

Initiative for implementation of OER Recommendation in Sahel

ACTION PLAN

Introduction

The adoption by the UNESCO General Conference of the Recommendation on OER (40 C/32) provides an unprecedented opportunity to integrate OER practices into the policies and strategies of governments around the world, particularly in countries and regions where the adoption of OER has lagged behind. In many countries, the use and production of OER is in its infancy or non-existent, and awareness of the OER Recommendation remains low among government officials, policymakers, and practitioners alike. Similarly, capacity to effectively use OER practices to improve both access to knowledge and learning outcomes is limited. Therefore, coherent actions are needed to ensure implementation of the OER Recommendation to raise awareness of the importance and opportunities offered by OER and to ensure effective ownership.

Background

Within the framework of the **“Initiative for the Implementation of the OER Recommendation in the Sahel”**, the UNESCO Regional Office in Dakar and the UNESCO CI Sector have partnered with OER Africa to conduct a needs analysis survey and organize two webinars to engage with national focal points and other key actors from Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal in the Sahel region. The initiative seeks to : 1) raise awareness of the OER and the OER Recommendation among the governments of these countries, and 2) support the implementation of interventions in the five (5) action areas of the OER Recommendation at the national level and in coordination with other partners working in the region, including at the inter-regional level. The first collaborative webinar was held on November 25, 2020 to present the OER Recommendation to focal points and stakeholders and discuss the results of the preliminary survey. The second subsequent webinar, held on November 30, 2020, discussed concrete strategies and actions to advance the operationalization of the OER Recommendation. This action plan is based on the discussions that took place during these engagements.

Steps to operationalize the OER Recommendation

The Sahel region is facing multidimensional crises: terrorism, conflicts, structural and economic challenges, poverty, displaced persons, COVID-19, etc. It is important to take this context into account when developing any strategy to operationalize the OER recommendation. Discussions during the consultative webinars showed that some of the proposed activities must be prioritized in order to gain

buy-in at all levels and make the OER recommendation operational in the region. These interventions were categorized according to the five areas of action of the recommendation.

Building capacity of stakeholders to create, access, re-use, adapt and redistribute OER

Raise awareness

OER can increase access to educational and research resources, improve learning outcomes, maximize the impact of public funding, and empower educators and learners to become co-creators of knowledge. Prior to any intervention, the need to communicate the OER recommendation and its potential benefits to all stakeholders at all levels emerged from the discussions. Government buy-in is essential. Participants suggested the following outreach activities:

- Draft a white paper for decision makers at government level on the potential benefits of OER and how these can contribute to national goals.
- Map existing OER and open and distance education initiatives as well as good practices in the region.
- Share success stories from the region on how OER has contributed to the creation of and access to teaching and learning materials, improving learning outcomes, and empowering educators.
- Develop research instruments for access to OERs and promoting distance training between educational partners. Countries can conduct research on challenges, experiences, and the potential of using OERs in the region.

Train teachers

The need to train teachers from a pedagogical perspective, as well as on the creation and use of OER, was identified as a key activity to operationalize the OER recommendation in the Sahel region. Initiatives, some of which are supported by UNESCO, exist in the region. These initiatives can be used to develop such training.

The use of OER at the basic education level in the region is lagging behind or almost non-existent. Teachers at this level of education naturally have a greater need for capacity building than at the university level. Similarly, the number of OERs targeting basic education is very limited. The focal points advocated for:

- Identify professional development needs of teachers for the integration of OERs into education at each level.
- Reinforce teachers' ICT competencies and skills for OER creation, adaptation, and use, with a focus on accessibility as well as the diversity of the types of resources (teacher training support, teaching and learning materials in all subjects and at all levels, and resources that are inclusive and accessible to marginalized communities, etc.).
- Adapt existing training and resources from outside the region for faster implementation. Countries can train trainers and cascade this training.
- Openly license all training materials and shared across the region where possible.

Developing supportive policy

Engaging decision makers within government is key to developing policies and plans that encourage the creation and use of OERs at the national level. This line of action relies heavily on the groundwork

done by the awareness raising activities and builds on this. The activities below have been suggested to develop supportive policies within the Sahel region:

- Set up national inter-ministerial collaboration and exchange mechanisms (include basic and higher education and vocational training, culture, and others) on OER and to address issues of acquisition, promotion and licensing of open educational resources.
- Capacity building of focal points on advocacy skills for OER Recommendation;
- Provide support, where necessary, for updating content procurement policies to take into account resources published under open licenses;
- Support the implementation of policy/strategy for open licences (ex. Creative commons licenses) so resources can be adapted, translated, and made accessible to all.
- Provide support, where necessary, for OER integration into national education policies, strategies, and planning, including at the basic education level.

