OER Africa

Building African higher education capacity through openness

Who We Are

OER Africa is a ground-breaking initiative established by the South African Institute for Distance Education (Saide). We play a leading role in supporting higher education institutions across Africa in the development and use of Open Educational Resources (OER) to enhance teaching and learning.

OER Africa received seed funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation in 2008. Since then, we have diversified our projects and partnerships to focus primarily, but not exclusively, on teacher education, academic skills for higher education, agriculture, and health education. This work continues to be supported by the Hewlett Foundation as well as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, amongst others.

The OER Africa Vision

Vibrant and sustainable African education systems and institutions that play a critical role in building and sustaining African societies and economies through free and open development and sharing of common intellectual capital.

What is OER?

OER refers to educational resources that are freely available for use by educators and learners, without the need to pay royalties or licence fees. Although OER is sometimes confused with online learning or electronic learning; it is however, not the same thing. Indeed, in a developing-world context, many educational resources produced may be printable, while also shareable in a digital format.

Our Mission

To establish dynamic networks of African OER practitioners by sensitizing and connecting like-minded educators – teachers, academics, trainers, and policy makers – to develop, share, and adapt OER to meet the education needs of African societies. By creating and sustaining networks of collaboration – face-to-face and online – OER Africa supports African educators and learners to harness the power of OER. In turn, they can develop their capacity and join emerging global OER networks as active participants who showcase Africa's intellectual property, rather than passive consumers of knowledge produced elsewhere.

The OER Value Proposition

Although OER means different things to different people, we believe that it can make some of the following key contributions to African education:

- Increase the availability of relevant, need-targeted learning materials and support more productive learners and educators;

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- Reduce the cost of access to educational materials by removing copying restrictions;

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- Encourage educator participation in relevant course design through adapting or developing materials for learning programmes that are pertinent to African contexts and learners;

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- Encourage educator and learner participation in relevant course delivery through use of appropriate technologies and acquisition of the skills necessary to move away from lecture-based teaching; and

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- Build capacity for learning through collaborative partnerships and communities of practice, both within and across educational systems and organizations.

In short, OER initiatives can build capacity in African education by providing educators free or low-cost access to tools, content and communities of practice. These in turn can support them to develop and/or adapt educational materials and integrate them into high quality courses and programmes. Through such processes, both educators and learners will benefit from improved and collaborative delivery of education.

Our Services

To promote OER use in Africa, OER Africa nurtures relationships with existing educational networks and institutions and offers them three complementary forms of support:

Policy Engagement

The success and sustainability of OER relies on creating a supportive environment to integrate these resources into an institution or system's processes. This is why OER Africa offers organizations practical assistance in creating appropriate policies, in areas such as intellectual property rights, materials development and appropriate use and support of information and communication technologies (ICT) for education.

An OER policy then becomes one of many strategies to improve educational quality and ensure cost-effective operations. The OER policy promulgated by the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana, is an example of such a policy, and can be accessed here - http://tinyurl.com/oer-policy. This policy covers various aspects integral to making a success of OER, ranging from technical infrastructure and skilling of personnel to incentive and reward structures.

Development/adaptation of OER for education programmes and courses

OER can improve both the quality of education programmes and the management of delivery costs. Saide's experience in course design and materials development for distance education programmes allows us to help educators, as well as educational organisations, to meet their teaching and learning needs cost-effectively. For example, we have supported the Bunda College of Agriculture - Malawi, in the development of an OER-based Communication Skills text book targeting first-year undergraduates, whereas prior to this intervention, neither faculty nor students had access to a single, high-quality common text - http://tinyurl.com/bunda-college.

OER Africa also engages in small proof-of-concept pilots for single modules within a programme and processes aimed at producing comprehensive sets of OER for entire programmes. This was the case in our support to the Kamuzu College of Nursing, Malawi in the joint development of a CD-ROM providing evidence based information and materials to mid-wives seeking to upgrade their skills beyond diploma or degree level - http://tinyurl.com/kamuzu-midwifery.

The AgShare project involves Masters and PHD students in the co-development of relevant and open agriculture teaching, learning and research resources, based on their findings from participatory action research projects. Through this provision of relevant up-to-date OER, agriculture courses in African universities are enriched. An open license means that these resources can also be re-used or modified for use by other stakeholders such as small holder farmers involved in the agricultural value chain. **(http://www.oerafrica.org/agshare)**

Support to collaborative networks
OER Africa increasingly provides support to regional educational networks, such as the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), and the African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) amongst others. The type of support depends on each network's need, but ranges from facilitating the design of collaborative projects, providing online tools for collaboration and sharing through the OER Africa website, or assisting networks with developing or enriching their own websites. In addition, based on needs expressed by the institutions with which it collaborates, OER Africa has facilitated the creation of two networks - one for the African Health OER Network **(www.oerafrica.org/healthoer)** and Africa Teacher Education OER Network **(www.oerafrica.org/teachered).**

The OER Africa website (**www.oerafrica.org**) provides extensive information on the nature and benefits of OER. Learning materials can be viewed and downloaded from our collection of resources. If you are just discovering OER, OER Africa provides an excellent starting point for learning about the benefits of using, sharing and finding OER.

