COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING

External Evaluation of the 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

FINAL REPORT

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>3YP</td>
<td>Three-Year Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South East Asian Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOCODOL</td>
<td>Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning</td>
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<td>CARICOM</td>
<td>Caribbean Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCTI</td>
<td>Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher’s 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>CCEM</td>
<td>Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers</td>
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<td>CEMCA</td>
<td>Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>COL-RIM</td>
<td>COL Review and Improvement Model</td>
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<td>CFTC</td>
<td>Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation</td>
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<td>CLP</td>
<td>Community Learning Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>information and communications technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>IGNOU</td>
<td>Indira Gandhi Open University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>face-to-face</td>
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<tr>
<td>FaB</td>
<td>flexible and blended learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>L3F</td>
<td>Lifelong Learning for Farmers</td>
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<tr>
<td>LIVES</td>
<td>Learning Through Interactive Voice Educational System</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal</td>
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<tr>
<td>METC</td>
<td>Media Training Centre (South Africa)</td>
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<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>monitoring and evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOOC</td>
<td>massive open online course</td>
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<td>MOU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-government organisation</td>
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<td>NOUN</td>
<td>Nigerian National Open University</td>
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<td>ODL/E</td>
<td>open and distance learning/education</td>
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<td>OER</td>
<td>open educational resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>QA</td>
<td>Quality Assurance</td>
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<td>RADA</td>
<td>Rural Agricultural Development Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RETRIDOL</td>
<td>Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>RBM</td>
<td>results-based management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SADC-CDE</td>
<td>Southern African Development Community Centre for Distance Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>TQF</td>
<td>Transnational Qualifications Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>technical and vocational education and training</td>
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<tr>
<td>TVSD</td>
<td>Technical and Vocational Skills Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VUSSC</td>
<td>Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth</td>
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<td>WITU</td>
<td>Women in Technology Uganda</td>
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Executive Summary

The consultants were requested to address four primary questions in the conduct of this evaluation. The following summary is a distillation of findings, conclusions and recommendations that are discussed in detail in this report.

Question 1. What has been the performance of COL in this triennium against the identified outcomes and indicators?

i. All of the initiatives moved forward successfully, on time and within budget. The large majority of the agreed performance indicators were met by March 2015. The fact that many of the indicators for the period were achieved early begs the question as to whether there was too much caution when setting the original targets.

Recommendation: Performance indicators need to be ambitious, with a stronger focus on outcomes rather than outputs.

ii. While it is not possible to suggest that some initiatives have run their course, there is little evidence of any exit strategies that would enable COL to “hand over” an initiative to appropriate stakeholders.

Recommendation: Initiative plans for the next period should include the exit criteria that would need to be met for each initiative.

iii. There is a need to assess how best, within COL teams, to minimise overlaps, exploit synergies and enhance the effectiveness of planning and delivery in the development of future plans. For example, within the Education sector, there is overlap of activities for Teacher Education, Higher Education, VUSSC, Open Schooling, eLearning and, to a lesser extent, TVSD. Similarly, the roles of staff at Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) and of the Vancouver-based teams related to activities in Asia should be clearly demarcated.

Recommendation: A review should be undertaken to consider where and how COL best adds value and how more integrated teams might enhance synergies among staff and the various initiatives.

Question 2. How appropriate are the two strategic sectors, Education and Livelihoods & Health, in realising the aims of the current Three-Year Plan?

i. There is no evidence that dividing the initiatives into two strategic sectors has enhanced delivery. Rather, the initiatives tend to operate independently, with the staff involved sharing experiences and common concerns mainly on an informal basis.

Recommendation: Consider dropping the concept of sectors and instead establishing mechanisms for promoting greater formal and informal teamwork among all staff.
Question 3. Have the core strategies and strategic goals been useful in support of achieving the aims of the current Three-Year Plan?

i. The strategic goals are appropriate and important. They have provided an overarching framework for the individual initiatives and link to COL’s mission statement.

**Recommendation:** Future plans should continue to use strategic goals as the overarching framework for integrating programme initiatives.

ii. The added emphasis of the cross-cutting themes — Gender and eLearning — has improved understanding and outcomes. Gender mainstreaming has been given fresh impetus with the internal professional support of a Gender Equality Manager, resulting in greater staff understanding and commitment. However, the application of eLearning is an inherent feature within each initiative and is therefore questionable as a cross-cutting theme.

**Recommendation:** COL should maintain the role of the Gender Equality Manager, but the need for a dedicated cross-cutting theme to support eLearning (as currently defined) should be reviewed.

iii. COL’s core strategies — partnerships, capacity, materials, policy and models — continue to be appropriate. However, they are not all “core.” Partnerships are a core business process and therefore part of each initiative. Capacity building and materials are necessary strategies for achieving outputs and ultimately outcomes. Enabling policies are essential if interventions are to be sustainable. The least-used strategy is that of models — that is, developing operating models to pilot-test and demonstrate successful implementation to prospective adopters. *Seeing* an innovation in operation allows potential adopters to assess how the employed strategies might need to be modified to fit the local operating environment. A good example was the adoption and scaling up of L3F in this plan period.

**Recommendation:** COL should define the concept of model building, describe the contexts when it might be applied, and encourage its strategic use.

Question 4. What lessons can COL, its Board of Governors and its partners take from the operation of the plan into the next plan period?

i. A significant success of this 2012–2015 3YP has been engagement with all countries in the developing Commonwealth. However, several stakeholders expressed concerns that COL activities are being spread too thinly around many countries.

**Recommendation:** COL should focus on fewer activities but deliver those in greater depth.
ii. COL teams have employed results-based management (RBM) to good effect for this 3YP. Given the large number and scope of activities across initiatives, the rigour that RBM requires has ensured focus, which in turn has contributed to delivering on the indicators.

**Recommendation:** COL should maintain the application of RBM and the Logic Model for planning and delivery, but ensure that Performance Indicators are critically assessed and focus more strongly on outcomes rather than on outputs.

iii. A culture of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is embedded in COL, but obtaining appropriate data from partners has proved challenging. This will likely become more acute as more emphasis is placed on qualitative measures to assess outcomes and impact.

**Recommendation:** Initial project design should include an M&E plan, jointly developed with partners.

iv. COL has many partners, including governments and their institutions, as well as non-governmental civil society organisations. The most frequent challenge to effective delivery during this 3YP was the availability of partner support resources: staff availability (for support and as participants), infrastructure, equipment and funds. Problems were most acute with government organisations, in particular those in the formal Education sector. ODL and OER activities are new and often perceived as marginal activities.

**Recommendation:** A rigorous assessment of the capabilities and resources of partners to support activities must be part of the initial appraisal, including agreement about risks and clarification of assumptions.

v. The relative cost-effectiveness of COL has been commented upon favourably by external consultants who cite the many activities delivered and outcomes achieved for modest investment. However, little systematic evaluation of cost-efficiency and the relationship of costs to outputs and outcomes has been attempted (except in the Healthy Communities, L3F and TVSD initiatives). COL staff said they would welcome guidance to develop a structured approach to apply to their work.

**Recommendation:** A practical methodology for analysing the relationship between costs, outputs, intended outcomes and impact should be developed with external assistance.

vi. While COL’s brand currently enjoys strong equity value in terms of respect and loyalty, the application of ICT and OER in the international delivery of education is fast changing. Today, there are many new players and new approaches to delivery, involving both the public and the private sectors.
**Recommendation:** COL needs to closely monitor innovations in ICT and OER and often review where it might add the most value and leverage its endeavours.

vii. COL has successfully attracted funds in addition to those received from donor countries. The need to diversify and grow revenue will likely escalate as demand for services continues to grow. On one hand, COL’s track record and strong brand equity have positioned the organisation for success. On the other hand, there is very limited capacity among current staff to mount a fund development programme.

**Recommendation:** COL should consider appointing a Business Pursuit Manager.
1 Introduction

1.1 This evaluation was commissioned by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), according to the Terms of Reference (see Annex 2). The two consultants who undertook the evaluation were Neil Kemp and Glen Farrell, selected on the basis of a competitive tender.

1.2 The evaluation considered the strategies and activities at the initiative level, as summarised in the results-based management (RBM) logic framework. An “evidence-based” assessment of outputs and outcomes was used to evaluate whether activities were efficient, effective, relevant and sustainable, and whether the specific needs of girls and women were being addressed. The findings are supported with both quantitative and qualitative data, the details of which are provided in Annex A.

1.3 The research was heavily dependent on secondary sources of information. These included available and relevant documents from COL, such as the logic framework, baseline studies, M&E strategies, consultants’ reports, partners’ reports, contracts with partners, quarterly COL Activity Updates, Annual Progress Reports to the Board, Board meeting minutes, travel reports, President’s reports and specialist publications. These data were supplemented with interviews conducted with COL staff, Board members, partners, consultants and stakeholders.

1.4 The detailed report (see Annex A) provides the results of our analysis of each of the initiatives, including discussion of the degree to which their intended outcomes were achieved and of the RBM and Logic Model being employed. Recommendations for each initiative are at the end of each section in Annex A, and a summary of the main recommendations is provided at the end of this Summative Report.

1.5 The authors received great support from all staff within COL and cooperation from everyone asked for interviews. We particularly thank Lydia Meister for her help and support, and Patrick Spaven for his advice and critical comment.

1.6 This summative report provides a brief overview of the evaluation of each initiative.
2 Higher Education Initiative

Outcome statement: Higher education institutions have ODL policies, systems and materials in place to provide quality education to increased numbers of people, particularly women and marginalised communities.

2.1 The demand for higher education across the developing Commonwealth grows apace, driven in particular by large increases in senior school graduates. However, education budgets are constrained, limiting investment, which in turn has necessitated governments to explore different delivery models. ODL is a major contender as it offers much potential to reach many more students than traditional learning models, and with qualitative enhancement and economies of scale. COL has demonstrated its expertise in developing and applying ODL for higher education, and institutions and governments systematically seek its advice.

2.2 The Higher Education initiative addresses these challenges, and the performance indicators for the 3YP are shown in Table 2.1. The budget allocation for this in the 3YP was C$1.27 million.

Table 2.1: Performance indicators and achievements for the Higher Education initiative, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least 2 governments in different Commonwealth regions create enhanced access for learners by implementing ODL policy</td>
<td>Achieved: National Higher Education ODL policy has been established in Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles and Trinidad &amp; Tobago. A regional policy framework has been endorsed by CARICOM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 4 institutions in 3 different regions of the Commonwealth implement ODL policies and systems to substantially increase the number of learners</td>
<td>Achieved: 6 institutions in 3 different regions are now involved in implementing institutional ODL policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education institutions in 10 countries provide increased access to improved gender-inclusive content, including OER</td>
<td>Achieved: CEMBA/CEMPA programmes offered in institutions in 11 countries and faculty supported to develop and update learning materials and gender case studies using OER. The Legislative Drafting programme was revised and is available as OER to students in 8 countries in the Pacific region, Nigeria and Canada.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 institutions in 4 countries improve the quality of their programmes through implementing quality assurance and leadership training. At least 4 put in place an institutional quality policy.</td>
<td>Achieved: 10 institutions in 9 countries have adopted COL-RIM, and 2 have put in place an institutional quality assurance policy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3 As is clear from Table 2.1, the performance indicators were exceeded. This suggests that those for the next plan period should be set to ensure they are appropriate and challenging. Additionally, confusion between outputs and outcomes was evident in the application and reporting of the indicators, with less consideration given to achieving the latter in terms of impact and sustainability.
2.4 The total spread of COL Higher Education activities is impressive. It involves prioritising capacity building, instituting quality assurance, supporting research, and developing ODL courses and OER. In all this work, COL has placed strong emphasis on partnerships and encouraged local ownership. However, some activities continued to need COL’s direct investment, among them: the Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDOL); the COL Review and Implementation Model (COL-RIM); the COL Research Chairs; and the Commonwealth Executive MBA and MPA programmes (CEMBA and CEMPA). While the management of each of the programmes improved over the 3YP and each programme contributed to the achievement of performance indicators, a challenge for the next period will be to work with partners to achieve long-term sustainability of the programmes.

2.5 Clarity on setting outcomes and then understanding progress towards their achievement was hampered by the lack of baseline research and lack of M&E plans. However, research to establish these for the next plan period has already been commissioned.

2.6 The Higher Education sector is diverse and growing rapidly, with already 50,000 higher education institutions in the developing Commonwealth (the large majority being in India). Many universities with high global rankings are also involved in growing international outreach through: building partnerships to offer ODL and transnational education (TNE) programmes; providing validation services; making resources available; and exchanging staff and researchers. Some of the services on offer are often similar to those of COL, although motivations might differ. A critical review of all COL’s Higher Education sector work is therefore recommended to assess where and how COL might deliver the most added value, and how it might work with other Commonwealth universities active internationally.

Such a review should also explore how to integrate Higher Education related activities more effectively within COL, possibly targeting fewer but dealing with them in greater depth. The review should as well include all other COL Higher Education related activities, particularly VUSSC, Teacher Education and the cross-cutting theme areas.

2.7 Gender considerations were prioritised during the 3YP and good examples of interventions within the higher education institution included incorporating gender criteria in developing all new teaching materials and establishing leadership-training programmes for female academics. This momentum needs to be maintained, given that the Higher Education sector in many Commonwealth countries continues to be male dominated.

2.8 A cause for concern is that the activity mix and programmes within higher education institutions in 2015 look very similar to those of 2011. Many of the observations made in 2011 remain relevant today — particularly that higher education institutions have been under-monitored and -evaluated, with insufficient consideration given to the potential to cooperate with other international higher education players.
3 Teacher Education Initiative

Outcome statement: More teacher education and training institutions use ODL methodologies to provide quality training and continuing professional development of larger numbers of teachers.

3.1 A major constraint on student enrolments to both primary and secondary schools in the developing Commonwealth is the number of trained teachers available. The Teacher Education initiative has addressed this by capitalising on the potential that ODL offers to increase teacher supply and to improve the quality of learning.

3.2 The 3YP employed core strategies of partnerships, capacity building and materials development to deliver the performance indicators shown in Table 3.1. The budget allocated for Teacher Education in the 3YP was C$1.35 million, and activities took place in 18 countries.

Table 3.1: Performance indicators and achievements for the Teacher Education initiative, 2012-2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least 4 additional institutions, from each region of the Commonwealth, adopt gender-sensitive ODL methodologies to substantially increase the number of teachers trained or upgraded</td>
<td>Achieved: 6 additional institutions adopted gender-sensitive ODL methodologies to substantially increase the number of teachers trained or upgraded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 teacher education institutions in 4 countries in all regions of the Commonwealth enhance the quality of their curricula through the development and use of new materials, including OER</td>
<td>Achieved: 26 teacher education institutions in 8 countries enhanced the quality of their curricula through the development and use of new materials, including OER.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 teachers and teacher educators are trained on various aspects of ODL, including the development and use of OER</td>
<td>Partially achieved: 5,486 teachers and teacher educators were trained on various aspects of ODL, including the development and use of OER. Note: The required target of 10,000 trained proved extremely challenging (see text). Without enrolments by teachers in the MOOC, there would have been a greater shortfall.</td>
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</table>

3.3 The first two performance indicators were significantly exceeded. The third, and most challenging one — 10,000 teachers trained — was not achieved. Delivery was dependent on partners cascading activities, and many of those partners experienced difficulties. An example is the conflict in northern Nigeria, where a significant project for the education of nomads had been planned. Over 5,000 teachers were eventually involved in training through the Teacher Education initiative, with over half enrolled on the massive open online course (MOOC) programmes launched in 2014.

3.4 A number of unplanned benefits were realised from the involvement of teachers in training. In Ghana, for example, participants launched a national initiative to disseminate Open Resources for English Language Teaching (ORELTL) modules; and in Kenya, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development
(KICD) approved these modules for use as Supplementary English Educational materials in the country’s secondary schools.

3.5 While capacity building in Teacher Education advanced during the 3YP, greater emphasis should have been placed on outcomes and impact. The new six-year cycle provides opportunities to plan and consider how COL interventions might add best value and sustainability. This should include integrating Teacher Education activities more effectively at both strategic and institutional levels (i.e., in terms of development of materials, access to OERs, in-service teacher education, quality assurance, etc.), essentially moving beyond capacity building to deliver impact through the teaching and learning experience.

3.6 The Teacher Education team established areas of good practice for cooperation with partners. These areas included well-researched baseline studies and the application of “Concept Notes.” The latter detailed the operating environment for each activity, and ensured that interventions were responsive to partner needs and that risks were identified and mitigated. The Concept Notes also helped COL make well-informed decisions about the levels of support needed.

3.7 The achievement of gender outcomes was patchy, particularly for activities in Southern Africa. However, there are now clear plans in place that should deliver change.

3.8 Some of the challenges identified in the achievement of outcomes in Teacher Education were similar to those experienced within other COL initiatives, particularly where government institutions were lead partners and with responsibility for cascading activities. Problems encountered in the delivery of activities included lack of support resources, intermittent Internet access, great variability in understanding of ICT and its application amongst workshop participants, and difficulties in follow-up to consolidate and extend learning experiences. However, it remains important to work closely with the formal Education sector. This implies a need to strengthen initial planning and appraisal, identify risks, build on initiatives already developed, improve follow-up, and integrate activities more effectively, including focusing on fewer of them but in greater depth.

3.9 Because MOOCs offer opportunities to engage and support the training of thousands of teachers, their potential should be critically assessed. Results from the three courses to date must be reviewed, and consideration given to how to integrate them with other Teacher Education interventions.

3.10 There are areas of overlap between Teacher Education and other COL initiatives, particularly Open Schooling, TVSD and Higher Education (including VUSSC). These areas should be reviewed and consideration given to how best to exploit synergies, minimise overlap and encourage team integration.
## 4 Open Schooling Initiative

**Outcome statement:** *More learners, particularly girls, have access to quality learning opportunities at the secondary level through the introduction and expansion of open schooling.*

### 4.1 Open schools have demonstrated that they can be an effective means to deliver education to those students who might normally find it difficult to attend regular schools. These include those in more remote locations, school drop-outs, and those from other disadvantaged or marginalised groups.

### 4.2 Five lead activities with ambitious performance indicators were set for the Open Schooling initiative, as shown in Table 4.1. The total allocation of funds for Open Schooling in the 3YP was C$1.25 million.

**Table 4.1:** Performance indicators and achievements for the Open Schooling initiative, 2012-2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 additional countries establish new open schools to expand access to equitable learning opportunities for girls and boys</td>
<td>Achieved: Vanuatu, Pakistan, The Bahamas and Belize</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 10 existing open schools substantially increase enrolment and performance by adopting new gender-sensitive policies and systems | Achieved:  
  - OER policies adopted: Bangladesh, Botswana, India, Namibia, Kenya  
  - Quality assurance system: Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho, Tanzania, Mozambique  
  - Organisational strategy and management information system: Papua New Guinea  
  - Gender guidelines: piloted in Belize, India, Tonga and Tanzania  
  - Cost and financing: Antigua & Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Jamaica, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & The Grenadines, Trinidad & Tobago |
| At least 10 open schools introduce 5 new vocational and 5 new technical subjects to attract learners who would otherwise be excluded | Achieved:  
  - Pakistan: 3 vocational subjects introduced  
  - Bangladesh, Ghana and Vanuatu: 9 subjects introduced (3 in each country)  
  - Namibia: 1 online Vocational Certificate; ECD under development  
  - Next fiscal year: 8 vocational subjects planned (2 in each country) in India, Trinidad & Tobago, Botswana, Malawi |
| 10 open schools adopt and use OER | Achieved:  
  - Belize, Namibia, Zambia, Lesotho, Botswana, Mozambique, Kenya, India, Bangladesh |
| Increased accessibility to quality education for marginalised girls through appropriate curricula and technology | Achieved:  
  - Botswana: training material developed for girls in leadership roles  
  - Bangladesh: 3 subject areas developed following identification by girls  
  - Pakistan: content for 13 subjects developed and available online |
4.3 The Open Schooling initiative achieved its planned outcomes and performance indicators, with some completed even by the end of the second year. It was not possible to establish whether the original indicators were sufficiently challenging or whether this was the result of greater efficiency in delivery.

4.4 While the potential of Open Schooling to enhance access to schooling for young people remains strong, it is challenging. Successful delivery needs multiple overlapping interventions at all levels in the education system. Close partnership with governments has been essential for several reasons: to ensure integration with national systems, for the formal recognition of training and, ultimately, for sustainability. Problems were experienced because Open Schooling activities were often treated as marginal by governments. For example, staff trained in developing open resources (mainly teachers) had to return to their full-time posts with no time allowed for essential follow-up; equipment was not always available; Internet access proved difficult; and funding for the long-term was limited.

4.5 More detailed project planning with each partner at the initiation stage might help improve delivery and impact. This would also clarify roles and responsibilities and identify potential risks. Plans and progress should be regularly updated through review with each partner.

4.6 A useful evidence-based approach was adopted for country prioritisation for the Open Schooling initiative. This involved assessing a country’s needs, undertaking “preparedness” surveys for each potential partner and then identifying possible barriers to implementation.

4.7 Baseline studies were established but the quality of the data to chart progress was patchy, mainly because of poor in-country recording systems. There is a need to identify clearly with partners, at the planning stage, the M&E and data requirements that might usefully measure progress, and then agree how these data might best be collected. Additionally, primary research is needed to assess the qualitative impact and this has yet to be initiated.

4.8 While logic frameworks were in place for all lead activities, the initiative would have benefited from more detailed plans that indicated how the individual activity (e.g., workshops) contributed to an intended activity outcome. Sharing such details would have helped consultants and trainers better understand the context of their involvement, encourage their comments on progress, enhance evaluation, and recommend possible follow-up.

4.9 COL ensured that all involved in the Open Schooling initiative understand Intellectual Property requirements. There were good examples of how IP considerations were included in national policies for open learning.

4.10 The next 3YP should target the achievement of impact through, for example, selective focusing of activities (geographically and by topics) and in greater depth. This would facilitate scaling-up, encourage sustainability and move beyond capacity building (which continued to dominate activities).
4.11 There are growing overlaps between Open Schooling activities and those of other COL initiatives, particularly Teacher Education and TVSD. These need to be reviewed and rationalised in order to exploit synergies, eliminate any duplication and encourage integration across COL teams.

5 Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

Outcome statement: More VUSSC partner institutions collaboratively develop and deliver relevant courses through the use of appropriate ODL methodologies, including eLearning strategies, as per the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF).

5.1 The core strategies used during the 2012–2015 3YP in the VUSSC initiative were capacity building, networking/collaboration, and strengthening the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF). Performance was assessed using the indicators shown in Table 5.1. The budget allocation for this initiative in the 3YP was C$1.023 million, of which C$173,000 was a donation from the Hewlett Foundation.

Table 5.1: Performance indicators and achievements for the VUSSC initiative, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 institutions use gender-inclusive OER to offer 9 new certificate, diploma or degree programmes, at least 5 of which are registered on the TQF</td>
<td>Achieved: 11 institutions in 8 countries are using OER to offer undergraduate and graduate degrees, diplomas and certificate programmes, 6 of which have been registered on the TQF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 VUSSC countries reference their qualifications framework to the TQF</td>
<td>Achieved: The following regional bodies (representing 47 countries) have referenced frameworks to the TQF: • European Qualifications Framework (16 countries) • CARICOM (12 countries) • Southern Africa Development Community (8 countries) • Pacific Registry of Qualifications and Standards (9 countries) • ASEAN (2 countries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 institutions increase their use of ICTs to deliver programmes to larger numbers of learners</td>
<td>Achieved: 10 institutions in 10 VUSSC countries. However, data related to enrolments and completion is not available as yet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 As is apparent from Table 5.1, all performance indicators have been fully met or exceeded, some by the end of the second year of the 3YP, which begs questions about the degree of challenge involved in setting them.

5.3 The number of countries involved has increased to 38 during the 3YP period in the regions of Africa, Asia-Pacific and the Caribbean. The level of engagement of the countries has also steadily increased, from basic participation
in training to the development of materials, listing of courses on the TQF and participation in the management of VUSSC.

5.4 The picture that emerges from the VUSSC story is one marked by the following observations:

- The number of participating countries has increased from 32 to 38.
- There is clear evidence that the investment in capacity building is paying dividends in terms of course and materials produced and used.
- There has been remarkable success in the adoption and use of the TQF — a “potentially game changing” development described in the external evaluation of the 2009–2012 3YP.
- There are encouraging examples of networking and collaboration between and among institutions more advanced in their adoption of the VUSSC model.

COL and staff associated with the VUSSC initiative should rightly be pleased with the results to date.

5.5 However, it is also clear that the rate of adoption is occurring most quickly in countries with facilitating policies, previous institutional commitments to ODL and higher levels of available ICT infrastructure — all of which probably gives rise to the availability of experienced leadership! Without a strategy for helping the less advantaged countries to “catch up,” it is likely that the variance of adoption will be exacerbated.

5.6 The following points are suggested for consideration for the next plan period. They focus on the authors’ analysis of what we see as the central challenge going forward: that of enabling small states to assume full management responsibility for embedding VUSSC as a sustainable part of their education systems. The points are based on the comments and suggestions of various stakeholders who kindly offered interviews.

- Focus on interactions with member countries that increase the capacity and confidence of VUSSC leaders to be more involved in the planning process and to take full responsibility for monitoring VUSSC implementation.
- Develop linking mechanisms at the regional levels to foster easier and more relevant collaboration in the development of courses and programmes and for the regionalisation of VUSSC management. The option of devolving these responsibilities to extant regional bodies before creating new ones needs to be explored as a first step.
  - Taking such action may also enable participation by, and partnerships with, non-member institutions in the region that may be more advanced in their eLearning offerings. Such a strategy could produce greater economies of scale and a faster route to sustainability for the entire small state membership.
- Focus on the development, evaluation and promotion of a limited number of collaborative models of institutions working together intra-nationally and internationally to demonstrate shared responsibility for curriculum
planning, development of related courses, shared delivery of the courses, student recruitment, and the awarding of credentials. The objective should be to demonstrate the opportunities for reducing institutional costs related to course development and delivery while enhancing quality.

- While the VUSSC results to date are encouraging, they could be even more impressive if COL resources were marshalled effectively through a more coordinated model. For example, the policy work done by the eLearning Education Specialist was commented on by interviewees as being very helpful in some VUSSC member countries. There are clear overlaps with the Higher Education and Teacher Education initiatives. Consideration of the rationalisation of roles and responsibilities is discussed in the Higher Education section and included in the recommendations.

6 Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) Initiative

Outcome statement: Marginalised communities in agriculture sector negotiate and access development resources in a sustainable manner through the use of gender-sensitive ODL and as a result of partnerships between government, civil society and the private sector.

6.1 The emphasis in the 3YP has been on replicating the L3F model, promoting self-sustainability and scaling up using strategies of model building, capacity building, partnerships and policy development. Activities were focused on the regions of Asia, Africa and, more recently, the Caribbean. The expected involvement of Pacific region countries did not occur during the 2012–2015 3YP period.

6.2 The performance indicators for the 3YP are shown in Table 6.1. For the 2012–2015 period, the budget allocation was C$2.1 million, with an additional C$840,000 provided by CIDA as a grant to replicate the model in more countries in Africa.

6.3 The conclusions regarding the successful achievements and results presented in Table 6.1 are based on the wealth of data accumulated by COL and supplemented with stakeholder interviews.

6.4 A remarkable level of attention had been given to M&E processes that have provided data on which to base planning for continuous improvement and future outcomes. Baseline studies were conducted before expansion into new countries or with new in-country Primary Partner groups. In some instances, this resulted in a decision not to proceed because of lack of readiness. For example, baseline surveys were conducted in India and Sri Lanka, Kenya and Uganda, Papua New Guinea, and Jamaica during 2012, and in Ghana and
Tanzania in 2013. Regular activity progress reports and annual evaluation reports have provided benchmark data for updating activity logic frameworks.

Table 6.1: Performance indicators and achievements for the Lifelong Learning for Farmers initiative, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievement at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A 50% increase in the empowerment of participants in 5 countries of 3 Commonwealth regions</td>
<td>Not achieved: While there exists a clear indication of empowerment in Asia and Africa as measured by a recently developed Empowerment Index, the data indicate that the outcome of 50% was overly ambitious. However, a modest increase of 10% was achieved and data will continue to be collected as measurement tools improve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 25% increase in income of participants measured by social groups and gender in 5 countries of 3 Commonwealth regions</td>
<td>Achieved: Target has been exceeded in both Asia and Africa, with increases in some African countries as high as 175%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A social rate of return of 1 to 3 among 20,000 participants, disaggregated by social groups and gender in 5 countries of 3 Commonwealth regions</td>
<td>Achieved: Target has been exceeded. In India, around 20,000 participants have generated income and assets over C$12.0 million and repaid the bank loan. In Kenya and Uganda, where HIV/AIDS-infected women (who are not given loans by banks), more than C$100,000 worth of loans have been raised. COL’s direct investment is less than C$1 million since 2012. Even if indirect cost is taken into account, for every C$1 investment, L3F has generated at least C$12 worth of direct assets—4 times the initial investment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3F is a sustainable system replicated by Secondary Stakeholders with enhanced investment in 8 countries of all Commonwealth regions.</td>
<td>Achieved: Target has been exceeded: 12 institutions, including government, financial institutions and private companies, in 8 countries have started investing resources in L3F.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 50% of the participants are women</td>
<td>Achieved: Target exceeded. More than 75% of the participants are women.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.5 The adoption of the L3F model, while varying across the regions, is now pan-Commonwealth in scope. In Africa, L3F is operating in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Mauritius and Ghana and is being replicated in Seychelles. And there is mounting evidence that L3F results in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania are making a strong impression on policy-makers.

- In Asia, L3F operates in Sri Lanka and India. India remains the most mature example of L3F in terms of its impact on Primary Partners. A 2013 study by the National Institute of Bank Management in India found that the cost–benefit ratio of the L3F project was 10 to 1: each rupee invested generated a return of Rs10. Sri Lankan government agencies have started replicating L3F.
- L3F development in the Caribbean region is in the early stages in Jamaica. Initial attempts to develop in the Pacific region (Papua New Guinea) have to date been unsuccessful.

6.6 Learning through Interactive Voice Educational System (LIVES) is an L3F activity with a focus on enhancing the use of mobile phone technology for delivering information and training to Primary Partners. Some beta testing has been done, with encouraging results.
6.7 Continuing to scale-up the L3F initiative with the intention that the partnerships will move to the macro stage of self-sufficiency development will require specific attention in the next 3YP period. The following suggestions may be helpful:

- COL facilitated some visits of key personnel from new and potential partnerships to travel to India to see and discuss L3F in action. This has proved very effective and could be expanded.
- Enhance awareness of the L3F, stressing win-win partnerships through using new and existing links with development agencies and funding institutions involved in managing and funding related rural poverty programmes. L3F is a good news story that should be told from as many platforms as possible.
- Consider how social media might be better applied to enable problem solving and communications among partner leaders.

7 Healthy Communities Initiative

Outcome statement: *More people, particularly women and youth, in more local areas, especially resource-poor communities, use better-quality learning opportunities to improve community health and development.*

7.1 Major problems in healthcare in countries in the developing Commonwealth remain. These countries together account for 60% of all maternal and 40% of all infant deaths globally. Providing appropriate health education can contribute greatly to reducing the incidence of these deaths, but resource-poor communities lack access to relevant learning opportunities. COL’s Healthy Communities initiative addresses these needs through its community learning programmes (CLPs), which focus on two broad areas:

- **Advocacy:** aims to establish the CLP model and provide evidence of its success, and thus influence policy-makers and practitioners
- **Capacity building:** seeks to build capacity for the design and delivery of quality CLPs among national, regional and local stakeholder groups; these include media outlets, community groups, NGOs and public authorities

7.2 The 3YP performance indicators are detailed in Table 7.1, together with achievements to 2015. The total budget for Healthy Communities in the 2012–2015 3YP was C$1.32 million.
Table 7.1: Performance indicators and achievements for the Healthy Communities initiative, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 new or significantly enhanced relevant and gender-sensitive community ODL programmes are delivered in resource-poor communities in at least 16 countries in 3 Commonwealth regions</td>
<td><strong>Significantly achieved:</strong> Since July 2012, 52 new CLPs have been designed and over 36 CLPs were delivered in multiple sites in 10 countries across 3 Commonwealth regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are 60,000 users of community ODL programmes in two key social groups (60% women and 40% youth)</td>
<td><strong>Achieved:</strong> Quarterly variations exist (see text), but results indicate there are &gt;30,000 identified users and 800,000 estimated users. More than 60% of those users are women (impossible to assess age of users).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning achievements and positive changes in health-seeking behaviours are evident</td>
<td><strong>Achieved:</strong> Although the detail is not fully understood, findings from initial research studies indicate that CLP has contributed positively to behaviour and learning outcomes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3 Table 7.1 indicates that the Healthy Communities initiative has, from its modest beginnings, delivered on the intended performance indicators and outcomes. Success has been achieved through delivery cooperation with six leading core regional partners and local partners in 20 countries. A “headline” summary of results shows that Healthy Communities has:

- Reached nearly 800,000 users
- Identified over 30,000 active users of the CLPs
- Designed 52 new CLPs, with 36 delivered to date in multiple sites in 10 countries
- Produced over 475 hours of learning content
- Led to the broadcast/delivery of over 745 hours of learning content;
- Catalysed over 1,000 hours of training
- Facilitated training sessions with 1,055 participants representing 275 organisations

7.4 Unplanned benefits include the extension to working in other social areas, such as covering domestic violence in Jamaica and young offenders in Trinidad & Tobago.

