“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world...”

Nelson Mandela Launching the Mindset Network, 2003

Stephen Murgatroyd, PhD FBPsS FRSA, with Janet Tully, MSc

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We met a great many people who openly and honestly shared their experience of their work with COL, their understanding and their evidence of impact, where this was available. In some cases, individuals travelled many miles to make sure their voices were heard. For an organization like COL to have created such levels of commitment and engagement is a statement in itself.

Any errors or omissions are our responsibility.

Stephen Murgatroyd, May 2015
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>CARICOM</td>
<td>Caribbean Community</td>
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<td>CCEM</td>
<td>Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers</td>
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<td>CCTI</td>
<td>Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration</td>
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<td>CEMBA/CEMPA</td>
<td>Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration/Public Administration</td>
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<td>Centre for International Education and Development</td>
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<td>Department for International Development</td>
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<td>information and communications technology</td>
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<td>Initiatives Using Technology to Improve Education</td>
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<td>Indira Gandhi Open University</td>
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<td>ITfC</td>
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<td>L3F</td>
<td>Lifelong Learning for Farmers</td>
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<td>LGBTQ</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or Questioning) community</td>
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<td>massive open online course</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-government organization</td>
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<td>National Institute of Open Schools</td>
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<td>National Open University of Nigeria</td>
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<td>ODL</td>
<td>open and distance learning</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>open educational resources</td>
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<td>RETRIDOL</td>
<td>Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning</td>
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<td>TQF</td>
<td>Transnational Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>TVET</td>
<td>technical and vocational education and training</td>
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<td>TVSD</td>
<td>technical and vocational skills development</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>Unite Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>VUSSC</td>
<td>Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth</td>
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<td>WITED</td>
<td>Women in TVET</td>
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<td>WOU</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONTEXT

The environment in which COL is operating is fast changing and challenging.

Learning and education are seen as critical to the achievement of national development goals, yet learning and education are themselves changing in response to new technology and greater knowledge of education effectiveness and efficiency. A strong focus on return on investment is leading to new models for the design, development, deployment, delivery and recognition of learning. New competitors for COL’s position in this market for ideas and opportunity are emerging, both from other development agencies and from the private sector.

COL remains well positioned for now, but needs to respond to the changes and challenges with boldness and ambition.

KEY FINDINGS

• COL has had a major impact on farmers, senior and junior faculty members, institutional leaders in formal and non-formal learning, many policy-makers and educational administrators, people it works with directly through partnerships and alliances, and other institution members, such as key individuals in UNESCO and the Ford Foundation.

• COL has varying impact on post-secondary school and other formal institutions within the Commonwealth — in some cases substantial, in others modest.

• COL has had significant impact on selected non-formal and informal learning organizations and networks, especially through its work in Learning for Farmers (L3F), Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD), Healthy Communities and community-based learning.

• COL’s impact on public policy is modest at the national level, except in relation to the small states of the Commonwealth. The Transnational Qualifications Framework represents a major opportunity for such states to increase learner mobility, and the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is a nascent opportunity to increase access to quality learning in affordable ways for each of these states (but see # 5 under “Increasing Impact” below).

• COL needs to respond to the changed context and challenging conditions in order to increase the impact of its work.

STRENGTHS THAT COL NEEDS TO BUILD ON

The following are areas of strengths in COL’s operation on which the organization now needs to build if it is to improve its outcomes and impacts further in the next strategic plan.
• Leveraging partnerships to achieve outcomes
• Developing certain kinds of policy
• Building certain kinds of capacity
• Using microfinance through partners to achieve outcomes
• Building local ownership, focus and alignment
• Positioning open and distance learning (ODL) and open educational resources (OER) as development options
• Ensuring that gender issues are front and centre
• Connecting learning to development
• Evaluating outputs and outcomes
• Positioning COL as a focused organization

INCREASING IMPACT

The following recommendations suggest areas in which COL needs to significantly change or improve in order to increase its impact.

1. **Having more ambition** – COL needs to be more ambitious and set challenging goals. This is especially the case with formal education programs and VUSSC.

2. **Recognizing that “less really is more”** – COL needs to focus on demonstrating its the value in four to six nations, where it can show the impact of its work in both formal and non-formal (and sometimes informal) settings across a range of educational challenges.

3. **Achieving better alignment with national goals** – COL needs to articulate how its activities support the development goals of nations.

4. **Making partnerships more encompassing** – COL needs to expand its partnership horizons to look for strong partners whose values align with COL’s and who can bring additional resources to a specific challenge. In particular, COL should seek stronger links with the private sector, major development agencies and NGOs working in the Commonwealth.

5. **Matching capacity building with strategy building** – COL needs to do much more to help Commonwealth nations create strategies for education, health and development and leverage flexible approaches to learning, including ODL and OER.

6. **Developing effective communities of practice** – COL needs to become more systematic in developing communities of practice that support the strategic intent of an initiative.

7. **Moving to scale** – COL needs to dedicate real resources to the development and strategic communication of the models that work and the conditions required for those models to work. COL’s strategic communication is currently very weak.
8. **Becoming more of a social impact organization than an educational development organization**
   – COL needs to accelerate its transition from an educational development organization to a backbone organization\(^1\) that is focused on social impact.

9. **Rethinking its funding model** – COL needs to seek out a group of major donors who support its mission and strategy and to develop strategic funds for each region of the Commonwealth, no strings attached.

10. **Rethinking its strategic communications** – COL needs to seriously rethink its strategic communications approach and its Web presence.

While this impact assessment supports the work of COL and its people, it also documents the changes needed in COL’s current planning cycle if COL is to have stronger institutional and national impact going forward. For COL to be more successful as a social impact organization having an impact on the development goals of nations, it needs to be more ambitious, strategic and focused and to operate more collaboratively and less as an organization of program-based silos.

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\(^1\) For a description, see www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/understanding_the_value_of_backbone_organizations_in_collective_impact_1
1 Setting the Context for COL’s Work Beyond 2015

1.1 Introduction

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is, according to almost all of those interviewed for this assessment, a highly respected and well-regarded, flexible and nimble intergovernmental organization. It is good at leveraging partnerships, networks and relationships to achieve outcomes intended to have an impact on both formal and non-formal learning, organizations, policy and society. A not-for-profit organization based in Canada, COL is funded by voluntary donations from member governments of the Commonwealth. It is a board-governed organization, with 45 staff based in Vancouver and New Delhi; and has a budget of approximately $11 million. Twelve of those on staff (including the Director of Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia [CEMCA] and its Program Officers) are Education Specialists, two are in senior leadership positions and have served as Education Specialists, and the remaining 31 are professional, administrative and support staff.

COL is not a funding agency. Its major role is to focus and align the work of partners on a specific set of educational and learning outcomes, linked to a broad strategy for development. It uses project management, microfinance, capacity-building activities, communities of practice, communications and project monitoring and evaluation to enable these developments.

The mandate of COL appears clear: it seeks to help governments expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using appropriate technologies, particularly those that support open and distance learning (ODL). However, it does much more than this. It works not only with government and public sector institutions and organizations to increase access, quality, performance and outcomes in education, but also with many other organizations — private sector, public: private partnerships, nonprofits, formal and informal networks, other intergovernmental agencies — and in both formal and non-formal learning settings so as to help nations achieve their development goals. Indeed, COL’s decision to adopt the mantra “learning for development” better reflects its actual activities. It would be more accurate to say that COL seeks to help nations through a range of agencies achieve key development goals through learning.

COL’s work is not focused on ODL alone (though this is at the heart of all that it does). It is also focused on a variety of forms of learning: flexible learning approaches for farmers and skills development; a range of different learning strategies and methods to enable the education of girls and women; and a focused approach to the use of radio, text messages, voice mail, television, video, print and newsprint to enable community-based and “village” learning. These are in additional to more traditional approaches to ODL — modular print-based courses, multimedia courses, eLearning, video-based learning and, more recently, massive open online courses (MOOCs).

COL is seen increasingly as a global leader in the use of open educational resources (OER) — materials that are free to adopt and adapt under a Creative Commons License or other appropriate arrangement. Before and following the UNESCO OER declaration in Paris in 2012, the development of which involved COL in a significant way, COL has championed this work, which is capturing the imagination and attention of many in the Commonwealth (not just in developing nations, but also in developed nations).

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2 The full declaration is available at www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/Events/Paris%20OER%20Declaration_01.pdf
The joint UNESCO–COL Chair in OER at Athabasca University is in high demand as a researcher, an advocate and a thought leader. COL is enabling the rapid growth OER in practice in more countries in the Commonwealth than is any other single organization.

COL also works at the policy level. COL has created a strong policy focus on quality and performance, ODL, technology for education, access to education for girls and women, and OER, especially in higher education and teacher education. Several national quality assurance policies, regulations and institutions have leveraged COL’s quality assurance framework and processes (COL Review and Improvement Model [COL-RIM]) as the starting point for their quality assurance and regulatory frameworks (India, Sri Lanka for example). Work has also been undertaken in improving the quality of open learning materials and OER and the quality of instructional design and student-related supports.

The Transnational Qualifications Framework, developed with COL’s assistance by the small states of the Commonwealth, and the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) are powerful examples of COL’s strategic role in the development of both policy and institutional frameworks that will increase learner access, learning recognition and transferability and learner mobility.

1.2 THE CONTEXT IN WHICH COL OPERATES

COL is an accomplished, respected and focused organization with respect to ODL and flexible responses to the challenges of access, quality and performance in education. It also has a proven track record in some jurisdictions for skills development through non-formal learning. However, the context in which COL works is changing rapidly.

According to a significant number of those interviewed, eight specific developments are important for COL to understand as it plans its next six years of work:

1. **New development goals** – The post-2015 development agenda ([The World We Want](#)) expands the importance of education and learning as development goals in themselves and as a vehicle for achieving the new goals. Education is the key to many of these developments, not just in terms of educational outcomes but also in terms of health, sustainable development and the economic goals of nations. COL’s strategic thinking post-2015 aligns with some of these goals, but needs to be direct, explicit and concrete, and effectively communicated to member governments of the Commonwealth. These more ambitious goals are being started at a time when, in per-capita terms, development aid is declining and many others are entering the field of flexible, open and distance education. Education, while figuring more prominently in the development agenda, will be a highly contested space.

2. **Learner mobility and transferability** – As globalization continues, so too does the mobility of learners. Learners are looking for greater flexibility for learning, wider credit recognition, and greater transferability of learning between institutions within nations and between nations. The European Union has committed to greater learner mobility as the core feature of its 2020 plan. COL is committed to improved access to quality learning across the Commonwealth and has supported, through VUSSC, the development of a Transnational Qualification Framework to support transferability and recognition across the small states of the Commonwealth. For the

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next decade, we expect demands for more flexibility, transferability and global recognition of credentials to rise. There are opportunities for COL to contribute to these developments by linking its work to transnational qualifications models and frameworks\(^4\) and by developing an approach to ensuring that ODL is not discriminated against in such arrangements.

3. **Quality is as important as access** – Recent studies show that in some countries, 25–50% of youth who have graduated from primary school cannot read a single sentence. The evidence is clear: those closest to learners have the greatest impact on learning outcomes yet cannot overcome the impact of social conditions, culture and community\(^5\) — thought exceptional teachers make more of an impact than poor-quality teachers.\(^6\) Thus, there is a growing focus on teacher expertise and quality, especially in primary and lower-secondary education. COL’s teacher education strategy is critical to development goals and needs to be seen as such. This strategy needs to embrace not just initial teacher education but also the ongoing professional development of teachers. As one interviewee said, “Imaginative and creative approaches to support for teachers — perhaps using informal and non-formal methods just as much as more formal ones, are what is needed.”

4. **Curriculum refocusing** – Several countries are reviewing and changing their curriculum to move from broad-based content to a strong focus on competencies and outcomes, partly to ensure that the “outputs” of education better serve the socio-economic needs of the nation. These significant shifts will require substantial redevelopment of curriculum resources and substantial investment in teacher professional development. There are opportunities for COL (i) to engage in this work in order to create the base materials that support school systems (especially flexible learning for skills and open schools in such systems); and (ii) to promote creative approaches to professional development using OER, MOOCs and the non-formal learning models it has developed for many of its initiatives (e.g., Lifelong Learning for Farmers [L3F], Technical and Vocational Skills Development [TVSD] and Healthy Communities).

5. **Learning analytics and learner assessment** – New forms of technology-based assessments of learning are emerging in the developed world as a means to support learning systems and hold them accountable for value creation. Learning systems at all levels need new approaches to assessment that leverage these emergent technologies.\(^7\) Through its work in its Teacher Education, Higher Education and Open Schooling initiatives, COL needs to focus on these technologies and how they can enable competency- and outcome-based assessment. TVSD may also benefit from competency-based skills assessment methodologies “unbundled” from teaching. “We are struggling with assessment of competency” was a sentiment repeated often in interviews. COL’s internal capacities to respond may be limited.

6. **System Assessments And Accountability** – The OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has had a significant impact on the way in which Ministries of Education

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\(^7\) See the work of the Centre for Applied Measurement and Evaluation, University of Alberta, Canada.

8 Coursera, 10.4 million; edX, 3 million; Udacity, 1.5 million; MiriadaX, 1 million; FutureLearn, 800,000.

off solutions. As an interviewee from Bangalore said, “COL will never have nationwide impact since its strategy is focused on capacity building one institution at a time....” And a person from OpenSchools noted that, ““Some funders may be frustrated with COL because it is not moving quickly to scale — yet, many who have moved to scale have poor results from doing so.... COL’s results are solid.”

These developments are a sample of current developments likely to impact COL in the time scale of its next six-year plan that were frequently mentioned in interviews. There are others — the growth of MOOCs, a refocusing of quality assurance on student engagement, growth of work-based learning accreditation — which COL is already aware of and working on. These particular developments are highlighted because they have significant long-term strategic implications for COL and its focus.

One other context issue is the future of the Commonwealth itself, which remains a concern and a question. Several senior government officials and former COL Board members observed that COL’s Commonwealth credentials are strong, but uncertainty exists about the Commonwealth’s future as an entity. One person said, “COL’s reputation is strong and vibrant — in many ways, stronger than that of the Commonwealth itself.” Another put this challenge differently, saying “A significant barrier for COL is its connection to the Commonwealth which, in this country at least [Kenya], is a problematic connection.” The implication in at least three nations (Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria) was that the Commonwealth connection limited scope and potential impact rather than aided this. It was also observed that many countries did not see the Commonwealth as a “first port of call” when looking at the future for education, learning or social development.

1.3 The Basic Impact Summary

COL’s intended impact is captured in this statement: “A substantial and equitable increase in the number of Commonwealth citizens acquiring the knowledge and skills for leading productive and healthy lives, through formal and non-formal open and distance learning opportunities.”

COL’s core theory of change can be summarized this way: Engaged learning through a variety of flexible approaches that are focused largely on ODL and supported by both experienced local educators and technology (where appropriate) can: transform the lives of individuals; enable enhanced access and learning outcomes; improve the efficiency of learning systems; and improve social and economic conditions in the communities in which that learning takes place.

Nevertheless, (a) the approach to learning, whether formal or non-formal, should be based on evidence of need, relevance and efficacy; (b) quality should be embedded in the learning process and learner supports; and (c) learning should be contextualized to local circumstances and conditions (it must be relevant) and must be owned and driven locally.

In each of COL’s initiatives, the theory of change works slightly differently, but the above elements appear common to all. For example, in L3F, it is essential that the focus be on farming as a skill practised daily. For Legislative Drafting, it is essential that learners develop not just a skill but also a deeper understanding of the unintended consequences of poor drafting and a strong link to the community of drafters within the Commonwealth. For teacher educators, it is essential that the development of professional practice reflect local conditions in schools rather than a broader (and Western) theory of practice. For the Healthy Communities initiative, it is essential that the approach to health learning be
embedded in community-driven and -owned activities — it is not just about professional radio or other forms of programming. Not all of COL’s initiatives have developed an explicit and clearly communicated theory of change, as is evident both from a document review and from interviews.

COL seeks to secure the intended impact through a specific range of initiatives:

In formal educational systems

- Open Schooling
- Teacher Education
- Higher Education
- Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

In non-formal and community-based skills development and learning:

- Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD)
- Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)
- Healthy Communities

In addition, COL supports these specific initiatives with two cross-cutting themes: gender and eLearning. Gender is largely integrated into the core initiatives; eLearning is variously integrated and pursues some separate activities, such as its current promotion of Aptus, Classroom Without Walls.

1.4 **FORMAL EDUCATION**

Achieving institutional and social impacts in the two very different environments of formal and non-formal education is challenging. Among the challenges for formal educational systems discussed by interviewees:

- The lack of structural arrangements (technology infrastructure, policy, professional development supports, financing) to enable technology-enhanced learning
- The lack of strategic commitment within government at the highest levels, in institutions and at the local and regional level within a nation
- The strong resistance to changing the dominant teaching paradigm in which the teacher determines what, how and when a learner learns
- A state of un-readiness among teachers, learners, parents and communities for alternative and more flexible approaches to learning, especially technology-enhanced learning and open schooling
- The curriculum focus on information rather than competencies or outcomes
- The internal politics of higher education institutions and colleges, especially as they relate to teacher preparation
- The lack of understanding of the opportunities afforded by blended learning and ODL among teachers and institutional administrators
- The lack of acceptance of OER
- Quality assurance regimes as inhibitors to innovation and change
• The lack of capacity for adoption of new methods of teaching and learning in light of high-demand workloads
• The frequency with which leadership within a system (Ministers, government officials and institutional leaders) changes
• The power of labour unions to resist significant change in methods of teaching and learning

Still, COL persists and can show impact — in some cases, significant impact. Examples of successful programs that are changing institutional practice:

• in Sri Lanka, the reform of external degrees (representing some 2250,000 individuals enrolled) using COL-RIM as a basis for redesigning the way in which such degrees are offered
• VUSSC, which has already enabled some 49,000 individuals to participate in boot camps, workshops and other events
• the growth of online learning as a core offering of UTech in Jamaica since 2000
• the development of open universities throughout the Commonwealth, with COL playing a significant role (e.g., the Open University of Tanzania, the Open University of Bangladesh, the Open University of Nigeria, the Indira Gandhi University)
• the establishment of a medical network in Malaysia
• focused interventions in teacher education (e.g., at the National Teachers’ Institute in Nigeria and the Faculty of Education in Sri Lanka) and the imaginative work of the non-profit organization IT for Change (ITfChange) in Bangalore
• the reorganization of extension education at the University of the South Pacific
• the offering of the Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration/Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) in some 11 countries

Perhaps the most demanding development COL is seeking to secure through formal education relates to primary and secondary education. COL has been an early and leading advocate of open schooling — a strategy to make primary and secondary education available to anyone (school-aged children and adults alike), anywhere at any time, with learner support. The National Institute of Open Schools in India credits COL as a leading “thinker and doer” and a respected partner. In Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, Pakistan and Trinidad & Tobago, COL has supported policies and the development of open schools, though not all have been sustained. In Trinidad & Tobago, the demise of open schools was the result of a change of Minister and a new focus for the work of the Ministry of Education. Work is ongoing in a variety of nations, but is challenging since the concept is new to many and requires a strong policy and strategic commitment by government, school systems and teachers. COL has been instrumental in developing and supporting a community of practice for open schooling through the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA), which helps sustain open school initiatives.

Technical and vocational education in colleges is also a component of the formal education change strategy COL is pursuing. In Kenya, all of the technical colleges (including the Kenya Technical Teachers College) are engaged as a collaborative co-operative network in modularizing programs, expanding access through technology and seeking in systematic ways to attract more women to trades. The first female carpenter in Voi, Kenya, made clear that this investment in change made her new career

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10 The work continues on a smaller scale through the Catholic School system in Trinidad & Tobago.
possible. COL, through the Coast Institute of Technology in Voi, helped create new opportunities for her and many like her to develop skills through modular programming. Similar impacts on both staff and students were reported at the Technical Training Institute in Tikka, Kenya. As a result of their efforts and those of COL, the Government of Kenya is revising its policies on technical education. In Vanuatu, the government is also developing new policies and approaches to TVSD for schools and young people as is South Africa and several other countries.

1.5 NON-FORMAL LEARNING

COL has developed significant and widely recognized competencies in strategic and practical approaches to non-formal learning in relation to skills, farming, health and community development. At the heart of this work is a focus on evidence, partnership, engagement and commitment over time.

Critical to success for each of the areas COL has chosen to work is the idea of multi-stakeholder engagement for delivery and support of evidence-based transformational change driven locally by stakeholders.

In Sri Lanka, L3F has transformed mushroom, ginger and turmeric farming from subsistence farming with almost no prospect for growth in 2006 to a vibrant and effective, sustainable farming business that is again attracting young people and inspiring others to begin to farm in 2014. Ingredients for success include: helping farmers organize into sustainable, self-financing associations; connecting farmers to universities, banks and learning; and using the private sector telephone companies to support farming developments through low-cost voicemail learning systems. COL is the “glue” that has enabled this to happen. Similar stories can be found in Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Mauritius and Papua New Guinea. A new development for L3F is just beginning in Jamaica. Seychelles, without the help of COL, is now pursuing its own version of L3F.

In the Healthy Communities initiative, women in India and the regions of Africa and the Caribbean have been creating radio programs they own, develop and broadcast and then use as a basis for community engagement and learning. While professional broadcasters help, this work involves communities owning radio and using radio to build the resilience and health of communities. The Indian government recognizes the importance and value of this work. According to one senior official in the Indian government, “COL has ensured that community radio is able to leverage community knowledge and professional skills in the service of human development, health and community advancement.” A major sponsor of such work also stated that COL’s work in India had ensured that community radio had “impact as a tool for social development and well-being.” Building an evidence-based, quality program strategy, facilitating capacity building, and creating a community of practice have all been tools designed to support this work.

As for technical and vocational skills development, COL is doing some inspiring work in a variety of different places across the Commonwealth. In Kenya, women are collaborating in skill-sharing and enterprise development activities. What people learn from their formal education is quickly shared with a network of others who are not currently engaged in formal learning. In Jamaica, the idea of the “communiversity,” in which students at UTech share their knowledge and skills through non-formal learning workshops and activities in the community is just now beginning, helped by the university requirement that all students must undertake such community service as part of their degree. In Vanuatu, non-profit organizations (such as the Regional Training Centres and Wan Smolbag Theatre) are
using ODL to engage people in informal community learning for life skills and technical skills (e.g., small engine repair, using concrete, tourism). Similar developments are occurring in the Pacific, Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.

1.6 **KEY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

According to the majority of those interviewed, the key areas where COL could improve:

- **Strategic communication, Web presence and leverage of social media** – This is not a trivial issue. It speaks to the ability of COL to be an effective advocate for scalable models that others can replicate, and its ability to communicate its real and substantial achievements. COL’s Web presence is dated and, said many interviewees, suggests a brand that is tired and not dynamic.

- **Evaluating outcomes and impacts** – COL needs to be an evidence-based social impact organization, not an advocacy organization based on ideological commitments to ODL and OER. All of the three outcome evaluations covering the three-year plans 2006–2015 have made this point, and many interviewees have too. Evidence acts as a persuasive force for change. COL’s evaluation work is patchy and not as focused as it needs to be, according to the outcome evaluators. There are no initiative-based impact evaluations (other than this present study and some aspects of the evaluations of L3F and TVSD). In moving forward, COL may wish to see outcome and evaluation as a cross-cutting theme deserving of significant support. Evaluation has been better in some areas — VUSSC, L3F and TVSD, for example — than in others. COL needs to be world class at this work and become a rigorous self-evaluating institution.\(^\text{11}\)

- **Developing transferable models and methodologies** – In some areas, COL has been developing models that others can take, adopt and adapt and then move to scale. COL needs to become much more systematic about this for all areas of its work. Sir Michael Barber,\(^\text{12}\) describing his method of “deliverology,” makes the point that it is critical that someone describe in detail what needs to be done to secure outcomes and impact so that others can take this model and then “deliver” it. COL needs to be the one that describes the detail of its models so that others can deliver them. It has done this to some extent with quality-assured community learning programs, its L3F work, its open schools model, its COL-RIM, and its work in TVSD. It now needs to do this for all aspects of its work. “Where are the models that we can adapt and use?” asked several respondents to the Challenge Dialogue and interview questions.

- **Aligning its Human Resources (HR) practices with the core purpose of its business** – COL has adopted a UN-like model of HR management, with time-limited periodic terms for its Education Specialist staff and performance evaluations that are still very much focused on outputs. COL needs to align its HR practices with the core impacts intended, recognizing and supporting staff not just for their individual performance but also for their collective performance as a team and for their adaptive and innovative capacity. COL should be concerned about turnover in some portfolios (eLearning, for example). It may want to consider a significant rethinking of who is hired, for what time periods and with what expectations for teamwork.


Throughout this document, specific suggestions are given for improving COL’s impact, in general terms and in terms of each COL initiative. These suggestions — all of which come from interviews, responses to the Challenge Dialogue, or other sources documented in the methodology above — are intended to help COL imagine a different future.

In particular, we draw attention to the need for COL to accelerate movement toward becoming a more focused social-impact organization that is truly dedicated to learning for development, and away from an academic/educational change and consulting organization — a model that has predominated COL’s earlier history. COL has done so much to move in this direction, but now needs to see this as a key part of its next multi-year plan. This flows from several significant concerns about COL’s lack of strategic ambition and lack of focus on transferable and scalable models, especially as they relate to formal education.

These comments should not detract from COL’s significant achievements — documented here. They are intended to highlight the idea that the future for COL is not a “straight line from the past” but a “ramp up for impact.”

