

Seventeen Years of Delivery of Open and Distance Education by The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) in East Africa and Beyond

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Abstract: *This paper narrates the evolution of The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) since approval by Parliament in 1992, its establishment in 1993 and operationalisation in 1994. The paper shows that OUT has grown tremendously from being simply a national institution into a strong and vibrant university with an international status, serving students from the east and central African regions by 2011. The paper further discusses evolution milestones that OUT has witnessed during the seventeen years of its operation. As part of the major milestones, OUT has established twenty four Regional Centres that are supplemented by the four Coordinating Centres of Zanzibar, Pemba and as well as the two Kenyan Coordination Centres located within Nairobi and Nakuru premises of the Egerton University in Kenya. Three more regional Centres will be inaugurated in July in the envisaged new regions of Njombe, Katavi and Simiyu. In terms of academic programmes, OUT currently offers 20 undergraduate degrees, 3 certificates, 4 diplomas, 2 postgraduate diplomas, 20 masters and 5 PhDs. In order to strengthen the quality assurance of the academic, discourse in teaching, research and consultancy services as well as security and confidentiality of examination matters at The Open University of Tanzania, the Directorate of Examinations Syndicate was established in 2008 to oversee all activities regarding administration of examinations and processing of students results and awards. The quality assurance unit that was established in 2009 is also due to be elevated to a full fledged directorate. Moreover, in order to ensure the culture of strategic planning is consistently cultivated, nurtured and sustained, OUT has over the last six years conducted 12 six monthly review workshops. In an effort to ensure that the strategic planning culture is embraced in the hearts and minds of staff, OUT has since the academic year 2008/09 piloted and adopted the Open Performance Review and Appraisal System (OPRAS) in order to improve objectivity of the annual review process. This has necessitated the abandonment of the old annual confidential review forms used by most east African universities. The paper ends by highlighting the main prospects and challenges that OUT has faced over the last seventeen years of delivery of ODL education as well as the manner in which it has sought to exploit any emerging opportunities apart from facing the challenges head.*

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) is the third public university to be established in Tanzania. It was founded by the Government vide the Act of Parliament No. 17 of 1992. Whilst the first Vice Chancellor was appointed in 1993, its maiden Chancellor was installed in January 1994. The Act No. 17 was later on repealed and replaced by the Universities Act No 7 of 2005 which gives more powers to the University's Council in the management of the University's operations. The implication of the Universities Act is that the Ministry responsible for Education and Vocational Training remains with the mandate of preparing, monitoring and regulating the implementation of the country's education policy including the review of legal regimes. Moreover, following enactment of the Universities Act No. 7 of 2005 by the Parliament and subsequent assent by his Excellency, the President of The United

Republic of Tanzania, the responsibility for regulation, establishment and conduct of universities in Tanzania was transferred from the former Higher Education Accreditation Council (HEAC) to the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) in 2006. Consequently, in 2006 OUT was re-registered and re-accredited by TCU after which it was awarded the Charter that became effective on the 1st January 2007. However, the actual public ceremony to award Charters to qualifying public universities was held on 5th March 2008.

Historical overview

Before discussing OUT at greater length, it is worth noting that the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania under the leadership of the late Mwalimu Julius Nyerere had had a long interest in exploiting the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode for university education. A presentation of chronology of events is important in order to contextualize the evolution of ideas behind the early realization of the potential of the ODL mode of delivery into the right perspective. To begin with, The Anglo-Tanzanian study report titled “Education Media in Tanzania: Their Role in Development” (1979) recommended the establishment of a correspondence institute at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) as one of the pathways for exploiting the ODL system in the country. Again, in the year 1980, the Government of Tanzania appointed the Presidential Commission on Education under the Chairmanship of Hon. J. Makweta to review the entire education system since independence and provide recommendations on the way forward. This Committee, whose report came out in 1982, reaffirmed the proposal of setting up a correspondence institute at UDSM as recommended earlier in the Anglo-Tanzania study report (*ibidem*). In another endeavour, the then Minister for Education and Culture appointed a Committee chaired by Mr. Nicolas Kuhanga in 1988 to explore the feasibility of establishing an Open and Distance Learning institution in Tanzania. The establishment of OUT was based on the recommendations of the Kuhanga committee’s report (URT, 1990). In 1993, UNESCO and the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned Prof. Peter Kinyanjui to study the modalities and to assess the resources needed to establish OUT.

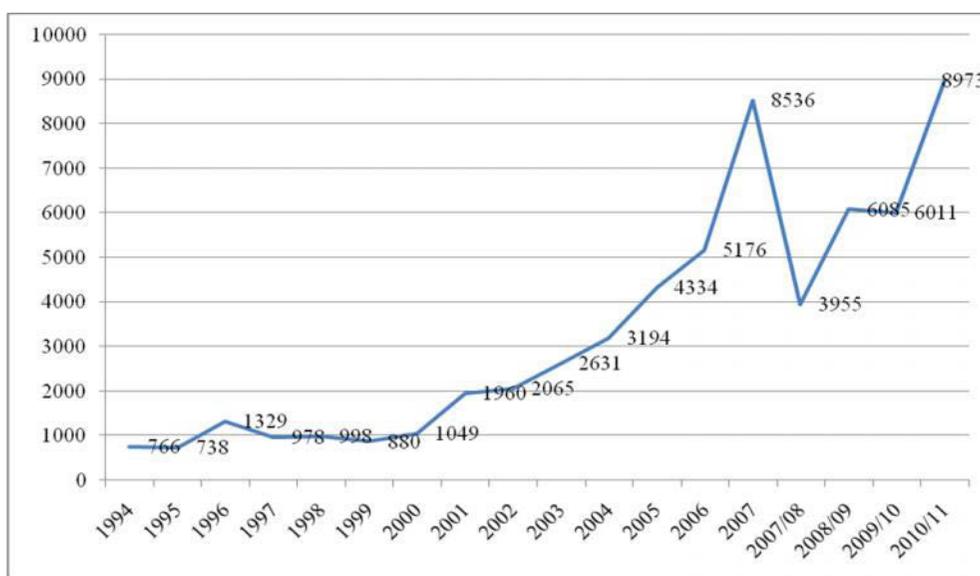


Figure 1: Student Enrollment (Undergraduate and Postgraduates)

Operationalisation

The Open University of Tanzania operations started in 1993 following the appointment of the first Vice Chancellor and installation of the Chancellor in January 1994. In January 1994, the OUT admitted its first batch of 776 students (OUT, 2010) and since then the enrollment trend has generally increased overtime (see Figure 1). Prior to 2007, OUT used to run its academic programmes between January and December. Effective 2007, however, this system was changed and a new academic year running from September to August was introduced for a number of varied reasons; one of which was the necessity to align OUT operations to the Higher Education Students Loan Board (HESLB), operational almanac.

