NRNA Open University Initiative Task Force
Terms of Reference (ToR)

Introduction

Open University Initiative is a NRNA project developed over the last seven years and brought to NRNA community in the last five years. This project was declared as "NRNA Flagship Project" by NRNA Houston Conference 2010. A White Paper on the Open University Initiative was prepared along the way as a compilation of ideas generated through workshops and studies made during this period. The White Paper was submitted by the NRNA Open University Project Champion to the NRNA ICC project evaluation committee formed in 2013. The committee recommended the work of the initiative to be worthy of continuation by the NRNA. Subsequently the Chair of the Open University Initiative Task Force (OUNITF) was appointed. The Chair of the OUNITF, therefore, presents these Terms of Reference to the NRNA ICC President for the approval of the organization. Conceived to be executed as a collaborative initiative of multiple institutions, NRNA and NRNs are positioned to be major players in the making of the Open University of Nepal. This document outlines major elements of the project that concern with the NRNA and NRN community.

Vision, Mission, Goals and Objectives:

Vision

"Igniting the spirit of learning and harnessing the excellence in every human being for building an intellectual, prosperous, sustainable, and always-learning society"

Mission

Establishing a comprehensive research university of open learning in Nepal with extensive involvement of Nepalese diaspora community

Goals

1. to take university to people's homes and communities over a robust technological foundation,
2. to remove all barriers to learning opportunities including those of income, circumstances, geography, and readiness by mode of open learning,
3. to meet informational, educational, technical and vocational needs of people by connecting learners with sources of knowledge and skills that may be found anywhere inside or outside the country,
4. to convert the raw knowledge and skills found in the nature, society and culture into formal knowledge by means of distributed knowledge production, co-development and collaboration,
5. to continue educating and training youth that take foreign employment by facilitating lifelong education and learning,
6. to convert brain drain into brain gain by mobilizing diaspora people in education, research and transfer of knowledge and skills,
7. to offer a learning system that scales to rising enrolments and efficiently adapts to population movement,

8. to bring people residing outside big cities into the mainstream of knowledge economy through education, transfer of skills, and entrepreneurial knowledge,
9. to become the model open university of the 21st century,
10. to democratize education and massify learning by making it possible to educate all people.

Objectives
1. Establish Nepal National University: a public open university by 2015
2. Mobilize in-country and diaspora contributors for distributed educational content development and delivery by 2015
3. Secure broadband communication infrastructure in 12 districts in Muktinath-Lumbini corridor for first pilot operation of the university by 2015, and throughout Nepal by 2018
4. Offer at least 3 degrees of rural interest, 2 degrees of urban interest, and 1 degrees of workers-abroad interest by 2016
5. Secure technical collaboration and assistance from the best distance learning institutions to establish best practices and best technological solutions by 2016
6. Provide technological foundation, content foundation and bridging programs to school systems for improving primary and secondary education by 2020
7. Become the university with the largest range of program offerings in Nepal by 2025

Stakeholders, Roles and Responsibilities:

Through agreements of September 20, 2010 and October 07, 2010, NRNA has entered into partnership with the Government of Nepal – Ministry of Education, Athabasca University Canada, and Canada Foundation for Nepal with regards to establishing the national Open University in Nepal. All partners sincerely contributed to the mission and brought the mission to prominence. However, the dissolution of the first Constituent Assembly before passing necessary law for the establishment of the Open University and formation of the Open University Infrastructure Development Board (OUNIDB) without dissolving the Open University Initiative Steering Committee formed in October 2010 and subsequent transfer of government fund to the OUNIDB introduced less than desirable situation. That happened especially because the OUNIDB executives did not uphold the spirits of the past agreements and that of the works of the diaspora, thereby creating some stress and unforeseen delays in the mission. Nevertheless, the diaspora initiative persisted and the most fortunate scenario that developed in recent time has been that top three political parties representing in the legislative parliament of Nepal have made written commitment to establishing the Open University through their election manifesto. This is a top priority projects of Ministry of Education.