7.5 The two areas where the achievement of intended outcomes fell short were ensuring the longer-term sustainability of the CLPs and addressing the advocacy agenda:

- **Sustainability:** CLPs are developed and delivered with small NGOs and community radio stations in low-income countries, and these organisations have found it difficult to secure local funding. COL should build on its current efforts and continue to assist local partners in their drive for financial self-sufficiency.

- **Advocacy:** Activities need to be extended both to embed CLP approaches in national policy and programmes and to attract resources for partners. This could involve direct engagement with key influencers within national and state governments, including through a targeted communications strategy.

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7.6 Assessing the outcomes and impact of Healthy Communities capacity building has proved challenging, but COL has established good output reporting systems for partners and initiated a number of qualitative research projects to seek evidence. First results from the latter are encouraging and indicate that, at least partly, the CLPs have improved knowledge and behaviours amongst the target user groups.

7.7 Within the Healthy Communities, a useful effort was made to assess the cost-effectiveness of activities. First indications are that unit costs were between C$3 and C$8 per active learner. If all potential users are included, this falls to approximately C$0.23 per user. Unit costs should reduce as greater economies of scale are achieved through attracting more users.

7.8 COL has invested significantly to develop and promote the distance-training/mentoring programme in close cooperation with partners. This has been delivered flexibly, with local support and resources specific for different groups of participants. It has been well received and partners commented that it offered real potential for scaling-up and for achieving regional and global outreach. In all, 230 participants began the programme in 2014 and the first full cycle finished in March 2015. Participants were surveyed and summative evaluation results are awaited.

7.9 The design, development, delivery and monitoring of the Healthy Communities is to be commended. Partners greatly appreciated COL’s approach, particularly the application of participatory development techniques throughout:

- The baseline studies were thorough and all delivery options were considered through close consultation with partners.
- A quality and benchmark assessment tool, SOCIAL, was developed and employed with partners.
- The distance learning programme was jointly developed with partners, who also acted as mentors for participants.
- The six core regional partners provided in-depth annual and full 3YP reports.

7.10 The development of COL’s CLPs and their application to health and social problems have been dynamically delivered and are applauded by partners and stakeholders. Similar successes were reported for Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) with its activities in Community Media. COL appears to have carved out a niche in the application of learning technologies to improve health and social development in poor communities. The next stage will be to scale up and test the approaches in new environments and different communities.
8 Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD) Initiative

Outcome statement: Organisations and institutions increase equitable access to quality technical and vocational skills development through flexible and blended approaches, particularly for the informal sector.

8.1 COL identified the need to address high youth unemployment across the developing Commonwealth as a priority, and its TVSD initiative, through the application of flexible and blended learning (FaB), has sought to expand access to quality skills training. In particular, this initiative has targeted the unemployed, women and those in the informal sector.

8.2 The performance indicators for TVSD in the 2012–2015 3YP are shown in Table 8.1. The total budget for the period was C$1.25 million.

Table 8.1: Performance indicators and achievements for the TVSD initiative, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 20 institutions or organisations in 15 countries across all Commonwealth regions start or strengthen flexible and blended learning and substantially increase their learner enrolments, particularly for the informal sector | Achieved: Overall, 40 institutions in 19 countries are involved:  
  - Africa: 14  
  - Asia: 3  
  - Caribbean: 15  
  - Pacific: 8 |
| 15 new quality TVSD courses are in use, and are available as OER                        | Achieved: Overall, 126 new courses are in use or development, and of these 15 are available as OER:  
  - Africa: 53 (5 as OER)  
  - Asia: 15 (5 as OER)  
  - Caribbean: 49  
  - Pacific: 9 (5 as OER) |
| New technology-enhanced quality TVSD course components are in use in 20 institutions   | Achieved: Overall, 15 institutions are involved to date:  
  - Africa: 13  
  - Asia: –  
  - Caribbean: 1  
  - Pacific: 1 |
| 10 institutions implement flexible and blended TVSD policies and strategies            | Achieved: The focus has been with INVEST Africa institutions:  
  - Implemented: 11  
  - Under development: 1 |

8.3 The TVSD approach to flexible and blended learning was delivered through partnership activities within each Commonwealth region (Asia, Africa, Caribbean, and the Pacific), each with its own set of annual performance indicators. Activities were successfully implemented through a noteworthy mix of programmes involving NGOs, governments and education and training institutions as partners. The indicators for the 3YP were all significantly exceeded. For future years, these could probably be more challenging.
8.4 Some “headline” quantitative results at the end of the 2012–2015 3YP show that TVSD:

- Had 6,694 new learners on new informal sector courses
- Had 8,272 new learners in new flexible core programmes
- Worked with 64 institutions in 22 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Pacific
- Produced, with partners, 158 new courses and 16 open education resources
- Encouraged 45 institutions or organisations to have new technology-enhanced course components in use.

8.5 TVSD needed to respond to great disparities both in partners and trainees. The latter might be school dropouts, students from all levels of schooling, formal and informal sector employees, women, the unemployed and disparate communities, in both urban and rural areas. Partners had widely different governance, ownership and access to funding and resources, particularly for ICT and Internet access. Potential partners were therefore systematically screened through an online “readiness” survey and a training needs analysis tool was employed to assess training needs of teachers and instructors.

8.6 The needs, levels of innovation and speed of change both between and within countries varied greatly. This required partners, COL staff and associated consultants to work together closely to identify the appropriate FaB mix to suit the specific context. For example, online learning platforms were available in African and Caribbean institutions, while learning materials, not dependent on technology support, were important for Pacific locations.

8.7 Establishing capabilities and resources for delivering ODL and FaB required upfront investment. The 3YP activities therefore had to address capacity building. The next stage should involve scaling up, building on lessons to date and placing greater emphasis on outcomes, impact and sustainability. Parallel research, including tracer studies with technical and vocational education and training (TVET) staff, trainees and others should explore impact and sustainability, with the aim of informing future TVSD interventions.

8.8 Two other areas to address for the planning of future TVSD activities include:

- Ensuring that the staff trained in workshops are given time by their employers for essential follow-up activities
- Encouraging greater cooperation between regions (although the sharing of experiences within regions was evidenced (particularly with INVEST Africa partners)

8.9 TVSD has proactively engaged with partners to implement strategies fostering the inclusion of girls and women and promoting gender equality and gendered approaches. Good evidence of success was provided, including increases in female enrolment, promotion of TVET opportunities to girls,
production of gender-sensitive materials, and involvement of women’s organisations.

8.10 The TVSD team carried out a cost-effectiveness analysis in order to inform future strategic investment decisions. This has to be welcomed, and COL would benefit from external advice to establish guidelines and benchmarks.

8.11 The success of TVSD in its application of ODL and FaB learning should be promoted as part of a targeted strategy aimed at a wider network of influencers and potential sponsors for TVET programmes — all part of the model building previously referenced.

8.12 Overlaps between the TVSD and other COL initiatives were identified. These should be reviewed to exploit synergies and minimise overlap.

8.13 Continuing support for TVSD is warranted, because it has gathered momentum and is delivering. However, consideration should be given to focusing on a fewer activities and/or countries but treating those with a greater depth and level of engagement.

9 Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

Impact statement: A substantial and equitable increase in the number of citizens in Commonwealth Asia acquiring knowledge and skills for leading productive and healthy lives through formal and non-formal open and distance learning opportunities.

9.1 CEMCA is a regional resource to promote technology-enabled learning for Commonwealth Member States in Asia. COL provides core funding for CEMCA. It is an autonomous body accorded international status by the Government of India. CEMCA is treated as a separate initiative within COL and within the risk-based management (RBM) framework. It had a delegated budget of C$1.05 million in the 2012–2015 3YP period. It works in the initiative areas of Teacher Education, Higher Education, Open Schooling, TVSD and Healthy Communities (essentially, the Community Radio and Community Learning Programme [CR and CLP, respectively]), as well as eLearning and gender themes.

The performance indicators (provided in Annex A) are quite detailed. Additional indicators were also developed for some of the initiatives during the 3YP's implementation.

9.2 A report on the achievements for each indicator is provided in Annex A. It shows that all were either achieved or partially achieved. A few difficulties were encountered in making this assessment: M&E reports had been developed only for the CLP and Higher Education initiatives. For all initiatives, there was very limited provision of documentation, particularly workshop, partner and visit
reports; there were no baseline studies. And there was limited partner-provided data to chart progress.

9.3 Based on the documents available (both from COL in Vancouver and from CEMCA) and on stakeholder interviews, it would appear that there had been only limited joint engagement in developing the initiatives, planning activities and performance indicators, and sharing the experiences of implementation of programmes. There was also only informal agreement as to who might lead on a particular activity, between Vancouver and CEMCA, both in Asia generally as well as India specifically. For the next plan period, the development of detailed RBM and logic frameworks should be rigorous, with cooperation between the teams and baseline and M&E plans in place in a timely manner.

9.4 That said, the two M&E reports produced (for Higher Education and CR/CLP) were excellent and positive. They indicated good levels of CEMCA achievement against the indicators. Gaps were due either to the lack of data (for CLP) or to activities still being very much at the capacity-building stage, with time needed before outcomes could be realistically assessed for the activities (for Higher Education).

As the M&E Evaluator for the CLP positively commented:

“CEMCA has substantially demonstrated a deepening of its engagement in the community media sector across the South Asian region.... There is a palpable recognition of CEMCA not only as a training organization, but one that is engaged in scaling community media education from awareness building to consolidation, innovation and inclusion.”

9.5 Although Indian partners were still in the large majority for CEMCA activities, a success over the 3YP period was diversification into other countries, particularly Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Greater engagement across Asia should be maintained for the coming plan. However, given the relatively limited budget available, it might be more appropriate to engage in fewer initiatives but in greater depth, improve coordination, and minimise overlap with other COL activities in Asia.

9.6 There was good progress in engaging with women in CEMCA activities in community media, although this was not apparent for other activity areas. It would be appropriate for the CEMCA team to develop gender-responsive indicators for all activities.
10 eLearning: A Cross-Cutting Theme

Outcome statement: More governments, institutions and civil society organisations use eLearning and open educational resources (OER) for teaching and training in formal and non-formal environments.

10.1 COL defines eLearning as the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to expand access and to transform teaching and learning practice. The main objectives of the cross-cutting theme, eLearning, were to improve national and institutional readiness for delivery of eLearning and the production and use of OERs.

10.2 To achieve COL’s eLearning desired outcomes, five core activities were identified in the 2012–2015 3YP:

- policy development with governments
- design of online courses and delivery of them with education and training institutions
- supporting of the creation of open textbooks
- accreditation of the Commonwealth Certificate in Technology Integration for Teachers (CCTI)
- establishment of country-level agreements for the delivery of the CCTI and offering of programmes based on the CCTI

10.3 Three separate individuals held the post of eLearning Education Specialist over the 3YP period, which resulted in some breaks in continuity. The current professional in the post (since the end 2014) has had the role re-designated as Education Specialist, Technology Enabled Learning. This is now established as an independent initiative rather than a cross-cutting theme.

10.4 The performance indicators for eLearning in the 2012–2015 3YP are shown in Table 10.1. The budget allocation for the period was C$1.135 million.

Table 10.1: Performance indicators and achievements for the eLearning cross-cutting theme, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 governments and 10 institutions in 3 Commonwealth regions develop and implement eLearning and OER programmes</td>
<td>Achieved: 13 institutions and 9 countries initiated eLearning programmes in 3 Commonwealth regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 6 governments adopt OER policies</td>
<td>Partially achieved: Antigua &amp; Barbuda adopted ICT in Education/OER policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COL interventions led to draft policy/strategies in Grenada, St. Vincent &amp; The Grenadines, Seychelles, St. Kitts &amp; Nevis, Belize and Mauritius.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000 teachers and trainers use eLearning effectively</td>
<td>Achieved: Over 5,000 teachers were trained in developing teaching and learning online, ICT integration, OER and Mobile App for education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 learners across sectors (including civil society) effectively use eLearning</td>
<td>Achieved: Over 207,250 learners are using eLearning modalities as a result of COL programme activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10.5 It is apparent from Table 10.1 that, for the most part, the performance indicators were achieved and, while there were areas of difficulty encountered, the eLearning initiative resulted overall in important and tangible outputs.

10.6 Experience through implementing the 3YP indicated that to establish ICT and OER policy within government is complex and labour intensive, requiring close engagement by COL staff. As the performance indicator achievements indicate that only one country adopted an ICT policy in the 3YP period, thought needs to be given as to whether this area of activity should be continued, at least through the approach currently formulated.

10.7 Baseline research and M&E planning were in place, which no doubt offered some continuity for the new staff. The Education Specialist is, however, already commissioning studies for the forthcoming plan.

10.8 Challenges were experienced with the CCTI. As a result, adoption by governments was at a much lower level than planned. The Education Specialist has proposed that, for the next plan period, the focus be on adaptation through local institutions.

10.9 The way in which COL has chosen to foster the use of eLearning is confusing. All of the initiatives are expected to use eLearning with increasing effect and are supported with the impressive expertise of staff in the Knowledge Management office. It would therefore seem redundant to maintain eLearning as a cross-cutting theme with separate staffing and resources. Doing so is likely to increase instances of activity overlap and further redundancy.

11 Gender: A Cross-Cutting Theme

Outcome statement: More partners adopt gender-inclusive approaches and strategies to promote gender equity.

11.1 Addressing gender imbalances in access to education and training have been a continuing commitment for COL, with gender mainstreaming adopted as an organisational strategy. The approach has included the delivery of gender-specific interventions whenever girls/women or boys/men are identified as being in a particularly disadvantageous position.

11.2 The appointment of the Gender Equality Manager in 2013 provided great impetus to drive the agenda forward in a well-planned approach, coordinating with the other Education Specialists in each initiative area and addressing both internal and external needs.

11.3 A Gender Strategic Plan for the 3YP period provided necessary direction and performance indicators, shown in Table 11.1.
Table 11.1: Performance indicators and achievements for the gender cross-cutting theme, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10,000 girls and women have increased access to quality education and training</td>
<td>Achieved: Significantly exceeded, with at least 21,000 girls and women having increased access in the Caribbean, Pacific, Asia and Africa regions of the Commonwealth. These numbers are based primarily on enrolments and not on completion rates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 boys and men have greater access to targeted training in areas where they are disadvantaged</td>
<td>Partly achieved: At least 500 young men and boys have greater access in Trinidad &amp; Tobago and Cameroon. The Healthy Communities initiative is the only initiative that targeted training of boys and men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 10 partners mainstream gender in their programmes</td>
<td>Achieved: Exceeded, with 45 partners in 4 regions of the Commonwealth demonstrating elements of gender mainstreaming in their programmes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60,000 additional women access non-formal education, leading to increased income and better health-seeking behaviour</td>
<td>Achieved: Exceeded, with over 145,000 additional female learners having access.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11.4 As the gender theme was cross-cutting, it partnered each of the individual initiatives, with achievement of outcomes and performance indicators shared across all and investments made from the initiative budgets. There was also a gender-specific allocation of C$220,000 for the 3YP period.

11.5 This appears to have worked well. The Education Specialists reported that they established gender-responsive indicators for each initiative and that they had been monitoring progress accordingly.

11.6 Table 11.1 indicates that the performance indicators were achieved. More challenging concerns for the future will be to assess qualitative enhancement and also the longer-term impact of activities. This will likely require parallel primary research.

11.7 Gender equity in the hiring of consultants was also achieved, with an almost equal proportion of men and women making up the total of 512 contracted for the 3YP period (although there were some variations by initiative and region).

12 Discussion and General Findings

12.1 This section brings together the general findings from the evaluation of individual initiatives, and investigates broader aspects, as were required within the Terms of Reference for this study.

12.2 All the initiatives moved successfully forward, on time and within budget. The large majority of the agreed performance indicators were met by March 2015, with many met by the early part of the third year. While these successes are to be celebrated, it does give rise to questions as to whether some
performance indicators and their outputs and outcomes were sufficiently ambitious. The proposed indicators for the next plan will therefore need to be critically reviewed to ensure appropriateness.

12.3 Many activities were within the “capacity development” category, which frequently resulted in emphasis on outputs or short-term outcomes rather than on longer-term impact and sustainability. This remained a challenge for it very much depended on the actions of partners. We suggest that more detailed consideration of impact and sustainability be systematically addressed at the initial planning and appraisal stage. This would also include covering an exit strategy for COL in its initiatives.

12.4 Many of the performance indicators included “quality” criteria, but there was little detail as to how qualitative change had been (or might be) assessed. We suggest that, for some activities, a separate and parallel evaluation, including that through primary research, should be designed at an early stage to assess quality enhancement.

12.5 **Core strategies:** COL’s core strategies — that is, partnerships, capacity, materials, models and policy — continued to be appropriate, but they are not all “core.” Partnerships are a core business process and therefore part of each initiative, while materials and capacity building are necessary strategies for achieving outputs and ultimately outcomes. Models that demonstrate effective implementation of a desired outcome, underpinned by partnerships with enabling policies, infrastructure and resources in place, can be a critical ingredient for enhancing adoption and scaling up an innovation.

12.6 **The strategic sectors:** The strategic sectors were established to encourage sharing of experience across initiatives within common areas, both to exploit synergies and to avoid duplication. However, there was only limited evidence that this had happened. There are some examples of formal cooperation, with probably the best example being the cross-cutting themes where Education Specialists in various ways collaborated with the gender and eLearning teams. Overall, there is no compelling evidence that dividing the COL initiatives into two strategic sectors added value.

12.7 **How many initiatives are appropriate?** The evidence shows that all the initiatives are being delivered on time and on budget and with the large majority of performance indicators met. It is not possible to suggest that some have “run their course” on the basis of evaluating one 3YP. However, any decision on reducing or reshaping the COL programme must consider where COL offers comparative advantage or wants to position itself strategically over the coming years.

12.8 **Results-based management and the Logic Model:** The application of RBM and the Logic Model built successfully on the recommendations of the summative evaluation of the 2009–2012 3YP. Given the number and scope of activities involved for each initiative, the rigour that the RBM Logic Model approach required ensured that focus was maintained. However, a number of
gaps in application were identified. These are reported in detail in Annex A for consideration in the next plan.

12.9 Each of the initiative teams provided examples of good practice in their planning and delivery of activities, but these had not been systematically assessed or compared for wider adoption across COL. Other key areas for consideration include the realistic assessment of risks, planning, and developing a consistent approach to M&E plans.

12.10 **Partners:** Partnerships are central to COL’s work and the successful implementation, impact and sustainability of activities are dependent on a partner’s support, competence and commitment. It is impressive that COL has successfully implemented so many activities and with such a large number of partners around the Commonwealth. Partners interviewed reported that the COL partnerships had provided them with opportunities to build regional and global networks for learning and support that would not have happened without COL.

12.11 However, even the best plans can go awry and there were many examples of resources not being accessible as agreed, or participants not being available for a planned workshop. There is a need for greater deliberation at the project preparation and appraisal stage, with joint review (and sharing) of the critical success factors, risks and assumptions. This also reinforces the proposal for COL to target fewer activities but addressing those in greater depth.

12.12 **The COL brand and communications:** Internationally, there is great respect for COL, the professionalism of its staff, and its position as a global thought leader. Its brand is strong. Partners and consultants commented that association with COL had raised their own prestige and opened the door to new opportunities for activities and funding.

12.13 However, beyond partners and stakeholders, knowledge of COL is limited. Raising the profile of COL to a much wider group of decision-makers, influencers, professionals and organisations involved in development projects is vital, both to retain current stakeholders and to promote to new ones. Strategies we suggest include:

- Refresh the brand.
- Embark on a targeted communication strategy.
- Make the website more dynamic (this is vital, as the website is the window through which most of the world accesses COL).
- Enhance the professional visibility of COL staff.

12.14 **Diversifying revenue sources:** COL has been successful in securing support from across the Commonwealth, but this has resulted in greater demand for its services, which it is unable to meet from its limited resources. COL is dependent on its core financing from a limited number of sources, and this implies risk. COL must actively seek ways to increase and diversify its revenue base. We propose that a professional be appointed to lead on business pursuit, although this could be contracted out.
12.15 **Costs, outcomes and value for money:** COL teams have achieved an appropriate balance between programme expenditure and administration, management and governance costs. Budgets are delegated to the individual Education Specialists and there is evidence that this has facilitated focused decision-making and reduced transaction costs. However, each initiative received nearly equal allocations in spite of quite different needs. This suggests the need for some reassessment of the resource allocation process.

12.16 Relatively little consideration was given to the relationships between costs and outcomes and cost-efficiency in the activities. These are complex issues. We suggest that an external consultant be employed to review needs, develop a practical methodology to establish and facilitate the use of measures for these factors, and test their use with COL staff.

### 13 Summary of Recommendations

Listed here is a summary of the authors’ main recommendations. Initiative-specific recommendations are included in each section in Annex A.

**Planning**

Future planning should continue to employ strategic goals. These have provided an overarching framework within which to locate the individual initiatives and their related activities.

a. Performance indicators need to be ambitious, with a stronger focus on outcomes rather than outputs.

b. While recognising that activities are iterative, plans for long-term sustainability of an intervention should to be included within the initial planning.

c. Initiative plans for the next period should include exit criteria that would need to be met.

d. COL should focus on fewer activities but deliver them in greater depth.

**RBM and the Logic Model**

a. The application of RBM and the Logic Model to planning and delivery in COL should be maintained.

b. Appraisal needs to be strengthened with consideration of alternative approaches and their relative costs. This should also be done for activities continuing from a previous plan period.

c. More systematic baseline studies should be implemented.

d. A Key Project document file should be maintained for each activity to facilitate continuity, activity delivery and briefing of staff and consultants. This file would need to be updated regularly.

e. More detailed risk analysis should be undertaken at the appraisal stage, with assessment of the likely impacts of each specific risk.

f. There is a major need to improve data collection with partners to support M&E.
g. A challenge for the next plan is to develop approaches to assess qualitative outcomes.

**Internal management and organisation**

a. COL should undertake a critical review of all its Higher Education sector work to assess where and how it might deliver most added value. This should include the Higher Education initiative, Teacher Education initiative, VUSSC, technology-enabled learning and knowledge management.

b. Consider dropping the concept of sectors and establish mechanisms promoting greater formal and informal collaboration between staff. This would include a review of the current roles and responsibilities of the Education Specialists (including in CEMCA) to reduce overlap, enhance synergy and encourage greater teamwork.

c. COL teams should share and build on the many examples of good practice identified in this study.

**Partners**

a. A more rigorous assessment of the capabilities of partners to meet the needs of activities should be included at the appraisal stage, including agreed-to risks and assumptions.

b. COL needs a consistent policy as to how it cost-shares with partners.

**Consultants**

a. Consultants/trainers should be provided with more background on the activity they are involved in.

b. Consultants/trainers should be required to assess more critically the successes of the activities to date and the implications for future direction.

c. COL should undertake a critical review of all its Higher Education sector work to assess where and how it might deliver most added value. This should include the Higher Education initiative, Teacher Education initiative, VUSSC, technology-enabled learning and knowledge management.

d. COL teams should share and build on the many examples of good practice identified in this study.

**COL brand and communications**

a. A consistent approach to the application of the brand and brand values should apply to all communications.

b. The content, functionality and presentation of all COL-related websites should be reviewed to ensure consistency with the values of COL.

**Costs and outcomes**

a. A more critical assessment of value for money and the relationship between costs, outputs, intended outcomes and impact should be included in the initial appraisal of an activity.

b. COL should develop a comprehensive strategy to diversify its revenue base.
Annex A

Annex A: Table of Contents

This Annex provides the background detail, analysis, review and recommendations for each of the individual initiatives.

Note:
- For ease of comparison, the numbering of each section in Annex A follows the numbering in the Summative Evaluation report.
- All dollar amounts referred to in Annex A represent Canadian dollars.

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Section 2  Higher Education

Outcome statement: Higher education institutions have ODL policies, systems and materials in place to provide quality education to increased numbers of people, particularly women and marginalised communities.

2.1  Background

2.1.1  The demand for higher education across the developing Commonwealth has grown fast, driven in particular by large increases in senior school graduates. However, education budgets are constrained and mainly focused on increasing capacity at the school level, which has limited investment in higher education. Some of this demand for higher education places is being absorbed by a growing private sector, but this in turn needs student fee revenue — which few students from poor or marginalised communities can afford. These constraints have obliged governments to seek other cost-effective options; and ODL, with its potential for providing quality learning and with economies of scale, offers great potential.

COL has demonstrated its expertise in developing and applying ODL for higher education, and institutions and governments systematically seek its advice.

2.1.2  Performance indicators defined for the Higher Education initiative in the 2012–2015 3YP were:

- At least 2 governments in different Commonwealth regions create enhanced access for learners by implementing ODL policy
- At least 4 institutions in 3 different regions of the Commonwealth implement ODL policies and systems to substantially increase the number of learners
- Higher education institutions in 10 countries provide increased access to improved gender-inclusive content, including OER
- 10 institutions in 4 countries improve the quality of their programmes through the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms and leadership training, with at least 4 of them putting in place an institutional quality policy
- At least 4 institutions in 2 Commonwealth regions improve research output through COL Chairs

2.1.3  The budget allocation for the Higher Education initiative for the 3YP is set out in Table 2.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$463,000</td>
<td>$463,000</td>
<td>$395,000</td>
<td>$1,321,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Allocation of funds for the Higher Education initiative, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan
2.1.4 COL support for the Higher Education sector across the developing Commonwealth has considerable history and has been demand led, particularly through requests from individual countries. Additionally, as modes and approaches to ODL delivery are constantly evolving, new solutions need to be reviewed and tested for appropriateness. COL has demonstrated its expertise in this regard, such that institutions and governments systematically seek its advice.

2.1.5 The lead activities for the 2012–2015 3YP in the Higher Education initiative were:

- Building capacity for higher education
- Promoting quality assurance
- Conducting research studies and audits (including by the COL Research Chairs)
- Developing course and resource materials in ODL, OER, etc. for higher education

COL also supported the Regional Training and Research Institute for ODL (RETRIDOL) at the National Open University of Nigeria, as a regional resource for ODL in West Africa.

2.1.6 To deliver the above, COL was active in 25 countries in the 2012–2015 3YP period and engaged with many partners, including through regional higher education networks and associations, universities (particularly open universities in the Commonwealth) and national organisations.

2.1.7 The research for this evaluation was based on a review of consultants’ reports, other COL documents and interviews with a selection of partners and consultants. Only two M&E reports were available for this 3YP, and this lack of significant critical assessment of progress across the Higher Education initiative restricted this research and review.

2.2 RBM and the Logic Model

2.2.1 There were detailed logic frameworks available for each of the activities in the 3YP and these set out individual and specific performance targets. The then newly appointed Education Specialist in Higher Education updated plans and support documents from the beginning of the 2014/2015 year.

2.2.2 Most of the activities continued from the previous plan period and no baseline surveys were developed for the 2012–2015 3YP. The specially developed Higher Education initiative’s “activity monitoring spreadsheet” was useful and provided detailed analysis of the totality of activities, their progress to date and their forecasted end-of-year position. The Education Specialist’s July 2014 report provided good comment on progress towards the achievement of outcomes.
2.2.3 No overall monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan was in place for the 2012–2015 3YP period, although some ad hoc monitoring took place. The risks and assumptions were presented realistically, though at a high level.

2.3 Partners and Implementation

2.3.1 The Higher Education initiative is delivered through a series of activities, many interrelated, and through specific programmes. Each of these is presented and discussed below.

RETRIDOL, National Open University of Nigeria

2.3.2 The Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDOL) is a partnership with the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and is intended to be a regional resource centre for ODL in West Africa. RETRIDOL supports capacity building and research in the region, including through networking with regional and local organisations. It was established in 2003 and NOUN provides accommodation, staffing and running costs and COL supports programme activity with an allocation of $75,000 per annum.

2.3.3 For the previous 2009–2012 3YP, the COL Evaluator commented that little or no activity had taken place. However, for the 2012–2015 3YP, challenging performance indicators were agreed and progress was monitored and reported. Following success, the contract for RETRIDOL was renewed for another two years.

2.3.4 RETRIDOL received accountable advances from COL every six months against the agreed work plan. The Education Specialist in Higher Education reported a growing number of RETRIDOL programmes in 12 institutions in the region (in Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone) and his view was that there had been good progress. A review of COL’s commitment to RETRIDOL was planned, but COL agreed to postpone.

2.3.5 The detailed achievements for RETRIDOL are as follows:
- 32 academics from 5 institutions in Nigeria attended the national workshop on OER
- 45 academics from 12 institutions in 3 member countries attended the Course Material Development for ODL workshop
- 23 academics from 5 Nigerian institutions were trained in QA Mechanism in ODL and dual mode delivery
- 32 faculty members from 5 institutions in Nigeria received training in e-tutoring skills in ODL
- 18 academics from 6 universities were trained in materials development and policy
- 25 participants from 10 institutions in Nigeria and Ghana were trained in developing and writing fundable research proposals
- 35 academics from 6 institutions were trained in online assessment and evaluation in ODL
• A study of QA practices in single (2) and dual mode (6) distance learning institutions in Nigeria was conducted
• RETRIDOL developed activities with 12 institutions in three member countries in West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone)
• A tracer study of NOUN graduates was conducted

Many of these are part of capacity-building programmes. The challenge will be to set more challenging outcome indicators. While it remains that Nigerian institutions and personnel remain dominant in the activities, there was an evident trend towards engaging with more countries.

Quality Assurance (QA): COL-RIM

2.3.6 The rapid expansion of higher education provision in the developing Commonwealth has placed pressure on the quality of delivery and the learning experiences of students. COL has addressed this challenge through the application of the COL Review and Implementation Model (COL-RIM), which offers a low-cost, self-administered, quality assurance tool for higher education institutions. COL-RIM is supported by light-touch external consultant reviews to provide objective verification. Successful institutions receive a formal letter from the COL President and they are then able to employ this as a positive statement in their marketing and communications. Formal COL-RIM validation has now been implemented in 14 institutions across Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.

2.3.7 Two external M&E reviews were included in this plan period: one for Wawasan Open University, Penang, and one for Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University (KKHSOU), India. These highlighted a number of concerns and successes, both in relation to the universities and for the overall delivery of the COL-RIM process. For example, the consultant reported that COL-RIM had resulted in improvements to QA procedures, including staff involvement in organisational reviews, redefining application criteria for research funding and hiring two new staff with ODL experience. The consultant commented on the relative success of the activity:

“The general consensus emerged that the COL-RIM three-stage process design had facilitated an honest, evidence-based, multi-dimensional appraisal of current strengths and weaknesses...”

“Presentation of papers at conferences had been included in the KPIs for academic staff appraisal. Staff who are funded by the University to present papers are required to present them to colleagues in the University to enrich the research culture....”

2.3.8 COL support for COL-RIM is $70,000 per year. For the 2012–2015 3YP, the performance indicators were:
• COL-RIM implementation planned in 10 institutions in 3 Commonwealth regions
• Institutional-quality policy planned to be framed and implemented in 4 institutions
2.3.9 The following activities have been completed and these all contribute to achieving the planned performance indicators:

- COL-RIM Verification completed for Fatima Jinnah Women University, Pakistan
- COL-RIM Verification completed for University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka
- COL-RIM Verification completed for Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan
- COL-RIM Self-Review and Verification conducted for National University of Lesotho
- Monitoring and Evaluation of COL-RIM implementation conducted at Wawasan Open University (WOU)
- COL-RIM Verification completed for Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University, Assam, India
- COL-RIM Staff Survey and Preparatory Visit to BR Ambedkar OU, India, completed

2.3.10 There was only very limited evidence provided regarding the effectiveness of the overall programme. The two consultants’ reports were targeted on two specific universities rather than offering review and comment about impact and sustainability (should COL no longer provide funding). Given that national QA systems are being developed in many countries and that other organisations provide QA guidelines (e.g., UNESCO), a deeper and more critical review of COL-RIM and its comparative advantage relative to other approaches is recommended.

**Course and resource materials for higher education**

2.3.11 This activity prioritised the development of course and resource materials for higher education institutions, with new materials being made available through OER networks. The intended outcome for the 2012–2015 3YP was that at least 10 institutions in three Commonwealth regions be involved. Some of the materials developed were used to support other COL-related activities within the Higher Education initiative (e.g., COL-RIM, capacity building and the CEMBA/MPA within the broader initiative).

2.3.12 Work plans were in place (with performance indicators) that detailed materials to be produced each year. Progress towards meeting these requirements was monitored by the Education Specialist. Given the varied nature of the activities and the dependence on several partners to deliver, amendments were necessary during each year. However, any change had to be agreed by COL senior management.

**COL Research Chairs**

2.3.13 The establishment of Research Chairs for ODL/OER aimed to promote research and innovation. It was intended that eight Chairs be located in all the main regions of the Commonwealth for this 3YP, but six were in place and a further two were being established.

2.3.14 Contracts were in place for each Chair and all appointees committed themselves to an annual work plan, including to undertake research and/or
resources development to support ODL/OER. The COL funding of $120,000 per annum was a contribution to the cost of the Chair, with the partner university being responsible for the rest, essentially the majority (although the proportion varied according to the country and salary scales).

2.3.15 It was not possible to assess the effectiveness of the strategy, as there were no M&E or other reviews undertaken. A number of studies by the appointees were evidenced and these were in compliance with the work plan. A more critical, evidenced-based assessment does need to be undertaken to consider outcomes, impact and sustainability. A Board member interviewed also referred to this need.

