

# SOFIE Newsletter

Issue 1

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The SOFIE research project aims to increase access to education and learning for young people living in high HIV prevalence areas in Malawi and Lesotho, by developing a new, more flexible model of education that uses open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) to complement and enrich conventional schooling

## Inside this issue:

Foreword	1
ODFL definition	2
Research Team	2
Sofie News	3
Review Papers	4
Publications, meetings, activities	6
Contact	6

## A recently launched, 3-year research project in Lesotho and Malawi funded by the DFID-ESRC

### Foreword

The research team welcomes readers to the first project newsletter, which provides information on recent and forthcoming project activities in different countries and announces research outputs. It will be published at intervals and updated regularly on the project website ([www.ioe.ac.uk/sofie](http://www.ioe.ac.uk/sofie)).

In many countries in sub-Saharan Africa AIDS is recognised to be a major threat to national development. Education, which is at the heart of development, has been especially hard hit with increasing numbers of orphans and other vulnerable children unable to attend school regularly. At the same time schools are strongly challenged to meet the needs of the children who walk in the door are unlikely to reach out to those outside the classroom. In these countries there is an urgent need for education to be delivered more flexibly:

As deaths from HIV and AIDS cause the number of orphaned children to increase drastically, action must be taken to protect their right to schooling and education. It will, therefore be necessary to create alternative pathways to learning that meet *needs and requirements* of these children<sup>1</sup>.



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The SOFIE project aims to meet this need by using ODFL to develop a more effective, flexible model of schooling for high HIV prevalence areas that can complement conventional schooling.

The research team is led from the Department of Education and International Development at the Institute of Education, University of London and our special thanks go to the research partners who have joined us for this project. The field work will be carried in Malawi and Lesotho. (*More on SOFIE research team on page 2*).

If you would like to receive copies of this newsletter or know somebody who does please email [m.harri@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:m.harri@ioe.ac.uk)

**Pat Pridmore - Principal Investigator**

<sup>1</sup>Government of Malawi (undated) *Combating HIV and AIDS in the Education Sector in Malawi: Strategic Plan 2005-2008*. Lilongwe: Ministry of Education.

## Open, Distance and Flexible Learning in the Context of HIV

Southern Africa remains at the epicentre of the HIV epidemic and the disease is now seriously impacting on family structures in the region. Under such conditions it is important schools continue to consider how they might best respond to the challenges of increased inclusivity, education quality and improved completion rates. To do this schools in Southern Africa may well need to become more open, flexible and responsive to the changing social circumstances of the children they serve. But what do we mean by open, distance and flexible learning?

Open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) is generally thought of as an amalgam of concepts used to capture recent trends in education, especially those involving the convergence of technology based learning with more conventional forms of face-to-face education. Openness here refers to the removal or reduction of barriers that can prevent learning. These barriers might involve institutional or curricular inflexibility and the limited availability of education at

restricted locations and/or times. Distance education has been defined by Perraton<sup>1</sup> as an 'educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner'. This does not necessarily mean that all the teaching and learning has to be conducted by teachers who are separate from their students, as regular face to face meetings often form an essential part of a distance learning programme. Flexibility refers to the degree of autonomy, independence and control a learner has over their learning, as a result of the relative openness and the ability of the programme design to overcome distance and separation (geographic, psychological, pedagogical, economic and social) and provide appropriate structure and support to maintain and enhance learning.

**Chris Yates, Co-investigator**

<sup>1</sup>Perraton H (1982) *Alternative routes to Formal education: distance teaching for school equivalency*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

## Research Team

### Core team members:



Back left corner: Chris Yates, Thabiso Nyabanyaba and Tessa Welch  
Front left corner: Ephraim Mhlanga, Catherine Moleni and Pat Pridmore

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Education Research and Training (CERT),  
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## Research Team

### Support team members

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Ms Mirella Harri, Research Officer, Institute of Education, University of London

### SOFIE advisory group

Dr. Carew Treffgarne, DFID

Ms Caroline Pontefract, UNESCO

Prof. Julia Preece, National University of Lesotho

Dr Augustine Fadeson Kamlongera, Ministry of Education and Culture, Malawi

## SOFIE News

### UKFIET Conference

Three team members attended the UK Forum for International Education and Training (UKFIET) held in Oxford, UK, in September and gave a presentation on the project design and the preliminary findings from the background papers.

### First Team Workshop



The first team workshop was held in Johannesburg 3 to 6 September 2007. The workshop was very productive and generated a lot of new ideas on how to take the project forward and especially on the nature of the intervention.

During the two first days of the workshop, the team reviewed the project design and updated the work programme. The five background review papers were presented by their authors and peer reviewed by other team members. The team also received presentations from colleagues involved with projects that could help to inform the development of

the SOFIE project. On the third day, the team launched the SOFIE project at the annual seminar of the National Association of Distance Education and Open Learning of South Africa (NADEOSA). The fourth and final day of the workshop was used for detailed action planning for the next two phases of the project i.e. until June 2008.

The team members also visited a NGO project in Soweto called NOAH that provides after school support for vulnerable children.