Evolution Milestones

In this section, a brief overview of a number of milestones associated with the growth of OUT are highlighted in order to assist in following its evolution path. The following evolution parameters are covered:

- Physical Infrastructure;
- Corporate organisational structure;
- Policy and operational procedures;
- Staff mindset;
- Mainstreaming strategic planning in OUT operations;
- Teaching and Learning;
- Academic staff, research and publications, and consultancy services;
- ICT Infrastructure and services;
- Library services;
- Faculties, Institutes and establishment of academic department and centres;
- Student demography and geographical distribution;
- Quality assurance framework;
- The critical role of top leadership;
- The critical role of the Regional Advisory Committees (RACs);
- Academic programmes and courses;
- Development of the National ODL policy;
- Public Image/Perception of the ODL system of delivery;
- The phenomenal growth of the MBA programme;
- Collaboration potential with Tanzanian and other regional universities;
- Security and Confidentiality of Examinations;
- Adoption of the Open Performance Appraisal System;
- Enhancing the Leadership skills of Regional leaderships;

Physical infrastructure

The original idea that the Government would have built and provided equipment to a permanent headquarters of OUT together with all regional centres in five years (i.e. by 1998/99) has not been realized. It is important to underscore that the decision to establish regional centres in all regions was entirely political since the Kuhanga report had recommended establishment of zonal centers rather than regional centers in the first instance. Since the conceived idea of establishing regional centers contravened the recommendations of the Kuhanga report, failure to have its own premises for a permanent headquarters and associated regional centres in place by the late 1990s was inevitable. In fact, OUT headquarters had to move from the Institute of Adult Education premises in 1994 to the Tanzania Industrial Research Development Organisation (TIRDO) premises. In 2001, OUT headquarters moved to the current temporary headquarters at Kinondoni that was until the year 2007, a set of buildings built by the National Bank of Commerce as staff residential

quarters. The current HQ at Bungo, Kibaha district, Coast region, was bought by Government and was only surveyed in 2007 in order to acquire the title deed that was offered to OUT in 2008 (as Plot No. 542, Block 41). The current temporary headquarters will soon become the future Kinondoni Regional centre as well as the main operational centre for OUT residential Masters programmes in addition to the ICT courses.

The development of the permanent headquarters area of 105 acres at Bungo, Coast Region has started. However, more support from the Government and other stakeholders, including Development Partners, would be needed to backstop this initiative. By April, 2011 OUT owned permanent buildings in Mbeya, Iringa, Ruvuma, Singida, Dodoma, Kagera, Rukwa, Katavi, Njombe and Kilimanjaro regions or prospective regions while in Tanga region, OUT is sharing the physical facility under a special arrangement for 20 years effective the year 2007 with the national trade union umbrella association abbreviated as TUCTA. It is hoped that this arrangement with TUCTA may be extended to Morogoro and Arusha regions. The Open University of Tanzania has also been given a loan from TEA to construct a new regional centre in Mtwara region.

It is important to note that, with the exception of the parent ministry, other ministries in Tanzania have in the past through their permanent secretaries (and particularly the Inter-Ministerial Technical Committee (IMTC) shown a negative stand in terms of co-operation in transferring some of the unused or under-utilized properties under their jurisdiction to OUT. This has happened in several instances even when the concerned ministries knew that the identified infrastructure were laying idle or being used for unobjective purposes by influential political authorities. This type of attitude sent an early signal to OUT management that relying on ministries alone to secure premises was not a rational strategy to bank on and that there was an urgent need to change the course of action. Hence, OUT took a different direction in which involved forging co-operation with regional authorities. The strategy of forging co-operation with regional authorities through establishing Regional Advisory Committees (RACs) was justified by the stakes of the regional authorities and the direct impact of OUT graduates in the regions and districts. Indeed, this strategy was accepted by regional authorities because it provides a guarantee that OUT graduates will remain in the regions and districts after graduation.

Corporate Organisational Structure

The corporate leadership of OUT in terms of the organisational structure has changed from the maiden structure with the Vice Chancellor assisted by Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) and the Registrar that was in place from 1994 until the Dec. 2006 when the position of Registrar was replaced by Deputy Vice Chancellor responsible for Resource Management (see Figure 2). The new corporate organisational structure became effective on the 1st January 2007 following the adoption of OUT Charter (OUT, 2007b) in the same year. The new corporate structure of positions (OUT, 2007a) has the Vice Chancellor assisted by three Deputy Vice Chancellors; viz Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), Deputy Vice Chancellor (Resources Management) and Deputy Vice Chancellor (Regional Services) as illustrated in Figure 3. In the long-run, OUT sees the possibility of having up to five Deputy Vice Chancellors; the fourth is envisaged to be the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Learning Technologies) and the fifth is expected to be the Deputy Vice Chancellor responsible for Research, Publications as well as Postgraduate Studies.

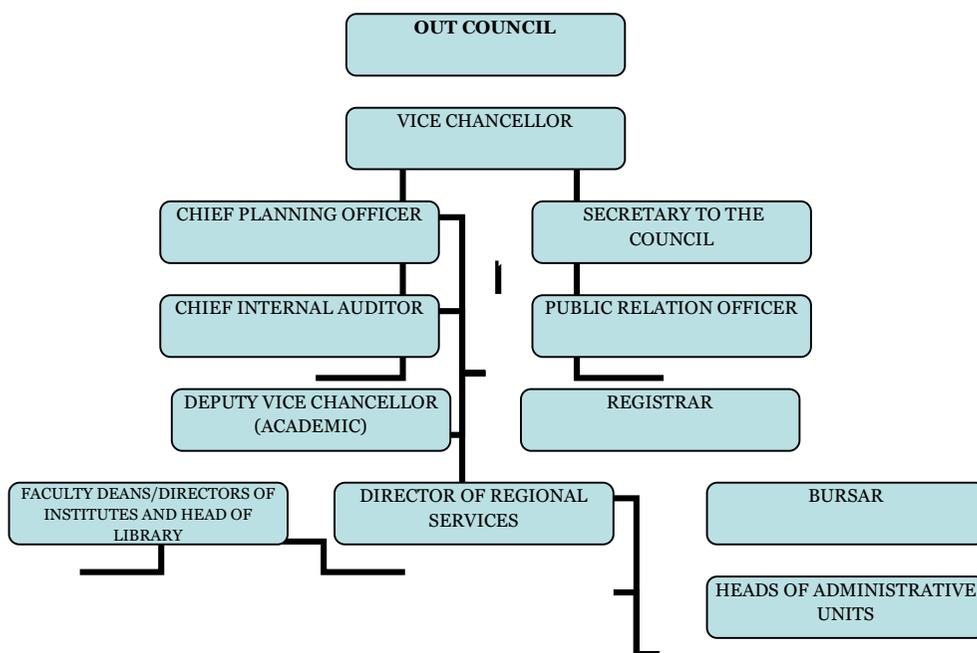


Figure 2: OUT Old Organizational Structure (1993 – 2006)

Since OUT inception, there have been some *ad hoc* measures to adjust the number and composition of the committees. A comprehensive external review report by Rakels, (2004) indicated the need to review the number and composition of the committees to be fewer, more lean and also more focused with non-repetitive agenda. The culture of running long committee meetings was reversed in order to have most meetings not lasting more than two to three hours so that officials spend more time implementing resolutions instead of moving from one meeting to another. An external evaluation has been done recently in order to establish the extent to which the organisational culture of running meetings efficiently has taken root at OUT nowadays (Rakells & Jenson, 2011). However, as the authors went in press, the report was being finalized but clearly there are positive indications that need to permeate to departmental and faculty levels.

Policy and Operational Procedures

The critical role of policies and operational procedures has been highlighted in a variety of literature as one of the five pillars of ensuring effective transformation of any organisation (Luhanga *et al.*, 2003; Mbwette, 2006). Other pillars include; the legal framework, organisational structure of positions, the composition and structure of the committees as well as the strategic planning framework. Between 2004 and April, 2011, OUT Council has approved over 25 policies and operational procedures thus indicating the extent to which grey areas have been minimized in its operations. As time goes by, more policies and operational procedures will be developed in order to accommodate emerging issues, challenges and realities as the University continues to pursue its mission of delivering affordable quality education for all through open and distance learning. At the same time, the University will continue to regularly revise and update the existing policies and operational

procedures in order to strengthen the delivery of academic programmes, research and consultancy services.

