as a means to increasing access to education and has common elements with the ICT policy, with emphasis on the integration of ICT in education.

The ODL policy supports the promotion and consolidation of education development in basic, secondary, TVET, higher and tertiary education. ODL interventions have strong ties with other sector policies such as decentralization, early childhood development, orphans and vulnerable children, persons with disabilities and gender, equalization of opportunities, gender, youth, labour, and HIV and AIDS.

The policy objectives seek to address the three main priority areas of access and equity, quality and relevance, and governance and management. The specific objectives are to:

- Respond to personal development and human capital demands;

- Establish sustainable funding and financing mechanisms for ODL; and
- Enhance public–private partnerships of ODL.

The policy document includes an elaborate and flexible implementation framework which is attached as an appendix. The coordinating structures are the Ministry of Education, which will implement the policy through an ODL directorate, which will also be responsible for quality assurance; the Malawi College of Distance Education as a national ODL centre; and an ODL advisory board consisting of both private and public institutions to ensure alignment of ODL programmes to local, regional and international standards.

### *Mauritius*

A distance education policy framework was developed in 2013, spearheaded by the then Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), including higher education stakeholders. It has not emerged, however, into a national ODL policy framework. Section 4 of the Open University Act refers to the role of the Open University as the focal point for the provision of ODL in Mauritius and the development and practice of ODL. The objectives of the Open University<sup>2</sup> are to:

- Encourage the use of ODL at all levels of education and training; and
- Be the focal point for the provision of ODL in Mauritius through the establishment of active partnerships with local public and private institutions, as well as overseas institutions engaged in education and training.

The national organization responsible for all HEIs, the Higher Education Commission (established in 2018), is also responsible for establishing the ODL framework in Mauritius.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.open.ac.mu/ou-act](http://www.open.ac.mu/ou-act)

### *Mozambique*

The Government of Mozambique adopted an Education and Human Development Strategic Plan in 2018, which emphasizes distance learning as a key enabler towards expanding educational opportunities and improving the quality of education. The strategy emerged in the face of the government's attempt to revive the distance learning system because of the shortage of school places and in order to support the learning of students who live long distances from their nearest school. It integrates distance education in primary and secondary education, particularly because demand for secondary education is higher than the supply of secondary school classrooms. It was developed based on a pilot project established in 2014 involving 35,000 students who could not attend school physically. The strategy also draws on lessons from the limited success of night school courses, where few students would attend.

### *Namibia*

Namibia developed its national ODL policy in 2008, which was later adopted in 2016. The national ODL policy has a focus on the application of ICT in ODL, and it urges the need to acquire and develop appropriate ICT infrastructure to support the delivery of ODL programmes and services and to develop institutional ODL policies, making full use of technology. The ODL policy also has a focus on the application and usage of OER in ODL, although it acknowledges its current limited development in the country. The national ODL policy was developed in consultation with internal and external related policies like the SADC ODL policy, the Namibia Qualifications Authority Act, Namibia's Fourth National Development Plan, the Education Act 2001, the Namibia Vision 2030 policy framework and several others. The policy is accompanied

by an implementation plan and the execution of activities started in 2018/19. The main objectives of the ODL policy are to:

- Promote functional and sustainable ODL programmes and services;
- Increase access and success through inclusive ODL programmes and services;
- Develop ODL programmes and services that will contribute to the creation of a knowledgeable society;
- Adhere to national and international policy declarations; and
- Support national and regional development initiatives.

The coordinating structures to implement the national ODL policy are the Ministry of Education, Arts & Culture and its various directorates, ODL institutions, regulatory authorities such as the Namibia Qualifications Authority and the National Commission for Research, Science and Technology, and an established trust, the Namibian Open Learning Network Trust (NOLNeT), that has the facilitating role of ensuring that members of public educational institutions implement the ODL policy. The objective is that publicly funded ODL institutions share their resources and expertise. The following institutions were the founding members of NOLNet: the Directorate of Adult Education in the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture; the Namibian College of Open Learning; the University of Namibia through its Centre for Open, Distance, and eLearning; Namibia University of Science and Technology through its Centre for Open and Lifelong Learning); and the National Institute for Educational Development through its In-service Unit.

### ***Seychelles***

The national ODL policy was adopted in June 2015 in Seychelles and is linked to the ICT in Education Policy (which covers lifelong learning and OER), the National Human Resource Development Policy, the Seychelles Integrated National Human Resources Development Strategy, the document *Towards a Knowledge-Based Society* and the National Employment Policy and Strategies. The ODL policy seeks to:

- Facilitate and increase access to quality education for all, as well as to skills development;
- Provide more significant opportunities for lifelong learning for all and the development of a knowledge-based society, irrespective of gender, age, background, and social and physical status;
- Provide a more coordinated approach to education and lifelong learning;
- Mainstream ODL as a means of achieving education for all at all levels;
- Promote lifelong learning to achieve the vision of a knowledge-based society;
- Contribute towards the harmonization of education and training nationally and regionally; and
- Promote access to learning for sustainable development.

### ***South Africa***

South Africa adopted its policy on distance education (DE) for its universities in the context of an integrated post-school system in 2014 (DHET, 2014a). In this respect, the scope covers post-schooling institutions such as universities, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions and community colleges, as well as several private post-school institutions

(registered private further education and training [FET] colleges and private HEIs), sector education and training authorities (SETAs), a National Skills Fund (NSF) and various regulatory bodies responsible for qualifications and quality assurance in the post-school system such as the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and Quality Councils. The DE policy is linked to the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) policy on post-school education (DHET, 2014b) and the Council on Higher Education's Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (CHE, 2013). The post-school education policy (DHET, 2014b, p. xi) states as its aims:

- *A post-school system that can assist in building a fair, equitable, non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic South Africa;*
- *Expanded access, improved quality, and increased diversity of provision;*
- *A post-school education and training system that is responsive to the needs of individual citizens, employers in both public and private sectors, as well as broader societal and developmental objectives.*

Thus, while it does not explicitly state support of open and distance learning, it recognizes the influence of ICT in enabling blended, flexible and open distance education. The policy focuses on the provision of distance education and places emphasis on:

- Providing a system-wide definition of distance education;
- Supporting the growth of quality distance education;
- Ensuing distance education provides opportunities for the expansion of access to education;

- Providing funding for evidenced-based, cost-effective models of distance education and the capacity to evaluate and regulate distance education provision;
- Promoting the development and use of OER; and
- Creating an enabling environment for the appropriate integration of ICT to enhance distance education provision in both public and private universities as well as in other post-schooling institutions.

The policy provides for a matrix for distance education access for learners who are entirely offline or fully online, on the one hand, combined with, at the other end of the spectrum, a range of learning possibilities from exclusive face-to-face contact sessions to hybrid or blended models to remote education. It also promotes institutional support systems for school leavers, particularly those who have less exposure to distance education institutions.

### ***Tanzania***

Tanzania has a final draft of its national ODL policy that has been developed to date (SADC Secretariat, 2020). The commitment to ODL is also expressed in Tanzania's Vision 2025, its Education and Training Plan and its national ICT policy (both adopted in 2016). Its ICT implementation plan, also adopted in 2016, includes a commitment to the integration of ICT in learning and teaching in formal, non-formal and informal education and training.

### ***Zambia***

A draft ODL policy was developed in 2012 but was not adopted because of the requirement to only have one main policy, namely the education policy. The intent was to have a chapter in the education policy that would ensure policies and strategies for the ODL sector. The Education and

Skills Sector Plan of Zambia includes policies on ODL. In the seventh national development plan, there is mention of the use of technological and ODL approaches to education and training.

### ***Zimbabwe***

Zimbabwe developed the final draft of its national ODL policy in 2019 (SADC Secretariat, 2020). Zimbabwe adopted a policy on ICT in higher and tertiary education, science and technology development policy in 2019 which takes account of how ICT can enable ODL across its 50 HEIs. Zimbabwe also has a national ICT policy, which also references the enabling role of ICT to support access, quality and equity in education.

## 7. ODL policy, gender equity and inclusivity

Along with enabling access to learning opportunities, equity and inclusion are also strong imperatives in ODL policy and practice. Here, commitments to gender equity and the inclusion of people with disabilities are crucial equity imperatives. However, information on the extent to which Member States have addressed gender equity and inclusivity in ODL policy has been challenging to ascertain. Unfortunately, the majority of Member State officials were not available to respond to interviews, which limits the nature and extent of accurate data on ODL policy and gender equity and inclusivity in this report. Those officials who were interviewed were not aware of gender equity and inclusivity clauses in policy.

The SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework (SADC, 2012) makes explicit reference to gender equity and inclusivity imperatives.

### **SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework**

**Policy statement:** SADC Member States shall promote inclusive education in the development and delivery of ODL programmes and services.

**Specific objectives:**

- To integrate inclusive education (cross cutting issues) in national ODL policies;
- To develop innovative programmes and strategies for implementing inclusive education;
- To implement the Regional ODL Gender Mainstreaming Strategy and other regional strategies;
- To identify and adopt relevant aspects of existing national, regional, continental and global policy frameworks that address inclusive education; and
- To build technical capacity of Member States to mainstream inclusive education.

Some national ODL policies and practices have embedded these objectives while, for others, the specific equity and inclusion issues are not made explicit in the policy.

### ***Angola***

While an explicit ODL policy has not yet been adopted in Angola, an existing policy on ICT in higher education science and technology highlights the specific objective to promote and ensure women's participation, thereby reiterating that this policy and new path will 'open the road to increasing the number of Angolan women in scientific careers, producing scientific knowledge and enriching national scientific community at regional and international levels' (Fongwa, 2012, p. 5).

### ***Botswana***

Inclusive education in Botswana, through the 2011 inclusive education policy, requires all school-age individuals to be in education. Furthermore, gender equity is enhanced in Botswana through the Commonwealth of Learning and UNESCO's gender mainstreaming guidelines.