1.7 IMPACT SUMMARY

Clear impacts are discernible for each of the initiatives COL is engaged in. Those impacts are not everywhere and have not occurred every time, but they are apparent. These impacts are on:

- **Individuals** – Of the 150 teaching staff interviewed during this impact evaluation, almost all (132) made clear that the exposure to new ways of teaching and learning using ODL and OER had changed their lives as teachers, learning designers and educators. One interviewee, a very experienced senior Professor at a highly regarded university, credits COL with “totally transforming the way I think about my work, which has had a long-term impact on my country, given the work I do.” Farmers in Sri Lanka, CEMBA graduates in Malaysia, graduates of the Legal Drafting program in Samoa, hairdressers in Kenya, bricklayers in Africa, and medical personnel in Malaysia all said that “open distance learning” or flexible learning had changed their prospects in life.

- **Institutions** – Many (but not all) institutional leaders and senior administrators made clear that the exposure to new thinking initiated by COL and supported by capacity building and networking had changed their strategic focus and institutional practices. COL was widely seen as helping to make a difference, whether this related to new approaches to quality assurance, the use of OER, modularizing of the curriculum, new approaches to teaching, learning and student engagement, or new uses of technology for learning. Fully realizing the opportunities afforded by these approaches is, however, a more complex matter — constrained sometimes by policy, infrastructure, change capacity and resources. Some of those who did not yet embrace ODL and OER as part of their strategic intent pointed to various barriers, such as poor infrastructure, competing priorities or lack of support from government.

- **Communities** – Whether we look at the impacts of the non-formal learning initiatives (L3F, Healthy Communities, and TVSD) or the formal system initiatives (Open Schooling, Teacher Education, Higher Education, VUSSC, Legislative Drafting), it is also clear that COL can claim that it is having an important and, in some places, significant impact. In particular, it is clear that COL
is enabling increased access to quality learning and improved learning outcomes and systems efficacy in a number of very specific instances (e.g., TVSD in Kenya, Teacher Education in Sri Lanka, and Legislative Drafting in Samoa). It is also clear that direct social and economic benefits accrue from COL’s work, especially when we look at the example of learning for farmers, TVSD, life skills development, community health, teacher education and open schools.

The issue is not whether COL is having an impact, but whether COL’s impact could be greater both overall and at the initiative level and at the national.
2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 STARTING POINTS
We sought to understand and evaluate how well the theory of change being used by COL (both overall and at the level of specific initiatives) is producing outcomes and impacts within COL’s sphere of control and influence. This approach to understanding impact assessment differs from a traditional one for good reason, as the table below summarizes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact assessment within results-based management often implies...</th>
<th>The reality for COL is...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear cause and effect relationships</td>
<td>It is working in open and complex systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive and intended outcomes and impacts</td>
<td>Unexpected positive and negative outcomes and impacts occur in every case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A focus on ultimate impacts for beneficiaries and stakeholders</td>
<td>Outcomes and impacts at each stage of a value chain are important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit that goes to the progenitor</td>
<td>Multiple actors create outcomes and impacts and deserve recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A story that ends when the initiative or project secures success</td>
<td>The change process never ends unless a decision is made to do so</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 A THEORY OF CHANGE APPROACH
Taking this theory of change approach enabled us to test whether COL is systematic in its work; whether COL’s impacts are what it anticipated when it developed its approach to each of its initiatives; and whether the theory of change itself is defective, given the outcomes and impacts we can see occurring in the field.

COL adopted results-based management (RBM) in 2003 and began to embed this work in its approach to planning, reporting and evaluation in systematic ways thereafter. It has been helpful to COL to do this, but also limiting. Logic models, logframes and RBM:

1. Are ideally suited to short-term projects with limited, clearly defined objectives, indicators and outcomes. They work best where there is a simple linear logic.
2. Tend to work best with quantitative indicators based on specific outputs (e.g., the results of a particular activity) and short-term outcomes. They are good for proving rather than improving.
3. Focus on the specific outputs of a single organization. Logic models, logframes and RBM are not really useful for identifying shared outcomes and assessing the contribution of collaborative relationships to shared long-term outcomes.
4. Work best as a tool for reporting upward to donors, and for assessing whether an organization has carried out the activities that it was required to do or committed to doing. Logic models,

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logframes and RBM are not really useful for reporting to all constituents. COL’s country reports and project reports to stakeholders show this.

5. Tend to work best for single organizations with very specific activities. Outputs and outcomes tend to be very specific too. It is difficult to compare the performance of organizations with this kind of data.

In contrast, an approach to strategy development, planning and public assurance that uses the theory of change and its related tools (e.g., outcome maps and logic models)\textsuperscript{14}:

1. Reflects and makes explicit the deeper understanding of context that informs strategies and relationships. This approach helps inform flexible and diverse strategies and can be used to track contributions to complex change processes. It provides indicators for measuring an organization’s contribution to long-term social change over time; and it tends to support flexible and adaptive strategies better in complex situations.

2. Makes use of long-term and short-term, quantitative and qualitative indicators of success within a framework of a pathway to change. This approach tracks changes in behaviour, attitudes, relationships and capabilities that contribute to success.

3. Promotes identification of shared outcomes, and allows different actors to plan and track their collaborative contributions to shared outcomes

4. Can be rooted firmly in inclusive stakeholder dialogue around shared outcomes. This approach enables public reporting that reflects shared learning — as strong an accountability framework as RBM.

5. Allows organizations to monitor their growing capability to influence change. This approach can yield data that allows us to compare the effectiveness of different approaches and activities across initiatives and organizations.

Examples of the theory of change as a basis for planning, strategy development, evaluation and public assurance are available at www.theoryofchange.org/library/toc-examples/\textsuperscript{15}.

Since COL has only recently begun to articulate its theory of change at the initiative level and has yet to do so at an institutional level, what follows is a first look at what this approach may reveal. In this work, we asked:

- What is the theory of change for each initiative?
- How does this translate to impacts at the individual, institutional and societal level?
- Where is the practice of change in action?
- What can we learn from all of COL’s activities and initiatives to suggest where the theory of change needs to be altered and how COL could improve the organization’s impact?

\textsuperscript{14} See previous note.
2.3 SOURCES OF DATA
The following sources of data were used in this impact assessment:

- 480 interviews, conducted from 2013 to 2015 (with individuals either in person or by telephone or Skype), which focused on outcomes and impacts and the implied theory of change COL was employing. Countries visited were the United Kingdom, Nigeria, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, India, Mauritius, South Africa, Kenya, Vanuatu, Samoa, Sri Lanka and Malaysia.
- 7 workshops and focus groups with the VUSSC Management Committee, participants in CEMBA/CEMPA, Legislative Drafting, L3F, Healthy Communities and gender initiatives.
- Attendance at the 7th Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF7) and opportunity to meet with and discuss impacts with key influencers.
- Attendance at strategic planning and Focal Points sessions in Mauritius, Malaysia and Trinidad & Tobago.
- Discussion with Ministries of Education in Singapore, Australia and Canada.
- Discussions with Department for International Development (DFID).
- 75 in-depth responses to the Challenge Dialogue document.
- Desk review of all outcome and related evaluation studies since 2006 available in the COL Knowledge Management System, together with about 120 other documents related to COL’s work since 2006.
- Substantial discussions with the 2006–2015 outcome evaluators.
- Interviews with past and present COL personnel.
- Interviews with 3 UNESCO–COL Chairs.
- Participation in COL’s strategic planning work in October 2014, which included a review of impacts related to the task of strategic planning, and individual meetings with Education Specialists.

2.4 DETAILED METHODOLOGY

2.4.1 Documented Evidence
This was the first impact evaluation undertaken by COL. This fact imposed constraints in three ways:

- COL has no history of looking systematically and objectively at the impacts of its work on institutions, beyond anecdotal data.
- Possible impacts that might be discerned are buried in documents or evaluation studies and not easily or readily discovered — and forensic impact evaluation is difficult, if not impossible.
- COL’s own monitoring and evaluation history is varied in quality and inconsistent in approach within and across initiatives.

The last point is especially notable. COL’s use of RBM began in 2003 and encouraged a strong focus on outputs and outcomes, not impacts. All three of the 2006–2009, 2009–2011 and 2012–2015 outcome evaluations raised issues about the quality and evidence base for this work. Not mentioned is that if evidence of outcomes is unclear, then evidence of impact will be even more problematic.
2.4.2 Interview Data
Among the interviewees were individuals being asked to recall work from 2006–2007 (about seven or eight years later), as well as those just about to launch activities in 2014–2015. Some people had a long history of work with COL, others were more recent arrivals to the organization. Some were Board members, others were consultants. While this gave a range of experiences, it made a systematic approach to interviewing and exploration of impact difficult.

Furthermore, the construct of “impact” was difficult for some, while others gave example after example. Distinguishing between an output (the what) and the impact (the so-what) was not obvious for many interviewees. Not all were as familiar with COL’s range of work as others were.

The point here is that a rigorous pursuit of a single interview schedule and framework was not possible. So, all were asked to describe the impact COL had or was having and explain why this impact had occurred. Interviewees were also asked to explore what they understood COL’s theory of change might be with respect to the work they were familiar with. All were asked what COL could do to improve its impact. Everyone was generous with his or her time and thoughts and appreciated the opportunity to share.

2.4.3 Challenge Dialogue
The Challenge Dialogue System™ has been used extensively to explore how individuals and groups understand a specific issue, opportunity or challenge. Over 220 people were asked to respond and some 75 did so in depth and in detail. This was not a survey. It sought to engage individuals who were not interviewed and have them explore the impact of COL’s work and the theory of change. What was sought were insights and commentaries, which these 75 individuals provided on the basis of confidentiality.

2.4.4 Focus Groups and Workshops
Different methods were used in workshops with VUSSC and Healthy Communities groups than with other groups. We used a modified 32-item Q-Sort\textsuperscript{16} to explore the theory of change for these two initiatives.

For the L3F, CEMBA/CEMPA, Legislative Drafting and other workshops, we engaged in a focus group conversation focused on these key questions:

- What is the theory of change for each initiative?
- How does this translate to impacts at the individual and the institutional level?
- Where is the practice of change in action?
- What can we learn from all of COL’s activities and initiatives to suggest where the theory of change needs to be altered and how COL could improve the organization’s impact?

2.5 A QUESTION OF ATTRIBUTION
A key problem for this work (and for related work for other development organizations) relates to the attribution of impact to COL versus its partners.

In looking at impact, we should therefore look at the spheres of control, influence and interest that COL has in each of its initiatives. See Figure 1.

![Diagram of project, partners, and beneficiaries spheres]

**Figure 1: Control, influence and interest spheres for COL.**

In Bangladesh, for example, CEMCA provided funds, technical support and mentoring to the Centre for International Education and Development (CINED) to support self-learning for entrepreneurs. A typical program was five print modules supported by video, community radio and newsprint for entrepreneurs wishing to grow and sell flowers. Between February 2013 and November 2014, 478 such entrepreneurs had started their own business, 22,000 had accessed these materials and related supports on the CINED website, and over 1,000 had used the hotline support. Many more have accessed this non-formal self-managed learning through community learning centres. Some 300 have secured microfinancing. COL did not create or deliver these resources; it enabled CINED and its partners (including 10 other NGOs) to do so. The real impact of COL in this example is not the 478 businesses or 22,000 Web users or other such outcomes. Rather, the real impact is the support COL provided (explicit and tacit knowledge and some capacity building) for the development of a multi-channel model for informal skills development and learning, COL’s sharing of effective practices from similar work elsewhere in the Commonwealth, and COL’s ability to facilitate connections and partnerships.

These may appear as “soft” impacts, but are as critical as the “harder” outcomes that the partner (CINED) is achieving. According to CINED, COL’s support has given them the confidence to see the model as having the potential for a wide range of community learning skills initiatives that leverage this same model. Thus, impact here can be seen in terms of the development of a strategy to significantly expand the reach of this initiative through replication in other skill areas and through the use of other distribution channels (10 NGOs in Bangladesh and the proposed new development TV station are already committed).

In Jamaica, where COL is seen to be unlike many other educational development organizations, the impact is similar: “COL is helping us identify processes and strategies which will make us successful on an ongoing basis and thus be sustainable,” said the outgoing Vice Chancellor of UTech. One interviewee said that, unlike many other development agencies which arrive with an agenda and process and funds, COL is a genuine partner with shared values and intended outcomes and a listening and capacity-building process to enable organizations to flourish. The outcomes for beneficiaries are the outcomes of partner organizations — the real outcomes for COL relate to their partners and the change that they help create in the ways of working and strategies of their partner organizations.

This “question of attribution” is important. There is a danger of underestimating the value created by COL’s work, as well as of exaggerating the impact of COL by attributing all of the success of partners and
beneficiaries to COL. Thus, the achievements of the organizations become fuzzy. We can be clear, however: COL makes a difference to partners who make a difference to beneficiaries; and between COL and its partners, development goals are being met.

2.6 LIMITATIONS OF THIS WORK
We did not look at:

1. **Value for money** – This was not in the terms of reference for this work. The methodology for value for money is complex\(^\text{17}\) and out of scope. The 2012–2015 outcome evaluation provides data about expenditures. DFID’s July 2014 review of COL\(^\text{18}\) also contained a rudimentary value-for-money review. It states, “COL has exceeded many of the expected results and is therefore offering good value for money.”

2. **Annual impacts** – We could look only in general terms at the way impacts were described to us or could be discerned from data or evaluation studies. Tracking these annually from 2006 to 2015 was not possible. Furthermore, given that many activities take time to have an effect, such an exercise could also be misleading.

3. **Impact by country or region** – Insufficient data is available or can be discerned, though some initiatives have more impact in some places than others. Where this is clear, we report it. We have suggested that country reports be modified to look more directly at impacts — especially impacts as they relate to national development goals.

4. **Quantifiable data** – There is a little data to show quantifiable impact or impact that can be attributed to COL. For example, COL had a significant role in the development of open universities as an influencer, shaper of strategy and thinking about possibilities. But, can we attribute the increased student access to these institutions to COL? COL has helped shape open school policies and strategies, but it would be difficult to claim that all enrolments and completions in open schools linked to COL are due to COL — hence the question of attribution discussed above.

2.7 CONFIDENTIALITY
All respondents, whether in interviews, workshops or focus groups, were guaranteed confidentiality. Names are not mentioned in this document unless we were asked to be explicit about attribution.

2.8 REPORTING
Each initiative is reported on separately in the following sections of this document. We use a standard template for each, which includes:

1. **Estimate of Impact** – This shows our estimate of impact on a 5-point scale (1 being low, 5 being). These estimates are based on our judgement of the weight of evidence available. Where insufficient evidence is available, no rating is given.

\(^\text{17}\) For a basic description, see [http://ivythesis.typepad.com/term_paper_topics/2009/12/value-for-money-audit-process.html#axzz3Xxda39ul](http://ivythesis.typepad.com/term_paper_topics/2009/12/value-for-money-audit-process.html#axzz3Xxda39ul)

\(^\text{18}\) Refer to iati.dfid.gov.uk/iati_documents/4594430.docx (page 10)
2. **Theory of Change** – This is our distillation of what the theory of change *appears* to be from the evidence we gathered. For some initiatives, this was difficult, given that we were asked to look at the period 2006–2015 and many initiatives changed and “morphed” in this time. When significant changes had occurred (e.g., for eLearning, CEMCA), we document our understanding of the new and the old theories of change. These provide a starting point for a serious conversation about what exactly COL is seeking to do and what its assumptions appear to be.

3. **Key Practices** – We document all of the key features (not every detail) of the activities under the banner of each initiative. Our intention is to show that these activities are the products of the theory of change. Where there is an issue of fit as raised by respondents, we discuss this.

4. **Evidence of Impact** – We document what we discovered about impact, drawn from the sources we describe above. Where we have no evidence, we explain why.

5. **The Program Model and Scalability** – A key question for COL is whether each initiative has an explicit model that COL can document and other organizations can adopt or adapt with minimal or no intervention by COL. This has happened with L3F in Seychelles, for example. We document highlights of COL’s work in each three-year period in a simple summary table and comment, where appropriate, on issues of scalability based on the interviews and related data.

6. **Potential Impact Indicators** – Within the table showing highlights of COL’s work from 2006 to 2015, we include a column titled Possible Impact Indicators. Derived from all sources of data, this represents our attempt to suggest the kind of impacts COL may seek to track in the future and “design into” its monitoring and evaluation work.

7. **Improving Impact** – We document specific suggestions for improvement of impacts, derived from our sources.

8. **Conclusion** – We provide an overall conclusion about the impacts of the initiative and what this might mean for COL’s strategic planning and foresight activities, as well as for day-to-day operations.
3 OPEN SCHOOLING

Estimate of Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact on Individuals</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Ongoing evidence of strong impact for many who have used open schools, including many adult learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Institutions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Impact varies significantly by location and over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Communities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of evidence makes it difficult to provide a meaningful statement here, but there is no doubt that COL has helped increase access to schooling through this work in selected communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment
Work undertaken through the Open Schooling initiative has varying levels of impact, very dependent on policy and strategic support by government.

3.1 THEORY OF CHANGE
About 58 million young people worldwide are not in primary school, but would be if schooling was compulsory, affordable and available everywhere. Within Commonwealth countries, this number is estimated at 23.3 million.19 If we add secondary education, the worldwide number out of school increases to 270 million and the Commonwealth represents some 84 million or higher.20

Many governments cannot respond to the challenge of providing universal primary education and achieving a significant expansion of secondary education through conventional “bricks and mortar” schools staffed by highly qualified teachers. Open schooling — the use of ODL, including OER and continuous improvement of instruction — is seen as a critical component of an access and quality strategy for many emerging school systems.

Key elements of the theory of change for this work are21:

- Enabling government to rethink their strategy for access, quality and success in school systems by encouraging the growth and development of open schools and OER and the full integration of information and communication technology (ICT) in schools. Not all governments understand the benefits.
- Strengthening local capacity for the design, development, deployment and delivery of quality learning resources, and connecting educators to others in other jurisdictions pursuing similar learning and development strategies.

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19 See an analysis of the current state of primary education throughout the Commonwealth at www.comparativist.org/Commonwealth/?page_id=31
20 See above note.
21 See video presenting this work at https://vimeo.com/90914473
Reinforcing the need for evidence-based decision-making, both at the level of the school system and at the government level, through the effective use of monitoring, quality assurance and evaluation systems.

COL’s work on open schooling varies between jurisdictions in its ability to make all of these components of the theory of change operational. For example, in Trinidad & Tobago, many of these elements were in place and working, but a change of Minister of Education ended formal support for the initiative, despite strong evidence of efficacy. In Namibia and India, open schooling is a significant success and all of these elements are in place.

There are three broad types of open schooling:

- **complementary**, which offers the standard national curriculum in an open manner (e.g., Namibian College of Open Learning [NAMCOL])
- **alternative**, which offers an alternative curriculum targeted toward more vocationally oriented programs (e.g., National Indian Open School [NIOS])
- **integrated**, which does not only cater for a large student body but also acts as a catalyst, a resource, a clearing house, and a laboratory for the whole school system (e.g., Vancouver Learning Network, Alberta Distance Learning Centre)

Not all students of open schools are primary and secondary school students. A growing number are adult learners developing technical and vocational skills and essential skills using open schools and OER.

### 3.2 Key Practices

Under the Open Schooling initiative, COL is involved seven key practices:

1. Supporting policy development for open schools, OER, gender equity and quality assurance
2. Building capacity for management, finance and administration of open schools
3. Building capacity for the design, development, deployment and delivery of curriculum, including effective learner supports and curriculum adaptation
4. Creating support networks for practitioners of open schooling and OER curriculum through COL’s participation in the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA) and COL’s support for OpenSchoolingConnect4 Web space and use of Moodle for curriculum deployment
5. Microfinancing key initiatives to develop capacity and foster best practice
6. Promoting quality assurance and developing quality assurance practices among practitioners
7. Using monitoring and evaluation to provide evidence of efficiency and effectiveness of open schooling in securing educational and social outcomes

These practices are presented in this way for a reason. In the last three three-year plan evaluations, evaluators have drawn attention to the dependence on the first three practices (especially the first one) in securing outcomes. Indeed, where projects under this initiative have been problematic it is because of the lack of genuine resource and policy commitments or shifts in such commitments over time.

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22 The Catholic Schools in Trinidad & Tobago are continuing to support open schooling on a modest scale.
It cannot be stressed too strongly: this is difficult work. The educational policy space is highly contested and volatile, yet key to the development goals of nations. This is also a complex space. Increasing access may have no direct impact on outcomes for many who attend school, and outstanding learning materials may not be sufficient to overcome the impact of social conditions on learning outcomes.

3.3 Evidence of Impact

3.3.1 Impact on Individuals
Fourteen individuals who had completed education through open schools expressed that their learning experiences had been “life changing.” A sergeant in the Trinidad & Tobago police force and three others in that country made clear that their livelihoods and well-being had been transformed through their learning experience. Others reinforced this idea. In Vanuatu, the organization delivering technical skills through open learning told story after story of the impact of this work on learners.

Individuals who had participated in capacity-building workshops focused on course development or OER had varied responses. This was also evident in the three-year plan evaluations 2006–2009, 2009–2012 and 2012–2015 and from 21 interviews undertaken by the impact team. Nine of the latter felt “unready” for the work, and their development and knowledge were subsequently not fully sustained. One said, “One-off workshops or even two workshops do not lead to sustainable change when the change required is a change of mindset, approach to learning and teaching.” Such events were not leveraging the assets of a community of interest (e.g., OpenSchoolingConnect4 or COMOSA) as a basis for sustaining and developing the knowledge and skills gained in workshops. Few were aware of the Certificate in eLearning offered through the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand or of other options to build on their workshop. As some observed, they were not well prepared for what they experienced.

This mixed bag of impacts reinforces the importance of the design, development and deployment of such capacity-building efforts. Given that Open Schooling projects are occurring in some 33 countries and there are over 56 contracts associated with this work, ensuring that capacity building does indeed build and then grow capacity is difficult to achieve.

3.3.2 Impact on Institutions
In the field of open schooling, COL is seen as pioneer and imaginer of possibilities. In an interview with the Chair of the National Institute of Open Schooling (India), he made clear that he saw COL not only as a key “thought leader” but also as a significant “influencing agency” for Ministers and policy-makers in the Commonwealth and around the world. In his view, “COL’s work in open learning demonstrates just what a focused, relentless small organization can do to create momentum and focus around this work.” He speaks as a leader in an organization that was founded 26 years ago and that supports India’s significant initiatives in this area of work — the largest open school system in the world.

In some nations, open schooling has had a significant impact, especially Namibia (over 40% of secondary education is through open schools), India (over 1 million open school students a year), Belize, Botswana, and Zambia. In these cases, the role of COL has varied from initiator and lead (Belize, Botswana) to supporter and connector (India). In other nations, for example Tonga, COL has facilitated and

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24 See an account of this work at www.col.org/progServ/programmes/education/Documents/OS-Programmes-Tonga.pdf
supported connections and development in partnership with others (e.g., University of the South Pacific). There are also significant potential impacts arising from this work in Sri Lanka and the promise of significant opportunities for development in Ghana.  

More recently, the strong focus on the development of quality-assured OER is seen by some as a “game changing” development, especially given the growing use of OER to enhance capacity, rapidly develop locally relevant resources through the adoption and adaptation of OER and the use of OER in existing more formal school systems.

Given that many teachers who provide learner support in schools do not have formal training in teaching, expanding the use of OER has an institutional impact in that it provides base resources from which students can learn and teachers (however well they are qualified or not) can then offer support. In responses to the Challenge Dialogue used by the impact evaluators, this emerged as a major theme. As one Ministry official from Botswana said, “OER will have a real and substantial impact on our system. We now have high quality, instructionally sound materials in our own language linked to our own curriculum, which students can use independently or with the support of other learners and/or a teacher. I see this as very important.”

Even in Trinidad & Tobago, where a significant development of open schools was halted midstream, key individuals involved in this work continue to support it. As a former Ministry official (now with Catholic School System) said, “This was one of the most important things we did to improve the reach of our education system and improve quality at the same time…. We will find a new route to making this work.”

Another institutional impact relates to teaching. Many teachers in primary, junior secondary and secondary schools do not have teacher education qualifications. COL’s Open Schooling initiative takes teachers and provides them with training in the integration of technology both into their teaching and, for some, into the process of designing engaged learning. Five hundred teachers experienced the former in 2012–2013 and over 1,750 have been involved in boot camps and capacity-building workshops aimed at design since this work began. While this may seem modest, each of these persons acts as a starting point for the work of cascading skills in their region.

In those Ministries that have embraced OER and ODL as the basis for open school systems, institutional impacts will ripple for some time to come. As one interviewee said, “The genie is out of the bottle and cannot be put back.”

### 3.3.3 Impact on Communities

A policy commitment to increasing access to quality learning and, through effective practice, increasing the successful outcomes of schooling is intended to have a social and economic impact. Upskilling of a community and increasing literacy and numeracy all have known socio-economic impacts.

However, systematic data is not readily available to permit the assessment of this for COL’s open school initiatives. Anecdotal data and materials from interviews suggest that these impacts are now beginning to be seen, especially in mature open school systems that COL has helped enable.

