

8. International Relations

8.1 Backdrop

The mission of NIOS focuses on provision of relevant continuing and developmental education to prioritized client groups through an Open Learning System at the school stage. It strives to reach the unreached by taking education at the learner's doorsteps. To realize its envisioned goals it has made wide networking at different levels and initiated significant collaborative endeavours with International Institutions like COL, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, SIDA and SAARC. As early as 1991 onwards such collaborative endeavours had been there between NIOS and these apex International Organisations. The collaborative programmes basically aim at:

- Capacity building
- Resource building/sharing
- Sharing knowledge and information

Capacity Building

Meaningful networking and linkage with international organizations like COL and UNESCO formed one of the priority areas of NIOS planning. As a result of close linkage and partnership with COL and UNESCO, NIOS organized a number of Internship and Attachment programmes during 2000 to 2005. Under these programmes, NIOS provided training/orientation and field exposure pertaining to open schooling to a good number of COL sponsored officials from several countries.

Resource Building

The International Organisations, such as COL, UNESCO, UNDP, World Bank, UNICEF, SIDA, shared a common goal of generating a learning society through provision of universal quality education to all harnessing the potentialities of technology mediated learning strategies. NIOS, India shares this concern with International Organisations. As a manifestation of this sensitivity, NIOS has provided its study materials in print and on CDs to the Commonwealth countries. It has extended its academic support to Commonwealth countries, especially African countries, by providing Resource Persons to assist in development of learning materials and project proposals in open schooling in the country-specific contexts.

Sharing of Knowledge and Information

NIOS as one of the major institutions among the open learning institutions at school level all over the world has strengthened its international relations by organizing conferences, workshops and seminars in Open Learning and Distance Education (ODL). In this endeavour, COL, UNESCO, UNDP and UNICEF have provided immense support to NIOS in providing a platform for interaction among different countries for sharing of knowledge and information in ODL.

8.2 Open Schooling Association of the Commonwealth (OSAC)

Open Learning and Distance Education, all over the globe, has evolved as a vibrant and potential delivery mode of education. Present century has witnessed many innovations and experimentations in the open schooling system. There is a growing concern in both developed and developing countries for inter-country cooperation and collaboration for sharing of experiences in ODL. In response to this, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Canada formed in the year 2001 the Open Schooling Association of Commonwealth (OSAC) with National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), New Delhi, as its Headquarter.

Objectives

The objectives of OSAC are to:

- meet and discuss relevant and pertinent issues relating to Open Schooling;
- act as a liaising agency for information dissemination, co-ordination and mutual consultation among members;
- share resources and infrastructure for mutual benefit and growth;
- organise human resource development programmes for Open School functionaries ;
- promote research and development activities;
- take necessary steps for assurance of quality and standards of Open Schooling

Functions

The major functions of OSAC are to:

- organise periodical meetings of members for discussing issues of mutual interest;
- hold Workshops, Conferences as a forum for discussion;
- develop and maintain data base on various aspects of Open Schooling;

- facilitate/support research and developmental activities through joint research projects among members;
- bring out Journal on Open Schooling; and
- perform any other task which may promote Open Schooling;

Journal of Open Schooling

One of the significant developments in this context was launching in November, 2001 of the OSAC Journal of Open Schooling, a half yearly Journal in Open and Distance Learning. This was initiated as a first step towards realization of one of the envisaged roles and functions of OSAC. Since 2001, the OSAC Journal of Open Schooling is regularly brought out by NIOS, India in collaboration with COL as a half-yearly International Journal.

The Journal provides informational inputs about the concerns, researches and new developments in Open Schooling, especially in the Commonwealth countries through conceptual papers, research articles, research reviews and book reviews.

To develop awareness about recent developments in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in developed and developing countries, the OSAC Journal of Open Schooling has provided a useful forum for exchange of ideas and experience in ODL.

During 2005-06, two issues of the Journal were brought out and widely circulated to the Commonwealth countries. In order to realize the envisaged roles and functions of the OSAC Forum, efforts are being made to strengthen its activities through COL intervention by way of collecting Research Abstracts from various countries by involving Education Officers of respective countries.

