

Educational media initiatives

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) reports on its work



Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) is the only office of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) outside Vancouver, Canada. CEMCA functions through networking and information transfer. The CEMCA Advisory Council comprises representatives from major open learning institutions in the region. The advisory council serves as the guiding light for broad policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation. CEMCA's services are available to all developmental and educational institutions and agencies in Commonwealth Asia.

COL established and funded CEMCA as a regional centre to build capacity in educational media in the Commonwealth Asia region. CEMCA began with a media focus but has since expanded to embrace all technology-based learning while also serving to link open and distance learning (ODL) needs in any area with ODL competencies. It is intended as a resource for the region that can organise capacity-building workshops, and provide expertise and resources in the area of ODL using its own staff and local experts. CEMCA is an autonomous body accorded international status by India.

In consonance with the mission of COL, CEMCA promotes the meaningful, relevant and appropriate use of information and communication technology to serve the educational and capacity-building needs of the Commonwealth member states in Asia. CEMCA has two main sectors of operation:

- Education
- Livelihood and healthy communities.

In the education sector, CEMCA works in the areas of:

- 1 Open schooling
- 2 Higher education
- 3 e-Learning
- 4 Digitally integrated content for ODL
- 5 ODL.

In the livelihood and healthy communities sector, CEMCA works in the areas of:

- 1 Healthy communities, Foundation for Research in Community Health (FRCH)
- 2 Skills development
- 3 Low-cost technology
- 4 Internet radio/community radio.

Apart from this, CEMCA has been conducting two major projects: for the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, on science for women's health and nutrition; and Planet Earth.

CEMCA has also been:

- Conducting regional consultations on community radio awareness – to orient and guide functioning community radio stations (CRS) – CEMCA also facilitated a face-to-face meeting with managers of functioning CRS with officials of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) of India in February this year (2009).
- Holding a workshop for letter of intent (LOI) holders – to guide them through the next stages of the procedure, so giving LOI holders an opportunity to interact with officials from MIB and the Department of Telecommunications. CEMCA has also been helping LOI holders to apply for their SACFA (Standing Advisory Committee on Frequency Allocation), and so on, which many applicants find difficult to negotiate on their own.
- Setting up a permanent help desk – to help applicants through all stages from filling the basic application to applying for SACFA and other licenses. To date, CEMCA has facilitated over 100 CRS through various stages of their applications.
- Holding capacity-building groups – for NGOs and CBOs (community-based organisations) in content generation for audio and video (like IT for Change/ITFC – Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka, FRCH in Pune/ Parinchey – Maharashtra), etc. The long-term vision is for these groups to have CRS of their own.

CEMCA helps the Asian Commonwealth member countries to increase their access to education of quality at all levels by focusing on quality assurance, teacher development, alternative forms of schooling, new approaches to higher education, and the creation of expertise in e-Learning.

Teacher development

CEMCA has been working on:

- Expanding teacher education through combinations of ODL and classroom-focused training
- Increasing opportunities and capacity for developing and delivering quality professional development to teachers and other education sector personnel

- Applying ODL and flexible learning to increase access to basic and secondary schooling, particularly for the marginalised and those whose access to education is restricted.

Higher education

CEMCA has been working on:

- Developing and strengthening systems, models and materials for higher education through open universities and dual-mode operation universities
- e-Learning for education sector development
- Increasing awareness, building capacity and developing content for e-Learning in the education sector
- Facilitating the use of open educational resources.

Quality assessment, particularly in multimedia learning materials, is another of our major thrust areas.

EasyNow

EasyNow is an educational initiative that provides the arena for academic institutions to develop multimedia material at affordable cost with the active participation of the internal staff – academics and technical personnel – so that they enhance the quality of ODL programmes in respective institutions. It also provides the multimodal platform for the benefit of all categories of students so that no one is in a disadvantageous position. It uses advanced techniques for optimising the size of the various files so that audio and video streaming is achieved over the NET and students have access to the material instantaneously. As EasyNow has successfully addressed some of the major problems plaguing online ODL programmes using cost-effective techniques, it is becoming popular with academic institutions desirous of running their virtual campus.

CEMCA has been training institutions and universities to use EasyNow with the active support of V. Krishnamoorthy, who had initially conceived and developed the modules. CEMCA has so far trained staff members of four institutions in India, namely Yashwantrao Chauhan Open University, Nashik; Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai; Central Institute of Education Technology (CIET), New Delhi; and National Institute of Open Schooling, NOIDA. It has provided training to the University of Maldives, Male; and the Sri Lanka Open University in Nugegoda, Sri Lanka. CEMCA has also organised workshops in authorware for three institutions including the Bangladesh Open University (BOU), Dhaka. The training of the staff of the Malaysia Open University, Kuala Lumpur is yet another milestone in the activities of CEMCA, which may be followed by a few more institutions this year. Over the four days of training, the participants are introduced to the following major activities through hands-on practice:

- Creating text using HTML and PDF formats
- Making and editing movies using Movie Maker (an open source software)
- Making slide shows

- Capturing and editing audio using Audacity (an open source software)
- Using optimisation of text, audio and video files for streaming effects
- Using the text-to-speech techniques of open source or proprietary software like Text Aloud
- Uploading lessons on the NET .

The participants are also informed of the possibility of using techniques for the visually handicapped, including magnification, audio conversion and Braille printing. Participants are introduced to other available open source software that they can download and use in the production of enriched media lessons. The groups prepare the lessons, based on the softcopy of the lessons available, in multiple modes and in nine different formats during the four days of the workshop. The nine possible modes are:

- 1 Internet browsing
- 2 Open and Distance Learning (ODL) format
- 3 Format for persons with special needs

Audio-based

- 4 Streaming audio
- 5 Text to speech

Video-based

- 6 Slide show
- 7 Streaming video – traditional classroom
- 8 Streaming video – enriched classroom
- 9 VCD or DVD for standalone systems.

One of the major capacity-building initiatives in community radio that CEMCA has undertaken has been through the community radio project of RVPSP, Department of Science and Technology, known as the Science for Women's Health and Nutrition. The project is aimed at raising awareness about health and nutrition-related issues among women. Thirteen community radio stations were prepared to take up the project, and eventually ten community radio stations ran the programme as a daily broadcast.

CEMCA came up with the idea of demonstrating the use of an internet-based teleconferencing system that was cost-effective for Wawasan Open University, Penang, Malaysia. The model it devised would work on the basis of a call-in facility with audio and video input and a live streaming/webcasting service in place. CEMCA decided to work with Skype for the call-in audio-video facility. CEMCA also thought of live streaming using a static IP address and with an MMS/HTTP port opened for facilitating easy access to students and others.

DR SREEDHER RAMAMURTHY is Director of Commonwealth Education Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), New Delhi.