A very warm welcome to you to this meeting in which the countries present will share their experiences of implementing the CFS project and the lessons they learned as a result. This would not have been possible without the support of UNICEF and we are very grateful to Ms Durston, Changu and Maida for their support, both financial and intellectual.

I don’t know how much you know about the Commonwealth of Learning so it may be appropriate to say a few words here. When Heads of Government decided to set up the Commonwealth of Learning in 1987, they saw this as an imaginative response to strengthening higher education in the developing world by making use of the potential of open, distance and technology enhanced education. Traditional teaching methods simply cannot cope with the scale and diversity of learning needs in the developing Commonwealth. Over the 22 years of its existence, COL has not only expanded the definition of what we mean by ODL but has also convinced Commonwealth Member States to see the value of harnessing ODL methodologies for achieving development goals.

Like the rest of the international development community, we are committed to supporting Member States in their aspirations to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, especially Goal 2, which relates to achieving Universal Primary Education and EFA Goals, and Goal 6, which refers to ‘improving all aspects of the quality of education’. These then are also areas of concern to UNICEF and give us a common platform for joint action.

It has become obvious to the global community that if the development goals are to be achieved by 2015, it would require close collaboration between different entities and actors. It is for this reason that since the turn of the century, the discourse of development has been dominated by an emphasis on partnership. The former Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, believed that partnership was not an option but a necessity in the new world order.
As Manuel Castells reminds us, ‘Synergy effects depend on adding value because of successful integration in a process of production that yields higher productivity, and thus profit, for its components.’ (Castells, 2009, p. 82). By bringing together the comparative advantages of the various actors, it is possible to eliminate duplication of effort and achieve results which are not possible for the partners to achieve alone.

For any partnership to be fruitful, it has to be based on a win-win framework. The UNICEF-COL partnership has three major stakeholders.

Let us first take the case of UNICEF—what’s in it for them? How does COL add value?

First COL brings expertise in distance and eLearning and UNICEF can deploy distance education methodologies to scale up its reach.

Second, COL also brings its own networks into the mix—and these are mostly institutional partners—thereby expanding the circle of UNICEF.

Finally, this is also a strategic partnership that helps UNICEF further its agenda of ‘harmonisation.’

What do the country stakeholders get out of this collaboration?

One, as we all know, ministries usually have limited budgets for training. This project builds the capacity of the participants thereby contributing to human resource development.

Two, the Teacher Resource Centres, which usually face a resource crunch are strengthened.

Three, by mainstreaming the CFS principles and models into pre and in-service teacher education, both the quality of teacher education and the quality of teaching are enhanced.

So how does COL benefit from this partnership?

1. COL is a modest organisation in terms of both financial and human resources. This project helps strengthen our work in teacher education in 10 developing countries of the Commonwealth.
2. The introduction of CFS principles enables us to enrich our capacity-building efforts in teacher education.
3. Finally, we too enlarge our network by tapping into UNICEF partners.

It seems as if it is a win-win situation for all the key participants. That does not mean that there are no challenges. Coordinating so many nodes in such a massive undertaking is one, ensuring that deadlines are met is another. However, these are all surmountable with a bit of patience and perseverance. Having sympathetic and sensitive colleagues certainly helps and we again place on record our appreciation for our UNICEF colleagues. We are very grateful to Jenny Glennie for accepting our request to facilitate this meeting. And finally on behalf of COL, let me thank our country representatives for travelling long distances to get here for this important meeting.

With that I wish the meeting every success.