



UNITED NATIONS  
UNIVERSITY

**UNU-ViE**

Vice Rectorate in Europe

## Innovative Capacity Development Through E-learning with a Special Focus on Africa

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UN Campus Bonn, Germany

### **Building a UNU consolidated strategic approach to e-learning for capacity building!**

E-learning has earned a place as a viable capacity building strategy. Recent studies show an increasing integration of technology in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in developing countries, in particular in Africa (Farrell, Shafika 2007)<sup>1</sup>. Where pressing development challenges require an increasingly rapid adoption of new knowledge, skills and competences, ICT and e-learning represent a huge potential. Yet HEIs often fail to equip faculties with the necessary competences and organisational frameworks to successfully use e-learning. There are still infrastructure constraints.

#### **The potential UNU contribution**

It is time to mobilize the United Nations University resources and knowledge to take up this challenge. The United Nations University through the Vice-Rectorate in Europe and in cooperation with the UNU Headquarters and the UNU Media Studio invites you to join us at a strategic workshop at the UN Campus in Bonn, Germany, on 26-27 November 2008. Together we will leverage our current capabilities, identify new opportunities and design a common innovative and consolidated UNU approach to e-learning for capacity building.

Efforts have already been made inside the UNU to develop e-learning activities. The workshop will build upon these initial experiences to elaborate a holistic UNU capacity building service portfolio to develop, implement and improve innovative capacity building methodologies using e-learning and ICT and to disseminate them effectively.

#### **Background**

The UNU strategic workshop “Innovative Capacity Development Through E-learning with a Special Focus on Africa” will address the severe limitation in access to and outreach of higher educational programmes in Africa. Today there is no more doubt about the role of educational technologies as a means to enable Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to increase the outreach and the quality of their programmes significantly and thus to allow more eligible students to join their programmes.

On a regional level the relevance of “ICT for Education” has been emphasized through a number of education initiatives, such as the African Union “Second Decade on Education” and the “Education Agenda” of the “New Partnership for Africa’s Development – NEPAD”.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.col.org/colweb/site/pid/3096>

On a country level the relevance is documented through numerous national policies and programmes on “ICT for Education”. UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, the African Development Bank, the World Bank, the Association of African Universities, and the Commonwealth of Learning have stressed the important role of ICT for *quality Higher Education* (HE) in the attainment of the MDGs.

### **Barriers**

Some progress has been made so far in African Higher Education institutions to introduce e-learning (cf. AVOIR, MERLOT African network of Open Educational Resources, African Virtual University, creation of e-learning centres, as in Kenyatta University and Makerere University). But the early successes are still isolated. Innovative models of capacity building for knowledge creation and sharing, as well as learning technologies are of foremost importance. What can bring wider spread successful implementation?

HEIs which use ICT in education often organise it in the same transfer oriented way which they use without e-learning, creating an impact chain that leads to ineffective use of e-learning in HEIs. For example, content delivery is insufficient for quality learning. This legacy approach largely neglects the potential of new technologies to strengthen capacities of HEI in Africa using different learning methods and pedagogies. New technologies can support more than content. The ability to implement e-learning with quality, accessibility and scalability are key to uptake by African HEIs. This requires innovation not only in technology, but in the fundamental educational models and pedagogies used by the institutions.

Without these changes, the situation results in the decrease of credibility and quality of e-learning initiatives. This in turn leads to a rejection by the university management, to resistance by faculty, and low innovation potential for education. Rejection and resistance create observable low absorption capacity of HEIs in Africa and hinders HEIs, their management leaders, professionals and administrators to take advantage of those facilities available in a holistic way. Only “lone ranger” approaches build islands of innovative use – which, however, in turn cannot be absorbed and scaled by the organisations to benefit HE teaching, learning and organisation processes. Consequently, students do not develop suitable skills for the labour market, and capacity in the field of ICT innovation remains low.

### **Objectives**

The aim of the UNU strategic workshop is to discuss a new strategic direction for a UNU service portfolio which can set new impulses in the cooperation with African HE institutions towards a better integration of e-learning and ICT.

Towards this end the UNU calls upon its RTC/Ps to participate in order to document a solid portfolio overview of the UNU's activities, experiences and expertise in the field of e-learning for HE with a special emphasis on the African region, also drawing from experiences and expertise from other target regions of relevance to UNU RCT/Ps scope.

The workshop aims are:

- a) to take stock of the already existing UNU activities and expertises in both technology and educational pedagogy
- b) to discuss future cooperation and development of e-learning inside UNU in selected key areas to leverage that expertise,
- c) to envision and discuss strategic directions and to create synergies and benefit of existing expertise and networks, and

- d) to draw a first outline of a combined UNU e-learning approach with a focus on the African context.

The two-day event is intended foremost as an interactive forum for exchange and sharing of existing experiences, designed to offer a platform that brings together UNU academic staff from different RTC/Ps, experts from the field of e-learning as well as strategic partners in order to creatively think and design a collaborative approach to improve the impact of capacity development actions. Participants will be invited to join efforts to build a common vision for e-learning which could lead to the pooling of resources, capacity and expertise as to better address the challenges in capacity development.

### **Structure of the workshop**

The workshop is designed as highly interactive and participants are invited to engage in an action-oriented, collaborative and creative thinking process. Input from selected key e-learning experts will complement the internal perspective of UNU, but don't expect to sit and listen. We will be working together to create a new vision.

The workshop will be structured around the following three main sessions:

- E-learning at UNU: where do we stand?  
We'll create an overview of e-learning and examples of its state-of-the art applications, its potentials and benefits. Examples and showcases shall enable us to come to a better understanding of the e-learning landscape by sharing what has been done at UNU level.
- E-learning at UNU: what can it bring to us?  
Which practices have not fully been tapped yet? Which actions could be worth to consider for our future development? How to make use of collaborative and networked learning, e-learning 2.0 and Open Educational Resources to bring value to our activities?
- E-learning at UNU: the next steps.  
What can be done at UNU? What could be the next concrete steps? How to implement new practices depending on our target groups? How to integrate impact assessment and what can we already elaborate in terms of proposal for funding?

### **Envisaged outcomes**

Tentatively, the following outcomes could already be envisaged:

1. A consolidated online learning and capacity development strategy for the UNU.
2. Starting the elaboration of a proposal (or set of proposals) for funding.
3. Creation of a core group within the UNU to implement these proposals and get funding. This group could form the basis of an e-learning hub for the UNU.

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