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### 3.4 The Program Model and Scalability

Work under the Open Schooling initiative have scaled up in the period since 2006.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Policy commitment secured in Cameroon</td>
<td>• Launch of open schools connect as a community of interest/practice website</td>
<td>• New open schools in Bahamas, Ghana, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Pakistan and Belize</td>
<td>• Increased access to and success in quality learning for individuals in participating countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ongoing work in Bangladesh (junior secondary school)</td>
<td>• Securing of William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (WFHF) funding support for open school curriculum; 16 courses developed</td>
<td>• 14 additional courses developed for WFHF</td>
<td>• Number of new open schools sustained over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Open Schooling initiative initiated in Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
<td>• New open schools in Kiribati and Tonga</td>
<td>• Policy for open schools adopted in Bangladesh, Botswana and Bahamas</td>
<td>• Number of courses or programs developed and in use in open schools or other organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• COMOSA formed with 22 members in four chapters “signed up”</td>
<td>• Strengthening support for 10 existing open schools supported by COL</td>
<td>• Growth in the use of OER in open schools in Belize, Namibia, Zambia, Lesotho, Botswana, Mozambique, India, Kenya and Bangladesh</td>
<td>• Volume of OER developed, adopted and adapted and put to use to improve learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, Trinidad &amp; Tobago and Zambia support 100 Master Teachers initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Gender guidelines piloted in India, Belize, Tonga and Tanzania</td>
<td>Number of teachers, educational leaders and policy-makers able to design, develop, deploy and deliver ODL courses and programs or quality OER materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Quality assurance systems for open schools developed in Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho, Tanzania and Mozambique</td>
<td>Increased social and labour mobility resulting from the successful completion of schooling through open schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.5 Improving Impact

From the interviews and feedback from the Challenge Dialogue, seven specific suggestions emerged for improving the potential of the Open Schooling initiative to have impact:

1. **COL should work in fewer locations to offer greater and more focused support, and to create a more comprehensive roadmap and best-practice framework for open school development.** "Do better at sharing the best practices so that others can ‘steal’ more easily]” was a comment. Almost all respondents and interviewees suggested that “less is more.”

2. **COL should find new ways to build capacity.** For example, COL should use MOOCs more extensively and make “just in time” design, development, deployment and delivery resources free for teachers and others wishing to adopt open schooling. Comments included “We push innovation, but still do the basics in a very old-fashioned way”; and “More of this is now being done, but COL needs to get focused on doing capacity work better.”

3. **COL should build high-quality OER curriculum in partnership with a select group of Commonwealth governments.** COL should expand on the successful build of quality courses
undertaken with the support of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, aimed at strengthening essential skills and needed technical and vocational skills.

4. **COL should partner with other major players in education in emerging nations to leverage the latter’s resources and capacity to expand the understanding of open school best practices.** Examples of major players include the **World Bank, New Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, GEMS, Google, and the Gates Foundation.**

5. **COL should aggressively strengthen the work of COMOSA and significantly enhance the functionality of OpenSchoolConnect.** As well, **COL should make effective use of social media to sustain the ongoing professional development of those engaged in open schooling.**

6. **COL should develop an advocacy strategy in which former Ministers, current Ministers and thought leaders “talk up” open schools and their success and draw attention to evidence of open school efficacy.** As one person said, “This needs not just to be about projects but a really strong movement!”

7. **COL should undertake a systematic impact evaluation of open schooling in specific countries, focusing on educational, social and economic impacts and expanding the model developed by Sir John Daniel.** \(^{26}\) **COL should link this analysis to the tools and resources that it COL and its partners have developed.**

### 3.6 CONCLUSION

COL’s Open Schooling initiative is a key part in the education program family and benefits all Commonwealth countries as it expands the range and variety of OER that all teachers can use to improve learning. Impacts on individuals and some institutional impacts are clear, but it is difficult to establish what the social and economic impacts have been, given the paucity of available data.

4 Teacher Education

Estimate of Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Individuals</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ongoing evidence of strong impact for many who have used ODL, OER and new approaches to teacher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Institutions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Impact varies significantly by location and over time. COL has had an impact on how many institutions consider supporting teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Communities</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Lack of evidence makes it difficult to provide a meaningful statement here, but COL has increased access to, and the quality of, teacher education for specific communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment

ODL and OER are now in widespread use in teacher education. As an early advocate and an engaged organization, COL has done much to position ODL, OER and now MOOCs as a core part of the fabric of its Teacher Education initiative work throughout the Commonwealth.

4.1 Theory of Change

According to a 2007 UNESCO report, “To have quality education for all, in primary and secondary education, 5.2 million new teachers are needed by 2025, most of them in Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, millions of teachers need upgraded competencies and skills to take up the potential of online, open and flexible learning.”

COL has accepted this challenge for some time. Its theory of change is that quality teaching can follow from school-based, modular learning and development for teachers that are focused on the use of information technologies, pedagogies derived from eLearning and distance education, and the systematic leveraging of OER and well-designed learning materials, expertly facilitated. Teacher education organizations and Ministries of Education must be aligned with this work and be engaged in its deployment.

While different tools may be deployed to enact this theory of change, COL has relentlessly pursued through its Teacher Education initiative, the improvement of teacher quality in partnership with others throughout the Commonwealth.

4.2 Key Practices

Under the Teacher Education initiative, COL is engaged in the following practices:

- Advocating for ODL, OER and teaching through innovative practice

- Supporting policy-making and strategic decision-making in Ministries, school systems and partner organizations to provide ODL and OER as a basis for expanding teacher education and ensuring development and innovations in pedagogy
- Supporting teacher preparation and teacher professional development organizations in their use of ODL and OER to improve teacher preparation and teacher quality
- Developing and working with partners to implement quality assurance measures for teacher education using ODL and OER
- Being a key collaborator within the Commonwealth, especially in developing nations, for those seeking to improve teacher education, quality for teacher education, and the use of ODL, ICT and OER in relation to teacher effectiveness
- Offering capacity development opportunities both directly and with partners to enable the more widespread use of ODL and OER for teacher preparation
- Developing materials required to support quality teacher education through ODL. All materials developed are available on a Creative Commons License.
- Developing and distributing a quality assurance tool kit for teacher education
- Promoting gender-inclusive teacher education and materials
- Making use of a range of technologies (e.g., radio, MOOCs) as a means of improving teacher quality. Three MOOCs of relevance to teachers have been offered.

The role of partners is fully recognized in this work. For example, outstanding work is being done with COL’s (CEMCA) support in India, through the work of Bangalore’s IT for Change (ITfC) and its work on professional development, described here:

“The Subject Teacher Forum (STF) is an ‘in-service teacher education’ programme for high school teachers in Karnataka was started in 2010-11 by RMSA Karnataka, in collaboration with IT for Change. Over the last four years, ITfC has trained around 500 Government High School teachers in mathematics, science, head teacher and social science, as master trainers to integrate ICTs for teacher professional development. ITfC has also trained around 100 head teachers, as master trainers, to integrate ICTs for school leadership. These master trainers have trained around 6,000 of their colleagues across the state of Karnataka. All participants have become members of the subject wise virtual forums and are actively sharing ideas, resources, insights and seeking support. The mailing groups have crossed more than 35,000 emails so far, this would make this the largest programme of its kind in the world (where more than 5,000 teachers in a single geography are forming communities of learning and are in regular interactions with one another for continuing professional development). The virtual forums are created and maintained by ITfC, working closely with RMSA.”

COL has supported this work through both microfinance and CEMCA’s expertise. In interviews with the ITfC team, COL’s involvement has been one of enabling and encouragement.28 The fact that this work is

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28 CEMCA has also supported ITfC’s work related to the Kelu Sakhi radio project that aimed to develop community radio skills among the disadvantaged rural women in the taluks of Mysore district, in Karnataka, South India. Following a positive response to the project, CEMCA decided to support the second phase of skills training, which took place in April 2007. Before the second phase was initiated, CEMCA undertook an external evaluation of the program to understand the process of engaging disadvantaged women in using technologies for their empowerment. This report details the findings of that independent assessment.
not integrated into COL’s teacher education initiative is a separate matter in terms of the integration and connectivity of CEMCA’s work within COL: it is teacher engagement and professional development aligned with COL’s theory of change in this area.

4.3 Evidence of Impact

4.3.1 Impact on Individuals
A senior Professor of Education at UNISA explained how exposure to COL’s thinking and work on instructional design and ODL early in her career was transformative for her own practice; and that in turn had an impact on a great many of her students and her peers. The staff of the Faculty of Education at the Open University of Sri Lanka also explained how their partnership and work with COL had significantly enhanced the quality of the collective work of the faculty and also had a direct impact on each individual working in the faculty. Similar sentiments were expressed by those engaged in teacher preparation and in ongoing development from Bangladesh, Jamaica, Ghana, The Gambia, India, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa and Samoa. Innovations in teacher education supported by COL change the way teacher educators think about their work and how they undertake that work. Survey data collected from capacity-building workshops show a high degree of short-term satisfaction (about 75% satisfied).29 No follow-up data with respect to impact on practice two to three years after such events is available.

During the impact evaluation, we had only marginal contact with teachers in practice. However, when we did encounter them, they praised COL’s support for their classroom-based work.

4.3.2 Impact on Institutions
The impact evaluators interviewed key personnel from Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Kenya and Nigeria. Real progress was reported to have been made through capacity-building workshops in these countries in reinforcing instructional design principles and practice, encouraging use and developing OER, and making more extensive use of blended learning and ICT in teacher preparation and support. Indeed, in a meeting with a majority of the Faculty of Education at the Open University in Sri Lanka, it was clear that COL was the inspiration for a great many initiatives that had positioned them as a leading teacher education organization in that country. This fact was confirmed in meetings with the Government of Sri Lanka’s Ministry of Education officials. COL was seen as a mentor, coach and guide for the work of this institution.

From work based in The Gambia, four countries developed guidelines for replicating the workshop focused on Open Education Resources for English Language Teaching (ORELT). In Kenya, new materials developed by participants at a capacity workshop are now widely in use. In Sri Lanka, the entire work of the Faculty of Education has been shaped by its engagement with COL.

4.3.3 Impact on Communities
No direct evidence is available to enable us to say with confidence what impact this work has on schooling and the outputs of schooling. Nor is any evidence available that would show the cost–benefit

of projects and approaches undertaken through the Teacher Education initiative compared with other more conventional ones.

4.4 The Program Model and Scalability

The program model is based on direct intervention in teacher education through quality assurance, high-quality materials and resources (e.g., radio programs), and systematic capacity building— all involving partners. More recently, MOOCs have been added to this mix.

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 2006: 142 engaged in capacity building in India, Nigeria and Sri Lanka</td>
<td>• Materials for school leadership developed and in use in The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone</td>
<td>• 575 engaged in capacity building for ODL in Africa</td>
<td>• Number of teachers engaged in capacity building leading to direct changes in teacher preparation and CPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 981 engaged in capacity building in India</td>
<td>• Radio programs for nomadic teachers launched and in use in Nigeria, Kenya and Tanzania</td>
<td>• 102 engaged in capacity building in Jamaica and Belize</td>
<td>• Materials developed and used by teachers, with a measurable impact on practice and student learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consortium building in India, South Asia and West Africa</td>
<td>• QA tool kit launched and used in Jamaica, together with work on ODL in Jamaica</td>
<td>• 207 engaged in capacity building in Maldives, Jamaica and India</td>
<td>• Improved learning outcomes for learners as a result of improvements in teacher preparation and ongoing professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Launch of Green Teacher Program (2005) and an online version (2006)</td>
<td>• Substantial work with QA tool kit throughout India</td>
<td>• OER policy development workshop for participants from Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Tanzania</td>
<td>• Widespread use of OER by teachers as part of instructional strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adapted version of Green Teachers offered by partners in India and 3 African countries</td>
<td>• 870 teachers engaged in capacity building and materials development in Sri Lanka, Jamaica, The Gambia, India, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria</td>
<td>• Development of new teacher education materials for multi-grade teaching in Belize, Maldives, Namibia, Samoa and Solomon Islands</td>
<td>• More extensive use of ICT in classrooms, leading to improved learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I-CONSENT and WACTED consortium partnerships developed together with relevant learning materials</td>
<td>• Transformational role played by COL in the work of the National Teachers Institute, Nigeria</td>
<td>• Materials developed for continuing professional development (CPD) in India, diploma programs in Jamaica and Belize, and for teacher education in Maldives</td>
<td>• Expanded use of COL’s teacher education resources in teacher preparation and CPD throughout the Commonwealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Diploma in Guidance and Counselling (NCERT Delhi), MA in Teacher Education (Sri Lanka), Nigeria teacher education and NIOS (India) materials developed</td>
<td>• Substantial work on child-friendly schools in partnership with UNICEF (begun in 2008) in Swaziland, Botswana, South Africa, Nigeria and Lesotho</td>
<td>• Materials developed for continuing professional development (CPD) in India, diploma programs in Jamaica and Belize, and for teacher education in Maldives</td>
<td>• 3 MOOCs offered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 65 teachers trained in instructional design in Sierra Leone and Samoa</td>
<td>• Support of the work of Freetown Teachers College in Sierra Leone in becoming a dual-mode institution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Launch and leverage of WikiEducator</td>
<td>• Improvement of training materials in South Africa and Uganda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is not evident are any systematic analyses of the impact of these interventions on learning outcomes for learners, in direct assessments of teacher quality and performance, or in the performance of schools and school systems. It is difficult to look at the impact of these interventions in the absence of such data. The more widespread adoption of ODL and OER as practices in teacher education is dependent on evidence of efficacy and effectiveness.

The evaluations of this work, including that most recently completed, focus on whether or not the outcomes intended were achieved — not whether these outcomes made a difference. The overwhelming response of all those interviewed and who responded to the Challenge Dialogue is that they did, but no one could produce evidence of impact on student learning, systems outcomes or improved school performance.

4.5 Improving Impact

Improvement in school outcomes (not just on standardized test scores) is key to any national development agenda, and teaching quality is a critical component of achieving these improved outcomes. Given the findings of many who have looked at teaching in the developing nations (and especially at those teaching who have not received any professional education and are unqualified), work to improve teaching quality is a critical mission if “learning for development” is a serious ambition for COL. The challenge is focus — that is, identifying where COL can leverage modest investments and its expertise to have most impact.

In the past, the focus has been on improving teacher preparation — seeking to ensure that qualified teachers are the best that they can be. There is no suggestion that this focus should be abandoned. Indeed, over half of those interviewed about this initiative suggested that there was much more yet to do, especially in terms of essential skills, multi-literacy and the use of OER in teaching. However, there was also a concern that COL is not responding to the challenge of unqualified teachers.

From the interviews and feedback from the Challenge Dialogue, three specific suggestions emerged for improving the potential of the Teacher Education initiative to have impact:

1. COL should make more extensive use of MOOCs for capacity building (e.g., using year-round MOOCs as opposed to fixed-date MOOCs) and seek to find opportunities to credential MOOCs through proctored challenge examinations offered by national partners. “Credit” here could count towards teacher qualifications or be recognized as a continuing professional development credit where that is helpful or required. This would be a way of reaching a great many teachers in-service (qualified and unqualified) and could truly leverage the capacities COL has developed since this work began.

2. COL should make use of the approaches adopted by the L3F, TVSD and Livelihoods & Health initiatives to offer support and development for unqualified teachers. Doing so recognizes that the teacher supply from qualifications is not going to match demand. While interviewees

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suggesting this were mindful of the sensitivities, they called for the use of radio, smartphones, SMS, voicemail and social media to provide support to both qualified teachers in practice and unqualified teachers. The work with nomadic teachers may provide a starting point for this work, as will strong links to COL’s work in its Open Schooling initiative.

3. **COL should look to take existing work to scale.** COL has developed some world-class materials for certificates, diplomas and degrees. Nine people asked whether there was a way of leveraging these materials through VUSSC or other mechanisms to make these available across the Commonwealth and to secure greater recognition through the Transnational Qualification Framework. “It seems a shame to see these materials as captured within a national boundary,” said one interviewee. While many of these materials are OER, the point being made was that the impact the materials could have was minimized by the current conceptions of use.

None of these suggestions was based on a criticism of current use. Rather, there was a genuine desire to see COL’s work in this area having a greater impact on practice.

The impact evaluation also identified opportunities to strengthen partnerships (e.g., in Sri Lanka). COL’s strategy in its Teacher Education initiative has been to leverage partnerships. It may need to do so in a focused way if it wishes to take MOOCs to scale as a response to the challenges of achieving teacher quality in developing nations of the Commonwealth.

### 4.6 Conclusion

Teacher Education is a “quiet success” for COL. It is a respected area of COL’s work and has had a significant impact on several teacher education organizations. There is much more to do to extend this impact and to build out models that affect those who are working in schools but are not qualified, and those who intend to qualify through more formal training.
5 HIGHER EDUCATION

Estimate of Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score: Policy work (1 = low / 5 = high impact)</th>
<th>Score: Courses and programs (e.g., CEMBA/CEMPA)</th>
<th>Score: Capacity building</th>
<th>Score: COL-RIM</th>
<th>Score: Chairs program</th>
<th>Score: RETRIDOL</th>
<th>Score: Publications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Individuals</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Institutions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Communities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment

Higher education is a complex area and COL has sought to have impact through a variety of routes (regional centres, study tours, capacity building, extensive and respected work on quality, Chairs, support for policy, OER-focused work). But the impression left is of a piece-meal approach to impact. COL needs to focus firmly on one or two things in its Higher Education initiative for it to have significant impact.

5.1 THEORY OF CHANGE

There is no clear theory of change for COL’s work in its Higher Education initiative other than some basic tenets: increasing access to quality online and distance learning and OER through a variety of means. More specifically, in the 2012–2015 period, COL intended to work on the following matters:

- Support the development and implementation of ODL policy, both at the national and the institutional levels
- Provide technical assistance to new open universities and support the transition of conventional institutions to dual mode
- Strengthen leadership and entrepreneurial skills development for both women and men in higher education
- Ensure the development of robust systems in higher education institutions through the implementation of low-cost quality assurance models
- Support the adoption and use of OER

The aim was to secure specific outcomes documented in the logframes and business plans for higher education. This work is very process and outcome focused.

When asked, few interviewees could articulate the theory of change in relation to this initiative, including the present and immediate past Education Specialist. Several Board members made clear that this was an area that COL “should not abandon,” as higher education provided part of the rationale for
both the creation of COL in 1988 and its ongoing voluntary funding. However, those same interviewees found it difficult to outline the impact they expected COL to have in higher education given the complexity of higher education systems and the nature of decision-making within colleges and universities.

At best, COL seeks to be a “lighthouse” for evidence-based innovation that can make a difference to access, quality and learning outcomes. In one statement, COL has said it is engaged in "strengthening institutions in developing Commonwealth countries that are striving to provide affordable higher education to larger numbers of their citizens.”

5.2 Key Practices
Under the Higher Education initiative, COL is engaged in the following practices:

- Supporting policy development (national, regional and institutional) with respect to ODL and OER
- Supporting gender-inclusive courses, programs and practices
- Supporting evidence-based research, social networking, conferences, workshops and Web-based advocacy
- Supporting leadership development activities aimed at increasing the institutional adoption and use of ODL and OER
- Support for a quality assurance practice framework and process known as COL Review and Improvement Model (COL-RIM), which has been described as a “do it yourself” quality assurance process built on best practices and which uses external verifiers and specific tools for institutional self-assessment
- Supporting a Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA program and a program in Legislative Drafting. COL acts as lead for these programs, which are delivered locally by partners.
- Conducting sector reviews and audits for post-secondary education aimed at supporting strategic planning, policy development and the expansion of ODL/OER, including the development of new open universities and the strengthening of existing open institutions
- Supporting capacity building for ODL and OER course and program development
- Supporting COL Research Chairs. Eight Chairs in OER are planned. Six were in place when this impact evaluation was undertaken.
- Supporting the Regional Training and Research Institute for ODL (RETRIDOL) in Nigeria
- Engaging in regional and international higher education networks

At any one time, COL is active in between 20 and 30 Commonwealth countries in relation to higher education. With the advent of COL MOOCs (which began in 2013 as COL offerings), the range of countries and individuals touched by COL’s work in higher education will markedly increase.
5.3 Evidence of Impact
Impact varies by the activity within this portfolio. For example, COL-RIM is intended to impact institutions, and there is good evidence that the CEMBA/CEMPA impacts both individuals and institutions. In the following sections, we review impacts for each component of the Higher Education portfolio based on available reports, interviews and responses to the Challenge Dialogue.

5.3.1 Impact on Individuals
*Growth of ODL and OER as engines for the “massification” of higher education*
A key task for all who have worked in this initiative since the 1970s has been to expand access to and success in higher education, especially for under-represented groups. COL’s work in higher education has been focused on this and its relentless commitment to advocacy for open education is part of the reason the Commonwealth has been so successful in growing institutions committed to open admission. COL works behind the scenes with governments and influencers, and its work is often not visible though the results are tangible.

The re-opening of the National Open University of Nigeria in 2001 following its closure in 1984 was influenced in part by the tireless work of COL.31 The expansion of higher-education institutions in India (in addition to IGNOU, there are now 13 accredited open universities), Malaysia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Tanzania, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Cyprus and Mauritius is also due in small part to the influence COL has had through ministerial meetings, policy forums and networking. This work is noted here to recognize that the impact of many individuals often goes unnoticed but is very real. Even a small change in the participation rate represents a real impact on a large number of individuals.

*Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA (CEMBA/CEMPA)*
The impact evaluators met with alumni, faculty and current students of this program in Sri Lanka, Jamaica and Malaysia. It was evident that the program, despite some challenges of curriculum currency and relevancy, had a significant impact on its learners in both career terms and in terms of life-long learning. Several graduates are now pursuing doctoral programs and some had secured significant and substantial promotions in organizations that supported their graduate work or through employment in another organization. One person said, “I can honestly say that the ripple effects of being on such an important Commonwealth program have been felt in all areas of my life.”

*Legislative Drafting*
This program, which has now also been adapted by Athabasca University as a post-baccalaureate diploma program (see here), seeks to support those who have a responsibility for this work to become more proficient in drafting laws, regulations and ordinances. The impact evaluation team met with some who teach on this program in Vanuatu and many alumni and teachers in Samoa. It was evident that the program had significantly enhanced their proficiency, promoted deeper respect for their work and created a sense of community among legislative drafters in the Pacific region. One person said, “This program showed me the way to significantly enhance the professionalism of our work.” A faculty member at the University of the South Pacific is leaving the academic community to focus more extensively on this work because it “this so much meets a need for so many of my colleagues I will dedicate myself full-time [to its pursuit].”

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31 Interviews with Nigerian officials and former President/CEOs of COL.
5.3.2 Impact of Institutions

Quality assurance tool kits, best practice exemplars and COL-RIM

From its inception, COL’s work on quality — its tool kits, case studies, guidelines and the COL-RIM process — have been instrumental in shaping both institutional quality practices with respect to ODL (and now OER) as well as quality assurance practices at a national level. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) of India, created by the University Grants Commission in 1994, was heavily influenced by COL’s work on quality. The first Director explained in an interview that the building blocks of some of the early work to create quality assurance and a quality culture came from COL. In 2007, in partnership with COL, NAAC produced a quality assurance tool kit for teacher education, which remains influential to this day. Similar comments were made by quality assurance bodies in Kenya, South Africa and the Caribbean.

While many parties have now moved “past where COL is” (as at least two interviewed put it), most acknowledged that the starting point for their work with respect to quality assurance and ODL and OER was COL.

Capacity building

COL as an organization — not just through its Education Specialist in Higher Education — has worked to develop the capacity of higher education institutions to adopt and adapt ODL and OER and to design, develop, deploy and deliver flexible learning for credit. Each time COL engages in capacity building, it is directly influencing not just the individuals attending workshops, boot camps and related events, but the social networks influenced by those individuals. But in its Higher Education initiative, COL has gone further. It has worked to develop the capacity of institutional leaders (Vice Chancellors, Provosts and others), including over 100 in Africa, to leverage ODL as part of the strategic work of their institutions. Through RETRIDOL, located in the National Open University of Nigeria, 300+ people have been trained in the use of ODL in 2012–2015, with over 250 trained in ODL practices during each of those three-year periods.

An especially important focus for this work has been to expand the gender-inclusiveness of higher education, in terms of access and of pedagogy and content. The holders of the gender cross-cutting position with COL have worked closely with successive Education Specialists to build a deeper understanding of gender as an issue and an opportunity in all that COL does. There is much more to be done here, especially in some regions.

In interviews in several institutions, the issue of Higher Education capacity building was seen as needing “patient capital.” For example, at the University of Technology in Jamaica, COL’s persistence has moved the institution from being a small player with respect to ODL to seeing ODL as central to its future and core to its strategic plan. As the then Vice Chancellor said, “COL never gave up on us — and now we see the future as moving to being more of a dual mode player — but it will take some time!!”

Commonwealth Executive CEMBA/CEMPA

For at least four of the participating delivery institutions (Open University of Sri Lanka, National Open University of Nigeria, Wawasan Open University and the University College of the Caribbean), this program is a key financial engine for the well-being of their business schools and important for their brand position. For at least one, it is the basis of the institution’s well-being. By participating in this program, faculty has exposure to collaborative course and professional development beyond that which the institution could provide on its own. From a brand standpoint, being part of a global network and
being able to leverage the Commonwealth brand brings dividends beyond student numbers and revenue. As one person said, “This program provides us with credibility for all that we do....”

Legislative Drafting
COL’s program has helped stimulate and expand the work of the Pacific Legislative Drafters Technical Forum, held annually in the region. The program is also supported strongly by the University of the South Pacific, and Athabasca University has adapted the program for a post-baccalaureate diploma. The alumni in Samoa meet regularly to share best practices. The work of these graduates can have a profound impact on the laws, regulations and court systems in their respective jurisdictions. There is strong support for the program from those directly engaged in its operation.