8.3 International Conferences and Workshops

- **Regional Workshop on Equivalency Programme for Life Long Learning, Manila**

Dr. Anita Priyadarshini, Deputy Director (Academic), NIOS participated in the Regional Workshop on Equivalency Programme for Lifelong Learning, organized by UNESCO, APPEAL, Bangkok from 25 to 29 April, 2005 at Manila. The objective of the Workshop was capacity building for developing, implementing and evaluating Equivalency Programmes. The Workshop also aimed at sharing experiences related to the Research Study on Models of Equivalency Programme assigned by UNESCO-APPEAL to four countries, viz., India, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand. This Research Study was carried out by NIOS for adult neo-literates under its Open Basic Education programme and was coordinated by Dr. Anita Priyadarshini. In this Regional Workshop, a Country Report was presented alongwith the complete Report

of the Research Study conducted by NIOS on its Open Basic Education Programme.

- **Asian Round Table on Open and Distance Education**

The Open University of Sri Lanka in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) organized from 20 to 22 May 2005 the Asian Round Table on “Open and Distance Education” for attainment of the following Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) enunciated by the United Nations.

- MDG 1 - Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- MDG 2 - Achieve universal primary education
- MDG 3 - Promote gender equality and empower women
- MDG 4 - Reduce child mortality
- MDG 5 - Improve maternal health
- MDG 6 - Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other disease
- MDG 7 - Ensure environmental sustainability
- MDG 8 - Develop a global partnership for development

A number of papers and presentations were made by the experts and educationists from the countries participating in the Round Table. In the context of MDG No. 2, Shri V.J. Williams, Director, Department of Evaluation, National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), New Delhi presented a Paper. He made the presentation on Open Basic Education, its concept and implementation in India, wherein he highlighted the problems faced for providing Primary and Elementary Level Education to disadvantaged groups of the society.

Shri V.J. Williams stressed the need to identify the partner Institutions and Organizations which can come together for promoting Open Distance Learning and adoption of information communication technology initiatives at the regional, national and international levels.

- **International Workshop on Open School at Colombo and NIOS Consultancy to National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka**

An International Workshop on Open School was held in Colombo on 18 May 2005. The Conference was organized by the National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka, in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning, Canada, at Hotel Galadari, Colombo. The main objective of the workshop was to develop a clear perspective of form and role of the Open School to cater to multiplicity of learning needs beyond the formal system of education. The main focus of the workshop was on building a strong foundation for setting up the Open School.

The Chief Guest for the inaugural session of the workshop was Dr. (Ms.) Tara de Mel, Secretary, Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka. The participants for the workshop were:

- Educational Consultants from the Commonwealth of Learning, Canada
- Consultants from the National Institute of Open Schooling, India
- Representatives of the National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka
- Representatives of Non-formal Education, MOE, Sri Lanka
- Representatives of the Ministry of Skills Development, Vocational and Technical Education, Sri Lanka
- Representative of the Open University, Sri Lanka
- Local Educational Consultants and Educationists
- Representatives of international organizations (UNESCO, UNICEF, ILO and GTZ)

The specific objectives of the workshop were to:

- share experiences of Open School Systems in other countries;
- analyse common problems in education and seek solutions from mutual experiences gained from Open Learning system in operation in other countries;
- identify Open and Distance Learning models and strategies;
- network effectively with the countries having good experience of operationalisation of Open School System and;
- identify challenges and issues related to the Open School System.

Fr. T.V. Kunnunkal, Founder Chairman, NOS (India) presented a paper on “*Establishment of the Open School, India*” Mrs. Gopa Biswas, Deputy Director (Academic), NIOS, India made a presentation on “*National Institute of Open Schooling – India and Technical and Vocational offerings at NIOS*”. The papers, among other things, covered detailed information on different aspects of open schooling, some non-negotiables in setting up an open school, process steps for setting up of NOS, a quick update of NIOS and an overview of the courses and programmes, specially the vocational education courses offered by NIOS.

Prof. Mohan B. Menon, Education Specialist, Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Canada and Prof. J. Wikramasinghe, Director General, National

Institute of Education, Sri Lanka provided rich resource inputs to the programme.

At the end of this International Workshop, H.E., the President, Ms. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumarathunge, formally launched the Open School.

The next three days after the International Workshop were spent for consultation with Dr. Nanda Wanniarachchi, Director, Open School, NIE and various other functionaries of the Open School, Sri Lanka. During, discussions, other departmental heads of NIE and some representatives of the Ministries of the Government like Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational and Technical Education, Mr. PHG Premasiri, Director, General, were actively involved.