**Capacity building**

2.3.16 Capacity building had the objective to support the professional development of staff in higher education institutions to grow ODL and related activities. The activities included: course and materials development; eLearning; OER access, design and development; enhancement of professional and academic competencies; teaching and tutoring of skills; and institutional leadership and management. The performance indicators set out in the 2012–2015 3YP were:

- Tutor training for 5,000 tutors in Malaysia
- Institutional ODL policy development in 4 institutions
- ODL policy development in 2 countries
- Capacity building for at least 500 faculty members in Africa and Asia through the pan-African project
- Capacity building of 50 faculty members in OER-based content development and revision
- Capacity building in leadership for 100 senior academic administrators
- 150 academic and related staff trained in QA processes
- 3,000 professionals trained in management and administration through CEMBA/CEMPA programmes
- 35 professionals trained in Legislative Drafting
- Increased support for women in higher education (Certificate in Designing and Facilitating eLearning)

The budget for capacity-building activities is $242,000 per annum.

2.3.17 Several of the planned outputs detailed above are shared with other activities within the Higher Education initiative. For example, CEMBA/CEMPA reports separately, QA activities also fall within COL-RIM, and other activities are delivered through RETRIDOL. Without an M&E report to review and assess progress, it has not been possible to comment critically. However, the Education Specialist maintained progress reports and confirmed the achievement of the planned outputs.

2.3.18 Over the 2012–2015 3YP period, while workshops, seminars, etc. remained part of the means of delivery, there was a shift towards more of the activities being offered remotely, through ODL and other technology-enhanced interventions. These approaches appear to offer greater opportunity to deliver economies of scale with enhanced outreach and participation.
The CEMBA and CEMPA programmes
2.3.19 Partner universities welcomed the Commonwealth Executive MBA and MPA programmes (CEMBA and CEMPA) and, in interviews, commented on the popularity of the programmes with students. The “COL brand” and COL’s association were seen to enhance the international credibility of CEMBA/CMPA.

2.3.20 There were formal agreements with 11 higher education institutions to deliver CEMBA and CEMPA programmes; and in 2012, there were 3,376 enrolled students.\(^1\) The completion rates (approximately 80%) were also very good when compared with postgraduate programmes offered elsewhere, both full- and part-time, including through flexible delivery arrangements. However, total enrolments appear to have grown only modestly over the last four years and there were large disparities in enrolments among the partner higher education institutions. Does this reflect a reduction in demand or limited capacity in the partner higher education institutions? This warrants further investigation, as there was no evidence available at the time of this study.

2.3.21 The overall female proportion of enrolments (approximately 25% in 2012) across all institutions was low, although the trend has been upwards — likely to be over 30% in 2013. While efforts need to be maintained in order to address the imbalance, the COL-initiated development of gender-appropriate programmes and materials continues. These should have positive impact.

2.3.22 Each of the countries where the CEMBA is delivered has other international MBA programmes on offer from foreign universities. These are offered through various modes, including supported ODL, eLearning and in partnership with local institutions. However, the foreign degrees are generally expensive and the reported popularity of the CEMBA is that it is affordable and has international credibility. Indeed, the modest fee paid by participating universities to COL is structured to offer incentives for partner universities to set student fees at very modest levels.

2.3.23 It was not possible to assess the sustainability of the programme should COL support, for both some financing and programme management, be removed. A review of the programme would seem important, including with field visits. This would cover such areas as:

- Is there likelihood of new enrolment growth and institutional partners?
- What is the comparative advantage of the CEMBA/CMPA given other programmes on offer?
- Is a financially sustainable model possible?

MOOCs
2.3.24 Involvement with MOOCs was new for COL. It only started after the 3YP was underway. Each MOOC was delivered in partnership with universities across the Commonwealth and involved other COL initiative areas (e.g., Teacher Education). Board members commented that they were encouraged to learn that

\(^1\) Some higher education institutions have still to send 2013 statistics. Hence, these enrolment data are incomplete.
COL teams were engaging successfully in implementing MOOCs as part of a strategy to enhance outreach and engage with larger communities of professionals.

2.3.25 COL was involved in the development and delivery of three MOOCs in 20014/15:

- Open education resources in partnership with LMP Education Trust, India
- MOOC on MOOCs (for the L3F initiative)
- MOOC for teacher education (for the Teacher Education initiative)

2.3.26 A report on the first MOOC was that some 1,505 academics participated, from over 50 countries (30 in the Commonwealth); and that of these, 605 completed with a formal certificate of achievement awarded. There was 39% female participation — a good result, given the normal large gender imbalance in Higher Education. Presentations involved staff from 10 countries.

2.4 Discussion

2.4.1 The progress against the performance indicators is set out in Table 2.2. The outcomes for the initiative were not specified against the activity areas, but only as the general statement provided at the beginning of this section.

Table 2.2: Performance indicators and achievements for the Higher Education initiative, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least 2 governments in different Commonwealth regions create enhanced access for learners by implementing ODL policy</td>
<td>Achieved: National Higher Education ODL policy has been established in Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles and Trinidad &amp; Tobago. A regional policy framework has been endorsed by CARICOM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 4 institutions in 3 different regions of the Commonwealth implement ODL policies and systems to substantially increase the number of learners</td>
<td>Achieved: 6 institutions in 3 different regions are now involved in implementing institutional ODL policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education institutions in 10 countries provide increased access to improved gender-inclusive content, including OER</td>
<td>Achieved: CEMBA/CEMPA programmes offered in institutions in 11 countries and faculty supported to develop and update learning materials and gender case studies using OER. The Legislative Drafting programme was revised and is available as OER to students in 8 countries in the Pacific region, Nigeria and Canada.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 institutions in 4 countries improve the quality of their programmes through implementing quality assurance and leadership training. At least 4 put in place an institutional quality policy.</td>
<td>Achieved: 10 institutions in 9 countries have adopted COL-RIM, and 2 have put in place an institutional quality assurance policy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4.2 Each of the activity areas and programmes within the Higher Education initiative had an additional set of performance indicators (beyond those of the
overall Higher Education initiative) and these were reviewed at least annually. The sum of these individual indicators went beyond the overall requirements. Although there had been no individual M&E studies during the 2012–2015 3YP, the Education Specialist in Higher Education reported that most of these individual performance indicators were achieved, with many exceeded (see Table 2.2). However, greater clarity and evidence needed to have been made available through a Higher Education M&E plan, plus interim reports for the 3YP.

2.4.3 Review of the logic frameworks for each activity and programme area indicated some confusion between outputs and outcomes. This will need to be addressed for the next plan period. However, all indications from the previous paragraphs and from the discussion below indicated that the first part of the overall planned outcome — that “Higher education institutions have ODL policies, systems and materials in place” — has been achieved.

2.4.4 The second part of the outcome statement was beyond the scope of this evaluation:

“To provide quality education to increased numbers of people, particularly women and marginalised communities.”

To make a meaningful assessment of this would have required evidence from M&E studies, which had not been undertaken, together with primary research, aimed at addressing “quality” considerations. However, with those caveats, there appeared to have been good effort towards achieving qualitative enhancement within many of the activities — for example, through COL-RIM, establishing national policies, and developing quality materials (and available as OERs).

2.4.5 Some comments were made in the previous section regarding progress for each activity and programme. A number of additional observations are offered below, including implications for future delivery.

2.4.6 RETRIDOL has moved ahead positively and extended activities outside Nigeria. A number of studies and workshops were run during the period. The Education Specialist in Higher Education had followed up concerns raised in the previous plan evaluation and progress was evidenced. The requirement for RETRIDOL to agree to intended activities for each quarter before receiving funds proved a useful means to ensure progress towards agreed outputs and outcomes. The activity would benefit from regular monitoring reports to COL from the team in Nigeria. The Education Specialist reported on RETRIDOL:

“There has been consistent publication of the journal and more commitment in the capacity building workshops, in terms of improving knowledge and competencies of ODL practitioners.”

2.4.7 COL-RIM achieved the outcomes intended. Evidence was provided by the consultant’s reports following review of institutions. The COL-RIM handbook was being revised with the intention to make it available as an OER for other higher education institutions to access.
2.4.8 Feedback from the COL-RIM evaluations offered a number of learning points, both for the institution involved and for delivery of the programme. For example:

- The approach proved labour-intensive for the higher education institution. This might be a barrier to future adoption.
- Items on the questionnaires need to be reviewed and updated to ensure they reflect the local context. Problems were also experienced when questionnaires were translated.

2.4.9 The consultant also commented that, while the COL-RIM programme to date had engaged with those institutions offering ODL and blended programmes (mainly Open Universities), the QA approach on offer could be applied equally well to campus-based institutions and this could be explored.

2.4.10 What was unclear was how the COL-RIM programme would be sustainable without the “Secretariat” role of COL in direct support and the associated investment. This suggests that the programme might benefit from a more critical review.

2.4.11 CEMBA and CEMPA: While there had been no recent evaluation of the programme, the Academic and Main Boards provided both monitoring and directional roles: they charted progress, ensured direction and considered course content and appropriateness. Partner institutions were positive about involvement in these programmes, and see the COL brand association as attractive to students, adding international status. University staff expressed some concerns about the lack of external quality assurance, particularly in countries where local QA systems were underdeveloped. This could have risk implications for COL.

2.4.12 It was notable that CEMPA programmes recruit proportionately fewer students. A representative from an institution suggested that stronger students always opted for CEMBA, with CEMPA as a fall-back. This needs to be explored to assess why numbers are significantly lower, whether there is any potential for growth, and whether COL support is cost-effective relative to alternative delivery arrangements and programmes on offer.

2.4.13 Delivery and strategy: The number of individual projects and sub-activities underway within each activity area was significant, and when summed across the Higher Education initiative, the total is large. For example, in one recent quarter within the initiative, 19 separate events took place or specific materials/documents were produced. The documentation available did not clearly explain how each sub-activity interrelated and contributed towards achievement of the proposed outcomes. There seems to be a need to rationalise some activities, as overlap was evident. For example, QA and OER development were common elements of several activities.

2.4.14 The Higher Education initiative would benefit from better project planning, as discussed in Section 12. As COL moves to the new plan, the
individual Higher Education programmes should be appraised. If it is agreed to proceed with each, then baseline studies should be established and Key Project documents put in place to provide the necessary foundation for M&E. The structured use of spreadsheets or project planning software might enhance understanding of the activities and their interrelationships, and could simplify management and facilitate financial planning and control.

2.4.15 Overlap of activities was evident between the Higher Education initiative and most of the other COL initiatives. There would seem to be scope for rationalising approaches to management. The overlap might be significant, as with VUSSC, Teacher Education and CEMCA initiatives, or less significant, as with the MOOC in L3F or cooperation with the University of the West Indies for the Healthy Communities initiative. However, often the same higher education institution might have several different relationships with COL, with these varying according to the initiative.

2.4.16 The application of ODL in higher education institutions across the world both to support campus-based delivery and to offer their programmes globally, has become increasingly widespread. For example, UK universities reported that over 600,000 students were studying for UK degree programmes through some form of transnational education arrangement (TNE) outside the UK in 2014. The mix of ODL strategies included all blends of learning, even fully online. The tools available to support these strategies are also evolving fast, as are the institutional and inter-institutional arrangements involved to effect delivery. A key consideration for COL in this operating environment concerns where and how it might best add value to support delivery of Higher Education in the developing Commonwealth.

2.5 Gender

2.5.1 The gender dimension came into sharper focus during the 2012–2015 3YP and was addressed in all the activities, particularly where the Education Specialist was able to exert direct influence. For example, the development of materials was reviewed against gender criteria, gender case studies were developed, and leadership training for women academic managers was established.

2.5.2 However, in many countries, higher education remains a male-dominated profession, although change is underway, with increasingly more female students enrolling and progressing to academic positions. This trend was reflected in the proportion of female students enrolled in the CEMBA programme, a near-doubling over recent years.

2.5.3 While all these trends were positive, there is still more to be done and the Education Specialist in Higher Education is working with the Gender Specialist to

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ensure gender considerations are taken more fully into account in the planning and delivery of all activities.

2.6 Sustainability

2.6.1 The strong emphasis placed by the COL team on local partnerships and local ownership was apparent and commendable and should facilitate longer-term sustainability. However, some of the programmes (e.g., COL-RIM, CEMBA/CEMPA, RETRIDOL) are currently organised by, and with direct investment from, COL, with no clear approach for devolving to partners or longer-term (post-COL support) sustainability. This needs to be addressed systematically for each activity and programme, and in more detail than this overview evaluation allowed. An exit strategy must be considered for each programme in the next plan.

2.6.2 The COL-supported Chairs are only partly funded by COL, with the major cost being borne by the host university. There were also possibilities of combining with UNESCO to provide joint approaches. Would the withdrawal of COL support reduce the ability of COL to secure quality research relevant to its needs? Would doing so negatively affect the COL brand?

2.7 Efficiency of Delivery

2.7.1 COL has a strong ethos of delivering value for money across all initiatives and the Higher Education initiative reflects this. The initiative delivered many programmes and sub-activities from its small team in Vancouver, through placing much emphasis on local partners and employing local or regional consultants. This all served to enhance outreach and reduce expenditure.

2.7.2 The trend to employ ODL approaches for capacity building across the developing Commonwealth offers opportunities for economies of scale. Similarly, the development of MOOCs to support specific initiatives has the potential to enhance impact for a limited investment. The challenge identified was to establish a methodology to understand outcomes and assess cost-effectiveness and efficiency.

2.7.3 It should be a requirement to review the cost and outcomes associated with each activity and programme at the appraisal stage, and would be a factor to include in any M&E plan. This is discussed in Section 12.

2.8 Recommendations

2.8.1 An overall review of COL’s support for the Higher Education sector across COL should be undertaken to consider where COL best adds value and to advise on a future strategy and priorities for the sector’s activities across the developing Commonwealth. (This should also involve CEMCA, Teacher Education and VUSSC initiatives.)
2.8.2 COL should commission reviews for each programme and activity within the Higher Education initiative, particularly for COL-RIM, CEMBA/CEMPA and COL Chairs. In the plan period for each of these, long-term sustainability should be a major consideration and possible exit strategies should be identified.

2.8.3 Baseline studies and M&E plans need to be in place for each activity, the results of which are necessary to advise the formulation and appraisal of the next plan. (Note: The consultants understand that the Education Specialist in Higher Education has already commissioned such reviews.)

2.8.4 COL Education Specialists should review their overlapping interests in higher education and related areas across the various initiatives (particularly Teacher Education, VUSSC, Higher Education, CEMCA and the cross-cutting theme areas) with a view to reducing overlap, exploiting synergies and building teams. This could result in reorganisation.

2.8.5 Clear consideration of the sustainability of activities (both organisational support and financial) within each activity needs to be included at the appraisal stage and included in the logic frameworks and other planning documents.

2.8.6 More detailed planning documents for each key partnership or sub-activity/project should be in place to facilitate appraisal and delivery, sharpen approaches to M&E, brief consultants and other stakeholders, and enhance understanding.

2.8.7 The impetus to establish gender-inclusive approaches should be maintained, including through working with CEMCA on their Higher Education managed activities.
## Section 3  Teacher Education

Outcome statement: *More teacher education and training institutions use ODL methodologies to provide quality training and continuing professional development of larger numbers of teachers.*

### 3.1 Background

3.1.1 The overall approach of the Teacher Education initiative was to capitalise on the great potential that ODL offered both to increase total numbers of trained teachers, in countries facing teacher shortages, and to improve the quality of the learning experiences of teachers and, ultimately, their students. Millennium Development Goal related studies have indicated a shortfall of 10 million teachers worldwide and that the shortfall was growing.

3.1.2 The 2012–2015 3YP outlined the core strategies of partnerships, capacity building and materials development to support the Teacher Education initiative:

- To advocate the use of ODL in teacher education and develop the capacity of teachers and teacher educators in different aspects of ODL
- To support ministries and institutions to harness the potential of ODL and ICT and thereby strengthen and expand teacher education institutions
- To support institutions to design and implement quality programmes;
- To work with institutions and quality assurance agencies to develop and implement quality assurance frameworks
- To collaborate with international partners and training institutions to promote the development, adoption and use of OER

3.1.3 The performance indicators for the 2012–2015 3YP were defined as:

- At least 4 additional institutions, from each region of the Commonwealth, adopt gender-sensitive ODL methodologies to substantially increase the number of teachers trained or upgraded
- 10 teacher education institutions in 4 countries in all regions of the Commonwealth enhance the quality of their curricula through the development and use of new materials, including OER
- 10,000 teachers and teacher educators are trained on various aspects of ODL, including the development and use of OER

3.1.4 The budget for the 2012–2015 3YP totalled $1.35 million as set out in Table 3.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$450,000</td>
<td>$450,000</td>
<td>$450,000</td>
<td>$1,350,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.1: Allocation of funds for the Teacher Education initiative, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan*
3.1.5 Eighteen countries were involved in teacher education activities during the 2012–2015 3YP, although the levels and nature of engagement in each country varied greatly, reflecting local needs and absorptive capacities.

### 3.2 RBM and the Logic Model

3.2.1 This evaluation benefited from key documents: baseline studies, “Concept Notes,” consultant reports and the RBM/Logic Model documents. Interviews were conducted with consultants and partners via Skype. The Logic Model was developed by COL staff at the beginning of the 3YP and provided clear analysis and proposals for delivery.

3.2.2 The draft of the overall plan was reviewed through meetings and workshops with intended partners, and they were required to produce a Concept Note before the partnership was allowed to proceed. This provided analysis and arrangements for delivery of activities. Concept Notes offered a practical means to understand better the operating environment, ensured that interventions were responsive to partner needs and facilitated risk identification. Employing Concept Notes enabled the Education Specialist to make informed decisions about the levels of COL support needed and about the partnership agreement. As an approach, this appeared to have worked well.

3.2.3 It proved necessary to amend the 2012–2015 3YP during implementation (e.g., because of delays in some countries, plus The Gambia’s departure from the Commonwealth), but the changes were reviewed and agreed in consultation with partners. The Education Specialist revised the plans from mid-2014.

3.2.4 The M&E structure in the initial plan placed requirements on partners to monitor implementation against defined criteria:

- Programme participation (gender and appropriateness)
- Quality of programme
- Participants’ level of satisfaction and mastery of the knowledge and skills taught
- Extent to which participants’ expectations are met
- Other factors (e.g., economic, political or institutional leadership issues) that might influence the implementation of the capacity-building programme

These requirements formed part of the formal agreement between COL and the partner prior to committing resources.

3.2.5 An external consultant undertook an Interim Evaluation of the Teacher Education initiative in July 2014 and Final Evaluation in April 2015. These provided excellent analysis and comment. A series of useful activity-level baseline studies for projects were undertaken early in the 3YP. For example, the...
Nigeria English Language Teaching (ELT) study offered important insights into effective approaches to project delivery. As the external evaluator commented:

“That the findings of the baseline study guided and informed the conduct of the capacity development activities and also served as the basis for determining the extent to which the capacity building workshops on ORELT could add value to the repertoire of knowledge and skills of teachers who participated in the workshop.”

3.2.6 The logic frameworks identified a few risks and assumptions, but these were expressed in very general terms. The baseline studies and Concept Notes offered greater clarity of what risks there might be.

3.3 Partners and Implementation

3.3.1 Most Teacher Education initiative activities were in partnership with government departments and institutions. While this was important for scalability and integration with the national education framework, the reality was that there were frequent delays, inconsistencies, bureaucratic structural hurdles, vested interests, and participant funding (e.g., for travel and accommodation) not forthcoming and sometimes requiring COL to step in), or the promised ICT and Internet support was not available (or less than anticipated). There were also difficulties encountered with the all-important follow-up activities.

3.3.2 Any innovation in teacher education needs to be in close step with the total delivery of school education, including interrelationship with pre- and in-service teacher training, curriculum reform, programme and materials development and assessment procedures. The Final Evaluation made a number of recommendations in this area and we endorse these.

3.3.3 The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) has a good history of constructive partnership with COL and, through the experiences gained, was able to plan new initiatives effectively through understanding where and how COL might best add value. An example is the integration of ICT and OER into the Teacher Education programme. For this, teachers were able to visit the OUSL study centres across the country and access online materials. The Project Coordinator at OUSL had monitored qualitative change to check progress towards outcomes. In addition, she encouraged staff and students to reflect on their experiences and write them down, and she intends to publish the results.

3.3.4 Gauhati University, Assam, began a partnership with COL in 2013 to develop ODL materials to support the quality enhancement of ELT provision in primary schools. The enthusiastic Project Coordinator reported that while training and materials development had been successful, she had been

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4 Open Resources for English Language Teaching at Junior Secondary School, S.Y. Ingawa, COL (February 2013).
concerned about Internet access for teachers, so both o-line and print versions of materials were produced. But other unplanned changes had an impact: the university had a change of Vice-Chancellor, which affected prioritisation and time scale, and materials developed had to be placed in the university's central distance learning hub rather than at the Education Faculty. However, the Project Coordinator has managed to consolidate and extend activities by securing finance from the British Council to work with the UK Open University. The result is that an ODL Diploma in English Language Teaching programme was launched in October 2014.

3.3.5 A number of unplanned benefits were reported. For example: The Gambia's training workshop covering Open Resources was followed up by the Ghanaian participants launching their own national initiative to disseminate the strategies they had learnt. In Kenya, delegates were inspired to reproduce the materials developed to share with colleagues, and adapt materials planned for junior secondary, for use at senior level. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development approved these materials as supplementary materials for schools.

3.3.6 Problems were frequently encountered. For example: the project to train nomadic teachers in northeast Nigeria was deeply affected by the conflict in the region, resulting in only 400 of the intended 1,200 teachers being able to join the programme. Even close monitoring of the ever-changing local political situation would have been unlikely to forecast such a large impact.

3.3.7 There was often great variability in workshop and other participants’ knowledge of ODL/OER. For example, in the teacher education project in Maldives, the teachers’ level of understanding of ICT/ODL was found to be very basic, requiring revision of the programme. This problem might have been averted had there been a baseline study for the Maldives project. Ultimately, the workshop was successful and did achieve many of the intended outcomes. The consultant involved commented that policy-makers in Maldives should have been better engaged and more aware of the potential that technology-enhanced learning offers to improve the delivery of education across the nation’s scattered island communities.

3.3.8 The Education Specialist introduced new programmes aimed at increasing professional support for teacher educators and teachers, including encouraging new MOOCs relevant to the needs of developing Commonwealth countries. The three MOOC programmes that were supported during the final year of the 3YP were:

- Teach Smarter with OER, with NCERT, India (over 1,000 registrations)
- Using ICTs to Enrich Teaching and Learning, with the African Virtual University (1,692 registrations)
- Action Research, with Wawasan Open University, Malaysia (362 registrations)

The Education Specialist critically reviewed the results and feedback from the delivery of the three MOOCs and concluded that for the future, there should be careful choice and preparation of partners, sufficient time for course
development (including staff training, materials design, etc.), increased marketing and communications, enhanced student support during delivery, and further research into likely impact and options for the future.

3.3.9 COL is to be commended for having capitalised on the growth of MOOCs during the 2012–2015 3YP. These seem to have potential to support the Teacher Education initiative. An important need is to understand better the participants, their motivations and experiences, and how they might be applying their new knowledge in their work — and what follow-up needs might be.

### 3.4 Discussion

Table 3.2: Performance indicators and achievements for the Teacher Education initiative, 2012-2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Number of institutions using ODL to train and upgrade teachers increased</td>
<td>1. At least 4 additional institutions - from each region of the CW - adopt gender-sensitive ODL methodologies to substantially increase the number of teachers trained or upgraded.</td>
<td>1. <strong>Achieved:</strong> Six additional institutions adopted gender-sensitive ODL methodologies to substantially increase the number of teachers trained or upgraded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The content of teacher education curricula improved</td>
<td>2. 10 teacher education institutions in 4 countries in all regions of the Commonwealth enhance the quality of their curricula through the development and use of new materials, including OER.</td>
<td>2. <strong>Achieved:</strong> 26 teacher education institutions in 8 countries enhanced the quality of their curricula through the development and use of new materials, including OER.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Access to and quality of teacher education programmes enhanced</td>
<td>3. Graduate output of partner institutions significantly increased due to the use of ODL to train more teachers</td>
<td>3. <strong>Partially Achieved:</strong> 5,486 teachers and teacher educators trained on various aspects of ODL, including the development and use of OER*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Equitable enrolment into teacher training programmes significantly increased through the use of ODL strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Graduate output of partner institutions significantly increased due to the use of ODL to train more teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These include enrolments on the MOOC programmes.

3.4.1 The original performance indicators were mainly realistic and two of the three were fully achieved. The most challenging one was “10,000 teachers trained.” However, this depended on the cascading of activities by partners to wider groups of teachers. While some cascading occurred, it was not at the level planned. Additionally, a significant proportion of the 5,486 reported were enrolments to the MOOC programmes, and these had not been envisaged when the original performance indicators were set. This experience indicates:

- Performance indicators should be critically assessed to ensure they are realistic and with the assumptions and risks set out.
- Cascading of activities is vital for the achievement of outcomes, and this does need to be reflected in some way when the performance indicators are developed.

3.4.2 COL interventions have delivered positive outcomes and sown the seeds for future growth. To quote from the Interim Evaluation:
“There was no doubt that COL’s interventions were effective and have great potential to contribute to increasing the number of qualified teachers…. Perhaps more importantly, the activities were very relevant to COL’s Mission....”

3.4.3 While there was some confusion between outputs and outcomes in the logic frameworks (and the performance indicators related more to the former), there was evidence of the achievement of outcomes; and the conclusion from an evaluation of workshops concluded that:

“Participants were satisfied with the training and found it useful; they learnt from the training and gained relevant and useful knowledge and skills; and their behaviour changed in the sense that they applied the knowledge and skills gained....”

3.4.4 Defining requirements in the shared (with partners) Concept Note provided a relatively neutral basis for agreeing to the contract. There were examples of good practice, but a review of some Concept Notes indicated weaknesses, particularly in relation to post-workshop activities and the subsequent performance of participants. However, the use of Concept Notes is to be commended, with proposals being strengthened by:

- Providing clear and standard guidelines for their preparation so that expected outputs and outcomes are clearly defined and closely related to the Teacher Education Logic Model
- Detailing clearly the resources available in the partner, including for follow-up
- Identifying factors that may influence the successful implementation of the proposed activities, including potential risks and how to mitigate them
- Outlining strategies for post-workshop follow-up activities and continuing support to participants

It is recommended that Concept Notes be included in the briefing for consultants and trainers, who should then be encouraged to provide feedback and suggest modifications.

3.4.5 Significant regional variations were noted. For example, in many countries Internet access proved difficult (or prohibitively expensive), while Caribbean schools were piloting the use of tablets in the classroom. This has implications for the sharing of experiences across countries and regions.

3.4.6 A number of common barriers constrained implementation of some activities during the 2012–2015 3YP:

- Technological infrastructure was inadequate to support ICT and online access within the partner organisation for following up after the training and for engaging with teachers in their schools.
- It often proved difficult to secure the release of the intended participants for training, because of bureaucratic delays, regular teaching
commitments, holidays, and lack of funds to pay for travel and subsistence.

- Participants normally had to return to their full-time post with no time allocated for all-important follow-up to consolidate learning, develop materials and implement change.
- The mixed background of participants in terms of knowledge of ICT/OER necessitated last-minute changes to programmes and resulted in lower levels of outcomes than planned.
- Collection of data by partners was inadequate to inform progress towards outcomes.

3.4.7 Among the critical success factors identified in this evaluation:

- A baseline study (for planning and appraisal) for each of the activities needed to be thorough and undertaken jointly with the partner.
- The Concept Note for partnership with the lead institution ensured clear and shared understanding of the obligations, risks and assumptions.
- Regular and close monitoring of the state of preparedness of the partner to deliver the intended outputs for a specific activity was vital. The operating environment frequently had changed from the initial planning, including for reasons beyond the control of the partner (e.g., political instability, external funding needs, etc.).
- A knowledgeable and aware lead contact for the relationship within the partner institution was identified as being extremely important. Also, it was important that the Education Specialist maintained close contact with them.
- Consultants and trainers mentioned that participants often had not accessed or worked through necessary preparation documentation prior to attending activities. This had resulted in the need to provide more “remedial” training than planned.

3.5 Gender

3.5.1 Addressing the gender dimension was not straightforward. A few successes were reported, but challenges remained — most being beyond the control of COL. Achievements included:

- A Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit for teachers and teacher educators was developed by COL (unfortunately, the plans to pilot in the Caribbean in 2014 had to be postponed).
- During workshops, gender was always addressed, including to ensure that materials developed were gender responsive.
- Programmes supporting the Science and Technology Centre at the University of Gambia focused on attracting more female secondary teachers. This programme had attracted 130 women teachers up until The Gambia left the Commonwealth.

3.5.2 Partners were encouraged to ensure gender balance was a priority for each activity. This met with mixed results in that there was a small majority of women on programmes in Asia (53%) and a minority in Africa (35%). There
were no data provided by partners to indicate any cascading of COL capacity building towards achieving the COL overall performance indicator of “10,000 girls and women have increased access to quality education and training.”

3.5.3 The Education Specialist identified the need to prioritise gender in the Teacher Education initiative activities, and has developed gender-responsive output indicators for Teacher Education in cooperation with COL’s Gender Specialist. This will be a priority consideration for initiative in the next plan.

3.6 Efficiency of Delivery

3.6.1 It was not possible to assess the efficiency of delivery of the Teacher Education initiative because of a lack of appropriate data. This is an area worthy of further study, as it is important to ask whether better outcomes (and ultimately impact) might be achieved through employing other alternative delivery approaches for the activity (which could be lower cost).

3.7 Sustainability

3.7.1 The Teacher Education capacity-building activities advanced significantly during the 2012–2015 3YP. However, greater understanding is still required regarding how to deliver impact and sustainability of the various interventions, and this includes for qualitative change. Agreement on how progress for each of these considerations might be measured is necessary: measurable indicators should be defined and included in partnership contracts. One approach might include parallel research and tracer studies, covering institutional staff, trainees and other participants in Teacher Education initiative programmes in a number of specific projects.

3.7.2 The Teacher Education initiative has delivered on the performance indicators for the 3YP. The evaluations and reports from partners and others all point to good achievements, and unplanned benefits were evident. The application of RBM and the Logic Model has contributed to success by ensuring focus. The Teacher Education team had responded with developing new practices to enhance the quality of delivery.

3.7.3 At the more strategic level, as was commented in the summative evaluation for the previous plan (2012):

“It is not difficult for COL to find footholds but it has not always found it easy to obtain leverage (in teacher education) particularly with strategic partners…. COL needs to take a hard look…. Ambitious new thinking is required by COL and its partners.”

These comments still have resonance in 2015. We would endorse the need for “a long hard look,” particularly given the speed of change in technology-supported innovations in teacher education. Without critical review, COL is likely to continue with more of the same.
### 3.8 Recommendations

3.8.1 COL should focus its Teacher Education initiative efforts strategically and consider how COL interventions might best add value, achieve impact and be sustainable.

3.8.2 The separate activities within the Teacher Education initiative should be better integrated, drawing together the development of instructional materials, access to OERs, in-service teacher education, quality assurance, and so on. This should be at both the overall strategy level as well as within specific partnerships.

3.8.3 There should be greater emphasis towards ensuring the effective cascading of activities through to classroom teachers and students — hence, reinforcing the desired impact.

3.8.4 A standard template for the main factors to address in the Concept Notes should be employed and these should be shared with all involved in the project — partner staff, consultants, trainers and participants. This would include detailing information and data required from partners, including at agreed points of monitoring.

3.8.5 Preparation by the partners should be monitored more closely in the run-up to an activity, including through visits and Skype, to ensure that equipment and materials are in place, participants are alerted and any preparation materials have been distributed in advance.

3.8.6 Follow-up should be done to ensure consolidation and the taking forward of learning experiences (e.g., for developing OERs and cascading to colleagues and students).

3.8.7 Greater priority should be placed on achieving the gender-related performance indicators.

3.8.8 Possible approaches to assessing qualitative change in activities should be reviewed. This could include parallel research studies with a selection of partners. Research might involve tracer studies with staff, trainees and other participants in the activities.

3.8.9 Potential of synergies should be maximised across the COL initiatives, particularly with Open Schooling, TVSD and some areas of Higher Education, CEMCA and VUSSC. This might require reorganisation within COL.

3.8.10 Key document files for each partnership or sub-activity/project need to be established. These would facilitate appraisal, improve delivery, sharpen approaches to M&E and enhance understanding.

3.8.11 Assessing cost-efficiency and/or cost-outcomes associated with delivery should be incorporated into appraisal and the M&E of activities.
Section 4  Open Schooling Initiative

Outcome statement: More learners, particularly girls, have access to quality learning opportunities at the secondary level through the introduction and expansion of open schooling.

4.1  Background

4.1.1 There has been a surge in demand for secondary school places across the developing Commonwealth, primarily as a result of the success of increasing primary school participation. However, for many of the poorer countries, barely a third of children are enrolled at the secondary level. There are a number of reasons, including resource and infrastructure limitations. The need for trained teachers, appropriate materials and accessibility is also major.