### ***Eswatini***

Reasonable accommodation and budgetary support are in place to ensure the inclusion of children and youth with disabilities. During television lessons, means are provided to support deaf learners with sign language interpreters. Tablets are also provided for learners with special needs to support their learning, and this is most relevant for ODL. Work is in progress to develop a gender equity policy premised on the following objectives: 'both boys and girls will be equally supported in open and distance learning. Both boys and girls should be able to access open and distance education, and also for those children who drop out of school for reasons such as pregnancy' (Fikile Mduli, Chief Inspector, Tertiary Education and Curriculum, Ministry of Education and Training, Eswatini).

### ***Lesotho***

The National University of Lesotho has been developing gender-responsive curricula and learning materials to promote gender equity in ODL practice.

### ***Mauritius***

Every learner is guaranteed a seat at primary and secondary levels as per the National Policy and Strategy Paper on Special Education Needs. All those who qualify will also have access to free tertiary education at the undergraduate level. There is a dedicated Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, which regularly organizes training in gender issues for stakeholders.

### ***Malawi***

Malawi promotes inclusive education through the implementation of its Inclusive Education Strategy (2017–2021), with the objective of promoting equitable access to quality education at all levels and including learners with disabilities and special needs.

### ***Namibia***

As part of the implementation plan of the ODL policy, the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture is planning to develop strategies for the implementation of inclusive education pertaining to ODL; undertake capacity building in the use of inclusive education in ODL; and align inclusive institutional education policies with national policy.

### ***South Africa***

South Africa's policy on the provision of distance education in its universities and its White Paper on Post-school Education does not make any reference to gender equity or inclusivity but commits to the development of a framework to support people with disabilities in post-school

education. However, the policy makes only a cursory reference to race and gender and no explicit reference to a commitment to gender equity (DHET, 2014a; DHET, 2014b).

### ***Seychelles***

Inclusive education and training is one of 13 focus areas of the national ODL policy in alignment with the inclusive education policy, which facilitates the inclusivity of all programmes and services for all learners. In addition, the 2017 Education (Amendment) Act promotes gender equality, and the ODL policy mentions its aim of providing opportunities for all, regardless of gender, including gender equity.

### ***Zambia***

The Ministry of General Education has an Out of School and Girls Strategy (2014) in place, which enhances the provision of inclusive ODL programmes and ensures that learning materials are gender-sensitive.

### ***Zimbabwe***

Zimbabwe's draft policies on ICT in higher and primary education refer to gender equity. There are, however, limited references to inclusive education in the ICT-related policies. However, Zimbabwe's Constitution commits to gender equity and inclusivity, and Zimbabwe has a dedicated Disabled Persons Act, which makes provisions for the welfare and rehabilitation of people with disabilities.

The above listing shows the extent to which progress has been made with national ODL policy development, and yet it also reflects the need for ongoing support for some Member States with the development of dedicated national ODL policies. It also shows that ODL policy assumes

different forms, from being a dedicated ODL national policy to the inclusion of ODL clauses and commitments in complementary policies. These complementary policies include national ICT policies, higher education and TVET policies, skills development policies, policies on out-of-school youth, national digital learning policies and policies on OER. If the clauses in complementary policies are taken into account, then it can be said that more Member States have adopted ODL policy provisions. However, there is a shared understanding that the promulgation of dedicated national policy on ODL would be better placed to provide an enabling environment for the implementation of ODL and for all role-players and stakeholders to cohere around a unified vision and mission for ODL at country level. In this respect, a promulgated national policy provides legitimacy and a mandate to policy-specific actions across the ODL institutional landscape in Member States. Minaar (2013) explains the importance of national ODL policy in supporting the development of institutional ODL policies as well. The national ODL policy allows for coherence in purpose, vision, mission, strategic issues, goals, objectives, action plans and decision-making in the development of institutional policies.

The baseline analysis also shows that national ODL policies, where they have been adopted, place significant emphasis on enabling access to education and learning opportunities via ODL. In doing so, much of the focus is on establishing national systems to allow learners access to educational resources and their teachers to support and assess their learning. Existing policies also reference the range of pedagogical options to support flexible learning opportunities for learners. Thus, open, distant and flexible pedagogy features alongside the expansion of equitable access to learning. The latter refers to attempts by policy formulation and implementation to prioritize the reach of ODL opportunities to the most excluded and

marginalized learner communities. In this respect, national ODL policies, where they have been adopted, are also visionary, aspirational statements.

The continued lack of coordination and coherence amidst rapid change in ODL worldwide, and the continued need for support with national policy development and implementation, strengthen the case for regional support and capacity building in ODL policy development, implementation and evaluation.

## 8. ODL quality assurance frameworks and standards

The SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework (SADC, 2012) promotes the idea of institutional, national and regional quality assurance frameworks.

### SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework

**Policy statement:** Member States shall support the development of Institutional, National and Regional Quality Assurance Frameworks to promote delivery of quality ODL programmes.

**Specific objectives:**

- To facilitate the development of national quality assurance frameworks to harmonize the development and delivery of quality ODL programmes within Member States;
- To support the development and implementation of Regional Qualifications Framework.

Member States have national qualifications frameworks, and their ODL institutions and organizations have institutional frameworks and dedicated structures responsible for the quality assurance of teaching, learning, and research, as well as quality management. Institutions responsible for quality assurance, especially in higher education, are designed mainly for traditional face-to-face education delivery systems. Some institutions of higher education also have separate dedicated standards for online learning. International organizations such as the Commonwealth of Learning have been working with higher education institutions (HEIs) to develop quality assurance standards specific to the provision of ODL in sub-Saharan Africa, such as learner support and ODL infrastructure, but there has been no widespread implementation to date. If the parity of qualifications obtained through the ODL stream are to be perceived as being of equally acceptable quality to more traditional modes of delivery, appropriate assessment and evaluation tools adapted for ODL in the region need to be rapidly developed.

### ***Botswana***

The Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA) holds responsibility for quality assurance. While there are no national ODL standards yet, the Commonwealth of Learning and the BQA developed a set of national ODL standards in 2019. Quality assurance guidelines (such as quality assurance standards for blended learning and a strategy for technology-enabled learning) are being used for ODL at the Botswana Open University.

### ***Eswatini***

The Eswatini Higher Education Council (ESHEC) is responsible for quality assurance in Eswatini. There is a National Qualifications Framework in place for assessing the quality and relevance of skills while the National Quality Assurance Framework evaluates the quality of programmes. This combined function is overseen by the ESHEC. The Institute of Distance Education, at the University of Eswatini, offers distance education courses to learners and has been working actively with the Commonwealth of Learning to apply quality assurance guidelines to its courses.

### ***Lesotho***

The National Qualifications Framework of Lesotho has just been launched; however, there is no national quality assurance framework in place to support the delivery of ODL. The National University of Lesotho has been an active participant in developing and using the regional ODL standards spearheaded by the Commonwealth of Learning in 2018 to regulate the ODL programmes.

### ***Malawi***

The Malawi Qualifications Framework has been developed and is in its final stages of adoption. There are National Education Standards, which provide a framework for quality assurance – though enforcement has been quite challenging due to inadequate technical capacity.

### ***Mauritius***

The Mauritius Qualifications Authority has developed a quality assurance framework, which contains provisions to audit HEIs every five years, including the Open University of Mauritius, where an audit was carried out in early 2019 (TEC, 2019). Several tools are being used to assure the quality of courses, as indicated in the Mauritius case study in this report. A new organization called the Quality Assurance Authority<sup>3</sup> was set up in 2018 with the mandate to promote and maintain quality and sound standards in higher education through appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. However, there are not yet any specific standards for ODL.

### ***Mozambique***

Mozambique has a regulatory agency for ODL that accredits institutions and programmes, namely the Instituto Nacional de Ensino a Distância (National Institute for ODL). Mozambique also has a range of private and public institutions that provide ODL.

### ***Namibia***

Namibia has a National Qualifications Authority (NQA), established in 1996, that set up the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in 2006. The National Quality Assurance System, also set up in 2006, is administered by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE); the NQA, which is mainly responsible for administering the NQF as well as accrediting institutions

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<sup>3</sup> [www.hec.mu](http://www.hec.mu)

and persons; and the Namibia Training Authority (NTA), which is mandated to regulate the provision of vocational education and training (VET) and the registrations of VET training providers. Even though these three bodies are responsible for quality assurance in the country, their roles are not well defined, and their functions seem to overlap. While the NCHE is responsible for quality assurance in higher education, the NTA for quality assurance in VET and the NQA for administering the NQF and accreditation, it is not clear who is responsible for basic education and formal and non-formal ODL programmes. Nevertheless, all three publicly funded ODL institutions in the country have quality assurance mechanisms in place. All ODL programmes offered by HEIs will be quality assured by the NCHE using the criteria from the National Quality Assurance System for Higher Education.

Namibia's Quality Assurance Framework, although not making specific reference to ODL as a form of delivery, is set to facilitate the recognition of prior learning (RPL). Namibia has a national policy on RPL and the NQF includes an agreed credit system and clear standards for different types of qualifications, thereby enabling the recognition and comparability of qualifications.

The Grade 10 and 12 qualifications offered through distance mode are quality assured under the Directorate on Programmes and Quality Assurance to ensure that quality within teaching and learning is upheld. In addition, the Directorate on National Examinations and Assessment Board only registers part-time centres offering Grade 10 and 12 if they meet certain registration standards. The Grade 10 and 12 qualifications are currently quality assured under the Cambridge Assessment International Education system, an international examinations body. Namibia has quality assurance mechanisms that are general, and which do not specifically

highlight the particular mode of delivery (such as ODL). The same general mechanisms have been applied to ODL providers using the National Qualifications Authority Accreditation Regulations, and such an institution, the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL), has subsequently been accredited.

### ***Seychelles***

The Seychelles Qualifications Authority, set up in 2005, has developed and implemented the National Qualifications Framework,<sup>4</sup> which the Department of Public Administration is using to recognize the qualifications of public service personnel. HEIs are also using the rigorous NQF to accredit their programmes. There is, however, no specific provision for the accreditation of ODL programmes yet.

### ***South Africa***

South Africa's Higher Education Act of 1997 set the platform for quality assurance 'to provide for quality assurance and quality promotion in higher education'. This led to the creation of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), the South African Qualifications Authority and the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC). Moreover, South Africa has a National Qualifications Framework, which was formally promulgated in 2008.