The situation today has been such that NRNA ought to re-negotiate with the government to claim the stake in the leadership of the mission for a fixed number of years and establish the university under its leadership as it is found to be extremely difficult for the NRNs to operate under bureaucratic and political control that are inherently slow, not-democratic, and not-transparent. In this light, the following roles are proposed to be re-negotiated by the NRNA and be entered into the agreement with the government.

NRNA:
1. Negotiates with the Government of Nepal for the renewed commitment to the agreement made in October 2010,
2. Assumes the leadership of the mission for minimum of five to ten years, puts its financial, academic and technical expertise into establishing a world class Open University in Nepal;
3. Develops plans and solicits national and international funding in collaboration with other national and international partners;

4. Establishes a fully functioning and world class Open University in Nepal by 2020;
5. Works with other national and international academic, philanthropic, and development partners to implement OUN plans;
6. Hands over the institution to the people of Nepal through a governing body duly formed as per the law made by the Legislative Parliament of Nepal at the end of its term;

(**Note:** In the subsequent weeks after the presentation of this document to the President of NRNA, one round of negotiation has already been done with the Ministry of Education. We have received unequivocal words from the Ministry that (1) the spirit of the past agreements will be honoured, (2) NRNA contributions will be duly acknowledged, and (3) the bill to the parliament will be tabled with acknowledgment and space for NRNs.)

Government of Nepal:
1. Provides necessary legal outlet to establish OUN as an autonomous public university and to set up a dedicated endowment fund and account;
2. Exempts custom duties on equipment and supplies imported for the use of OUN by NRNA, its sister organizations, and partner institutions be they newly purchased or be free of cost transfer of already operating technological equipment, mobile computing devices, data servers and machinery previously used by other international institutions;
3. Permits equal opportunity for Nepalese Diaspora to contribute to academic, administrative and management functions of OUN as resident Nepalese;
4. Allows academics and professional experts to render services to OUN physically or virtually from Nepal and abroad and be financially compensated as per contracts made between OUN and the contributors;
5. Recognizes NRNA as the lead partner organization for establishing OUN and supports NRNA's efforts to mobilize agreed international funding, in-kind support and expertise for the development and operation of OUN.

Athabasca University, CFFN, and Other Potential Partners:
1. Collaborate in developing plans, seeking funding for the establishment of the Open University;
2. Partner in the implementation of the agreed upon components of the OUN plan;
3. Adapt courses and processes and translate open knowledge and courseware applicable to the OUN;
4. Develop open content, tutor and collaborate in research, program development and program delivery;
5. Collaborate in training of OUN faculty and staff in open education;
6. Take other roles as may be mutually agreed.

Task-Force Team is attached.

Team expansion and development approach:
The above tallied is the team to provide immediate traction in the project. Upon ratification of this TOR by the ICC, the regional coordinators will be asked to communicate with Deputy Regional Coordinators, ICC Members and NCCs to provide one coordinator per country. The country coordinators of the region will then select among themselves the regional coordinators to represent the ICC Task-Force to honour the kind of system NRNA has established for its everyday functioning.

The country coordinator thus selected will take lead role to form NRNA country chapters named OUNI Country Chapter. Subsequently, the member of the Country Chapter will select/elect their own Country Chapter Coordinator. The NRNA ICC Member, NRNA country chapter President, and Regional Coordinator and Deputy Regional Coordinator applicable to that chapter will be advisors to each chapter. From each region two people will be selected to represent the region to the main task force. Once the team is formed in that manner, the Task Force will be reformed at that moment.