Encouraging effective, inclusive and equitable access to quality OER

Resources are required at all levels to ensure access to quality OERs. Though many universities rely on quality assurance mechanism and open concepts, basic education has strong needs of support to use effectively OER for teaching and learning across the region. Stakeholders should aim to build on effective practices from within the region. To do this, the following actions are suggested:

- Ensure the training (regional) on accessible and inclusive OER (norms, standards, best practices, etc.);
- Promote the adaptation and translation of OER into regional languages as well as in accessible format.
- Mapping and sharing best practices on making content accessible in an inclusive and equitable manner.
- Develop a manual of procedures/book of good practice for developing inclusive and accessible OER in the region. This will guide all stakeholders on leveraging solutions that already exist to help to ensure quality and equity.

Nurturing the creation of sustainability models for OER

A consortium of partners is necessary for the effective implementation of OER and to ensure access to technology and equipment, the development of relevant skills, and Internet connectivity. When countries were planning for the roll out of distance education solutions during the COVID-19 lockdowns, some private partners offered to assist with products, financial assistance, technical assistance, and partnerships. Countries can bring these partners together and identify ways to build on these relationships. Thus, it would be appropriate to:

- Initiate a round table with technical and financial partners and all relevant government ministries (including Ministry of Finance) to exchange on sustainability model for OER.
- Develop and propose model contracts for open license content production by teachers and partners.

Promoting and reinforcing international cooperation

Regional networking and collaboration will be key to rolling out this plan. Countries and focal points should identify champions across the region to drive the process with support of UNESCO and international partners.

Champions must develop a road map with regional priorities for resources necessary beyond advocacy. This will require looking at what is working in open and distance education practices; researching why and where open interventions are successful and how this can be scaled up and avoid duplication of efforts. This will also enable countries to pool human and financial resources where possible to use these as effectively as possible.

Constant collaboration between countries in the region and international stakeholders is necessary, so champions should build on existing partnerships and networks and ensure the incorporation of OER issues. Increasing partnership in the region may be achieved by also promoting collaboration and the sharing of good practices, including through exchange forum gathering public, private, community and CSOs actors.

Various forms of support are required across the Sahel region. Some countries will require additional support as they face more challenges. Other lines of intervention necessary to further OER adoption in Sahel include:

- Leverage existing partnerships for content procurement to ensure current procurement and content creation processes are not made redundant.
- Partner with existing Centres of Excellence. (More information is needed on this World Bank initiative.)
- Identify and engage public sector partners to collaborate on the promotion, creation, and use of OERs and providing alternative sources of funding to support this.
- Develop regional networks and partnerships with public and private sectors.
- Support policy development that promotes technological infrastructure and skills in the production of digital educational content.
- Devise mechanism to value and promote creators and developers of openly licenced content (including work done to create, translate, and adapt OERs).

Schedule of priority activities

This table contains a list of activities to be prioritized over the next 12 months and assigns responsibility to stakeholders involved in this process.

Activity	Responsibility/Partners	Deadline
<i>Regional collaboration structure and initiating government engagement</i>		
Draft a white paper for decision makers at government level on the potential benefits of OER and how these can contribute to national goals	UNESCO HQ	TBD
Conduct analysis of policy environments and education regulation in the region	UNESCO Dakar, OER Africa, ICDE	May 2021
<i>Capacity building</i>		
Identify capacity building needs for the region	OER Africa	March 2021

Activity	Responsibility/Partners	Deadline
Capacity building of Focal points on advocacy for OER and integration of OER in national policies, strategies, etc.	UNESCO and OER Africa	March 2021
Regional training on accessible and inclusive OER (norms, standards, best practices, etc.)	UNESCO, ICDE	TBD
Document and share OER success stories on educational resources development	UNESCO, ICDE and OER Africa	June 2021
Adapting OER for teachers training	UNESCO & OER Africa	TBD
Reinforce teachers' ICT competencies and skills for OER creation, adaptation, and use	UNESCO, OER Africa, ICDE	TBD
OER Awareness		
Set up national inter-ministerial collaboration and exchange mechanisms (basic and higher education and vocational training, culture, and others) on OER	Focal points, UNESCO	April 2021
Organization of exchange forum gathering public, private, community and CSOs actors on OER operationalization in the region	UNESCO, ICDE and Government of the region	October 2021
Mapping, licensing content		
Map existing OER and open and distance education initiatives in the region	OER Africa with support from UNESCO	March 2021
Mapping and sharing best practices on making content accessible in an inclusive and equitable manner	UNESCO	TBD
OER Accessibility		
Develop a manual of procedures/book of good practice for developing inclusive and accessible OER in the region	UNESCO	TBD
Sustainability model		
Develop and propose guideline to public institution for contracting for open license content production	UNESCO & Partners	May 2021