As an outcome of the Workshop and follow up sessions, a comprehensive report was developed which provided some guidelines and directions and an operational roadmap to set up an open school in Sri Lanka. The report is divided in two parts. Phase I is the period of planning and preparation. In Phase II, the process of implementation has been elaborated. Different aspects of Open and Distance Learning that need to be addressed have been identified and the agenda for action set in Phase I stated in specific terms.

The report has been submitted to COL and CEMCA.

- **Awareness and Advocacy: Using ODL for Literacy and Skills Training: A South Asia Consultative Meeting**

Dr. Sushmita Mitra, Director (Academic and Student Support Services), NIOS attended and presented a paper in the COL organized programme titled *Awareness and Advocacy: Using ODL for Literacy and Skills Training: A South Asia Consultative Meeting* held at Dhaka, Bangladesh, from 26 to 28 September, 2005. Participants were from Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. Representatives from COL, UNESCO, and other local NGOs were also present.

The objectives of the programme were:

- To identify the best practices in “non-conventional” approaches such as ODL and ICT based approaches in literacy and skill training in South Asian Countries.
- To extract the lessons regarding the factors that made the practice best.
- To understand the prospects and problems of self-replication of best practices.
- To define the role of policies in the prospects and problems of self-replication of best practices.

- To offer a roadmap for strengthening the policy formulation process based on the best practices.

The outputs of the Consultative Meeting were:

- A report on the lessons learnt from best practices in South Asia and on “non-conventional” approaches such as ODL and ICT based approaches in literacy and skill training
- A broad road map for strengthening the policy formulation environment for integrating non-conventional approaches such as ODL and ICT based approaches in literacy and skill training
- Specific, well-defined follow-up activities for strengthening the policy formulation environment

- **Kannangara Memorial Lecture, 2005 at Colombo**

The National Institute of Education, Colombo, Sri Lanka organized the sixteenth Kannangara Memorial Lecture in the memory of Dr. C.W.W. Kannangara. This programme was unique in the sense that the Chairman, NIOS, Shri M.C. Pant, was requested to deliver the lecture on the Concept, Evolution and Application of Open Schooling. The previous lectures were delivered by the Sri Lankan nationals. The lecture of the Chairman, NIOS was read by the Director (Academic), NIOS (India), Prof. K.R. Chandrasekaran on 17 January, 2006 at Colombo. The Chairman, NIOS could not attend the programme himself.

The programme was chaired by Mr. Sushil Prem Jayantha, Hon’ble Minister for Education, Government of Sri Lanka. Prof. Jagat Wickramasinghe, Director General, National Institute of Education, Colombo was also present. The programme was attended by around 300 invited delegates from the fields of Education and Administration. The lecture was very much appreciated since it gave an insight about the open schooling programme to Sri Lankan Educational community. The Minister of Sri Lanka assured the participants that the Open Schooling programme would be developed as a full-fledged project for expansion of Secondary Education in the Country.

- **International Conference on Vocational Education and Training through Open Schooling: Challenges and Future Strategies (8-10 February 2006, Kovalam, India) Organized by the National Institute of Open Schooling, India and the Commonwealth of Learning, Canada**

There are immense opportunities for human resource development in the field of agriculture, manufacturing and social services sectors for developing countries like India. A properly planned and effectively implemented Vocational Education and Training (VET) system through open and distance learning (ODL) will (i) equip the learners having varying learning abilities with particular emphasis on marginalized groups with appropriate skills for sustainable

livelihood, (ii) facilitate creation of a pool of technologically qualified human resource, and (iii) make the youth entrepreneurs. However, in many countries, particularly in developing countries, the VET programme under the formal education system faces certain limitations with regard to expansion, access, equity and cost effectiveness. Consequently a large number of individuals who would like to acquire competencies and skills are excluded from the benefits of VET.

There is a need (i) to sensitise the society about the importance of VET in the context of reduction of un-employment and poverty, (ii) to bring about attitudinal changes in the society to ensure dignity of labour thereby diverting more people to join skill based programme for earning livelihood, and (iii) to provide equitable access to Vocational Education and Training (VET) programme. Certain other challenges that need to be addressed are:

- Need to meet the constantly changing requirements of technology/industry with inbuilt flexibility to switch over courses with changes in demand pattern.
- Quality improvement by involving industries in designing the courses, development of curriculum and learning material, training of faculty, practical training of students and evaluation and certification.
- Recognition of the Vocational Education and Training through ODL system from the national agencies for accreditation/recognition.
- Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for development of instructional material, programme delivery and support systems.