The CHE is the independent statutory quality council for South African higher education, whose role is to lead and manage quality assurance; research and monitor trends and development; initiate a critical discourse on contemporary higher education issues; and provide advice to the Minister on strategy and policy.

The HEQC defines quality in term of:

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<sup>4</sup> [www.sqa.sc](http://www.sqa.sc)

- Fitness for purpose, an evaluation of how well an organization fulfils its stated mission;
- Value for money based on efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of teaching and learning; and
- Transformation, the development of the learner through teaching and learning that meets the needs for social and economic growth, underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms ensuring quality education and a fair chance of academic success.

### ***Zambia***

The Zambia National Qualifications Authority, the Examinations Council of Zambia and the Teaching Council of Zambia are responsible for quality assurance and for enhancing and upholding teacher and professional quality. Though there is no specific provision for ODL, institutions use various tools to ensure the quality of their programmes. In collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning in 2018, the Institute of Distance Education at the University of Zambia developed quality assurance guidelines for its distance education programmes and an institutional quality assurance policy.

### ***Zimbabwe***

While Zimbabwe does not have a national ODL policy nor a national ODL quality assurance policy, it established the Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework in 2018, which ensures quality in education and training and enhances the national and international mobility of graduates and workers through increased recognition of the value and comparability of Zimbabwean qualifications. It also provides a model for transparency in its comparison of qualifications and increases coherence between education output and the needs of the labour

market. The framework is aligned with the SADC Qualifications Verification Network, launched in 2017, and the SADC Qualifications Framework (Mashinga, 2018).

Zimbabwe adopted a quality management system (ISO 9001) in 2015, and some of its institutions have an ODL institutional quality assurance framework, such as the Zimbabwe Open University, which also has a dedicated quality assurance unit (Mapolisa and Ncube, 2015). This unit has reportedly had a positive impact on teaching, learning, research and quality management (Nyenya and Gabi, 2016).

## 9. Continuous professional development of teachers in ODL

The SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework (SADC, 2012) promotes the recruitment of ODL staff commensurate with enrolment numbers and advocates for the institutionalization of continuing professional development of staff at ODL institutions.

### **SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework**

**Policy statement:** Member States shall ensure that staff recruitment at ODL institutions is commensurate to enrolments and diversity of programmes and that staff are appropriately trained.

**Specific objectives:**

- To institutionalize continuing professional staff development programmes in ODL institutions; and
- To recruit sufficiently trained members of staff

In the SADC Region, the lack of adequately trained, experienced and competent staff for various positions in ODL – such as teaching, material designers and developers, ICT personnel, learner support services, audio-visual specialists (Maritim et al., 2012) – continues to be a systemic challenge. These challenges were corroborated at a UNESCO ROSA meeting in 2017 where policy-makers from SADC Member States reported that their foremost challenges included:

- Limited teacher/educator capacity for integrating ICT – in-service and pre-service;
- High turn-over of capacitated ICT teachers (deployed to better jobs);
- Negative teacher attitude towards ICT;

- Limited use of ICT in assessment; and
- Lack of awareness of the benefits of integrating ICT in education.

The COVID-19 crisis exposed the structural nature of this challenge. It illuminated the need for more concerted effort toward continuing professional development for teachers, particularly in open, distance and flexible learning competencies. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, only 64% of primary and 50% of secondary teachers received minimum training in sub-Saharan Africa, which often does not include basic digital skills (UNESCO, 2020a). Even in contexts with adequate infrastructure and connectivity, many educators lack the most basic ICT skills, meaning they will likely struggle with their own ongoing professional development, let alone with facilitating quality ICT-enabled distance learning (UNESCO, 2020b). The COVID-19 crisis has exposed an urgent need for better training and professional development of both initial and in-service teacher education in new pedagogies, including teaching through ODL.

### ***Malawi***

In Malawi, a dedicated SADC Centre of Specialization for teacher and secondary education was established in 2014. The Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE) was to play this role. Alongside this initiative, a knowledge management system was also established at the Open University of Tanzania with a backup at the MCDE.

### ***Namibia***

Most institutions offer basic computer skills and ICDL (International Certificate of Digital Literacy) training programmes, which are open to all the tutors and learners.

### ***South Africa***

The South African Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training adopted a Professional Development Framework for Digital Learning in 2017. This Framework is South Africa's response to the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework. It was established to support digital-learning training providers, institutions and organizations across the public and private sectors with a shared framework on how to support the professional development of digital learning competencies among student-teachers and in-service teachers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some public and private HEIs ran dedicated training programmes on remote and online teaching for teachers. Devan (2020) reports on the experience and approach adopted at his HEI.

### ***Tanzania***

The Open University of Tanzania became an established Centre of Specialization for teacher and secondary education in Tanzania, and established a knowledge management system that curated knowledge through the following activities:

- Facilitated networking and collaboration among ODL practitioners from 2008 to date through Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA) and Distance Education and Teachers' Training in Africa (DETA) conferences;
- Supported ODL practitioners to undertake both short- and long-term training in ODL;
- Built capacity of training of trainers in gender mainstreaming in ODL for 36 ODL practitioners;
- Conducted regional training of trainers for M&E Experts from the SADC Member States to track agreed indicators in the Regional ODL M&E Framework;
- Developed gender mainstreaming guidelines for ODL programmes;

- Disseminated ODL informational education and communication (IEC) materials to all SADC Member States.

## 10. ODL infrastructure

ODL infrastructure refers to the physical resources in which ministries of education and ODL institutions invest to enable the delivery of ODL. Across the region, national infrastructure initiatives assume the form of enabling access to digital infrastructure, sometimes referred to as information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure. They include the provision of access to connected digital devices (ranging from dedicated labs or rooms where desktop computers, laptops or tablets are available) as well as regular, quality access to the internet and wide-ranging digital education resources for teachers or lecturers and learners. ODL infrastructure also presupposes regular access to electricity, buildings and the digital infrastructure that supports the management and administration of ODL courses and programmes.

### SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework

**Policy statement:** Member States shall facilitate enhanced availability, capacity and utilization of ICT in the development and delivery of ODL programmes.

**Specific objectives:**

- To advocate for the establishment of appropriate ICT infrastructure to support the delivery of ODL programmes and services;
- To equip staff and learners with requisite ICT skills;
- To advocate for use of appropriate mix of technologies to cater for diverse needs of learners.

In addition, the nature and extent to which learners and lecturers have access to appropriate ICT infrastructure in their homes or at the individual level constitute a crucial component of an institution or Member State ODL infrastructure. Moreover, the more recent

literature considers ODL infrastructure and issues of ICT access to not only include access to physical devices and the internet, but to also involve the digital literacy, digital skills and digital fluency necessary for consuming and producing digital technologies for learning and teaching appropriately and safely.

This baseline study considers the available comparable indicators in each of the Member States that can support learners and teachers at the individual and institutional level with accessing ODL resources, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: ICT infrastructure for ODL in SADC Member States**

Member States	Mobile subscriptions (per 100)	Internet users % population	TVs/1,000	Radios/1,000
Angola	43,1	21.5%	12.71	52.85
Botswana	150	47.5%	16.92	137.9
Comoros	59,9	20.5%	1.75	157.76
DRC	43,4	8.3%	127.09	353.72
Eswatini	94	57.3%		156.26
Lesotho	114	31.9%		
Madagascar	40,6	9.5%	18.85	176.86
Malawi	39	14.2%	3.4	212.44
Mauritius	151	67.0%	210.99	343.47
Mozambique	47,7	20.9%	3.4	36.73
Namibia	113	53.0%	30.28	117.1
Seychelles	184	72.5%	132.85	507.25
South Africa	159,9	55.0%	130.11	368.63
Tanzania	77,2	38.7%	2.8	239.39
Zambia	89	53.7%	25.43	110.15
Zimbabwe	89,4	56.5%	29.2	89.95
Source	World Bank (2018)	Internet World Stats (2019)	Nation Master (2004)	Nation Master (2003)

### ***Botswana***

It can be argued that provisions for ODL infrastructure are inadequate in Botswana, especially for learners from remote rural areas and low-income households. There is limited access to

relevant digital curriculum content as well as OER and MOOCs. Some materials are used by the Botswana Open University (BOU) which have been developed in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning. BOU is also a partner of the Commonwealth Executive Masters of Business Administration/Master of Public Administration (CEMBA/MPA) consortium led by the Commonwealth of Learning where MBA programmes are served through distance education. The learning management system used at BOU is the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) platform, and training in ICT skills is carried out through the Centre for Instructional design at BOU.

### *Eswatini*

The University of Eswatini has satellite centres that allow learning through the Moodle LMS and a fully-fledged centre, the Institute of Distance Education (IDE), that offers ODL courses including nursing programmes across the country.

HEIs are trying to garner support to purchase digital devices. Most funders' support (especially UN Partners) is directed to school-going children. Learners with disabilities at school level receive the requisite support under the Universal Service Obligation Fund to assist special-needs learners.

With regards to access to digital devices, lecturers make use of their own personal laptops and do not have access to institutional digital equipment due to the lack of available financial support. International partners donate digital devices to schools which are mainly allocated for students' use.

The University of Eswatini's full-time lecturers teaching in the IDE have access to institutionally owned desktops, but the IDE has a large number of part-time lecturers who do not

have access to university facilities save for the library. Learners can access computers through computer labs, meaning they have to be on campus in order to access university-owned digital devices. Digital learning centres have been established in the different regions of the country for the convenience of students to access internet facilities outside campus. The university has also received a generous donation of a mobile computer laboratory with 45 tablets from the Eswatini Communication Commission. The university has acquired Zoom licences, which allow lecturers to conduct virtual classes. The university has main line internet and Wi-Fi for both lecturers and learners. Learners also received a once-off 3G data package to use on their mobile devices during the COVID-19 lockdown. The university uses the Moodle LMS as its official learning platform for students to access relevant digital curriculum content which has been uploaded for them. However, not all course instructors are up to speed on the use of the Moodle LMS. Some IDE staff have been introduced to using OER and have minimal awareness of MOOCs. Ongoing training in ICT skills is available. The Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at the university is offering a series of webinars on the use of Moodle and teaching and learning. In addition, the IDE offers group and individual support on same. The IDE has a multi-media coordinator to support staff and a technologist to support learners.

