Launch of the
Open Educational Resources Training Platform

Speech
by
Mr. Jānis Kārkliņš
Assistant Director-General
for Communication and Information

UNESCO HQ, Paris

1 November 2011
Ms Irina Bokova, Director-General, UNESCO,
The Honourable Stanley Simataa, Deputy Minister for Information and Communication Technology of Namibia,
Sir John Daniel, President and CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning,
Mr. Qian Tang, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

Distinguished guests,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen present here in Room X at UNESCO in Paris, those watching the live internet-stream, and those participating through Twitter and UNESCO’s Facebook account.

1. Tonight I’m very pleased to provide a brief background on the development of the UNESCO OER Platform.

2. The Director-General mentioned that UNESCO has a special relationship with OERs as it was at a 2002 Meeting supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and organized by the Communication and Information Sector that the term was created;
3. Over the last 9 years, UNESCO provided support to the global OER movement through the UNESCO OER Wiki, organizing events, and releasing several publications.

4. I would also like to highlight UNESCO’s related work that provided support to the OER movement including:

   a. Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace,

   b. UNESCO Guidelines on Governmental Public Domain Information

   c. WSIS Plan of Action

   d. ICT Competency Framework for Teachers (which was launched last night)

5. Within the framework of the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education, a Draft Resolution from the 35th General Conference, and with the generous support of the Government of the United States of America, UNESCO commenced development on the OER Platform Project;

6. The basic idea was 3-fold:

   a. release selected UNESCO publications as fully-licensed OERs,
b. persuade member state institutions who had made adaptations of the UNESCO publications to also share them as OERs,

c. all on an online Platform that would allow a user to easily: Find, Compare, Build, and Share new materials;

7. In line with fundamental software-development tenets of never trying to re-invent the wheel, the UNESCO OER Team conducted a global search and comprehensive evaluation of existing OER platforms;

8. Having found none to match our unique intergovernmental requirements, the call went out to develop a new Platform, which had to:

   a. Fully meet our OER requirements;

   b. Be multi-lingual

   c. Be based on free and open-source software

   d. Demonstrate gender equality in the development team

   e. Based in a developing country
9. I’m very proud to state that our selected contractor, the University of Witwatersrand from South Africa exceeded our requirements:
   a. They’ve demonstrated world-class professionalism developing a complex system in only 15 months
   b. They used an African free and open source software development framework called Chisemba
   c. Their Team of 7 developers comprised of 3 women and 4 men from South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Kenya showing excellent commitment to our global priorities of Africa and Gender Equality.

10. I’d like to sincerely thank Professor Barry Dwolatzky from the University of Witwatersrand for a job well done;

11. In parallel with the development of the Platform, the UNESCO OER Team had to identify the 1st UNESCO publication to be made available as an OER on the Platform;

12. The choice was easy: the *UNESCO Model Curricula for Journalism Education* is 1 of the Communication and Information Sector’s most successful products.
13. Released in 2007, it has been adapted by more than 65 university journalism schools worldwide in over 55 countries.

14. In early 2010, the UNESCO OER Team and the UNESCO Office in Windhoek, Namibia met with the Polytechnic of Namibia and the University of Namibia and agreed the 2 institutions would be the 1st to share their UNESCO-adapted curricula on the Platform as OERs.

15. We are very grateful to Dr. Tjama Tjivikua, Rector of the Polytechnic of Namibia, Professor Alaphia Wright, Director of the UNESCO Windhoek Office, and Jaco Du Toit, Adviser for Communication and Information in the Windhoek Office for that excellent 1st meeting.

16. Dr. Tjivikua and Mr. Edwin Tjiramba from the University of Namibia are special guests with us today;

17. In a few minutes, the Hon. Stanley Simataa will outline the benefits for the 2 Namibian institutions as well as for education in Namibia.

18. Having selected the 1st UNESCO product to be made available as an OER, and the 1st set of adaptations, the UNESCO OER Team conducted world-wide meetings to promote the Platform including: Windhoek, Lisbon, Saint
Petersburg, San Francisco, New Delhi, Loja in Ecuador, and Cape Town.

19. The Team has also extensively promoted the Platform within the organization identifying many new products and global adaptations in the 2012 – 2013 pipeline including:
   
a. The UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Curricula

   b. The UNESCO Curricula for the General History of Africa

20. I’d like to quickly highlight how the OER Platform and the UNESCO/COL OER Policy Guidelines that will also be launched tonight will play a major role in the License-Masters-Doctorate Project for the Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa (known by it’s French acronym – UEMOA). More details are provided in the newly released OER brochure (available in French and English).

21. In conclusion, I’d like to emphasize that UNESCO now has a very strong OER Programme with:

   a. OER Platform

   b. UNESCO/COL OER Policy Guidelines
c. OER Community on the WSIS KC – the world’s largest OER Community

d. OER Research Chairs

e. Events – such as the 2012 World OER Congress that Sir John will be highlighting

f. Projects – such as UEMOA LMD and the OER Gateway in the Commonwealth of Independent States, and finally

g. Strong partnerships – especially with the Commonwealth of Learning, Governments such as the United States of America and Namibia, and development agencies such as the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

22. I’d like to thank the OER Team for their excellent work and Indrajit Banerjee, Director of the Knowledge Societies Division for providing the team with resources, guidance, and the most importantly, freedom to get it done.

Thank you for your attention and I would now like the Honourable Stanley Simataa, Deputy Minister for ICT of Namibia to officially launch the OER Platform.