These challenges need to be addressed by developing strategies and plans of action for implementation of viable and effective VET Programme through ODL system. Among other things, it requires exchange of ideas and experiences among representatives of trade and industry, VET practitioners, academicians, educational planners and administrators. Keeping this in view, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) India, in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Canada organised an *International Conference on Vocational Education and Training through Open Schooling: Challenges and Future Strategies from 8 to 10 February 2006 at Kovalam, Kerala, (India)* to deliberate on the impending challenges and issues and suggest appropriate responses to these challenges.

The conference was attended by nearly 100 delegates from the Commonwealth of Learning, Canada, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Bangladesh, New Zealand, Pakistan, and India.

Objectives of the Conference :

- To discuss strategies for development of marginalized groups through VET.

- To examine issues that contribute to quality VET through Open Schooling with focus on course development, course delivery, evaluation, staff development and training, and collaborative arrangements.
- To explore the use ICT for VET through Open Schooling.
- To outline a road map for development and expansion of the Vocational Education and Training Programme through Open Schooling.
- To examine possibilities of international cooperation and networking which may be mutually beneficial, and to learn from experiences of practitioners in the field.

Major Themes of the Conference

- Theme I** : Vocational Education and Training for Marginalized Groups
- Theme II** : Quality Issues in the Provision of Vocational Education and Training
- Theme III** : Acknowledgement/Recognition of the Importance of Vocational Education and Training
- Theme IV** : Vocational Education and Training through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and the use of ICT.

The Conference was a mix of presentations in Plenary Sessions, Panel and Open House Discussions and Group Sessions. The recommendations of the conference on each theme were presented and discussed at the end of each session.

Each theme was introduced in the plenary session presided over by an eminent educationist from among the participants. Thereafter, identified speakers made their presentations. It was followed by interventions, observations, suggestions and queries. Based on the inputs and issues raised in the plenary session, each theme was discussed in groups in parallel sessions. The participants again met in plenary session in which the Reports of the groups were presented and deliberated upon.

The conference was initiated by lighting the lamp by Shri MAA Fatmi, Hon'ble Minister of State, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, Sir John Daniel, President and CEO, COL, Prof. Ashoka Chandra, former special Secretary, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, Shri M.C. Pant, Chairman, National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) New Delhi, and Shri D.S. Bist, Secretary, NIOS.

Based on the deliberations in various sessions, the recommendations of the conference were drafted and presented at the valedictory session on 10 February, 2006. The chief guest at the valedictory session Hon'ble Education

Minister, Govt. of Kerala Shri Bashir Ahmed, delivered the Valedictory Address, after the summary presentation of the report and comments by the participants.

Major Recommendations of the Conference

1. Vocational Education and Training (VET) should be organized on national, state or local basis, to respond positively to cover various socio-economic educational requirements of the corresponding labour market.
2. Realizing the need to provide ample opportunities to enhance skills of marginalized groups, including those in informal sectors, the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode of education is required to provide easy access to relevant and need based vocational education programmes at various levels.
3. To facilitate access to VET programme to the huge number of workforce in the informal sector, there is a need to capture the potential of private initiative in providing training to the vast masses. In this endeavor, role of the Government should be more strategic than comprehensive.
4. The government may come forward to help in establishing a Skill Development Fund emulating the example of Korea and European countries. This Fund may be utilized by employers for training their employees in newer skills, by making specific proposals to the Funding Authority.
5. In collaboration with the Employment Exchanges in the country, the educational needs of various registrants may be studied and suitable courses may be offered to them by the Open Schooling Organizations.
6. Realizing that Open Vocational Education programme has potential to meet the educational and development needs of the differently abled persons, a flexible educational approach for appropriate VET courses needs to be adopted to provide appropriate responses to meet the challenges for their skill upgradation.
7. The ODL system should strive to prepare need based local specific modular courses with suitable provision of providing hands on training to the learners. Efforts may be made to make effective use of the traditional system of learning skills in family and/or under the guidance of artisans. The traditional ways of doing things may be made more effective by integrating technical, scientific and technological advancement in modern times.
8. Need based courses in emerging disciplines may be introduced for girls and women and special campaigns may be organized to encourage them to opt for such courses in vocational education and training.