4.1.2 Open Schooling can help alleviate these problems through its potential to offer quality learning opportunities and with economies of scale. COL’s Open Schooling initiative was developed to expand the scale, quality and efficiency of learning and also address gender inequalities. To facilitate these aims, the initiative established three overarching goals:

- Foster partnerships
- Design and create educational materials
- Build capacity among educational stakeholders

4.1.3 There were five lead activities within the initiative for the 2012–2015 3YP, and each had its own ambitious performance indicators:

- Establish new open schools
- Develop material in technical and vocational subjects
- Build capacity to ensure the integration of technology and OERs
- Develop and implement systems and policy in support of the open schools
- Introduce innovation for girls’ education

4.1.4 The performance indicators for the overall initiative for the 3YP period reflected each of the activities:

- 4 additional countries establish new Open Schools to expand access to equitable learning opportunities for girls and boys
- 10 existing open schools substantially increase enrolment and performance by adopting new gender-sensitive policies and systems
- at least 10 open schools introduce 5 new vocational and 5 new technical subjects to attract learners who would otherwise be excluded
- 10 open schools adopt and use OER
- Increased accessibility to quality education for marginalised girls through appropriate curricula and technology

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4.1.5 The budget for the Open Schooling initiative for the 2012–2015 3YP is set out in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1:** Allocation of funds for the Open Schooling initiative, by main activities, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All activities</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
<td>$460,000</td>
<td>$390,000</td>
<td>$1,250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish new open schools</td>
<td>$75,000</td>
<td>$88,000</td>
<td>$78,000</td>
<td>$241,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy and systems development and implementation</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
<td>$78,000</td>
<td>$168,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build capacity to ensure integration of technology and OER</td>
<td>$75,000</td>
<td>$82,000</td>
<td>$78,000</td>
<td>$235,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop material in technical and vocational subjects</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>$95,000</td>
<td>$78,000</td>
<td>$273,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation for girls education</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>$95,000</td>
<td>$78,000</td>
<td>$273,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional budget allocations for 3YP</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$60,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 RBM and the Logic Model

4.2.1 Comprehensive sets of documents in place for the Open Schooling initiative usefully informed this evaluation. These included:

- *Open School Strategic Plan 2012–2015*, including an analysis of barriers to change and a well-presented set of assumptions underlying the strategy
- Logic framework for the initiative, with outcome and performance indicators clearly defined
- Logic frameworks with performance indicators and outputs specified for each activity, including annual activity plans
- An analysis of opportunities through a detailed baseline study
- A monitoring and evaluation framework for the 3YP
- An evaluation report covering the activities of the SADC Centre for Distance Education (August 2014)
- An evaluation report titled *Building Capacity to Ensure Integration of Technology and OER* (October 2014)

The M&E plan was excellent and provided a consistent and clear approach to addressing each of the key factors: efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, impact and gender. However, this plan had not been followed through fully during the 3YP, although the M&E reports that were available were very good and provided useful comment to advise strategic direction.

4.2.2 The approach to the baseline study was thorough and offered critical information to facilitate plan delivery. It was enhanced through the development of survey instruments that were sent to potential partner countries, and resulted in detailed returns from 18 country representatives. The surveys covered separately each of the five activity areas for the initiative, as well as a more general instrument to facilitate understanding of how Open Schooling activities might be integrated with formal school provision in each country. The surveys addressed both qualitative and quantitative factors — the former directly related to the process and output indicators of the M&E framework.
4.2.3 Qualitatively, the surveys included consideration of country needs, levels of preparedness, initiatives, and barriers to education and open schooling, along the lines set out in the “theory of change” sections developed for the Open Schooling initiative’s M&E framework. Through this approach, those countries most likely to benefit from an investment against each of the activities were identified, and the likely risks assessed. The Education Specialist based partner selection for each country on these criteria and also partner willingness to commit finance and resources.

4.2.4 The baseline study was completed in 2013 (second year of the 2012–2015 3YP). Ideally, the findings should have been available in 2012 for initial planning and appraisal and to help define Open Schooling initiative 3YP priorities and strategies. Some of the detailed feedback received through the baseline research activities might usefully inform the development of the 2015 plan period.

4.2.5 The initiative and individual activity logic frameworks were well set out, with defined outputs and performance indicators. However, each activity would have benefited from having its own defined outcomes, although the planned actions within these were detailed.

4.2.6 The baseline study highlighted some of the difficulties in developing appropriate M&E plans for the initiative, such as sourcing data on open schooling and ODL in countries (due to lack of data or difficulties to access what might already exist). Interestingly, the act of completing the questionnaires resulted in requests for COL assistance to develop the country’s M&E framework. This illustrates the potential benefits of early engagement of partners in the initial project formulation process.

4.3 Partners and Implementation

4.3.1 The approach adopted by COL involved engaging all stakeholders to develop relationships and partnerships — with governments, managers, institutions and practitioners in secondary education. The strategy was that if interventions are to be sustained, all interested groups and influencers must be involved, given the many interdependencies.

4.3.2 The majority of Open Schooling activities and sub-activities were with governments and government institutions. Some difficulties experienced included uncertainties in securing finance, poor resources, and barriers to release of participants to attend workshops. Many of the activities required the partners to find resources beyond their planned budgets. Because of this, the achievement of intended outcomes for the Open Schooling initiative was highly dependent on the effectiveness of each partner. The Open Schooling Education Specialist addressed this risk through frequent contact with partners and by chasing up and making appropriate adjustments to delivery.

4.3.3 While the Open Schooling initiative had some activities with NGOs, government relationships were vital for successful delivery, given the need to
ensure integration with the formal system of schooling (e.g., with curricula and programme development, resource development, teacher training and updating, assessment and examinations). To deliver these requirements required a subtle blend of diplomacy, resolve and willingness to compromise. The importance of getting government relations right was commented on by the M&E consultant:

“On the whole, projects with Minister of Education buy-in tend to be the larger ones, and have the most support and comfort for sustainability. Smaller capacity building project beneficiaries are less certain of whether their activities can continue. Particular challenges around IT hardware, internet connectivity, finding the time to dedicate to the projects and financial support are all mentioned.”

4.3.4 The need for adaptability was highlighted in Vanuatu where the original plan for the Vanuatu open school was to improve access to students on more remote islands. A current problem was insufficient capacity to cater for Class 11 students. The school-leaving age had recently been raised, but available resources were insufficient to accommodate additional students. Distance education was identified as a possible solution.

4.3.5 As part of the Open Schooling initiative, COL has helped to establish communities of interested professionals, and the OpenSchoolingConnect website provides opportunities for social networking and for the promotion of relevant training programmes. While the OpenSchoolingConnect network has potential to be a lively network, linking teachers and professionals internationally, current levels of activity appear to be quite limited (only 2,400 visits in three years). If COL wants this network to have impact, it must promote it pro-actively, increase its attractiveness and ensure it reflects COL’s brand.

4.3.6 COL also supported the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA), an association of 22 members in each Commonwealth region. The website is managed by the members and facilitates the sharing and development of quality OER materials.

4.3.7 The COL partnership and support for the Certificate in eLearning offered through the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (OPNZ) has resulted in three intakes, totalling 47 education professionals from 17 countries. Student feedback has been positive and there was evidence of transfer of learning to home countries. The involvement also led to unplanned benefits, such as collaboration between OPNZ and the Bangladesh Open University. However, the M&E consultant suggested that greater clarity in the selection process for participation would be useful.

4.4 Discussion

4.4.1 Table 4.2 shows that all the main indicators for the 2012–2015 3YP were achieved, and some exceeded, even well before the end of the 3YP, and this is

5 http://openschoolingconnect.ning.com
6 http://comosa.net
despite of many local difficulties in delivery. An explanation for over-achieving could be that the original indicators were not sufficiently challenging, although the Open Schooling Education Specialist suggested that COL’s strong relationship with some key stakeholders in the Commonwealth enhanced the efficiency of delivery. In other cases the response of the institution was more positive and rapid than had been anticipated.

Table 4.2: Performance indicators and achievements for the Open Schooling initiative, 2012-2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To establish new open schools</td>
<td>Achieved: Vanuatu, Pakistan, Bahamas and Belize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 additional countries establish new open schools to expand access to equitable learning opportunities for girls and boys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To expand existing open school provision</td>
<td>Achieved:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 existing open schools substantially increase enrolment and performance by</td>
<td>1. OER policies adopted: Bangladesh, Botswana, India, Namibia, Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adopting new gender sensitive policies and systems</td>
<td>2. Quality assurance system: Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho, Tanzania, Mozambique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Organisational strategy and management information system: Papua New Guinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Gender guidelines: piloted in Belize, India, Tonga and Tanzania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Cost and financing: Antigua &amp; Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Jamaica, St. Kitts &amp; Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent &amp; The Grenadines, Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To develop material in technical and vocational subjects for open schools</td>
<td>Achieved:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 10 open schools introduce 5 new vocational and 5 new technical subjects to</td>
<td>1. Pakistan: introduced 3 vocational subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attract learners who would otherwise be excluded</td>
<td>2. Bangladesh, Ghana and Vanuatu: 9 subjects introduced (3 in each country)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Namibia: 1 online Vocational certificate; ECD under development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Next fiscal year: 8 vocational subjects planned in India, Trinidad &amp; Tobago, Botswana, Malawi (2 in each country)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To build capacity to ensure the integration of technology and OER</td>
<td>Achieved:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 open schools adopt and use OER</td>
<td>Belize, Namibia, Zambia, Lesotho, Botswana, Mozambique, Kenya, India, Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To increase access by young girls</td>
<td>Achieved:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased accessibility to quality education for marginalised girls through appropriate curricula and technology.</td>
<td>1. Botswana: training material developed for girls in leadership roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Bangladesh: three subject areas developed following identification by girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Pakistan: 13 subjects’ content developed and available online</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.2 The potential of Open Schooling initiative to make a difference and to provide enhanced access to education for young people in the developing Commonwealth remains strong and COL interventions have worked well to support this goal. The 3YP outcome statement referred to “more learners have access to quality learning opportunities.” There was evidence of increases in “access,” given the new open schools established, with more staff trained and new support materials being made available. However, the data available to substantiate was patchy — either non-existent or unreliable.
4.4.3 Additionally, the measure of “quality learning” cannot be automatically assumed, given lack of data. Controlled primary research is probably required to assess this. What can be concluded at this stage is that, as a result of the COL interventions, teachers are better trained and new and relevant materials are being produced. The challenges of data collection and research were also identified in the baseline survey. If outcomes and impact are to be assessed appropriately, a major effort involving countries and partners will be required, including through establishing a pilot research project in a select few countries.

4.4.4 The delivery of the performance indicators was very reliant on actions and resources from the partners. The indicator of “4 additional countries establish new open schools” is an example where achievement depended on many factors, most well outside COL’s control. In this case, the major responsibility had fallen to the governments concerned. In such dependencies it is important to highlight the main risk factors with thorough joint planning and frequent follow-up. This helps ensure that all partners understand, agree and deliver on commitments.

However, even with the best planning, changes in local operating circumstances can undermine success. For example, the well-laid plans with the Bangladesh Open University were much delayed by national political upheavals. In Pakistan, changes in the partner’s senior management caused postponements. For Vanuatu, workshop participants were not provided with computers until the last moment and subsequently had only limited access to online resources for follow-up. In a workshop run by the Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL), staff were released only for one day when three days were reportedly necessary.

4.4.5 Within each of the activity areas for the Open Schooling initiative, an impressive mix and number of sub-activities took place, with institutions and organisations in 33 countries involved in some way. The management of these has been challenging, particularly given frequent changes in the local operating context — staff turnover and their availability, infrastructure and resource requirements, etc. The annual tracking sheets developed for activities were useful. As the M&E consultant reviewing the capacity building activity commented:

“COL’s Open Schooling initiative runs multiple, large scale projects at a time. There are a variety of monitoring and project management activities which are used to track progress and ensure communication with partners remains consistent and constructive. Monitoring occurs at the level of a tracking sheet for all activities, a yearly monitoring plan as well as consultants’ monthly reports and ‘Base Camp’. Not only this, but the publication and provision of outputs on the online platforms also acts as a tracking means. ...

“It was most useful to have reports from project managers to validate against participant feedback. This evaluation found them to be credible and valuable. The evaluator understands the

4.4.6 COL importantly, sought to ensure that the Intellectual Property (IP) associated with OER was addressed through inclusion in workshops. It was clear from feedback that there had been little knowledge of IP implications by teachers and government staff before attending. International comparative experiences were shared to develop policies. As a reviewer of activities in Kenya reported:

“COL’s Open Schooling consultant worked with each institution following the Kenyan Symposium to support their development of Open Education and Copyright Policies. This resulted in the development of draft policies for five open learning institutions: Bangladesh Open University, Botswana Open University, Namibia College of Open Learning, the National Institute of Open Learning in India and the Network for Non Formal Education Institutions (NNFEI) in Kenya. . .”

4.4.7 Training workshops were a major component of capacity development activities and an important component of these was follow-up by participants to consolidate their learning experiences and production of new learning materials. This required some form of continuing support (typically online) from the trainer, but barriers were encountered in several of the projects reviewed. For example, participants (teachers in the main) needed to return to their full-time work with no time being made available, and the necessary equipment and/or Internet access were often not available.

4.4.8 However, for a multi-media training workshop for Namibian teachers, the original project design made provision for follow-up and the reinforcement of learning through running two workshops about three months apart and with online support through BaseCamp and with Skype conferences. This achieved real success:

“The group wrote a set of ten scripts; filmed, narrated and evaluated the completed product. They finished in October 2013 and have been integrating them in their teaching activities already. They would have liked more support to develop more.’

4.4.9 Capacity development still dominated and ran across all activities in the Open Schooling initiative. It remained important, delivered many of the required outputs successfully, and achieved some longer-term outcomes. However, a priority for the next plan period should be to focus more strongly on mid- to longer-term impact, including giving consideration to limiting the spread (geographically or by topic) to fewer projects and activities but in greater depth.

4.4.10 Growing overlaps were identified between activities falling within the Open Schooling initiative and those within other COL initiatives, particularly Teacher Education, CEMCA and TVSD. These overlaps need to be reviewed and
rationalised in order to exploit synergies, eliminate any duplication and enhance team working across COL.

4.4.11 SADC-CDE, the regional Centre for Distance Education, is a significant activity for COL in Southern Africa and is based in BOCODOL, Botswana. A recent COL-funded M&E study (August 2014) of activities was very positive:

“Despite all the challenges reported ... the performance of the SADC-CDE in this triennium against the identified outcomes ... has been outstanding. All the strategic objectives have yielded appropriate results, as prioritized country needs. This is a sign of contextually-responsive positive growth that needs to be encouraged. The SADC-CDE is now poised to take more responsibility and to achieve the objectives of its current Logical Framework as well as to introduce new aspects that are market-driven.... Based on the data discussed here and in the light of the undeniable impact made by the Centre, its continued existence is strongly recommended.”

4.4.12 Successes of SADC-CDE were evidenced through a number of activities involving member countries. For example:

- Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Mauritius and Swaziland all had in place roadmaps for action for the development of distance education.
- Based on the SADC-CDE guidelines for policy development, Mauritius, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and South Africa completed their national policies and were at various stages of obtaining Cabinet approval. In Mauritius, these had already been incorporated within the policies of the country’s regulatory body.
- SADC-CDE became internationally connected with other ODL/distance education activities underway in other regions, including: COL-RIM; participation in the IGNOU MA programme, the OU Tanzania and MEd in ODL; and the nomination of staff for the Otago Polytechnic programme.

The main concern identified related to the long-term sustainability of SADC-CDE, given its current high dependence on COL to provide contributions to operational costs. The M&E consultant suggested a number of possible approaches and these should be addressed.

4.5 Gender

4.5.1 Considerable attention was given to ensuring an appropriate gender dimension in all aspects of delivery of the Open Schooling initiative. There was good evidence that this had been successful.

4.5.2 The partner in Bangladesh, for example, had researched the education needs of young women, including those who might have left school before completion for marriage. Feedback indicated that they needed flexible approaches to delivery for training or to restart their formal education. These
needs were accommodated within the plan for the Girls Innovation Initiative Project in Bangladesh.

4.5.3 Gender guidelines were developed and piloted in Tonga, Belize, India and Tanzania. The guide *Gender Equality in Open Schooling* was produced (2014) following feedback from previous workshops. It is a well-researched, practical guide and a basic resource for use in open schools. It is aimed at raising gender awareness and gender responsiveness in the delivery and management of open schools.

4.5.4 The Open Schooling Education Specialist and the Gender Equality Manager developed a set of gender-responsive indicators for the Open Schooling initiative and for each activity within it. These were ultimately incorporated in the relevant parts of the logic framework. However, the monitoring of progress will be important and will require setting out data needs and agreeing responsibilities for collection with partners.

4.5.5 All partners and consultants interviewed for this study reported that they had included specific and wider considerations of gender in their work, and this was in response to the explicit requirement of COL. Such well-specified contracting does seem to have made a difference.

4.6 Efficiency of Delivery

4.6.1 The Open Schooling initiative delivered a considerable number of individual activities over the 2012–2015 3YP, as is evidenced in the cumulative quarterly reports. The contract spreadsheets indicate that until August 2014, some 56 contracts with consultants and partners had been issued. While no specific initiative measures were in place, the M&E consultant commented in her report:

> "Given the resource-constrained environments under which these activities take place, an excellent level of efficiency has been achieved…. People work under considerable strain – lack of financial, equipment and internet resources – yet remain committed to the projects."

4.6.2 We were not able to undertake cost-efficiency or related measures in this study, as the necessary data were not available. However, the future need will be to consider an approach as part of the M&E process, as is discussed in Section 12.

4.7 Sustainability

4.7.1 The decision to focus in particular on partnerships with government- and government-sponsored institutions was considered essential for implementing and sustaining any Open Schooling initiative, since these institutions are part of the formal education and accreditation system. The challenges associated with government were discussed previously and the evidence of experiences to date

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7 *Gender responsive* means being responsive to the different needs of both men and boys, and women and girls, as well as actively trying to bring about more equitable gender relations in a given context.
is varied. Some of the capacity-building activities have gone well, as one participant reported:

“Yes, we are already in the process of putting one of the courses online. The training is very useful.”

4.7.2 However, difficulties remained with partnerships involving government and public institutions, as described in several consultants’ reports and interviews. Among the concerns:

- Staff involved in capacity development activities had full-time teaching responsibilities and no time was made available for follow-up and to support cascading of learning.
- Funds were often only short term for an event and not committed for the long term. Open schooling activities were often an unbudgeted “additionality” rather than core and with a planned allocation.
- Access to ICT support and the Internet was frequently intermittent, and in some cases non-existent.

4.7.3 One aspect of sustainability identified was the problem of scaling up beyond the capacity-building phase. Better understanding of the wider context and needs are vital if real sustainability is to happen. As one participant commented:

“What I really think is left to do is the training of other participants all over our country, as well as to have more videos available at the different levels of teaching and subjects.”

The initial planning with surveys and baseline studies was very good. It should be developed further and include greater consideration of the needs, to ensure sustainability and impact.

4.7.4 Tighter joint project planning at start-up, with partner negotiation to ensure full understanding of commitments, should help reduce these difficulties. Additionally, the research activities to support M&E proposed for the Open Schooling initiative should include sustainability considerations.

4.8 Recommendations

4.8.1 The next plan should target the achievement of impact, including through selective focusing of activities (geographically/topics) and in greater depth. This would facilitate scaling up and sustainability and moving beyond capacity building (which continues to dominate activities).

4.8.2 Performance indicators should be challenging but based on considerations over which COL might have influence.

4.8.3 Primary research studies, in parallel with implementation, should be developed to strengthen M&E and provide assessment of quality enhancement and efficiency.
4.8.4 COL should provide more direction and advice to partners covering data collection needs — for example, for the assessment of outcomes, impact and effectiveness. Some of the data needed might be covered by the suggested primary research.

4.8.5 More detailed project planning should be undertaken at the initiation stage in order to plan and facilitate M&E and to establish tighter agreements with partners regarding respective responsibilities, particularly for workshop and other follow-up activities. This could include defining minimum criteria that a potential partner must meet if any partnership is to go ahead.

4.8.6 There should be greater emphasis on scaling up to move beyond capacity building, moving towards impact and longer-term sustainability. This needs to be better understood; and strategies might be informed by the primary research proposed and investigated in greater detail with partners throughout the delivery cycle.

4.8.7 The overlaps with the other COL initiatives should be reviewed in order to explore how better to exploit synergies and minimise any overlap. This is discussed in Section 12.

4.8.8 COL should support the long-term sustainability of SADC-CDE by encouraging revenue diversification.
Section 5  Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

Outcome statement: More VUSSC partner institutions collaboratively develop and deliver relevant courses the use of appropriate ODL methodologies, including eLearning strategies, as per Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) with:
- VUSSC member states using gender-inclusive OER courses
- Participating institutions using the courses and materials created through collaboration
- Participating institutions offering online learning programmes
- Learners being enrolled in VUSSC courses and programmes
- A pool of course materials being newly developed

5.1  Background

5.1.1  VUSSC is not a “university” in the conventional sense. It is a collective mechanism for developing, adapting and sharing courses and learning materials. It is also a forum for institutions to build capacity and expertise in online collaboration, eLearning and ICTs generally. VUSSC focuses on adding value to existing institutions and enabling small states to be contributors as well as consumers of courses and learning materials.8

5.1.2  The evolution of VUSSC is as follows:
- 2000: The 14th Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers (CCEM) in Halifax, Canada, passed a resolution requesting the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) develop a proposal for a virtual university for small states of the Commonwealth (VUSSC).
- 2002: A Proposal for VUSSC was developed by a COL Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).
- 2003: A Sub-Committee of Ministers of Education met in the Seychelles (March 2003), reviewed and endorsed the proposal, and asked COL to manage continued development of VUSSC initiative. The Ministers, in endorsing the proposal, made it clear that they were aware of the growing availability of courses from institutions in developed economies, but they did not want to become dependent on them in ways that would hamper the development of their own institutions. They were also concerned about the “growing number of online charlatans”!
- 2003: The 15th CCEM meeting in Edinburgh, Scotland, endorsed the proposal and business plan for VUSSC.
- 2005 and 2006: More specific data were gathered from representatives of small state9 governments (Interlocutors) who convened at meetings in

9 A “small state” is usually defined as a country having a population of fewer than 1.5 million.
Singapore, where it was decided to begin the implementation of the VUSSC initiative, with a focus on capacity building through workshops that focused on course development competencies and the use of ICT.

5.1.3 The VUSSC initiative was first included in the 2006–2009 3YP and has been continued as an integral part of each subsequent plan. Core funding support from COL has been augmented over the years with project-based funding from the Government of Singapore, the Government of India, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC).

5.1.4 There are currently 36 countries participating in VUSSC, with three primary players in the unfolding development of VUSSC:

The Commonwealth of Learning, which:
- Coordinates the VUSSC initiative
- Facilitates the creation of networks
- Shares expertise in educational technology (radio, television, print, multimedia, Internet, and eLearning)
- Supports indigenous capacity enhancement
- Shares its resources

Ministries of Education in countries of delivery, which:
- Develop appropriate policy and nominate representatives (called Interlocutors) to participate with COL and institutional representatives in managing the initiative
- Review existing policy
- Liaise with other ministries
- Allocate resources for a sustainable project
- Support implementation
- Monitor implementation
- Share information with partners

Participating institutions, which:
- Assume responsibility for programme development and delivery
- Are responsible for supplementing and adapting course materials to local contexts to meet the specific needs of students
- Commit to the granting of the awards earned by graduates

5.1.5 Table 5.1 shows the funding allocations for the VUSSC initiative from the core COL budget and from the balance of a previous grant provided by the Hewlett Foundation, before the start of the 2012–2015 3YP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COL budget</td>
<td>$300,000</td>
<td>$250,000</td>
<td>$300,000</td>
<td>$850,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hewlett Foundation grant</td>
<td>$109,000</td>
<td>$64,000</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$173,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Benchmark Data

5.2.1 The report presented to the CCEM in 2003, based on an analysis of activity in each of the Commonwealth regions, indicated that there was very limited virtual learning activity and that future development would require substantive capacity development and inter-institutional collaboration.

5.2.2 From the outset, COL instituted a process of systematic monitoring and evaluation (M&E) with regular reports, beginning in 2007, commissioned by an independent evaluation consultant. The consultant was also training VUSSC leaders in member countries to participate in the M&E process and to provide reports. COL had also been commissioning independent evaluations of its 3YP achievements, beginning with the 2006–2009 3YP. These reports, all of which are available on the COL website or from the COL VUSSC leader, chronicle the evolution of the initiative as it has progressed toward its stated long-term outcome of “increasing the number of VUSSC partner institutions collaboratively developing and delivering relevant courses using ODL methodologies and e-learning strategies.”

5.2.3 Another source of benchmark information is the accumulated data that flows from COL’s quarterly reporting on progress being made towards the achievement of outcomes and outputs.

5.3 RBM and the Logic Model

5.3.1 The VUSSC initiative was first included in the COL 2006–2009 3YP at a time when COL was in its initial phase of RBM implementation and staff were in the throes of learning how to apply the model. A review of the logic frameworks developed for the subsequent iterations of the 3YPs shows a pattern of increasing sophistication, particularly within the last three to four years. However, the lack of documentation of amendments made as a result of the annual “Activity Log Frame” reviews made it difficult to track the changes that have occurred. It would have been helpful if that was clarified, along with the reasons for the changes.

5.3.2 In 2010, a process was begun involving the country Interlocutors and the VUSSC Management Committee working with COL staff to develop a VUSSC Logic Model linked to the overarching outcomes described in the 2009–2012 COL Logic Model. A comprehensive M&E plan was developed to ensure the Logic Model could be reviewed and modified on an annual basis. This process enabled the VUSSC initiative Logic Model to evolve smoothly in line with the COL Logic Model for 2012–2015.

5.3.3 Furthermore, annual work plans were developed for each of the core initiative activities using a logic framework that described the actions to be

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10 Dr. C. Cunningham-Dunlop, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada.
11 John Lesperance, jlesperance@col.org
12 A panel of Interlocutors was established in 2008 to provide guidance to COL about the development of VUSSC.
undertaken, the expected outputs and outcomes, performance indicators and their means of verification, baseline data, risks and assumptions, budget allocation and countries participating. Annual work plans are reviewed quarterly and modified as required, in consultation with the country partners.

5.3.4 Staff assisted in the development of RBM documentation by providing templates for:
- Initiative Logic Models
- Activity Log Frames
- Quarterly reports
- Event reports
- Semi-annual reports for the COL President

These templates helped ensure a consistent application of RBM across all initiatives, particularly with regard to demonstrating linkages between initiative and activity outcomes and outputs and the corporate long- and intermediate-term outcomes.

5.4 VUSSC Achievements for 2012–2015

5.4.1 Intended outcomes and performance indicators: Table 6.1 indicates the status of achievement of VUSSC outcomes and the related performance indicators as stated in the COL Logic Model for 2012–2015.

Table 6.1: Outcomes, performance indicators and achievements for the VUSSC initiative, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 institutions use gender-inclusive OER to offer 9 new certificate, diploma or degree programmes, at least 5 of which are registered on the TQF</td>
<td>Achieved: 11 institutions in 8 countries are using OER to offer undergrad and grad degrees, diploma, and certificate programmes, 6 of which have been registered on the TQF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 VUSSC countries reference their qualifications framework to the TQF</td>
<td>Achieved: The following regional bodies (representing 47 countries) have referenced frameworks to the TQF: - European Qualifications Framework (16 countries) - CARICOM (12 countries) - Southern Africa Development Community (8 countries) - Pacific Registry of Qualifications and Standards (9 countries) - ASEAN (2 countries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 institutions increase their use of ICTs to deliver programmes to larger numbers of learners</td>
<td>Achieved: 10 institutions in 10 VUSSC countries. However, data related to enrolments and completion are not available.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.2 Continuum of country adoption of the VUSSC model: The VUSSC Education Specialist responsible for the initiative and the commissioned Evaluator, Dr.

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13 The information for the tables in this section is based on the VUSSC Monitoring & Evaluation Report, Yearly Update, July 2014 and March 2015, prepared by Dr. C. Cunningham-Dunlop.
Catherine Cunningham-Dunlop, developed a model for assessing the progress being made by member countries in adopting and implementing the VUSSC concept. Tables 6.2 and 6.3 illustrate the assessment model and classification criteria and their application to the current VUSSC member countries.

### Table 6.2 The classification model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Key</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participating</td>
<td>Participating in boot camps, meetings, and capacity-building events; sharing and creating materials; training colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging</td>
<td>In addition to participating, also engaging in organisational planning; using materials in courses, programmes and degrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing</td>
<td>Also using and implementing the TQF, implementing VUSSC courses, programmes and degrees, enrolling and graduation learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining</td>
<td>Creating a system for independently sustaining VUSSC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6.3 Current status of adoption and implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Participating</th>
<th>Engaging</th>
<th>Implementing</th>
<th>Sustaining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa &amp; Mediterranean</td>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Lesotho Namibia Swaziland Cyprus Malta Zanzibar</td>
<td>Seychelles Mauritius</td>
<td>Botswana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia Pacific</td>
<td>Kiribati Vanuatu Tonga Solomon Islands Fiji Nauru</td>
<td>Brunei Darussalam Papua New Guinea Tuvalu</td>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>Samoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>Belize Guyana Dominica Grenada Montserrat Cayman Islands Turks &amp; Caicos</td>
<td>The Bahamas Barbados Antigua &amp; Barbuda St. Kitts &amp; Nevis St. Lucia St. Vincent &amp; The Grenadines</td>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago Jamaica Barbados</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.5 Conclusions

#### 5.5.1 Monitoring and evaluation: The external evaluation report for 2009–2012 described the VUSSC M&E activities as being primarily focused on outputs and stated that the countries should take on increased ownership of the monitoring process. The process has been improved considerably during the current plan:

- There is now a formal M&E Plan.
- Countries are more involved in providing monitoring reports.
- Data are being used in the annual review and update of logic frames.

That said, the degree of ownership of these processes remains highly variable and is correlated with the degree of adoption of VUSSC and with the level of involvement of Interlocutors in the planning process.
5.5.2 **Achievement of planned results:** The initiative results have clearly been achieved, as indicated in Table 6.2. However, most of the outcomes were accomplished with essentially a year left in the 2012–2015 3YP, which begs questions about the degree of challenge involved in setting them and about the appropriateness of the planning process itself.

5.5.3 **Adoption and implementation of the VUSSC Model:** The good news from the current status shown in Table 6.3 is that there has been substantial progress during this plan period in terms of not only the number of countries engaging in capacity development activities but also the number using this increased capacity to develop and use course materials, to begin to create full degree, diploma and certificate curricula and to deliver them to learners using OER and ICT delivery models.

5.5.4 The bad news is that the most important and challenging task lies ahead: that of building on the results achieved to date to have small states assume full management responsibility for making VUSSC as a sustainable part of their education systems.

5.5.5 To that end, it may be time rethink the founding notion that VUSSC membership should continue to be solely focused on small states. As one Interlocutor stated in an interview:

“There are now so many courses and programmes being offered that we could perhaps utilise partners and enable VUSSC to develop more quickly…”

5.6 **Summary**

5.6.1 The picture that emerges from the VUSSC story is one marked by the following observations:

- An increased number of participating countries (from 32 to 36)
- Clear evidence that the investment in capacity building is paying dividends in terms of course and materials production and use
- Remarkable success in the adoption and use of the TQF: a “potentially game changing” development described in the external evaluation of the 2009–2012 plan
- Encouraging examples of networking and collaboration between and among institutions more advanced in their adoption of the VUSSC model

COL and staff associated with the VUSSC initiative should rightly be pleased with the results to date.

5.6.2 However, it is also clear that the rate of adoption has occurred most quickly in countries with facilitating policies, previous institutional commitments to ODL, and higher levels of available ICT infrastructure — all of which likely give rise to the availability of experienced leadership! Without a strategy for helping the less advantaged countries to “catch up,” it is likely that this variance of adoption will be exacerbated.
5.7 Recommendations

5.7.1 As is discussed in Section 3 on the Higher Education initiative, we recommend a comprehensive strategic review of all COL activities relating to that initiative. VUSSC should be part of this.

5.7.2 The following suggestions are for consideration in planning for the next plan period. They are based on an analysis of what we see are the central challenges going forward: that of enabling small states to assume full management responsibility for embedding VUSSC as a sustainable part of their education systems; and, more importantly, on the comments and suggestions made by Interlocutors, institutional administrators, a former COL Board member, and COL staff who kindly made time for interviews.

i. Focus on interactions with member countries that increase the capacity and confidence of VUSSC leaders to be more involved in the planning process and to take full responsibility for monitoring VUSSC implementation.

ii. Develop linking mechanisms at the regional levels to foster easier and more relevant collaboration for the development of courses and programmes, and for the regionalisation of VUSSC management. The option of devolving these responsibilities to extant regional bodies before creating new ones needs to be explored as a first step.

iii. In taking such action, consider also enabling participation by, and partnerships with, non-member institutions in the region that may be more advanced in their eLearning offerings. Such a strategy could produce greater economies of scale and a faster route to sustainability for the entire small state membership.

iv. Focus on the development, evaluation and promotion of a limited number of collaborative models of institutions working together intra-nationally and internationally. Such models should demonstrate shared responsibility for curriculum planning, development of related courses, shared delivery of the courses, student recruitment and awarding of credentials. The objective would be to demonstrate the opportunities for reducing institutional costs related to course development and delivery, while enhancing quality.

v. While the VUSSC results to date are encouraging, make them even more impressive going forward by marshalling COL resources more effectively through a better-coordinated model. For example, the policy work done by the eLearning Education Specialist was commented on as being very helpful in some VUSSC member countries.

vi. Fully document amendments made as a result of the annual Activity Log Frame reviews. This would enhance M&E. The reasons for any such changes need to be clearly explained.

vii. As discussed in Section 2, Higher Education Initiative, reduce the overlaps between the Higher Education and Teacher Education initiatives by considering some form of rationalising roles and responsibilities.
Section 6  Lifelong Learning for Farmers Initiative

Outcome statement: Marginalised communities in agriculture sector negotiate and access development resources in a sustainable manner through the use of gender-sensitive ODL and as a result of partnerships between government, civil society and the private sector.