COL Chairs
The impact of the UNESCO-COL Chairs varies considerably, from significant to negligible. For significant impact, we can see the development of OER policies and practices in both the emerging and developed nations (such as Canada) of the Commonwealth. Professor Rory McGreal heads an initiative aimed at significantly increasing the availability of OER to all post-secondary students in Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan. For many other COL Chair positions, there is little to show, though the investment involved is minimal.

Other organizations are questioning the value of supporting specific persons versus supporting specific outcomes. It may be time for COL to revisit the value and return on investment it secures from these positions.

Research and engagement
COL publishes papers, books, monographs, a journal (Learning for Development), a newsletter (Connections), operational guides and audio and video resources as well as hosts a conference every two years (Pan-Commonwealth Forum [PCF]) at which papers are presented following peer review. It has also offered courses on research32 and, since 2013, has been using MOOCs. It is difficult to know what impact these substantial activities have, other than they have helped to establish COL as a thought leader and “go-to” organization for the ODL and OER evidence base for institutional development.

According to a great many interviewees, these contributions represent COL’s work in supporting “a movement and commitment to open, distance and flexible approaches to learning based on sound examples and systematic practice.” Another person said, “While some may see these as academic resources, these are precisely the kind of resources that most influence practice in higher education.” Others point to the “trigger” these provide — especially PCF — for lasting social networks. This work is “brand building work” and, as some people observed, it “may need to be approached more strategically than seems to be the case at present.” A great many interviewees commented on the need for COL to “significantly and dramatically” improve its Web presence and use of social media.

Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDOL)
COL has been supporting RETRIDOL since August 2003. RETRIDOL has had a patchy history, as each of the outcome evaluation reports produced in the period 2006–2015 has shown. A substantial monitoring and evaluation study was conducted in 2010. It suggested that RETRIDOL should more closely resemble CEMCA if it was to achieve its potential, severing ties with National Open University of Nigeria and

32 Practitioner Research and Evaluation Skills Training (PREST); see www.col.org/resources/publications/Pages/detail.aspx?PID=347
become an independent organization. A Board report by the Education Specialist in March 2012 stated that if RETRIDOL was to be sustained, new strategies were needed. The report maintained that RETRIDOL was not operating in full alignment with the strategic intentions of COL, either in terms of reach (not enough activity outside Nigeria) or scope (lack of focus on mainstreaming gender and too narrow a focus on selected elements of ODL).

RETRIDOL has had an impact on individuals and some institutions through capacity-building work, but few could point to major achievements in West Africa (though several interviewees praised the capacity-building work and its impact on their institution). Its planned journal has since improved, releasing at least one annual publication during the past three years.

The value of such regional initiatives is questionable, and no one who contributed their voices to this impact assessment felt that they demonstrated any value to COL, with the distinct exception of CEMCA.

5.3.3 Impact on Communities
A key part of COL’s strategic intentions with respect to its Higher Education initiative has been to grow access to, and success in, higher education through the use of ODL and OER. A key mechanism for enabling this expansion of post-secondary systems has been work on policy and strategic commitment by governments.

Clear successes in which COL can be seen to have had a role have occurred in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Seychelles, Papua New Guinea, Uganda, Cameroon, Kenya, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) nations, Sri Lanka, Zambia, Ghana and Guyana. All have policies and commitments with respect to ODL, some of which are very significant in terms of their impact on access. It is through this work that COL’s societal impact from its work in higher education can be understood. It set out to increase access and has worked diligently to do so.

VUSSC is treated as a separate initiative, but needs to be mentioned here since some 34 four countries engaged in VUSSC have not only accepted ODL and OER but have gone further and are seeking to promote learner and labour mobility through the Transnational Qualifications Framework. These are significant achievements in which COL, as part of a team, played a significant role.

5.4 The Program Model and Scalability
COL’s work under its Higher Education initiative is not a program but a collection of activities, each contributing to promoting ODL and OER and improving access to, and success in, higher education throughout the Commonwealth, especially for under-represented groups.

Scalability and sustainability are therefore problematic, especially when VUSSC is treated as a separate and distinct activity.

|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------------------|
| • 250 trained in ODL and 16 in instructional design | • 9 partners offer CEMBA/MPA and course revisions completed | • COL-RIM completed in 7 institutions  
• Over 3,300 students enrolled in | • Increased access to, and success in, higher education as a result of ODL and OER initiatives enabled by COL |

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| 250 enrolments in CEMBA/CEMPA, and 26 graduates | COL-RIM in use in 6 institutions and widely respected as a process; 2 more scheduled for 2011/2012 | CEMBA/CEMPA, with a growing % of females |
| 77 Legislative Drafting students, with 17 completions | Legislative Drafting continues to grow | 3 MOOCs launched in 2013, with more planned |
| Sector reviews in Cameroon, Seychelles, PNG, Uganda | RETRIDOL problematic and almost dormant | National ODL policies adopted in Sri Lanka and a regional strategy developed for CARICOM |
| COL-RIM developed and completes reviews in 2 institutions | 4 institutions adopt ODL | Quality policies and processes in place at 14 institutions |
| WikiEducator launched, involving 1,700 individuals, 50% of whom committed to development of materials | RETRIDAL active in Nigeria and other parts of Africa | Expansion of ODL and OER courses and programs in Commonwealth higher education institutions, measured as a % of all courses and programs available |
| | | Increased volume of modular courses, making access more available and flexible for learning for under-represented groups in high education |
| | | COL seen as a “go-to” organization for advice and policy guidance on, and innovation in, evidence-based change |
| | | Policy adoption and implementation of gender mainstreaming: number of countries with ODL, OER and gender mainstreaming policies and implementation guides |
| | | Extent of collaborative program development among higher educational institutions within and between Commonwealth nations |
| | | Growing volume of peer reviewed research papers and grants for ODL and OER research in Commonwealth higher education institutions |

What could move to scale are new approaches to course and program development, new approaches to assessment, and the systematic development of OER focused on skills.

It should be noted that VUSSC and its contribution to the Higher Education initiative are treated separately in this evaluation, but clearly the two initiatives are related. The impact evaluation of VUSSC is discussed in the next section of this report.

### 5.5 Improving Impact

Higher education is a difficult space to secure impact. Many competing forces pressing on colleges and universities are seeking to influence the strategy and practice of these institutions. Governments, too, are under pressure to both continue the “massification” of higher education and improve quality while keeping access affordable — not just for students but also for taxpayers. COL has built an effective, focused reputation for diligent work in ODL and OER in higher education and now needs to think through its strategic intentions for the next six-year planning period. As in past outcome evaluations, respondents were more critical of COL’s work in this initiative than any other one. Higher Education has also been subject to fewer monitoring and evaluation reviews than the other initiatives have.
From the interviews, workshops and feedback from the Challenge Dialogue, five specific suggestions emerged for improving the potential of the Higher Education initiative to have impact:

1. **COL should systematically review the return on investment it receives from each of its activities in Higher Education and determine which activity should remain core and which COL can begin to exit from through strengthened partner roles.** For example, the CEMBA/CEMPA and Legislative Drafting programs have achieved a level of maturity that should reduce COL’s direct involvement. COL-RIM could have a stronger user-pay component, as suggested by the outcome evaluation (2012–2015). There are also opportunities for consolidation and focus between Teacher Education, Higher Education and VUSSC.

2. **COL should recognize that it is engaged in a social movement to transform higher education.** Access, gender-inclusiveness, improved outcomes, affordability and flexibility should be its core concerns. Its current publications and related offering present it as a research centre seeking to influence governments and academics through evidence-based research, policy work and capacity building. If it is to have greater impact, it needs to consider shifting to being more of a backbone organization aimed at securing social impact through evidence-based activities, social marketing and leveraging of partnerships within the Commonwealth. It also needs to engage with more partners who are pursuing similar ends.

3. **COL should develop an OER for the VUSSC, Higher Education and TVSD initiatives, with a focus on the most-needed resources for the skills in highest demand—skills that would aid economic and social development.** As person said, “Rather than COL’s OER work being ‘bits and pieces,’ why not focus on 10–12 skills a year that would support the regional economic initiatives across the Commonwealth?” These skills could include high-level undergraduate and graduate skills linked to technical and vocational skills in health, education, community development, business and entrepreneurship and eldercare.

4. **COL should focus on three or four major activities that have strategic implications for the whole of the sector within the Commonwealth, rather than spreading COL thinly across so many projects in so many places.** “Less is more” was a recurring theme in almost all interviews associated with higher education. For example, launching an initiative to rethink how students are assessed (suggested by five interviewees), and building on new approaches to assessment and developments in analytics could be of significance to the agenda of many institutions that are moving past the early stages of ODL and OER development. New approaches to course design that use the techniques of rapid course development could also speed up design and creation and deployment of ODL that makes use of OER. Have “flagships rather than many small boats” was how one interviewee expressed the need for focus.

5. **COL should significantly shift gears in its use of the tools it recommends and promotes if it is truly seeking to be an agent of change and transformation in higher education.** COL’s use of social media, the Web, community of practice resources and related networking tools is poor and does not provide a good practice base for innovative approaches to engagement.

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34 For a description of a backbone organization, see Stanford Social Innovation Review’s 4-part series at www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/understanding_the_value_of_backbone_organizations_in_collective_impact_1

involvement and change. “Many others,” said one senior official in government, “do a much better job of engagement through social media and the web than COL does.

5.6 Conclusion
No interviewee suggested that COL should end its work in higher education. Almost all people suggested the need for focus, a more strategic approach, and the development of better tools for engagement. Some challenged whether the returns on investment for the work in this sector were strong enough to sustain it. “What COL needs,” said person, “is a rethink of this work.” Another said, “Busy does not mean effective.”
6 Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

Estimate of Impact

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<th>Score</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Impact on Individuals</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Impact on Institutions</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>Impact on Communities</td>
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Estimate of Impact Score (1 = low / 5 = high impact)

Comment

VUSSC is a central activity for COL in that it involves 34 countries and a great many post-secondary institutions. Ensuring its success is vital to COL’s strategic intentions. While the VUSSC initiative had many achievements and clear impacts, much more needs to be done to leverage it within the Commonwealth. It also needs a secure, stable funding model.

6.1 Theory of Change

As a mentor, coach and guide to the Management Committee of VUSSC and partner institutions, COL seeks to support the development of co-operatively developed, OER modular programs that states are free to use and that are readily transferable and recognized through a Transnational Qualifications Framework (the development of which COL facilitated). To enable these program developments, COL engages in capacity-building boot camps and workshops, facilitation of policy and quality assurance workshops, strategic planning and related management activities. COL also leverages the support of other COL specialists — for example, in eLearning, gender, Teacher Education and TVSD — to support innovative thinking and connectivity to other initiatives.

The basic theory of change is that all states in the Commonwealth can be contributors and not just consumers of learning materials and programs for the public good, provided they engage in systematic and focused, deliberate collaboration. In this sense, VUSSC is a backbone activity for COL: it represents a significant contribution to the Commonwealth development agenda and fully leverages all of COL’s skills and competences. It is an example of COL showing leadership in the use of innovative approaches to learning in support of development.

Not part of the agenda for VUSSC, though some would like it to be, is the development of pan-Commonwealth credentials. VUSSC has ruled out becoming a qualifications-awarding agency. Learning modules developed by VUSSC are delivered by local institutions and accredited by them. Nine interviewees felt it was time to revisit this, given the development of “unbundling” within higher education.

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36 Seventeen of the 49 people interviewed about VUSSC felt that in any future development of VUSSC, the issue of credentialing should be reconsidered, especially in light of the unbundling of higher education.

37 This is the term being used to refer to the idea that development of courses is separated from delivery of these courses and that the assessment of learning and competencies can be separated from the work of teaching and instruction.
education. One suggested that VUSSC could develop competency-based assessments administered regionally, along the lines of Western Governors University in the USA.\(^{38}\)

### 6.2 Key Practices

The small states of the Commonwealth face particular challenges in education, especially beyond school. These include:

- the problem of scale (few states among these nations are big enough to offer the range of programs and courses that may be needed to meet the development needs of the nation)
- the problem of capacity (few states have the capacity to design, develop, deploy and deliver ODL programs and OER within their nation)
- the problem of consequences (higher education is often a route to leaving a small state for larger and more varied opportunities elsewhere, mainly due to the level of youth unemployment).

The last challenge is particularly problematic in Jamaica, where some 85% of those who do secure a degree or similar qualification leave the island to secure full-time employment.\(^ {39}\)

Twenty-eight Ministers of Education of the small states of the Commonwealth agreed in October 2003 to create a collaborative framework for the co-operative development of courses and programs.\(^ {40}\) They have since been joined by eight more states. More recently (in April 2010), they adopted the Transnational Qualifications Framework by which they each agree to mutually recognize programs and credentials, thus permitting a high degree of learner and labour mobility. COL acts as a managing agent and facilitator for this work, which is directed and overseen by a VUSSC Management Committee and related sub-committees.

In reviewing the work done under the VUSSC initiative since 2003, we can see these significant actions\(^ {41}\):

- Challenging and coaching institutions and small states to imagine a different future for education, one that involves systematic and collaborative approaches to ODL and OER
- Supporting the strategic role of the VUSSC Management Committee and related sub-committees, acting as a secretariat
- Leveraging emerging technologies to enable access to rich learning resources even when Internet connectivity is problematic. For example, Aptus is in use in Vanuatu where Internet access is often problematic.\(^ {42}\)
- Using monitoring and evaluation to provide an evidence base for decision-making. VUSSC has an embedded strategy for monitoring and evaluation.
- Offering workshops, boot camps (extended training and development sessions), and facilitated policy and quality assurance sessions to build capacity for ODL and OER among the small states. There have been 53 such events since 2006 involving some 1,677 participants from 31 countries.

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\(^ {40}\) The proposal they approved is available at [www.col.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/VUSSC_EM-Report_200306.pdf](http://www.col.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/VUSSC_EM-Report_200306.pdf)


• Working to ensure that gender issues are addressed in VUSSC activities and programs
• Pursuing and supporting key developments that will sustain VUSSC. Examples include the Transnational Qualifications Framework, funding for the VUSSC strategic plan, and support for OER.
• Maintaining communications through both frequent face-to-face sessions, a Web presence and other means
• Actively promoting VUSSC as an example of collaborative approaches to ODL and OER development and acting as a champion for VUSSC in international and national settings
• Supporting the Moodle platform for courses and programs delivered through VUSSC

The learning modules and programs offered by VUSSC include programs in entrepreneurship, distance education, disaster management, eco-tourism and information technology.

VUSSC needs to significantly improve its Web presence, its portal and its social media communications strategies. The main COL website VUSSC pages are dated (2013 being the most recent document); the VUSSC resource page is only partly functioning; VUSSC’s Facebook page is rarely updated; and the VUSSC website has an upcoming event dated 2012 on the opening page. It seems amateur.

6.3 Evidence of Impact

6.3.1 Impact on Individuals
Several specific individuals who had attended boot camps or benefited from accessing a VUSSC program made clear that the experience had been transformative for them. One said, "My imagination was ‘set on fire’ by the boot camp and what we might do with OER and ODL." As well, a successful student who took the Starting Your Own Business course is now a very successful exporter of food products from Trinidad & Tobago, and he is now mentoring five other individuals in business start-ups. While the monitoring and evaluation report shows that boot camps have had varying impact on individuals,43 reports are generally favourable. A key impact has been the development of ongoing collaborative networks created and sustained by individuals or students.

Some 49,000 individuals had completed boot camps, workshops or related activities for VUSSC by December 2014.44 Some 723 students were enrolled in VUSSC programs.

6.3.2 Impact on Institutions
VUSSC is dependent on the institutional capacity of VUSSC states to adopt and adapt course modules, programs and OER developed through VUSSC collaborations, and to integrate ICT into their work. Interviews were conducted in key institutions and with government officials in Vanuatu, Samoa, Jamaica, and Trinidad & Tobago and with a gathering of VUSSC-related institutions during the 7th Pan-

43 For example, see the section on boot camps in the 2008 evaluation report. Available at www.colfinder.org/vussc/VUSSC_2008_Interim_Evaluation_Report_by_Dunlop.pdf
44 This calculation is based on the assumption (supported by survey findings) that 80% of those trained in boot camps and additional VUSSC capacity-building workshops and courses (excluding the 723 students enrolled in VUSSC formal certificate/diploma/degree programs) will go on and train an average of 50 people. The base of direct contact is 1,903 participants/attendees/students. Of this, 944 (80% of 1,180) will likely go on and train others (944 x 50 = 47,200). This second wave of contact (47,200) plus the base (1,903) equals 49,103.
Commonwealth Forum in Nigeria. These interviews included those with leadership of University of the South Pacific, the University of the West Indies, Roytec (Trinidad & Tobago) and the University of the Indian Ocean. VUSSC is not core to any of these institutions except Roytec.

There is a growing use of VUSSC materials and OER within institutions. There are 11 institutions in eight countries using OER to offer qualifications (including undergraduate and graduate programs, certificate and diploma programs) and a growing use of ICT in the delivery of programs in 10 VUSSC countries, with an additional six planning to do so in the near future. New courses are being developed (three in the last three-year planning cycle) and courses are also increasingly gender inclusive. As was observed in the 2011 outcome evaluation (see 259–268 at pages 38–39), progress on course and program development is considerably slower than many anticipated — a point reiterated in many of the interviews conducted for this impact evaluation.

Five observations emerge from the interviews and feedback from the Challenge Dialogue:

1. Adaptive capacity for the use of ODL and OER varies significantly within and between institutions but is growing gradually. Since VUSSC began, boot camps and other developments have enabled capacity to be expanded, but VUSSC has yet to reach a “tipping point” at which OER and ODL become preferred modes of delivery within the small states.

2. VUSSC competes with other interests in the work of institutions and is easily marginalized. One key government official and several in leadership roles noted that VUSSC is not “top of mind” and is not embodied in the strategic intentions of many institutions.

3. Many interviewees were beginning to see that the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) provided a significant step forward for VUSSC programs as well as for all institutions, especially now that TQF is linked to the European Qualifications Framework, Pacific Registry of Qualifications and Standards, CARICOM, Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Southern African Development Community. This means that 85 countries are able to recognize TQF-approved programs. Six programs are now TQF approved, with more in the pipeline for approval.

4. As programs, modules and OER developed collaboratively under the VUSSC umbrella expand, the impact of VUSSC expands proportionately: more programs equals more impact, not just through additional program capacity but from the sense of momentum such developments create. It is therefore critical that VUSSC find ways of accelerating program development. VUSSC is as much a “change agency” as it is a collaborative program support network. The fact that 36 nations are now engaged — up from the founding 28 — signals that a movement is occurring.

5. Through its Education Specialist, COL continues to coach VUSSC to a significant degree. While the Management Committee is the “owner” of VUSSC, VUSSC’s continuance, both in terms of funding and in terms of relentless pursuit of this opportunity, remains largely dependent on COL. While acknowledging that ownership needs to shift to member states, few interviewees thought that VUSSC could sustain itself (certainly in terms of programs and courses) without the work of COL.
VUSSC is just now beginning to make a difference to the way some institutions think about their work. At Roytec in Trinidad & Tobago, this is clearly the case. The young, vibrant institution dependent on innovation and development for revenue has embraced VUSSC and is making it work.

### 6.3.3 Impact on Communities

No evidence is available to discern impact on communities in the small states of the Commonwealth.

The proposition in the 2007–2013 business plan is that VUSSC could significantly increase access to and success in higher education for the small states of the Commonwealth — a 20% gain in overall enrolment attributable to VUSSC (see page 12 of the plan, points 4 to 7). Both the 2011–2013 and the more recent VUSSC evaluation reports do not assess directly whether this has been achieved, though it is clear that a great many individuals in VUSSC countries have been able to benefit directly or indirectly from contact with VUSSC.

### 6.4 The Program Model and Scalability

VUSSC has developed gradually, painstakingly and deliberately, as should any multi-lateral collaborative organization involving so many countries and their institutions. The highlights of the VUSSC journey to date are summarized below.

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<td>• 2000: 14th Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers in Halifax, Canada, asks COL to develop a proposal</td>
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<td>• 2002: Proposal for VUSSC distributed to Commonwealth Ministers of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 2003: Ministers of Education meeting in Seychelles; COL invited to manage continued development of VUSSC initiative</td>
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<td>• 2003: 15th Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers in</td>
<td>• 2005: Orientation and planning meeting on Virtual University, Flexible Learning held in Singapore</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 2006: Second strategy meeting of Interlocutors and Institutional Managers agreed on; Letter of Intent</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 2006: Mauritius boot camp</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 2006: Meeting of Interlocutors in Jamaica</td>
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<td>• 2007: Singapore boot camp</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 2007: Trinidad &amp; Tobago and Samoa boot camps</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 2008: Seychelles</td>
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<td>• 4 online training and development workshops (boot camps)</td>
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<td>• Development of design templates to speed learning module development</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 8 new VUSSC courses developed</td>
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<td>• 6 countries offer VUSSC-developed courses</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 2009: VUSSC Management Committee formed and begins strategic and operational management, supported by COL</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 12 institutions use gender-inclusive OER to offer new certificate, diploma or degree programs, 4 of which are TQF registered</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reference frameworks secured to align total quality management (TQM) with related qualifications frameworks for 41 countries</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 9 institutions significantly increase ICT use so as to increase access to learning in their communities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Number of VUSSC course modules in use and leading to student completion throughout the Commonwealth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Programs registered with TQF and used to aid learner and labour mobility</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The extent to which VUSSC programs can be seen to contribute to social and economic development in the small states of the Commonwealth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Annual improvement in post-secondary education attainment rates in each of the small states of the Commonwealth</td>
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</table>
Several interviewees and all of those who responded specifically to VUSSC issues in the Challenge Dialogue expressed concern about the slow rate of progress of collaborative program development. One person who was closely involved in the launch of VUSSC called it “the pregnant elephant” which was taking a long time to gestate: “Progress is painstakingly slow, almost to the point of [my] wondering whether it will ever reach a mature state.” While the achievements to date were acknowledged, the perception was that much more could be done much faster.

There are two models at work here. The first is the model for collaborative modular course and program development followed by local deployment. The second is the referencing process for the TQF and the use of the TQF to support learner and labour mobility in the small states. What COL and VUSSC are seeking is an acceleration in program development that will feed the TQF process. AS COL is keenly aware, both are complex. COL is also aware (and has been for some time) of the program development challenge. Rapid course development and leveraging of OER need to occur to build modules and programs faster. Online training for this work, the use of design templates and the use of “rapid response” design are methods already being explored.

The TQF took time to be aligned with existing national, regional and international qualifications and quality assurance frameworks. Now that programs developed by VUSSC are being referenced and recognized, the hope is that this work too will accelerate.

### 6.5 IMPROVING IMPACT

From the interviews and feedback from the Challenge Dialogue, six specific suggestions emerged for improving the potential of VUSSC to have impact.

1. **COL should work to engage institutions at the highest level in committing to ODL and OER.**
   
   This will lead to improved outcomes and impact over what can be achieved with generalized, non-specific interest. Securing strategic commitment is critical for VUSSC’s next stage of growth.

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45 See [www.col.org/resources/crsMaterials/VUSSCrsMat/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.col.org/resources/crsMaterials/VUSSCrsMat/Pages/default.aspx) for access to learning materials developed by VUSSC.

46 Sir John Daniel, speaking as President and CEO of COL in 2008 said, “The three-week workshop model is not sustainable in the longer term because it is too expensive. We trust that there is now, or shortly will be, a large enough cadre of skilled educators who can work in the online world.” See [www.col.org/resources/speeches/2008presentations/2008-VUSSC/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.col.org/resources/speeches/2008presentations/2008-VUSSC/Pages/default.aspx)

2. **COL and the VUSSC Management Committee should target policy commitment for ODL, OER and TQF in each of the small states.** Government policy commitment to ODL and OER is key to the next phase of development of VUSSC.

3. **COL should see VUSSC not as a specialist function but as a team effort, and all of COL should play significant roles at different times in supporting VUSSC.** VUSSC is a flagship for COL’s work. It showcases ICT, gender-inclusive and modular course development, regional deployment strategies and effective leveraging of policy to change practice (e.g., TQF). VUSSC should be the focus for COL’s higher education efforts.

4. **COL should look at imaginative ways to increase its capacity to make more programs available faster.** Examples of how to could get course modules and programs into use more quickly include: systematic use of MOOCs to boost skills prior to boot camps; focused boot camps using the tools of rapid course development; more extensive use of template-based design and development; adoption of “teach less, learn more”; full integration of the existing OER bank; and use of “smart” assessment tools. Such effort is key for sustaining momentum and increasing the use of the TQF.

5. **COL should work to strengthen the sense of community.** Close to 50,000 people have been touched in some way by VUSSC, including over 723 students. This is a significant alumni who could become advocates and ambassadors for VUSSC and, subsequently, of the TQF. Systematic approaches to alumni development would encourage others to seek out and participate in the future work of VUSSC.

6. **COL and the VUSSC Management Committee should look carefully at strategic alliances and partnerships aimed at securing long-term financing for VUSSC.** VUSSC is poised for partnership. Major philanthropic and social enterprise organizations globally may be willing to support the move to scale that VUSSC now seems to be able to achieve.