9. Marginalized groups including girls/women and differently abled persons may be provided with guidance and counseling :
 - (i) to become aware of their interest, potential abilities and special talents, and
 - (ii) to pursue the courses designed to realise their potential.
10. Vocational Education Training (VET) has to be learner centred. Skills and competencies and capability development need be individualized. Quality assurance mechanism must be a dynamic mechanism and the quality of products and services needs to be decided upon. There has to be updation of knowledge and technology for raising and maintaining quality.
11. The educational institutions in formal education sector should take responsibility for Vocational Education and Training (VET) through ODL mode not only in direct training delivery but also in building competency standards, testing competencies and certification etc., for the purpose of optimum use of infrastructure and faculty.
12. A competency based training system may be developed. Identification of competencies must be done by analyzing the job functions, feed back from employers and learners looking into their personal growth needs and assessing the future requirements of the occupation.
13. The professional development of trainees may include the pre-service training and or in-service training depending upon the needs of individuals and may include elements such as education theory in general and particularly as it applies to VET and ODL system, methods of evaluating/assessing the learners, work, choice and use of contemporary multi media techniques particularly ICT, creating and producing appropriate learning materials including modular and computer aided instructional materials and an introduction to occupational guidance and counseling methods.
14. The Government should develop and prescribe National Competencies Standards to be attained by the institutions in their training programme and also develop suitable arrangements for testing and certification of competencies. An autonomous and independent Accreditation Authority may be constituted for this purpose.
15. The developing countries in Asia and Africa are grappling with the challenge of Human Resource Development. There is a need to set up or upgrade the open schooling system in these countries. The International agencies like the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, to assist the developing countries in these endeavours. The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) India, in its capacity as the Secretariat of the Open Schooling Association of Commonwealth, should take appropriate steps for promotion of Open Schooling in the developing countries.

16. International cooperation, through exchange of good practices and methods, should be utilized to apply internationally recommended norms and standards relating particularly to a system of assessment and evaluation, of scientific and technical symbols, occupational qualifications and certification, equipment and technical standards, information processing, equivalency of qualifications implying standardization of curricula and testing, occupational safety and security, environmental protection and conservation.
17. International cooperation should be utilized for capacity building in developing countries specially in the area of acquisition, adaptation and application of technology through fellowship and exchange programmes for teachers/trainers, students and administrators/managers, provision of work experience abroad, sustained cooperation between similar institutions in different countries.
18. Emphasis should be on the need for developing the learner having an adoptive personality as a generic skill, along with skills of creativity, entrepreneurship and learning ability.
19. Use of ICT for promoting VET and ICT enabled development to reach rural communities in bringing down economic transactions and cost of delivery system.
20. A substantial involvement needs to be maintained with industries and professional service sectors at all levels especially in the evolution of curriculum, in its transaction through teaching learning process, in the assessment or evaluation of students and as far as possible in joint certification.
21. A National Grid (NG) for VET may be constituted, which may be built on other available ICT networks. The National Grid may contain
 - i. database of skills and jobs for learners and for life long career development opportunities.
 - ii. learning and testing platforms.
22. Skill training to be demonstrated by using ICT in the form of digitization, simulations so that lessons learnt can be practiced with hands on experience.
23. There is a need for policy equalization. Technological and knowledge resources should be made available at grass root level for VET providers, trainers and learners. This may be linked with other developmental projects of Government.
24. Use of ESUSAT and other technology for networking personalization and contextualisation i.e.,

- i. Linking people to knowledge dissemination
 - ii. Personalized and small group learning
 - iii. Developmental activities.
25. Legal provisions may be made to ensure the responsibilities of the implementing partners.
 26. Possibilities for virtual infrastructure, wherever possible, may be explored.
 27. Rigorous but transparent monitoring system may be ensured. Appropriate preventive and remedial measures for ensuring quality, and bench marking of the institutions based on laid down performance standards may be explored.
 28. Sharing of resources may be explored by possible establishment of consortium of vocational training providers.
 29. There is a need to reach out to the villages. Community education should evolve through consultation and networking with those who can benefit from VET. The community may be the resource centre.

These recommendations submitted were adopted by the Conference which also authorized Chairman, NIOS to modify and edit in view of the need for implementing these recommendations.

