**Capacity-building**

- Workshops are held regularly to present and enrich the knowledge bases and promote inter-regional collaboration among policy makers.

- International Internet Fora bring together experts and policy makers worldwide who are involved in ODL to focus on key inter-regional topics covered by the project.

**Inter-regional Resources**

The Inter-regional Decision Support Tool (DST) (www.gdenet.org) assists decision-makers to make first-level assessments about the viability and quality of distance education programmes, current or planned, by providing key questions for reflection.

The objective of this tool is to guide reflection by posing questions and highlighting issues that concern quality assurance of distance education for further consideration. It is currently being linked to regional databases to provide locally relevant information. The DST is useful for looking at both existing programmes and new programmes currently being planned.

**Search the Regional Resources**

Search the Regional Resources with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) Knowledge Finder. This service provides an advanced search, query builder, and knowledge management tools to prepare, present and save results. This resource is incorporated into this project with the consent of COL.

**Global partners**

Coordinated by UNESCO’s Education Sector, Section for Reform, Innovation and Quality Assurance, the partners in the HEODLKB are:

- Communication and Information Sector, UNESCO, Paris
- The International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP), Paris
- The Institute for Information Technologies in Education (ITE), Moscow
- The UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional bureau for Education, Bangkok
- UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education, Santiago
- UNESCO Office in Cairo
- UNESCO Office in Harare

**Other partners also include:**

- The South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), Braamfontein
- The Open University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur
- The Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Vancouver
- Arab Open University in Kuwait
- Universidad Estatal a Distancia of Costa Rica (UNED)

**Contact person:** Ms. Zeynep Varoglu
**E-mail:** z.varoglu@unesco.org
**Website:** www.unesco.org/odl
Overview

Higher education institutions worldwide face significant challenges in providing increased access to high quality education while containing or reducing costs. The Higher Education Open and Distance Learning Knowledge Base (HEODLKB) project was set up to support decision-makers and practitioners with ready access to information and tools that will assist them in more effective policy planning, development and management of ODL in higher education programmes.

The HEODLKB addresses a growing interest in the use of ODL to extend access to higher education in developing countries. Launched by UNESCO in 2002, this project responds to the need for better understanding on how ODL functions, and addresses concerns regarding the quality of education provided through ODL.

The project has created three regional databases on ODL in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and the Community of Independent States (C.I.S.)/Baltic States. These databases are linked to a search tool through the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) Knowledge Finder. The Decision Support Tool (DST) proposes key questions concerning quality assurance of distance higher education.

During 2006-2007, the project is being expanded in scope to address two new regions – Arab States and Latin America/the Caribbean. The focus of the Arab States region will be on higher education, in general, while that of the Latin America and Caribbean region will be on quality assurance of distance education for teacher education. In addition, the project will explore the role of open educational resources in expanding access to quality ODL provision.

Regional Knowledge Base Resources

Web-based regional knowledge base (KB) resources provide storehouses of information that deal with various aspects of ODL, and which are tailored to specific regional needs.

Africa (www.africaodl.org) – selected readings, reports of good practice and other information tools. This resource, set up in partnership with the Global Distance Education Network (GDENET), addresses the fact that developing countries, in particular, have neither benefited from the growth of online distance education resources nor from the systemization of knowledge from other developed and developing countries in distance education.

Arab States (www.arabstates-odl.org) – prototype focusing on ODL higher education and populated with selected Arabic readings, reports of good practice, and other information tools. The KB aims at the development of a resource base and decision support tools to further develop ODL in the region. It is hosted at the Arab Open University in Kuwait.