

## Chapter 4.16

# Delivery of a Social Science Online Program in India

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### ABSTRACT

This narrative of an engagement with the open and distance learning system and its highpoint of launching an online learning package in 2001 reveals an attempt to integrate various components of the multimedia format of course development. The uneasy task of meeting the various needs of diverse learners became possible by using the information technology tools to communicate and interact more effectively. Well-structured architecture of the Web site of the program, including its peer-evaluated threaded discussion board has been well accepted by the learners. Rudimentary in its overall design, this first ever social science online program in India may be, it has generated in the institution a live interest in encouraging further attempts at launching online programs of study.

### INTRODUCTION

In the globalized world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, education has become a tool for growth of developing

countries. In this sense, education is an economic necessity in a nation like India, where the numbers are large and resources available are fewer in relation to higher cost of education for all. Whether it is the ancient Gurukul system or the present-day classroom system, knowledge seekers have always gone to the place of learning for receiving education, but the classroom system is increasingly proving to be inadequate to meet the challenges of demands for universal education, continuing education, and equity in access to educational opportunities. With the entry of the open and distance learning (ODL) mode of education, instead of people going to the place of knowledge it has now become possible to take knowledge to people. The current educational scenario in India requires that ODL institutions strive to make full use of information technology to achieve higher productivity in a cost-effective manner. In this context this chapter narrates the story of the author's engagement with the open and distance learning system and its highpoint of launching of an online learning package in 2001.

Introduced at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) to the distance-learning

mode of education in the late 1980s, the author became interested in the ODL's potential power for meeting the e-needs of India and educational needs of India, and after grasping, in the first five years of being at IGNOU, its unique features and their relevance to contribute substantially to the Indian educational system, an attempt was made to tap the potential of information technology tools to integrate within the ODL system. There were two challenges before us.

Encouraged by the results of dogged pursuit, in some other programs of study at IGNOU, of making course development a participatory exercise (Jain, 2001), the first challenge facing us was to create shared learning environments for making possible a sustained exploration by learners around critical issues in the subject of study. For this purpose we planned to appropriately integrate various components of the multimedia format of course development.

The second challenge was to meet IGNOU's objective of addressing the learning requirements of diverse target groups. The World Bank approached IGNOU to offer a learning package for resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) managers working in the various development projects. The wide range of managers employed in government, private, and voluntary bodies to manage the R&R issues of displacement caused by development projects in India presented a wide range of potential takers of such a package. It was not easy to integrate the various needs of different groups of potential takers of this group in one learning package, and it seemed very useful to tap the information technology (IT) tools to communicate and interact more effectively with the learners employed in different institutions ranging from a non-governmental organization to the government of India both at central and state levels to financial institutions carrying out huge development projects of various kinds. The sociology and economics faculty of the School of Social Sciences at IGNOU accepted to develop the learning package, and the author of this

chapter coordinated the project. In the light of these considerations, the goal of the collaborative learning processes focussing on the participation of learners became the underlying principle to conceptualize and develop the online learning package of a six-month post graduate certificate program of study in participatory management of displacement, resettlement and rehabilitation (PGCMRR, launched in July 2001).

The chapter has four parts: basic information about PGCMRR, academic and administrative issues, lessons learned and evaluation of the program, and concluding remarks that incorporate policy implications of promoting networking and collaboration in the world of knowledge.

## **E-LEARNING PROGRAM**

As part of IGNOU's commitment to offer courses to diverse groups of learners, and the initiative from the faculty led to launching of an online post-graduate certificate in PGCMRR through a financial support of the World Bank. Its objectives, target groups, entry requirements, and other information are given next:

- **Objectives:** The main objective of the program is to provide participatory management skills to the personnel involved in R&R work. The word "participatory" is of critical importance because no R&R is feasible without participation of those displaced. The PGCMRR students learn in this program the skills involved in taking a participatory approach, and they are expected to apply the same in their project work of PGCMRR. This, in turn, will hopefully prepare them to carry forward the same in real life to their work in the field of R&R.
- **The target groups:** The program has been targeted to: (a) those engaged in resettlement and rehabilitation (or R&R) divisions of development projects of the government and

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