

Minutes of the 22nd meeting of the CEMCA Advisory Council held on 26th December, 2022 at Sheraton Hotel, New Delhi at 10:00 hrs IST.

Attendees:

Commonwealth of Learning

Prof. Asha S. Kanwar - Chairperson
President and CEO, COL

Dr. Sanjaya Mishra - Special Invitee
Director Education, COL

Bangladesh

Mst. Rokhsana Begum - Member
Deputy Secretary
Scholarship & Engineering University Section
Ministry of Education
Govt. of People's Republic of Bangladesh

Prof. (Dr.) Syed Humayun Akhter - Member
Vice Chancellor,
Bangladesh Open University, Bangladesh

India

Mr. Mrityunjay Behera - Member
Economic Advisor
Department of Higher Education,
Ministry of Education,
Government of India, New Delhi

Prof. K. Setharama Rao - Member
Vice Chancellor
Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University
Hyderabad, India

Malaysia

Ms. Noor Jismin binti Mohd Yusoff - Member
Principal Assistant Secretary
International Relations Division
Ministry of Higher Education,
Govt of Malaysia
(Representing YBhg Datin Noorazah binti Omar)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mohd Azmir bin Mohd Nizah
Director of Education Malaysia Division
Department of Higher Education
Ministry of Higher Education
Govt of Malaysia
(Additional representative sent by Government of Malaysia)

Maldives

Mr. Ahmed Mausoom - Member
Education Development Professional
Head of Foreign Relations Section
Ministry of Education
Republic of Maldives

Sri Lanka

Ms. Hasini Thalagala - Member
Director of Education
Foreign Agencies & External Affairs
Ministry of Education, Isurupaya,
Battaramulla,
Sri Lanka
(Representing Ms. Madhura M Wehella)

CEMCA

Dr. B. Shadrach - Member
Director, CEMCA

Mr. T.K. Kaul - Secretary
Head, Admn. & Finance
CEMCA

Dr. Venkataraman Balaji, Vice- President, COL and Prof Saroj Sharma, Chairperson, National Institute of Open Schooling, NOIDA, India could not attend the meeting and sought Leave of Absence.

The Chairperson called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the 22nd meeting of the CEMCA Advisory Council.

1. Chairperson's Introductory Remarks

The Chairperson placed on record appreciation for the valuable contributions made by the following members who completed their tenure earlier.

- i) Prof. Nageshwar Rao
Vice Chancellor, IGNOU
- ii) Prof. Ashok Ogra
Advisor APJ Group of Institution
New Delhi

The Chairperson also placed on record appreciation of her contribution in the meetings of CAC to Ms. Madura M Wehella outgoing member who would be completing her term on 31st December, 2022.

The Chairperson also welcomed new members: Prof. K. Seetharama Rao, Vice Chancellor, Dr. BR Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad, India and Prof. Saroj Sharma, Chairperson, NIOS, NOIDA, India.

She also welcomed the following new Focal Points of their respective countries:-

- i) Mst. Rokhsana Begum of Bangladesh
- ii) Ms. Hasini Thalagala of Sri Lanka

For the benefit of new members, Chairperson gave a brief account of establishment of CEMCA. CEMCA was established in 1994 by Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in response to the needs expressed by Asian Commonwealth countries for a more effective use of educational media resources for Distance Education. Establishment of CEMCA was formalized under a host country agreement signed between the COL and the Government of India (GoI) in 1998 with headquarters in New Delhi. The GoI notified CEMCA as a diplomatic mission under section 3 of the United Nations (Privileges and Immunities) Act, 1947 in Gazette of GoI on 10th February 2000.

In alignment with COL's Strategic Plan 2021-27, CEMCA is promoting Sustainable Development, Economic and Social inclusion, Environment conservation and equitable and quality education. The plan has elements of continuity and change. CEMCA will continue to organize its work in two sectors: Education and Skills with Gender Equality as a cross cutting initiative. The work of the sectors will be complimentary and contribute to achieving corporate impact. However, there is greater focus on innovation, inclusion and measuring impact.

CEMCA Advisory Council (CAC) functions as an advisory body of COL on CEMCA affairs for broad policy formulation in its programmes and for monitoring and evaluating CEMCA's progress.

Commonwealth, also called Commonwealth of Nations, is a free association of sovereign states who have chosen to maintain ties of friendship and cooperation and acknowledge the British monarch as a symbolic head of their association. There were 54 commonwealth countries earlier. In 2022, two more countries, Togo and Gabon were inducted in the Commonwealth.