### ***Lesotho***

Some institutions of higher learning have ICT infrastructure in terms of computers for teachers and learners but not all tertiary and TVET institutions have appropriate ICT facilities. There is limited access to infrastructure for facilitators and learners in secondary education. Very few educators within educational establishments personally own laptops and computers.

### ***Malawi***

In terms of access to relevant digital materials, there is free access to online content for secondary school learners on the Ministry of Education platform, with support from mobile telecoms providers. Also, through support from international organizations such as the Commonwealth of Learning and United States Agency for International Development, online content for secondary school learners (including OER) have been developed, satellite centres have been established in all the three regions of Malawi, and public universities have developed online courses at various levels. There is currently no learning management system available, but there are close relationships with Notesmaster, the service provider for online facilities. There are ongoing challenges with training in ICT skills.

### ***Mauritius***

The ODL infrastructure in most institutions is adequate, with good bandwidth and an appropriate ICT infrastructure. Wi-Fi is available across most secondary, TVET and higher education institutions. The National Broadband Policy (2012–2020) includes the development of education applications and promoting the creation of digital content. Lecturers and teachers have laptops while some institutions, such as the University of Mauritius, provide laptops to all teaching staff. The Open University provides tablet devices to all registered students of undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Furthermore, the Open University, in collaboration with the COL, was the first institution on the island to offer a MOOC on sustainable business to local and international learners – and it attracted more than 10,000 participants over three runs. Finally, the Open University is an active partner of the CEMBA/MPA consortium and offers distance courses to its learners.

### ***Mozambique***

Mozambique has a national ICT policy that was adopted in 2000. In 2002, the government approved an action plan that had as its primary objective the design and implementation of strategic ICT projects in all sectors and institutions. According to the Mozambique ICT policy (2000), higher education and research institutions must play a significant role in seeking and implementing solutions and methodologies which will allow for the expansion of the use of ICT for production processes, the provision of services, as well as the improvement of teaching, learning and research in order to improve the living conditions of Mozambican citizens.

Mozambique has established the Mozambican National Education Research Network, which supports infrastructure capacity building in HEIs through a nationwide data network that connects its academic and research networks. These infrastructures were established to service the delivery of ODL as well.

### ***Namibia***

In Namibia, learners are not provided with laptops and they tend to buy their own. Teachers have their own devices. Access to the internet is available to those within the institution's premises only. Institutions have libraries, resource centres and computer labs at the main campuses, regional campuses and sub-regional offices and are equipped with computers, printers and projectors, and some have USB drives containing e-learning materials that students and teachers can use.

There is limited access to digital curriculum content and limited access to OER and MOOCs. Most institutions such as the University of Namibia (UNAM), the Namibia College of Open Learning (NAMCOL), and the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST)

have their own learning management systems (LMS). All institutions have adopted the Moodle LMS as the platform for all digital content developed for different programmes while Notesmaster has only been adopted by NAMCOL. The Moodle LMS is hosted by the institutions themselves, and the Notesmaster system for NAMCOL is outsourced. NAMCOL is tasked by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture to develop digital curricula for all phases (Junior Primary, Senior Primary, Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary), which will be accessed through Notesmaster.

UNAM has offered an online law degree to its students since early 2019, with the first intake of approximately 200 students.

### ***Seychelles***

There is limited access to relevant digital curriculum content, OER and MOOCs. A MOOC on the blue economy has been developed in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning and is currently on offer. Moodle and other LMSs are being used at educational institutions. A laptop scheme for teachers and students at secondary/tertiary level is being implemented.

### ***South Africa***

The national distance education policy adopted by the South African government in 2014 commits to ensuring that every post-schooling student has reasonable access to affordable connectivity (DHET, 2014a). Moreover, the Post-School Education and Training Policy (DHET, 2014b) covers all education and training provisions for those who have completed school, those who are still in schools and those who have never attended school. The policy highlights the need for equitable access to appropriate technology. Whilst South Africa does not have a coherent national policy on distance learning in higher education; the post-schooling policy

recognizes that ICT is indispensable for education provision and central to open learning. It suggests plans to improve ICT access and calls for teaching and learning interventions using ICT to be carefully planned and implemented. It also commits to promoting open learning and supporting the development and use of OER.

### ***Tanzania***

The Tanzanian government updated its 2003 national ICT policy in 2016, which was accompanied by a national ICT policy implementation plan for 2016–2021. By 2021, the plan aims to have 50% of schools and colleges using ICT in teaching and learning, and that the use of ICT will be incentivized in recognized informal education systems and skills development centres. One of the outcomes of the policy and implementation plan over time has been the establishment of the National Research and Education Network, which targeted 128 higher education and research institutions. Because of limited funds, recommendations were made to connect only 28 higher education and research institutions, and, by December 2018, 23 institutions had been connected.

### ***Zambia***

Internet penetration in the country is approximately 14%. There is limited access to digital curriculum content, OER and MOOCs. The Institute of Distance Education at the University of Zambia offers several programmes using printed materials, and they are now developing online content.

### ***Zimbabwe***

The Zimbabwean policy on ICT for higher education commits to implementing and promoting universal digital access at all HEIs in line with its national ICT policy. This includes:

- Strengthening and expanding the existing Zimbabwe Academic and Research Network, tasked to support and promote inclusive digital access to all HEIs in Zimbabwe;
- Setting out guidelines to inform higher education institution decision-makers about purchasing networks, supporting infrastructure and connected devices;
- Higher education institutions considering a spectrum of device-access models, from affordable ‘bring you own device/bring your own data’ (BYOD) models to supply-side access via a range of digital learning labs that can include shared-resource and one-to-one computing models;
- Considering a spectrum of connectivity and power solutions, from offline cached servers to Wi-Fi access, and from solar-powered to national grid electricity solutions.
- Negotiating digital inclusion rates and incentives and education data plans with partners. These will include the development of an incentive system, in partnership with private providers, for discounted access to connected digital devices for educational use, including payment schemes as part of the BOYD model; and
- Partnering with innovative start-ups and hubs to develop creative access solutions, applications and digital tools appropriate for Zimbabwean HEIs (MOHTESTD and UNESCO, 2018).

To date the initiatives identified in the policy build on pre-existing initiatives that have been ongoing prior to the policy adoption, such as the establishment of the Zimbabwe Academic and Research Network, which services higher and tertiary education institutions with connectivity access.

## 11. ODL funding, budgeting and resource mobilization

The implementation of ODL policy relies heavily on the availability of well-designed budgets, funding and strategies for mobilizing resources sustainably in support of implementation. The SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework (SADC, 2012) highlights these points.

### SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework

**Policy statement:** Member States shall allocate adequate budgets for the development and delivery of ODL provision and facilitate resource mobilization.

**Specific objectives:**

- To create separate budget lines for ODL provision;
- To develop appropriate funding formulae for ODL provision; and
- To develop and implement mechanisms for resource mobilization.

#### *Botswana*

There is a dedicated budget for the national ODL institution, the Botswana Open University, which is mainly through national budget allocations. However, funding has and remains a massive challenge as regards the upgrading of ICT infrastructure, staff capacity building, programme development and accreditation.

#### *Eswatini*

There is no dedicated budget for ODL provision and distance education students are not supported by government.

#### *Lesotho*

There are no specific budget lines for ODL provision.

### ***Malawi***

There is a dedicated budget line for ODL provision for the Malawi College of Distance Education, which falls under the Directorate for Secondary Education. It is, however, inadequately funded.

### ***Mauritius***

The Open University, which carries the responsibility for ODL provision, is financially independent. Initially, funds were provided to build the infrastructure at the Open University.

### ***Namibia***

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture allocates funds yearly to NOLNeT, which coordinates and facilitates ODL activities in the country.

### ***Seychelles***

There is no dedicated budget for online resources.

### ***Zambia***

There is a dedicated budget for online provision from the government treasury.

## **12. National ODL initiatives**

All SADC Member States have national ODL initiatives underway that are either led by the national ministries of education in partnership with ODL institutions such as universities, TVET colleges and open schools, and by other ODL organizations such as non-governmental and community-based organizations. In most cases, the initiatives are led by larger ODL institutions and their partners (including donor and development agencies) while civil society organizations also lead a few. Some of these initiatives are regional in nature while others are conducted at national and local levels:

- **Regional:** A few institutions across the Region have participated in collaborative projects on OER, coordinated by OER Africa and their partners. OER initiatives range from policy advocacy and support programmes, capacity building in OER creation, curation and pedagogical practice, partnership development and collaboration on dedicated OER projects.
- **National:** New institutional setups, new courseware, programmes that promote inclusion in the provision of ODL for people with disabilities, and initiatives focused on teacher capacity development rank among the most salient national initiatives.

### ***Botswana***

ODL initiatives include staff professional development up to PhD level; upgrading of ICT infrastructure at Botswana Open University; transformation in terms of upgrading colleges into an Open University; and extensive collaborations with local and international ODL organizations, including communities of practice like the Distance Education Association of

Southern Africa, the African Council for Distance Education and the International Council for Open and Distance Education.

### ***Eswatini***

There are opportunities for around 100 teachers to get trained in ICT skills, but this number is small compared to the number of teachers in the country. An Education Technical Working Group was set up comprised of Ministry of Education and Training management, United Nations agencies, representatives from teacher organizations, and partners in education and civil society to look into technical support systems. Also, there is an ongoing training programme for teachers at secondary school level conducted by the Emlalantini Development Centre on the drafting and use of open distance materials.

### ***Lesotho***

There are plans to transform the Lesotho Distance and Training Centre into a College of Open and Distance Learning, and eventually into an Open University.

### ***Malawi***

ODL satellites have been developed in the three regions of Malawi. OER materials at secondary level are in development, as are radio programmes for primary school leavers.

### ***Mauritius***

A national OER policy, supported by the Commonwealth of Learning is in preparation at the level of the Ministry of Education and the Open University of Mauritius.