Visits of Foreign Delegates to NIOS

International Visits

● Chinese Delegation's Visit to NIOS

A five-member delegation consisting of senior academicians from the Peoples Education Press, China visited NIOS on 24 August 2005. The delegates interacted with the NIOS faculty about the Open Schooling System in India in general and role of Audio-Video Teaching Aids in particular.

Prof. K.R. Chandrasekaran, Director (Academic), NIOS gave an overview of the role and functions of the NIOS and its organizational structure. Mrs. Manju Gupta, Assistant Director (Academic) gave information about various Courses of NIOS. The team visited the NIOS Studio where Shri R. K. Arya, Joint Director (Media) explained the process of development of Audio-Video programmes.

● NIOS Hosts COL Sponsored Institute for Educators

The NIOS, New Delhi organised a Commonwealth of Learning (COL) sponsored Institute for Educators of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Ghana and Nigeria from 11 to 22 September 2005. Thirteen

participants from these countries attended the programme. The objectives of the programme were:

- (i) To share experience of NIOS in conducting the open schooling programme
- (ii) To visit some study centres of NIOS.
- (iii) To interact with other organisations associated with NIOS activities.
- (iv) To develop proposals on prospects of establishing or upscaling the open schooling system in home countries.

On 12 September 2005, Dr (Mrs) Sushmita Mitra, Director, Department of Student Support Services (SSS), NIOS welcomed the delegates and gave an overview of the Programme Schedule. The discussion themes in various sessions were:

- Open Schooling System in India
- Unique Features of NIOS: Learners' Profile
- Courses and Programmes of NIOS
- Open Basic Education Programme
- Vocational Education Courses offered by NIOS
- Delivery Mechanism of NIOS
- Process of Curriculum Development
- Process of Material Development
- Cost of Development
- Student Support Services: The Partnership Model
- Evaluation and Certification
- Media in Open Schooling
- Use of ICT

Shri M.C. Pant, Chairman, NIOS gave precise information about School Education scenario in India with special emphasis on open schooling system.

On behalf of the participants, **Ms. Zahida Qazi**, Programme Coordinator, Open Middle School Project, Institute of Mass Education, Allam Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan appreciated the presentations and interactions during the programme.

Ms. Susan Phillips Education Specialist COL informed that this Institute was the third major orientation programme for functionaries of

open schooling organized jointly by NIOS and COL. While giving highlights of the programmes of COL, Ms. Susan Phillips appreciated the efforts made by NIOS for conducting successfully the Institute for educationists from five countries.

Presentation of Country Reports

One of the tasks assigned to the participants from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nigeria and Ghana was to prepare the Country Reports. The underlined idea was that the Framework proposed in the Country Reports may prove useful for promotion of open schooling programmes in the respective countries. To develop draft frameworks for open schooling programmes, one NIOS officer was attached with each participating country for discussion on educational challenges and evolving appropriate responses. Accordingly the Country Papers prepared by the delegates were presented.

- **Visit of delegates from 25 countries**

As requested by NIEPA, a team of 43 foreign delegates from 25 countries Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Costa Rica, Gambia, Georgia, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Macedonia, Madagascar, Mauritius, Nepal, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Uganda, Venezuela and Zambia visited NIOS on 16 February, 2006. They interacted with the faculty of NIOS (India).

- **British Prime Minister's Visit to OBE Centre of NIOS**

The Salaam Baalak Trust got an opportunity to interact with the British Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, and his wife Mrs Cherie Blair on 7 September 2005. The couple interacted with the children at the Trust. The children presented them paintings and drawings made by them. The learners staged a street-play on the lives of street children. The Salaam Baalak Trust, Paharganj, New Delhi is an OBE Centre of NIOS and is taking care of the education of street children.

- **UNESCO Project Meeting on Disaster Preparedness**

A two-day meeting was organised by UNESCO on 12-13 September 2005 to discuss the strategies of the project on Education for Natural Disaster Preparedness in Asia-Pacific in the context of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). During the meeting, several presentations were made by the experts in the light of Tsunami disaster. Participants from Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bangladesh made presentations on the post Tsunami scenario. NIOS was requested to give a presentation on the Disaster Preparedness on behalf of participating organizations. The Director (Academic), NIOS,

Prof K. R. Chandrasekaran, made a presentation on various steps taken by NIOS for integration of Disaster Management in the curriculum at Secondary, Senior Secondary and OBE levels in different subjects like Environmental Science, Science and Technology and Social Sciences. The presentation was appreciated by UNESCO representative for ESD in Bangkok and also by the Director in-charge of UNESCO at Delhi.

