

# ICT for education



**Stephen Nolan**  
Executive Director, GeSCI

*GeSCI - The Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative (<http://www.gesci.org>) was established in 2004 by the United Nations ICT Task Force in an attempt to address an old problem in a new way—that is, raising global standards of education for communities in the developing world. GeSCI works at local, national and international level to support developing countries, as they create and deliver strategies to harness ICTs for education and community growth, transforming the prospect of learners and citizens and the fortunes of developing nations.*



**The concept of GeSCI was established in 2004 to raise global standards of education for communities in the developing world. How far do you think you have been able to achieve this?**

We have achieved a lot since 2004, particularly in making the concept of GeSCI a reality. Our country programmes, particularly in Namibia and in India have become established, our work in building knowledge around ICTs in education is well-underway, and we have established several key partnerships in the process. In terms of raising educational standards, this is, of course, an ambitious long-term goal, but we know we are on the right track.

**What are some of the major achievements of GeSCI in terms of policy and implementing strategies to harness ICTs for education and community growth?**

There have been several so far, but I'll just mention three. One is the central strategy called 'complete system', that guides all of our work, and provides a model approach to development. By this, we mean programmes that are comprehensive, demand-driven, capable and efficient, and coordinated. Another is our work in Namibia, where we are working closely with the Namibian government, and other stakeholders, to implement a national ICT in education plan. A third is our work on developing practical knowledge tools for policy makers and practitioners, such as studying the costs of benefits of various technology options for education.

**Do you believe the targets of the Millennium Development Goals are achievable by 2015? What are the concrete steps GeSCI has adopted to make the UN MDGs a reality?**

The MDGs are achievable, yes, but it won't be easy, and doing so will require sustained and focused efforts and significant commitments of resources. It is interesting to share with you that the UN ICT Task Force, the Governments of Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland, and Canada founded GeSCI in direct response to the MDGs. So the MDGs are ever-present in all of GeSCI's work. More specifically, GeSCI's work relates to MDGs 1,2 and 3, as well as MDG 8.

**How do you undertake partnerships in developing countries and what is the active role GeSCI plays in those partnerships?**

GeSCI looks to bring all the stakeholders to the table in a collaborative way, as a catalyst for addressing core challenges to

education, and we look to complement and coordinate existing efforts already underway. It's important to say that we don't approach partnerships with a fixed agenda. Instead, we look to understand the context and then clearly articulate where we can add value. The value that we can add is typically bringing all the stakeholders to the table, build and implement a plan with those stakeholders, and mobilise resources to do so.

**Developing nations have lack of resources, lack of infrastructure, poverty and many other plaguing problems. What are the main hindrances before the ICT sector to develop as a tool of education in developing countries?**

One hindrance is too much emphasis on the technology and not enough on education priorities and employing technology as part of a larger solution that includes maintenance, training and capacity building, access, and infrastructure, among other things. Another is a lack of coordination among ICT in education efforts. A third is lack of real knowledge about the costs and benefits of e-Schools strategies.

**What are your initiatives to bring about large-scale impacts in ICTs and education and going beyond the pilots?**

All of our country programmes, such as Namibia, India and Ghana are designed to do just this.

**Can you briefly share your experiences in these countries?**

Our programmes are all at different stages, and we have come the furthest in Namibia. Just a couple of days ago, the Government of Namibia and GeSCI officially launched the National ICT in Education Policy. This was an important achievement for Namibia and for GeSCI's and we are now working with the Ministry of Education to develop a national implementation plan. Both the government and NGO sector of Namibia have been instrumental in this process.

Our experience in India has been equally positive. Aruna Sundarajan, GeSCI's Country Programme Facilitator in India, is leading a comprehensive selection process to determine which 2 states are most interested in working with GeSCI and working with the Federal Government in an advisory role.

GeSCI's work in Bolivia and Ghana are both earlier on in the process. ■