### ***Namibia***

ODL initiatives consist of research, capacity building and collaborations between institutions. A national ODL conference is hosted every two years; and training and workshops on the

development of OER policies, quality assurance in ODL and educational technologies are regularly conducted. A national OER policy was recently developed and is yet to be approved by the Cabinet. In terms of collaboration, in September 2020, the University of Namibia and the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in promoting ODL and the sharing of resources to the benefit of students, staff and the Namibian population. The Namibian College of Open Learning and NUST also signed an MoU in early March 2020.

### ***Seychelles***

There is one ODL institution at tertiary level, namely the Seychelles Institute of Open and Distance Education. The Seychelles Institute of Teacher Education launched its first online course in a blended learning mode to train in-service teachers. The University of Seychelles has also offered a few online courses, and the MBA course (CEMBA/MPA), offered in collaboration with the COL, will be rolled out as of 2020.

### ***Zambia***

Various ODL initiatives are underway in Zambia. It has established 20 Open Innovative Schooling initiatives and launched the e-learning portal, Smart Revision, and the Notesmaster Platform in 2019 and 2020, respectively, as well as an educational radio channel in 2017.

## **12.1 National COVID-19 responses and ODL**

As explained in the introduction, the COVID-19 pandemic also catalysed the pervasive adoption of ODL strategies, including among Member States in the SADC region. The rush to ensure that learning losses precipitated by the forced closure of learning institutions are contained, and that

learning continuity strategies are focused on leaving no one behind, characterized the responses of many Member States. Such ODL strategies included:

- Attempts at confronting a more exposed digital divide. Zero-rating digital education content to ease access and use via connected mobile devices emerged as a central intervention for many countries, focusing on partnerships between Member States and network service providers;
- Leveraging and building on existing radio and television education broadcast programmes emerged as another critical strategy, focusing on reaching learners and teachers who do not have regular, affordable, quality access to internet-connected devices.
- The innovative use of print media, which included workbooks and worksheets that were distributed to learners and parents for collection at distribution centers (such as schools) to support learning continuity at home;
- The home as a pedagogic space in collaboration with formal learning institutions (such as schools, TVET colleges and universities) also emerged strongly as a salient feature in the promotion of learning continuity. Home schooling appears to have increased as a result in many countries across the world, including in SADC Member States;
- The importance of (i) integrating psychosocial support, social and emotional learning and the well-being of learners, teachers and parents, and (ii) engaging as learning communities also emerged as further salient features of learning under lockdown (AUDA-NEPAD, 2020).

### ***Angola***

Based on newspaper reports, the Angolan government has embarked on a distance education plan to support learners and teachers with learning continuity at home (AllAfrica.com, 2020a).

### ***Botswana***

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a programme in collaboration with network service providers offering internet services to learners, the development of working-at-home policy, a COVID-19 response task team, the adoption of WHO Protocols and the development of a SADC COVID-19 policy brief have all been undertaken. However, there were significant challenges reaching those students and staff without sufficient data and/or internet services at home. General lockdown effects concerned emotional and mental wellness and the general management of the unusual ‘new normal’.

### ***Eswatini***

Structured and informal learning took place during the lockdown at all levels. Learners and teachers (including higher education) were engaged through various media platforms such as radio, television, WhatsApp, Facebook, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Zoom and others. Network service providers were contracted to provide cheaper data bundles (for students). This exposed the digital divide in Eswatini and only learners with suitable devices and internet connectivity benefitted – at the expense of the huge majority who did not have such access.

Challenges during that period included limited broadband infrastructure coverage, which is a barrier to e-learning. Bandwidth is not sufficient at times for some of the teaching tools. Most students also lacked multimedia devices such as laptops and tablets. Facilities in computer laboratories (desktop PCs) were also insufficient.

The advent of COVID-19 brought significantly changed attitudes towards ODL. Students had to be supported through diverse media such as the radio, television, YouTube, Google Classrooms, Blackboard, WhatsApp and emails – all of which are fundamental ODL channels. In this regard, support was sought from international partners such as UN Agencies, local companies and others, including government funds. Teachers unfamiliar with ODL methodologies had to be trained.

The challenges the country experienced in implementing the above mitigating measures related to finance, preparedness at human capital level, reaching disadvantaged groups such as children/students in remote areas, and the availability of the necessary devices to access and send information. Electricity was also a challenge as it was not readily available in some parts of the country, along with load shedding and other unscheduled power cuts.

### ***Lesotho***

There were no special provisions made to support ICT infrastructure for ODL in response to COVID-19, even though ODL was the official means of ensuring the continuity of learning. Thus, challenges resulting from COVID-19 included a lack of proper ICT infrastructure and formal educational establishments' lack of preparedness.

### ***Madagascar***

Remote learning strategies in Madagascar included their Ministry of National Education and Technical and Vocational Education's (MINTETVE) launch of educational TV and radio instruction to support remote learning for students out-of-school. They also featured live broadcasts on RTA Official – their YouTube channel. Moreover, the MINTETVE is on a

recruitment drive to hire more designers to rapidly increase the production of educational content for all Malagasy students (World Bank, 2020).

### ***Mauritius***

Most HEIs adopted a shift towards digital learning. However, not all of them were prepared as they did not all have ODL learning materials. Some HEIs used recorded lectures or Zoom sessions to teach the syllabus. For secondary schooling, TV programmes were produced and broadcast for students.

The Ministry of Education requested educators at all levels to produce educational videos, which were then broadcast on national television channels during the lockdown period. The Mahatma Gandhi Institute led the production of videos in Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Modern Chinese for all grades in primary education. Multimedia materials and educational videos were produced in all Asian languages.

### ***Malawi***

Online and radio programmes were developed during the onset of COVID-19, but there were several challenges, including:

- Unaffordable devices for accessing online lessons;
- Poor internet access and the digital divide;
- Poor radio reception and coverage in some areas;
- Lack of radios in some vulnerable households;
- Low digital literacy;
- Lack of parental support due to low literacy levels; and
- Lack of teacher support in the learning process.

### ***Mozambique***

The Mozambican government closed schools for a period during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their National Council for Quality Assurance in Higher Education analyzed more than 500 face-to-face programmes adapted for delivery as online programmes in 32 institutions.

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Technology, Higher Education and Technical Education, in collaboration with the private sector and civil society, adopted various strategies, including the promotion of radio, TV and online learning, and the delivery of printed material for self-learning to schools.

### ***Namibia***

There have been plans to buy laptops for students to improve their access to learning materials since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Higher education institutions ensured the continuity of learning through their learner management systems, while some secondary schools used Google Classrooms and WhatsApp to follow the syllabus. However, not every student could afford sufficient data to access these services. There were other challenges including: teaching staff with minimal online teaching and assessment skills; students struggling with online learning due to lack of technical skills; limited student support centres; and challenges with internet connectivity.

### ***Seychelles***

A laptop scheme for secondary schools and tertiary-level institutions is being reinforced. However, internet access at home still remains a challenge for many students.

The COVID-19 response was to source, adapt and disseminate learning content using diverse media (online, radio, TV) to ensure the continuity of students learning. However, many

students were not able to watch lessons broadcast on TV. Because schools were closed so quickly, the pressures to put learning content online may have been compromised the quality of these materials.

Given this is the first time the Seychelles Institute of Teacher Education (SITE) has offered ODL training to teachers, it is understandable that SITE encountered many challenges. Most learners had difficulty accessing the materials online and the SITE platform was, literally speaking, a non-starter. Teachers reported numerous challenges in preparing materials for ODL.

### ***South Africa***

South Africa's Department of Basic Education (DBE) developed a concerted COVID-19 response, which included the development of a host of distance educational materials that were also accessible through its website. Where students had access to the internet, they could find diverse multimedia resources (such as video and audio clips, or interactive workbooks) and reading and study materials on the DBE's website. The website also includes a section for parents with various pedagogical recommendations on how to continue their children's learning at home. The website also has a section with information on support related to educational broadcast content, including television and radio programmes. All network service providers zero-rated education websites to provide cost-free access to learners (World Bank, 2020).

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) has developed quality assurance guidelines on emergency remote learning, teaching and assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The higher education sector organized its response to the pandemic in three phases, which were aligned to the respective lockdown levels imposed by the government. Phase 1 was in response to national lockdown level 5, which involved an emergency planning phase that

promoted access to devices and data for students and staff so that they could engage in emergency remote learning. The Department of Higher Education (DHET) and HEIs negotiated with internet service providers to secure low-cost internet access for students, as well as zero-rating for HEI websites.

Phase 2 (since June 2020, but earlier in some HEIs) aligned to national lockdown level 3 and can in some sense be described as the consolidation phase of emergency remote teaching and learning. By then, the majority of students would have secured access to devices and data or have had materials delivered to them in printed format to circumvent the lack of devices and learners' limited access to data and online course materials, and also for those learning programmes not yet digitized.

Phase 3 is anticipated to involve planning for the 'new normal' while Phase 4 is anticipated to map out a long-term plan in higher education. Here multi-modal teaching, learning and assessment approaches are anticipated to become integral to future sectoral and institutional strategies, with the integration of digital technology as a central feature of systemic and institutional transformation (CHE, 2020).

### ***Tanzania***

The Education Sector Taskforce led by the Ministry of Education developed a concept note and work plan that discuss the development and rollout of distance learning programmes to pre-primary, primary and secondary students via radio and television. These broadcasts began on 20 April and took place three times a week (World Bank, 2020).

### ***Zambia***

Zambia set up multi-sectoral working groups in response to COVID-19. The government received Global Partnership Education funding and a specific COVID-19 response plan for education was established. An educational television channel was launched to provide continuity of learning during the lockdown.

However, maintaining the continuity of learning was constrained by inadequate ICT skills; limited computers in learning centres; the high cost of internet access; and poor or no ICT infrastructure in remote and rural areas.

### ***Zimbabwe***

The Education Sector Response Strategy developed by the Ministry of Education focused on mitigating the immediate impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning. Many of their interventions were focused on prevention and public awareness, but also on ensuring the continuity of learning through the provision of remote learning services via radio and online and offline electronic resources. The government also encouraged the use of digital platforms. A private organization, the Higher Life Foundation, provided free access to its online learning platform; but without support to enable learners to connect to the internet, use of the platform was limited (World Bank, 2020).

