This quote, which was told by John Dewey, was the center message during the recent evaluation meeting of the digital libraries established across Eritrean colleges. The message was clear: we shall make a paradigm change on the way we give education to our college students, which eventually translates on improving the overall education, hence development, of the nation.

This use of technology is the best way to mitigate the shortages of books, libraries, and educators in our schools and colleges. It is also the best way to integrate world class digital educational materials that are available at various open online sources into our education. It is to be remembered that colleges around Eritrea has established a digital library system to enable them the acquisition, storage, and distribution of digital materials. They have been working together and providing regular evaluations in order to assess the work accomplished and to outline a work plan for the near future. As a result of these engagements many colleges have shown progress, newer institutions have joined the effort, and those lagging behind have urged themselves to move forward.

Such a gathering for assessment has recently taken place at the end of the last month at the Eritrean Testing Center, in the heart of Asmara. The meeting was conducted by the Commission of Higher Education, RORA Eritrean Digital Library, and by deans and technical teams of each college in Eritrea. Colleges presented the current status of their digital library infrastructure, the progress they have made, challenges they have faced, and they discussed the way forward to advance the delivery of education through technology. Cost of hardware, shortages of trained human resources and integrating resources with the current available courses in the curriculum are some of the challenges that have been mentioned. Access to digital material has been increasing and several access sources have been identified for colleges, in addition for them to collaborate with RORA Eritrean Digital Library, which has a huge resource of materials.

Several useful presentations were made during this event: one being on ways to set up a simple wireless network that enables efficient distribution of digital materials. This presentation focused on cost effective hardware and software that can be used to set up the required network.

This specific presentation inferred from a recent experience of setting up an off-line intranet network service at the Eritrean Festival at Expo Asmara, which gave kids access to educational and entertainment materials on mobile devices. Another presentation was also given at the evaluation meeting on the resources RORA has and services it provides to colleges and
other institutions. The current status of digital learning around the world, and the experiences in other developed countries was also discussed in order to give a global context to this specific endeavor.

The evaluation meeting concluded by establishing a committee of four members that is expected to assess, review, and provide comprehensive recommendations on the digital library platforms of each college.

It is also to be remembered that Eritreans in the diaspora have been fundraising to send e-reader tablets for this effort, which has been gaining momentum in North America and Europe. In the past few years the Eritrean Relief Association-UK (ERA-UK), the Young PFDJ Paltalk group, and the EriReaderUSA have provided numerous tablets to be used by students in Eritrea. ERA-UK has been delivering significant amount of tablets for the past three consecutive years and is in a process to deliver more. Subsequently, in a bid to give a gift of 1,000 tablets to Eritrean students for the upcoming 25th Anniversary of the Eritrean Independence, Eritrean community in USA is conducting fundraiser efforts on the social media and already raised substantial amount of money during the annual YPFDJ Conference in Las Vegas (an amount that would get around 250 tablets) and at an event in Seattle.

Access to tablets is the essential tool to assure that all students have access to these digital libraries and to provide supplemental materials to their regular classroom education. The usefulness of tablets in Sub-Saharan Africa and the changes it bring to the provision of education has been widely documented. It is to be understood that, in the African context, tablets are not for purpose of indulgence but are cost effective tools that allow Africans to leap forward into this age of information and information sharing.

Eritrea, through its grassroots efforts, is pursuing the improvement of education through the digital platform, and these tablets would be handy in distributing these massive education materials to the masses of the people. Eritreans all over the world are urged to give due emphasis to the procurement of these tools for those that can’t afford it, in a bid to pull the later on the same level of educational opportunities. This is a cause for social justice.