Developing countries in the Commonwealth are firmly committed to the attainment of the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, particularly the goal of providing access to primary education to all children. Attaining these goals depends in large part on the availability of an adequate supply of well-trained and highly motivated teachers, and the provision of more opportunities for continuing professional development for primary and secondary school teachers.

The challenges

Although significant levels of success have been recorded in expanding school enrolments and enhancing teacher supply since the endorsement of the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000, many challenges still need to be addressed.

Inadequate access to education

Despite recent progress, none of the Commonwealth developing countries has yet attained full Universal Primary Education (UPE). The net enrolment ratio (NER) – the percentage of a country’s school-age children enrolled in school – ranges from 60–90 per cent. For example, India’s NER is 89 per cent, South Africa’s is 86 per cent, Nigeria’s is 64 per cent, Ghana’s is 73 per cent and The Gambia’s is 67 per cent, according to UNESCO’s EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010. These figures indicate that there are millions of school-age children who need to be provided with access to basic education and for whom teachers have to be trained and recruited.

Insufficient supply of teachers

There are serious shortfalls in teacher supply that need to be addressed if UPE is to be attained by 2015. It is projected that the stock of teachers for Sub-Saharan Africa must rise from 2.6 million in 2007 to 3.7 million in 2015, an increase of almost 50 per cent, according to the report, Projecting the Global Demand for Teachers (2009), carried out by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Below are some specific county examples of how much countries need to increase their teacher numbers by to meet their shortfalls.

- Bangladesh – from 365,000 (in 2007) to 509,000
- Kenya – from 147,000 to 227,000
- Malawi – from 44,000 to 80,000
- Nigeria – from 580,000 to 704,000
- Uganda – from 132,000 to 228,000

The shortfall in teacher supply is described as a crisis by many, including teacher education expert Professor Bob Moon.¹

The huge need for teacher recruitment

Equally challenging is the issue of teacher recruitment. For instance, to attain UPE, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa must recruit almost as many teachers in the next eight years as are currently teaching now. Looking at just one country, Nigeria, UNESCO projects that with the growing demand for education, population growth and attrition of current teachers, the country must recruit almost one million teachers by 2015.

Limited capacity for teacher training

Some countries have made remarkable efforts to close the teacher gap. Yet these rates are still not sufficient to achieve UPE by 2015. Expanding teaching forces require expanded teacher training. Existing conventional teacher training institutions lack the capacity to address these shortfalls in teacher supply, prompting the need to explore other alternatives – such as open and distance learning (ODL) – for teacher education.

Disparities in pupil-teacher ratios

According to the findings of the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010, the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) looks rather impressive, with many countries having a PTR of 40:1 or less. However, these impressive national averages hide many disparities, particularly rural-urban disparities in teacher supply. For example, in Malawi’s rural schools, the average PTR is 77:1, compared with 44:1 in urban schools. Indeed, the ratio of pupils to trained teachers is 200:1 in some rural schools. And while the average PTR in developed countries is 14:1, in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is 44:1. These numbers reveal huge shortfalls in teacher supply for rural schools in many countries.

Unqualified teachers

A significant proportion of teachers in many countries are untrained or unqualified. For example, only 49 per cent of teachers in Ghana are trained/qualified, 51 per cent in Nigeria and 75 per cent in the Caribbean. This has far-reaching implications for the quality of tuition provided in schools. It is suggestive of the dire need for upgrading courses for these teachers. ODL strategies can and should be used to upgrade in-service teachers on the job without taking them away from their schools or disrupting their duties as teachers.

Inadequate continuing professional development

In almost all of these countries, there are very few (if any) opportunities for continuing professional development for primary and secondary school teachers. Given the dynamic nature of knowledge and skills and the changing learning needs of children...
in primary and secondary schools, this has had a negative effect on teachers’ performance and effectiveness. In many countries, a clear policy on in-service training is yet to be articulated.

Harnessing ODL for teacher training

There is widespread agreement that shortfalls in teacher supply cannot be addressed through conventional face-to-face training. Almost all Commonwealth countries have recognised this and are investing in ODL for teacher training.

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is playing an important role by helping developing countries to build the capacity of their teacher training systems so that they adequately address the shortfalls in teacher supply and also enhance teachers’ quality, performance and effectiveness. Working in partnership with teacher training institutions, governments and other international agencies, COL is currently spearheading several major teacher education initiatives.