### **13. Institutional case studies**

Many Member States have established dedicated ODL institutions to offer programmes of study at a distance such as open universities, some of which stand as mega universities and count more than 100,000 students. Some Member States have established virtual universities, which vary from being strictly universities that offer programmes online or just departments offering a programme online – the African Virtual University falls under this category. Some institutions offer blended learning, such as online, face-to-face and distance learning. Other institutions establish departments or units dedicated to ODL, with academic staff to deliver their programmes. However, some universities have established a small unit with the main responsibility of coordinating ODL activities at the university level. Such a unit does not have its own staff to run courses through ODL but relies on other departments' staff already offering courses in a traditional face-to-face mode (Mukama, 2018).

#### **13.1 Case study 1: ODL good practice at the Open University of Mauritius**

The Open University of Mauritius (OU) is the second public higher education institution in Mauritius in terms of student numbers, with a student population of 6,000 (national and international). It was established in 2012 and is one of the fastest-growing universities on the island.

Through its blended mode of learning, OU promotes access to university education for learners upon completion of their secondary level education as well as for adult learners. OU is currently running 78 programmes of study, ranging from foundation to doctoral level.

### ***Partnerships***

OU has been developing affordable and high-quality blended learning materials in collaboration with international partners such as the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the Commonwealth of Learning, the International Council for Open and Distance Education, the African Council for Distance Education, the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa and the International Association of Universities. It benefits from its partnerships with other open universities in the region, the Open University of Tanzania and the Open University of Sri Lanka, and from reputable face-to-face institutions such as Imperial College (UK).

### ***Adult education***

Most of the learners at OU are employees of organizations who can sustain their learning practices due to the flexible approaches offered by OU. Employees are free to study at their own place and pace while taking advantage of the blended mode of study with tutorial support as well as the use of the online learning facilities (OU, 2019). ‘Students have expressed their satisfaction with the learning environment, support received from staff, the flexibility of the programmes and the technology used in teaching and learning’ (extract from the first quality audit of OU [TEC, 2018]).

### ***Strong learner support***

Learners enrolled in distance education programmes benefit from a good blend of online and distance learning courses supported by innovative study materials and videos produced at OU’s studio. Tutorials are also organized; although mostly optional, they do provide opportunities for the student to meet their tutors and fellow learners. Faculty staff further support learners through regular optional face-to-face sessions or through virtual classroom sessions. Virtual sessions

serve the neighbouring island of Rodrigues, and throughout the years, a lower attrition rate has been observed (personal communication with Mr V. Patten, Head of Quality Assurance, OU, September 2020).

Induction sessions are carried out to initiate learners in university education. Pre-enrolment counselling sessions and information services are also available for any learner.

### ***First MOOC***

Recently, OU and the Commonwealth of Learning partnered to develop a massive open online course (MOOC) on Business for Sustainable Development. Addressing the complexities of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, the course introduced the sustainable corporate strategy and the sustainable business scorecard and provided insight into the opportunities for sustainable trade and the fundamentals of sustainable consumption and production. This first ‘home-grown’ MOOC, which was offered in June and November 2019 and June 2020, attracted more than 10,000 learners from 60 countries and was delivered entirely online. As an example of true pan-Commonwealth cooperation, the learning content was delivered through the mooKIT LMS platform, which had been developed by the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur. In contrast, the technical contents were delivered by resource persons from Australia and Mauritius.

‘The course on Sustainable Development in Business was my first MOOC experience, and it has served as a springboard for my future endeavours,’ said a participant from Nigeria (Angheli-Zaicenco, 2020).

### ***e-Library***

OU has two campuses, equipped with adequate physical infrastructure and several computer labs to increase access for those that have limited facilities. It has around 40 classrooms with wireless

capacity supporting one device per classroom seat, and 10% of the classrooms meet the Audio/Visual & Multimedia Room standards. The 'e' modality is fully embraced by giving access to electronic tools and devices. The Moodle LMS platform is used. A free tablet is given to all those studying for degree programmes.

An e-library consisting of nearly 500,000 titles of e-books, and audio-visual clips, past exam papers, dissertations and projects are available. Registered learners have access to international online journals and databases such as EBSCO Information Services, JSTOR, ScienceDirect.com, Emerald and ProQuest.

### ***Employability courses***

Based on a survey conducted by the Human Resource and Development Council in 2011, OU developed a number of employability short courses, thus providing the opportunity for learners to acquire the much-needed soft skills for the '4th industrial' era. Experts from the industry developed the study materials while integrating the pedagogy of ODL. Each short course comprised several videos demonstrating the application of employability skills in the workplace.

### ***Quality assurance***

OU is the only ISO-9001-certified university on the island. Furthermore, OU aspires to adopt a solid and reliable quality assurance system based on current international norms. With the help of international organizations such as the Commonwealth of Learning, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK), OU is setting up a quality assurance framework defining quality assurance policies, procedures and systems. An institutional quality assurance policy was developed in 2017,

targeting the specificities of ODL. [Acknowledgment: Dr K.S. Sukon, Director General, Open University of Mauritius]

### **13.2 Case Study 2: Good practices in ODL at the University of Namibia**

The University of Namibia (UNAM) is the largest university in Namibia, with a student population of 30,000. It was established by an Act of Parliament in 1992. Within UNAM, the Centre for Open, Distance and eLearning (CODEL) operates as a dual-mode centre with over 6,000 registered distance and online mode students. CODEL promotes the development and implementation of policies, procedures and standards for effective service delivery in open, distance and e-learning. Various initiatives have been implemented to integrate the use of ICT in teaching and learning.

#### ***Enhancement of distance learning practices through the use of ICT***

All distance-mode assignments were previously solely submitted as printed hard copies. CODEL piloted the online submission of assignments and the online assessment thereof through three of its already existing programmes offered through the distance mode in 2016, and, thereafter, completed the roll-out across the rest of the programmes after a positive and successful evaluation of the pilot phase. This practice required the use of a learning management system (the Moodle LMS) and agreements with national network service providers to provide 3G or 4G dongles or sim cards to first and senior students at reduced pricing. This enabled online assignment submission and assessment, even from mobile phones. Online assessment was also piloted and almost two-thirds of students in the selected programmes managed to submit their assignments online, which was encouraging for a new initiative. For the academic year of 2017,

all assignments for students studying through distance education, with the exception of a few such as mathematics assignments, were submitted online using Moodle.

### ***Moving 'e' in teaching and learning***

CODEL also proceeded to develop and expand the skillset of academic staff, part-time tutors as well as students to adopt e-learning for blended and/or online learning implementation. UNAM has an online and blended learning strategy through CODEL, whereby courses with the largest number of students are expected to make advanced use of e-learning to improve the quality of student learning while reducing pressure on the University's physical infrastructure. With this approach, lecturers are able to take full advantage of available technologies in their efforts to enhance teaching with modern instructional approaches, and to improve student learning, while strengthening their scholarship of through their research activities. These accomplishments are all in line with the teaching and learning principles outlined in the UNAM Teaching and Learning Policy as well as with an innovative approach to teaching. The following 'e' activities have been conducted:

- Blended learning: Every teacher training session starts with an introduction to the concept of blended learning, identifying the specific needs of lecturers to help suggest suitable instructional design models suitable to their needs and goals.
- Ticketing system: CODEL implemented an online ticketing system following a two-pronged approach to provide better support to ODL and online students, as well as lecturers wishing to use CODEL services. A user guide was created for CODEL staff and students, which shows how to respond to tickets that were created by a student or lecturer

and assigned to a CODEL staff member. This online support system is accessible via the internet from different locations.

- Virtual learning environment: CODEL adopted the Moodle platform as its learning management system for e-learning services at UNAM. Various software servers were installed for different functions.
- ePortfolio – Mahara: ePortfolio in education is a pedagogical approach that promotes reflective and meaningful learning. It requires students to reflect on their learning and promotes meaning-making. Mahara is open-source software that CODEL has integrated into Moodle to foster both reflective and collaborative learning.
- Video Capturing – Panopto: Video capturing of lessons using Panopto has enabled the introduction of innovative blended learning pedagogies such as the Flipped Classroom. CODEL supports lecturers to record their lessons and make them available on-demand to students, thereby enabling face-to-face sessions to be more interactive and focus on deeper learning. The Flipped Classroom concept also fosters meaningful interactions between students and lecturers based on the content that students can access beyond class time.

### ***Plagiarism detection and academic writing support – URKUND***

URKUND<sup>5</sup> is text-matching software that helps with the detection of plagiarism. With URKUND, tutors no longer need to rely on their hunches when they suspect plagiarism but now have a tool to support them. URKUND also benefits students as it encourages them to cite,

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.orkund.com/>

paraphrase and reference more carefully. [Acknowledgment: Dr M. Beukes-Amiss, Director CODEL, Open University of Namibia]

### ***Development and implementation of quality guidelines and measuring tools***

In late 2017, the Commonwealth of Learning and UNAM, through CODEL, formalized a collaborative agreement to support the University in implementing projects focusing specifically on quality assurance. The development and implementation of quality guidelines and measuring tools started with a focus on outlining all the activities and processes within CODEL through which these could be implemented, thus ensuring their subsequent improvement. This practice involved the training all CODEL management and staff members. Quality guidelines were fully developed for seven units at CODEL. The administration and measuring of the quality guidelines were completed with the write-up of a report on the quality assurance findings and self-improvement plans. This practice cultivated collaboration among staff, who realized that all activities and processes at the Centre are inter-dependent – if quality suffers in one area, the overall reputation of the Centre is affected. Staff members also regarded the process as an opportunity to introspect on their current practices, which enabled them to diagnose deficiencies in their products and services.

### **13.3 Case Study 3: Malawi College of Distance Education**

Established in 1965, the Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE) celebrates its 55th year in 2020. It is one of the oldest distance learning institutions for secondary education in Southern Africa. Historically, it has been a correspondence college, with much of its delivery conducted through distance education. More recently, the MCDE has blended face-to-face teaching with ODL. In 2014, the MCDE became a designated SADC Centre of Specialization for Secondary

Education as well as the country's ODL centre. To date, the MCDE has trained ODL practitioners from SADC Member States in nine key ODL areas (Gwede, 2014). The MCDE's role is to:

- Provide an alternative formal secondary school education to school-going-age children, youth and adults who are unable to secure places in conventional secondary school systems;
- Provide second-chance education to adults who missed out on formal education; and
- Provide support for distance education-based teacher education.