6.1 Background

6.1.1 Using the Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) approach, the initiative aims at reaching a large number of small farmers and marginalised sections of rural communities, particularly women in South Asia, Africa and the small islands of the Caribbean and Pacific using open and distance learning (ODL) and ICTs. The initiative focuses on building capacity among farmers, landless labourers and extension officials to help them develop value-added farming, encourage more sustainable use of natural resources, strengthen their ability to face globalisation, and ensure food and livelihood security.

6.1.2 The concept of L3F envisages partnerships between research institutions, financial institutions, the corporate sector, extension agencies and farming communities. The model as evolved by COL and farmer organisations (the Primary Partners) is expected to convince the Secondary Stakeholders, such as financial institutions, the ICT sector and government, of its value; and to influence the decision to scale-up and replicate L3F in a self-sustainable manner.

6.1.3 The concept of the L3F initiative is rooted in an earlier programme called Poverty Reduction Outcomes through Education and Networks (COL-PROTEIN) that began in 2003, which emerged in part to address the Millennium Development Goals related to poverty reduction. A positive response to the programme developed into the more comprehensive L3F model, which is guided by the following hypotheses:

- There are mutually reinforcing contractual relationships between rural producers and the formal public and private sectors.
- The performance of rural credit, when blended with appropriate capacity building, will be improved with regard to productivity, returns and non-performing asset (NPA) levels.
- Capacity building will enlarge the market for bank credit among small and marginal farmers, particularly women.

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14 Primary Partners are the community-based organisations (often self-help groups) made up of poor people in the agricultural sector.
15 Secondary Stakeholders comprise governments, financial institutions, ICT companies and education institutions.
16 Theoretical Perspectives on the Contribution of COL-PROTEIN to Distance and Open Learning for Development, Alluri, Krishna and K. Balasubramanian, COL (2012).
• ICTs, though structures such as rural Internet kiosks, rural telecentres, mobile phones and community radio, can facilitate capacity-building processes.
• Indices\textsuperscript{17} for testing these hypotheses have been developed and verification data are being collected as the initiative proceeds.

6.1.4 By the end of the COL 2009–2012 plan, the L3F model was operating, albeit at varying stages of development, in three countries in Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Mauritius), two in Asia (India, Sri Lanka), one in the Caribbean (Jamaica) and one in the Pacific (Papua New Guinea). The emphasis in the 2012–2015 3YP was on replication, developing self-sustainability, and scaling up using model building, capacity building, partnerships and policy development strategies.

6.1.5 Budget allocations for the L3F initiative in the 2012–2015 3YP are set out in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Financing of the Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) initiative, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COL budget allocations</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
<td>$430,000</td>
<td>$430,000</td>
<td>$1,260,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional funding (CIDA) – support for scaling up of L3F for farmers in sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$840,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.1.6 Table 6.2 indicates the growth phases of L3F — described as micro, meso and macro — that reflect the development of the model from concept and pilot assessment to the ultimate outcome of self-sufficiency and the completion of COL’s leadership role. The phases are also used to position and assess the progress of Primary Partner organisations as they move from micro to meso to macro en route to self-sustainability.

Table 6.2: The evolution of Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) initiative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept development:</td>
<td>Micro level: model building with Primary Partners in more countries</td>
<td>Meso level: Scaling up with Secondary Stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot project in India</td>
<td>Role of COL: active implementation</td>
<td>Role of COL: active implementation and facilitating efforts to enable empowerment of grassroots organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000 learners</td>
<td>50,000 learners</td>
<td>245,000 Learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{17} Social rate of return (SRR) measures the value of the benefits relative to the costs of achieving those benefits. It is a ratio of the net present value of benefits to the net present value of the investment. For example, a ratio of 3:1 indicates that an investment of $1 delivers $3 in social value. It measures social, environmental and economic outcomes and uses monetary values to represent them. Empowerment Index measures the ability of the beneficiaries to participate in and negotiate decision-making at the household and community levels.
6.2 RBM and the Logic Model

6.2.1 The expected L3F initiative outcome for the 2012–2015 3YP, the related performance indicators and the associated risks and assumptions are shown in Table 6.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Risks and assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Marginalised communities in the agriculture sector negotiate and access development resources in a sustainable manner through the use of gender-sensitive ODL and as a result of partnerships between government, civil society and the private sector. | - 50% increase in the empowerment of participants in 5 countries of 3 Commonwealth regions  
- A 25% increase in the income of participants by social groups and gender in 5 countries of 3 Commonwealth regions  
- Social rate of return of 1 to 3 among 20,000 participants disaggregated by social groups and gender in 5 countries of 3 Commonwealth regions  
- L3F is a sustainable system replicated by Secondary Stakeholders with enhanced investment in 8 countries of all Commonwealth regions  
- At least 50% of the participants are women | - The fluctuating global and local economy affects savings and credit among farming communities.  
- There are unstable and volatile economic policies in many countries.  
- There is possible instability of partner organisations in terms of ideology, human resources and financial resources. |

6.2.2 A remarkable level of attention has been given to M&E processes and these have provided data on which to base planning for future outcomes. Baseline studies were conducted before expansion into new countries or with new in-country Primary Partner groups. In some instances, this resulted in a decision not to proceed because of lack of readiness. For example, baseline surveys were conducted in India and Sri Lanka, Kenya and Uganda, Papua New Guinea and Jamaica during 2012, and in Ghana and Tanzania in 2013. Regular activity progress reports and annual evaluation reports have provided benchmark data for up-dating activity logic frameworks.

6.2.3 Application of RBM: L3F is a “poster” initiative in terms of the efforts made to embed the application of the model not only in the context of COL planning processes, but also within its partner organisations. For example:

- There is a clear Logic Model for the initiative and logic frameworks for the various activities that were developed in concert with partners and increasingly initiated by them in the first instance. Indeed, no funds are distributed to a Primary Partner until a strategic plan has been submitted using the logic framework format. Partner organisations were provided with initial training, with follow-up and coaching by in-country resources persons. A comprehensive three-part M&E process was required to be in place that involved participatory monitoring by the Primary Partners.
• The M&E strategies of the Secondary Stakeholders (e.g., financial institutions, ICT companies, institutions) and the COL M&E process as per the corporate and initiative Logic Models and the Activity Log Frames enable continuous monitoring and updating of the initial statement of risks and assumptions.

6.2.4 Achievements during the 2012–2015 3YP: L3F was expected to be implemented in 4 regions of the Commonwealth during this plan period: Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Mauritius, Ghana, Tanzania, Seychelles); Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh); Pacific (Papua New Guinea); Caribbean (Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Grenada). The expected outputs from the regional activities were:

- ODL reaches a large number of farmers particularly women
- The capacity of partnering organisations to facilitate gender-sensitive and gender-responsive L3F is strengthened
- Government ministries, financial institutions and ICT companies play a major role in L3F
- L3F is scaled up at the meso level and attracts policy-makers

6.2.5 However, the stage of development of the initiative varied across the regions. This variance was reflected in the regional- and the country-level Activity Log Frames and therefore in the related performance indicators. The L3F achievements to date were described in detail in an evaluation report that consolidated data from reports received from Primary Partners and Secondary Stakeholders as well as from the COL M&E process.\(^\text{18}\)

6.2.6 Tables 6.4 and 6.5 show the consolidated results across all regions. Table 6.4 is a consolidation of the achievement of output results and Table 6.5 provides an overview of the status of the overarching outcome for the L3F initiative.

Table 6.4: Output-level results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planned outputs</th>
<th>Output indicators envisaged for 2012–2015</th>
<th>Achievement of output indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ODL is reaching a large number of farmers particularly women</td>
<td>ODL is reaching 164,000 participants, 50% of whom are women</td>
<td>The target has been surpassed with more than 60% being women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthened capacity of partnering organisations in facilitating gender-sensitive responsiveness</td>
<td>The capacity of at least 36 NGO, government and other Secondary Stakeholders to facilitate gender-sensitive and gender-responsive L3F is enhanced</td>
<td>The target has been exceeded in 77 NGO, governmental and other Secondary Stakeholders. At least 45 are actively involved in implementing various aspects of L3F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministries, financial institutions and ICT companies play a major role in L3F</td>
<td>15 financial institutions and 5 ICT companies are involved in L3F</td>
<td>Target exceeded: 20 financial institutions and 6 ICT companies are involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3F scaling up at the meso level attracts policy-makers</td>
<td>4 government ministries/departments are internalising L3F</td>
<td>Target exceeded: 12 institutions (government, financial institutions and private companies) have started investing resources in L3F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^\text{18}\) Lifelong Learning for Farmers Interim Evaluation Report, COL (August 2014).
Table 6.5: Overview of initiative outcome status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corporate outcome envisaged for 2012–2015</th>
<th>Status of outcome to present</th>
<th>During 2014–2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A 50% increase in the empowerment of participants in 5 countries of 3 Commonwealth regions</td>
<td><strong>Target not achieved</strong>: While there exists a clear indication of empowerment in Asia and Africa as measured by a recently developed Empowerment Index, the data indicate that the outcome of 50% was overly ambitious. However, a modest increase of 10% was achieved and data will continue to be collected as measurement tools improve.</td>
<td>Efforts will be made to strengthen the empowerment process in Jamaica.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A 25% increase in the income of participants measured by social groups and gender in 5 countries of 3 Commonwealth regions</td>
<td><strong>Target exceeded</strong>: This is the case in both Asia and Africa, with increases in some African countries as high as 175%.</td>
<td>Efforts will be made to address income in Jamaica and Mauritius.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A social rate of return of 1 to 3 among 20,000 participants, disaggregated by social groups and gender in 5 countries of 3 Commonwealth regions</td>
<td><strong>Target exceeded</strong>: In India, around 20,000 participants have generated income and assets over $12.0 million and repaid the bank loan. In Kenya and Uganda, where HIV/AIDS-infected women (who are not given loans by banks), more than $100,000 worth of loans have been raised. COL’s direct investment since 2012 is less than $1 million. Even if indirect cost is taken into account, for every $1 investment, L3F has generated at least $12 worth of direct assets — four times the initial investment.</td>
<td>Efforts will be taken to quantify indirect costs and intangibles as well as direct benefits and tangibles. The Institute of Development Studies at the University of Nairobi is already involved in this exercise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. L3F is a sustainable system replicated by Secondary Stakeholders with enhanced investment in 8 countries of all Commonwealth regions.</td>
<td><strong>Target exceeded</strong>: 12 institutions, including government, financial institutions and private companies, in 8 countries have started investing resources in L3F.</td>
<td>Efforts will be made to enhance and sustain the investment by these institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. At least 50% of the participants are women</td>
<td><strong>Target exceeded</strong>: More than 75% of the participants are women</td>
<td>The focus of “women in development” approach will continue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The COL initiative outcome is “Marginalised communities in agriculture negotiate and access development resources in a sustainable manner through the use of gender-sensitive ODL and as a result of partnerships between government, civil society and the private sector.”

6.3 Discussion

6.3.1 While the foregoing tables provide a useful overview of the L3F initiative’s results achieved, they do not reflect the regional variances or the differences between and among countries within the regions. The following narratives summarise those variances that are described in detail in the previously referenced August evaluation report.

6.3.2 Africa

L3F is operating in five countries in Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Mauritius, Ghana) while it is being replicated in Seychelles. The Canadian government (through CIDA) provided additional funding to scale-up L3F in Ghana and Tanzania.
Implementation began in Ghana in September 2013. While it has taken some time to get partners involved, a detailed study on the scope and focus of L3F is now underway.

In Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, most of the participants are women who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS and who were not able to undertake intensive work. For this reason, the enterprises were kept at simple, subsistence and semi-commercial level. The financial institutions have responded well to this approach and the impact on household food security has been substantial. It appears that the positive impact of L3F on the health of these women may be an unanticipated result.

- There is mounting evidence that L3F results in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania are making a strong impression on policy-makers.
- Government auditors in Kenya have noted that SACCO, a cooperative funding partner organisation, has become self-sustaining.
- In Uganda, a World Bank report on the Sub-Saharan Challenge Programme refers positively to the effectiveness of an ODL network developed at Makerere University to provide information to L3 farmers.
- In Tanzania, an L3F partner, the Federation of Cooperatives (TFC), has been assigned by the government to set up a National Cooperative Bank using the L3F model.

6.3.3 Asia
L3F operates in two countries in Asia (Sri Lanka and India) and of these, India remains the most mature example of L3F in terms of its impact on Primary Partners, the involvement of Secondary Stakeholders, particularly financial institutions, and the progress it has achieved towards scaled-up self-sufficiency. Findings of a 2013 study by the National Institute of Bank Management in India:

- The cost-benefit ratio of the L3F project is 10 to 1: each rupee invested in the project generated a return of Rs10.
- Loan repayment by L3F farmers increased remarkably, as did their net income.
- Farmers involved in L3F benefitted in terms of improved animal and crop husbandry practices and managerial abilities.
- Participation in L3F resulted in a higher rate of social returns.

Sri Lankan government agencies started replicating L3F. However, in Sri Lanka, unlike India, the role of financial institutions has not been strong. Nevertheless, ICT companies have been approaching L3F under their corporate social responsibility commitments rather than just as a business development strategy.

L3F in Sri Lanka started during 2007. However, the Secondary Partner (Open University of Sri Lanka) began to use a project-based strategy in 2010, with the result that there are now two types of activities: one involving farmers producing crops such as ginger and turmeric, and the other involving mobile

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19 Investments by the Commercial Banks in Training of Rural Communities and Its Impact: Scope of Open and Distance Learning, Dr. Naveen Kumar and Dr. Anjali Kulkarni, National Institute of Bank Management (2013).
phone based learning with a specific focus on women. Both of these are showing positive results.

6.3.4 Caribbean
L3F has had an inconsistent start in the region (only Jamaica to date). While the Secondary Partner, the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA), achieved some useful results using mobile phones to inform farmers about disaster management and pest control, to date it has been unable to involve financial institutions and ICT companies. Consequently, COL decided in 2014 to work in parallel with Producer Marketing Organisations (PMOs). Recent developments are more promising: RADA’s board has requested RADA to mainstream gender and L3F, and has requested COL to help in installing and using Learning Through Interactive Voice Educational System (LIVES). There appears to be renewed enthusiasm within RADA resulting from a recent visit to India to see a L3F model in operation.

6.3.5 Pacific
An attempt was made in 2012 to work with the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI), the Kairak Vudal Resource Training Centre (KVRC), and the Ginigoada Bisnis Development Foundation (GBDF) in Papua New Guinea (PNG). However, COL withdrew from the NARI partnership due to a disagreement over methodologies. Later attempts were made to work with KVRC and GBDF. An orientation visit to India occurred and some gender training was done. However, COL did not see any major efforts from these organisations in terms of follow-up. As a result, COL’s effort in PNG was minimised. The GBDF has continued to use ODL in non-formal education as a result of COL capacity-building inputs.

One of the main reasons for the difficulty in getting L3F established in PNG has been the difference between COL funding contribution policies as compared with those of large donor organisations prominent in the country. Hence, it was difficult to convince stakeholders about factors such as social rate of return and credit. It is intended that in 2015–2021, concentrated efforts will be made to revive L3F in the Pacific.

6.3.6 Learning Through Interactive Voice Educational System (LIVES): This is an L3F activity with a focus on enhancing the use of mobile phone technology for delivering information and training to Primary Partners. Mobile phone based learning started in India, and later COL and the University of British Columbia developed a partnership to evolve a learning management system for mobile phones called Learning Through Interactive Voice Educational System (LIVES). The system enables learning to be managed through audio messages, as well as enabling responses of learners to be tracked.

6.3.7 The intention was to undertake large-scale beta-testing of the technology on a pan-Commonwealth basis (in India, Jamaica and Seychelles) during 2012–2015. This started in India through a partnership with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT). While this testing demonstrated considerable potential, some technical issues evolved that needed to be addressed before further development could occur. The use of standard
mobile phone technology for distributing information to large numbers of people remains an important component of many L3F activities as Table 6.6 shows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Output indicators envisaged for mobile phone based learning</th>
<th>Output indicators realised in mobile phone based learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIVES reaching 1,000 participants, with 50% of them being women</td>
<td>Reached 200 participants for beta testing. LIVES reached 300 women in remote places in Afghanistan who underwent a course on child care in their own language. The Government of Canada supported UBC, with concurrence from COL, to manage the programme.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.4 Gender

6.4.1 Most of the Primary Partners involved in L3F were local self-help NGOs whose membership was predominantly female. It is not surprising, therefore, that the outcome performance indicator that “at least 50% of L3F participants be women” has not only been achieved but often exceeded by 50%. At this point the percentage of women participants is about 75% and the intention is that the focus on the “women in development” approach will continue.

6.4.2 In Africa (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania), most of the participants were women who were infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. Through their participation in L3F, they have been able to secure loans to increase crop production and this has resulted in increased household food security. It is now being hypothesised that the L3F result of improved food security for women who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS could likely have a positive impact on improving health conditions generally, and studies on this issue are being contemplated.

6.4.3 One of the performance indicators for the L3F LIVES project was to reach 1,000 participants, of whom 50% were to be women during the beta testing stage. As previously indicated, the beta test had to be postponed part way through. At that point, however, it had involved 200 women in India and another 300 in women in remote parts of Afghanistan.

6.4.4 As discussed above, membership of the L3F Primary Partner organisations is predominantly female, with the result that the gender performance indicator has been exceeded. Given that gender outcomes are described in terms of both equity and balance, the future challenge will be to increase the participation of men.

### 6.5 Summary

6.5.1 The evaluation report\(^\text{20}\) of COL’s 2009–2012 3YP concluded that the testing of the L3F model in South Asia had shown that it can make a significant difference to peoples’ livelihoods, particularly in terms of empowering the

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predominantly women farmers. However, the report concluded with the observation that time is running out for the micro field testing of L3F and that it needed to demonstrate that it could rapidly scale up without the current level of COL support. The report also noted that the central challenge was to convince banks to lend to subsistence farmers on the strength of their learning activities. The current L3F plan, with its focus on replication, developing self-sustainability, and scaling-up using model building, capacity building, partnerships and policy development strategies, clearly embraced the challenge, with attempts at expansion into Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific.

6.5.2 The successful partnerships in Sri Lanka, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania and the evidence of positive beginnings in Mauritius, Ghana and the Caribbean, together with the expansion that has occurred in India, clearly demonstrated the cross-cultural portability of the model.

6.5.3 The use of ODL and available communication technologies for training purposes, together with the dissemination of information to farmers is, to COL’s credit, a key component of every partnership. Furthermore, COL has been helpful through securing involvement of mobile phone companies.

6.5.4 The most promising output during the 3YP period has been the growing involvement of financial institutions. This has produced win-win relationships between the banks and the farmers, particularly in Asia and Africa. There are now numerous operating partnerships that can be used as models for further expansion.

6.5.5 There was growing evidence that the successes of L3F were attracting serious attention from policy-makers, with linkages being made between the L3F model and other rural poverty reduction initiatives underway in the same countries.

6.5.6 The evidence regarding the cross-cutting themes of gender balance, sensitivity and eLearning applications indicated these are important aspects of all L3F activities.

6.5.7 Not all efforts to expand L3F were successful. The exemplary M&E processes that have chronicled the successes have yet to provide insight, other than hypotheses, into the conditions that hinder or foster adoption of the model. Greater understanding of these conditions might be helpful in terms of future scaling-up decisions.

6.6 Recommendations

6.6.1 COL has stated that the emphasis in the new plan period will be continuing to scale up the initiative with the intention that the partnerships will move to the macro stage of self-sufficiency development. Accomplishing that goal will require more diversified and targeted awareness-creating strategies than have been employed to date. The following suggestions may be helpful:
• COL facilitated visits of key personnel from new and potential partnerships to visit India to see and discuss L3F in action. Several of the people involved were interviewed and all mentioned how important this opportunity had been in helping them to understand the process and in encouraging them to take up the partnership challenge. It therefore seems useful to expand these opportunities, both virtual and real.
• In order to create awareness, new and existing links with development agencies that are engaged in managing and funding related rural poverty programmes should be used.
• Communication strategies targeting financial institutions should be developed that show evidence they can take action to create win-win relationships with subsistence farmers.
• Consideration should be given to how social media might be used to enable problem solving and communications among partner leaders. This was mentioned in interviews with Primary Partners as well as with Secondary Partners.
• There is a growing pool of experienced people in several of the countries: How might their expertise be fully utilised?

6.6.2 As an organisation, COL might also consider the degree to which the L3F model can be used in the context of the other aspects of its work. Health and wellness, for example, would seem to be an important dimension of social empowerment, as the results in Kenya with women who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS would seem to indicate.
Section 7  Healthy Communities Initiative

Outcome statement: More people, particularly women and youth, in more local areas, especially resource-poor communities, use better-quality learning opportunities to improve community health and development.

7.1  Background

7.1.1  The provision of healthcare in the countries of the developing Commonwealth is a major challenge and they together account for 60% of maternal deaths and 40% of infant deaths globally. The availability of appropriate health education can contribute greatly to death reduction, and communities are in great need of accessible and relevant learning about health. COL’s Healthy Communities initiative seeks to address the needs. It involves two broad activity areas:

- Advocacy: aims to establish the community-learning programme (CLP) model, provide evidence of success, and influence policy-makers and practitioners to adopt.
- Capacity building: seeks to build capacity for the design and delivery of quality CLPs among national and regional groups and key stakeholder groups at the local level; these include media outlets, community groups, NGOs and public authorities.

The intended 2012–2015 3YP result was “more and better local opportunities for gender-inclusive learning and social and behavioural change used by a significant number of citizens in 16 countries in 3 regions of the Commonwealth.” The performance indicators for the 3YP were:

- 30 new or significantly enhanced relevant and gender-sensitive CLPs are delivered in resource-poor communities in at least 16 countries in 3 Commonwealth regions
- 60,000 users of CLPs are in two key social groups (60% of all users are women and 40% of all users are “youth”)
- Learning achievements and positive changes in health-seeking behaviour are evident

7.1.2  Table 7.1 shows the expenditure and budget allocations for the Healthy Communities initiative in the 2012–2015 3YP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 1 (expenditure)</th>
<th>Year 2 (expenditure)</th>
<th>Year 3 (allocation)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$447,307</td>
<td>$459,044</td>
<td>$415,000</td>
<td>$1,321,351</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.1.3  Activities associated with the Healthy Communities initiative were being delivered in association with six “core regional partners” working with local
partners in 20 countries — although the levels and depth of engagement varied depending on the size of each country and its capability.

### 7.2 RBM and the Logic Model

7.2.1 The Healthy Communities initiative Strategic Plan and Logic Model provided good detail and were consistently applied for planning each of the intended outcomes, setting performance targets and the means to verify each one. The risks and assumptions were clearly assessed and presented. The use of a 13-question “theory of change” checklist provided greater insight into the background, needs and planning.

7.2.2 The M&E approach was developed as an integral part of the strategic plan and with the direct involvement (and shared commitment) of partners. Each partner was required to produce a quarterly monitoring report covering all their community operations, and COL employed them to assess progress towards outcomes (although some contained inconsistencies, mainly related to the difficulty of collecting data on users; see below). As the Interim Evaluator commented:

> “It can be difficult to get monitoring information from the local partner radio stations on a monthly basis. Some COL partners prefer not to include the monitoring requirements in their contracts with their partner radio stations because it becomes more like an obligation, rather than a mutually beneficial exercise.”

7.2.3 To contribute to M&E, a quality and benchmarks assessment tool (SOCIAL) was developed (by COL, the M&E consultant and the Healthy Communities initiative partners). SOCIAL was employed by the partners to measure change that might result from the initiative interventions. The assessments were employed to enhance understanding and provide feedback for programme improvement.

7.2.4 To assess qualitative outputs and outcomes, partners were encouraged to upload their scripts, audio programmes and other materials to the online CLP toolkit. Narrative comment was also encouraged, and offered insight into outcomes:

> “A special intervention was made in Abuja by a group of 20 (12 men/8 women; 10 youth under 30) campus radio broadcasters, social media activists and stakeholders, entitled radio(inter)active, resulting in 25 blog posts, 16 audio podcasts, 3,161 tweets, 100+ Facebook posts (indicating integration of different media).”

7.2.5 A key component within the CLP has been developing and delivering training, leading to the CLP Developer’s Certificate. This is a distance training/mentoring programme offered in association with the University of the West Indies and supported in-country through mentoring by local partners. In
total, 230 students from 25 countries have started the programme. While the impact has yet to be fully assessed, an ongoing evaluation is underway (March 2015) with participants. Feedback is awaited after completion of the full programme.

7.3 Partners and Implementation

7.3.1 Most activities are delivered in close cooperation with select specialist partners as intermediaries operating at national, regional and local levels. These intermediaries included media and communication for development organisations, community-based organisations and community radio associations. There were only a few examples of working with government organisations or a partner supported by government (although there were exceptions, such as the Jamaica Constabulary Force). Involvement with NGOs was identified as the best means to achieve flexibility and minimise the delays frequently associated with government-partnered projects. The challenge was to identify partners that had some degree of financial stability and were also appropriate for CLP involvement.

7.3.2 COL financial support was relatively modest, but partners interviewed commented on its importance, particularly for those in some of the poorest countries and communities where local philanthropic support might be limited and government health and social budgets over-stretched. Some international agencies provided support, but as partners separately commented:

“They normally have their own global agendas and we have to deliver to these and often these are inappropriate in our context, whereas COL listens to the local community, is flexible and adapts and invests according to local needs.”

“Other agencies focus on bean-counting (numbers only matter) but COL puts more emphasis on quality. COL understands the need to sow seeds over longer periods; others seem to be short term.”

7.3.3 Successful engagement with partners can result in unplanned benefits. For example, in Jamaica, what had started as a specific “health” activity extended to working with the police to address problems such as domestic violence and lack of good parenting. In India, experiences of the Gurgaon project are being applied in the design of a new project in the more rural Jharkhand.

7.3.4 Some partners were employed effectively by COL to extend activities to other centres and countries. For example, the partnership with Radio Riverside in South Africa was expanded to nine locations in South Africa. The online training programme, with mentoring from South Africa, expanded into other African countries to include Cameroon, Nigeria, Mozambique, Namibia, Lesotho, Malawi and Sierra Leone. Model building centred on radio, supported by mobile phones for learner interaction (e.g., for reminders to listen), was extended to programme delivery using only mobile phones.
7.3.5 The consultants and partners interviewed and the reports reviewed for this study indicated that much of the success of the Healthy Communities initiative was due to the attitude and approach of the COL team, their commitment to the philosophy of “participatory” development and their ability to encourage learning between peoples across countries and regions. This was said to have laid foundations for the longer term:

“COL has pioneered, promoted and mainstreamed an approach to the use of radio tailored to the needs of the communities. This involved consultations with the community and learning their needs, including local community voices in the programmes, introduction of quality through planning, scripting, local voices and expert voices all helps ensure programmes are attractive.”

7.4 Analysis and Discussion

7.4.1 The overall summary of achievement of performance indicators in the Healthy Communities initiative over the 2012–2015 3YP is provided in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Performance indicators and achievements for the Healthy Communities initiative, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>1. 30 new or significantly enhanced relevant and gender-sensitive community ODL programmes are delivered in resource-poor communities in at least 16 countries in 3 Commonwealth regions</td>
<td>1. Significantly achieved: Since July 2012, 52 new CLPs have been designed and over 36 CLPs were delivered in multiple sites in 10 countries across 3 Commonwealth regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. 60,000 users of community ODL programmes in 2 key social groups (60% women and 40% youth)</td>
<td>2. Achieved: Quarterly variations (see text) noted, but results indicate &gt;30,000 identified users and 800,000 estimated users. Users are predominantly women (&gt;60%). Impossible to assess age of users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Learning achievements and positive changes in health-seeking behaviours are evident</td>
<td>3. Achieved: Findings from research studies indicate that CLP has contributed to behaviour and learning outcomes, although how is not fully understood.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium term</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Quality learning programmes in use by specific groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Learning achievements and increased knowledge and skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Empowerment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Social and behavioural changes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This refers to data for unique users in a single quarter and is thus an under-estimate for the full 3YP (see text below).

7.4.2 A headline summary of results shows that the Healthy Communities initiative achieved the following in the 3YP period 21:

- reached an estimated 790,000 users

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- identified over 30,000 users of the CLPs
- led to the design of over 475 hours of learning content
- led to the broadcast/delivery of over 745 hours of learning content
- catalysed over 1,000 hours of training
- facilitated training sessions that were completed by 1,055 participants representing over 275 organisations

7.4.3 A crucial question necessary to assess progress in achieving performance indicators surrounded the definition of number of users. The Healthy Communities initiative team sought to develop practical working estimates towards clarification and suggested three categories of users:

- **Potential users**: The total number of the target audience that could have access to a CLP. This was estimated to be 1.96 million in the M&E evaluation study, possibly even greater. It was based on census demographics and factoring in the specific target audiences.
- **Estimated users**: These were based on data that partners provided and were required to justify. As with identified users (see below), the initiative team reviewed with partners the reliability of these data.
- **Identified users**: These were users identified primarily through their participation in face-to-face (F2F) events, such as listening/discussion groups or community events (e.g., health camps, in which users could be counted, or through mobile phone usage)

7.4.4 The 3YP performance indicator target of 60,000 referred to “identified users.” This was assessed through a quarterly monitoring basis to provide “snapshots” of programme usage during the three-month period. The number and type of CLPs in operation varied and figures were not cumulative, but quarterly reports suggested between 30,000 and 57,000 identified users. Because of the quarterly variations exposed by the snapshot approach, the Healthy Communities initiative Education Specialist suggested as the target that two quarters within a year should have recorded 50,000 identified users. This would seem a practical solution, but it might still underestimate the actual total.

Note that the estimate for potential users is the least reliable, while that for identified users is the most accurate. For the latter, the local partners are required to provide greater justification for their data when providing quarterly reports.

7.4.5 The baseline studies offered a good assessment of local options to enhance appropriate decision-making on engagement, planning and investment. However, they would also have benefitted from a more critical analysis of possible delivery options available.

7.4.6 Four in-depth research projects were commissioned (each combining quantitative, qualitative and participatory approaches) to obtain greater insight into learning and behaviour outcomes of the CLPs. The results were very positive and indicated that the CLP had contributed. Among the useful insights:
“PLM [a local community radio in Malawi] is doing a tremendous job. Peoples’ lives have changed ... previously many families did not know about family planning methods and were having lots of unspaced children. This has ended now.”

It was seen that the partner's involvement in the CLP had resulted in an increase in their capacity to design, produce and deliver content; and that the quality of delivery had improved as they progressed through the episodes.

7.4.7 The key problems identified concerned how to quantify programme usage and the question of attribution (i.e., how best to disaggregate the CLP specific-behavioural changes from other healthcare influences to which the community might be exposed).

7.4.8 Other evidence of qualitative change in community radio activities was provided: scripted presentations were in regular use (whereas previously they were unscripted and with ad hoc speakers) and focus groups from the targeted communities were employed to assess their understanding of key messages. Findings were then fed back into topic choice and programming.

7.4.9 There was also good evidence of more responsibility being placed on the partner — for example, when difficulties were identified by Jet FM, Jamaica:

“Only a pilot (two hours) of the programme was produced as the content was found not to be in keeping with the baseline survey conducted. The content was reworked during this period and was aired later....”

7.4.10 The development of the distance training/mentoring programme required significant time and investment by COL, but it offers great potential to extend the experiences gained from delivering the Healthy Communities initiative to a wider global network. Partners and tutors in South Africa and the Caribbean were all positive about the results to date and likely future impact.

7.4.11 Because it was a demanding programme with participants needing to fit study and field work around their work commitments, drop-outs were to be expected, although initial reports indicated these to be fewer than anticipated. While a formal evaluation report is awaited, the process of mentoring all participants through frequent contact via Skype and mobile phones has contributed much to maintaining commitment.

7.4.12 There was flexibility in approaches to delivery, designed to reflect local circumstances. For example, where there were connectivity problems, additional F2F support was provided as well as print and DVD materials. The degree of serious interaction and deliberation between and among trainees, mentors, facilitators and partners was reportedly high and substantive. Discussions among key national and regional partners were initiated to move towards establishing an independent community of practice.
7.4.13 A number of activities are delivered in India in partnership with the CEMCA team, although guidance on demarcation of responsibilities between the Healthy Communities initiative and India-based teams would seem useful. This was similar to the other COL initiatives in Asia and is discussed in the CEMCA section. For the Healthy Communities initiative, however, a working relationship was established with agreed common outcomes and coordination of efforts.

7.4.14 Efforts were made to engage with governments at state and national levels to promote the advocacy agenda, but most activities to date have been local, working with district health staff and local authorities. Government direct involvement has so far attracted only limited support, other than with the Jamaica police. In India, a dialogue was started with the Department for Information and Broadcasting to support and facilitate scale-up of activities. But, overall, more effort needs to be made. As the Healthy Communities initiative Education Specialist commented:

"...the results are less than I had hoped in this 3YP. Evidenced-based advocacy and take-up by government is a key outcome for the next plan."

7.4.15 Based on the above considerations, it is clear that the Healthy Communities initiative has, from modest beginnings, delivered the intended outcomes and is steadily extending operations to new networks built around the expertise of partners. The development and promotion of the distance-training/-mentoring programme continues to enhance the potential for positive growth beyond that originally planned.