### 6.6 Conclusion

VUSSC is a significant achievement for the Commonwealth and for COL, but it needs to “step up its game” to have significant impact on learning for development in the nations it serves. The ingredients are there — modular, gender-inclusive courses aligned with local, national and regional needs and coupled with a framework for learner and labour mobility. The challenge now is to increase the use of what exists, rapidly expand the program base, and secure strategic and policy traction to increase scale. This is a task for the whole of COL, not just a single Education Specialist. All of the tools available to COL should be deployed to accelerate the achievements possible here.
7 TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (TVSD)

Estimate of Impact

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ongoing evidence of strong impact for many who have used ODL, OER and new approaches to TVET and TVSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Impact varies significantly by location and over time. COL has had a substantial impact on how many institutions offer flexible, modular approaches to skills development and have moved to greater gender inclusiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>While it is clear that TVET and TVSD are having an impact on communities (so many reports to the impact evaluators said so, and some many examples were given), turning this into quantifiable evidence is difficult. The score here reflects this.</td>
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Comment

The work under the TVSD initiative is of critical importance to governments and communities and is showing signs of significant impact. Modular, flexible, competency-based learning using ODL, OER and self-help with mentoring and coaching is paying off in TVSD; and developing more flexible approaches to TVET is producing results for institutions, such as registration growth, higher completions and more opportunities for collaboration. This work is an area of growth and success by COL.

7.1 THEORY OF CHANGE

All of the government officials interviewed as part of this impact assessment stressed the importance of employability skills and skills for entrepreneurship and livelihoods. Sixty percent of the 2 billion Commonwealth citizens aged 29 or under are three times more likely to be unemployed than their older counterparts. Thus, skills are top of mind for Commonwealth nations and key to their development plans. Prolonged youth unemployment is both an economic challenge and a challenge to the resilience of communities. The work under the TVSD initiative is fundamentally about livelihoods of individuals and the resiliency of communities.

COL’s theory of change for its work on skills is that a combination of creative approaches to formal skills development, using ODL, OER and ICT, coupled with imaginative approaches to non-formal education will enable change and development in the sector and enable individuals to improve their livelihood, create support networks and build resilience. COL wants to support opportunities to provide a range of creative, efficient and flexible options for learners to acquire, develop and grow their skills within their local communities. These approaches, which are not widespread across many Commonwealth nations, can lead to improvements in access, gender-inclusiveness, and costs and, at the same time, improve efficiency and the effectiveness of such learning. Such work will also increase the opportunities for learners to earn livelihoods, improve their health and lead to communities with greater resilience.
This work requires not just institutional capacities but also policy commitment and strategic investments at the national, regional and institutional level. It seeks to engage formal learning organizations, NGOs and social network organizations in skills development.

7.2 **Key Practices**
Under the TVSD initiative since 2006, COL has been involved the following key practices:

**Formal education**
- Being a relentless and courageous advocate for ODL, OER and modular-based collaborative learning
- Finding institutional champions and systems champions and nurturing their development through proactive mentoring, coaching and guiding
- Creating learning materials for skills in modular form under a Creative Commons License so that they can be readily used by any organization — educational institution, training agency, NGO, company or individual
- Building capacity for ICT, ODL and OER, instructional design and blended learning
- Developing certification in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in partnership with others
- Encouraging and enabling gender inclusiveness in all aspects of TVSD’s work
- Supporting the development of a community of practice that can quickly share ideas, materials, approaches and lessons learned
- Partnering with institutions, organizations and networks that can accelerate learning and increase access
- Supporting policy development related to ODL, ICT and OER and skills development
- Developing institutional collaborative approaches to curriculum and materials development
- Engaging in systematic, thorough and in-depth evaluation (including value for money)\(^{48}\)

**Non-formal education**
- Being a tireless advocate community-based learning using ODL, OER and ICT
- Creating partnership and alliances with like-minded, value-sharing organizations
- Supporting the uses of low-cost technologies to make knowledge and skills readily available in community settings
- Creating learning materials that are accessible and easy to use and can be used in a variety of different ways (in print, online)

\(^{48}\) The 2015 Final Evaluation of INVEST Africa by Shafika Isaacs is among the most thorough of the evaluation reports undertaken for COL of all the reports we reviewed.
• Supporting the development of self-help and mentoring networks, and encouraging learners to connect to these networks or to create them

7.3 Evidence of Impact

7.3.1 Impact on Individuals
The impact evaluation team was able to meet with institutional leaders, faculty and students (formal and non-formal students) in Kenya (Nairobi and Voi), Vanuatu and Samoa; and interviewed 18 individuals with strong TVSD/TVET roles in Jamaica, Ghana, Nigeria and Sri Lanka. Without exception, all indicated that their work had been significantly changed as the result of COL’s interventions. Faculty members made clear that modular approaches to skills development, the use of ICT, ODL and OER were starting points for the transformation of their teaching. Full- and part-time on-campus students (including the first female construction worker to qualify from Voi) were clear that the modular, flexible and blended learning approaches had both secured their skills and enabled them to study in flexible ways. Non-formal learners were also clear that the self-help networks and mentoring were making a difference to their businesses, employment and livelihoods. All of those interviewed were also committed to improving gender equity in terms of both access to and success in skills development, with students actively seeking out new recruits to ensure that this occurs.

7.3.2 Impact on Institutions
Faculty demonstrated their involvement and committed to modular, blended learning in active class sessions in Voi (Kenya), Samoa and Nairobi. COL’s NGO partner working in Vanuatu was actively engaged in skills development for women and said that the work with COL was “a bedrock on which they want to build.” All of the institutional leaders and faculty members interviewed were, in the words of one institutional leader, “irrevocably committed to ODL and OER as core to our work” and also to gender inclusion. “No talent wasted,” said another person.

Indeed, since 2006 COL has secured a strategic commitment to ODL (adding OER later) from over 125 institutions and networks throughout the Commonwealth, especially through INVEST Africa (13 institutions in six countries). These strategic commitments are from small countries (e.g., Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu) and large countries (e.g., Nigeria, Pakistan and Bangladesh). The growing number of course materials available as OER, enable committed institutions to adopt and adapt these materials and put them quickly to use. As one person said, “It is like a snowball coming down from the mountain in Nepal; each course gathers momentum and speeds us into producing more.”

Key to the strategy being pursued by COL is the development of collaborative institutional networks. In Kenya, the Principals of the technical and vocational institutions are working collaboratively and collectively to enable policy development, sharing of innovations and best practices, and initiation of change. The INVEST Africa network is doing the same. The emphasis on collaboration is a tangible feature of the work in all regions of the Commonwealth, to the point at which many Principals of institutions made clear that this aspect of the work should also be seen as a “breakthrough.” Said one, “While we do compete for scarce resources, we do so from a platform of common interests, shared assumptions and common standards.” These changes have led to significant growth in student registrations, completions and satisfaction, as a well as to gradual improvement in gender inclusiveness.

\[49 \text{ Based on a count from reports to the Board 2006–2015.}\]
In the 2006–2009 period, partner selection and participation was problematic. COL is now focused on working with partners who are willing to invest (even in a limited way) to make success happen. “Skin in the game,” focused commitment and “values-aligned decisions” seem to be the hallmark for successful institutional partnerships. All interviewees showed great respect for COL’s mentoring, coaching, challenging and guiding. One said, “We are often stuck and COL makes sure we get ‘unstuck’ fast.”

7.3.3 Impact on Communities
More evidence is needed to demonstrate the impact of skills development on livelihoods and communities. Many anecdotal stories show that there is a strong link between enhanced skills, ability to earn, health and resilience, but systematic evidence is lacking. The case for a focused approach to TVET and TVSD would be strengthened considerably by tracer studies of those learners engaged in this work one, three and five years after completion.

7.4 The Program Model and Scalability
Highlights of the work under the TVSD initiative are summarized below.

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<tr>
<td>• WikiEducator used to house skills materials accessed by The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Pacific States, Bangladesh and Pakistan</td>
<td>• Curriculum for women’s literacy developed and deployed in India</td>
<td>• COL enables strategic planning for skills in Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>• Employment of skills course completers 1, 2 and 5 years after completion from COL-related institutions, courses and programs</td>
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<td>• Botswana and Tanzania commit to ODL as a means of delivering TVET; joined by Fiji, Nauru, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu focused on Basic Trades for Youth</td>
<td>• Policy development in Solomon Islands and Zambia</td>
<td>• 23 new flexible courses developed in 2012/2013</td>
<td>• Household income comparison of TVET and TVSD completers vs non-completers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bachelor degree in TVET developed by University Education Winneba (Ghana) with COL’s help, and a Special Certificate jointly developed by COL and UTech (Jamaica)</td>
<td>• Capacity building for Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
<td>• Pacific ODL TVET roadmap developed and adopted</td>
<td>• Number of women securing skills education leading to improved livelihoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Policy development in West Africa: Ghana, Kenya, Sierra Leone,</td>
<td>• Beginning of OER as Namibia agrees to share course materials across the Commonwealth</td>
<td>• 35 institutions using modular, flexible learning by 2013</td>
<td>• Range of COL-initiated and -supported skills courses developed and in use by institutions across the Commonwealth, leading to increased and faster completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Curriculum for Community Nurse Education completed and deployed</td>
<td>• 11 new Women in TVET (WITED) chapters established and working to increase women’s participation in TVET</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 7 African institutions move to modular, flexible courses and increase their use of ODL; each show significant growth in enrolment, some as high as 33%</td>
<td>• Significant expansion of skills access for women</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>• Consolidation of INVEST Africa (13 institutions) and a focused strategy for development</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Over 50 new skills development courses</td>
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<td>• University of</td>
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This point is reinforced in the INVEST Africa evaluation, pages 80–81.

This is the measure used by the Education Policy and Data Centre in its impact assessment of non-formal education in 28 developing countries. See www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/The_Extent_and_Impact_of_Non-formal_Education.pdf
Zambia
• NGOs engaged in course development and delivery as active partners with COL.
• Start of INVEST Africa: Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics, Mauritius Qualifications Authority, and National Board of Technical Education Nigeria

Vocational Technology (UNIVOTEC, Sri Lanka) diploma in TVET supported by COL, as is UTech (Jamaica)
• Capacity building for 350 teachers from 2012 to 2015

Evaluation studies suggest modest improvements in the TVSD model, but the key will be building demonstrable gains in a small number of countries (“less is more”) to show how these approaches to both formal and non-formal skills development can have impact, especially on livelihoods. The framework of collaborative approaches to modularization, ODL/OER and ICT in TVET, coupled with the building of non-formal networks for learning, is demonstrably effective (see the INVEST Africa evaluation). Working systematically to develop a range of high-demand skills OER and competency-based assessment methods independent of these resources for skills certification carries significant potential across the Commonwealth.

The challenge now is to achieve even more outstanding results on a national scale. Kenya is already a long way down this road, with six of INVEST Africa institutions based there. Other nations (Sri Lanka, Jamaica) may also provide opportunities for national impact.

7.5 IMPROVING IMPACT
From the interviews and feedback from the Challenge Dialogue, just three specific suggestions emerged for improving the potential of TVSD to have impact — reflecting the strong support for COL’s efforts:

1. Rather trying to work in every developing nation of the Commonwealth, COL should focus its skills work on building a comprehensive, systematic and focused model that others can adopt and adapt to suit their local conditions. This would enable other jurisdictions to see value in new approaches, especially if they are presented with evidence of effectiveness and efficiency. Showing gains in enrolment, outcomes and gender equity aligned with cost-efficiency and faster completion are powerful ways of encouraging adoption by others. COL needs what one person called “a fully elaborated model” that works as “a transformative practice in two or three countries at a scale which creates momentum and commitment from others.”

2. COL should develop (a) substantial sets of OER focused on needed skills in developing nations; and (b) related but independent assessment processes for prior learning/work-based learning so that skills certification can be related to experience, learning or both.
• Skills are skills: the development of quality-assured materials covering high-demand skills as OER would enable all institutions in the Commonwealth to adopt and adapt them on demand, especially if they were systematically aligned with National Qualification Frameworks.

• Rigorous, competency-based assessments are needed for the high-demand skills so that learners can be assessed for transferable skills and so that those who feel they already have the skills and do not need courses can be assessed for their prior or work-based learning. The unbundling of assessment from learning and the use of assessment methods for prior learning could be a further “game changer.” As one respondent said, “So many people have not been to formal education but have real skills and competencies.... We need to assess and certify these and develop much wider understanding of learning.”

3. **COL should, in the countries in which it operates, develop learning and skills alliances with governments, NGOs and the private sector to help resource TVSD, create pathways for learners to enter the workforce, and track outcomes.** COL’s funding of this work is not trivial. In INVEST Africa, COL’s overall investment amounts to about $52,146 per institution over three years. Sharing this cost but also increasing regional and national engagement in the skills agenda could lead to additional benefits: resource sharing, co-operative education, collaboration on materials development, private-sector investment in both skills development and subsequent hiring, ongoing evidence-gathering of efficacy, and so on. As one respondent said, “None of us can do this stuff on our own — we need a network to do this well.... It’s a whole village project, not just a head man.”52 Some nations have such mechanisms in place, which COL needs to connect to; other nations do not.

### 7.6 Conclusion

Increasing the skills of individuals within a community is a necessary precondition for social and economic development, whether those skills relate to personal health and hygiene or to advanced technical skills. Providing the opportunity to develop such skills through flexible, formal learning or through creative approaches to community-based skills development is the challenge COL has set itself. This is a critical area of work according to all government officials interviewed, and must be continued for COL to be relevant to the development goals of nations. It is an area where COL demonstrates its significant commitment to learning for development and can show results

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8 LIFELONG LEARNING FOR FARMERS (L3F)

Estimate of Impact

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Individuals</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Institutions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Impact varies by location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Communities</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Impact varies significantly by location</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comment**

L3F is one the most impactful initiatives sustained by COL. It has engaged in a systematic approach to learning for development, and COL acts as a backbone organization in support of NGOs, self-help and non-profit organizations, banks and other private sector interests to improve the conditions of farmers. L3F is an example of learning for development that deserves the widest possible recognition. It is widely admired as an example of COL’s innovative and creative approaches to non-formal learning.

8.1 THEORY OF CHANGE

Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) seeks to use microfinance and non-formal learning to: strengthen community-based and co-operative local organizations of farmers; focus the attention of farmers on the skills and techniques needed to improve livestock and crop health and yield; partner with farmer organizations, banks and telecommunication companies to sustain this work; and develop the skills and competencies needed for the empowerment of farmers to better connect to, and manage, their supply chains. The strategic intent is to move farming from small-scale, low-yield subsistence farming to more co-operative successful farm operation that sustains communities.

Since many farmers are female, an additional component of this work is to support health-related learning for women that enables them to better manage their physical and family health.

Underlying this focused work is a commitment to use L3F to build resilient and engaged communities and empowered individuals.

8.2 KEY PRACTICES OF L3F

Under the L3F initiative, COL has made extensive and effective use of several important elements:

- Developing learning materials is community-based and supported by experts – A key feature of L3F is that the learning materials used are developed by experts who work with local farmers to ensure focus, clarity and relevance. Engagement is key at all stages of the design, development, deployment and delivery of mLearning resources.
- Non-formal learning is pivotal – Extensive use is made of mobile devices (voice and text messages), radio and other media (including newsprint) rather than classroom-based work. Self-help groups and learning co-operatives are also important for this work.
• Strengthening local institutions and their connectivity is seen as vital – L3F works to support farm co-operatives and farming organizations, and to strengthen their links with financial organizations and farm research organizations (which focus on all aspects of farming, from genomics and plant health to economics and marketing). Through this work, L3F helps the research organizations translate their work into action that will benefit the local institutions.

• NGOs and telecommunications companies are highly engaged (though in differing ways in versions of L3F)

• An approach to learning that balances farming knowledge and skills with business knowledge and personal development enables empowerment and engagement

8.3 Evidence of Impact

8.3.1 Impact on Individuals

Over 245,000 individuals are currently engaged in L3F, the majority of whom are female. Many of the women in Africa are affected by HIV/AIDS. From interviews and documented evidence, it is clear that L3F is changing the lives of many farmers and their families. In Sri Lanka, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, India and Mauritius it is also clear that farming of certain crops, animals, foods and spices has moved from subsistence to export and that this in itself is changing the income levels, health and well-being of individual farmers.

Individual case histories shared with the impact evaluators show that L3F continues to be empowering, having a strong impact on livelihoods and health. As one female Sri Lankan farmer said, “Learning with my telephone and community has changed the lives of my family. We feel secure and confident about our future. We didn’t before.” Income for mushroom farmers in Sri Lanka as a result of L3F has increased (per family) by about R21,000. This directly impacts some 250 families. Similar results are reported for ginger and turmeric farmers, where incomes have risen between 75% and 100% since L3F began.

Evidence from Kenya and Uganda also shows that, as a result of improved income levels and health education, farmers involved in L3F are eating healthier diets, which is positively affecting family health.

The development of L3F in Jamaica (2009 and again in 2014) and Seychelles (2013) is more recent and it is not yet possible to describe impacts there. Development in Papua New Guinea has stalled for complex reasons related more to the nature of the donor economy than to the nature of L3F.

8.3.2 Impact on Institutions

At the institutional level, several local farm institutions in participating countries have been revitalized and are taking an active role in supporting innovation and development for their members, actively promoting non-formal learning and creating stronger links between farmers, banks, NGOs, researchers

53 Some 75 individual farmers were interviewed as part of the impact assessment, and workshops were held with a further 40. Challenge Dialogue and summary impact assessments were obtained from 15 people.


55 This is a re-launch of the work in Jamaica. The impact evaluators spent time with the Jamaican organizations engaged in this work and attended a workshop associated with this work.
and markets. Several are also now more actively involved in “co-operatizing” their organization (e.g., Uganda’s Agricultural Based Innovation System Brokerage Association, which has created two co-operative farming organizations since 2010) and improving supply chain management.

Independent evidence of impact can be seen from the evaluation undertaken by the National Institute of Bank Management (NIBM) in India. It showed that L3F was six times less expensive than the face-to-face training offered to farmers by the banks themselves, yet the income earned by the banks from L3F farmers borrowing money for livestock is eight times that secured from non-L3F borrowers in the region. Indeed, the average net returns were high for L3F borrowers: INR 232,527 compared to INR 131,850 for non-L3F borrowers (a 76% advantage). It is estimated that L3F farmers in 2014 borrowed and paid back 95% of $15 million ($14.25 million), significantly increasing farm capacity and the ability of farmer-led organizations to support this work. This is why 25,000 farmers and their colleagues in NGOs signed a petition asking for an expansion of ODL and L3F-like programs in India on a national scale. In India and certain L3F countries in Africa, this program has had a significant impact on bank lending and support behaviour towards farmers.

In Tamil Nadu, where this work began, the Vidiyal Centre for Social Interaction (a Tamil NGO) has leveraged its connection with L3F to truly engage and empower women in the communities in which they work; and has worked to build true community engagement, resilience and support, helping to strengthen the NGO.

In all, over 117 NGOs are actively engaged in L3F. Fourteen of those people interviewed indicated clearly that L3F had opened their eyes to the ways in which a focused approach to non-formal learning could empower and change farming and leverage resources for community development.

New institutions have been created as a result of L3F. These include (but are not limited to):

- Agricultural Innovation Systems Brokerage Association, which shares innovative developments across Tanzania, Kenya and Ghana
- a savings and credit cooperative (SACCO), called ODLN SACCO, established in Uganda, has 1,100 shareholders and some 40 self-help groups providing financial and other supports to its members
- Table banking (a non-formal kind of institution), which began in Kenya and is being used by some 1,400 persons
- Three marketing associations formed in Kenya, for bananas, soy and orange-fleshed sweet potato, which have and buy-back arrangements with hotels that enable better supply chain management

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57 The cost-benefit ratio of L3F project is 10.01, which indicates that for each rupee spent on the program, Rs 10.0 are generated as the return benefit from the project. The rate of investment on L3F projects was 901% for dairy enterprises (i.e., the program yielded Rs 9.01 for every rupee that the L3F project cost for the dairy enterprise development.
58 See www.col.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/L3FFarmers%20memorandum_India_Nov2010.pdf for a copy of the petition.
• A goat husbandry and processing company has been established in Tamil Nadu with more than 2,000 L3F shareholders, and a second producer company formed, with 600 L3F shareholders.

It takes time for an innovative program like L3F to secure impacts of this kind. However, one sign that these impacts are now better understood is that the decision of Seychelles to adopt L3F was taken independently of COL: COL is supporting, not running, that program.60

8.3.3 Impact on Communities
The clearest impact can be seen where L3F began — in Tamil Nadu. Here, productive agricultural land increased from 25% to 85% between 2004 and 2010,61 with a resultant increase in income and sense of sustained security for these farmers. Ten NGOs are now engaged in L3F, expanding from an initial focus on livestock to a broader focus on seed crops, water quality and community well-being. More critically, engagement and empowerment indicators used by Vidiyal all show significant year-by-year gains.

A longitudinal study of L3F in Tamil Nadu62 shows clearly that:

• Learning in combination with social capital is able to influence the income of the participants.
• Learning and social capital have significant influence on empowering women.

More specifically, that study shows that: “There is a significant difference in the political and psychological empowerment level between three groups. Nearly 95% of the women in L3F have high empowerment score compared to 78.2 % of [those in] self-help groups and 52.9% of [those in] no L3F/no self-help groups.”

In Sri Lanka, during meetings held by the impact evaluators with farmers, it was clear that whole communities were benefiting from the greater security afforded by improved income and health of farmers. Focusing on the growing of ginger and turmeric, area under cultivation increased in just two years (2010–2012) from 2 acres to 70, and the number of farmers has increased from 9 to 150. Mushroom farming is also expanding. Young entrepreneurs are now entering farming and see it as a significant opportunity. Crops are expanding from ginger and turmeric to vanilla and orchids. Banks, having seen a loan of R1.7 million fully repaid in a single growing season, are now willing to invest.

More importantly, from a community perspective, L3F has shifted groups within these farming communities from being inter-personally competitive to being collaborative and co-operative; and from being unwilling to share to partnering on innovation and quickly disseminating new learning. This applies to learning about health, education and other aspects of life as well as to farming practices. As one farmer said, “We are more resilient now as a community than we have ever been.”

8.4 The Program Model and Scalability
L3F has been through a number of iterations, beginning in 2004 in Tamil Nadu.63 The table below shows the scale up of L3F in the period since 2002.

60 COL is offering two capacity-building training workshops. The program is run by a partnership between a government Ministry and a bank.
63 Between 2002 and 2004, COL engaged in a process of review, design and development. The program began formally in 2004 in five villages in Tamil Nadu.
Not all L3F initiatives have been as successful as those in India or Africa. Jamaica and Mauritius, for example, have involved more than one “false start” and L3F did not succeed in terms of the intended model in Papua New Guinea. Each new location requires the forging of new partnerships and alliances, developing systematic focus on both farm productivity and the farmer as a healthy and engaged person and new approaches to farmer collaboration and co-operation.

As the outcome evaluations of 2009, 2011 and 2014 all note, success in one location (e.g., India) does not mean automatic success in another (e.g., Jamaica or Papua New Guinea). Nonetheless, the core elements of the model developed for L3F are showing promise in each region of the Commonwealth except the Pacific.

8.5 IMPROVING IMPACT

From the interviews and feedback from the Challenge Dialogue, four specific suggestions emerged for improving the potential of the L3F initiative to expand both its reach and its impact:

- **COL should systematically and effectively communicate its L3F work in simple, clear and explicit terms.** The intent should be to enable others to replicate this work without COL’s help—for example, by developing “brag and steal” tools, framework and models.

- **COL should focus on becoming a backbone organization that enables others to have social impact.** The critical work is to guide vision and strategy; support aligned activity both within a region and across the Commonwealth; establish systematic and shared measurement practices; build public will and commitment; advance policy; and mobilize funding. COL needs to engage NGOs, banks and telecommunication companies in co-operative and mutually

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65 See [www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/understanding_the_value_of_backbone_organizations_in_collective_impact](http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/understanding_the_value_of_backbone_organizations_in_collective_impact) for a description of a backbone organization.
supportive arrangements aimed at expanding L3F to other regions and so have collective impact\textsuperscript{66} without COL having to be directly involved over long periods.

- **COL should seek to finance L3F through funding by banks, telecommunication companies and donor organizations (as a % of loans repaid) so that L3F can be financed independently of COL’s current donor-based funds.** Options include developing appropriate partnerships, alliances and independent funding to sustain L3F where it is operating now, and expanding L3F to other locations, especially in the Caribbean and the Pacific.

- **COL should demonstrate the applicability of emerging technologies to the delivery of non-formal learning, and should build a strong, effective community of practice around this work. Examples of such technologies include Learning through Interactive Voice Educational Systems (LIVES), developed by UBC and NIC; and Aptus.\textsuperscript{67}

### 8.6 Conclusion

What COL has done with L3F is provide thought leadership, support, encouragement and a systematic approach to this work. It is a model that COL can replicate, not just in relation to other non-formal education activities (e.g., Healthy Communities, TVSD), but also as a means of achieving intended outcomes related to its Higher Education, Teacher Education And Open Schooling initiatives.

\textsuperscript{66} The White House Council for Community Solutions has recognized the potential of collective impact to play a major role in transforming the ways in which communities approach their social problems. A 2012 report assembled on behalf of the Council found that among 12 “needle-moving community collaboratives” that had achieved at least 10% progress in a community-wide metric, all 12 met the conditions of collective impact.