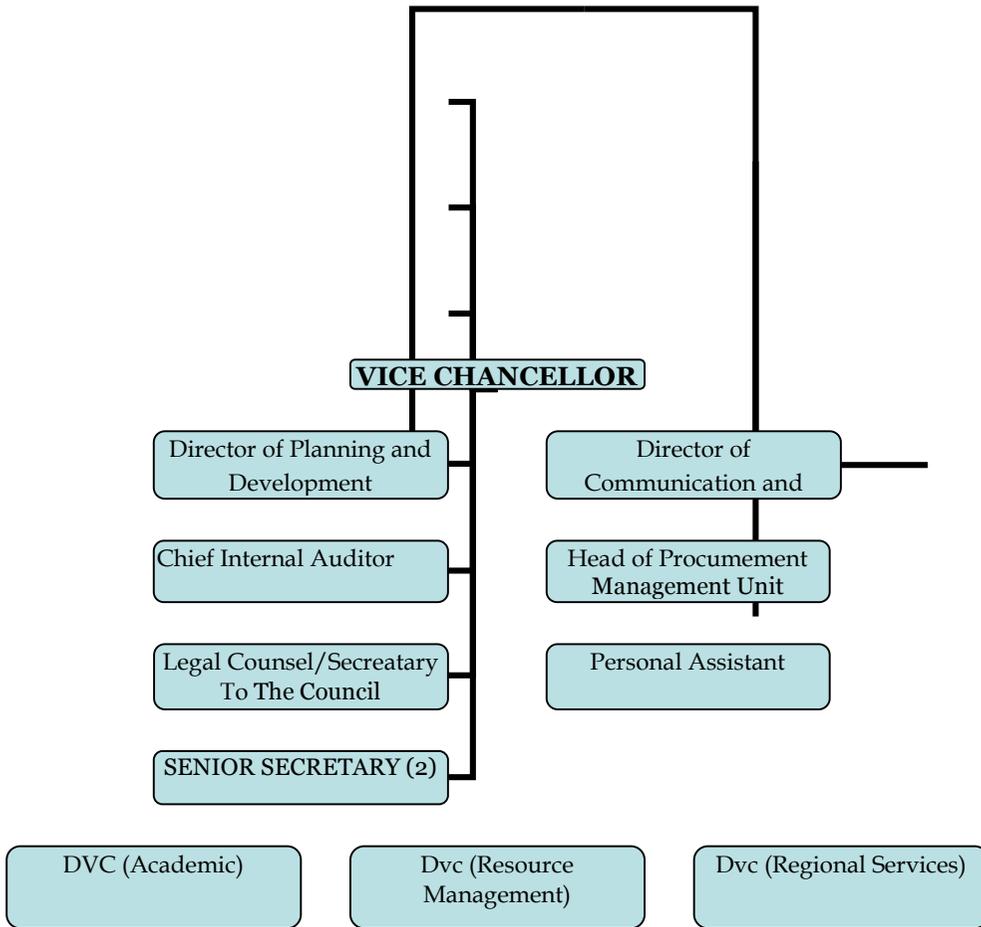


Figure 3: OUT New Organizational Structure (2007 – 2011)

Staff Mindset

The history of OUT is linked to small numbers and qualifications of both academic and administrative staff with no technical staff in the year 1994. By April, 2011, however, OUT boasted to have 670 staff out of whom 325 are academics, 301 are administrative, and 48 are technicians. The current deployment policy underscores the imperatives of allocating new recruits in the regional centres. Nonetheless, in view of the fact that the demography of OUT now involves many younger staff than ever before as can be seen in Figure 4, something must be done in order to ensure that the organisational culture, norms and values (e.g., honesty, dedication to hardworking, trust, and other ethical standards) permeate these staff with relative ease. This opportunity must be tapped without delays since some of the young staff can turn into potential sources of malpractice and lack of ethics and/or integrity. However, even amongst the old staff, there are also few whose mindset has not changed to the extent that they at times attempt to sabotage OUT operations directly or indirectly. The notion that every educated person would have a mastery of at least the basic elements of

ethics is a far cry from the specialized education that most students today receive, particularly in the universities.

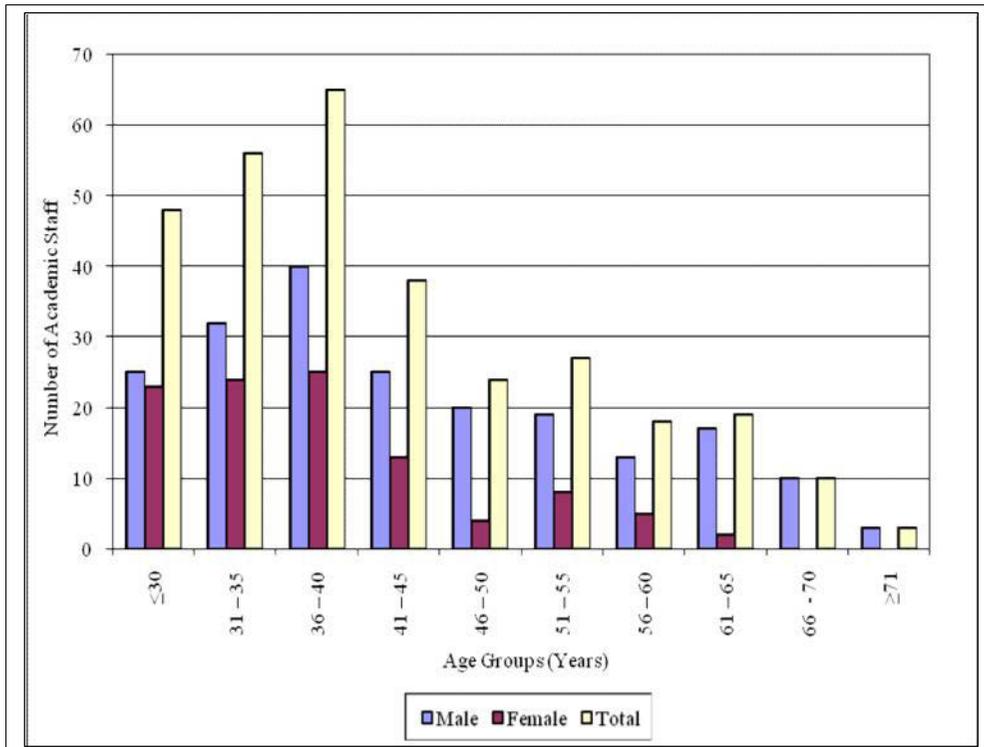


Figure 4: Demography of Academic Staff

Although the old staff whose mind set have not changed much continue to exist, these are now relatively few. Nonetheless, OUT cannot afford to ignore them. It is the intention of OUT to give these staff a limited opportunity to overhaul their mindset in order to embrace the reform. Otherwise, if they continue to oppose the reform process, their performance assessments as judged vide the Open Performance Assessment System (OPRAS) targets will justify ending their contracts or offering them the option of early retirement. In any case, where a staff member is found to have been involved in malpractice which has been proven beyond reasonable doubt, OUT management will use the existing HRM policy and rules to terminate their work contracts. However, contract termination will be considered by the respective appointing authorities only after giving the opportunity to the involved staff to be heard as required by the relevant national labour laws (URT, 2004), as well as after seeking legal opinion. The Open University of Tanzania Facts and Figures (OUT, 2010), show that by June 2010, the age profile of OUT administrative and technical staff of about 70% had an age of less than 40 years of age thus confirming the relatively young staff age as also shown in Figure 5.