7.5 Sustainability

7.5.1 The need to secure funding from other sponsors was clearly identified in the Healthy Communities initiative risk assessment, and the Education Specialist consistently considered possible approaches within each different country and partner context. Strategies adopted included:

- Seeking support from the main line ministries (e.g., Health, Rural Development) – Some successes were achieved in terms of in-kind investments (e.g., with some Health Offices and hospitals in India and Malawi and the Jamaica police). In South Africa, there was cash investment by the government’s Media Development and Diversity Agency.
- Accessing “development funds” from NGOs and donors – There were some successes with cash investments from trusts in the UK (for programming in Malawi), a foundation in South Africa and an NGO in Bangladesh.

7.5.2 While investment frequently came in the form of in-kind support, partners and consultants explained that cash inputs make the real difference. The need was to continue to build the capacities of national, regional and local partners to secure sponsorship, including from the private sector. A six-week course, covering funding and sponsorship, was piloted in early 2015, in the
distance training and mentoring programme. This might form the basis for extending and diversifying sponsorship-related training.

7.5.3 Sustainability, both financial and organisational, has been of real concern to COL, and it was identified as a risk area in previous evaluations. The approach adopted by the Healthy Communities initiative Education Specialist has been to ensure that local partners take leadership responsibility and build networks through operating nationally and regionally and also to assist in identification of new partners.

7.5.4 All partners interviewed said that their goal was to achieve financial independence through improving the diversity of revenue sources. There was considerable optimism that their association with the COL brand, the activities and the networks this enabled them to build has enhanced their own status; they now had more confidence to pursue funding opportunities and new partners. However, they all reported that COL financial and professional support was crucial to help them build up their own capacities and expertise. As the M&E consultant commented in relation to the Media Training Centre (MTC), South Africa:

“The relationship with COL has also given MTC international exposure and greater credibility – through its association with an international inter-government agency. MTC has now worked in 6 African countries as a direct result of their partnership with COL, so this interaction has definitely increased the footprint of the organisation and put MTC on the map. The recognition that MTC now enjoys has strengthened the organisation and has also led to funding partnerships.”

7.5.5 COL should help partners diversify their funding base. Possible approaches include seeking leverage through COL’s global brand to help attract in-country and international funds. This might include working with international agencies, philanthropic organisations and companies with a corporate social responsibility agenda (e.g., banks, healthcare related or media groups).

7.5.6 The influence of COL Board members and other high-profile stakeholders might usefully stimulate introductions and facilitate opportunities.

7.5.7 A concern expressed was that it was only the better-organised and larger partner organisations that were able to attract support from donor agencies and international NGOs. Smaller operations in the poorer Commonwealth countries faced real challenges given that typically only a few local donors or charity organisations existed and government departments, operating in support of health and community programmes, had only limited resources.
7.6 Efficiency and Costs

7.6.1 Attempts were made to estimate unit costs associated with the Healthy Communities initiative. To achieve this, calculating the size of the user group attracted to programmes was a crucial factor. A consideration was that the more engaging and informative the CLP content might be, the larger the audience, the greater the potential impact and, in turn, the lower the unit costs. However, as was discussed above, data on user groups are complex. A unit cost estimation for COL’s investment, based on potential and identified groups of users (see definitions above), indicated the following for 2013/2014, based on COL total expenditures:

- Identified users: 56,900 = $8.06 per user
- Potential users: 1.96 million = $0.23 per user

7.6.2 This simple calculation omits the costs incurred by partners or additional funds secured from other sources. That is an area worthy of further study. A further use of unit costs data would be to consider the relative costs of alternative approaches to delivery to achieve the defined project outcomes.

7.6.3 An analysis of the costs for the Healthy Communities initiative project in Malawi included estimates for the indirect investment costs of staff (based on time committed over a three-month period) plus contributions from other funding agencies. The net result was that the cost for 3,300 active learners was approximately $1.35 per learner. This is a useful and interesting approach and might offer a benchmark for future planning.

7.6.4 Significant resources were invested in the development and delivery of the distance learning and mentoring programmes and, while the evaluation has yet to be fully reported, partners and mentors involved were impressed by the quality of the programmes and the high level of engagement of the participants. This approach offers great opportunities for economies of scale and for extension and engagement with communities in many more countries.

7.7 Gender

7.7.1 The Healthy Communities initiative included a number of gender-related objectives. The external M&E consultant commented that monitoring was not capturing the necessary information to be able to comment clearly on the achievement of gender-specific output/outcome indicators for capacity building or advocacy.

7.7.2 However, women have been the priority for all components of the CLP, including for subject content and for presenters and speakers from the communities targeted. For example, the Gurgaon project in India concerned the reproductive and sexual health of women living in a non-formal settlement of 100,000. Good examples were reported from partners and consultants about the high levels of engagement of women and also about how they encouraged their husbands to listen to programmes.
7.7.3 A review of trainees attending the various capacity-building programmes in one quarter of 2013/2014 indicated that of those completing the programme (total 483), women were the majority (over 54%). Additionally, of the completers, 47% were under 30 years old, which related to achievement of the performance indicator for youth.

7.7.4 However, women might not always be the main focus for gender activities. For example, in the Caribbean, the needs of disaffected young males were identified as a major concern, as their behaviours impacted negatively on women. The Jamaican Constabulary project addressed domestic violence and parenting; and in Trinidad the CLP is within a juvenile male prison.

7.8 Recommendations

7.8.1 The next 3YP should prioritise the achievement of the long-term self-sufficiency of local partners, both in financial and delivery competencies. This is essential for the sustainability of the Healthy Communities initiative and should be an underlying factor at all stages of planning, delivery and monitoring.

7.8.2 COL should assist partners in diversifying their funding base. Possible approaches include:
- Seeking leverage through COL’s global brand recognition to help secure sponsorship funding
- Promoting the success of the Healthy Communities initiative to government, policy-makers and other stakeholders
- Seeking support from COL Board members and other high-profile stakeholders to facilitate access to financing opportunities
- Strengthening training on securing sponsorship within the distance-learning programme

7.8.3 The Healthy Communities initiative has grown some excellent partnerships for delivery. The need is to continue to grow the network of lead partners able to deliver national and regional outreach through establishing their own partnerships.

7.8.4 A stronger focus on the advocacy agenda is essential. This includes closer engagement with national and state governments, particularly at higher levels where policy influence is possible.

7.8.5 The distance learning programme should be critically reviewed at the end of the first cycle of modules. If outcomes are good, then the potential for scale-up should be assessed with careful analysis of likely investment needs. The approach offers real opportunity to deliver economies of scale, but it has investment implications, including support for expanding the number of mentors and for marketing the programme to new audiences.

7.8.6 Practical and cost-effective approaches to data collection by partners need to be supported and improved. This will help provide a clearer understanding of outcomes and impact on key user groups and facilitate
programme improvement. The piloting and application of qualitative achievement indicators should also be extended to improve understanding of outcomes and ultimate impact.

7.8.7 The approaches to assessing cost-efficiency already developed should be extended and findings employed in planning and delivery, particularly to assess likely costs associated with different options for project delivery.
Section 8  Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD) Initiative

Outcome statement: Organisations and institutions increase equitable access to quality technical and vocational skills development through flexible and blended approaches, particularly for the informal sector.

8.1  Background

8.1.1  COL staff identified that a major priority should be to address the challenge of high youth unemployment across much of the developing Commonwealth. Previously, COL had demonstrated that the use of flexible and blended learning (FaB) could enhance equitable access to quality technical and vocational skills training, particularly for the unemployed, for women and for those in the informal sector.

8.1.2  The TVSD initiative (TVSD) sought to promote access to employable skills through capacity development in the developing Commonwealth. This involved supporting partnerships with technical and vocational institutions, with government ministries and with NGOs. These partnerships and associated interventions were aimed at exploiting the potential of FaB learning, combined with appropriate digital technologies, so that institutions might:

- Extend the scope of their skills development programmes to include the informal sector
- Expand the scale of their training interventions to reach larger numbers of youth and adult learners in both the formal and informal sectors
- Improve the quality of skills development within their respective local contexts

8.1.3  The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the TVSD initiative for the 2012–2015 3YP were:

- 10 institutions implement flexible and blended policies and strategies
- 20 institutions or organisations in 15 countries across the 4 Commonwealth regions start or strengthen flexible and blended learning and substantially increase their learner enrolments, particularly for the informal sector
- 15 new quality TVSD courses are in use and are available as OERs
- New technology-enhanced quality TVSD course components are in use in 20 institutions

8.1.4  TVSD was delivered through activities focused on each Commonwealth region and with financial allocations made according to these (see Table 8.1). This approach provided additional transparency and facilitated some cost-effectiveness comparisons.
Table 8.1: Annual budgets, by region of activity, for the Technical and Vocational Skills Development initiative, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity area</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total (all activities)</td>
<td>$450,000</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>$65,000</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>$198,000</td>
<td>$180,000</td>
<td>$175,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>$127,000</td>
<td>$135,000</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
<td>$80,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.2 RBM and the Logic Model

8.2.1 A comprehensive set of key documents for the TVSD initiative informed this evaluation. They included:
- TVSD Strategic Plan 2012–2015
- Logic frameworks with outcomes and outputs specified for each activity
- Baseline studies completed for a number of the activities
- M&E framework for the 3YP
- Annual monitoring and evaluation reports (July 2013, July 2014 and March 2015)

In addition, interviews were conducted (via Skype) with a selection of partners and consultants, as well as with the TVSD Education Specialist. A selection of consultants’ reports and Education Specialist reports were also reviewed.

8.2.2 The delivery of TVSD was structured around the four regions, and performance indicators for each region were developed annually and in some detail. These were regularly updated to record progress and then reviewed in the M&E reports. Both quantitative and qualitative considerations were addressed in the indicators, as was gender.

8.2.3 The TVSD approach to M&E is to be commended, as the model employed reviewed each activity against the criteria (drawn on OECD evaluation guidelines) covering effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability and gender equity. It also introduced considerations of costs (related to efficiency) and organisational learning points for COL. Qualitative criteria were applied to each of the objectives being addressed. The M&E report for July 2014 built on the previous one (July 2013) and moved from assessing institutional progress to exploring how teachers had acquired skills to integrate FaB learning and teaching. The summative report of March 2015 consolidated and analysed findings over the 2012–2015 3YP and assessed their contribution to the achievement of COL’s desired impact for the plan period.

8.2.4 The risks and assumptions were identified for most regional sub-activities and projects, were clearly defined and were referenced in the plan documents. The 2012–2015 TVSD Strategic Plan provided a useful diagrammatic representation of the Logic Model and offered analysis and insight to the implementation of change, considering barriers, critical success factors and assumptions associated with the delivery of the TVSD. All these represent good practice for sharing across COL.
8.3 Partners and Implementation

8.3.1 The TVSD initiative over the 2012–2015 3YP period engaged with 64 partner institutions in 22 countries (covering all regions of the Commonwealth). The partners involved were highly varied, ranging from public and private training providers, governments and national bodies to informal and formal sector organisations. The mix reflected the disparate nature of provision of skills education and training at all levels in the most countries. This presented challenges for TVSD delivery, as organisations and institutions involved were so varied in terms of their governance, ownership, funding and access to resources — particularly ICT and Internet. Programmes offered were also at widely differing levels, as were the competencies and experiences of the staff involved.

8.3.2 Partners were identified through a number of means, including as proposed by governments and COL Focal Points, from direct requests by the potential partner and by the TVSD Education Specialist in the course of her work. However, all potential partners were required to undergo an assessment to evaluate their appropriateness for support. The Education Specialist has developed an online “Readiness Baseline Survey” to assess institutional and individual readiness to participate in the TVSD initiative. It is involves a questionnaire that might be contextualised to reflect the location, nature and level of development of the institution. In some cases, institutions reported that completion of the questionnaire had made them realise that they were not yet ready for TVSD involvement. They responded by establishing their own development plan to achieve the COL criteria and secure future engagement.

8.3.3 In addition, an eLearning Training Needs Analysis (TNA) tool was developed to assess the training needs of teachers and instructors in eLearning. The approach informed the planning and delivery of institutional eLearning training for TVSD partners.

8.4 Overall Finding and Performance Indicators

8.4.1 The March 2015 summative evaluation reported that for the TVSD initiative and for INVEST Africa there was strong evidence that the initiative had achieved its intended outcomes in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. As the evaluator commented:

“...an analysis of outcomes achieved over the three year period 2012 to 2015 ... found that the TVSD Initiative has been effective, efficient and relevant for its partners. It also found that the Initiative is designed for sustainability and has promoted gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls with some TVSD partners.”

A review of consultants’ reports and interviews for this evaluation supported these conclusions. Difficulties in the delivery of TVSD were encountered and

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these are discussed below. They include the challenges of achieving impact and sustainability.

8.4.2 Table 8.2 sets out TVSD initiative achievements over the 2012–2015 3YP relative to the original performance indicators. All the latter have been achieved and many significantly exceeded. Some “headline” cumulative data for the initiative at the end of the 3YP included:

- New learners on new informal sector courses: 6,694
- New learners in new flexible core programmes: 8,272
- Worked with 64 institutions in 22 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Pacific
- Produced with partners 158 new courses and 16 open education resources
- Encouraged 45 institutions or organisations to have new technology-enhanced course components in use

Table 8.2: Performance indicators and achievements for the TVSD initiative, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 institutions or organisations in 15 countries across all Commonwealth regions start or strengthen flexible and blended learning and substantially increase their learner enrolments, particularly for the informal sector</td>
<td>Achieved: Overall, 40 institutions in 19 countries are involved:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Africa: 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Asia: 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Caribbean: 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pacific: 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 new quality TVSD courses are in use, and are available as OER</td>
<td>Achieved: Overall, 126 new courses are in use or development, and of these 15 are available as OER:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Africa: 53 (5 as OER)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Asia: 15 (5 as OER)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Caribbean: 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pacific: 9 (5 as OER)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New technology-enhanced quality TVSD course components are in use in 20 institutions</td>
<td>Achieved: Overall, 15 institutions are involved to date:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Africa: 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Asia: –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Caribbean: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pacific: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 institutions implement flexible and blended TVSD policies and strategies</td>
<td>Achieved: The focus has been with INVEST Africa institutions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Implemented: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Under development: 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.4.3 One example of successful achievement of outcomes comes from the INVEST Africa project that involved 13 polytechnics and technical institutions in seven countries. The evaluator involved commented:

“INVEST has not only exceeded its outcome targets but the nature of the FaB policies developed by partner institutions; the establishment of appropriate organisational structures by all INVEST institutions in ways that can support the pedagogical shifts required to enable FSD; the continued investment by partner institutions in ICT infrastructure, suggest that from a
qualitative perspective, the programme has been effective in growing institutional capacity to adopt and integrate FAB learning and teaching.”

A technical education institution director interviewed for this evaluation reported that COL-led interventions had directly resulted in establishing eLearning programmes, and that all staff and students now access the OERs routinely through the institution’s own web pages.

8.4.4 There is no doubt that TVS D has delivered a remarkable mix of activities, projects and programmes in many difficult circumstances, involving both small NGOs and large government institutions and across a variety of countries. While more than meeting the agreed performance indicators, and achieving the planned outputs and outcomes well before the end of the 3YP period is to be welcomed, it could be that the indicators chosen, although representing a challenge, included some of the more straightforward ones to achieve.

8.5 Factors Influencing Delivery

The operating environment

8.5.1 In most low-income countries, the provision of technical and vocational education and training is challenging as it must offer opportunities for many varied groups: primary school drop-outs, students completing at all levels of formal schooling, formal and informal sector employees, women, the unemployed (including disaffected young males), and disparate communities, in both urban and rural areas. TVSD interventions have had to respond to these different needs when deciding options for engagement and investment.

8.5.2 The TVSD initiative selectively built relationships with partners in the four regions of the developing Commonwealth over the 3YP. Needs were very different because levels and speed of innovation and change varied greatly both between and within countries. These differences required partners, COL staff and associated consultants to work together closely to agree to the most appropriate FaB learning mix to suit the specific context.

8.5.3 For example, courses delivered through Moodle platforms were already established in some technical and vocational education institutions in southern Africa and the Caribbean, whereas more basic learning materials, not dependent on technology-supported solutions, were needed for NGOs in remote locations in Vanuatu. As a consultant for a training project in Kiribati commented:

“This process of introducing ODFL for TVET is still in its infancy in Kiribati because the concepts and ideas were new to many of the workshop participants and contrasted sharply with that which they learned through formal accredited training. Thus the nature of policy development and change was focused first and foremost on awareness raising among the decision makers....”

8.5.4 The recruitment and retention of staff for training institutions was reported as a problem and by several partners. Attracting appropriately skilled
individuals was difficult and high staff turnover was experienced, due to both government policies on staff movement and the attraction of better employment opportunities elsewhere. Turnover is always difficult to forecast, but it was an identified risk, so some contingency in the initial planning of the activity, perhaps to train a larger cohort of staff, would seem appropriate.

8.5.5 The question of when the TVSD might transition from the strong focus on capacity development to greater emphasis on outcomes and impact was discussed with partners and the Education Specialist. The latter explained that targeted investment remained an important consideration in ODL:

“The cost structure of distance learning is different from conventional education and investment. COL partners who are starting distance eLearning need investment and other support to produce learning materials before students can join the programme, which will be made available as OER.”

8.5.6 To support this, evidence was provided that funding support, particularly for the initial phases of a project, had proved vital towards self-sufficiency. For example, according to an NGO Director in Samoa:

“COL supported the external consultants … COL is also funding a local consultant to re-write training manuals for other important skill needs in the community…… the COL investment has been crucial for without it we would not have been able to afford the external expertise to start development of the programmes.

8.5.7 The above considerations are all valid, although the implication is that at the initial planning stage, more detailed consideration needs to be given as to how longer-term sustainability might be achieved. It is also important to learn, as the activity develops through monitoring each iteration and feeding back implications to strengthen the sustainability plan.

8.5.8 Workshops and training for capacity development typically require significant follow-up by the participants to reinforce and build on their learning experiences, producing new materials and/or cascading their learning (acting as tutors) to colleagues and others. However, this was often reported to be a challenge as participants were often in full-time employment as teachers. This is reflected in the comments of one consultant after running a training programme:

“Though everyone wanted to participate in the online support, which is a very noble attempt, due to time commitments for other activities, not all participants were able to submit work to be reviewed. The on-going work and feedback is very crucial as it will truly enable participants to master the knowledge that was delivered earlier....”

8.5.9 Follow-up activities were identified as crucial towards ensuring the success of the activity and achievement of outcomes. There is no easy remedy, save to ensure that staff availability for consolidation of activities is explicit
when joint plans between COL and the partners are agreed on. In addition to staff availability, access to resources might prove a challenge:

“The Internet connectivity was also a problem. It was too expensive for me to do the course as I had to use broadband width. There was a lot of downloading of materials, pdf files, watching videos, and this only increased the cost of doing the course.”

Building on success
8.5.10 The Education Specialist worked with the COL Gender and eLearning advisors both to seek comment and to enhance delivery of TVSD activities. She explored other opportunities for cross-COL cooperation. For example, METI, Samoa (see box below), was keen to extend the COL relationship to include a “Healthy Communities” activity, but ultimately METI decided it lacked adequate capacity to support.

Working with a small NGO
The METI Charity Trust project on Samoa is an interesting example of partnering a small but dedicated informal sector NGO that promotes adult training for self-reliance for small island communities. The Commonwealth Secretariat had recommended COL to the METI Director and, through the COL partnership, lead trainers from each village (nominated by the community) have been trained and involved in developing training materials and delivering training. The relationship is growing and new priority areas to address through training are being followed through.

COL has supported the external consultants with fees. METI meets the salaries and staff costs partly through support from government. COL is also funding a local consultant to rewrite training manuals related to other important skill needs in the community. METI recognises that the COL investment has been crucial, for without it they would not have been able to afford the appropriate external expertise to develop their programmes.

8.5.11 There were overlaps between TVSD and other initiatives, most notably for the vocational topics in the Open Schooling initiative and CEMCA, and to some extent with both Teacher Education and Higher Education. The need is to identify all overlaps across COL with a view to exploiting synergies, minimising overlap and providing mutual support.

8.5.12 It is inevitable that the ICT infrastructure supporting technical and vocational education across the developing Commonwealth will improve rapidly and with increasing reliability. The support and investments that COL has made with partners to date have provided qualitative enhancement of programmes and positioned staff in these institutions to exploit evolving ICT innovations.

8.5.13 The approach to the delivery of TVSD offers a number of useful case studies and examples of good practice in the planning, operational delivery and M&E of COL initiatives. The Education Specialist identified a number of criteria for the successful delivery of projects:

- An “institutional readiness” assessment of partners is vital.
- Multi-year/longer-term relationships forge strong partnerships and commitment and facilitate the cascading of training.
Multi-partner activities provide opportunities for peer-learning and support, which extends COL’s reach.

Top-down as well as a bottom-up approach is needed, with inclusion of policy-makers.

Local consultants should be used, who are aware of local opportunities and constraints to delivery.

The implication of the above is that, for the future, focus should be on a smaller number of activities, with strong planning, monitoring of delivery and solicitation of feedback.

Knowledge sharing

8.5.14 While some evidence of knowledge sharing within a region was apparent, there is limited evidence of sharing or collaboration occurring between institutions in different regions.

8.5.15 There would seem to be only limited knowledge of the successes of the TVSD initiative outside the COL-engaged network of institutions and individuals. A focused TVSD communication strategy could both raise greater awareness of the importance and tremendous potential that FaB offers the TVET constituency and promote it to possible sponsors.

8.6 Efficiency Considerations

8.6.1 The application of ICT and FaB learning to address TVSD initiative needs is attractive because it offers the possibility of delivering economies of scale and also of engaging with new communities of learners, both in the formal and informal sectors. However, the costs of provision, whatever they might include, must ultimately be in some balance with the likely social and private returns in the labour market associated with the skills acquired. This is also a factor for consideration when longer-term (post-COL) sustainability is addressed, although it should be noted that this area has been little studied and there are no good benchmarks that might better inform investment choices for COL.

8.6.2 The TVSD initiative certainly generates many activities with positive outcomes, considering the relatively modest levels of investment involved. Accordingly, the M&E Consultant commented:

“It is assumed that the wide range of expertise and networks that COL provides in its institutional capacity building programmes and activities provide a more cost effective and cost efficient way of promoting greater and more equitable access to quality skills development for citizens of the Commonwealth.”

8.6.3 The M&E reports, interestingly, seek to address the relationship between costs and outcomes and pose the question: Could more and better outcomes have been achieved for the same level of investment? The overall report for the 2012–2015 3YP period indicated that the COL average investment per institution involved (64 institutions) was approximately $19,961 for the three-year period,
although there were large variations between institutions — for example, the average for INVEST Africa was approximately $17,000 per institution per annum. A separate calculation suggested that for INVEST Africa participation, this represented approximately $242 per “learning opportunity” for the 3YP.

8.6.4 The approach to transparency, through clearly showing allocations to each of the regions and then relating these to outcomes, does serve to indicate disparities between the regions and institutions involved. An interesting “snapshot” for expenditure to date indicated that the cost (to COL) per new course developed varies from $5,300 in the Pacific to $11,100 in the Caribbean, with Asia and Africa falling between these two ($7,300 and $7,100, respectively). There are different contributing factors that might have accounted for these differences, but even though basic, the approach offers a useful start towards improving understanding of the relationship between costs and outcomes for TVSD delivery.

8.6.5 While these approaches exclude considerations such as the impact on the ultimate beneficiary (the student or trainee) or other direct (and indirect) costs met by the institutions, it is an area worthy of further studies and also for extending to other COL initiatives.

8.6.6 Could more have been achieved for similar investment by COL? This is difficult to answer straightforwardly, as the TVSD initiative Education Specialist had to target carefully the limited resources to leverage matching support from partners. For example, in INVEST, COL provided the Moodle platform for FaB teaching and learning, but the institutions needed to seek additional funds to support and maintain the IT infrastructure for delivery. Institution heads were very supportive of the COL approach, as this M&E evaluator said:

“COL focused its investment on strengthening institutions through a range of institutional capacity building activities targeted at Principals, Champions and Teachers which would in turn serve to cascade to the rest of the institution. In this way COL was able to stretch a limited budget to reach a critical mass of institutional change agents in the form of Principals and FSD Champions among a target group of TVET institutions. These institutional heads and Champions would catalyse further investment and support through the use of their own funds and/or they would leverage additional resources through other partnerships ....”

8.7 Sustainability

8.7.1 The TVSD approach has been to place responsibility for follow-up firmly with partner institutions, who were required to cascade training, extend implementation and maintain the necessary support infrastructure. Sustainability of an activity can be maintained through a variety of means: in the trained individual acting as a change agent in their current or future posts; through the institution embedding FaB in its teaching and learning processes; and in system-wide change that might require or catalyse others to change. For the latter, a Director from a partner NGO in Samoa reported:
“Sustainability is always a challenge.... We now have trained staff able to take on management responsibilities, we feel competent at the moment to train our life skills coaches.... We are now a recognised training provider by the Samoa Qualifications Authority, which allows our trainees to access other levels of training, and other development assistance organisations are becoming involved.”

8.7.2 Similarly in Sri Lanka, following a COL-supported review of the ODL programme for the National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority, the Sri Lankan Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (the national apex agency) agreed to implement the recommended changes.

8.7.3 The INVEST Africa programme sought to achieve sustainability in a number of ways, such as through the websites of some of the institutions where OERs are now available online for students and staff. As one polytechnic Director commented:

"We are now investing to make available resources and courses online. But we still welcome COL involvement, the external prod helps us maintain momentum .... I much appreciate the network COL has generated through INVEST, I have a group of peers with whom I am in regular contact."

8.7.4 Many of the partnerships developed over the period of the 2012–2015 3YP are still in their infancy, and sustained activity remains necessary to develop sufficient critical mass towards securing sustainability.

8.7.5 An assessment of the likelihood of sustainability and the impact of the TVSD initiative would (as for the other COL initiatives) probably benefit from parallel objective research activity, perhaps based on a longitudinal study. There are now institutions that have been involved with TVSD for five years and these and their staff could usefully inform a study.

8.8 Gender

8.8.1 Throughout the 2012–2015 3YP period, the TVSD initiative has proactively engaged with partner institutions and focused strategies towards the more equitable provision and enrolment to TVET programmes. There was good evidence that this was having a very positive effect, and the various M&E reports (July 2014 and March 2015) and other consultants’ reports all offered good examples to illustrate successful interventions for fostering the inclusion of girls and women and promoting gender equality and gendered approaches. The findings were reinforced by a review of reports from trainers (for an example from Uganda, see text box).
8.8.2 The Education Specialist has worked closely with COL’s Gender Equality Manager, and a gender-equality toolkit was developed and print and electronic resources on gender and ODL were both made accessible through the COL Gender Micro-Site. An impressive development has been the Women in Technical Education and Development (WITED) chapters that COL has actively encouraged and supported within INVEST Africa. Over the 2012–2015 3YP, the WITED chapters have grown from 3 to 11 and have been active in many different areas, including providing support for:

- Outreach programmes to schools to encourage more girls to follow technical programmes
- Remedial programmes for girls who might have underperformed at secondary school
- Career counselling and mentoring to girls
- Positive discrimination strategies through application of a female quota for the recruitment of women learners

8.8.3 Other systematic approaches to ensure the inclusion of gender considerations were evident from reports reviewed and interviews undertaken with consultants and partners. These included:

- Support for training and new technical areas that specifically attract and encourage women’s participation
- Support for switching delivery of courses to flexible and distance learning, thereby encouraging greater participation by previously excluded groups (both men and women)
- Inclusion of gender-neutral language and gender sensitivity in course design and associated materials

8.9 Recommendations

The March 2015 TVSD initiative evaluation reports provided a number of detailed recommendations for the future of the initiative and we would support these. In addition we would add:

**Women in Technology Uganda (WITU): Impact of training for small entrepreneurs (extract from consultant’s report)**

“Of the 40 people trained, 35 were women while 5 were men. The objectives of the training were to assist business owners improve and scale their businesses, help the creation of new businesses, help increase their savings, which in turn would improve their standards of living … The three months course was flexible as most of it is self-taught in groups and WITU facilitated and mentored, while allowing the trainees a chance to become trainers themselves. … We executed the training and evaluated it. At the beginning of the training, the trainees mostly operated hand to mouth businesses, with little savings, lack of business planning, little or no financial management or literacy, poor customer care and entrepreneurship skills. WITU carried out a training to assist the businesses scale, make more profits and save more. By the end of the follow up 3 months mentoring period, 11 new businesses had been created and … 15 already existing businesses had been scaled such that they have increased sales and are saving more.…”
8.9.1 Continuing support for the TVSD initiative is warranted as it is gathering real momentum and delivering positively on the key outcomes. However, consideration should be given to focusing on a fewer activities but in greater depth and level of engagement.

8.9.2 Sustainability should be more explicitly considered in the initial planning and appraisal stages, and risks identified and addressed within the monitoring activities.

8.9.3 A parallel research study should seek to assess the impact and sustainability of a selection of partnerships and to identify key factors to advise the planning of activities. These might include tracer studies with technical and vocational training (TVET) staff, trainees and other participants.

8.9.4 The successes of TVSD initiative and the role of FaB and ODL should be promoted as part of a targeted communication strategy aimed at a wider network of influencers and potential sponsors for TVET.

8.9.5 A study should be undertaken to develop straightforward guidelines for appropriate cost-efficiency and cost-outcome measures to apply to TVSD programmes. This is in common with other initiatives, as discussed in Section 2.

8.9.6 The overlaps between the TVSD initiative and other COL initiatives should be reviewed with the intention of exploring how better to exploit synergies, minimise overlap, and encourage teams and support across COL.

8.9.7 The M&E framework developed for the TVSD initiative has applicability to other COL areas and would usefully inform the development of a common approach for the organisation. The other examples of good practice include the “Institutional Preparedness” and “Self-Assessment” questionnaires that might also be considered for wider applicability in COL.
Section 9 Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

Impact statement: *A substantial and equitable increase in the number of citizens in Commonwealth Asia acquiring knowledge and skills for leading productive and healthy lives through formal and non-formal open and distance learning opportunities.*

9.1 Background

9.1.1 The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) is a regional resource supported by COL. It promotes technology-enabled learning to serve the education and training needs of Commonwealth Member States in Asia. COL provides core funding for CEMCA, and CEMCA is an autonomous body accorded international status by the Government of India.

9.1.2 CEMCA is treated as a separate initiative within COL and within the RBM framework, and it has its own delegated budget and separately defined impact, outcomes and activities for the 2012–2015 3YP. It works in the initiative areas of Teacher Education, Higher Education, Open Schooling, TVSD and Healthy Communities, as well as with the eLearning and gender themes. The performance indicators for each of these are detailed in Table 9.1.

9.1.3 A 2014 update on the activities for the 2012–2015 3YP period reported that CEMCA will:

- Support the articulation of policies that promote the development, adoption and use of OER
- Collaborate with quality assurance bodies to ensure the development and effective deployment of quality multimedia materials
- Design and create systems and models for sustainable community media initiatives
- Empower women in media literacy, health, democracy and leadership
- Create and support a network of clearing houses for content exchange through multiple platforms, formats and media
- Support research on emerging technologies, including use of mobile devices for effective use by ODL students

9.1.4 The CEMCA budget for the 2012–2015 3YP period is set out in Table 9.1.
Table 9.1: Annual budgets, by activity, for the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia initiative, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity/initiative</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>$55,500</td>
<td>$55,500</td>
<td>$56,000</td>
<td>$167,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical and Vocational Skills Development</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>$55,000</td>
<td>$58,000</td>
<td>$163,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Schooling</td>
<td>$29,000</td>
<td>$35,000</td>
<td>$35,000</td>
<td>$99,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Education</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
<td>$65,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>$96,000</td>
<td>$95,000</td>
<td>$94,000</td>
<td>$285,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Media/Healthy Communities</td>
<td>$94,500</td>
<td>$89,500</td>
<td>$87,000</td>
<td>$271,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$350,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>$350,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>$350,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,050,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9.2 RBM and the Logic Model

9.2.1 The impact, outcomes and performance indicators were clearly defined in the 2012–2015 3YP strategy document. Logic frameworks were in place for each activity areas listed in Table 9.1, although the detail was variable across the activities. The logic frameworks could have been better detailed, with more reference to partners and countries of delivery. See the comments below about overlap with other COL activities in Asia.

9.2.2 The activities all required baseline surveys to provide direction and prioritise actions, as well as to agree management responsibilities with COL teams in Vancouver. The M&E consultant for the Community Media activities, while positive about the successes of the activities that he was able to review, commented that the lack of baseline data and details of activities during 2012/2013 had limited the evaluation. Although a detailed M&E strategy was not available, two interim evaluations have been undertaken for Community Media and Higher Education. These have provided useful detail on progress during the period of the 3YP.

9.3 Partners and Implementation

9.3.1 The Annual Progress Reports for CEMCA offered useful descriptions of the breadth and number of activities in which CEMCA staff were involved, as well as progress against the performance indicators. Activities covered Bangladesh, Malaysia, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, although the majority were with partners in India.

9.3.2 The CEMCA team was particularly successful in growing its community media programmes that involved partnerships with the Government of India, with community radio stations in India, with Bangladesh and with NGOs. There was reported good success of the Community Radio Continuous Improvement Toolkit (CR-CIT) and how partners have responded positively to it. As the evaluator commented:

“CR-CIT’s design and participative structure ... found approval from most participating Community Radio Stations. Many
The excellent levels of women’s engagement in the programme were evidenced and the performance indicators were achieved. However, delays in delivering some of the programmes resulted in lack of participant continuity, which ultimately reduced effectiveness.