\textsuperscript{67} Aptus is being used extensively in L3F in the Manndeshi Foundation program.
9 HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Estimate of Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Impact on Individuals</th>
<th>Impact on Institutions</th>
<th>Impact on Communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>④</td>
<td>Examples were given to the impact evaluators in every community of significant and transformative impact on individuals and self-help groups, especially women.</td>
<td>The institutions here are community radio stations, but also health clinics and related organizations. There is clear evidence that radio stations have significantly improved their sustainability, quality programs and engagement with communities as a result of COL’s work.</td>
<td>Women’s groups in particular, but also communities’ health and resilience, have been impacted by COL’s creative and focused approach to this work. Small villages in India, Jamaica and across Africa, as well as larger communities, have benefited from this work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment
Non-formal and informal education through community networks are a growing part of the response to health, well-being and social development around the world, not just in the developing world. COL’s work on quality for radio programming, sustainability of local radio (also supported by CEMCA) and community learning programs has had a significant impact where it has been deployed. The challenge for COL is scalability of this work.

9.1 THEORY OF CHANGE
COL’s Healthy Communities initiative, established in 2009, addresses Millennium Development Goals in increasing access to learning opportunities by all citizens (female and male, leaders and the disadvantaged, the young and the old), especially healthcare workers and community-based groups, in developing regions of the Commonwealth. The initiative enables better individual and community responses to maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS, nutrition and fitness, the environment, and other health and development challenges, particularly those faced by women and youth.

This focused initiative built on past COL work in relation to climate change and water resources, the environment, media empowerment and health, rural and peri-urban development68 – all of which took place in the 2006–2009 planning period.

Leveraging social networks (especially self-help groups, mobile learning (mLearning) and community radio) provides a basis of reaching a great many people quickly and effectively, especially in communities with low rates of adolescent and adult literacy. Engaging community members not simply as an “audience” but as program designers, creators and broadcasters can further enable and accelerate community development and personal well-being and can create opportunities for livelihoods.

68 This was also the beginning of L3F.
Collaboratively sharing program ideas and best practices and improving the quality of community radio, learning resources and other community learning resources can accelerate their contribution to healthy communities.

9.2 Key Practices
Under the Healthy Communities initiative, COL has been involved in the following key practices:

- Focusing on the local level, generally in one or perhaps two districts within a region to develop best practices, prototypes and exemplars that can be shared with others
- Involving local stakeholders from the outset in decision-making about topics, messages and program design and execution and seeing stakeholders as owners and co-creators, not consumers
- Bringing together different types of groups — community networks, media/ICT outlets, health and development experts, public policy representatives, NGOs and government agencies — into collaborative program design, management and evaluation processes so as to ensure reach, breadth and depth
- Prioritizing the lived experience and stories of learners and other community members, combining them with “expert” information — starting and ending with “real stories” and never giving advice in isolation from these stories
- Drawing on traditional cultural formats, such as storytelling, drama, music and other folk media, and making the experience culturally rich but also culturally located
- Highlighting interactive, dynamic and engaging formats, not just “talking heads”
- Promoting multi-channel and blended approaches (e.g., combining radio with mobile telephony, and face-to-face interactions and community mobilization with engaging media content) and seeing this as about “starting a movement” not simply “delivering materials”

This last point was emphasized by all interviewees involved in this work. They saw themselves as engaging communities in mobilization and collective action, not just appealing to individuals.

9.3 Evidence of Impact

9.3.1 Impact on Individuals
For many of the women’s groups encountered by the impact evaluators in India and Jamaica, and from accounts provided by the key contacts present at the 7th Pan-Commonwealth Forum, we can see significant impact on individuals, especially women and girls. One leader of a women’s group said, “This work is changing our community. We women work together, we get help, we help our children, we are making learning work.” A woman in Jamaica was so moved by a radio program on violence towards women in the home that she has started a self-help group and a women’s shelter that has so far helped over 800 women.

Over 50 collaborative teams and hundreds of listener self-help networks are finding ways of taking their learning and turning it into action. With over 790,000 users and 30,000 engaged in active learning
(2012–2015) and many more from past programs, COL is impacting the understanding and behaviour of many individuals across the Commonwealth.

Significantly, some 1,750 individuals since 2009 have experienced capacity-building activities from over 290 organizations. Several of the people interviewed by the impact evaluators made clear that these experiences were, as one said, “game changing for me! I never imagined just how good community learning programs could be and what we could do with them — my eyes were opened.” Just as faculty attending boot camps can see new ways of teaching, so community broadcasters and developers can see new ways of working. “The impact on me was immediate — I went back and started to change the way I worked,” said one interviewee from Malawi. Another made clear that the work COL did with them on quality was inspiring: “There were so many small things I can do immediately that changed the way we worked and got immediate results that I can honestly say I am a better broadcaster, and always will be, because of COL.”

9.3.2 Impact on Institutions

As part of the impact evaluation, we visited community radio stations in Jamaica, South Africa, India (Delhi, Hyderabad and Bangalore) and participated in a workshop with all engaged in this work who attended the Pan-Commonwealth Forum in Nigeria. In particular, we were able to engage in in-depth conversations with government officials in India and Jamaica as well as NGOs and several self-help groups who both developed programs and organized their communities into “action groups” to respond to the challenges raised by the programs they created. We also discussed the impact of this work with UNESCO.

There are five kinds of institutional impacts:

1. **Impact on quality** — Through its relationship with regional partners, COL has developed workshops and online courses aimed at improving the quality of programs, radio output and community engagement. These have added to both quality and the integrity of production. According to program managers interviewed. “If you compare our programs before and after these learning activities, they are night and day different,” said one station owner. COL’s introduction of the social-quality benchmarks and assessment tools is widely adopted not just by COL-supported radio stations, but by many others who have no direct connection to COL.

2. **Impact on community engagement for design, development and delivery** — A key feature of the work of COL is to encourage and enable participatory learning through mLearning and radio. It is this that has attracted support from governments, NGOs and UNESCO and it is this feature that makes this work a significant contribution to community resilience. In a small community, north of Delhi, the local radio station is a hub for several networks — a women’s health group, a youth leadership group and a group focused on better education for all. This work keeps the station viable as well as vibrant, with these groups making programs and expanding the station’s work.

3. **Impact on collaboration** — COL has enabled and supported collaboration between radio and mLearning practitioners focused on community health and resilience within countries and between countries. Through regional partners, COL has also effectively promoted networking, program sharing, collaborative resourcing and collaborative learning. There is a focused, active peer-to-peer network. There are also local collaborative networks. In the 2012–2015 period, for example, some 45+ such networks existed, enabling cross-sectoral program development (e.g.,
women’s health in India, responding to drought in Jamaica, and dealing with violence in South Africa) with many agencies involved.

4. **Impact on reach** – Radio stations have limited bandwidth reach. When mLearning becomes part of the mix of supports, then the reach is extended in terms of both distance and time. When self-help groups are added, this also extends reach. What is attractive to investors is this reach. The Government of India, in its strategy for community radio, understands this and supports this work. So does the Government of Jamaica. Reach is extended when programs and content are engaging, leading to audience growth in excess of 30% in some cases. COL’s work is to ensure that the opportunity for community-based learning programs provide rich opportunities to extend reach. This is why the Jamaican Police see the work of the local radio stations as key to learning about safe communities.

5. **Impact on outcomes** – Evidence is available from focus groups, evaluation reports and surveys that this work changes behaviour. Whether it is better preparedness for drought (Jamaica), HIV/AIDS (Malawi) or reproductive health (India), understanding and behaviour changed. This is true for many of the topics covered. Of particular importance is the way in which mLearning was used to reinforce messages from radio. In many cases, care-seeking mLearning behaviours and self-management significantly improved.

**9.3.3 Impact on Communities**

Evidence exists that this program can have an impact on local communities, especially women and youth — key targets for these investments. In visits to four stations (India and Jamaica), the impact evaluators met women and youth self-help groups who were self-organizing around key issues of health, safety and youth leadership. All reported active networks of 30-40 people engaged in activities that were “triggered” by the COL-supported program. Care-seeking behaviour, peer-support networks and changed health behaviour are all documented in evaluation studies conducted by partners.

**9.4 The Program Model and Scalability**

The varied history of COL’s work in community development, health and livelihoods prior to 2009 makes it difficult to describe a worked-through, elaborated and embedded model. There were “bits and pieces” of work in 2006–2009, each with a specific focus and each making use of varied technologies. In 2009, COL decided to focus on both its Healthy Communities initiative and an enabling strategy, learning from these past efforts. By 2014, it had a coherent, focused strategy and growing evidence of effective outcomes and some of impact.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Partnership with World Health Organization, UNESCO and NGOs for health initiatives through media</td>
<td>• 3,800 learners engaged in community health programs: maternal health and youth</td>
<td>• 6 community learning programs (CLPs) established or enhanced through 10 agencies in 3 regions</td>
<td>• Number of CLPs leading to changed health and help-seeking 68 behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 16 national agencies</td>
<td>• 120+ local organizations</td>
<td>• Number of self-help</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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69 For evidence, see page 18 of the 2015 evaluation of this program.

70 See comments in the 2009 outcome evaluation for COL especially, at paragraphs 158–185, which is very critical of the lack of strategic cohesion of this work in the 2006–2009 period.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Media Productions</th>
<th>New Media Units</th>
<th>NGO Partnerships</th>
<th>Media Skills Training</th>
<th>Climate and Water Issues</th>
<th>Environmental Education</th>
<th>ODL Training</th>
<th>Intermediaries Trained</th>
<th>Policy Makers Engaged</th>
<th>Sustainability and Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>250 productions (many dealing with HIV/AIDS) developed and made available across 13 countries</td>
<td>2 new media units established in Malawi and Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Strong NGO partnerships at a regional level</td>
<td>25 people trained in media skills, including community-driven production</td>
<td>Focus on climate change and water issues for environmental education using ODL; materials developed and in use in 9 countries; partnership with Centre for Environmental Education, India and others; pilot project in Kenya</td>
<td>Partnership with a range of institutions, including DFAIT and Commonwealth Foundation for good governance education, focused on NGOs, including youth programming; 10 countries participating</td>
<td>Building of multimedia capacity (COL's Media Empowerment program [COLME]) through video development (200 produced), support for TY and radio stations and media units in 15 countries, begun in 1988</td>
<td>Engaged in delivering ODL training</td>
<td>353 learning intermediaries trained from 18 countries</td>
<td>Major regional partnerships established and initiative active in 18 countries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

69
AS the 2011 outcome evaluation noted, COL’s “cascade strategy” — working with national and regional networks to cascade activities throughout a region — enables COL to have greater reach and, potentially, more outcomes and impacts: a bigger return for its investment. COL has a robust model, which is adapted and adjusted in each jurisdiction. It does work and does have impact, but evidence of impact is not as deep as it needs to be to trigger wider adoption. It is clear — in the 2009, 2011 and 2015 outcome evaluations and also from our own work — that much more needs to be done to evaluate outcomes and impacts. The scalability of this work depends on strengthening evaluation.

The departure of the Education Specialist in 2014 and the decision, based on funding considerations, not to immediately replace him, puts this initiative in a difficult position. The leadership provided by COL, especially advocacy, partner selection, mentoring, coaching and connecting, is critical to the ongoing success of this work. Just as the strategy was becoming embedded and momentum occurring, with growing evidence of efficacy, the program is now vulnerable.

9.5 Improving Impact

From the interviews and feedback from the Challenge Dialogue, three specific suggestions emerged for improving the potential of the Healthy Communities initiative to have impact:

1. COL should strengthen the evaluation and data collection components of this work. Evidence is key for investors, governments, partners and others who are looking to expand and develop this work. Advocacy for a model in the absence of evidence of efficacy and impact is difficult, no matter how convincing individual narratives and exemplars are. Catherine Dunlop’s 2013-2014 annual evaluation of VUSSC, for example, is helpful, but it also calls for more and better evaluation studies. Almost all of those interviewed made clear that this was both a challenge and a need. As one said, “I could do so much more if we had the evidence to show impact.”

2. COL should expand the range of non-formal learning approaches in use. COL is engaged in significant developments in non-formal learning through L3F and TVSD, as well as through community learning programs (CLPs). Other developments using social media (also part of some CLPs) are occurring and there is a growing interest in voicemail learning. COL needs to share these developments across its initiatives and leverage its eLearning Specialist to develop a broader range of options for community-based non-formal learning. Several respondents made clear that they were experimenting with many of these approaches, but these efforts were not being shared across the community of practitioners.

3. COL should strengthen the community of practice. The workshop at the Pan-Commonwealth Forum facilitated by the impact evaluation team demonstrated the like-mindedness and shared values of those working on the Healthy Communities initiative. Comments such as “We have so much in common... it is as if we have worked together for years, yet we have just met!” and “There are so many great program ideas here, wish I had them two months ago when I needed them” suggest that much more could be achieved by a closer networking of these individuals and their teams. This was reinforced in the interviews. As one person said, “I would love to test my ideas out with this peer network — but it needs to be quick and simple to do so.”

online community of practice would facilitate more rapid discussing of emerging issues, collaborative problem-solving and dissemination of innovation. Of all the potential communities of practice COL could create, this is the one that would most likely succeed quickly.

9.6 CONCLUSION
There is a strong sense of purpose and shared values among all of those working in the Healthy Communities initiative. While there are nuanced areas of disagreement, the overwhelming impression is that this work is supporting a committed and focused group in achieving like-minded outcomes and securing a range of impacts that are making a difference to the well-being of individuals and helping develop resilience in communities. Despite some limitations of the evidence (documented in all outcome evaluations and again in this impact evaluation), impact indicators are strong enough to suggest that this work — as part of COL's focused efforts in non-formal learning — has a place in COL’s repertoire of responses to the challenge of learning for development.

UPDATE: For financial reasons, COL has determined that it can no longer support the work of the Healthy Communities initiative as a separate program.
10 COMMONWEALTH MEDIA CENTRE FOR ASIA (CEMCA)

Estimate of Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Individuals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Impact varies by activity significantly. Some individuals have been very significantly impacted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Institutions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Impact varies over time and by institution and region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Communities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Some evidence of impact on communities, especially for community radio work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment:
CEMCA is an important regional hub for COL in Asia. More needs to happen outside of India for CEMCA to be truly effective at a regional level.

10.1 THEORY OF CHANGE
CEMCA was established as an Asian regional hub for ICT/media support for ODL in 1994 and is based in New Delhi. It is intended to provide thought leadership, program support and capacity building in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, Darussalam, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Malaysia and Singapore. It has the status of a Diplomatic Mission and is a funded largely by COL, to which it reports.

At various times, CEMCA’s strategic intentions, though generally aligned with those of COL, have differed from the core work of COL’s programmatic approach. It is seen within COL as having a separate status with separately defined impact, outcome and output expectations and with a results-based management framework. CEMCA seeks to mirror some of the work of COL Vancouver — Open Schooling, Teacher Education, Higher Education, TVSD, community media, eLearning and gender — but does so through its own work, sometimes leveraging the work of COL. As the 2012–2015 outcome evaluation notes, many of the arrangements between COL and CEMCA are ad hoc.

CEMCA has not articulated a theory of change. Its focus is on promoting ODL, ICT and OER in a range of contexts in order to increase access to, and success in, learning (formal and non-formal) throughout the region, with a strong focus on India. It seeks to have impact, through partnerships and alliances with a range of organizations, on institutional practices (encouraging early adopters), learners and communities. A strong focus prior to 2012 was on community radio and non-formal learning. Since 2012, it has been focused more on the range of initiatives aligned with COL’s strategic plan (especially Higher Education and Open Schooling) and with OER while maintaining a different kind of support for community radio. In all of this work, gender issues as they relate to women have been important.

For its small staff, CEMCA is active and produces significant outputs and outcomes for the funds available. Productivity is high. However, given staff, logistical and resource constraints, CEMCA is also

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72 In 2013/2014, CEMCA also received funding from IDRC, UNESCO and NIOS, and in previous years was also supported by the Ford Foundation.
73 CEMCA has a separate Advisory Council, chaired by the President and CEO of COL.
limited in what it can do. Focus and a strong sense of purpose is therefore essential to ensure relevance, value and impact.

10.2 Key Practices
The following are the key practices at CEMCA:

- Building partnerships and alliances — something CEMCA appears to be exceptionally good at, though it has not always handled exits from these partnerships well
- Securing additional financial support for initiatives. In the last three-year plan, for example, it secured between C$140,000 and $170,000 annually from third parties
- Providing capacity-building workshops for ODL, OER and ICT in education (through the Open Schooling, Higher Education, and Teacher Education initiatives) and community learning programs in community radio
- Developing materials to be included in courses and programs offered by others for credit (e.g., certificates and diplomas) or for open badges
- Producing quality multimedia resources to support its work in quality, ICT in education and community radio
- Supporting the development of institutional and national policies related to ODL and OER
- Building communities of practice for course sharing (Easy Now!), teacher education (in partnership with IT for Change [ITfC] and Government of India) and community radio. CEMCA’s work here is pioneering and significant.
- Developing tools that provide opportunities for partners to accelerate their use of ODL, OER and ICT in education and community development (e.g., Easy Now! and I-Radio)
- Undertaking research and development activities

CEMCA brings not just expertise and knowledge to its work, but also commitment and passion. This is evident in the way in which past and present staff talk about their work at CEMCA. They bring real energy and zeal to the work as if this was “missionary work,” as one person called it.

One challenge for these practices is ensuring that they cover the region and do not just focus on India. There are difficulties in working in such a large country with so many needs (“We can do so much here and still have so much more to do”) and in accessing partners in Malaysia, Maldives, Bangladesh and Pakistan. More could be done to build connection networks in these countries.

To some extent, CEMCA has achieved some developments ahead of its colleagues in Vancouver: creating a mechanism for using Mozilla Open Badges, launching I-Radio to reach learners (especially in Bangladesh), developing Easy Now! as an OER mechanism, and developing training programs (in partnership with others) to sustain community radio. The challenge is to do this and align the work with the initiatives undertaken from Vancouver.

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74 For a description, see https://wiki.mozilla.org/Badges
10.3 Evidence of Impact
CEMCA is a respected organization in India. All interviewees both praised and admired that such a small organization “could do so much and have so much impact,” as said one Under-Secretary in the Government of India said. Others made clear that they saw CEMCA’s publications, such as the review of eLearning in Asia (2013) as “authoritative and definitive.” The UNESCO Chair of Community Media was also full of praise about the contribution CEMCA had made by facilitating the development of community radio. He was equally supportive of the shift away from this as a core focus for CEMCA’s work after 2012, saying, “It was the right thing to do at the right time. COL had made its contribution.”

10.3.1 Impact on Individuals
Women involved in community learning programs (CLPs) in India reported a significant impact on their own thinking about health and well-being and about their place in their family and community. In three different radio stations and their CLP self-directed women’s groups, the story was the same: engagement and empowerment began as a result of their connection to CEMCA’s work. Owners and operators of these radio stations also made clear that their work had undergone significant change, both in terms of how to run a radio station (skills training) and of realizing the opportunity that their work had to impact the lives of so many. “CEMCA opened my eyes to the possibilities of our work…. I will be forever grateful, no matter what happens,” said an interviewee.

In both Teacher Education and Higher Education, individuals interviewed had a similar message. “Once I understood just what ICT could do to help me and how I could use learning designs and materials created by others, there was no stopping me…. My lessons and teachings are completely different because of our work” was one comment. “I hadn’t realized just how masculine our materials were until CEMCA helped me look at them critically,” said another, a colleague from IGNOU. “I am working hard to ensure balance.”

A director of the National Institute of Open Schools (NIOS) said, “I am sure this is true for many in our organization and others look to CEMCA for leadership around ICT in education and OER — they have certainly opened my eyes.”

Individuals from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka praised CEMCA’s innovation and research. Among the comments were: “Many don’t see publications as having an impact — I can assure you that CEMCAs do — always thoughtful and enabling resources which give me the tools I need to help change my university.” “I came away from the 2014 leadership workshop with completely new insights about what we could be doing at the OUB for the next stage of our development; it was not just inspiring, but thought provoking.”

Two individuals from Pakistan were not as supportive of CEMCA. They felt that CEMCA was “too focused on India and not focused enough on the region to have a real impact.” Individuals interviewed in Malaysia expressed similar sentiments.

10.3.2 Impact on Institutions
The most substantial impact CEMCA has had institutionally in the period 2006–2015 is on individual radio stations and their networks in India. It has also had some modest impact on stations in other regions in Asia. All interviewed from radio stations operating through Asia suggested that the two most important impacts were: (a) the development of a systematic, quality approach to CLPs; and (b) the
development of a support network (formal and informal) of mutual help and sharing among the radio stations, exemplified (but not restricted to) sharing program design and ideas. Said one person, “Running a radio station can be a lonely business. CEMCA helped me realize I was part of a network ... a family if you like.”

In terms of formal education, CEMCA has had some impact on selected colleges and universities in the region, but it is modest. There are a great many such institutions (782 universities of varying kinds and many more degree-granting institutions in India and 88 degree-granting institutions in Malaysia, for example). CEMCA cannot possibly hope to impact all, but it is working with several key institutions (e.g., IGNOU, WOU, BOU), seeing them as hubs that can influence others. This appears to be working, insofar as several of those interviewed within and beyond these “lead” institutions suggested that this cascade strategy “is leading to the gradual adoption of more innovations in teaching and learning, most especially focused on quality assurance and OER.” Indeed, CEMCA’s work on quality assurance for OER was singled out for praise by several Vice-Chancellors and institutional leaders and by many who responded to the Challenge Dialogue.

For its work in schools, which is modest, the key impact has been the work with IT for Change (ITfC), which has built one of the largest communities of teacher practitioners working on ITC in learning and education. Said one of the co-leaders of ITfC, “This work is having a transformative impact on schools and teaching throughout the region [Karnataka] and is championed by head teachers and subject leaders. Over 5,000 teachers are involved and it has spurred major developments in OER.” This work is now being extended to other regions in India.

10.3.3 Impact on Communities
The work on community radio and CLPs is having an impact on communities, as was evident from the four women’s groups met as part of the impact evaluation. One group leader said, “You can’t imagine just what this has all meant for the health of my family and my village!” Each week, 20 women meet and review their work in the village and look at what else they can do to promote a healthier life-style. Their village has 2,300 people, and the women are the leaders of that community.

The work on open schools, ODL and OER and teacher education is creating new routes for access to learning for many, including normally under-represented groups, though little (if any) quantitative data is available to measure this impact. While evidence on the scale of CEMCA’s impact is scant,75 many interviewees referred to the OER work and the Easy Now! OER sharing platform as “accelerators for access” in Bangladesh, Malaysia and India. While a great deal of CEMCA’s energy is focused on India, community impacts were also clear in Sri Lanka (community radio and television, teacher education) and Malaysia (OER).

10.4 The Program Model and Scalability
CEMCA can be seen in the period 2006–2015 to have gone through two phases. Up to 2012, a strong focus was on community radio and community engagement. CEMCA did not neglect other opportunities, as the highlights in the table below show, but a significant amount of energy and capacity was dedicated to community radio development in India. After 2012, with a change of leadership in July 2012, CEMCA aligned itself more directly with the strategic initiatives being pursued by COL in Vancouver.

75 The 2012–2015 outcome evaluation draws attention to the need for baseline and follow-up data.
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Strong focus on quality assurance for multimedia learning materials (QAMLM), with focus on India and Malaysia</td>
<td>• Expansion of the use of QAMLM across India, Sri Lanka and Maldives</td>
<td>• Community of practice developed and sustained for teacher educators in partnership with ITfC and government of India; over 90 trained as facilitators and 5,000 teachers engaged</td>
<td>• Growth in access to and student completions in, schools colleges and universities as a result of ODL and OER developments enabled by CEMCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 250 professionals in 6 institutions engaged in capacity building for ODL</td>
<td>• IGNOU offers post-graduate diploma in Community Media, with support from CEMCA</td>
<td>• Online continuous professional development linked to open badges developed; 40 participants in pilot courses from India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka</td>
<td>• Number of teacher-supported change networks (school, college and university) actively engaged in ODL/OER materials and teaching developments sustained year by year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Multimedia resources for caregivers in partnership with CAREINDHI and Science for Women in partnership with Government of India</td>
<td>• Launch of I-Radio in Maldives, India and Malaysia</td>
<td>• VOS platform launched with NIOS for virtual open schools</td>
<td>• Improved quality indicators for programs in higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Building supports for marginalized women and men in Bangladesh</td>
<td>• Ongoing support for CLP in community radio for 15 stations, including training 300 women in CLP and production who then produced 10,000 hours of programs focused on women and the use of science</td>
<td>• Capacity-building workshops attended by 150 teachers</td>
<td>• Sustainability and impact of local radio stations show continuous improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strong focus on supporting community radio development in India in partnership with Government of India and Ford Foundation; 13 stations involved in creating CLP</td>
<td>• 150 radio stations established in India and Bangladesh with CEMCA support</td>
<td>• OER policy workshop for 17 Indian institutional leaders; 1 adopted OER policy quickly</td>
<td>• Number of new courses and programs developed and available as a result of CEMCA’s capacity building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 13,000 women surveyed about potential of CLP for radio</td>
<td>• 100 trained in ODL materials development using Easy Now!</td>
<td>• Continued support for community radio with work on sustainability and Master training of broadcasters</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
CEMCA is not a program or an initiative: it is a regional hub for COL’s work in Asia. For it to achieve more, it needs to work at doing more in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan and Maldives, possibly by making more use of networks and communities of practice and local partnerships. It also needs to do much more monitoring and evaluation of outcomes and impacts and use these to narrow its range of activities, focusing more of its efforts on activities showing real substantial results.

The most replicable activities CEMCA is undertaking — not just in developing nations, but also in developed nations — is its work with ITfC on building a community of practice for teachers and on supporting CLPs in community radio. Here, scalable models have been built and evaluated and are achieving impacts.