Mainstreaming Strategic Planning in OUT Operations

Strategic planning is the cornerstone of OUT operations. Without strategic planning, OUT will never know where it is going, leave alone knowing if it will ever get there. An important concept of strategic planning is an understanding that in order for OUT to flourish, everyone needs to work to ensure the strategic objectives are achieved. Bearing in mind that, prior to the year 2004, OUT did not have in place a dynamic Rolling Strategic Plan, it will be

exceedingly presumptuous to claim that within the last six years, the planning culture has been fully mainstreamed.

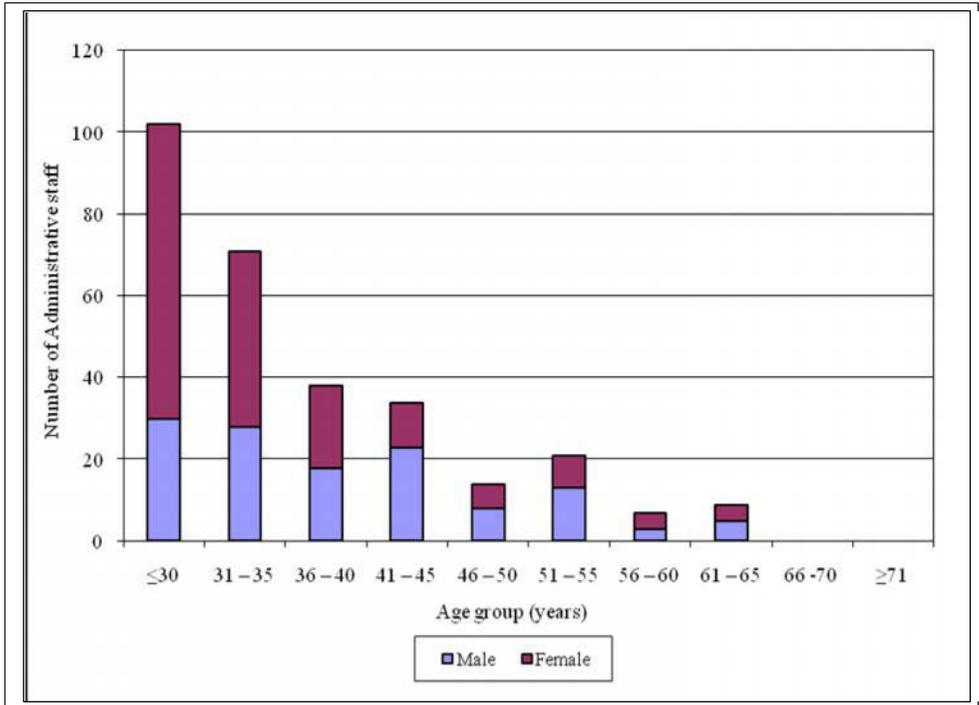


Figure 5: Demography of Administrative Staff

At corporate level, the extent of mainstreaming strategic planning is in no doubt embraced although it is obvious that even at that level, there are some individual members of the secretariat who are still living in the past. At Faculty/Institute levels, OUT has done more work to mainstream the strategic planning culture by tying staff performance to the strategic objectives and targets as outlined in the OUT RSP (2010/11 – 2014/15) effective July 2009 when the new cascaded targets for Deans and Directors under the Open Performance Appraisal System (OPRAS) were set.

In order to ensure the culture of strategic planning is consistently cultivated, nurtured and sustained, OUT has over the last six years conducted 12 six monthly review workshops. The underlying objectives of the review workshops are two fold: firstly, to review the progress in the implementation of the strategic plan. Secondly, the review workshops serve as a forum for presenting and discussing relevant topics which draw key issues from OUT strategic planning document. The ensuing deliberations and opinions from these workshops are critical ingredients in improving, refining, strengthening and consolidating OUT strategic planning. Typically, in each workshop, a number of external stakeholders are usually invited in order to share their opinions and experiences. Recent reviews recommended that while one of such workshops should focus on progress review, the other should examine performance with respect to quality assurance as coordinated by the relevant unit.

Teaching and Learning

Over the seventeen years of its existence, OUT has worked to improve the teaching and learning environment and technology in all its regional centers as well as the temporary

headquarters and externally located centers. In terms of the mode of delivery, it has now prepared grounds to intensify use of ICT –mediated learning.

Academic Staff, Research and Publications and Consultancy Services

The evolution of the number and qualifications of the academic staff of OUT has been highlighted in OUT facts and figures (OUT, 2010). Majority of the academic staff are deployed at the headquarters and the newly recruited staff are allocated in the regional centres as a deliberate measure of bringing more academic staff closer to the students. In addition to the full time academic staff, OUT receives the services from about 200 part time academic staff who come from various public and private universities. OUT assumes that, four part time staff are equivalent to one full time academic staff. Until 2004, the main role of the academic staff of OUT was in teaching activities only. However, with increasing numbers of students enrolled at OUT, it became necessary to seek participation of co-operating tutors in marking assignments following review of experiences of Open University of UK and Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU).

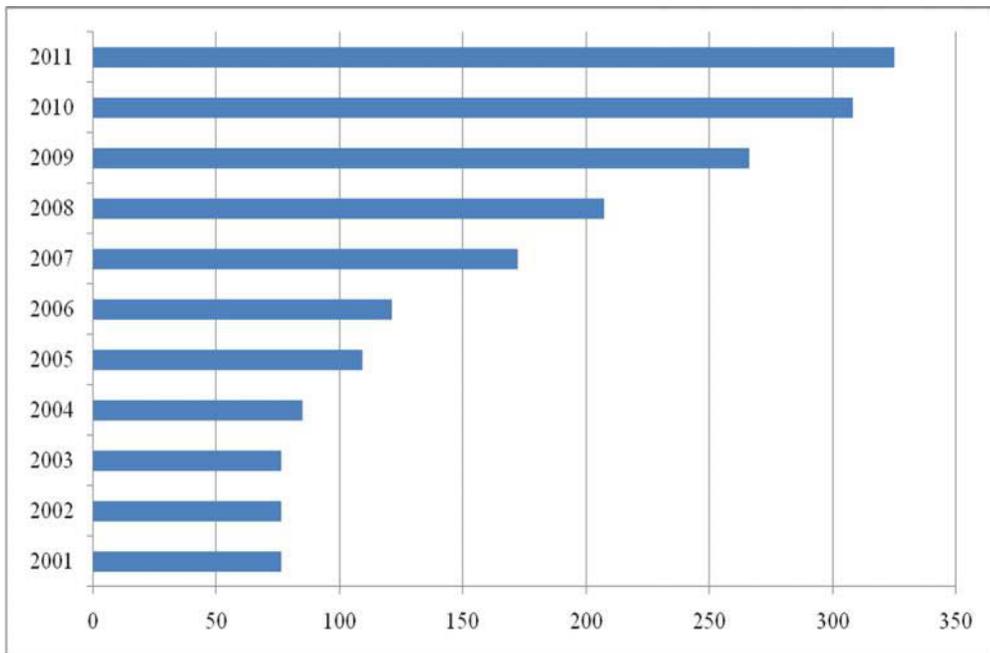


Figure 6: Recruitment of Academic Staff

This measure, together with closer follow up of the individual academic staff workloads, has to some extent, enabled OUT to encourage its staff to be more involved in seeking research funding from various sources including the small internal source for small research grants introduced in 2006. This has resulted in staff acquiring research grants from a variety of external sources to OUT. This has led to increased publication of papers in journals including establishment of two new journals with about 50% of papers from OUT staff and the remaining 50% coming from other authors from African universities and at times from Asia. The Journals produced by OUT include HURIA that publishes all varieties of papers. JIPE is a journal that covers Issues and Practice in Education and the third is the Law Journal. All these journals are produced once in six months. To encourage the authors to review the papers in time and for the authors to amend them; it has been necessary to pay extra funds to put reviewers followed by authors and ultimately the editorial boards in

residential accommodation to ensure the journals come out in time. As part of the process of changing the staff mindset to mainstream research and publications in their work, the university has done this successfully and as a result, a number of staff have been promoted based on the publications thus acting as an additional incentive. However, undue delays in processing payments by the Directorate of Finance and Accounting has led to some unnecessary delays in publication of some of the journals that were ready on time.