- OERs for English Language Teaching (Pan-Commonwealth)

COL is working with educational institutions throughout the world. For more than 30 years, Nigeria’s National Teachers’ Institute (NTI) has been working to increase the skills and knowledge of teachers in the country. NTI is the world’s only ODL institution dedicated exclusively to teacher training. It currently trains more than 80,000 teachers annually. In addition, NTI provides re-training for some 140,000 teachers each year through its MDG programme.

With a NER of 64 per cent, Nigeria has a school-age population of more than 24 million students and about 580,000 teachers. Ensuring these teachers are qualified and effective is one of Nigeria’s primary education challenges.

NTI’s focus is providing in-service training to primary and secondary school teachers. This includes upgrading under-qualified teachers, as well as ongoing professional development. The use of ODL enables teachers to remain in their jobs while they upgrade their qualifications. The ability to pursue ‘anywhere, anytime’ learning is particularly appealing to women, who make up more than 60 per cent of NTI’s enrolment.

NTI’s courses – which span all categories of teacher training – are largely print-based, supplemented by videos and radio programmes broadcast on NTI’s own station, Teachers’ Radio. COL recently signed an agreement to support the development of 24 new radio programmes that will help teachers upgrade their teaching skills in maths and science. Learner support is provided by course tutors who work out of NTI’s more than 800 study centres nationwide.

Despite challenges in harnessing the potential of information and communication technology, NTI remains focused on meeting Nigeria’s urgent need for quality teacher training.
Commonwealth to develop open educational resources (OERs) in multimedia and traditional text formats to support school-based training for teachers working in the upper basic education sector. These resources will be freely available for use and adaptation:

- ‘Green Teacher’ programme (India) This is a one-year Diploma in Environmental Education for teachers and educators developed by India’s Centre for Environment Education in partnership with COL. Offered through distance mode, this continuing learning course teaches in-service teachers how to increase learning about environmental issues.

- Child-Friendly Schools (10 Commonwealth countries) Through a two-year partnership with UNICEF, COL is promoting quality in education through the ‘Child-Friendly Schools’ model. Working with partner institutions and ministries of education in 10 countries, COL is developing ‘train the trainer’ workshops that introduce Child-Friendly Schools to teacher training institutions and teacher resource centres.

- Dissemination of TESSA OERs (Uganda and Zambia) Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) is a consortium of 18 organisations, including COL, which is collaborating to develop extensive multilingual OERs for teacher training. COL and TESSA have formed an additional partnership to promote the dissemination and use of TESSA resources by primary school teachers and teacher educators in Uganda and Zambia, to ensure the effective use of these OERs.

- Training for head teachers and principals (West Africa) COL is working with Memorial University (Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada) to provide training to improve the professional skills and effectiveness of head teachers and principals in The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Using print, audio and video training materials, these educators will, in turn, train other head teachers and principals in their countries.

- Quality assurance (India, Jamaica, Nigeria) COL collaborated with the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in India and 18 teacher training institutions in the Commonwealth to develop a Quality Assurance Toolkit for Teacher Education. The Toolkit helps teacher training institutions conduct internal assessments and enhance the quality of their programmes. It has been disseminated through workshops in Jamaica, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea.

Conclusion

The success of the UPE campaign has created an urgent need for more teachers – many more teachers in some countries. Fresh new thinking and solutions are required. The focus of teacher training must shift to providing recurrent in-service programmes of professional learning. COL is working to help teacher education institutions offer quality ODL programmes that will enable teachers to upgrade their skills and qualifications. Increasing the number and quality of teachers is an essential element in the quest to realising UPE by 2015.

Endnotes
1 See Time for Radical Change in Teacher Education, p. 10.
2 Available for download at www.col.org/QAToolkit_TE
3 For more information, see www.ntinigeria.org

Annalalai University is a unitary, teaching and residential university. It was founded in 1929 by the late Hon. Dr Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar of Chettinad. The present Pro-Chancellor is Dr M.A.M. Ramaswamy, a philanthropist and a patron of sports.

During the last 82 years, the University has grown rapidly having 49 Departments of Study and over 3240 members on its teaching staff with a campus that occupies an area of about 1000 acres.

The Directorate of Distance Education, established in 1979, offers over 500 different programmes of study and is approved by the Distance Education Council of New Delhi. It is credited with the largest enrolment in India and is well-equipped with state-of-the-art technology to serve its students in a first-class learning environment. It has the unique distinction of being the first institution in India to offer Postgraduate Degree programmes in Applied Psychology, Physics, Chemistry, Zoology, Botany, Bioinformatics and Law through Distance Education.