The MCDE offers the following courses:

- Malawi School Certificate of Education Course (equivalent to the General Certificate of Education – 'O'-Level);
- Junior Certificate Course;
- Primary School-Leaving Certificate Course; and
- Orientation Course in Management and Practice of ODL for Teacher Supervisors in Open Secondary Schools.

The MCDE works with a network of centres where students receive full-time tuition. These centres used to be referred to as distance education centres, which were then became known as night schools; now they are referred to as open secondary schools or open day secondary schools (ODSSs). Some of these centres operate in conventional primary school buildings. Each ODSS has a team of teacher supervisors who deliver face-to-face instruction to the students.

At its headquarters in Blantyre, the MCDE is involved with:

- Developing and printing learning materials;
- Developing, producing and broadcasting radio programmes that supplement, complement and enrich printed learning materials;
- Supporting ODSSs – the MCDE provides an orientation course in the management and practice of ODL for ODSS teacher/supervisors, and provides materials for ODL student teachers; and
- Training teachers in interactive radio instruction.

The MCDE has an institutional ODL policy, which was adopted in July 2015. As yet, the MCDE does not have either an explicit gender policy or a policy on OER (Isaacs, 2015). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the MCDE partnered with Mobi-School, a company that supplies learning content via radio and TV programmes as well as various digital media such as WhatsApp, SMS, USSD messaging, Voice and SmartApp. Furthermore, the MCDE is currently looking into leveraging the mobile phone penetration of an estimated 9 million cell phones (AllAfrica, 2020b).

#### **13.4 Case Study 4: The Technical and Vocational Teachers College in Zambia**

##### **ODFL policy**

The Technical and Vocational Teachers College (TVTC) has a policy on open, blended and flexible learning (ODFL), which was adopted in 2014, updated in November 2016 and officially adopted in 2017. This revised policy reiterates the TVTC's commitment to ODFL as a basis for expanding access to more learners in inclusive ways. The policy restates the enabling and supportive role that ODFL can play in reaching adult learners who work in the informal economy and learners with disabilities. The policy is explicit about promoting OER as well as

strengthening collaborative partnerships. The policy also commits the TVTC to promoting sustainable development and livelihoods in their courseware and programmes.

### ***ODFL courseware***

The TVTC offers a range of ODFL programmes and has developed non-formal courseware in entrepreneurship education and training that targets students and local community members.

This, they believe, is a component of their promotion of sustainable livelihoods. The ODFL courses they offer include:

- Commercial Secondary School Teacher Diploma;
- Bachelor of Business Studies Teacher Education;
- Bachelor of Science in Design and Technology Teacher Education;
- Technical Teacher Diploma;
- Guidance Counselling and Placement with English and Civic Education Diploma;
- Teaching Methodology Diploma; and
- ICT for Teachers Diploma.

### ***Institutional leadership***

The TVTC has, over the years, developed a dynamic leadership team to drive and manage institutional change towards expanding access to learning opportunities and promoting quality, equity and inclusion. They send their senior management and champions on regular capacity building courses and programmes and have developed a culture of openness to innovation. In doing so, they engage with a wide range of partners including donor and development agencies, the Ministry of Education, TVET authorities and local community organizations and enterprises.

In their quest to develop a learning and innovation culture at the TVTC, the leadership also encourages all their partners to invest in the monitoring and evaluation of their programmes; they then share the findings and engage their partners on strategies to improve the institutional offerings on an ongoing basis.

## **14. Conclusion and recommendations**

### **14.1 Responses from Member States**

#### *ODL policy status*

Since the adoption of a Regional ODL Framework in 2012 and a Regional ODL Strategic Plan in 2013 for the SADC region, 12 of the 16 Member States have a national ODL policy in place in some form. This number includes the seven Member States that have a draft policy in place and the five who have a dedicated, formally adopted national policy or national strategy. Moreover, while four Member States do not yet have a dedicated ODL policy, ODL may feature in existing policies on education, training and ICT.

The baseline analysis also shows that the objectives of the respective national ODL policies are coherent and relevant to their country contexts and their respective education systems. Most Member States reported linkages between their ODL policy and related education, training and ICT policies. Although the ODL policies are visionary and aspirational, many Member States reported challenges with infrastructure, funding, system capacity and staff capabilities upon which the successful implementation of ODL policies are dependent. Additionally, Member States reported that they experienced challenges with the coordination of relevant policy mechanisms and that the implementation of their respective policy focus areas was uneven and limited.

The value of a dedicated ODL policy is that it provides an enabling environment for all institutions and role-players to cohere around the expansion of quality learning opportunities for all based on the affordances offered by ODL, particularly for the most excluded and marginalized communities. This baseline study recommends that UNESCO and the SADC Secretariat continue closely monitoring ODL policy development and implementation among all

16 Member States and provide dedicated support to those Member States that are most challenged with policy formation and implementation.

### ***Quality assurance***

The baseline analysis has shown that all Member States have the national qualification frameworks, systems and structures in place to support the quality assurance of ODL in their respective countries. However, none reported dedicated standards and specified rubrics for ODL provision and ODL courses. Studies by Nguyen (2015), Neuhauser et al. (2002) and Larson et al. (2009) have all shown that there is no significant difference between ODL and face-to-face delivery on student outcomes. They do confirm, however, that ODL quality assurance requires specified quality metrics and indicators, hence reiterating the need for specified rubrics and standards (Kanwar et al., 2019). This baseline study recommends that quality assurance frameworks and standards in the Region be closely monitored by UNESCO and the SADC Secretariat.

In addition, the adoption by the African Union Commission (AUC) of a proposed African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) would be well worth monitoring by the SADC Secretariat and UNESCO. The AUC has reportedly concluded a mapping exercise and will commence with a policy document on the ACQF soon thereafter (African Union, 2020).

### ***ODL infrastructure and national ODL initiatives***

The baseline study has found that, across the Region, access to quality ODL infrastructure to support the delivery of ODL for all remains a significant challenge. Many national infrastructure initiatives are making attempts to address infrastructural backlogs. They include strategies to ensure universal quality access to an affordable digital learning infrastructure that can support

teachers and learners. This baseline study has shown that almost all 16 Member States have some form of ICT policy that promotes universal, equitable quality access to the internet and digital devices in education at national level. However, the implementation of these policies to realize their policy goals has been limited. At institutional level, many ODL institutions have made attempts at providing relevant ICT infrastructure for their students and staff. While some inroads have been made, the road to universal digital access for all remains a long and arduous one.

Some strides have however been made with reference to collaborative projects on OER in the Region. However, these have taken place largely at the level of HEIs. Universities in Malawi, South Africa, Seychelles and Mauritius have led initiatives to develop relevant OER and, in some cases, MOOCs. The study therefore recommends that the SADC Secretariat and UNESCO builds on work that has already begun to monitor progress with ICT infrastructure in each of the Member States and how they are harnessed to support ODL.

### ***ODL funding and resource mobilization***

The baseline study has found that, in most Member States, there is no dedicated budget for ODL provision except for a few Member States that have granted powers to specialized structures and institutions. The latter includes Mauritius and Malawi, where the Open University of Mauritius and the Malawi College of Distance Education play the role of specialized ODL institutions. In these cases, funds have been earmarked for ODL provision. Here, too, the study recommends that strategies of successful funding and resource mobilization can be monitored and shared among Member States in the Region.

### ***Role of ODL in COVID-19 response***

The baseline analysis found that the COVID-19 pandemic has catalysed ODL to greater prominence in each of the Member States. A recent study conducted by SADC in July 2020, revealed that ‘all member states concur that government actions were focused on the development and use of online materials in ensuring continuity of academic experience during the pandemic’.

However, the study also found that all Member States’ national responses to the pandemic included various forms of ODL to enable learning continuity during lockdown. Many Member States were caught off-guard and were compelled to strengthen their responsiveness towards combatting the infection rate of the coronavirus. The COVID-19 crisis also revealed limited and sometimes inadequate national preparedness. Institutions in very few Member States had online materials and the requisite infrastructure to cope with the vast number of learners, especially in remote regions, during their respective lockdown restrictions. Many Member States’ strategies included the promotion of access to digital devices to students, lecturers and teachers, particularly in HEIs. A few Member States forged partnerships with the private sector to zero-rate or reduce data costs in education. Some Member States made use of radio and television education broadcasts, and also reported on the widespread use of chat platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram as communication media between teachers and among teachers, learners and parents.

In some cases, schools served as collection points for printed materials for learners’ use at home. It is anticipated that the COVID-19 pandemic will continue until at least the end of 2022, which means that the basis for ODL expansion that emerged under COVID-19 will need to

be consolidated and developed further. Here, the SADC Secretariat and UNESCO can support Member States with their delivery of ODL under the continuing COVID-19 restrictions.

## **14.2 Recommendations**

### ***Increasing support for the development and implementation of national ODL policy***

#### *National level*

The SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework and the Strategic Plan (2012–2017) were developed with the active participation of the 16 Member States. However, while many Member States have adopted national ODL policies, they are not always aligned with the SADC Policy, nor are they always accompanied by a national implementation plan. To enable alignment with the SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework, the following may be considered:

- SADC focal points in respective governments to mobilize political support for the adoption and implementation of the SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework (this role can be incorporated in their terms of reference);
- The establishment of dedicated ODL desks in national ministries of education to ensure the promotion and continuity of ODL implementation, especially under conditions at these ministries where staff turnover is high;
- The development of national task forces/steering committees with a champion to lead and coordinate the ODL technical committee of SADC; and
- Capacity building of existing structures on integrating ODL policy prescriptions in existing education policies and related ICT policies.