Current efforts are geared toward encouraging OUT staff to exploit their niches in terms of, for example, being present all over the country to compete for various consultancy services following approval of both the Consultancy services policy (OUT, 2009c) and operational procedures as well as the Incentive Policy and operational procedures (OUT, 2009d) by OUT Council. The Open University of Tanzania Consultancy Bureau as a non-profit making organization was registered in 2010. It is too early to comment on whether the culture of participating in consultancy services has gradually started to be mainstreamed by OUT staff.

ICT Infrastructure and Services

Between 2004 and 2009, the first ICT Policy and ICT Masterplan was prepared and implemented by using funding support from Tanzania Education Authority, UNESCO, SIDA, AfDB /World Bank, OUT self generated funds and the subvention from Government of Tanzania. In 2008, the process of updating the ICT Policy and ICT Masterplan was initiated and soon the new Policy and Masterplan will be approved by OUT Council. In the meantime, the ICT infrastructure and services have substantially improved at the headquarters as well as in at least twelve regional centres out of the 27 centres in existence.

Through a programme of enhanced income generation, OUT is working to open community training centres in all regional centres within OUT premises. The University has launched the customized MOODLE system for use by its staff and students in more academic programmes following trial use in the B.Sc. ICT programme. The arrival of the SEACOM cable in June 2009 marked a crucial watershed in terms of averting the hitherto very high costs of bandwidth access that also limited exploitation of the video conferencing and multi-media technologies in the past.

A programme of ensuring all staff are computer literate has been initiated and for academic staff, no extension of contracts is granted if a staff member fails to undertake and pass the basic ICT literacy test administered by the Institute of Educational Technology. It should be noted that, despite the positive achievements outlined in the foregoing sections of this paper, the Government of Tanzania has not yet accepted the necessity for an ODL institution like OUT to have either “ring-fenced” funds for payment part timers or to include such funds within Personal Emoluments (PE) code. As a result, most part time staff payments are not honored in time.

Library Services

Over the last few years, the University has increased book collections at the headquarters and in the regional centres through annual OUT allocated funds, SIDA and World Bank funds. In particular, funds from SIDA and World Bank have helped the purchase of more multiple copies of books in regional centres. Between 2008 and 2010, the World Bank fund has enable OUT to procure 3,577 textbooks. Of these copies, 1,500 copies have been distributed in five regional/coordination centers as follows: Kilimanjaro (250 copies), Zanzibar (250), Dodoma (250), Mbeya (250), Iringa (250), and Mwanza (250).

Furthermore, supported by the World Bank, a Library Management System (LMS) will be established to support libraries in the higher education institutions and research institutes. The LMS will improve library management regarding: education material search; library lending and returns; procurement and payment of education material; circulation management; financial management regarding fees; charges and subscriptions; access to a national catalogue of library holdings; and inter-library loans management. The LMS will facilitate the cataloguing of books and digitized materials, and the sharing of knowledge. Funding are also provided for subscriptions to electronic resources that support S & T education and research.

The on-going efforts to digitize all books and journals will undoubtedly assist in internal sharing of resources with other OUT students. This will be enhanced further by the common efforts to increase access by students to a number of e-resources at national level jointly that will hopefully be an additional benefit to OUT students. Plans to build a big library building at Bungo are quite advanced at the moment as part of the next tranche of funds from the World Bank intervention through a loan to the Higher education sub-sector of Tanzania.

Faculties, Institutes and Establishment of Academic Departments and Centres

The Deans of faculties and Directors of Institutes are appointed for a period of three years using the search committee appointed by DVC Academic. Their appointment is subject to an acceptance test in the respective Faculties and the Senate prior to approval by the Council. Following signing pilot performance Contract Agreements in December 2008 with DVCs, in July 2009, all Deans and Directors signed the first OPRAS Contract Agreements with the DVCs based on the cascaded proportion of the corporate Rolling Strategic Plan (RSP) targets for which the respective DVCs signed with the VC.

Following many difficulties of controlling some subject coordinators, all their duties were transferred to the Heads of Academic Departments or of Centres. Currently, OUT has only one Centre for Economics and Community Economic Development. While their (the Heads) appointing authority is the VC, their three year contracts are subject to a successful probation period of one year. The first team of Heads of Academic departments was appointed in February 2008 and by February 2009; six (6) Heads of Departments failed the probation period out of 25 Heads despite their attendance of two induction workshops. The Heads of Academic Departments are also required to sign maiden performance Contract Agreements with their respective Deans based of the targets cascaded from the Faculty or Institutes level effective 1st July 2009. The University has introduced a number of monetary incentive packages as well as provision of Internet connectivity for all Deans and Directors through “Vodacom” portable modems in lap tops purchased by the University as part of its efforts to create a conducive working environment.

Student Demography and Geographical Distribution

Historically, majority of OUT students were working staff with families. However, since the year 2003, the number of ex-form six students admitted by OUT has substantially increased to the extent that the proportion of the older students to the young seems to be almost at par. The general distribution of the students appears to be still broad with some active districts offering buildings to OUT. In general, when regional centres are rehabilitated, the number of students increases dramatically during the next academic year. The number of students in neighbouring East African countries is bound to increase when local institutions will be appointed to act as hosts of the Coordinating centres as explained above.

Quality Assurance and Control Framework

Like all East African universities, OUT has embraced the Quality Assurance and Control framework developed jointly under the coordination of the Inter University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) and the National regulatory bodies for Universities such as Tanzania Commission for Universities. As a result, an institutional Quality Assurance and Control Policy was approved in 2008 (OUT, 2008). In tandem, the OUT Quality Assurance and Control Operational Procedures has been approved by Senate and OUT Council. The University has appointed a coordinator who is assisted by two academic staff. It is the intention of OUT to review all academic programmes. Given the depth and breadth of the Quality Assurance and Control activities, OUT envisages elevating this unit into full directorate under the office of the Vice chancellor.

The Critical Role of top Leadership

The existence of firm leadership is a very crucial part of the success of any ODL institution as guided by the belief in the Mission as well as the need to be results-oriented. It is quite clear that without the conviction and belief in the importance of the ODL mode of delivery, OUT would not have taken off in 1994. The resilience, perseverance, dedication and understanding character of the founder Vice Chancellor Prof. G.R.V. Mmari under the very stringent funding environment that existed then which by the way still continues to date, was and still remains to be a very important hallmark of OUT's success to date. Furthermore, the assertion of firm control of resources that has characterized the current leadership coupled with a very clear vision of where OUT desires to go immediately as well as in the future, has been the characteristic of the current leadership. When the foregoing measures are supported by developments in Science and Technology and in particular, the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT); the extent of achievement of the targets set by OUT has increased. Had the available local funding to OUT increased to match with the student unit costs and their numbers, much more would have been achieved.