Finding resources

All resources within the OER Africa website are free to download and reuse for educational purposes. These resources are carefully tagged to the relevant licensing options which makes it simpler to understand any limitations on re-use and re-purposing. Most of the teaching and learning resources on OER Africa have been created by our partner institutions in higher education. Other resources include, but are not limited to an introduction to the OER movement, technical approaches to OER development, open licensing, policy issues, and strategies for OER dissemination and sustainability. An easy to use search facility is available.

Our domains

We focus on supporting and developing OER in the following thematic areas: agriculture, health education, academic skills for higher education, and teacher education. The spaces provide the possibility to engage in networking opportunities to advance education, share knowledge, address curriculum gaps, and support educational communities through the use of OER. Visit the thematic spaces to find out more about each area and how you can participate in the networks.

Sharing and showcasing your OER

OER Africa showcases some great African OER institutional initiatives, with which OER Africa is proud to be associated. These spaces provide access to the OER developed in each project as well as the process by which that OER was produced, and is being used.

Saide

Saide, the South African Institute for Distance Education, is a non-profit organization established in 1992 to assist in the transformation required by the new democracy. Saide has since diversified in scope and reach.

Saide Mission

To increase equitable and meaningful access to knowledge, skills and learning through the adoption of open learning principles and distance education methods.
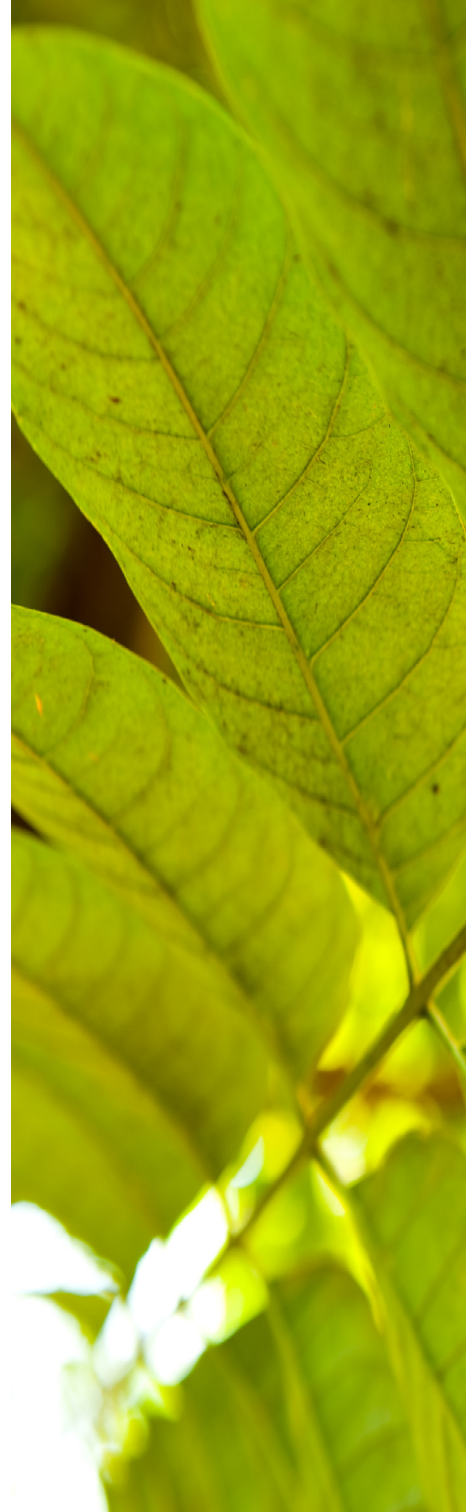
Saide's task is to contribute to the development of new models of open and distance education practice, that accord with and take forward the values, principles, and goals of the evolving education systems in Sub-Saharan Africa. Saide also pays particular attention to the appropriate use of technology in education.

What we do

- Promote open learning, quality distance education, open educational resources and the appropriate use of technology in policy development across educational sectors;

- Support programmes in sound and innovative course design, materials development, use of open educational resources, learner support, management, and the use of technology, particularly for large scale provision;

- Build knowledge about methods of opening learning in the African context through research, the development of resources, and the dissemination of information.

Saide's role

Saide is not an implementing agency. Rather it acts as an advocate, catalyst, and facilitator to bring about change in existing educational practices. As an independent organization that is not in competition with providers, Saide is in a unique position to facilitate change and collaboration.

Working with Saide's OER Africa Initiative

If you would like to find out more about OER Africa, we would be happy to hear from you.

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