

## **The Caribbean Universities Project for Integrated Distance Education (CUPIDE)**

**Project Title:** Caribbean Universities Project for Integrated Distance Education

**Implementing Agency:** The University of the West Indies

**Funding Agency:** Japanese Funds-In-Trust for Capacity Building

**Executing Agency:** UNESCO

**Project Start Date:** January 20, 2003

**Completion Date:** December 31, 2006

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### **Background:**

In January 2003, The University of the West Indies (UWI) signed an agreement with UNESCO to implement the “Caribbean Universities Project for Integrated Distance Education (CUPIDE)”. The project is funded by the Japanese Funds-in-Trust for Capacity-building of Human Resources and is a collaborative initiative involving UWI as the implementing agency and the University of Guyana, University Quisqueya (Haiti), Anton de Kom University of Suriname, University of Technology, Jamaica, as co-beneficiaries.

A Project Advisory Committee chaired by CARICOM<sup>1</sup>, comprising one nominated representative from each university, UNESCO as an ex officio member, and the UWI project manager as secretary to the committee, monitors the project and enables the smooth integration within each university of programmes developed under the project.

The development objective of the project is to develop the human resources within the region through enabling each of the five participating universities to develop and deliver quality distance education programmes using information and communication technology (ICT). In this way, the competitiveness of the region in general and the institutions in particular are to be enhanced, participation in the knowledge society increased – not only as users, but also as generators of knowledge – and cost savings realised in the use of the technology for distribution of the course materials and the teaching and administration of programmes. Collaboration among the participating institutions is also to be enhanced.

The CUPIDE project as it was conceived and designed in 2001 did not have the benefit of the commitment of Regional Governments to a connectivity agenda and a holistic Regional approach to the delivery of distance education. This change, coupled with the adoption of Internet and web based technologies as the platform for the delivery of distance education, provided the rationale

for the CUPIDE project to be revisited in 2004 with regard to the choices of technologies in delivering on its purpose and to seek the benefits through synergies within the overall umbrella of the CARICOM agenda and in particular the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network (CKLN) and E-Links Americas<sup>2</sup>.

**Immediate objectives:**

The immediate objectives for the remainder of the project are:

- To collaboratively develop the pilot course on distance education;
- To (further) develop the institutional strategic plans for distance education incorporating the use of ICT;
- To develop and implement a mechanism for electronic distribution of materials;
- To develop a Web portal;
- To implement the VSAT<sup>3</sup> network based on E-Link Americas;
- Based on the strategic plan of each institution, to identify specific programmes and staffing requirements and training for each of the universities;
- To identify appropriate personnel (academic, administrative, technical) in each institution to be trained in ICT for teaching, administration, and materials delivery, thereby building the human resource capacity in the provider institutions;
- To provide where necessary technical assistance in the development of the technical, administrative, and educational systems based on the use of ICT;
- To train the persons who have to use the technology including students;
- To identify the requisite recurrent budgetary support;
- To establish with the support of CARICOM and other such bodies strategic linkages with providers and manufacturers;
- Working with CARADOL<sup>4</sup> to continue to strengthen the links among the universities and other institutions;
- To develop projections of prospects for expansion to other institutions at different levels of the educational system;
- To evaluate the project.

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<sup>1</sup> The Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) was established by the Treaty of Chaguaramas and came into effect on August 1, 1973. The CARICOM members are: Antigua and Barbuda; The Bahamas; Barbados; Belize; Dominica; Grenada; Guyana; Haiti; Jamaica; Montserrat; St. Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Suriname; and, Trinidad and Tobago.

<sup>2</sup> E-Link Americas is an initiative that was launched by the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas. The operationalization of E-Link Americas in the Caribbean is linked with the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network (CKLN), a project which supports the same objectives as CUPIDE, but extends to some thirty-three (33) Caribbean tertiary institutions.

<sup>3</sup> Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) - an earthbound station used in satellite communications of data, voice and video signals, excluding broadcast television.

<sup>4</sup> The Caribbean Association for Distance and Open Learning (CARADOL) is a regional association that aims to: promote and advance the use of Open and Distance Learning as a means of contributing to the developmental goals of the Caribbean; foster an understanding of the theory and practice of Open and Distance Learning; and facilitate research and disseminate information within the Caribbean on Open and Distance Learning.