Regional/Coordination Centres

OUT has established twenty four Regional Centres that are supplemented by the three Coordinating Centres of Zanzibar, Pemba and Egerton University in Kenya. It is hoped that Coordinating Centres will be soon established in the remaining East African states as well as others. The University has already adopted a standard organisational structure for regional centres with a very recent advise from some RAC's to ultimately convert them into Colleges of OUT in future that is already allowable under the OUT Charter (OUT, 2007b). From recent Government support actions, it appears that the issue of providing OUT with more academic staff cannot be overemphasized. In this regard, the Government of Tanzania ought to be commended for its unwavering support to OUT in this respect.

The Critical Role of the Regional Advisory Committees (RACs)

The proposal to establish Regional Advisory Committees (RACs) which was endorsed by OUT council in the year 2008 has marked a major enhancement of the role of the communities in development of OUT led by members of the Regional leaderships in the operations of OUT. The real impact is that OUT has now been brought closer to the community in the regions than ever before. Available evidence has shown that the communities feel they are duty bound to support the Regional Centres in many ways; such as fund raising, making recommendations on improvements and access to buildings that belong to the regional authorities. In order to encourage competition between RACs, an annual award has been introduced since October 2009 to the top three RACs and the respective three Regional Commissioners are usually invited to Dar es Salaam to receive awards during the Graduation Ceremony.

Academic Programmes and Courses

As in January 2011, following curriculum review by some faculties and introduction of some new academic programmes; OUT offers 20 undergraduate degrees, 3 certificates, 4 diplomas, 2 postgraduate diplomas, 20 masters and 5 Ph.Ds. From the current curricula, OUT is offering up to about 800 courses. If this figure is correct, then with a number of students enrolled that is similar to The Open University of Netherlands (OU,NL) that on the other hand offers only 300 courses. OUT needs to audit the manuals if all the courses listed in the prospectus are really necessary and indeed some may even duplicate in view of each Faculty implementing Board resolutions without much consultations or coordination amongst the Faculties and Institutes.

Currently, the office of DVC (RS) is making an audit of all study materials available in the OUT stores and matching them with the approved course programmes. Even prior to conclusion of the above audit, it appears the policy of ownership of the study materials by the Faculty/Institutes has not yet been fully embraced by the Deans and Directors and some of them are not aware which study materials are for their Faculties/Institutes. Some of the study materials were at the outset provided to OUT by the Indira Gandhi National Open University(IGNOU), University of Nairobi (Kikuyu campus), (UK,OU) and the University of Abuja at the time of establishment of OUT in 1993. In the last three years; a number of new degree programmes like B.Sc. ICT, Bachelor of Arts (Social Work), BA (Mass Comm.) BA (Journalism), B.Sc. Env. Studies were established at OUT. New degrees envisaged to be offered soon include BA (Kiswahili)

As regards delivery, the use of a combination of print media and e-learning using MOODLE is now operational but rural areas are still relying on print media or CDs. Some masters degree programmes like Tourism, MBA and M.Sc in economics are also available in face to face instructional modes (i.e. evening or Executive mode for MBA) in addition to the MBA being also offered in distance mode.

Development of the National ODL Policy

The absence of the National ODL policy in Tanzania has led to substantial delays in permeating the ODL mode of delivery in other education sub-sectors as well as in other needy sectors like the Law school that has unfortunately been erroneously conceived in the residential mode at the outset inspite of its disadvantages as confirmed by the law school students. In the area of Vocational education and training (coordinated by the Vocational Education and Training Authority, VETA), some efforts to introduce distance learning has been made but the outcome of this attempt that unfortunately did not involve either OUT or the Institute of Adult Education but involved external collaborating institutions, is not yet widely publicized. In the areas of technical education as well as secondary and adult education, the exploitation of this mode of delivery has not found a home although The Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology (DIT) has made several attempts to mainstream in its sub-sector. Once the National ODL policy is approved, wider adoption of its use in Tanzania will be anticipated and hopefully, all education sub-sectors interested in exploiting ODL mode of delivery will work more closely.

A joint team of four staff (two from OUT and two from the Institute of Adult Education) have prepared a draft policy paper that has been reviewed by two local distance education experts. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) will soon call a one day workshop to discuss the draft policy soon ready for its formal adoption by Government of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Public Image/Perception of the ODL System of Delivery

Although a lot of effort has been made to publicise the quality of the products produced by OUT during the 17 years of its existence; there are too many skeptics who hold key decision making positions in Government who do not believe in the ODL mode of delivery as a credible alternative. These officials are either unaware of this system or they are reluctant to learn how the ODL mode of teaching and learning operates. The Open University of Tanzania has implored upon top national leaderships to use all opportunities when they talk to the general public about university education to start by mentioning OUT with only very limited success. However, the introduction of RACs seems to have also assisted to reduce the public ignorance about OUT. In addition, the confidence of the society in the quality of education delivered has also increased starting with production of certificates having substantial hidden security features that are kept under lock and key at all times since the year 2005 and the enhanced setting, security and quality of the OUT examinations under the Directorate of Examinations Syndicate has also increased the public confidence. The planned enhancement of the examination question data bank has improved further the OUT examinations security. Effective the academic year 2009/10, the University resolved to introduce two compulsory courses for all students as a further measure of bolstering the quality of its outputs. One course is the communication skills and another on basic computing. Both courses are meant to enhance further the quality of the OUT academic programmes.

The Phenomenal Growth of the MBA Programme at OUT

In spite of the fact that OUT admitted its first postgraduate students in the year 2001, the intake of these students has increased from 97 in the year 2001 to a figure that stands for the highest enrollment in Tanzania for postgraduate students of 5,946 by 2009/10. The MBA programme was introduced in 2002 with 12 registered students. However, by 2009/10, the MBA programme had a cumulative total of 3,194 registered students. Figure 5 shows the enrollment trend in the MBA programme which has generally recorded an increased trajectory. These students study in three modes of Distance, Evening and Executive that together, give students an unlimited ability and flexibility to undertake their studies. This rate of increase of enrollment shows the potential of the ODL mode of delivery. It should be noted that both the teaching and supervision of research are shared with staff of other public and private universities in Tanzania.

Collaboration Potential with Tanzanian and Other Regional Universities

The Open University of Tanzania sees that if the Government of Tanzania and its development partners will provide funds or guarantee loans to build the permanent headquarters of OUT at Bungo as well as providing OUT with buildings or funds to rehabilitate existing buildings in the remaining regional centres, a lot can be achieved. For example, it will be possible for OUT to collaborate with other universities to bring about massive expansion of the student enrollment by sharing its resources with residential institutions, be they public or private institutions. The issue of provision of funds for payment of part time lecturers for undergraduates in a timely manner is also a crucial matter that needs quick resolution.



Figure 7: Postgraduate Enrolment

Security and Confidentiality of Examinations

The need to strengthen security and confidentiality of examination matters at The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) prompted the establishment of a Directorate of Examinations Syndicate (DES) in August 2008 to oversee all activities regarding administration of examinations and processing of students results and awards. The directorate comprises of three departments: department of Examination Databank, Department of Records and Qualifications and the Department of Logistics and Awards.

The operations of the DES were earlier reviewed in workshop held on 27 Feb 2009 immediately after the first administration of exams under the DES. It was evident that the DES, at its infancy, had done a commendable work though a few weak points were identified for further improvement. Clear examination and qualification procedures, use of ICT and tighten security measures as well as commitment on part of staff resulted into several achievements summarized in Table 1.