During the pandemic, several new things emerged with implications for transforming education for the future. There is an increased awareness and demand for online and distance education courses compared to pre-pandemic time. Many Open Universities have started offering MOOCs. Future education is going to be blended learning. Distance Education is cost effective. It may help bridging the gap of 'Learning Loss' due to disruption in learning by pandemic. It may also reduce inequality, thereby vulnerable communities will also be brought to the mainstream. All these may therefore, will lead to achievement of SDG-4.

COL has been promoting the use of open educational resources (OER) for a long time. Use of online courses during pandemic increased suddenly and thereby increased demand for quality content. During the pandemic people and institutions started giving more attention to the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff. Some institutions are now taking better care of them. This needs to be sustained.

Climate change and its consequences are a matter of great concern and education has a role in alleviating the impact. A study by Botswana University brought out that the carbon footprint of distance learner is only a one-third compared to that of a campus student because of reduction in transportation etc.

Bill Gates during a summit in 2022 stated that manufacturing (of everything from steel, cement, plastic etc.) bears the largest responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for 30 percent of total emissions. Electricity accounts for 26 percent, agriculture 21 percent, transportation 16 percent and buildings 7 percent.

All members present participated in the discussion and expressed their views on the above points of the chairperson.

2. Confirmation of the Minutes of the 21st Advisory Council Meeting held on December 09, 2021

All members of CAC, especially those who were present in the last meeting confirmed the minutes of 21st Advisory Council Meeting held via Zoom on 9th December 2021. Member from Maldives Mr. Ahmed Mausoom seconded the proposal from Prof. Akhter, Vice Chancellor, Bangladesh Open University.

Vice Chancellor of Bangladesh Open University, however pointed out that his name has not been correctly mentioned at page 4 under Action item 2. This was noted for correction. Accordingly, at page 4 under Action item 2, name stands corrected as under:

Prof (Dr.) Syed Humayun Akhter

3. Action Taken Report

Director CEMCA presented the Action Taken Report and reported as under.

Action Item No. 1: CEMCA to work with Sri Lankan Institutions on the development of virtual Lab concept for practical subjects and collaborate on development of yoga programme as well.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka and a local organisation, Centre for Media and Information Literacy (CMIL), CEMCA has organised an online workshop on 22-23 November 2022, providing a detailed exposure to the concept of Virtual Labs as the first step.

National Institute of Education (NIE), Sri Lanka has shown interest to initiate a national level programme in 2023.

On the Yoga front, CEMCA has obtained permission to translate a unique training programme called, Common Yoga Protocol (CYP) in Sinhala language and make the content available for Sri Lankan institutions to use. Further, the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga is willing to certify learners in Sri Lanka in CYP once they complete the course.

CEMCA shall be working with local institutions and the Vivekananda Cultural Centre in Sri Lanka towards promoting training.

Action Item No. 2: CEMCA to organize an Orientation Programme for Parents for government officials and other stakeholder in commonwealth Asian countries on Online Education. CEMCA to provide details to take up Disaster Management course issue with the relevant department in Bangladesh

CEMCA published two related resources on Online Education, aimed to enhance awareness among the stakeholders including parents. The publications are listed as under:

a) Handbook on Online Education in Commonwealth Asia: <https://www.cemca.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/HandbookonOnlineEducationinCommonwealthAsiaByDrPanigrahiandDrPhalachandra.pdf>,

b) Guidelines for the parents on online education: Dr. Pawan Duggal : [GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS REPORT FINAL2.indd \(cemca.org\)](#)

CEMCA shall take up the Disaster Management course with appropriate authorities in Bangladesh.

Action Item No. 3: CEMCA to extend support for OER repository, and to provide advice on the development of MOOC in Bangladesh Open University. CEMCA to facilitate BOU collaboration with other Open Universities in Commonwealth Asia.

CEMCA is supporting UGC Bangladesh for OER in higher education. 20 Universities adopted OER policy, and 2000 higher education teachers have been trained on OER for learning.

CEMCA also supported several need-based course design and development as MOOC. With CEMCA's support, BOU established its own OER repository, and have started to populate contents.

Initiated by CEMCA, BOU has been collaborating with Netaji Subhas Open University Kolkata by establishing an MoU.

Action Item No. 4: CEMCA shall help to develop some skill programmes for e-commerce and the DTH technicians. CEMCA to bring out a publication which talks about the wellbeing which is of a great relevance as reference book for the school counsellor.

CEMCA is in discussion with National Skill Development Corporation – Bosch Partnership as well as with IIM, Ranchi for developing a course for DTH technicians and sales personnel.

Govt of India has a structural training programme through NCERT, SCERT and other State Govt for School Counsellors. As a result, good number of reference material is available as OER and through Open Access on the topics suggested.