## Introduction to the Review Papers

### Dr. Pat Pridmore, Principal Investigator

*Five review papers have been prepared within the initial work programme of SOFIE. The purpose of the review papers is to provide state of the art reviews on what is already known about the way in which HIV and AIDS can impact on educational access for affected children and young people in sub-Saharan Africa and on what efforts are currently being made to increase access especially in Malawi and Lesotho. Current ODFL initiatives are identified and ODFL is considered as a policy option in the Region.*

#### **Access to schooling in high HIV prevalence areas of sub-Saharan Africa: A cross-national review of recent research evidence.** Dr. Pat Pridmore

This paper seeks to develop a holistic picture of the way in which young people's access to schooling and to learning is impacted in high HIV prevalence areas by reviewing the recent research evidence from sub-Saharan Africa. The findings reveal the complex nature of the impact and show that broad adaptive capacities are emerging that may enable households to support a larger number of orphans. However, a key finding from this review is that many impoverished households are reaching the limits of their capacity to cope resulting in many affected children, especially maternal orphans, missing out on education now. Furthermore, conventional schools are

increasingly challenged to meet the educational and emotional needs of the children who walk through their door and are unlikely to reach out to the young people who cannot attend regularly. The findings imply that educational reform is needed to move away from the 'one size fits all' view of schooling and encourage education planners and practitioners to think creatively, 'out of the box', about alternative, more flexible forms of educational delivery. It is argued that ODFL systems and structures could play a useful role in facilitating educational reform by sharing the burden faced by schools and helping to integrate responses to learners' needs more effectively but case studies and interventions are needed in specific social and cultural contexts to evaluate these new models of schooling.

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#### **Keeping children in school: A review of open education policies in Lesotho and Malawi** Chris Yates

This paper provides a brief review of government policies in Lesotho and Malawi with respect to improving access to and equity in education for out of school youth. The paper is divided into five sections. Section 1 introduces the paper and provides its focus, importance and a definition of key terms. Section 2 looks at the size and nature of those who are presently outside school either because they have been pushed out or dropped out, or because they have failed to

obtain access. Section 3 reviews some recent theories of inclusion and exclusion with regard to schooling provision. Section 4 identifies policy developments that have been taken by the two governments with regard to promoting more open and inclusive education and training opportunities for youth and young adults. Section 5 concludes with a brief consideration of the implications of the discussion for the research questions we have posed for our study.

***Review of interventions used in different contexts to enhance access to education and attainment. Ephraim Mhlanga***

This paper is a critical review of interventions that are used in different developing contexts to enhance educational access and attainment. A mixture of educational interventions implemented in different countries were identified. The review showed that these interventions were implemented differently and with varying levels of success in different contexts. Whilst there are many interventions that aim at reducing the cost of education, very few pay particular attention to

addressing the quality of educational provision. With the exception of few examples in South Africa and in Namibia, there is hardly any use of ICTs in enhancing access and improving the quality of education, an important aspect worth pursuing through the current project. Drawing from Coleman's theory of social capital as an analytical tool, the paper concludes that effective innovations are those that are premised on sound school-community linkages and integration. Such integration facilitates ownership and support of school innovations by the community.

***The use of Open, Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL) initiatives to open up access to education in the context of high HIV/AIDS prevalence rates: the case of Lesotho. Dr. Thabiso Nyabanyaba***

This paper sets out to describe the extent of the national HIV/AIDS epidemic in Lesotho, identifying and critically analysing key Open, Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL) initiatives currently being implemented to increase access to education for young people. Despite the high priority attached to education and a national response to HIV/AIDS by the Lesotho Government, a key finding of the analysis is the extent of the challenges pre-

sented by the HIV pandemic in Lesotho and the internal inefficiencies within the education system, leading to high drop out rates, high repetitions rates and low completion rates. Several initiatives in the non-formal education sector and those drawing on open and distance education are described for their possibilities to open up access to education and address the growing HIV/AIDS pandemic. In conclusion, the paper argues for the possibilities of ODFL to improve efficiency rates in Lesotho and open up access to out-of-school youths, thus taking up the opportunity for the window of hope!

***A review of the extent of the national HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Malawi and key ODFL initiatives currently being implemented to increase access to education for young people. Natalia Streuli and Catherine Moleni***

The paper reviews the way in which the education sector –both government and civil society- in Malawi is responding to support student's access to education and achievement in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It also identifies and analyses key ODFL initiatives, structures and networks currently being implemented in the country.

The paper concludes that education sector in Malawi is dealing with a number of problems that go beyond HIV/AIDS such as low quality education, high repetition, absenteeism and dropout rates. Available research evidence suggests that ODFL should be prioritised together with conventional schooling because it can alleviate the huge demands that the system is facing. The evidence also recommends the design of programmes that are inclusive to all children, particularly those from the lowest quintiles, and not only to orphans. Some good practices are discussed.

# Forthcoming SOFIE publications, meetings and activities

## The SOFIE review papers

The research team is currently working on five background review papers, which will be published in January 2008 on the project's website. These papers will inform the design of case studies in Malawi and Lesotho to increase understanding of the household and school factors that influence educational access and attainment and can be addressed through a subsequent ODFL intervention.

The following papers will be published in January 2008 on the SOFIE website [www.ioe.ac.uk/sofie](http://www.ioe.ac.uk/sofie)

*Access to conventional schooling for children and young people affected by HIV and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa: A cross-national review of the research evidence.* (Pat Pridmore)

*Keeping children in school: A review of open education policies in Lesotho and Malawi* (Chris Yates)

*A review of ODFL interventions used in different contexts to enhance access to education and attainment* (Ephraim Mhlanga)

*The use of ODFL initiatives to open up access to education in the context of high HIV/AIDS prevalence rates: the case of Lesotho* (Thabiso Nyabanyaba)

*Education, HIV and AIDS in Malawi: The role of ODFL* (Natalia Streuli and Catherine Moleni)

## Team meeting

The next team meeting will be held in Malawi in June 2008.

## Contact details

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