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Mainstreaming of OER around the SDG4: The Ljubljana OER Action Plan 2017

Issue at-hand

The theme of the 2nd World OER Congress – “OER for Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education: from Commitment to Action” – reflects the pivotal role OER can play toward achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and above all Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Quality Education. The “Ljubljana OER Action Plan 2017” is the outcome document of the 2nd World OER Congress and is based on the outputs of the Regional Consultations, a global online consultation of the document in the months leading up to the Congress, and the deliberations of the 2nd World OER Congress. This Action Plan identifies concrete actions to mainstream OER to achieve SDG 4 on Quality Education. In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda with 17 goals (SDGs). Goal 4 calls on the international community to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

4 QUALITY
EDUCATION



Goal 4:

Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning

In order for OER to reach its full transformative potential for supporting the realization of SDG 4, OER needs to be more integrally a part of educational policies and practices from early childhood education to post-secondary and higher education and lifelong learning. Mainstreaming OER-based content will depend upon a commitment to openness and access of OER educational content by learners, educators, institutions and governments, and also requires that other pre-conditions to quality education are in place. The Ljubljana OER Action Plan 2017 calls for concrete action in five strategic areas to support the mainstreaming of OER around the SDG4 goal of ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promotion of lifelong learning. These are outlined below as policy recommendations.

Policy recommendation (i) develop the capacity of users to find, re-use, create, and share OER; (ii) adoption of OER should take into consideration language and cultural issues; (iii) ensure inclusive and equitable access to quality OER; (iv) assess and develop sustainability models; (v) develop supportive policy environments.

1. Building the capacity of users to find, re-use, create and share OER - To effectively use OER, educators, learners and librarians need the capacity to find, re-use, modify and share materials created under an open license. Furthermore, user-friendly tools to locate and retrieve OER need to be mainstreamed. Support and action in particular from governments, educational institutions, especially teacher and librarian training institutions as well as professional associations; are necessary for the realization of the suggested actions in this area. *In this instance the creation and use of AVU OER modules has helped build capacity for partner institutions that were involved, and even beyond.*

2. Language & Cultural issues - OER should be available in diverse languages, particularly those that are less used, under-resourced or endangered, including indigenous languages. It should also be adapted to the related cultural context where it is used for uptake in local contexts within a Human Rights framework. Furthermore, for OER to be used widely, sharing and use of knowledge from different sources needs to be accepted by educational stakeholders. *AVU has had its OER modules translated into French, English and Portuguese hence widening availability.*

3. Ensure inclusive and equitable access to quality OER - OER should be accessible to all learners who are both, in formal and non-formal education contexts. In addition, infrastructure such as electricity and connectivity and suitable devices / media to access OER remain challenges in parts of the world, including within national contexts. *African higher education and faculty in African universities have a role to play. The AVU has been a catalyst in African higher education.*

4. Develop sustainability models - OER are affecting traditional and stimulating new sustainability models associated with the creation and use of educational resources. OER also create opportunities for new providers to enter the education space with innovative models

designed from the start to be open. There is a need to identify the full spectrum of possibilities for innovative sustainability models and the benefits they provide government, institutions, educators, librarians and learners. To bring OER into the mainstream, Member States will need to analyze their goals and needs in education to support the development, adoption, maintenance, distribution, and evaluation of OER. This may include mechanisms to support that work financially and revisiting structures for mainstreaming OER, possibly including adjusting procurement models or the way teachers are incentivized to work on OER. *In the case of the AVU, the African Development Bank (AFDB) has been a key funder for the development of the initial OER programs.*

5. Develop supportive policy environments - Mainstreaming OER requires the creation, adoption, advocacy, and implementation of policies supportive of effective OER practices. In this regard, funding flows are more likely to follow from policy directives, and policies can be applied for both bottom-up and top-down approaches. The development of policy initiatives at governmental and institutional levels will facilitate OER mainstreaming. The incorporation of policy positions into existing policies have proven to gain more meaningful traction than stand-alone policy positions. Furthermore, OER policies taken at the governmental level will benefit and support OER policies taken at the institutional level. The purpose of OER policies is to address areas such as raising awareness on the benefits of OER, funding for evidence-based research, providing incentives for following good open education practices, and fostering of strategies and practices to support the use of OER. OER policy should encourage institutions and/or educators to use OER-based teaching materials as an integral rather than as a peripheral element of curriculum. *The AVU has engaged in some policy initiatives working with organizations like UNESCO and Commonwealth of Learning, as well as working through its member countries, and partner universities to raise awareness.*

Conclusion

It is worth noting that all the five areas outlined in the Action Plan the issues that have been spotlighted through the AVU experience of implementing the Teacher Education OER project. There has been capacity that has been enhanced or strengthened, but there are still challenges that need to be addressed to mainstream OER. The SDG4 goal of quality lifelong learning and the Ljubljana OER Action Plan 2017 offers a platform for the OER global community to collaborate, share knowledge and take action at local, national, regional and international levels. OER provides opportunities to strengthen the democratization of knowledge by making learning and teaching materials available to learners and educators at a larger scale while at the same time providing affordable educational options. The Ljubljana OER Action Plan embodies a collective will to convert OER commitment into concrete actions to help achieve SDG 4 through the key pillars of access, equity and inclusion.

References

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Sustainable Development Goals. <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

For more information, please visit AVU's Website: <http://www.avu.org/avuweb/en/>

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Working Across Africa

Beyond Technological, Language and Cultural Barriers

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