

**Address of Hon (Mrs) L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun**  
**Minister of Education & Human Resources, Tertiary Education &**  
**Scientific Research**  
**for the opening of the**  
**Africa Regional Consultation on Open Educational Resources**  
**(OER)**

**On Thursday 02 March 2017 at Le Voila Hotel**  
**“OER for Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education:**  
**From Commitment to Action”**

It is my pleasure and privilege to welcome participants from the Africa region to the **Africa Regional Consultation on Open Educational Resources (OER)**. This Consultation, as you know, is the fourth Regional one after those held in Malaysia, Malta and Qatar, and it will be followed by two more, in Brazil and in New Zealand respectively.

These Regional Consultations are a lead-up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World OER Congress to be organised by UNESCO and the Government of Slovenia in September 2017 in partnership with Commonwealth of Learning (COL).

It is now common knowledge that the main objectives of all the Regional Consultations are four-fold. These have already well documented and I will not take your time to discuss them again.

What is of crucial importance, though, is that this Consultation brings together Government officials and key stakeholders in the Africa Region to share policy initiatives, OER practices and discuss concerns and issues for inclusive and equitable quality education.

I understand that the outcome of this event will be a Global report on OER for the Africa region, which will be used at the 2<sup>nd</sup> World OER Congress.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Today, we recognize how important a milestone the Paris OER Declaration, adopted at the World OER Congress, held at UNESCO Headquarters in June 2012, has been in informing Governments and Educational Leaders about the potential of OERs to combat inequality in education.

If you allow me, I will refer to just two of the 10 recommendations made for Member States and therefore policy makers at that meeting.

We know that the promotion and use of OERs clearly help to both increase and widen access to education at all levels. We are talking here in a perspective of lifelong learning and, thus, this is applicable not only to formal education set ups but also to the non-formal ones. The spinoffs for the individual and the society at large are enormous.

The second recommendation in the Paris OER Declaration that I will take up here is the one that states, and I quote, “***Encourage the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds***”. Unquote.

Now this is highly pertinent: it means that policy makers should ensure that educational materials developed with public funds are not available exclusively to the recipients of public funds. We are today in a situation where we do have a large number of private providers of education in our different countries. I believe that we all agree that they are as much entitled to access the OERs.

**Provided** these are placed under an open license!

The key word, ladies and gentlemen, is “SHARING”. And when public and private providers agree to share know-how and resources, the results will certainly have a telling effect in improving the quality and the accessibility of educational delivery.

But then, sadly, we all know that this is more easily said than done. Often, there is limited sharing among institutions of learning. And this is especially the case for institutions of higher learning. There is a mistrust that has been historically institutionalized and that, for a variety of reasons. One of these could well be the lack of trust in resources created elsewhere, giving rise to the “it is not invented here” syndrome.

I can therefore well understand the reach and the pertinence of the theme of this 2-day Consultation, “**From Commitment to Action**”.

You, ladies and gentlemen, are professionals in the field. If we are here today, it means that our governments have committed themselves to support OERs internationally such that quality educational resources may reach those most in need of them.

However, commitment is one thing, but commitment without action is hollow. We need to act and I will like to congratulate COL for this push to move from Commitment to Action.

This forum also provides all of us an opportunity to give a thought to one particular challenge - the development of a supportive policy environment. Governmental and institutional decision makers play a crucial role in setting policies that shape the direction of education systems, and we must advocate for policies that can accelerate the adoption and the creation of more Open Educational Resources.

Lest we forget, we committed ourselves in September 2015 to meeting the targets of SDG 4, and OER is one of the ways whereby we can do that.

Hence, we need more countries to commit themselves to the adoption of open licensing policies for educational materials developed with public funds. In fact, the greater the number of countries and Governments that do so, the closer we will be to our ultimate goal of a genuinely inclusive and equitable society.

**Allow me, Ladies and gentlemen**, to quickly share with you two of the numerous programmes my Ministry has embarked upon to make this a reality.

One relates to the Inclusion concept. We have done a lot to ensure that our learners with disabilities have access to appropriate educational opportunities. We strongly believe that free quality education must be accessible to **all**, irrespective of their physical, economic, social or psychological situation. We also strongly believe that persons with disabilities, when given the proper support and facilities, can , in accordance with UNESCO's Guidelines on the Inclusion of Learners with Disabilities , I quote, "**contribute to knowledge and skills to their communities as well as change negative attitudes, stigma and discrimination.**" Unquote.

**Dear participants**, rest assured that the new Strategy Paper on Special Education Needs currently being prepared will place a reliance upon the use of OERs to fulfil our vision of a more just, humane and equitable society.

The second programme, ladies and gentlemen, is **Equity-related**.

We call it the Student Support Programme for the Lower Secondary sub-sector.

The aim behind this programme is to provide free additional support to students after school hours so as to consolidate their learning. The flexible mode of delivery will enable them to learn, at their own pace, and from home. Additional learning materials will be available to them—and OERs, both existing and new ones, will be part of those. Moreover, along with a dedicated website, full-time Educators will be recruited to prepare materials that will be quality-assured prior to on-line delivery.

In short, we want to see to it that ICTs contribute fully to equity in education—it is just a question of having the right policies and technologies in place.

**Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,** before ending, let me thank COL, UNESCO and all of you for being with us for the next two days. I hardly need to stress the fact that your presence is in itself a testimony of the buoyant atmosphere and attitude towards Open Educational Resources.

Please keep up the momentum and the good work. After all, as Nelson Mandela put it,

***“When water starts to boil, it is foolish to turn off the heat.”***

I wish you a fruitful working session and hope that the consultation yields concrete recommendations that can be implemented in the Africa Region.

I now have the honour and privilege of declaring this **Africa Regional Consultation on Open Educational Resources (OER)** open.