Resources financial plan

Office and Human Resource:

1. OUNTF Office Unit at the NRNA ICC Secretariat or some appropriate place in Nepal, with basic computing and printing facilities.
2. Internet connection in the office and WiMax based Internet facility to take around the pilot area and to OUNI programs to facilitate diaspora member participation in programs.
3. Three full-time staff (a, b, c) and one part time staff (d) reporting to the Task Force Chair with the following responsibilities on a semi-volunteer basis:
   a. Technology and Communication: Develops website, implements mass communication and social media solutions, integrates technology solutions for pilot programs, acquires and assembles Open Source content libraries, installs the technology solutions and delivers training in pilot area.
   b. Administration, Program Development and Outreach: Writes articles, utilizes social media for outreach, sends and receives emails and processes them, organizes workshops, recruits volunteers, interfaces with media, takes minutes, manages volunteer works, manages program development.
   c. Office Assistant: keeps accounts, transcribes conversations presentations, keeps office records, receives and delivers documents, prepares record of programs and proceedings, edits and archives pictures, videos and audio recordings, handles immediate needs of visitors, keeps office open and organized.
   d. Grant Writer: Collect data, interface with experts, write grant applications, submit grant applications and follow-up.

Financial Resources

Minimum Resources:

1. The staff be supported with a small token salary of Rs10,000 per month per person.
2. Internet and phone communication costs incurred on the mission.
3. Office expenses and basic travel expenses of volunteers and staff.
4. Cost of organizing public programs and those with policy makers.
5. Cost of printing and distribution of OUN related publications made by the task force.
6. Cost incurred in pilot open education program.
7. Cost incurred in the initial travel for fund and awareness raising among NRNs.

We estimate that about $20,000 will be needed to demonstrate visible NRNA impact.

Actions Requiring Significant Resources:

1. About $100,000 is required to professionally develop a Semi-Comprehensive Operational Plan of the Open University that will be good enough to solicit funding from international agencies and to position NRNA as the frontier institution to develop the university.
2. Pursue and acquire fund for developing comprehensive operational plan and, through it, develop the fully developed comprehensive operational plan.
3. Write grant applications for achieving component goals and associated activities as required to implement the plan,
4. Acquire land for the OUN, mostly public land; but nearly always there appears a need to also purchase some private land adjoining or enclosed in the public land for enhancing the land use, gaining adequate size for future, and cleanly avoiding any future boundary disputes and access issues ($100,000 - $300,000).
5. Develop pilot programs along with human resource, communication infrastructure and computing infrastructure for their implementation ($50,000).

(Note: Much of this fund will have to be raised among NRNA community, which will be practicable once we gain traction in implementing the 2010 agreement made with the Government of Nepal. As soon as the government eases on its exclusive grip on it and

accepts NRNA as an official and lead developer force, it will bring back the excitement there was in Nepal and among NRN communities during 2010-2012.)

Work breakdown and schedule

1) Immediate term plan (6 months):
    1. NRNA delegation negotiates with the government and reclaims the ownership of the initiative on behalf of NRNs such that NRN team will lead the initiative during its establishment phase,
    2. Finalize OU White Paper in participation with major stakeholders and advance it along with the Open University Bill to the parliament as a key instrument to educate about the advantages of diaspora mobilization,
    3. Create a 3 member ICC team to oversee OU matters and develop Terms of Reference for forming and running NRN OUNI Country Chapters,
    4. Lobby with leaders of major political parties to reclaim NRNA stake,
    5. Prepare a document outlining changes required in the proposed bill to ensure full and honourable participation of NRNs in the future of Open University, especially including:
        a. Using diaspora skills, knowledge, and innovation to be one of its stated goals,
        b. Participation of NRNs as equals to resident Nepalese in the academic and administrative positions,
        c. Freedom to co-develop and co-own programs, materials, resources, research-output and innovations with similar foreign institutions,
        d. Upholding the principle of openness in knowledge and information,
        e. Open ownership of inventions and innovations with fair and democratic system to reward innovators,
        f. Government obligation to ensure affordable access to broadband Internet by all Nepalese learners irrespective of their location and economic standing.
        g. System of total openness in continuing, technical and vocational programs and a balance of inclusion and competitive entry in professional and advanced academic programs.
    6. NRNA take initiative to create "Parliamentary friends of Open University" to further its claim and expedite the passage of the bill.
    7. Establish a NRNA Open Education Project Office as an NRNA arm operating full-time in NRNA office premises or at some suitable location.
    8. Launch pilot programs on "use of open content in transformation of schools and college education" and "collaborative knowledge creation", which will immediately popularize open education as well and NRNA brand among Nepalese people.