9.3.3 The growth of online support to encourage content exchange was commented on positively by stakeholders. The rate of use of the dedicated website increased so much that it was aid to be “Asia’s biggest archive of community voices.”

9.3.4 CEMCA’s support for the Higher Education sector was understandably limited compared with support for the full mix of COL’s Higher Education activities. CEMCA focused on three main areas:

- Capacity building for the use of OER-based eLearning
- Strengthening of ODL institutions in their use of ICT
- Providing of Quality Assurance of OER

Workshops in support of these aims took place in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Pakistan.

9.3.5 The M&E evaluator for CEMCA’s Higher Education activity reported positively on progress, with outputs achieved and some outcomes delivered. Again, lack of participant continuity across workshops reduced effectiveness. Vice-Chancellors were the target participants for some of the programmes and workshops, but, while there was good participation from India, engaging with Vice-Chancellors proved a challenge in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Many of the Higher Education activities were in their early stages. Thus, while outputs were positive, more time is needed before outcomes might be appropriately assessed.

9.3.6 The external evaluator commented:

“The output and outcomes of the programmes, efficiency with which the programmes were conducted and number of partners mobilized to support these programmes indicates highly effective programme management on the part of CEMCA.”

9.4 Discussion

9.4.1 CEMCA developed an ambitious programme that had originally sought to reflect the same breadth of activities and themes as COL, Vancouver. However, with more limited resources available, the CEMCA team focused on more limited objectives. This has been successful, as is indicated in Table 9.2, where is it is clear the performance indicators were achieved.
## Table 9.2: CEMCA performance against the performance indicators, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Comments (from CEMCA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Schooling</td>
<td>- 3 new and 3 existing open schools in the region expand access to learning opportunities&lt;br&gt;- 3 new industry-linked courses developed using OER are offered by partner institutions</td>
<td>Partially achieved:&lt;br&gt;- It was not possible to work with three new and three existing open schools, but as a strategy within Asia, COL has been able to support one new and two existing open schools.&lt;br&gt;- The Virtual Open Schooling platform was developed at the National Institute of Open Schooling, India. It plans to engage with more open schools in India. This will help increase access and learning opportunities.&lt;br&gt;- One industry-linked course was developed, and two more were nearly completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Education</td>
<td>- 5 institutions adopt ICT teachers’ blended learning model for continuous professional development</td>
<td>Partially achieved:&lt;br&gt;- Work in Karnataka has been appreciated with adoption of ICT-integrated teacher education and Communities of Practice model.&lt;br&gt;- Other states are also taking an interest (e.g., Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>- 10 institutions adopt OER based eLearning to improve quality of education&lt;br&gt;- 50 teachers in higher education institutions trained in training-of-trainers mode to develop OER-based online courses and offer training to 500 teachers to use OER&lt;br&gt;- 10 institutions adopt quality assurance mechanisms for OER-based content</td>
<td>Partially achieved:&lt;br&gt;- Three institutions (Wawasan Open University, Open University of Sri Lanka) and Uttarakhand Open University, India (UOU) adopted OER.&lt;br&gt;- This will be achieved through engagement with the above three institutions.&lt;br&gt;- A quality assurance framework has been developed, but its adaptation will not be easy at this stage of development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVSD</td>
<td>- 2 institutions implement blended and technology-enhanced learning to provide access to skills development&lt;br&gt;- 2 new TVSD courses developed and offered by ODL institutions&lt;br&gt;- 100 professionals trained, of which 50% are women who use their skills for improved livelihoods</td>
<td>Partially achieved:&lt;br&gt;- This will be achieved (Tamil Nadu Open University, and KK Handiqui State Open University).&lt;br&gt;- One TVSD course has been developed and will be offered for ODL delivery by 2 institutions.&lt;br&gt;- This will be achieved with the use of the Certificate in Community Radio Technology course being developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community media/Healthy Communities</td>
<td>- 20% increase in the number of CRS supported by CEMCA&lt;br&gt;- 100 community women empowered in media literacy, health, leadership, and democracy to develop community learning programmes&lt;br&gt;- Increase in the number of stakeholders using content exchange platforms to share programmes in different formats and media&lt;br&gt;- 9 community radio stations adopt sustainable models and showcase best practices</td>
<td>Partially achieved:&lt;br&gt;- This has been achieved, and CEMCA will be able to support more community radio stations.&lt;br&gt;- Already 300 community broadcasters have been trained (Year 1=140, Year 2=120, and Year 3= 20).&lt;br&gt;- Content exchange platforms are supported by CEMCA and it has substantially increased its user base as well as its content.&lt;br&gt;- Two community radio stations are being supported for sustainability. Research on sustainability is ongoing with eight stations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.4.2 CEMCA is recognised as a valuable asset to COL in Asia, where its close relationships with local professionals and officials enhance and support the delivery of COL objectives. It was clear from the quarterly and annual progress reports that CEMCA is impressively active. This was also reflected in the number of training programmes delivered, studies commissioned, and engagement with communities and other programmes.

9.4.3 However, there were areas in which CEMCA activities overlapped with those of other initiatives delivered direct from COL, Vancouver, and it was often not clear from reports who might be leading a specific action or how a decision to lead an action had been made. This can be confusing for partners, and does not make effective use of the full COL/CEMCA professional and team support. For example, activities had been reported with WOU, Malaysia, and OUSL, Sri Lanka, involving CEMCA, as well as direct with different COL teams in Vancouver.

9.4.4 Many of the CEMCA reports and the comments on performance indicators tended to relate in particular to activities in India, with lesser levels of direct engagement in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Maldives and Bangladesh. However, most Education Specialists in COL, Vancouver, are active in all countries across Commonwealth Asia. Discussions with COL/CEMCA staff indicated that decisions on arrangements concerning leadership for a particular activity or event tended to be ad hoc. While firm rules about demarcation of responsibility might not be appropriate, some form of guideline should be developed to offer direction.

9.4.5 The M&E consultant for Community Media commented on the lack of project and process documentation, particularly for the first year of operations, and noted that this had reduced the effectiveness of that evaluation. CEMCA has experienced some difficulties with staff turnover, but through adopting the approach suggested (to establish Key Project documents for each activity), such negative impact due to staff changes might be reduced.

9.4.6 CEMCA has its own dedicated website which provides open access to a good selection of resources, information and documentation. The website has undergone considerable development and has excellent functionality and access to Slideshare, Flickr and YouTube, as well as a Wiki platform, a video-sharing platform and Moodle LMS. There is also an ODL repository for materials that CEMCA had developed as part of a World Bank supported project, but for which the last entry was in 2005. Nevertheless, these resources are still often accessed. COL should consider whether investing in the repository is necessary to ensure it is maintained as a resource covering current ODL-related information — or
whether sustaining it without regular updating is appropriate for an organisation seeking to be a leader in global ODL delivery.

9.4.7 Considering all the above, it would seem useful for COL and CEMCA to undertake a review of the CEMCA web presence to consider, for example:
- Who might be the target audiences and where are they?
- How might overlaps with the main COL site be managed? Are there synergies that might be exploited and costs reduced?
- How might consistency in branding be assured?
- What approach is most appropriate for maintaining the ODL repository?

A review of the website, including design and functionality, might usefully be incorporated into the wider proposals discussed elsewhere in this report.

9.5 Gender

9.5.1 The Community Media evaluation indicated good progress in engaging with women. The efforts of the CEMCA team are seeing success in this area.

9.5.2 It would be useful for the CEMCA team to consider how to develop gender-responsive indicators for all activities with their partners. In particular, ensuring greater women’s participation in higher education activities should be prioritised and the COL Gender Equality Manager might usefully work more closely with the various higher education teams (CEMCA and COL, Vancouver) to develop a strategy towards greater inclusion of women in the activities.

9.6 Recommendations

9.6.1 Guidelines for the demarcation of responsibilities between CEMCA and COL, Vancouver, should be drawn up.

9.6.2 CEMCA staff should participate in RBM/Logic Model training, including developing a more consistent approach to project planning and the production of Key Project documents.

9.6.3 An evaluation of outcomes of the Higher Education sector activities should be considered at an appropriate time, in line with the sector M&E Evaluator’s recommendation.24 This should form a part of the proposed review of all COL Higher Education activities.

9.6.4 A review of the CEMCA website needs to be undertaken within the context of the overall approach suggested for the main COL website.

9.6.5 The COL Gender Specialist should develop a gender strategy with CEMCA staff in areas where there is a lack of clarity. This could involve the relevant Education Specialist from COL, Vancouver.

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Section 10 eLearning: Cross-Cutting Theme

Outcome statement: More governments, institutions and civil society organisations use eLearning and open educational resources (OER) for teaching and training in formal and non-formal environments.

10.1 Background

10.1.1 COL defines eLearning as the use of ICTs to expand access and to enhance and transform teaching and learning practice. Through the cross-cutting eLearning theme, COL has worked to improve national and organisational readiness and capacity for eLearning and the production and use of OERs. It has supported applied research and evaluation related to eLearning and OER, and the overall eLearning initiative for the 2012–2015 3YP was delivered through two main activity areas:

- Support for applied research to inform educational practice: This activity focused on conducting, supporting and disseminating applied, practice-based research to help guide COL’s learning-for-development practice. One priority was the launch and management of the Journal of Learning for Development. In addition, there was wide support for obtaining advice on and commissioning relevant research.

- Support educational transformation through the use of ICTs and OER: The approach included partnering with institutions and governments to develop ICT in education policies and strategies, capacity and materials. This involved support for the Commonwealth Certificate for Technology Integration for Teachers programme.

The rationale for these activities was that through the appropriate integration of ICTs and OERs in education delivery, more cost-effective approaches and enhanced quality would occur.

10.1.2 Performance indicators identified for the eLearning initiative in the 2012–2015 3YP are:

- 6 governments and 10 institutions/organisations in 3 Commonwealth regions develop and implement eLearning and OER programmes
- 6 governments adopt OER policies
- 2,000 teachers and trainers use eLearning and OER effectively
- 10,000 learners across sectors (including civil society) use eLearning effectively

10.1.3 Budget allocations for eLearning in the 2012–2015 3YP are shown in Table 10.1.

Table 10.1: Allocation of funds for the eLearning cross-cutting theme, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$435,000</td>
<td>$350,000</td>
<td>$350,000</td>
<td>$1,135,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10.1.4 The application of ICT approaches and eLearning underpinning have continued to be inherent aspects of all COL’s activities. The Education Specialist leading eLearning worked closely with colleagues covering the other initiatives, in particular those covering Open Schooling, Teacher Education, Higher Education, VUSSC and TVSD, plus the cross-cutting gender theme.

10.1.5 The specific output indicators for the eLearning theme included:

- Develop and implement ICT policies in education and OER policies
- Promote the inclusion of a gender component in these policies
- Foster country-level accreditation agreements for a technology integration certificate in the Caribbean
- Expand instructor training for the use of online and blended learning in the Caribbean and Lesotho
- Encourage the development of open textbooks in the Caribbean

10.2 RBM and the Logic Model

10.2.1 The current Education Specialist inherited the portfolio and has revised the documentation, drawing on the advice of colleagues and incorporating wherever appropriate some of the activities and performance indicators relating to eLearning within other initiatives. The current key documents clearly explain the intended outcomes, logic frameworks and activities, with risks identified.

10.2.2 The performance indicators for the defined activities are detailed, but due to the overlaps mentioned, several are the same for other initiatives, or also relate to the sum of select indicators for the other initiatives.

10.2.3 The baseline study undertaken in 2013 provides a clear set of directions for the planning and delivery of activities. The approach is to offer a critical analysis across all the main activities of the eLearning theme, with a strong focus on national and institutional policies covering ICT and OER policies. Reference was also made to the Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher’s ICT Integration (CCTI), TVSD-related instructor training, gender concerns and open textbook usage. The coverage and concerns helped the Education Specialist identify appropriate activities for COL strategic engagement.

10.2.4 A strong M&E plan also defined the methodology and specified key actions, against a timetable. In addition to the baseline study, there was a monitoring report in July 2014 (the next is scheduled for February 2015). These all usefully informed this evaluation.

10.2.5 The risks and assumptions are addressed for each of the main activities in the logic frameworks. However, these are necessarily at a high level. As was clear from the interim evaluation, the risks come into sharper focus when the individual sub-activities are implemented and realities emerge (e.g., the availability of ICT and computers, the existing competencies of staff involved).
10.2.6 The eLearning Education Specialist also developed a set of files for the priority countries, covering policy and also drawing in various consultancy reports relevant to the eLearning theme.

10.3 Partners and Implementation

10.3.1 The overlap with other initiative results in some cases with a variety of partners involved. These are a mix of government, national organisations and education and training institutions.

10.3.2 The intensity of the actions with each partner varies. The operational delivery of the larger and higher priority activities would benefit from comprehensive basic documents, beyond the normal partnership contract (as discussed in Section 2).

10.3.3 A selection of partners was interviewed. All expressed great respect for the COL teams with whom they work. There was mention of COL staff assisting in the delivery of some of the workshops, all successful. In addition, some concern was expressed about government funds being available for continuing activities if COL reduces its support and investment for capacity development programmes.

10.4 Discussion

10.4.1 Three Education Specialists were separately responsible for the eLearning initiative over the 2012–2015 3YP period, which resulted in some breaks in continuity. However, progress against the performance indicators (see Table 10.2) shows there was good achievement of the 3YP outputs and outcomes. These are discussed below and were also considered in the interim evaluation. As the evaluator commented:

“Overall, the eLearning initiative is going well. Many important milestones have been met and outputs have been created.”

10.4.2 The eLearning theme, because of its cross-cutting nature, did pose a few difficulties in allocating responsibility for the delivery of the performance indicators/intended outputs. For example, one of the indicators was “10,000 learners across sectors, including across civil society, use eLearning effectively.” This could include those enrolled on the MOOC programmes within the Teacher Education and Higher Education initiatives. It could also include the L3F initiative, which would result in 175,000 users. It would therefore be useful to provide explanations as to how this overall statistic is aggregated, including clarification of ownership and responsibility for delivering the performance indicator.
Table 10.2: Performance indicators and achievements for the eLearning cross-cutting theme against planned outcomes and outputs, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed outcome</th>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governments and educational organisations in the Commonwealth have implemented policies dealing with OER and ICT.</td>
<td>6 governments and 10 institutions in 3 Commonwealth regions develop and implement eLearning and OER programmes</td>
<td>Achieved: 13 institutions and 9 countries initiated eLearning programmes in 3 Commonwealth regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OER and ICT in education policies in Commonwealth countries and organisations recognise gender and include gender-related recommendations.</td>
<td>At least 6 governments adopt OER policies</td>
<td>Partially achieved: COL interventions led to draft policy/strategies developed in Grenada, St. Vincent and The Grenadines, Seychelles, St. Kitts &amp; Nevis, Belize and Mauritius. Antigua &amp; Barbuda adopted ICT in Education/OER policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation arrangements established for the Commonwealth Certificate in Technology Integration for Teachers.</td>
<td>2,000 teachers and trainers use eLearning effectively</td>
<td>Achieved: Over 5,000 teachers trained in developing teaching and learning online, ICT integration, OER and Mobile App development for education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country-level agreements established for managing and coordinating the delivery of the CCTI.</td>
<td>10,000 learners across sectors (including civil society) effectively use eLearning</td>
<td>Achieved: Over 207,250 learners are using a variety of eLearning modalities as a result of COL programme activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.4.3 The eLearning Education Specialists have spent time working with other Education Specialist colleagues and have developed mutually reinforcing approaches for some projects within the individual initiatives. For the next 3YP period, if a similar post is to be retained, it will be important to define clearly respective roles and responsibilities, together with an approach for demarcation in the event of overlaps. This would include the role of the Knowledge Management team, which is involved in developing and piloting devices (Aptus) and doing some work on the development of MOOCs.

10.4.4 Planning and appraisal of projects: As discussed elsewhere, we suggest that some projects and sub-activities need to have more detailed project plans. The COL partner contract, while important to ensure commitment, provides insufficient information for partners to understand the detail of the proposed approach, for example: why particular aspects of the programme might need to be delivered to specific time deadlines; the ICT, computer, infrastructure, etc. support necessary; numbers of and competencies necessary for the staff to be involved; the COL and local funding needs; and the infrastructure and other ICT provision needs for longer-term sustainability.

10.4.5 The need for improvement in project planning is evidenced by the feedback from the interim evaluation, which suggested more thorough planning, probably requiring more initial visits by the eLearning Education Specialist. As was indicated, this might have ensured more realistic time-scales and outputs. Similarly, a review of a selection of workshops related to capacity development in other countries identified such difficulties as lower numbers of staff attending

than agreed, low levels of student-to-student interaction during the online programme, and poor Internet access for online materials.

10.4.6 Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher’s ICT Integration (CCTI): The eLearning Education Specialist has responsibility for oversight of COL’s CCTI. The take-up of this by Commonwealth governments and institutions has been patchy to date and the performance indicators were also modest, particularly if COL perceives this to be a priority activity. The University of the West Indies is developing an undergraduate certificate programme based on CCTI.

10.4.7 The Antigua & Barbuda partners were positive concerning CCTI outcomes to date and report that 24 local teacher trainers have followed the programme over the last two years. COL finances much of the programme and funds School Net South Africa to provide professional support. The later modules of the programme on offer already involve previously trained Antigua & Barbuda staff as tutors and it is the government’s intention to integrate the CCTI approach into its teacher education programme. As a partner said:

“COL has provided exposure and opportunity to expand and explore ICT integration in education and the CCTI has provided teachers with a whole new view of how to apply ICT in curriculum.”

10.4.8 Interviews with other partners and consultants suggests that COL should develop a strategic plan for CCTI, with an appropriate level of funding, and that this might include greater provision for closer working with each partner initiative, such as initial planning and more frequent and detailed follow-up (both through meetings and online ). The CCTI programme would benefit from a separate review to assess progress to date, identify successes and barriers to implementation, and recommend future scope, direction and appropriate funding for the programme.

10.4.9 Gender: As the baseline report pointed out, there was little reference to gender in establishing government ICT policies and this was similar for OER policies, although many of the workshops and training activities had majority participation by women. However, the Gender Specialist is now involved in reviewing policies from a gender perspective at the drafting stage and is advising accordingly. This should continue as COL moves to formulate the next 3YP.

10.4.10 Technological change: COL activities are being delivered in the context of rapid developments in the technology that supports ICT and ODL. As was indicated in the baseline study, this can have profound implications, particularly as national policies lag significantly behind:

“The scale and scope of ICTs have diversified and become more complex in the past five years. This provides new technological and pedagogical possibilities for eLearning initiatives. But most countries developed their policies more than five years ago. Since then, smart phones, tablets, patterns of internet access and the
emergence of MOOCs have substantially changed the landscape for ICT integration in education...."

10.4.11 Government policies for ICT in education thus need to have the flexibility to adapt to accommodate the introduction of new technologies. The monitoring report also said that policies often remain static, with no strategies or funding to ensure action takes place. This implies a need to redefine the activity for the theme to embrace government (or institutional) policies and strategies.

10.4.12 Blended learning: The eLearning Education Specialist has identified that blended approaches to institutional and government capacity development might be a more appropriate approach to the theme rather than a single focus just covering online delivery. This is particularly so in operating environments where, at best, there might be only limited access to computers and the Internet. The consideration for a blended strategy has been similarly expressed by other Education Specialists leading initiatives (e.g., Open Schooling).

10.4.13 Research activities: The Journal of Learning for Development (JL4D) has been the responsibility for the eLearning Education Specialist (as Associate Editor) and two editions have now been produced, meeting the planned 2012–2015 3YP target. The level of readership, targeted numbers of active readers, etc. are not specified. If COL intends to continue to invest in the JL4D, such data might form part of the performance indicator, as they are for other activities.

To grow readership at this initial stage probably requires an active marketing and communications strategy, and this has budgetary implications. The other COL publications are also impressive and offer excellent insights and experience for ODL and related professionals. COL has an extensive global network of leading researchers and practitioners on whom to draw. These are also supported by the COL Chairs (Higher Education initiative) who, as part of their contract, are required to undertake research assignments.

10.5 Efficiency

10.5.1 The initial premise for the application of eLearning approaches concerned their potential to offer cost-effective and efficient approaches and deliver education both to more students and at higher quality. This validity of the approach overall is not in question. However, some consultants interviewed recommended that COL might better achieve progress towards some of the planned outcomes for specific activities through greater investment in planning and follow-up (as discussed above). While the costs might increase in the short term, the intended outputs and outcomes would be more effectively (and efficiently) achieved.
10.6 Sustainability

10.6.1 Few of the planning logic frameworks and planning documents explicitly referred to sustainability, although this was commented on by both partners and consultants. Two quotes:

(from a consultant): “If the activity is properly planned and effectively delivered, demonstrating outcomes and impact, it will be self-sustaining as governments and institutions will wish to continue.”

(from a partner): “It is now for the government to take on more responsibility for funding and delivering ICT and OER policies ... but there is some belief that COL will continue to support ...”

10.6.2 An interesting comment from a partner was that many school students are highly motivated to use ICT approaches in the classroom, given that increasingly many can access the Internet and resources at home. The suggestion was that their demands will oblige teachers to respond and change approaches to delivery.

10.7 Recommendations

10.7.1 Improve project planning documents with partners and share these with consultants. Ensure that sustainability is factored into the planning.

10.7.2 Specify clearly the roles and responsibilities for the eLearning Specialist relative to the other Education Specialists and the Knowledge Management team (see Section 2 for the fuller proposal). This should include identification of “ownership” for performance indicators.

10.7.3 Continue to develop gender-responsive output indicators for the eLearning theme in collaboration with the COL Gender Equality Manager.

10.7.4 Review the CCTI activity.

10.7.5 Redefine the activity for eLearning to embrace government (or institutional) policies and strategies rather than just policy.

(Note: In the new plan period, COL has changed eLearning into an independent initiative in the name of Technology-Enabled Learning under the Skills sector.)
Section 11  Gender: Cross-Cutting Theme

Outcome statement: More partners adopt gender-inclusive approaches and strategies to promote gender equity.

11.1  Background

11.1.1 Addressing gender imbalances in access to education and training has been a continuing commitment for COL. The organisation has invested considerable resources over its lifetime to achieve what it described in the previous 2009–2012 3YP as the advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment and to ensure that COL becomes “a model organisation which mainstreams gender in all its processes and at all levels.”

The focus on gender disparities also reflects COL’s commitment to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which had explicitly identified this need.

11.1.2 In most countries, gender disparities typically disadvantage women and girls, including their access to relevant schooling and training. COL activities seek to address these concerns as a priority. While girls make up the majority of out-of-school children, and women the majority of the world’s adult illiterates, in a few countries, particularly in the Caribbean, young boys have a lower participation and completion rate in education than girls. COL and its partners in the Caribbean respond to this need.

11.1.3 The appointment of the COL Gender Equality Manager in 2013 has provided great impetus to driving the agenda forward in a well-planned approach that addresses both internal and external needs. The strategy is described as:

“Implementing a mainstreaming strategy includes identifying gender-specific activities and initiatives, as appropriate, whenever girls/women or boys/men are in a particularly disadvantageous position. A gender equality perspective is taken at all stages of the programme cycle – planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – to ensure that the initiatives offer equal opportunities, benefits and participation to girls/women and boys/men.”

11.1.4 The performance indicators for the 2012–2015 3YP to deliver the proposed outcomes are:

- 10,000 girls and women have increased access to quality education and training
- 5,000 boys and men have greater access to targeted training in areas where they are disadvantaged
- At least 10 partners mainstream gender in their programmes

• 60,000 additional women access non-formal education, leading to increased income and better health-seeking behaviour

11.1.5 The Gender Strategic Plan for 2012–2015 proposed that the approach:
• Continue to harness the potential of open, distance and technology-mediated learning to expand access to quality education and training for women/girls and men/boys in both formal and non-formal sectors
• Promote the development of gender-sensitive policies, systems and materials
• Integrate gender concerns in all its initiatives and support at least one gender-related activity in each initiative
• Track gender-related data and results
• Develop capacity in gender, internally and among partners
• Proactively disseminate COL’s work on gender to stakeholders

11.1.6 As gender is a cross-cutting theme, the achievement of the proposed outcomes and performance indicators is shared across all initiatives, and investments are made accordingly from their budgets. The gender theme also has a separate budget allocation in the 3YP to facilitate delivery of its specific requirements (see Table 11.1).

Table 11.1: Allocation of funds for the gender cross-cutting theme, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>$120,000</td>
<td>$220,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11.2 RBM and the Logic Model

11.2.1 As the gender theme is cross-cutting, it aims both to partner and to complement each of the individual initiatives. Many of the intended outcomes for these initiatives include a gender-responsive dimension. The following gender theme key documents are in place and were reviewed for this study, as were those associated with the other initiatives:
• Gender Strategic Plan for 2013–2015
• RBM/Logic Model for the initiative, with the defined outcome and clear performance indicators to achieve these
• Gender-responsive indicators for each initiative
• Gender Update Action Plan to chart progress towards the intended outputs and outcome across COL
• Baseline data from each of the initiatives and activities
• Internal Gender Assessment of COL, done as a baseline for internal development needs

11.2.2 The approach to establishing gender-responsive indicators for each initiative was developed by the Gender Equality Manager, and the initiative-specific indicators were identified by each Education Specialist in cooperation with the Gender Equality Manager. This process has been successful and progress towards achievement of the new performance indicators is being
monitored. The individual Education Specialists all report positively on the exercise of agreeing gender-responsive indicators and then considering how to deliver them in the implementation of activities.

11.2.3 For example, within the Open Schooling initiative, a Guide to Integrating Gender Equity and Equality has been developed. This seeks to address gender equality concerns in aspects of open school planning, management and service. The approach has been refined through a pilot testing exercise in Tonga, Belize, India and Tanzania, with participation from main stakeholder groups (students, parents, staff, management, community organisations, NGOs and governments).

11.2.4 The Gender Update Action Plan provides a clear and regular assessment of progress on gender performance at both strategic and individual initiative levels. This has usefully drawn together reports and gender-specific data from across COL to enable consistent reporting.

11.2.5 The Gender Equality Manager has reviewed COL internal considerations and run workshops with COL staff. The Gender Internal Assessment report (2014) provides clear analysis and recommendations both in terms of how COL might work with its partners and stakeholders as well as for the management of COL. The partner and stakeholder activities are discussed below, as the internal findings were positive:

“There is general awareness among all COL staff that gender equality is important, and staff understand the rationale for its pursuit from an organisational perspective.... Much of this confidence is owed to: the effectiveness of training and awareness-raising activities; practical work experience in addressing gender-equality issues; learning through formal or self-directed means; and COL’s serious commitment to gender equality (as evidenced through gender-equality practices and tools that have been instituted)....”

11.3 Implementation

11.3.1 The Gender Equality Manager supports all Education Specialists in their strategies to ensure that gender-responsiveness is an inherent feature of their work. The requirements associated with the strategic imperatives are passed on to partners and consultants to ensure that they address and mainstream gender considerations in their activities.

11.3.2 All interviewed partners and consultants associated with this study reported that they were aware of this requirement and some individuals reported examples of how they were incorporating gender into their work. For example, for a training project relating to community radio, the consultant reported:

"Initially all nominations were males but we insisted on equality.... [The] topics in the course are more gender balanced and programmes have women’s involvement. Stories &
experiences being shared are from women and focus on community interaction of women ....”

And from a partner involved in operational delivery and support said:

“Gender toolkit works well – although we have modified it to contextualise to our local needs.”

11.3.3 An increasing range of materials and training available from COL offers support and advice to interested professionals, wherever they might be located. A COL gender microsite has been created to provide comprehensive access to print and electronic resources about ODL and technology-mediated learning related to gender. This is an excellent initiative and needs to be promoted to expand awareness. Currently, it is not greatly visible.

11.3.4 The Gender Equality Manager also runs regular training events as part of capacity building for all COL staff. Through the Internal Gender Assessment process, staff identified a number of specific areas in which better understanding was necessary: gender analysis, gender impact assessment, integration of gender equality in activities, gender budgeting and gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation. To ensure these approaches are realised, there is a need for continuing specialist support.

11.4 Discussion

11.4.1 There is real energy across COL to mainstream gender in its activities. The commitment of the President and the Board provides the context and direction, while the staff, through all their actions, are delivering the outputs and ultimately the outcomes.

11.4.2 The Gender Equality Manager reported the programme objective for the 3YP outcome to be:

“To enhance the institutional capacity of COL and its partner organisations to integrate gender equality considerations in programmes, policies and planning.”

11.4.3 Table 11.2 shows the performance indicators set out for the 2012–2015 3YP. It can be seen that most have already been met and the others should be met by the end of 2014/15.

11.4.4 These achievements, together with the additional evidence discussed below, demonstrate that the overall outcome for the gender theme for the 2012–2015 3YP is being delivered successfully.

“More partners adopt gender-inclusive approaches and strategies to promote gender equity.”

The evaluation of the previous 3YP recommended that what was previously a long list of actions in a Gender Action Plan should be refined into a Logic Model
with a carefully defined and limited set of indicators. This has been successfully achieved.

**Table 11.2**: Performance indicators and achievements for the gender cross-cutting theme, 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Achievements at March 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10,000 girls and women have increased access to quality education and training</td>
<td><strong>Achieved</strong>: Significantly exceeded, with at least 21,000 girls and women having increased access in the Caribbean, Pacific, Asia and Africa regions of the Commonwealth. These numbers are based primarily on enrolments and not on completion rates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 boys and men have greater access to targeted training in areas where they are disadvantaged</td>
<td><strong>Partly achieved</strong>: At least 500 young men and boys have greater access in Trinidad and Tobago and Cameroon. The Healthy Communities initiative is the only initiative that targeted training of boys and men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 10 partners mainstream gender in their programmes</td>
<td><strong>Achieved</strong>: Exceeded, with 45 partners in 4 regions of the Commonwealth demonstrating elements of gender mainstreaming in their programmes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60,000 additional women access non-formal education, leading to increased income and better health-seeking behaviour</td>
<td><strong>Achieved</strong>: Exceeded, with over 145,000 additional female learners having access.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11.4.5 The performance indicators set at the beginning of the 2012–2015 3YP period are being extended to reflect the new (2013) gender-responsive output indicators agreed for each initiative. Some of these are presented in Table 11.2. Consideration might also need to be given to the management of an indicator that combines both quantitative and qualitative criteria (see the fourth performance indicator in Table 11.2), as this might require primary research to ascertain progress.

11.4.6 As was discussed in relation to the other initiatives, a significant problem is to ensure that the correct data are being collected by partners, and this is also a major consideration for gender-specific information. With the increasing sensitisation of partners in relation to the mainstreaming of gender in their activities with COL, greater understanding of the need will no doubt grow and ultimately result in more specific reporting.

11.4.7 The focus on internal systems has resulted in all contracts being reviewed and a standard gender clause being included, for both partners and consultants. Gender equity in the hiring of consultants was also achieved, with an almost equal proportion of men and women making up the total of 512 contracted for the 3YP period (although there were some variations by initiative and region).

11.4.8 There is good evidence that Education Specialists are delivering on the specific performance indicators. For example, those for Teacher Education, Open Schooling and TVSD are presented in Table 11.3, which also serves to illustrate how well gender-related indicators are being followed through in individual activities.
Table 11.3: Progress towards achieving a selection of gender-specific outputs for the Open Schooling Teacher Education and Technical and Vocational Skills Development initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Outputs achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open Schooling initiative</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - Innovative and improved accessibility to quality education for marginalised girls through appropriate curricula and technology development | - Consultations to introduce the girls’ innovation project in at least 2 countries  
- The capacity of 25 teachers developed to include gender-sensitive content to enhance the teaching experience  
- Self-instructional handbook for girl learners developed  
- Gender guidelines for open schools developed  
- Strategy for pilot testing of gender guidelines developed  
- A gender-related webinar, “Open Schooling Connect,” conducted for the purposes of advocacy and consensus building | - Consultations to introduce the girls’ innovation project in 2 countries have taken place.  
- 25 teachers now have capacity to develop gender-sensitive content to enhance the teaching experience.  
- A self-instructional handbook for girl learners has been developed.  
- Gender guidelines for open schools have been revised and finalised.  
- A strategy for pilot testing of gender guidelines has been developed.  
- Pilot testing of gender guidelines is in progress in Belize, India, Tanzania and Tonga.  
- Webinar “An Introduction to Gender Equality in Open Schooling” was delivered. |
| - Partner organisations supported in their efforts to integrate gender-equality concerns in research, programmes, policies and planning | | |
| **Teacher Education initiative** | | |
| - More female and male teachers and teacher educators trained in ODL methodologies and in pedagogical content knowledge | - Teacher educators and faculty staff/module writers trained in various topics to build their capacity in ODL | - 13 faculty staff/module writers were trained at Gauhati University in an ODL course in ELT (10 women and 3 men).  
- 10 faculty staff/module writers were trained in Jamaica in the development of online materials (5 women and 5 men).  
- 30 teacher educators were trained in Abuja, Nigeria, in the integration of ICT in teaching/learning (6 women and 24 men).  
- 19 faculty staff/module writers were trained in Maldives in instructional design (11 women and 8 men). |
| **TVSD initiative** | | |
| - Institutions take positive steps toward more equitable provision and uptake of TVET programmes.  
- New flexible TVET courses that appeal to women.  
- Partner organisations supported in their efforts to integrate gender-equality concerns in research, programmes, policies and planning. | - 2 women in TVET (WITED) chapters established in TVET institutions  
- Gender policies established in 5 TVET institutions  
- 5 new skills training courses that target female participation developed  
- Partners’ institutional capacity to mainstream gender equality strengthened | - 5 new WITED chapters established (total of 8) and are carrying out activities to increase girls’ access to TVET.  
- 12 ODFL policies are in development or in use, with gender equity enshrined in core values.  
- Girls in TVET event held at Mombasa Technical Training Institute involved WITED representatives from 8 Kenyan institutes.  
- Women in Technology Uganda (WITU) completed ICT and business training for 35 informal sector women in Kampala.  
- More than 20 new skills training courses that target female participation were offered in Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria through INVEST Africa.  
- 1,231 women completed skills training for income generation in Bangladesh; 364 have started a new business.  
- 10 (of 20) female Life Skills Coaches (Taiala) trained in Samoa, and 3 women out of 6 Taiala trainers have been trained. |
11.4.9 However, overall, the integration of gender considerations in activities within each initiative are uneven, although there are excellent examples of success. The interventions of the COL Gender Equality Manager are making a difference and, combined with work in partnership with the COL teams, change is happening.

