COL Consults Africa on the 2nd World OER Congress

Five years since the Paris Declaration, plans are afoot for the 2nd World OER Congress, which aims to make the transition from commitment to action. According to a [background paper](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CCatherine%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CMicrosoft%5CWindows%5CINetCache%5CContent.Outlook%5CL8M8A7R3%5COER%20Regional%20Consultations%20-%20Background%20Paper.pdf) to the Regional Consultations for the 2nd World OER Congress, disseminated by COL, the global community will identify strategies to harness the potential of OER for achieving inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030. In support of these aims, COL convened a pan-African audience at the Commonwealth of Learning’s Africa Regional Consultation on Open Educational Resources, held in Port Louis, Mauritius, from March 2-3.

The consultations took the form of a two-day workshop overseen by the COL President, Prof. Asha Kanwar and hosted by the government of Mauritius. Discussion centred on strategies, examples and models available for mainstreaming OER in support of achieving the Sustainable Development Objective (SDG) 4 which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

A highlight of the meeting was the detailed and insightful presentation by the Saide Director, Jenny Glennie, on OER for equitable and quality education for all in Africa. Catherine Ngugi represented *OER Africa* and led a lively group discussion in English and in French, on OER initiatives and best practices in different countries. Participants from Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zambia debated the merits of national and institutional OER policies, as well as various OER projects ongoing in their countries. They explored together how better such initiatives might contribute to the achievement of SDG 4 going forwards and what role they and their institutions might play in ensuring this positive outcome.

In other sessions, Cheryl Hodgkinson-Williams of the University of Cape Town, brought the plenary up to speed with OER Research in the Global South, whilst Mark Horner of Siyavula provided a practical application of OER as a means of pedagogically sound, contextually relevant and regularly updated text books reach thousands of students in South African schools. Zeynep Varoglu of UNESCO flagged potential barriers to mainstreaming OER, ranging from language, culture and appropriate business models, to ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality content. These sessions provoked discussion and sparked debate, all of which resulted in grounded and nuanced inputs from the continent into the 2nd World OER Congress.

As the meeting drew to a close, the government of Slovenia invited all present to bring Africa’s unique perspective to the 2nd OER Congress to be held in the picturesque city of Ljubljana, on 18–20 September 2017, co-organized by UNESCO and the Government of Slovenia. As noted earlier, this event will mark five years since the [World OER Congress](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/events/calendar-of-events/events-websites/World-Open-Educational-Resources-Congress/) was held in Paris in 2012.