CEMCA is undertaking a review of publications available on the topic that are already in use in schools.

4. Annual Report 2021-22 (July 21 to June 22)

Director CEMCA presented the Annual report 21-22 of CEMCA and informed that CEMCA collaborated for various programmes and reaching to a large number of stakeholders from Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, India, Malaysia, Maldives and Sri Lanka during the year under report. Achievements of the year 2021-22 and the challenges were presented through a presentation.

The report is available in an online folder at:

<https://www.cemca.org/annual-reports#.Y7VQBH1ByUI>

5. CEMCA's Achievement Report for 2022-2 (July to November 2022)

Director CEMCA presented the Achievement Report of CEMCA for the current year covering the months from July to November 2022 (5 months)

The report is available in an online folder at:

<https://www.cemca.org/other-reports#.Y7VUKH1ByUn>

6. **Any other Business**

The Chairperson sought members priorities and views on the current developments in the region where CEMCA can support and add value.

- i) Ms. Hasini Thalagala of Sri Lanka acknowledged that CEMCA is working with some important organisations like TVEC in Sri Lanka. CEMCA has introduced some new initiatives like Virtual Labs. New approaches can be introduced in Sri Lanka. She further pointed out that Education reforms are under way in Sri Lanka and pilot programmes of reforms are taken up in schools. Skill Development needs mediation. There is low performance of boys as compared to girls. She desired if ODL can do something in bridging the under performance by the boys.
- ii) Mst. Rokhsana Begum of Bangladesh acknowledged that CEMCA is working with some Universities and also UGC for developing policies and programmes. Bangladesh has progressed a lot in launching Blended Learning. The draft of Master Plan is ready. It is being mapped to find the gaps so that proper policies are developed. New curricula based on livelihood are developed. According to Ministry of Youth, 15 million Youth have dropped due to pandemic. Vocational training is being imparted to these youth to bring them back in the fold. As a pilot project 100,000 youth of the age group 15-19 are taken for the project. Disaster management & climate resilience are the matters of concern in Bangladesh.
- iii) Prof. (Dr.) Humayun Akhter, Vice Chancellor of Bangladesh Open University pointed out that the UGC of Bangladesh is taking a lead in Blended Learning in Bangladesh. However, there is a misconception of Open University not being up to the mark among some decision-takers and among people also, even some educationists are also of the same view. Students getting degrees from Open University are discriminated against. He further stated that there should be advocacy for Blended Learning as it will be the trend in future Distance Education.
- iv) Mr. Ahmed Mausoom of Maldives pointed out that in an experiment where parents were invited, the turnover was poor when instructions were conducted online. He also pointed out that in Maldives, certain skills are lacking in some communities. Courses to bridge the gap, as per needs, have to be started. For students less than 18 years, literacy and numeracy have to be started. These are coordinated by the local governments. Some groups of Instructors are enthusiastic, but the budget provided by the government are not up to the mark. He further informed that the Focal Points are not being well informed with respect to the CEMCA/COL programs being carried out in the Country and hence would like to see better co-ordination in future.
- v) Prof. K. Seetharama Rao, Vice Chancellor Dr. BROU, Hyderabad, India pointed out that the enrolment of female students especially in Biological Sciences are quite encouraging. We need to link this effectively with climatic and organic farming. NGOs are also involved in having total organic farming in certain villages. He suggested that courses be developed in Biological Science especially in climatic action.

- vi) Ms. Noor Jismin and Mr. Mohd Azmir of Malaysia pointed out that distance learning after covid has gained momentum. They emphasized that course on Higher Education in digital learning will be of great help. Infrastructure in Educational Institutions need to be strengthened. Governance, infrastructure Innovation and culture of the Institutions need to be aligned to have better results.
- vii) Mr. Mrutyunjay Behera of India informed that in India for Environment related issues Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change and Niti Ayog are involved. There is large scale commercialization, thereby hazardous and dangerous waste products get piled up. This can be controlled if there are controls at the production stage and users do not use those products. Also for life skills like Domestic Help, no course is available. Also, we should have courses on Climate literacy.
- viii) Prof. Saroj Sharma, Chairperson NIOS could not attend the meeting, but she sent some points for consideration by e-mail.
 - a) Training of trainers' curriculum for NIOS teachers
 - b) National Virtual School with appropriate AR/VR content
 - c) NIOS Gender Green Teacher Programme needs promoted within India and outside India also.

7. Vote of Thanks

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks by the Head, Admn. & Finance who thanked the Chair and the members for their participation, valuable inputs, and rich contribution to the deliberations.