- **COL-NIOS Project for Identifying the Training Needs**

In collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), NIOS has taken up a project to identify the Training Needs of Coordinators and Teachers of the Study Centres of NIOS. Under this project, about 218 Accredited Institutions (AIs) having sufficient experience with NIOS were identified. Two separate questionnaires, one for Coordinators and other for the Teachers, were despatched to these AIs. The feedback will be analysed for developing appropriate training strategies.

- **Conference on Digital Learning**

A two-day conference on Digital Learning (2005) was organised by the Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies (CSDMS) on 18-19 October 2005 at 'The Grand', New Delhi. The theme of the conference was 'ICT and Education: Challenges and Practices'. A presentation was made by NIOS on the On Demand Examination System (ODES). This was highly appreciated by the participants as an innovative step towards flexible and fearless Examination System.

- **World Bank's Meet on Universalisation of Secondary Education**

The fourth meeting of Advisory Group on the Study of Secondary Education in India was organised by the World Bank at its New Delhi premises on 28 November, 2005. The paper prepared by the World Bank in the context of Universalisation of Secondary Education in India was discussed in detail.

Participating in the discussion, the Director (Academic), NIOS emphasised the need for promotion of Open Schooling programme to meet the goal of Universalisation of Secondary Education in India. The World Bank officials appreciated the proposal and assured that they would include a write up on potential of Open Schooling system and the endeavours of NIOS and the State Open Schools (SOSs) in the area of Open Schooling.

Visits of NIOS Faculty Abroad

- **Award of Research Residency at International Research Foundation for Open Learning (IRFOL) Cambridge from 7 to 18 March 2005**

Dr (Mrs.) Sushmita Mitra, Director (Academic) was awarded Research residency at International Research Foundation for Open Learning (IRFOL), Cambridge, which she availed from 7th to 18th March, 2005.

The purpose of this programme was for reflective activity through discussion and interaction with IRFOL staff, other resources and networks, draft a paper for publication, with support as appropriate from IRFOL colleagues; engage with IRFOL staff in developing a draft of a joint research proposal which could then be promoted for funding as appropriate.

As a consequence Dr Mitra had the opportunity to visit and interact with the staff of IRFOL, International Extension College, National Extension College, Institute of Community Studies and the Young Foundation in London, and other faculty members of Cambridge University. She contributed in a paper jointly developed by IRFOL called "*The art of the possible: issues of learner support in open and distance learning in low income countries*". She also developed a Concept paper titled "*The Effectiveness of Open Vocational Education at National Institute of Open Schooling*", after having discussion with IRFOL. She gave a presentation on Open schooling System in India to the faculty members of IRFOL, IEC, and NEC.

- Shri V.J. Williams, Director (Evaluation), NIOS visited Nepal from 21 to 23 July, 2005 to inspect schools for accreditation by NIOS.
- **NIOS and COL Sponsored Study Visit to the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand**

Two faculty members from the Vocational Education Department of NIOS viz., Dr Mamta Srivastava and Dr. R.S.P. Singh were sent to Design and Development Center of the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand for 15 days . This was NIOS and COL Sponsored trip. The group visited the following institutions .The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, DDC, Wellington Institute of Technology, Correspondence School, Massey University.

The objective of the visit was :

- To have discussion with the staff involved in evaluation of the courses.
- Observation and practical experience in instructional design .

- To spend time with staff from learning support team, early childhood education section , school of work place learning etc .
- To interact with staff of correspondence school, etc.

Several potential areas in which action can be taken were identified by the staff members. A few of them are as follows:

- Develop competency based vocational curriculum and self learning material.
- Introduction of credit system for all vocational courses.
- Courses to be transformed into modular form.
- Develop schedule for training programmes and monitor them strictly (A Monitoring Unit needs to be set up in the Department).
- Promotion of industry – institution linkages at all stages i.e., from curriculum development to assessment.
- Model training institutions to be set up for providing training as well as for validation.
- Need for Placement Cells in the Regional Centres so as to form linkages with local industries and other employment agencies.
- Establishment of Guidance and Counseling Centres in the Regional Centres for pre registration and as well as informing learners about lateral and vertical mobility.