2) Near term plan (1 year):
    1. Establish OUNI chapters in at least in 6 countries.
    2. Clinch NRNA and diaspora stake in OU governance by putting necessary instruments in Open University Bill.
    3. Intensify lobbying for accelerating the passage of OU bill.
    4. Select a location for OU Central Campus and establish citizen's group involving resident and diaspora members.
    5. NRNA apply funding application to launch "Diaspora Collaboration in Open Curriculum and Open Content Production" with donor agencies active in Nepal.

6. NRNA call for diaspora faculties and professionals willing to collaborate with local schools and colleges in content production, tutoring, research and mentoring.
7. NRNA launch a baseline data collection and resource mapping projects integrated with school, college, and local development in one municipality and one village development council.
8. NRNA provide training on screencasting, podcasting, and multimedia content development to 60 students and teachers of six schools and colleges in the pilot area.

3) Short term plan (2 years):
1. Establish OUNI chapters in at least in 20 countries.
2. NRNA launch a diaspora volunteerism in enhancement of public school education, where NRNA provides the connection between the schools and volunteers and experience sharing platform; the expenses are covered by volunteer themselves.
3. Establish parliament sanctioned entity, Open University, with diaspora stake in it.
4. Develop "Diaspora Affairs Unit" within Open University dedicated to engaging NRNs in education, research, innovation and collaboration building.
5. Develop one bridge-course on each on Science, Mathematics, and English to cater to students who wish to independently study to qualify for Open University programs at Technical and Vocational Diploma or Bachelor's level.
6. Identify the plans and curriculum for at least five technical and vocational programs that can modernize existing trades and and bring in terrain-specific engineering and technology.
7. Collaborate with other stakeholders to develop one broadband wireless corridor with at least 50 schools and colleges to demonstrate the efficiency and effectiveness of the open education programs.
8. Develop one hundred rural-youth podcasters, screencasters, and multimedia content developers dedicated to open education.

4) Near-long-term plan (5 years):
1. Establish OUNI country chapter in 70% countries with NRNA NCCs.
2. Engage 500 diaspora faculties, scientists and professionals in open university and open education associated research, innovation and academic collaborations.
3. Engage two dozen diaspora faculties in "massively open online courses".
4. Make Nepal a country where every student has affordable access to broadband wireless connectivity in collaboration with other national and international stakeholders.
5. Make Nepal a country mobile learning, where every student has smart mobile learning device with access to Internet, open content, and open education programs.

Risks and risk mitigation

Risks:
1. If adequate space for NRNA and NRNs could not be secured in the Open University Initiative through committed negotiation with the government, the synergy, momentum, and enthusiasm required to accomplish the mission may not be created among NRNs.

2. Risk of exclusion, lack of funds, lack of government support, delays in passage of bill in the parliament, loss of quality, and loss of team unity would be risks to the program success.

Mitigation Strategies:

1. Team expansion and country chapter formation will commence only after properly negotiating with the government, and securing written commitment to honour the October 2010 resolution.
2. The task-force will widely disseminate information to NRNs to raise awareness.
3. Regular bimonthly updates will be circulated among NRNs and wider public as were done until the government takeover of May 2012.
4. Interactions will be held in sufficient numbers and the institutional design discussions will be held in Internet based public forums.
5. Inclusion strategies and programs will be developed through public and participatory forums, and will be implemented as per decisions thus made.
6. Mechanisms will be created to make donations to qualify for charitable status (for tax-exemption on income).
7. Avenues to match the donations from other corporate or philanthropic sources will be sought to encourage contributions.
8. Maximum initial mobilization of diaspora from the region that will have the honour to host the headquarters of the OU will be done in fundraising among diaspora community.
9. Colleges and buildings will be allowed to be named by donors if they contribute to the majority of expense required to build or establish them.
10. Maximum transparency and openness will be practiced to keep our collective enthusiasm intact.
11. TF team events will be organized along with NRNA programs to maintain team unity.