10.5 IMPROVING IMPACT

From the interviews and feedback from the Challenge Dialogue, just two specific suggestions emerged for improving CEMCA’s impact:

1. **COL should designate lead institutions in each country and see them as hubs through which CEMCA works.** There are so many opportunities and it is difficult to contextualize them from a distance for each country CEMCA is expected to work in. There need to be national COL “quarterbacks” in each country who, fully understanding COL/CEMCA strategic intentions, seek out opportunities for CEMCA to have impact within its planning horizon and objectives. As one interviewee said, “Going ‘glocal’ requires a new relationship with each country — focal points are not always the best fit…. An institutional hub is needed to translate strategy into ‘on the ground’ options for actions.”

2. **COL should align CEMCA’s work more explicitly and directly with its own.** Since 2012, CEMCA has been more closely aligned with COL’s strategic agenda, adapted for local contexts. It needs to continue with this focus and alignment and “better connect and leverage the knowledge and skills of COL” in its day-to-day work. Rather than having ad hoc arrangements between the Education Specialist and CEMCA, clearer agreements are needed. As one Board member said, “I was always confused — was this something CEMCA was doing on its own or was it a deliberate part of a COL initiative — I never knew or could tell.”
There are also issues about brand position. CEMCA has built a brand of its own which, though connected to COL, is stronger than COL’s as a brand in some parts of India. Furthermore, CEMCA’s website is in fact more elegant and effective than COL’s main website. There needs to be closer alignment of the Web presence of COL in all of its Web activities.

10.6 CONCLUSION
CEMCA is an important part of COL’s overall contribution to the Commonwealth: it is a productive, respected and valued part of COL as a social enterprise. It needs to be more closely aligned with COL’s strategic intentions and COL should be seeking to learn from some of CEMCA’s innovations. For parts of CEMCA’s history, it has been “on its own;” and for other parts of its history, it has been “part of the COL family.” “After twenty years of operation, it should now be a ‘grown up’ member of the family,” said one former Director.
11 Cross-Cutting: eLearning

(This program will change in 2015–2021 to the Technology-Enhanced Learning Initiative, under Skills Development.)

Estimate of Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Individuals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Impact varies by activity significantly. Some individuals have been very significantly impacted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Institutions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Impact varies over time and by institution and region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Communities</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Not enough evidence to identify impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment:
COL is widely seen as a thought leader in ODL and ICT and a champion and early adopter of OER. Its championing of ODL, ICT and OER is key to its brand position.

11.1 Theory of Change

ODL, ICT and OER are at the heart of COL’s work. But ODL, ICT and OER are fast-changing areas of interest, investment and activity globally. In the 2009–2015 plans. Education Specialists were focused on the plan outcomes and impacts in a specific field — open schools, farming, TVSD, etc. — and could not be expected, at the same time, to stay fully abreast of all developments occurring both in technologies for learning and in their application to the work that COL is doing. A specialist dedicated to that task, who worked as a colleague and partner across all of the initiatives, was assigned to ensure that COL stayed current and relevant and was making best use of eLearning developments appropriate to the areas of work and to the local technology infrastructures within which this work takes place.

The theory of change here is simple: by keeping abreast of relevant developments in ODL and OER (bearing in mind COL’s strategic intentions and the technology infrastructure available in each nation in which COL is working), COL can keep eLearning relevant and current in its work and demonstrate thought leadership in IT application to its partners.

In the 2006–2009 plan, a different view of eLearning was taken — an initiative in its own right, as it will be again in the 2015–2021 plan. The theory of change then was that COL needed to be highly visible as an advocate and “player” in eLearning so as to be seen as a thought and action leader for the Commonwealth. Known as “eLearning and ODL for education sector development,” this work ranged from advocacy and policy-enabling work to capacity building and rapid development of OER.

The theory of change was to “demonstrate leadership in action in ODL, OER and ICT” and engage a large body of individuals and organizations in this work. COL sought partnerships with a range of organizations, including private firms (Microsoft), NGOs (William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Wikimedia Foundation), inter-governmental organizations (UNESCO) and institutional partners. COL partnered in certificate and diploma program development, pioneered policy work in OER and focused its efforts on specific gains in the Caribbean. In the coming planning period, COL intends to return to this model of working, with the additional assumption that this work also cuts across all of COL’s activities.
11.2 Key Practices
From a review of the range of work since 2006, the following appear as key practices:

- Advocating for ICT, ODL and OER as cornerstones for strategic and tactical work related to learning in developing nations
- Supporting policy development for ICT, ODL and, more recently, OER so that governments commit to new forms of pedagogy and increase access to and success from learning
- Developing partnerships and alliances to actively expand and promote ODL and OER (e.g., with UNESCO, Open Education Resources university [OERu])
- Developing, with partners, programs for ICT use in teaching (with Microsoft and ComSec)
- Building capacity through workshops, online learning and networks
- Supporting the development of courses and programs that enable a deepening of understanding of the use of ICT, ODL and OER in achieving educational outcomes
- Building a repository, initially with WikiEducator, of OER materials under a Creative Commons License so that anyone could access these
- Evaluating technologies for pedagogy aligned with COL’s programs and the on-the-ground capabilities and infrastructure in the developing nations of the Commonwealth
- Promoting appropriate technology to be seen to add value or “solve” problems on the ground (e.g., Classroom Without Walls/Aptus)
- Scanning developments in ICT, ODL and OER to ensure that COL maintains its role as a thought leader (e.g., systematic analysis of MOOCs and their challenges)
- Supporting MOOCs and other learning programs.

While this work has had many guises in the period 2006–2015, ICT has been key to access, quality and learning outcomes — a consistent theme of COL’s work, both at COL and at CEMCA and RETRIDOL). Each Education Specialist brings his or her own value to add to COL’s work, all have been concerned with the same focus: finding and using relevant ICT and related strategies that enable more people to learn in more places more often.

11.3 Evidence of Impact

11.3.1 Impact on Individuals
Interviews with 36 people, responses to the Challenge Dialogue and a review of all available documents and evaluation studies suggest that COL’s focused commitment to eLearning, the integration of ICT in formal and non-formal learning, the use of OER and the focus on ODL is a core component of how individuals understand and experience COL. In short, eLearning is core to COL’s brand. This cross-cutting work has an impact across all of the initiatives, but it is difficult to attribute a measure of eLearning “value added” to each specific activity — all Education Specialists share these commitments and articulate them in all of their work.
Individuals report a strong and lasting impact, especially in the Caribbean, of the work on integrating ICT into teaching, such as Initiatives Using Technology to Improve Education (ICT4E). And an evaluation of the value of this work (2009–2011) makes this clear.76 One interviewee in Trinidad & Tobago said, “It’s three and half years since I was involved in this, but I look back over my notes and materials all of the time — it helps me stay focused on the question ‘what could I do differently as a teacher?’”

Other comments relate to the issue of learning design. Two examples: “I now think completely differently about the work of ‘teaching and learning’ as a result of exposure to e-learning and OER”; and “I used to think I had to create all of my materials, but now I see myself as a ‘problem finder’ not a problem solver. There is so much high quality content I can access, that the real challenge is finding the right challenge for my students.” Many people echoed these sentiments.

The reach and impact of the early work in this initiative is significant. COL pioneered work in OER as an early adopter and advocate and had a significant impact on key influencers, who in turn influenced a substantial number of people. While it is not possible to quantify these cascade effects, everyone interviewed described them. UNESCO representatives in particular — but also everyone engaged in the certificate and diploma programs in which COL was intimately involved — made clear the sentiment that, as one person said, “Being there from the get-go made COL an important influencer, which had a significant and lasting impact on a great many teacher educators, policy-makers, and individuals who had the power to influence a great many others with respect to OER.”

With 10,000 people a day visiting Wiki Educator at one time and over 1,700 participating in online workshops through WikiEducator, one can see how this could occur. Important to note, however, is that the evidence base here is anecdotal.

Key to this individual impact was the range of work COL has been involved in. Whether we looked at certification, WikiEducator Learning for Content (L4C) work, Aptus, policy development, workshops or publications and technical reviews, individuals are clear about COL’s role. Said an interviewee, “COL is a place to keep an eye on if you want to be serious about e-learning.”

COL has earned this reputation through diligence, relentlessness and hard work.

11.3.2 Impact on Institutions

For some institutions, especially those involved in the design, development, deployment and delivery of certificate and diploma programs, the impact of COL’s work has been significant. The CEO of SchoolNet South Africa sees COL’s work creating the Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration (CCTI) being a critical endorsement of SchoolNet’s own work, which has in turn enabled it to expand its own reach and impact. Several organizations that systematically pursued CCTI as key to their professional development and capacity building, especially in the Caribbean (St. Lucia and The Bahamas in particular), attribute significant ongoing impact not just in terms of OER and ICT integration, but to the general improvement of pedagogy.

Others focus on realizing the potential of OER for rapid course development for ODL and in support of blended learning. Interviews at IGNOU and WOU and with representatives of six open universities in India, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka all made clear that COL’s work on eLearning and OER had been

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significant in terms of its impact on the design, development and deployment of their courses and programs. One Vice-Chancellor, supported by his Provost, said, “COL opened our eyes to a completely different way of thinking about instructional design and course development.” Several members of the VUSSC Management Committee also pointed to the work on OER as being “instrumental” in shaping their thinking about the future of VUSSC courses and programs.

The Classroom Without Walls/Aptus was also raised as carrying the potential of impact, though few interviewees could point to evidence of impact that was tangible. Several individuals from small island states where the Internet is unreliable (e.g., Vanuatu) said they saw Aptus as having significant potential impact in guaranteeing the availability of needed learning resources irrespective of the local technology infrastructure. They saw this device as expanding their reach and extending the “certainty of their offerings” no matter what the local conditions were. Similar sentiments were expressed in parts of India and Africa (especially in rural communities) where reliable access to the Internet is often problematic.

11.3.3 Impact of Communities
There is no substantial evidence base on which to determine the impact of COL’s eLearning work on communities or regions. While COL’s work is focused on increasing access to and success in learning in both formal and non-formal learning, it is difficult to attribute developments and achievements to this specific cross-cutting initiative.

### 11.4 The Program Model and Scalability
The highlights of the two distinct periods of this work within COL, 2006–2009 and 2009–2015 (see section 11.1), are as follows:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• WikiEducator major vehicle for OER: 8</td>
<td>• Continued growth and expansion of OER supported by COLVUSSC</td>
<td>• Continued work on policy development (strong focus on OER), especially in Africa and Caribbean; new policies drafted in Belize, Grenada, Ghana, St. Vincent &amp; The Grenadines, St. Kitts &amp; Nevis and Seychelles; new policies enacted in Antigua &amp; Barbuda and Belize</td>
<td>• Take-up of Aptus by NGOs, community learning agencies and educational institutions; number of new learners using ODL/OER as a result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2006: 5 ODL courses developed</td>
<td>• OER capacity-building workshops, especially in India and Malawi; 341 active members</td>
<td>• 2012: UNESCO–COL issues Paris OER Declaration following a substantive survey of governments</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Policy developed in 5 countries</td>
<td>• Partnership with ComSec and Microsoft focused on ICT development in Guyana</td>
<td>• Registrations and completions in courses and programs enabled by COL's work on ODL and OER capacity building</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 2,763 educators trained in 77 workshops</td>
<td>• 1,300 teachers and 224 mentors engaged in studying Commonwealth Certificate in Teacher ICT Integration; Trinidad &amp; Tobago, Bahamas, Guyana, St. Vincent &amp; The Grenadines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• 1st edition of OER Handbook released</td>
<td>• Learning 4 Content development accelerated; training online</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning 4 Content development accelerated; training online</td>
<td>• 2006: Post-graduate Diploma in Distance Education supported by COL; 40 completers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2006: Post-graduate Diploma in Distance Education supported by COL; 40 completers</td>
<td>• Commonwealth Computer Navigators Certificate designed,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Commonwealth Computer Navigators Certificate designed,</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

82
developed and delivered
- COL supports Cape Town Open Education Declaration

highly engaged
- Policy development across the Caribbean
- 2011: UNESCO–COL Guidelines for OER available
- 150 institutions engaged in OER development
- mLearning deployed in Tanzania and Kenya
- Initiatives in public health using OER in Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya

Teacher ICT Integration: Antigua & Barbuda, Trinidad & Tobago, St. Vincent & The Grenadines and Grenada are part of the ICT4E initiative
- 6 African countries engaged in course development and delivery using Moodle
- IT courses for open schools developed.
- 1 open textbook created for eastern Caribbean States
- OER workshops for TVSD, Higher Education and Teacher Education involving over 1,000 individuals
- *Education for Development* journal launched
- Focused promotion of Aptus (Classroom Without Walls)

### 11.5 Improving Impact

One challenge with this cross-cutting initiative of eLearning is the lack of baseline data and the lack of outcome and impact evidence to support judgements and decisions. A second problem is the question of attribution. Given that the work was intended, at least in the 2012–2015 period, to be cross-cutting, how can outcomes and impacts be attributed? Significant improvements in the monitoring and evaluation process for this work are needed.

Interviewees made four suggestions for improving the impact of eLearning:

1. **COL should rethink its work with respect to accredited programs.** The CCTI has been running for some time. Now that some key institutions — for example, the University of the West Indies — are adopting and adapting it, it is time to reconsider what is offered and how. Three interviewees suggested that this would be an ideal offering for VUSSC to take responsibility for on behalf of all Commonwealth nations. COL should also expand its thinking with respect to the MOOC offerings it began in 2013 as a way of engaging a wider community in understanding the potential of eLearning, ODL and OER.
2. **COL should include blended learning in the mix of ODL, OER and ICT in education (formal and non-formal).** Almost all interviewed, including two past COL eLearning Specialists, suggested this. The reasons: blended learning leverages this same knowledge and understanding; it would extend COL’s potential impact; and it was as important a development in education (especially formal education) as ODL and OER.

3. **COL should build a comprehensive OER centre focused on skills and competencies needed for employment and work.** Said one senior government official in Sri Lanka, “By focusing on needed skills which are needed across the Commonwealth COL could have a very significant impact on the area of highest need for our development.”

4. **COL should better demonstrate what gender inclusiveness looks like.** Not all of the work in OER and policy has been gender-inclusive. Several interviewees commented on the gender bias in some of the OER materials that COL has supported, and noted that not all policy frameworks make reference to gender inclusiveness. As one person said, “A lot of the talk about skills focused on stereotypes of how men and women are employed. We could make a major contribution by showing different roles models when we create learning materials and we should make sure we do.”

### 11.6 Conclusion

Reviewing COL’s eLearning journey from 2006 to 2015 suggests that COL has adapted to rapidly changing circumstances with respect to this area. It is worth remembering that the Internet was not common in the developed countries of the Commonwealth until 1995, and that its arrival in many parts of the Commonwealth dates from 2000 or later. As institutions adapt and as the technology continues to develop, COL needs to remain nimble and flexible with this work.
12 CROSS-CUTTING: GENDER

Estimate of Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact on Individuals</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>COL’s active pursuit of women’s issues and rights is having an impact on a great many individuals, as reported to the impact evaluators.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Institutions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mainstreaming gender is having an impact on program design, course material creation and teaching styles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Communities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Insufficient evidence is available to determine COL’s contribution to increased access to schools, colleges, skills and learning by women. Good evidence exists from the L3F, TVSD and Healthy Communities initiatives of impacts on women.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Comment

COL’s gender work, especially since it began to see this as core to all of its activities, is widely respected. Mainstreaming gender in course materials; focusing on women’s well-being, health and access to education; challenging systems to look at equity (including completion rates for boys in school systems); and ensuring that gender forms part of COL’s “brand position” are having an impact on how COL is perceived and works.

12.1 THEORY OF CHANGE

Gender issues are complex. Many people see gender issues in terms of increasing access to education for women. However, in some regions it is as much about boys and men completing upper secondary education or entering into areas of study and employment traditionally seen as “women’s work.” In other regions, gender inclusion can be about those for whom gender is problematic. A large number of Commonwealth countries still have legal prohibitions that impact the LGBTQ community, an issue that is being raised by the Commonwealth Secretary General Kamalesh Sharma, who points out that outlawing LGBTQ individuals — which 41 of the 53 states of the Commonwealth do — is against the 2009 Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles. The COL Gender Specialist has the task of ensuring that all of COL’s activities reflect a sensitivity to gender issues.

COL says its work related to gender is to: “Strengthen COL’s internal capacity to ensure that it is a model organization which promotes greater gender equality through the effective use of open, distance and technology-mediated learning.”

The Gender Specialist (hired from June 1, 2013, until at least the end of the 2012–2015 three-year plan) is tasked with ensuring that each initiative is gender inclusive in all aspects, and that gender mainstreaming is part of the core activities within each initiative.

The theory of change at work here is clear: by mainstreaming gender issues and ensuring that all that COL does is gender inclusive, COL can demonstrate both thought and operational leadership with
respect to gender equity; and, by doing so, can impact its partners to follow its lead. Gender-inclusive language, graphics and activities should be a feature of all that COL does, whether its work relates to policy development, new OER materials or new activities with respect to non-formal education.

A starting point for this work was an internal audit of gender within COL in 2004, which suggested that COL had not fully embraced gender mainstreaming and inclusion in its own work.

12.2 Key Practices

To convert this theory of change into practice, COL has developed a gender policy and action plan that underpins all of its work with respect to gender, equity and empowerment. The plan documents the actions needed and outputs expected for each initiative. This is benchmarked against the basic minimum standards for mainstreaming in UN agencies. Typical actions include:

- Systematically collecting data focused on gender for all of COL’s activities (e.g., looking at the gender balance in the contracting behaviour of COL itself as well as in each program initiative)
- Orienting staff, contractors and partners with respect to gender inclusiveness
- Supporting a gender microsite to help inform, support and engage COL’s partners and others in gender-related issues as well as providing an opportunity to connect and network to others
- Developing workshops (including instructional design workshops) to build capacity to strengthen gender awareness, gender inclusiveness and gender mainstreaming
- Developing quality assurance guidelines for materials development (including OER) that are gender sensitive
- Developing Webinars and other eLearning formats to enhance access to knowledge, understanding and skills for gender-related work
- Developing and using tool kits and gender keys for mainstreaming gender inclusiveness
- Offering scholarships to balance gender representation at COL-supported programs and events
- Supporting Women in TVET (WITED) chapters associated with TVSD initiatives
- Ensuring that policy development work in which COL is involved seeks to enshrine gender equity
- Supporting and developing skills training courses aimed at women
- Developing approaches to monitoring and evaluation to ensure gender sensitivity

It is clear, from the President and CEO of COL to the most recent recruits to COL, that this is a core issue for the organization. Through the efforts of all, not just the Gender Specialist, COL has built a reputation for its commitment to gender equity and inclusiveness. This was evident in interviews conducted for this impact evaluation. COL was widely admired for doing so.

Since 2012, COL has worked hard to document expectations, outputs and outcomes from its gender work following criticism in past outcome evaluations of its lack of objectivity and lack of results-based management practice in relation to this work. The gender action plan is specific and clear.
12.3 Evidence of Impact

12.3.1 Impact on Individuals
This work has a significant impact on individuals, male and female. A group of female students at the Coast Institute of Technology in Voi, Kenya, explained how modular and flexible learning enabled them to complete an education from which they would otherwise have had to withdraw. A great many L3F participants from India and Sri Lanka explained how their work had been transformed by seeing how they could self-organize and become more involved in the supply chain, based on their learning from other women role models. Teacher educators in Sri Lanka explained how gender inclusiveness and awareness had changed their approach to teacher preparation for primary education. Most powerfully, the creators of women’s self-organized community learning programs in Jamaica, South Africa and India all explained how empowering and engaging their work in health on communities had been.

12.3.2 Impact on Institutions
This work has had a significant impact on COL as an organization. Everyone is acutely aware that gender issues and gender inclusiveness is part of what COL now stands for. It is a part of its brand. Education Specialists are deliberate and focused in their use of the available tools and resources for gender inclusiveness.

Through the VUSSC initiative, the Higher Education, Teacher Education and Open Schooling initiatives and TVET activities are also having an impact on formal educational institutions that COL partners with for materials and program development. All who attend boot camps, capacity-building workshops and policy-related work are exposed to gender inclusion and develop responses to it. In COL’s non-formal work in TVSD, Healthy Communities and L3F, gender issues are front and centre, with a great deal of these activities involving women. Indeed, the issue in some of these non-formal education activities is how to gain greater involvement of boys and men.

Modular, flexible and open education is a strategy that lends itself well to gender inclusion. Men and women have commitments to their families and their work which makes learning difficult. Open education delivered flexibly and in a way that can be accommodated within the lifestyle necessary for livelihood creates new opportunities for learning. COL’s partnership with a great many NGOs enables gender inclusion to be a reality. Little quantitative data is available to demonstrate this, though gender policies in five TVET institutions and more than 20 courses offered by INVEST Africa target females. In the 2013–2015 period, 1,231 women have completed skills training in Bangladesh.

12.3.3 Impact on Communities
How COL’s work in non-formal learning impacts women in the community and understanding of women’s health is discussed in other parts of this report. No additional evidence is available of impact.

12.4 The Program Model and Scalability
Gender is not so much a program as a set of commitments embedded in all of COL’s work. In this sense, the issue of a program model and its scalability is moot. The real question for this work: Is there more COL could do to have more impact more quickly?
### Possible Impact Indicators

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Report on boys’ under-achievement published and distributed at PCF4 and CCEM</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEMCA publishes a report on women’s literacy and ICT</td>
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<td>Partnerships with Association for Strengthening Higher Education for Women in Asia, ACU, ComSec and Forum for African Women Educationalists</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 institutions in 2 countries developed and used indicators for girl-friendly schools</td>
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<td>COL gender policy and action plan in place</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender microsite developed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highlighting of gender issues through COL publications, including Connections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development of gender tools to accompany COL’s gender action plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal gender committee meets quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td>One specific gender-related initiative within each sector, and all future development to include gender-inclusive content and development processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong focus on women in community radio and Healthy Communities initiatives</td>
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<td>Publication of a research paper on women’s empowerment at the local level</td>
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<tr>
<td>Report on gender mainstreaming at IGNOU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focal Points identify gender-related needs as part of the three-year plan process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focused plan for gender mainstreaming included in logical model and budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender-sensitive performance indicators for all initiatives developed and in use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Series of reports on gender issues in ODL and OER</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender-related case studies included in CEMBA/CEMPA</td>
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<tr>
<td>COL introduces toolkit and gender keys to partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increasing number of OER supported by COL are gender inclusive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policies for ODL, OER and ICT include commitments to gender equity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Of 17 community ODL programs, 6 have women as primary targeted learners and 10 include clear gender elements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criteria for gender-inclusive ICT developed; study of these connected to policy underway</td>
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</table>

Having dedicated capacity to support this work has certainly been helpful in ensuring focus, a resource base and an evidence base on which decisions and actions can be taken.

It may be important, going forward, to connect to others engaged in similar work. For example: the Aspire Foundation (UK) is seeking to impact 1 billion women worldwide through a program of mentoring and coaching; the CAMFED (UK) organization is aligned with the gender agenda of COL as it relates to women’s empowerment through learning, and works in some of the same African countries as COL does; UNESCO is committed to equity in education and is seeking out plans to enable greater equity in
education, not just in access but in terms of outcomes; ComSec’s Gender Section has launched a Women’s Forum that aims to empower girls and women through education, enterprise and leadership at all levels of decision-making; the African Women’s Development Fund provides financial support to initiatives intended to engage and empower women throughout Africa; and CARE India has a 60-year history of working in this field. Given the platform of achievement that COL now has, partnerships and alliances will be a key component of achieving more impact from COL’s gender work.

12.5 IMPROVING IMPACT
From the interviews and feedback from the Challenge Dialogue, just three specific suggestions emerged for improving impact in relation to gender, reflecting the fact that respondents were generally satisfied with COL’s work in this area:

1. **COL should include in its gender microsite exemplars of best practices from institutional partners with which others can model their own institutional policies and practices.** Among the comments received were: “Given COL’s relationships with so many institutions, it could do much better in sharing what really works with us all”; and “While equity is improving, especially in higher education, we need to know more about what exactly it is that leads to more equitable learning outcomes.”

2. **COL should develop an online community of practice in gender matters to promote developments.** While the “network” component of the gender microsite is helpful, it is essentially a list of individuals who work on gender issues. Said one interviewee, “What is needed is a genuine, practical and focused place for dialogue around the practice of gender inclusion — the how and how not’s.”

3. **COL should work to ensure that a focus on gender is not just on girls and women but also on boys and men, as appropriate within specific educational institutions or program areas.** One comment was, “The book which focused on boys underachievement presented in 2006 was helpful in highlighting a specific challenge. It is time to look systematically again at this issue, especially across the Caribbean and in certain other Commonwealth countries.”

There was also a sense that COL could improve its partnerships and alliances at a national and regional level with groups committed to gender equity and inclusion. Almost all interviewees felt that COL could be doing much more to partner on gender issues.

12.6 CONCLUSION
With modest resources but an approach based on focusing and aligning all of COL’s efforts to achieve outcomes and impact, COL has developed a reputation for its strong commitment to gender inclusion and equity in all that it does — a contrast from the situation reported in the 2011 outcome evaluation. This is not a small achievement. It strengthens the sense of brand and integrity that COL brings to its work.