Other unquantifiable achievements include:

- Improved quality of exam papers including uniformity in layout;
- Improved quality of invigilation;
- Improved security in exam halls due to presence of security officers;
- Provision of a master list of all expected candidates for each session is helpful for invigilators;
- Increased discipline by staff handling examinations;
- Increased confidentiality of examinations by both staff and students;
- Improved work environment to academic staff;
- One information centre (DES) for exam regulations by students and staff;
- Improved quality customer service to students and staff;
- Rapid response to queries from invigilators;
- Increased tuition fee payments by students due to controlled entry in exams;
- Early feedback to student through early return of TT scripts.

The Directorate of Examinations Syndicate expects to pilot on-demand examinations (ODE) for five degree programmes in the 2010/11 academic year. With ODE it will be possible for students to sit for exams any time when ready without necessarily waiting for one main exam

session per year. The marking will be done instantly and coordinated by DES. It is envisaged that ODE will reduce operational costs and increase completion rate of our enrolled students.

Table 1: Achievements realized after the establishment of the Directorate of examination syndicate

SN	Item	Unit measure	Indicators		Remarks
			Before DES	After DES	
1	Exam paper leakages annually	No. of papers	> 10	0	Tightened security
2	Exam irregularities/cheating etc. every session	Case reported	> 20	< 2	Clear invigilation instructions
3	Staff handling exams, printing and packing	No. of staff	ca. ⁹ 80	2	Labour saving by use of ICTs
4	Photocopy papers used every session	No. of reams	ca. 1,300	ca. 100	Compulsory registration and use of EHTs ¹⁰
5	Turn up in each examination session	No. of students	ca. 3,500	ca. 7,500	Increased awareness, online & proper registration
7	Time taken to print and pack exams per session	Weeks	ca. 3	ca. 1	ICT use
8	Number of scripts in a marking panel	No. of scripts	ca. 120,000	ca. 60,000	Registration for exams & controlled invigilation
9	Missing exam papers in exam centres per session	No. of papers	> 20	0	Automated printing Vs Timetables
10	Hired photocopy machines per session	No of machines	2	0	OUT owned machines
11	Time to release exam results after exam session	Months	> 6	ca. 2	Supervised marking and data entry

Open Performance Appraisal System

As remarked earlier, OUT is implementing its Rolling Strategic Plans (RSP)¹¹ as a tool for institutional transformation geared towards achieving its mission and vision in a foreseeable future. Success in implementing the RSP depends on the full commitment of staff, whose day-to-day operations are properly planned, monitored and appraised. For this to be achieved, it requires that activities that OUT staff undertake are derived from the strategic objectives and targets that are outlined in the RSP. To facilitate monitoring and evaluation of implementation of the objectives it is imperative that individual staff are assigned specific targets, the achievement of which will form the basis for their annual performance appraisal.

⁹ *ca.* = *circa* = Latin word for ‘about’ or ‘approximately’

¹⁰ EHT = Examination Hall Ticket

¹¹ OUT Rolling Strategic Plan 2010/11-2014/15

In making sure that the above is achieved, OUT Management is fully committed to see to it that OPRA becomes the institutional system for performance appraisal and management at OUT. OPRAS - Open Performance Review and Appraisal System is an open, formal and systematic procedure designed to assist both the employer and an employee in planning, managing, evaluating and effecting performance improvement in the organization with the aim of achieving organizational goals during a given period of time. OPRAS is a system that requires the supervisor and the subordinate to sit together, at the beginning of the financial year, plan and agree on performance targets and criteria based on agreed objectives the rim of available resources.

The OPRA performance cycle is an annual one, beginning at any date agreed within the institution. OUT use 1st of July as the beginning of performance year because the University almanac goes with government calendar. Therefore, if there is award, for example promotion, which has financial implications, it is included in the annual budget for that particular year to be submitted to the Government Treasury.

At the beginning of the performance year, an individual performance agreement and personal development plan are established. After six months (in December for the case of OUT), a progress review is conducted and at the year end (June for the case of OUT) an appraisal made for the period between the beginning of the new duties and the end of the performance year.



Figure 8: Process Flow of OPRAS

The diagram above indicates how OPRA fits in the overall organizational planning, monitoring and evaluation cycle. The OPRA flow process starts with annual planning at the beginning of the financial year, where the institution sets institutional objectives where-from

the supervisors and subordinates cascade divisional/departmental objectives, sectional targets, and individual targets.

Several strategies were taken on in making sure that OPRAS has to be implemented at OUT from the financial year 2008/09. This includes; training of 53 staff members who had to fill in the OPRA Forms 2008/09 as a pilot phase, Preparation of OPRA Manual to make the system more understandable, appointment of the OPRA Monitoring Sub Committee (OMSC) to administer OPRA implementation at the University and organization of OPRA trainings to the rest of employees. Until 2010/11 academic year, OUT has trained a total of 507 staff (see Table 2).

Table 2: OPRA Trainings in 2008/09 – 2010/11

YEAR	Members of OUT Management	DRCs	Heads of Academic Department	Administrative and Technical Staff	TOTAL
2008/09	23	25	-	5	53
2009/10	(23)*	-	25	110	135
2010/11	-	(25)*	-	482	482
TOTAL					670

* Have been trained twice therefore, they were not included in the total number of staff trained in 2009/10 and 2010/11.

The mid -year review was done in December, 2010 awaiting Annual Appraisal in June 2011. An experience through the OPRA Forms submitted indicates that most of the staff have understood the OPRA System although regular trainings are recommended

Enhancing Skills for Regional Leadership

In a recent annual meeting of OUT community and external stakeholders, one of the invited RAC Chair from Manyara region who was also the first to host a community basic computer skills training centre put up by OUT demonstrated very high confidence and skills of presenting his paper using power point presentation, a skill that he gained only a month back. This is a typical case of a leader who has been trained by OUT who is immediately putting his skills to effective use and thereby challenging other Regional Commissioners whenever they meet. The Regional Commissioner for Singida also attended a similar training in the location where the second community training laboratory was opened in Singida region. These are only a few examples of how OUT is catalyzing the use of computers by Government officials such that they lead by example.

Highlights of Some Outstanding Graduates of OUT

During the 16 years of its existence, OUT has been able to train successfully to the first degree level, the following historical students:

- A former houseboy of the Ambassador for Norway in Dar es Salaam graduated with a first class B.Sc. degree,
- A market trader of 68 years of age got his BBA within 5 (five) years,
- A 75 years old retired Lawyer graduated with an LLB degree,
- A prisoner who finished his LLB degree within 4 (four) years has now registered for LLM under sponsorship of OUT.

The above are only a few examples of unusual graduates from OUT whose histories will soon be documented in a separate booklet planned to be periodically produced.

