

# AED/LearnLink

## Digital Tools for Development

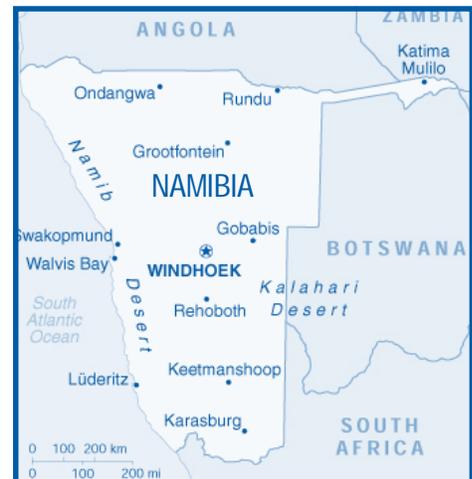
*AED/LearnLink uses information and communication technology (IT) to support development. Activities range from public access telecenters to teacher training, professional development, organizational networking, e-commerce, e-government, and institutional capacity building. Lessons from field experiences are shared to contribute to the body of knowledge on using IT for development.*



**Keyword Identifiers:** teacher training, professional development, educational technology, IT

**Purpose:** To strengthen professional development programs for educational professionals through information technology (IT) and to build teams of education technology champions in Namibia. With the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) and Namibia's Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, and Culture (MBESC), AED/LearnLink supports capacity building through the use of web-based, CD-ROM, and face-to-face training.

**Description:** This computer-assisted teacher training (CATT) project helps NIED implement the Ministry's Ten Year Plan for Educational Development and Support. The project includes the development of an Educational Development and Support Network (ED'S Net) ([www.edsnet.na](http://www.edsnet.na)), which is designed to provide web-based support for Teacher Resource Centres (TRCs) and basic education professionals and researchers throughout Namibia. The project also works with USAID/MBESC's Basic Education Support (BES and BES II) Project.



The main purpose of the CATT project is to introduce technology to support education, not to introduce technology for its own sake. Educational technology teams are being formed to maximize the use and impact of technology as a tool for encouraging and modeling more effective education practices. The hands-on training, combining computer literacy, application familiarity, and IT integration into instruction and daily Ministry activities, also will be conducted with a digitized set of 20 modules from NIED's Teachers Basic Competency Manual. Modules will be piloted to compare computerized training with other distance training methods to demonstrate strengths and weaknesses of IT in delivering professional development training. Emphasizing teamwork, discovery, critical and creative thinking, and active inquiry with responsible participation and ownership, the learning process for NIED staff and regional teams of technology champions can be applied later to professional development at all levels as well as to student learning in any subject.



Youth from "Kids on the Block" setting up computers

With equipment installed by the local NGO SchoolNet and its "Kids on the Block" (computer-savvy youth), the CATT-Namibia project established computer centers at NIED in Okahandja and Teacher Resource Centers (TRCs) in Ongwediva, Katima Mulilo, and Rundu, located in historically disadvantaged northern education regions of Namibia.

The CATT project also is supporting a larger Ministry initiative to develop Educational Development and Support (EDS) units at the regional TRCs. The TRCs will be converted into EDS units by adding regional advisory teachers, Internet connectivity, and computer centers.

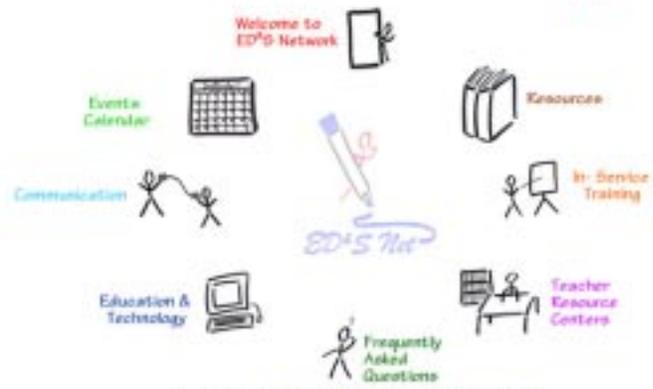
With the addition of the CATT-supported computer center, the Okahandja TRC became the first functional EDS unit, and the others in Rundu and Katima and finally Ongwediva followed soon after.

To facilitate communication, research, and training, the project is assisting NIED in establishing an ED'S Network web site to develop a virtual community of TRC and EDS unit staff and clients, including teachers, principals, advisory teachers, inspectors, and education researchers. After development by LearnLink/CATT, the web site eventually will be expanded and managed by NIED, its clients, and regional partners.

Additionally, the ED'S Net web site ([www.edsnet.na/edsnet](http://www.edsnet.na/edsnet)) will promote HIV/AIDS awareness and will provide links to sites of relevance to educators interested in HIV/AIDS issues. The inclusion of these materials acknowledges the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS on all sectors of Namibian society and fits with the Namibian Government's multi-sectoral approach to HIV/AIDS and USAID/Namibia's identification of HIV/AIDS awareness as both a special objective and cross cutting theme.

## Educational Development & Support Network

"Supporting Namibia's Education Professionals" 



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"Splash" page at <http://www.edsnet.na/edsnet>



Opening inauguration at NIED

Most importantly, web content is likely to focus on dynamic teaching philosophies, approaches, and pedagogies, compatible with the introduction of technology to enhance learning. The LearnLink/CATT project supports an open, highly interactive architecture, constructivist, learner-centered pedagogy, and activity-, inquiry-, problem-, and project-based learning.

**Key Challenges and Constraints:** Prior to Namibian independence in 1990, the access to and quality of teacher training programs varied dramatically by region, language group, and teacher training institution. Adding Advisory Teachers, computer centers, and connectivity will address the major historical weaknesses of TRCs—a lack of sufficient communication and professional development resources and few incentives or rewards for continuous professional development. Also, many already overworked NIED staff and Ministry counterparts must overcome the labor-intensive task of converting paper to digital formats.

**Desired Outcomes:** Improvements are expected in teacher professional development, education management, and, ultimately, educational quality. A final outcome is a group of IT-sophisticated technology champions with the knowledge and ability to demonstrate a discovery- and project-based learning model for integrating IT throughout Ministry activities.

**Unique Applications:** The inclusion of HIV/AIDS resource materials fulfills an urgent need. Also, an emphasis on selecting women as trainers and computer center employees advances opportunities for greater gender equity in the IT field. Furthermore, hiring formerly out-of-work youth to fill entry level center management positions provides a model that encourages projects and the Ministry to consider this group as a potential source of otherwise scarce technically competent personnel. Finally, by integrating IT networks and web and face-to-face training, this project offers a Ministry-supported educational reform model for upgrading the basic education system nationwide.

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