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77 Boys’ Underachievement in Education: An Exploration in Selected Commonwealth Countries. COL. Available at www.col.org/resources/publications/Pages/detail.aspx?PID=218
78 See Outcome Evaluation 2009–12 Plan, paragraph 483 and its reference to the 2010 Stakeholder Survey where COL was not seen to demonstrate its commitment to gender equality in its outcomes.
13 WHAT COL DOES WELL

Across the Commonwealth, COL appears to have developed strong, focused expertise in many areas:

1. **Leveraging partnerships for outcomes** – COL, with a few exceptions (e.g., offering some direct courses and programs that it runs from within its own resources) achieves outcomes through partners or networks of partners. This requires COL to be expert at finding, supporting and encouraging partnerships and sustaining these relationships over time. However, it also means that impact is dependent on partners and the relationship between partners and COL. COL practices strong project management — “tough love” — with its partners.

2. **Using microfinance through partners to achieve outcomes** – COL is not a funding organization and is financially constrained, given the scope of what it is seeking to do. COL’s Education Specialists have become expert at managing meagre resources to achieve outcomes. While they are often pressured to give more, COL has developed sufficient expertise to make small amounts of money go a long way so as to achieve key outcomes. The ways in which specialists finance projects differs between initiatives, reflecting different strategic intentions and differing contexts in which COL is operating.

3. **Building local ownership, focus and alignment** – COL works with local partners to build alliances and networks to deliver outcomes. Many interviewees observed that, unlike many other agencies, COL is nimble, flexible and responsive. It does not operate with an implementation and action model that must be followed across the Commonwealth, regardless of local context and circumstance. It builds focus and alignment around common goals and outcomes and builds local ownership for the work to be done. While COL requires evaluation of outputs and outcomes, it also pursues evidence-based work across all of its initiatives. Several partners congratulated COL on its open-mindedness and responsiveness. Said a CEO of an NGO in Africa, “Unlike many aid organizations and development organizations, COL is a true partner and seeks to build partnerships rather than seeks to control, demand and determine.” This also means that when COL exits, many of its initiatives will continue through this local ownership and focus.

4. **Ensuring that gender issues are front and centre in all that it does** – COL has a commitment to achieving gender equity and to ensuring that gender is seen to be a key issue in its work. It has a Gender Specialist who works across all of the initiatives to ensure that gender is front of mind in its work. COL’s President and CEO is a champion of this issue. The result is a strong focus on the education of women and girls and, in some jurisdictions, a focus on equity for males.

5. **Achieving certain kinds of capacity building** – COL has a strong reputation for building the capacity of individuals and organizations to design, develop and deploy ODL and OER and to develop quality assurance and policy. Of the heads of institutions who participated in the impact evaluation, almost all saw COL’s capacity building as a foundation on which they can build a new direction for their institution. An exception was the head of a resource-starved institution who would like to offer more ODL, but is unable to do so because of resource limitations.

6. **Achieving certain kinds of policy development** – COL has done a great deal to equip nations and institutions with evidence-based policy approaches to quality assurance, technologies for
education, ODL and OER. The challenge is that these specific policies need strategic integration with the overall educational goals and strategies of the nations or institutions. COL is good at key components of such a strategy, but is rarely at the table when the overall strategies are the focus. A Permanent Secretary said, “It never occurs to me to connect to COL when we are thinking about the higher education system as a whole. I only think of COL when I am looking at distance education.”

7. **Evaluating outputs and outcomes** – COL is getting better at evaluation. While some of its evaluative work leaves something to be desired, generally COL has an evidence base that helps it adjust its practices and work based on progress towards outcomes. In this work, it is evaluating models and their applicability not just to current projects and initiatives but to potential projects that can take these models to scale. COL needs to strengthen its capacity to use evaluation for continuous improvement across its initiatives and programs.

8. **Positioning ODL and OER** – COL is one of the few major international institutions (UNESCO and ICDE are the others) that is seeking to position ODL and OER as key components for the future of learning, especially as learning relates to development goals. While some others act as vendors for technology “solutions” to educational challenges, COL does not promote technology per se, but seeks to improve access, outcomes and quality through the focused and effective use of open, distance and flexible education where technology may have a part to play. Few other organizations have championed OER as effectively as COL.

9. **Connecting learning to development** – COL adopted “learning for development” in 2006 as the driving statement of its 2006–2009 strategy, defining development to mean the combination of the Millennium Development Goals, the Dakar Goals of Education for All, and the Commonwealth values of peace, democracy, equality and good governance. This represented a shift from a strong focus in previous plans on educational activities aimed at achieving educational effectiveness. As COL matures, this has become a more important articulation of the role and work of COL and, from preliminary planning for the 2015–2021 plan, will become more important over time. COL is now better focused and able to articulate the link between its approach to learning and the overall development agenda, but it could do more to articulate this commitment at the national level.

10. **Articulating what it does** – COL uses both informal and formal approaches to articulate the work it is engaged in. While its strategic communication is weak and, in several areas, out of date, it does know and can describe what it is doing (as the various presentations by its staff, including the President and CEO) show. More specifically, COL has been seeking to articulate models of ODL that others can “translate” and scale. Seychelles, for example, has adopted and adapted L3F using just the model and evidence without direct COL involvement.
14 HOW COL COULD HAVE MORE IMPACT

14.1 AN ORGANIZATION IN TRANSITION
Since the mid-1990s, COL has been transitioning from an educational change organization focused on best practice and technologies for ODL to a social impact organization that sees learning for sustainable development as its key mission. The shift is significant but not yet complete. Indeed, as Figure 1 suggests, COL is in a period between these two very different ways of working.

![Figure 1: COL’s transition period.](image)

How these two paradigms differ are summarized in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Best Practice and Educational Technology Change Organization</th>
<th>Backbone Organization Focused on Learning for Social Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Using technology and best practice learning models for effective and efficient learning systems, with the intention of improving access and quality</td>
<td>Effecting strategic shifts in how learning is designed, developed and deployed in order to provide improved access and success to more quality learning, in both formal and informal settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>One-off interventions to secure the use of ODL and technology-enhanced learning</td>
<td>Sustained investment over time for strategic impact on learning practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>As many as possible so as to secure tactical gains in the use of ODL; adoption and use are the key purposes, not impact</td>
<td>Sustained and strategic investment in partnerships so as to produce sustained system change in the ways in which learning is designed, developed, deployed and delivered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>Academically qualified staff acting as entrepreneurial agents of adoption and use of ODL</td>
<td>Skilled and strategic staff able to manage partnerships, engage in long-term strategic change intended to have long-term impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Small amounts everywhere to see what works</td>
<td>Focused and strategic use of scarce resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Indeed, there is a developed body of knowledge from Stanford University’s Centre for Social Innovation outlining the nature of backbone organizations for social impact. In brief, such organizations seek out partnerships and alliances that share:

1. **a common agenda** — All participating organizations (government agencies, non-profits, for-profits, community members, etc.) have a shared vision for social change that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving problems through agreed-upon actions.

2. **measurement systems** — All participating organizations agree on the ways success will be measured and reported, and have a short list of key indicators.

They are engaged in:

3. **mutually reinforcing activities** — A diverse set of stakeholders is engaged, typically across roles and institutions (and very often across sectors), co-ordinating a set of differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.

4. **continuous communication** — There are frequent communications over a long period of time among key players within and across organizations, to build trust and inform ongoing learning and adaptation of strategy.

Backbone organizations generally provide ongoing support provided by an independent staff dedicated to the initiative. The usual core business processes include:

- Securing focus and alignment within a partnership network for a vision, strategy and intentional impact for the work
- Leveraging different theories of change and resources of each partner organization and each initiative
- Supporting activities (usually with some microfinancing, mentoring and sharing of resources or materials) that are aligned with the strategic intent
- Establishing shared milestones, measurement and reporting systems
- Building capacity, commitment and public will, and garnering social supports for the work
- Advancing policy
- Mobilizing people, resources and commitments and leveraging existing activities
• Sharing best and next practice
• Supporting the operational management requirements for strategic success

As can be seen from the impact assessment details above, many of these features are strengths of COL. Yet, at the same time, COL still clings to some of the features of the old paradigm, notably:

• Being preoccupied with academic credibility. This has affected staffing decisions and key resource use (e.g., the publication of academic journals rather than practitioner resources)
• Using academic Chairs and positions (e.g., the UNESCO–COL Chair) that, with one important exception, produce very few outcomes and even fewer impacts for COL
• Designing Pan-Commonwealth Forum conferences as partly academic events (to provide a basis for the financial support of some participants) rather than community-of-practice events
• Issuing publications that closely resemble academic publications and, in some cases, are. There is nothing wrong with this per se, unless it distracts the organization from its primary purpose: achieving learning for sustainable development.

14.2 The Challenges Associated with Improving Impact
COL faces several challenges in the journey to becoming a more focused and effective backbone organization committed to achieving impact for learning for sustainable development. The following 14 points, emerging from the interviews and responses to the Challenge Dialogue, are reinforced by the results of outcome evaluations conducted since 2006.

1. “COL has no real strategic ambition” (interviewee) – COL is too readily satisfied with project- and initiative-level outputs and outcomes and is not really strategically focused on impacts at the national level. This is not surprising. Each nation that provides funding expects some return on its investment. This fact alone pulls COL in many directions. Rather than focusing on six to eight major strategic initiatives across the Commonwealth over a long period of time, COL uses projects to move towards strategic goals “in bits and pieces.” The exceptions to this is are L3F, CEMCA’s sustained work on community empowerment through radio, and TVSD. These are focused on a small number of regions and are building a model that can move to scale and be “copied” by others without COL’s involvement.

2. “Less really is more...” (Permanent Secretary to a Minister of Education) – In keeping with this, and in line with previous outcome evaluations, managing many projects across the Commonwealth is admirable but not necessarily impactful. Whatever else COL elects to do, it should choose some very specific nations in which to demonstrate the strategic impact that ODL/OER and flexible learning approaches can have on the national development agenda and key components of national learning systems. Natural targets for this would include technical education and skills development in Kenya, system-wide development (school through post-secondary and non-formal education) in Sri Lanka, and a focused strategy for Open Schooling in Africa. There are other candidates. The idea here is simple: choose four to six of these national strategic interventions as showcases for all that COL can do at a national level across all of its programs. What Ministers and their staff are looking for is not an idea, but a strategic solution...
— from idea through action to sustained impact. As one Minister of Education said in an interview, “Not pieces of the jigsaw — I want the whole picture on the cover of the box!”

3. **Alignment with national goals is weak** — COL needs to see its work as being much more directly aligned with the development goals of nations and regions of the Commonwealth, and to demonstrate clearly just how its work is aligned. For example, COL needs to articulate how its work in Kenya is aligned with *Kenya Vision 2030* or how its work in South Africa or Nigeria is aligned with the development goals of each nation. The value of COL’s work is lost in generalization. Focusing and being specific, showing how COL is directly and clearly contributing, would help underscore impacts. This is a critical strategic communications issue.

4. **Focus needs to be less on outputs and outcomes and more on impacts** — Almost none of the evaluation reports and reviews focus on impacts, yet this is what governments are seeking. COL’s work is replete with impacts of varying levels, yet almost all of COL’s recording and reporting focuses on activities (outputs) and limited outcomes. It may also be time to reduce the amount of staff reporting, and to increase the focus of that reporting on impacts by simplification and red-tape reduction now that results-based management is embedded in the work of the organization. Not all of the many documents produced by COL since 2006 are adding value to the organization. A more focused approach to outcome-impact reporting could reduce bureaucracy and improve performance.

5. **The silo approach to development needs to be reduced** — COL, despite its relatively small professional staff, operates in silos. There have been occasions when different activities are taking place under the leadership of different specialists at the same time in the same jurisdiction but are not connected. To have an impact at a national level, there is a need to see COL initiatives not as “stand alone” but as part of a systematic approach to the challenges of a nation. Doing this for all Commonwealth nations is not possible (given size, resources and the challenges of doing so), but it is for some. This may provide opportunities to rationalize COL’s work at the jurisdictional level. More specifically, it may be possible to organize staff (including CEMCA’s) in two teams — formal and non-formal education — and to develop stronger synergies between individuals working in these two domains (at least at the planning level), where the dynamics are very different.

6. **“Partnerships need to be more encompassing” (several respondents and interviewees)** — There are few partnerships and alliances between COL and the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, New Development Bank; few with major philanthropic organizations; and even fewer with the private sector. To significantly contribute to “learning for sustainable development” among Commonwealth nations, COL needs to find effective ways of leveraging relationships with all of these organizations. Part of the challenge here is that government funding suggests that support should focus on government-supported organizations. Yet, if governments are to enable to achievement of sustainable development goals, all organizations working in that nation need to be focused and aligned. COL needs some flagship projects in its selected nations focused on achieving impacts. COL also needs to be mindful about who it chooses to work with, but should not limit its partnership choices by prejudice.

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79 This is aligned with the DFID’s recommendation in its 2014 evaluation of COL (see the Recommendation on page 7 of that document).
7. **Capacity building needs to be matched by strategy building** – COL invests a great deal of energy in capacity building, boot camps, workshops and support. This is valuable, important and necessary work. However, capacities do not necessarily translate into impact until the institution, government or network organization makes strategic commitments and investments, as is clear from developments elsewhere. Policy development is not the same as strategy development and commitment. COL needs to focus some of its efforts on securing strategic commitment from the governments and institutions with which it works, especially for its work in formal education. The evidence is clear from COL’s own work, but also from others, that the commitment of institutional leaders is vital to adoption and sustainability. IT4Change in India began its work as a community of practice (CoP) with head teachers and this has paid major dividends, leading to one of the largest sustained CoPs in education in the world.

8. **COL’s communications are poorly focused** – A part of the legacy of the old paradigm within COL is a difficult-to-navigate website, overly complex communications and, frankly, poorly focused and strategic communication with donors and partners. (For example, country reports prior to 2015 do not really capture the strategic value of COL’s work.) While there is a welcome for Connections (COL’s regular magazine) and its news feeds, more focused stakeholder and strategic communications are needed to better connect with stakeholders and partners and to better engage these partners in COL’s work. A major rethink of its strategic communications, brand development strategy and Web presence is urgently needed. COL’s Web and social media presence do not reflect either the dynamic of COL’s work or its vibrancy. Knowledge management within COL and between COL and its partners is more of a problem than an asset.

9. **Effective communities of practice would help sustain COL’s work** – COL has developed some communities of practice (CoPs) networks to support its work (e.g., INVEST Africa, Commonwealth Open Schools Association, networks of legislative drafters, CoP for Teachers with IT4Change and others) and these are part of the tool kit for outcomes. Evidence is growing that these can sustain and continually innovate and support initiatives long after the initial development spurts occur. Such CoPs are not just social media, but focused and deliberate attempts to build ongoing capacity development through peer networks. COL needs to become more systematic and focused on the development of such communities of practice where doing so supports the strategic intent of an initiative. Appropriate logistic and software supports should be available to support this work.

10. **Regional network organizations are only marginally contributing to COL’s work** – With the notable exception of CEMCA (and sometimes RETRIDOL), the regional networks appear to be contributing in limited ways to the work of COL. Much more effective are local champions (whether formally recognized as Focal Points or less formally recognized, but very committed individuals) who understand the range of COL’s work, are highly respected in their community and connect COL’s initiatives across a nation in powerful and effective ways. This is clear, for example, in evidence from Botswana, Sri Lanka and several other countries. Developing these local “quarterbacks” or “champions” is a key task for strategic communication and ensuring that

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80 See the annual survey report of the Online Learning Consortium (formerly the Sloan Consortium) in the U.S. on the impact of strategic commitment on online learning take-up and adoption at [http://onlinelearningconsortium.org/publications/survey/grade-change-2013](http://onlinelearningconsortium.org/publications/survey/grade-change-2013)

81 See comment above.

82 Some Focal Points are very engaged and committed, others are not. The value added to COL’s work from their contribution varies.
COL remains “in mind” locally. Not all Focal Points or interlocutors are well equipped or appropriate for this work.

11. The role of Education Specialists needs to be re-examined – The skill set required for an Education Specialist is not a PhD or a senior position in an academic organization (though these are not barriers and may be essential for the Education Specialist role in Teacher Education and Higher Education). What is needed, rather, is expertise in change management, project management, partnership engagement and diplomacy. Some Education Specialists have not been best equipped for the challenges of this work, and even those who are well equipped often find the scale and scope of what they are expected to achieve intensely demanding. The skills needed for this work and the capacity of the team undertaking it should be thoroughly reviewed. This should also apply to other positions in the organization, most notably the role, function and professional development of those who provide support to the Education Specialists. COL needs to be a lean, focused and highly skilled organization with minimal bureaucracy.

12. COL’s funding models need to be re-examined – The rules for non-profits in different countries represented at the Board table differ significantly. In Canada, non-profits can accumulate available funds into restricted funds dedicated to specific purposes. They can also receive donations from a variety of sources and have significant corporate flexibility. COL is largely limited to voluntary finance from governments and small revenue (about $750,000) from its service offerings and some grants supporting specific activities. It therefore has limited capacity to act strategically over the long term knowing that the funds are available to support its strategic intentions. COL needs to seek out a group of major donors who support its mission and strategy, developing strategic funds for each region of the Commonwealth, no strings attached. The fear is that this will deter governments from making annual contributions — a major strategic communications challenge. COL should partner with an organization that can help it think though long-term creative financing within the rules of the Canada Revenue Agency. Annual and small funding from many nations can lead to, as one former COL senior staff member made clear, “being pulled in lots of different directions to do lots of bits and pieces” to satisfy implicit expectations of donors. Given the uncertainty over future funding from at least one major contributor, this matter is becoming more urgent an issue for COL.

13. COL has been unable to move to scale on many initiatives – A concern for some people interviewed (including some current and past Board members) is the apparent failure of COL to move to scale on many of its initiatives. However, other interviewees and respondents to the Challenge Dialogue countered this with the three following points:

- First, the challenge is to build ownership and commitment locally to the initiatives appropriate to a community or nation. COL, unlike some other development agencies, is not seeking to implement a template but to build local capacity for locally owned development. Through demonstration projects, others can take an initiative to scale. There are few examples of where this has actually occurred, though several suggested that the very idea of ODL or OER is now embedded and is moving to scale.

- Second, outcomes and impacts are a function of resource investments – For the funds available, COL has a great many outcomes and impacts it can point to. Some people
have suggested that “less is more” and that scale might be more possible to achieve if COL sought to do fewer things across the Commonwealth on a large scale. Yet, the meetings of the Focal Points and the interviews with some 480 persons suggest that COL is seeking to ensure relevance, ownership and appropriateness of both its work and the speed at which it is seeking to ensure adoption. There are tradeoffs here: small activities everywhere to embed an idea and enhance local capacity rather than flagship projects on a national scale that demonstrate what more flexible approaches to learning can achieve for sustainable development. COL is not faced with an either/or choice here: it needs to find a way for some national-scale projects to be part of the mix of its work.

- Third, **not all nations and regions within them are at the same state of development at the same time**. COL’s sensitivity to local conditions, its ability to focus and align the work of its partners and its “patience capital” seeds for scale over time. Some nations appear ready to embrace larger system scale change — and are actively engaged in doing so (Sri Lanka, for example, is making substantial changes to its school systems, and Kenya to its technical and vocational education systems). COL needs to identify opportunities to move to scale.

14. **VUSSC’s potential is not fully understood** – A concern of some interviewees is that VUSSC seems, in the words of one person, “the most promising development COL has been involved in on a large scale, but has yet to deliver.” Five main points were made here (see section 6 about VUSSC in this report) whenever it was raised with those most closely involved:

- COL is facilitating the work of VUSSC, but VUSSC is actually the responsibility of the small states of the Commonwealth. Concerns about its work are actually concerns about the capacity of the Management Committee and the Board of VUSSC to manage its future. COL is mentor, coach and guide to the Management Committee, but it may be time to push hard for a strategy that challenges VUSSC to deliver more. The small states of the Commonwealth, especially the Ministers of Education for these states, need to see the real potential of VUSSC as an agent of change for their nations.

- COL has achieved much since it began working with VUSSC in 2005. Twelve programs, with some 65 courses, are available not only to the VUSSC stakeholders but also to anyone across the Commonwealth as OER. The evaluator for VUSSC estimates that the potential impact of VUSSC on individuals across the small states is so far in the order of 49,000 persons.**83** We do not know fully what the non-VUSSC impact of these resources may be, but there is clearly a sizeable number of potential nodes of influence. It is time to build a focused alumni strategy to leverage their potential.

- The Transnational Qualification Framework (TQF) is seen as the major achievement of VUSSC. It permits the recognition of qualification earned in one nation by 31 other nations. A key part of VUSSC’s future (and that of COL and the Commonwealth) is to fully leverage the TQF as a core feature of Pan-Commonwealth collaboration.

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**83** This calculation is based on the assumption (supported by survey findings) that 80% of those trained in boot camps and additional VUSSC capacity-building workshops and courses (excluding the 723 students enrolled in VUSSC formal certificate/diploma/degree programs) will go on to train an average of 50 people. The base of direct contact is 1,903 participants/attendees/students. Of this, 944 (80% of 1,180) will likely go on and train others (944 x 50 = 47,200). This second wave of contact (47,200) plus the base (1,903) equals 49,103.
• A deliberate decision was made that VUSSC not be a qualification-granting organization (despite its name). Several of those interviewed still think it should be, as part of a strategy of enabling learner mobility. VUSSC is a collaborative, co-operative network that enables program development that otherwise no single nation could afford. Development of 12 programs, as well as plans for several new ones, all with such a limited resource base is, in fact, a significant achievement.

• VUSSC is a resource for the Commonwealth as a whole, not just for the small states of the Commonwealth. Since VUSSC is committed to OER, its programs are freely available worldwide (with acknowledgement). The new Oceans University in Sri Lanka, for example, is able to make effective use of these resources even though it is not one of the 32 contributing nations to VUSSC.

There is always more that can be done. VUSSC is a significant achievement of the small states, supported by COL, with some impacts now emerging.

14.3 Risks
According to the interviews and responses to the Challenge Dialogue, COL faces three main risks:

1. “Events” – When UK Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was asked what he considered to be the greatest threat a statesman might face, answered, “Events, dear boy, events.” ODL, OER and ICT in education are fast-changing domains that have recently attracted a great deal of attention and resources. “Events” in these areas — not the least of which are the growing commitments of large amounts of private capital aimed at leveraging ODL and ICT for developing nations — could soon displace some of COL’s work. For the next six years, if COL is to remain a leader in the Commonwealth in ODL, OER and ICT in education, it will need to focus on building partnerships and alliances, pursuing strategic work, and creating effective models that others can take to scale.

2. Money – COL’s funding is based on voluntary contributions. If a major donor changes the basis of its funding or withdraws that funding, COL could be very vulnerable. COL needs to act quickly to diversify its revenue base and to rethink its financial and business strategy. It needs to be much more enterprising and focused. The Board appears to be “on side” with such rethinking. A sense of urgency is needed.

3. People – COL’s reputation depends on the calibre and integrity of its people and their dedication. People within COL and those who work closely with COL expressed concern that the demands of the work are increasing and that the work of COL is becoming more stressful. By far the best predictor of success is employee engagement and satisfaction. COL needs to rethink its Human Resources strategy and develop strategies for greater empowerment and engagement of its staff.

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84 Not all staff share this view, but it is evident from some that the demands of the work, coupled with travel, have a substantial impact on work-life balance for some.
15 CONCLUSION

When the expert panel, chaired by Lord Asa Briggs, proposed the creation of the University of the Commonwealth for Co-operation in Distance Education — the starting point for the Commonwealth of Learning — the then Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Sir Shridath Ramphal, said that the thinking behind this proposal “stirred the imagination” and beckoned people to respond to the ideas and “work for their fulfillment.” On several subsequent occasions, he referred to COL as a major institutional achievement of the Commonwealth.

From its beginning on November 14, 1988, COL’s purpose was to strengthen the capacity of member countries to develop the human resources needed to support the economic and social development goals of those nations.85 COL has been focused on “learning for development” since the start86 — that is, having an impact on individuals, institutions and society by strengthening skills, learning, knowledge and understanding. Open and distance education was its primary mechanism.

Over time, COL has nimbly responded to significant and subtle changes in the landscape and needs of Commonwealth member countries. It now speaks of ODL, OER, quality assurance and non-formal learning. It is also beginning to make more extensive use of flexible learning strategies — open schooling, lifelong learning, non-formal learning, learning through mobile technologies, community learning using radio, and other means. All of its work is informed by a preoccupation with accessibility, quality, learning outcomes and effective means of delivery at a low or competitive cost. It has tried some things and failed. Even one of its now most successful initiatives (Lifelong Learning for Farmers) went through several iterations before finding its voice. Nevertheless, COL has been relentlessly pursuing its core agenda for over 25 years. COL is itself a learning organization.

Together the substantial evidence of outcomes and the more modest evidence of impacts (both at the initiative level and at a national level) indicate that COL remains the only intergovernmental organization committed to key sustainable development goals as they relate to education and learning using ODL and OER. What is more, COL remains focused on learners and learning outcomes. It needs to retain this relentless focus on people, not just institutions, as it adapts to a fast-changing development landscape, with more private and NGO players now seeking to occupy this same space.

“The future for COL is not likely to be a straight line from the past,” said a South African interviewee. Still, COL needs to leverage its past to build for its future. In doing so, it needs to look carefully at its strategic and operational strengths, the challenges it and its partners face, the options for its future, the response it has to these conditions, and the way it will ensure its effectiveness. Impact should be the driver.

85 See www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0158791890100115?journalCode=cdie20#.UzCp7fNdVS8
86 It formally adopted this statement in 2006.