### *Regional level*

The SADC Secretariat has an essential role in ensuring that policies are aligned and harmonized across the Region. Having taken a lead role in producing relevant frameworks on ODL in the early 2010s, the Secretariat has to be proactive in establishing a mechanism to support policy implementation and the monitoring and evaluation of ODL programmes. The ODL Strategic Plan (2012–2017) has to be updated so that the Member States can then enact their respective implementation plans. The updated Plan should ensure that ODL implementation and progress is placed as a regular item on the agenda of the annual SADC Ministerial Meetings. Furthermore, the SADC Secretariat must build an outreach strategy to inform and integrate the ODL agenda into other African mechanisms and structures.

The Regional Technical Committee of ODL stakeholders and experts has to be revived – especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic – to accelerate the transition to ODL adoption.

### ***Providing technical support for national implementation plans (notably through National Committees)***

To facilitate the necessary strategic streamlining and deployment of the national ODL framework, the following may be considered:

- Broader engagement with national stakeholders within Member States to develop institutional ODL policies aligned with the national vision and mission;
- The development of monitoring and evaluation plans based on elements of the regional Strategic Plan to ensure regular data collection and periodic reporting on progress with ODL implementation, as well as examining emerging barriers and constraints behind ODL adoption in Member States;

- The significance of networking amongst SADC national committees (these committees provide inputs at national level in the formulation of regional policies and strategies) and sharing of good practices of actionable national programmes in enhancing the adoption of ODL at all levels in the education system.

### ***Capacity building of national stakeholders***

As an emerging learning system in most SADC Member States, the implementation of ODL policies relies on specialized skills at all spheres of ODL delivery and management. The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the shortage of ODL-competent teachers and trainers and the need for concerted efforts to develop the teacher/trainer ODL skills base in the Region. Planned and structured training programmes can be designed and implemented across the Region.

UNESCO's ICT Competency Framework for Teachers and the Commonwealth of Learning's Teacher Futures provide relevant frameworks to guide teacher ODL competency development in the Region. It is also important to build the capability of the administrative and managerial personnel for improved practices of ODL in the Region.

### ***Leverage the SADC Regional Infrastructure Development Master Plan to promote universal digital access and integration in ODL educational programmes***

The SADC Regional Infrastructure Development Master Plan provides a framework for promoting infrastructure access, including digital infrastructure in the Region. It also highlights the importance of capacity building and content, which has relevance for the provision of ODL. These can also be aligned to Member States' ICT policies, which commit to the promotion of universal digital access via a host of mechanisms including the establishment of Universal Service Funds. These should be mobilized in support of ODL provision.

### ***Measuring, reporting and monitoring***

The SADC Secretariat can provide support to Member States on the establishment of institutional mechanisms for measuring, reporting and monitoring ODL policy implementation. Here, capacity building in monitoring and measurement based on shared reporting frameworks and data collection strategies can support the comparability of data across the Region. Here, Member States can also leverage their partnerships with civil society organizations in support of monitoring and measuring progress with ODL at national level.

### ***Integrating the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning Framework in ODL with the SADC Secretariat COVID-19 response***

It is noteworthy that the SADC Secretariat and UNESCO have redoubled their efforts to ensure that no one is left behind in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. To strengthen their COVID-19 response, the Secretariat and its partners can also draw on promising practices that have worked well in the Region, such as the strategies to use non-digital and digital resources as part of education recovery plans. A critical feature of the COVID-19 crisis is the rise in the number of children and youth who are either dropping out of school or are disengaged at school, with a concomitant increase in vulnerability and precarity. Here the SADC Secretariat can leverage the SADC Framework on Care and Support for Learning and Teaching to encourage Member States to integrate effective care strategies in their COVID-19 responses.

### ***Addressing boy vulnerability as part of a gender-equity response***

It is further noteworthy that a SADC Boys Vulnerability Framework has been developed recently. The Framework highlights the pattern of boy vulnerability and underperformance relative to girls in the SADC Region. This presents an opportunity to also pay attention to boy vulnerability as part of gendered ODL strategies. Here, too, the SADC Secretariat can play an

instrumental role in raising awareness about these conditions among Member States and to encourage partnerships with civil society formations to develop appropriate, supportive strategies.

### **14.3 Way forward following the baseline situational analysis**

While the baseline situational analysis uncovered critical information in several Member States, it has also encountered weaknesses that further studies will need to address. Foremost among these is that future studies will need to improve their linguistic representation of researchers and consultants conversant with the major official languages in the Region. The limited insights from Portuguese-speaking countries posed a significant disadvantage for this study. This baseline study recommends that, to improve the existing baseline, Portuguese-speaking consultants should also be included as part of the research team.

A second weakness was that the analysis relied heavily on email communication to set up interviews with officials from Member States. Because of the limitations of email communication (which generally solicits limited responses), this study further recommends that site visits to a sample of Member States also be considered in future studies, bearing in mind that site visits and face-to-face engagement with Member State officials in their respective countries are often more time-consuming and more costly. It is recommended that future studies include the required timeframes and budgets for a more substantive study. This becomes relevant particularly in cases where Member States need more support, and where ODL remains weakly represented in national policy.

Thirdly, the study purposefully selected four institutional case studies. Further studies will need to expand the institutional range of cases where ODL policy and practice provide

evidence-informed insights within their respective contexts. This report recommends an expansion of the baseline by including a larger, more diverse range of ODL institutions in the Region.

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# **Appendix A: Status of ODL in the SADC Member States Interview Questionnaire for Government Officials**

*Shafika Isaacs and Romeela Mohee , 15 July 2020*

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this interview is to ascertain the status of open and distance learning in your Member State. The findings of this interview will be consolidated into a baseline report on the status of ODL in member states in the South African Development Community (SADC), from which strategic recommendations to foster the promulgation of ODL in the Region will be proposed. This study serves to inform the status of ODL in 16 SADC countries, including their response and preparedness during the COVID 19 and post COVID 19 periods. It has been commissioned by SADC Secretariat and the UNESCO ROSA.

## **Part I: Personal Information**

1. Name of the Ministry in which you are employed.
2. Name of the department or branch in the Ministry?
3. Current Position?

## **Part II: ODL Policy Status**

1. Does your country have a National Policy Framework on Open and Distance Learning?
2. If not, what would be the reasons for not having a national policy framework on ODL?
3. If not, are steps being taken to adopt an ODL policy framework? If so, then please explain what those steps may be?
4. If yes, when was the policy adopted?
5. If yes, how is the national ODL policy linked to other relevant national government policies? Would these include policies on OER, MOOCs and ICT access?
6. If yes, what are the main objectives of this policy?
7. If yes, is the national ODL policy accompanied by an implementation plan?

## **Part III: Co-ordinating ODL Structures**

8. Has your country government established any national ODL structures to co-ordinate policy implementation across the ODL institutional landscape in your country? If so, please elaborate on the nature of these structures and co-ordinating mechanisms.

9. If not, what could be the reason for co-ordinating structures not being established as yet?
10. If yes, what has there been challenges with national ODL co-ordination? What would these challenges be?
11. How are these challenges being addressed?

#### **Part IV: Continuous professional development of teachers in ODL**

12. What strategies have your national government and ministry embarked upon to recruit staff at ODL institution in ways that are commensurate with learner enrolment?
13. What approaches have been adopted to ensure that ODL teachers, lecturers and facilitators have enlisted on continuous professional development and training programs and professional learning pathways?

#### **Part V: Quality Assurance Frameworks & Standards**

14. Does your country have national qualifications framework and a national quality assurance framework in place? If so, please elaborate. If not please explain why the country does not yet have these frameworks in place
15. Are you able to supply us with a copy of your national qualification's framework and national quality assurance frameworks?
16. What has been the experience of applying these frameworks since they were adopted?

#### **Part VI: ODL Infrastructure**

17. To what extent do all institutions offering ODL in secondary education, TVET and Higher Education have access to 'appropriate ICT infrastructure' in terms of:
  - Access to institutionally-owned digital devices for teachers and all learners (including learners with disabilities)
  - Personally-owned access to digital devices for teachers and learners
  - Access to Internet connectivity for learners and teachers provided by the ODL institutions
  - Access to relevant digital curriculum content
  - Access to OER and MOOCs
  - Access to appropriate learning management systems
  - Access to ongoing training in ICT skills
  - Technical support systems
  - Privacy and security provisions

18. What is the level of Member States preparedness to meet the changing needs of the learners of the 21st century at country and institutional levels?
19. What are the most pressing challenges at country and institutional levels to integrate ICT in learning, teaching, assessment and skills development?

#### **Part VII: National ODL Initiatives**

20. What has been the key national ODL initiatives in your country over the past 5 years?
21. What challenges have these initiatives encountered?
22. What are the key lessons from these national initiatives?

#### **Part VIII: National COVID-19 Responses and ODL**

23. What has been the most critical COVID-19 responses to ODL in your country?
24. Have any special provisions been made in your country to enable access to ICT infrastructure to support ODL since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in your country?
25. What challenges have you encountered during the implementation of these responses?

#### **Part IX: Funding, Budgeting and Resource Mobilization**

26. Does your ministry have dedicated budget lines for ODL provision?
27. How has your ministry and the national government mobilized funding and resources in support of ODL provision in your country?

#### **Part X: Inclusive and Gender-Responsive Education**

28. How does your country government/ministry integrate inclusive education in national ODL policy and in national implementation of ODL initiatives?
29. How does your ministry address gender mainstreaming and the promotion of gender equity in ODL?

#### **Part XI: Public Perceptions of ODL Quality and Credibility**

30. Does your ministry and government have any advocacy or communication strategy in place that challenges negative perceptions of ODL and that influences positive public perception of ODL?

## **Part XII: Skills Development and TVET**

31. Has ODL been applied to enable skills development and TVET at country and institutional levels? If so, how?
32. What challenges have been encountered when integrating ODL in technical and vocational skills development? How have these challenges been overcome?

## **Part XIII: Monitoring and Tracking Progress**

33. Does your Ministry track progress in the delivery of ODL at country and institutional levels? How is the monitoring, evaluation and tracking done?
34. What needs to be put in place to support your ministry and government to ensure tracking of progress on a regular basis? Do we need to set up a Regional Committee?
35. How do we address monitoring, evaluation and tracking of ODL at different education levels: secondary education, TVET, higher education?