PROSPECTS

It is quite clear from the brief overview of the evolution of OUT over the last 17 years that there are many prospects for the ODL mode of delivery in Tanzania and for the rest of Africa. These can be summarized as follows:

- The ODL mode of delivery has room to be extended to other education and non-education sub-sectors as long as the political will exists and the National ODL policy is approved alongside the relevant legal regime.
- The performance of OUT over the 17 years of its existence has confirmed that it has made a significant difference in the education sector.
- The Government of Tanzania and Development partners should support the efforts of OUT Management and Council to improve the infrastructure at its new headquarters at Bungo as well as in the remaining regional centres to prepare OUT well in advance to receive the anticipated wave of students from the new ward secondary schools wishing to join universities.
- The coming of marine cables to the coastline of Tanzania starting with SEACOM at the time when OUT has customized the MOODLE free open source learning management system, gives OUT a rare opportunity of sustainably mainstreaming use of ICT mediated teaching and learning in its delivery in view of the much reduced costs of bandwidth. OUT should support the current efforts of TERNET and MoEVT to establish the NREN in Tanzania in collaboration with TCU, NACTE and COSTECH.
- The prospects of OUT benefiting from the envisaged connection of African National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) to the GIANT 2 and other Asian and American networks are very high, thereby making it possible to use multi-media and video conferencing in teaching and learning.
- The active role of OUT in a number of regional and continental efforts will ensure that African ODL institutions benefit from the resulting economies of scale emanating from such collaborations or partnerships.
- The Innovation of introduction of RACs by OUT Management should be emulated by other ODL institutions in Africa and other developing countries.
- From the successful completion of the undergraduate degree by a prisoner, there is room for OUT and the Prisons department to agree on the future modus operandi of such prisoners from any other jails in Tanzania or abroad. Two more prisoners have registered themselves for first degree programmes in Law.
- It is possible for any one who meets the minimum admission criteria as set by TCU to graduate in a degree programme of his/her choice from OUT, commensurate to his/her passes on admission.
- Age does not seem to be a critical factor in success of a candidate in the ODL system of education.
- The ability of OUT to expand enrollment of the MBA programme confirms the resilience of its mode of delivery.
- Introduction of strict quality assurance and control measures will substantially assist to improve the public confidence of the ODL institutions. In this case, OUT must prepare the operational procedures for the Quality Assurance policy and also engage full time staff to implement it as well as conduct Monitoring and Evaluation.
- Timely formulation and adoption of a National ODL policy can assist to regulate all new comers to the field to ensure no pretenders get away.

- The existence of visionary, innovative and results oriented leadership in ODL institutions as guided by strategic plans can guarantee its eventual success.
- Policies and Operational Procedures are critical operational parameters of any successful ODL institutions in view of the distant geographical locations of its staff and students.
- To date, OUT is the only Tanzanian university that allows submission of its PhD theses in Kiswahili language thus depicting its relative openness and realism of its education.
- From the linkage of the Learning Management System (LMS) to mobile phones as tested at OUT; collection of mobile phones database of all students at the Regional or Coordination centres is a very crucial step in further enhancement of communication between OUT and the students.

CHALLENGES

- The Government of Tanzania should accept to set aside “ring-fenced” funds for facilitating immediate payment of funds to part time lecturers as done by all other Government owned universities in order to minimize complaints from such staff and to minimize the resulting delays in release of student’s results.
- If OUT chooses to completely relax its admission criteria as done by OU,UK and OU,NL; its admission criteria would make it fail to be recognized by TCU as well as the IUCEA as currently guided by the relevant national Act and its regulations. This means that OUT will have to remain partially open with respect to admission for some time to come if it is to retain recognition of its qualifications in East Africa.
- ODL institutions must update their curricula to have the minimum required courses with all service courses offered by the expert faculties only. The fact that, OUT has so many approved courses (approx. 800) only confirms the “*silo*” nature of the operations of the Faculties and Institutes at OUT. The sooner the duplicated courses bearing different codes and names are identified, the better. As a rule, Faculties should be required to adopt courses from other faculties instead of writing new ones when introducing new programmes or courses. In practice, this requires the vigilance of the Senate and its committees as well as the DVC Academic in the future.
- OUT has to rename and/or recompose the contents of such old courses as B.Sc. or BA General that are no longer required nowadays as employers tend to appreciate better graduates with some specializations/skills than those with general knowledge only .
- Residential universities that seek to add the ODL delivery mode to the residential system will have to respect the provisions of the National ODL policy prior to being formally recognized as institutions delivering education using the ODL mode of delivery or in dual modes instead of living them to declare it unilaterally as done now.
- ODL institutions like OUT, ought to be assisted by their respective Governments to ensure they reap maximum benefits from the anticipated fall in the bandwidth prices in Tanzania by June 2009. It is feared that, if this is not judiciously resolved soonest, Vsat based Internet Service Providers (ISPs) will monopolise the market and hike the prices.
- The Regional Advisory Committees (RACs) in the remaining 14 (fourteen) regions in Tanzania have to work closely with the OUT Management to ensure funds are obtained to either build new centres or to rehabilitate buildings in their regions and to raise funds for purposes of facilitation of installation of student PC laboratories to ensure all students get similar levels of service in the entire country as well as in the Coordination centres in neighbouring countries in East Africa.

- Effective introduction of new Learning Management Systems (LMS) has to be supported with incentives for academic staff that must be explicitly pronounced by the HRM policy after staff training. Student training in use of the new LMS ought to use both on-line and face-to-face mode for some time.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has highlighted numerous milestones that the OUT has achieved over the last one and a half decades. As part of the major milestones, OUT has established twentyfour Regional Centres that are supplemented by the three Coordinating Centres of Zanzibar, Pemba and Egerton University in Kenya. Until January, 2011 OUT owned permanent buildings in Mbeya, Iringa, Ruvuma, Singida, Dodoma, Kagera, Rukwa, Katavi and Kilimanjaro while in Tanga region, OUT is sharing the physical facility under a special arrangement for 20 years with the national trade union umbrella association abbreviated as TUCTA. The establishment of Regional Advisory Committees (RAC's) has marked a major enhancement of the role of the communities in development of OUT led by members of the Regional leaderships in the operations of OUT.

In terms of academic programmes, OUT offers 20 undergraduate degrees, 3 certificates, 4 diplomas, 2 Postgraduate diplomas, 20 Masters and 5 PhDs. From the current curricula, OUT is offering up to about 800 courses. In order to strengthen the quality assurance academic, programmes, security and confidentiality of examination matters at The Open University of Tanzania, the Directorate of Examinations Syndicate was established to oversee all activities regarding administration of examinations and processing of students results and awards. The University expects to pilot on-demand examinations (ODE) for five degree programmes in the 2010/11 academic year. With ODE it will be possible for students to sit for exams any time when ready without necessarily waiting for one main exam session per year. The marking will be done instantly and coordinated by DES. It is envisaged that ODE will reduce operational costs and increase completion rate of our enrolled students.

The University is implementing its Rolling Strategic Plans (RSP) as a tool for institutional transformation geared towards achieving its mission and vision in a foreseeable future. Success in implementing the RSP depends on the full commitment of staff, whose day-to-day operations are properly planned, monitored and appraised. For this to be achieved, it requires that activities that OUT staff undertake are derived from the strategic objectives and targets that are outlined in the RSP. To facilitate monitoring and evaluation of implementation of the objectives it is imperative that individual staff are assigned specific targets, the achievement of which will form the basis for their annual performance appraisal. In order to ensure the culture of strategic planning is consistently cultivated, nurtured and sustained, OUT has over the last six years conducted 12 annual review workshops.

In an effort to ensure that strategic planning culture is embraced in the hearts and minds of staff, the University has since the year 2009 adopted OPRAS. Open Performance Review and Appraisal System (OPRAS) is an open, formal and systematic procedure designed to assist both the employer and an employee in planning, managing, evaluating and effecting performance improvement in the organization with the aim of achieving organizational goals during a given period of time. OPRAS is a system that requires the supervisor and the subordinate to sit together, at the beginning of the financial year, plan and agree on performance targets and criteria based on agreed objectives the rim of available resources.

The paper has also highlighted the challenges and charted out available opportunities that OUT can potentially employ in order to mitigate those challenges. However, OUT on its own can not sustainably overcome those challenges without some form of support from other

stakeholders in the ODL sector. In this regard, government intervention in bolstering the operations of OUT programmes is highly called for.

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