11.4.10 The Higher Education initiative probably presents the greatest challenge for implementation, given the complex mix of long-term programmes that COL delivers and the sector’s inherent conservatism. However, the Education Specialist in Higher Education is working to seek practical approaches. For example, the recent report on scholarships indicates that of the 26 awarded, 20 went to women.

11.5 Efficiency

11.5.1 Efficiency relates in particular to how the individual Education Specialists deliver against their own specific plans. The COL Gender Equality Manager has a role in relation to the projects she leads, but these are currently evolving.

11.5.2 The cost-outcome considerations proposed in Section 2 on the Higher Education initiative also apply to the gender theme.

11.6 Recommendations

11.6.1 Education Specialists should work with partners to develop the latter’s capacity to make progress on gender-responsive policies and interventions.

11.6.2 The Gender Equality Manager should improve information and data collection with partners and ensure that sex-disaggregated data is collected.

11.6.3 The Gender Equality Manager should continue to review the M&E plans for each initiative to ensure that gender requirements are explicit.

11.6.4 The Gender Equality Manager should continue to support the other Education Specialists, the CEMCA team and other COL staff to move beyond basic gender concepts towards deeper understanding and application to activity delivery.
Section 12  Discussion and General Findings

COL Mission Statement: The Commonwealth of Learning helps governments expand the scale efficiency and quality of learning by using appropriate technologies, particularly those that support open and distance learning (ODL).

This section brings together the general findings from the evaluation of individual initiatives, and investigates broader aspects, as were required within the Terms of Reference for the study.

12.1  Background

12.1.1 This evaluation related to the 2012–2015 3YP (to March 2015), the focus of which was to deliver “Learning for Development.” The end date of March 2015 also coincided with the achievement deadline for a number of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). COL prioritises the MDGs, Education for All (EFA) and the Commonwealth priorities of peace, democracy, equality and the rule of law as its framework for action.

12.1.2 The Terms of Reference for the evaluation sought to address the following:
   i. What has been the performance of COL in this triennium against the identified outcomes and indicators?
   ii. How appropriate are the two strategic sectors, Education and Livelihoods & Health in realising the aims of the current Three-Year Plan?
   iii. Have the core strategies and strategic goals been useful in support of achieving the aims of the current Three-Year Plan?
   iv. What lessons can COL, its Board of Governors and partners, take from the operation of the plan into the next Three-Year Plan?

12.1.3 The delivery of the 2012–2015 3YP involved seven initiatives that fell within two programme areas:

   Programme area 1: Education initiatives
   • Open Schooling
   • Teacher Education
   • Higher Education
   • Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

   Programme area 2: Livelihoods & Health initiatives
   • Technical and Vocational Skills Development
   • Lifelong Learning for Farmers
   • Healthy Communities
In addition, two cross-cutting themes underpin and complement each of the above initiatives:

- Gender equity
- Use of eLearning strategies

12.1.4 COL maintains a separately managed regional centre in India, the Commonwealth Education Media Centre (CEMCA), which had its own parallel 3YP with similar initiatives and cross-cutting themes. This evaluation reviewed the achievements for each initiative and theme (and for CEMCA activities) against the performance measures associated with the outputs and outcomes set out in the 2012–2015 3YP.

12.1.5 Each of the initiatives and cross-cutting themes had agreed-on programme-level intermediate outcomes and performance indicators. These are all presented and discussed in detail in this report.

### 12.2 Stakeholders and the Financing of COL

12.2.1 The majority of Commonwealth countries benefitted from COL’s activities. An analysis of expenditure is provided in Figure 12.1.

**Figure 12.1:** Proportions of expenditure by Commonwealth region to March 2014

12.2.2 The annual revenue for COL was approximately $11 million up to March 2015. This was derived from a number of sources:

- Core voluntary contributions from all Commonwealth countries (the involvement of all was a success achieved this year)
- Income from other sources, including grants from intergovernmental organisations and foundations and fees for the provision of consultancy services
- In-kind contributions from COL partner organisations and institutions involved in the implementation of activities

The seven major voluntary contributors to COL were the governments of Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa and the United
Kingdom. COL senior management are actively seeking ways to grow a wider mix of contributions and revenue sources.

12.2.3 The Board of COL provides an important forum for developing and agreeing on future strategies. In addition to the regular meetings, the Board also has retreats to identify those areas emerging as major challenges for the developing Commonwealth and which might be addressed by using COL’s professional expertise. The network of COL “Focal Points” includes individuals nominated by each government. Their purpose is both to ensure engagement by each government and to identify new activities.

12.3 Overall Performance as Shown in the 3YP

Progress towards achieving the outcomes for each of the individual initiatives of the 2012–2015 3YP has been discussed in Sections 2–11. From the review, an encouraging overall picture emerges with good evidence of successes, and in each of the initiatives most of the performance indicators were achieved.

Strategic goals – The COL 2012–2015 3YP clearly defined three strategic goals. This section briefly considers these in turn and describes their appropriateness to inform strategy.

Strategic Goal 1: Quality education for all Commonwealth citizens

“Increased access to affordable primary, secondary and tertiary education, especially for girls, women and the marginalised.”

12.3.1 There was good evidence of success in terms of the related initiative outcomes. The detailed achievements are discussed under each initiative in this report. The comments below provide overall comment, with some examples.

Access to affordable quality education

12.3.2 Both the Teacher Education and the Open Schooling initiatives had a primary focus covering “quality,” “affordability” and enhanced “access.” The Open Schooling initiative directly contributed to increased access by:

- Assisting the establishment of new open schools
- Supporting existing Open Schools to increase enrolments and performance, including through adopting new gender sensitive policies and systems
- Introducing technical and vocational subjects

12.3.3 In teacher education the objective of training more teachers and teacher educators in the applications of ODL and OER in the delivery of primary and secondary education, directly addressed quality issues and approaches.

Girls and access to quality education

12.3.4 The COL teams targeted gender specific needs for all activities; strategies adopted evolved through their experiences of implementing projects and programmes during the plan period. These included employing gender
responsive indicators for each initiative and establishing a Gender Update Action Plan to chart progress towards intended outcomes. Activities reflecting this included:

- A systematic “Guide to Integrating Gender Equity and Equality” was developed within the Open Schooling initiative. This addressed gender equality in Open Schooling planning and management.
- Support was provided for the Women in Technology (WITED) chapters in Africa to mainstream gender.
- Ensuring that gender-neutral language and sensitivity is inherent in course design and associated materials was done for all COL-supported programmes.

12.3.5 Gender-focused activities were developed and delivered within the Higher Education and Teacher Education initiatives, inherent conservatism and male domination of the post-secondary sector in many developing Commonwealth countries, continued to be a challenge. Activities have included the review of all new materials against gender criteria, publication of gender case studies and establishing a Higher Education leadership programme for women academic managers.

**Marginalised communities**

12.3.6 COL continued to evolve its approach to working with marginalised communities. Lack of resources and access to ICT or the Internet by teachers, remained a challenge. However appropriate approaches to flexible and blended learning were applied, for example:

- COL, worked with an NGO in Samoa, and trained lead trainers from small island communities to develop training materials and deliver adult training for self-reliance.
- In Bangladesh for the Open Schooling initiative, the local partner evaluated the needs of young women who had dropped out of schooling; researches indicated that they needed flexible scheduling either for vocational training or to restart their formal education.

**Strategic Goal 2: Human Resource Development in the Commonwealth**

“Sustainable and replicable learning systems in place for farming, health and skills development in the formal and informal sectors.”

12.3.7 The three initiatives that directly addressed this strategic goal were L3F, TVSD and Healthy Communities, and they all demonstrated great flexibility and innovation to address the complex needs of their respective communities. For example: L3F initiatives applied lessons learnt from its many successes in South India to establish new activities in six additional countries. In Seychelles, the government, having read of the COL successes and approach, developed its own initiative based on these.

Within the Healthy Communities initiative, what had started as a specific health activity in Jamaica was extended to working with the Jamaica police to address
issues such as domestic violence and good parenting among young men in the community. In India, experiences learnt through the Gurgaon Healthy Communities project were employed in new activities in rural Jharkhand.

12.3.8 Addressing sustainability for these activities continued to be a challenge, particularly as much of the work was delivered through different partnership mixes with governments, NGOs and civil society groups. While some successes were apparent, this remains a priority for the next plan.

**Strategic Goal 3: Harnessing ODL and technologies to achieve development goals**

“Improved capacity of governments and civil society to provide quality learning for achieving MDG and EFA goals.”

12.3.9 COL’s priorities and initiatives directly related to MDG\(^ {25} \) and EFA\(^ {26} \) priorities. COL’s strategic positioning has been to employ ODL and eLearning to deliver impact. A few comments are offered below to illustrate relevance. The detailed outcomes for each initiative are discussed in this report.

- **MDG Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger** – This included for productive and decent employment, to which L3F activities directly supported and others, such as TVSD and the Open Schooling initiatives, contributed.
- **MDG Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education (and EFA Goal 6: Improve the quality of education)** – Activities under the Open Schooling and Teacher Education initiatives directly contributed to this goal.
- **MDG Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women (and EFA Goal 5: Achieving gender parity)** – Clear examples of this were provided above. They are also detailed in each initiative section and reviewed under Section 11, Gender: Cross-Cutting Theme.
- **MDG Goal 4: Reduce child mortality, MDG Goal 5: Improve maternal health and MDG Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (and see similar EFA Goals)** – The Healthy Communities initiative successfully prioritised maternal health, the reduction of child mortality and the raising of awareness of communicable diseases. L3F activities in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania involved women who were infected or affected by HIV/AIDS.
- **MDG Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development** – A core strategy of COL delivery has been to implement all activities through partnerships. There was positive feedback on the success of COL’s approach within and between countries, and within and between regions.

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12.3.10 In considering all of the above and also the detailed results from each of the initiatives, it can be concluded that the strategic goals proved both important and appropriate for COL for the delivery of the 2012–2015 3YP. They have provided an overarching framework within which to locate individual initiatives and activities. They also directly followed from the COL mission statement and were applicable to each initiative.

12.3.11 COL’s core strategies — that is, partnerships, capacity, materials, models and policy — continue to be appropriate, but they are not all “core”:
- Partnerships are a core business process and therefore part of each initiative.
- Materials and capacity building are necessary strategies for achieving outputs and ultimately outcomes.
- Enabling policies are essential if interventions are to be sustainable.

Strategies are hierarchical and were used sequentially over the course of a given programme. For example: partnerships were important for delivering every initiative; capacity building included more specific actions, such as developing material and training workshops; and models offered a means to transfer good practices and approaches across countries, with adaptations for the different operating environments. Ones developed to date include the adoption and scaling up of L3F in this plan period.

12.4 Performance Against 3YP Outcomes and Indicators

12.4.1 Progress in achieving the performance indicators for the 2012–2015 3YP was good and review of all initiatives indicated that the large majority of indicators were met by March 2015 — indeed, some were achieved in 2014. The details were discussed in the previous sections and, while all the successes are to be celebrated, they do give rise to questions as to whether the performance indicators were sufficiently ambitious. Setting appropriate indicators will therefore need to be reviewed in more detail for the next plan.

12.4.2 Most of the COL-supported activities still fall into the “capacity development” category. As such, these frequently resulted in emphasis on short-term outputs rather than on longer-term outcomes or impact. Moving towards the latter will be necessary but likely a challenge, as their achievement is often dependent on investment and activities from in-country partners and others. This indicates the major importance of the initial planning of interventions and ensuring the full buy-in of partners and other influencers — with risks identified.

12.4.3 A number of problems associated with longer-term sustainability were identified within most initiatives. Considerations as to how activities might be sustained after withdrawal of COL support need to be strengthened for most initiatives. These need to be systematically addressed when the logic frameworks are under development. Exit strategies should also be considered for a number of activities that have run for a number of years. They were rarely mentioned in the interviews or materials reviewed for this evaluation.
12.4.4 A more critical assessment of value for money and the relationship between costs, outputs, intended outcomes and impact should be included in the initial appraisal of an activity. This is considered below.

12.5 The Strategic Sectors

12.5.1 The Terms of Reference for this study required comment on the appropriateness of the two strategic sectors (i.e., Livelihoods & Health, and Education) in contributing to the 2012–2015 3YP. The seven initiatives were grouped into these two strategic sectors, with the two cross-cutting themes plus CEMCA. The strategic sectors were established to encourage experience sharing across COL, exploit synergies and avoid duplication. However, there was no compelling evidence that this had happened or that any value had been added.

12.5.2 Initiatives generally operated independently, with the staff involved sharing experiences and common concerns on a more informal basis (through daily contact and discussions) or formally in the larger Programme Update Meetings. There were also some structured joint activities through involvement in delivering the cross-cutting themes, where the Education Specialists and both eLearning and Gender Specialists had worked together to share policies, strategies and activities.

12.5.3 The analysis of the initiatives in all the previous sections indicated significant areas of overlap between activities in each of the initiatives and we accordingly recommend that staff review together how they might best minimise overlap, build joint activities and encourage greater team working. While it was beyond the scope of this evaluation to include a detailed analysis, we suggest an external facilitated workshop to explore with the COL teams (including CEMCA) where and how some restructuring might enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of planning and delivery for the next plan.

12.5.4 In all, 45 COL staff (as of autumn 2014) together delivered an impressive number of activities that were clearly evidenced in COL reports, documents and feedback from Board members. While it is recognised that over the 2012–2015 3YP the COL President has achieved much by ensuring that all Commonwealth Member States are engaged, the general consensus was that COL should take on less, but in greater depth, and with a strategic focus that directly aligns with COL’s agreed priorities. An approach suggested was to cluster activities around a limited number of strategic areas for delivery.

12.5.5 All COL staff interviewed referred to the tremendous pressure they felt under to deliver the activities and to respond to the increasing demands being placed on them, given the growing number of requests from governments and stakeholders. COL senior management were aware of these demands on staff and expressed similar concerns, particularly as this obviously had a detrimental effect on morale and performance.

12.5.6 Board members and stakeholders also reported general satisfaction that the balance between administrative support and operational expenditure was
appropriate: COL was seen as an efficient organisation. Stakeholders also reported that COL was transparent in its operations and had good financial controls and reporting systems in place.

12.6 How Many Initiatives Are Appropriate?

12.6.1 It was clear from the evaluation that all the initiatives were delivered on time and to budget, and that the large majority had very successfully met the required performance indicators. It was therefore not possible to suggest that some have “run their course,” given that this study concerned just one 3YP. However, any strategic decision on reducing or reshaping the initiatives must relate to where COL might want to be positioned five or so years from now.

12.7 Cross-Cutting Themes

12.7.1 The application of the cross-cutting themes has enhanced the delivery of the activities, as was discussed in previous sections. However, COL teams were not united in support for all to continue through the next plan period.

12.7.2 The need for the gender cross-cutting theme was endorsed by the Education Specialists. The view was that much has been achieved but that this was ongoing and the momentum started must be maintained.

12.7.3 There was no real consensus about the need for a single post dedicated to eLearning. The section covering eLearning clearly indicated its achievements and successes to date and commented on future options. All initiatives are underpinned by eLearning and the application of appropriate ICT is inherent in all COL’s activities. Suggestions were that if the post were to continue, it should do so on the basis of:

- Defining clear and appropriate responsibilities for the other Education Specialists
- Focusing on the development of national policies
- Leading on the commissioning of research studies and their publication and promotion

12.8 Results-Based Management and the Logic Model

12.8.1 It was clear from the review of each initiative that all teams in COL have developed and delivered the 3YP activities by applying RBM and the Logic Model. Given the number and scope of activities involved for each initiative, the rigour required by the RBM approach had ensured focus. This application of RBM successfully built on the recommendations of the summative evaluation of the previous 3YP.

12.8.2 Nevertheless, closer scrutiny of the documentation for each initiative gave rise to a number of concerns:

- Data collected or available for measuring progress towards intended outcomes was frequently insufficient to facilitate a full assessment.
• A single defined activity might encompass a large number of sub-activities, programmes and so on — some one-off and others coherently structured. It was often difficult to chart progress over the full 2012–2015 3YP towards the planned outcome.

• It proved difficult to assess how one particular action or approach had been selected as appropriate to deliver the outcomes.

• The methods and approaches to assessing risks and assumptions were varied. Most that were presented were at too high a level and needed to be made more specific to delivery, the project or the partner.

• The approach to M&E was variable, with not all initiatives having M&E plans in place or reports available. This reduced the ability to critically appraise overall progress (including for this review).

12.8.3 It was not always clear from the documents reviewed for this study how all the sub-activities or actions might interrelate or be sequenced to deliver on the intended outcomes. This was also not apparent in some of the agreements signed with partners. Often agreements related only to a one-off activity or for a limited period rather than for a period of sustained engagement.

12.8.4 3YPs should not be perceived as a blueprint. They need to evolve to meet changing circumstances and to accommodate new and innovative ideas that might contribute directly to achieving the intended outcomes and impact. A commendable example was the recent development of COL-partnered MOOCs. These were not planned for initially in the 2012–2015 3YP, but warranted investigation given their potential importance for COL and its many partners.

12.8.5 The vocabulary around the Logic Model and project planning needs clarification. The primary sub-division of a COL initiative is the activity, and for most of the initiatives, the activity embraces a significant number of individual actions (also confusingly referred to as activities in some COL reports). Actions might include, for example, workshops, consultancy visits, production of materials and publications, and development of national policy advice. For many of the COL activities, it was not clear how all such individual actions interrelate or contribute to a coherent pathway leading to the proposed outcome.

12.8.6 **Identification and project planning:** A more considered approach to identification of possible projects needs to be adopted by COL. The approach should include scene-scanning, assessing options available, using knowledge of what others are doing in the same area (to avoid duplication and identify possible synergies), prioritising actions, projecting likely costs and considering possible outcomes relative to the overall COL requirement.

12.8.7 The concept of baseline studies was not employed in a consistent way in each initiative. Clarification of how these might be developed and applied would be useful for COL teams.

12.8.8 Activities under each initiative were seen to be at varying stages of development and delivery. Some had followed on from the previous plan period; others were new. However, we recommend that, even for activities or projects
that are continuing from a previous plan period, a rigorous appraisal be undertaken. This would ideally require a baseline study that would allow for all delivery options to be considered.

12.8.9 **Key Project document files:** These were lacking and yet are important for a number of reasons, such as advising M&E, briefing consultants, facilitating management and briefing new staff. A Key Project document might include: the logic framework, statements of intended outcomes, delivery actions to be taken, time frames for delivery, agreements with partners, budgets, milestones, monitoring arrangements, sustainability considerations, and risks and assumptions.

12.8.10 While it might be onerous to develop a Key Project document for all projects, COL might wish to define a level (financial, number of actions or similar) for which such a document would be appropriate. As mentioned previously, a project document should not be a blueprint but rather evolve as implementation takes place over the plan period. The L3F team has developed an annual strategic plan that might offer a good starting point.

We recommend that all proposed actions be set out in a discrete Key Project document.

12.8.11 **Monitoring and evaluation:** The approach to M&E was variable across the initiatives, with some offering examples of good practice. A common structure might be instituted, which could accommodate individual variations and contextualisation, but M&E plans and delivery should be a requirement for all initiatives.

12.8.12 The Education Specialists and consultants identified difficulties in establishing a consistent approach to M&E plans across the initiative. The collection and comparison of data from each activity proved difficult. While COL staff placed increasing responsibility on partners to provide appropriate information, that has taken time to establish and often requires training. An area of concern identified was how best to assess qualitative change (a factor mentioned in most plans and outcomes) as this — like consideration of “impact” — tended to be measurable only over longer periods than the 2012–2015 3YP implied.

12.8.13 Risk analysis should be viewed as more critical and applied to each activity or project (if sufficiently large), not just to an overall initiative. The idea of the assessment should not just be to assess risk but also to understand the potential impact of risk. For example, a frequently mentioned risk in the logic frameworks for each initiative was the “political and economic stability in the country.” While this is no doubt true, it is probably a relatively rare occurrence. On the other hand, when running a series of development workshops, the non-availability of some delegates or lack of support resources was a frequent occurrence.
12.8.14 Understanding likely risks and their impact, and having a strategy to cope, is important. Most logic frameworks for initiatives and activities tended only to consider risk in general terms rather than as country- or project/action-specific. The likely impact of identified risks should be mentioned in the planning stage.

12.8.15 COL has established well-crafted partnership agreements as part of risk minimisation. These set out clear responsibilities for all parties involved. Detailed joint planning of activities with partners, to ensure that the critical factors are understood and the likely impact assessed, can contribute greatly to risk minimisation.

12.9 Partners

12.9.1 Partnerships are central to COL’s work and the successful implementation, impact and sustainability of COL activities are largely dependent on the level of support, competencies and commitment of each partner. COL partners have fallen into two main groups:

- NGOs, independent foundations and private providers involved in training for development
- Government institutions and organisations, including schools, higher education institutions, technical training centres, health centres and sometimes governments direct (particularly for policy-related activities)

In addition, partners might also be categorised as those with whom COL works to deliver the activities and those who might be targets for COL services — there is overlap between these categories.

12.9.2 Both types of partnership have funding constraints. For NGOs, independent foundations and private providers, finances are always tight, particularly for funds not tied to specific projects. For government institutions and organisations, activities with COL are likely to be new and innovative and generally additional to the fixed and hard-pressed budgets of Education and Health ministries.

12.9.3 Impressive was that COL, through various means, was able to implement successfully many activities with a large number of partners around the Commonwealth. The ability of COL staff to pick winning partners appears part of the “COL DNA.” And, from the partners’ perspective, they have welcomed opportunities that COL activities provide for them in terms of building regional and global networks to learn and to access support.

12.9.4 Various approaches to assessing partners were described by the Education Specialists. For example, the TVSD Education Specialist has developed an online “institutional readiness” questionnaire that requires all potential partners to assess whether they might yet be ready for engaging in an activity with COL. Feedback on its use is positive.
12.9.5 A finding discussed with partners, consultants and the Education Specialists in COL was lack of consistency across COL in the provision of funds and support for partners. For example, some Education Specialists do not provide funding support for participants and delegates to attend events or training (e.g., for travel or per-diem expenses), whereas others might. The reason reported for not meeting such costs, said the Education Specialists involved, was to measure the partner’s commitment: if they are unable to provide such modest amounts, how can the activity be sustained? The reasons for providing support were generally because the ministry or body concerned was either unable to or too late in making provision, and would have resulted in the last-minute cancellation of the activity.

COL policy needs to be clearer on these matters. Clarification and consistency is necessary, as the same partner might be involved with COL to support different initiative areas for which different funding arrangements apply.

12.9.6 Some partners do not deliver as required or might be going through a difficult period. COL staff had to manage these fluctuations and still deliver to meet the performance indicators. As one consultant suggested, COL staff specialise in “tough love” when the situation dictates such intervention.

12.9.7 However, as was clear from comments by consultants, even the best laid plans can go awry and clearly such experiences hampered the implementation of some activities. An approach to minimising such occurrences is have closer engagement with the partner at the preparation and appraisal stage. This would include jointly reviewing success factors, agreeing on a detailed work plan and clearly identifying risks and dependencies. Given Education Specialists’ workloads and COL finances, this reinforces the need for fewer activities but undertaking them with greater depth.

12.10 Consultants

12.10.1 Some activities involved active participation by the Education Specialist in the delivery of the project or training. However, given the reach of COL, this is necessarily limited and consultants are essential. The selection of good consultants can be just as important as the selection of the partner and COL has built up a global network of consultants. These might be local, regional or global, but all reported loyalty to COL and were genuinely pleased to be involved with the organisation.

12.10.2 In discussions, consultants suggested that the main project documents for an activity or project be shared with them in order that they might better understand what COL was seeking to achieve and the commitments between COL and the partner.

12.10.3 All consultants provide reports on their work and these proved extremely important in terms of assessing successes and weaknesses and of offering practical feedback on the progress of the activity. They are also important for M&E. However, some of the reports reviewed were quite variable,
with most providing factual details of attendance and courses, materials produced, etc., but few offering critical comment. A pre-defined structure for consultants’ reports on their activities might encourage greater critical assessment. Additionally, consultants should be asked to look for evidence of outcomes both planned and unplanned. Some do this already, but it is not consistent.

12.11 The COL Brand and Communications

12.11.1 It was clear that COL and its staff command great respect internationally for their professionalism, results and position as global thought leaders. The COL brand is strong. Several partners and consultants commented that association with COL had raised their own prestige — it opened the door to new opportunities with governments and other agencies.

12.11.2 However, beyond these interested groups of partners and stakeholders, knowledge of COL soon dropped away. Raising the profile of COL to a much wider group of ICT and ODL professionals and organisations involved in the delivery and funding of development projects is vital, both to retain current stakeholders and to promote to new ones.

12.11.3 COL should invest more in its branding and promotion, including ensuring a consistent approach to the promotion of COL’s underpinning values. In this context, the various COL websites are important.

12.11.4 COL’s web presence is the window through much of the world accesses the organisation. That presence must therefore reflect and communicate COL’s main proposition of being a global leader in the applications of ICT and ODL. Currently, it undersells COL: it is static and seems mainly to target those already aware of COL (particularly stakeholders and partners). There are also a number of other COL-owned or -initiated websites that lack consistency (e.g., in branding or feel) with the main COL website.

12.11.5 COL staff should be more visible in professional fora and with stakeholders. This might include staff making presentations at select conferences, promoting to potential and existing partners, and visiting other development professionals, such as multilateral and other development agencies. When in a country or region, COL staff should call in the local offices of its main funding organisations (e.g., CIDA, AusAid, Department for International Development) to exchange ideas about their projects and to enhance COL’s relationship with the agencies.

12.11.6 The *Journal of Learning for Development* represents a good means to represent COL, but it will need investment to market and ensure it is a main hit in web searches. Similarly, the suite of COL publications needs to be promoted more generally and the results of the commissioned research highlighted through targeted communications.
12.12 Stakeholders

12.12.1 Great respect for COL and its achievements was expressed by Board members interviewed for this study. As one commented:

“Given their headcount and budget I am amazed at what they deliver.... When I was approached to be a member I was reluctant, but then I discovered what they were achieving ....”

12.12.2 A few common themes in the feedback emerged:

- The transparency through which COL was willing to be viewed was exemplary.
- All the briefing papers and updates were excellent and summarised at the right level for the Board and funding partners.
- COL was adding great value and was an effective organisation.
- The use of the RBM and Logic Model methodology had definitely helped provide focus and clarity.
- Board members felt engaged.
- There were too many activities and too broad a mix of them. Fewer were needed, but to be undertaken in more depth.

12.12.3 Success breeds success: COL’s achievements have also resulted in new demand from across the Commonwealth. Governments want more activities in their country, but with no additional funds available. Several stakeholders interviewed were concerned that COL was spreading itself a little thin in its desire to deliver activities in every country.

12.13 Costs, Outcomes and Value for Money

12.13.1 COL has worked consistently to achieve an appropriate balance between programme expenditure and the costs of administration, management and governance. As the Department for International Development Annual Review for 2014 concludes:

“COL is exceeding the 80 percent target for programme expenditure. COL’s programme expenditure amounts to 87 percent after three quarters of the financial year 13/14.... COL has exceeded many of the expected results and is therefore offering good value for money.”

12.13.2 Budgets are delegated to the individual Education Specialists who lead an initiative or theme and there was evidence that this has facilitated both effective and appropriate decision-making and reduced transaction costs. The individual initiative teams maintain detailed accounts to ensure compliance and transparency in COL’s reporting to its stakeholders. This they manage through their own spreadsheets for budgets and forecasting and against each set of actions. A common format across all the initiatives would facilitate aggregation and assist the M&E of activities.
12.13.3 COL delivers all of its activities with partners, and all partners have provided supported delivery at varying levels, both direct and indirect. However, joint financing with partners was identified as a challenge, especially for relatively poor NGOs and with training recipients from disadvantaged communities. This issue, discussed above, has implications for sustainability.

12.13.4 In many of the activities, relatively little consideration was given to the relationship between costs and outcomes in the delivery of COL programmes, although the annual M&E of TVSD activities offered useful insights and provides a good starting point for considering costs and efficiency. This approach should be extended to include cost-related considerations at both the initial planning and appraisal stages as well as in M&E. Considerations at the planning stage, for example, might include:

- Could the same outcomes be achieved through a lower cost approach?
- Could similar investment have achieved better outcomes?

12.13.5 However, collecting appropriate data, analysing it and then imputing a relationship with outcomes, etc. is complex. If COL staff are to include this in their deliberations and reporting, they will need guidance, including guidelines that might be adapted to the needs of the specific activity. We recommend appointing a consultant to review the need, develop an appropriate methodology and provide good guidance notes. It should be a requirement to review the cost and outcomes associated with each activity and programme at the appraisal stage.

**12.14 Diversifying Revenue Sources**

12.14.1 Although COL has been successful in securing support from across the Commonwealth, demand for services continues to grow and COL is unable to meet these from its limited financial and staff resources. COL has been very dependent on its core financing from a limited number of governments and agencies, and this implies some risk. COL needs to increase and diversify its funding base, which might include drawing from many sources: government, international organisations, foundations and private sector.

Recently COL has been successful in securing support from UNICEF and the Hewlett Foundation, and this has enhanced COL’s attractiveness to others. However, seeking new revenue will require better promotion, positioning and proposal presentation if COL is to succeed in an increasingly competitive market. It will also require COL to develop or acquire sharper “big project” management skills.

12.14.2 Board members were keen for COL to address the need to generate additional revenue, and they made a number of suggestions, particularly to seek out new partnerships for securing new resources. Joint pursuit with other leading organisations and institutions would also serve to enhance the COL brand and reputation.
12.14.3 While securing new business has to be the responsibility of all staff, and the need to market and communicate success was considered previously, it is recognised that staff already have more than full-time commitments and that additional investment is necessary. COL should explore whether appointing a professional to lead on business pursuit might be appropriate. It was also suggested by COL staff that a searchable repository of COL proposals would greatly assist the development and submission of proposals for the future.

12.15 Summary of Recommendations

The main recommendations from this section are listed below.

12.15.1 Future plans should consider using strategic goals because those goals provide an overarching framework within which to locate the individual initiatives and their related activities.

12.15.2 The application of RBM and the Logic Model to planning and delivery in COL should be maintained.

12.15.3 Performance Indicators should be more ambitious, with greater focus on outcomes rather than outputs.

12.15.4 While recognising that activities are iterative, consideration of long-term sustainability of an intervention should be included in the initial planning. This might also include outlining an exit strategy.

12.15.5 COL should focus on fewer activities but deliver the ones it does do in greater depth.

12.15.6 A review of the current team structures in COL should be undertaken to minimise overlap, exploit synergies and promote team work.

12.15.7 The continuing need for a dedicated cross-cutting theme to support eLearning should be reviewed.

12.15.8 A number of routine operational measures should be addressed:

- Appraisal should be strengthened with consideration of alternative approaches and their relative costs. This should also be done for activities continuing from a previous plan period.
- A Key Project document file should be maintained for each activity.
- More detailed risk analysis should be undertaken at the appraisal stage, with assessment of the likely impact of each specific risk.

12.15.9 To enhance delivery and improve M&E, COL should:

- Improve data collection with partners to support M&E
- Develop strategies for more effective qualitative M&E of activities
12.15.10 A more rigorous assessment of the capabilities of partners to meet the needs of the activity should be included at the appraisal stage, including agreeing on risks.

12.15.11 COL needs a consistent policy regarding its approach to cost-sharing with partners across initiatives.

12.15.12 Consultants should be required to assess more critically the successes of their activities and the implications for future direction.

12.15.13 A consistent approach to the application of the brand and brand values should apply to all communications.

12.15.14 The content, functionality and presentation of all COL-related websites should be reviewed to ensure consistency with the values of COL.

12.15.15 COL should seek external advice to establish a methodology for the analysis of costs and outcomes.

12.15.16 A more critical assessment of value for money and the relationship between costs, outputs, intended outcomes and impact should be included in the initial appraisal of an activity.

12.15.17 COL should consider appointing a Business Pursuit Manager.
Annex B

Terms of Reference

External Evaluation of the 2012–2015 Three-Year Plan
THE STRATEGIC PLAN

1. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL), an intergovernmental organisation, commenced its current Three-Year Plan, Learning for Development in July 1, 2012. It will be completed on June 30, 2015.

2. The plan, set within a Results-Based Management (RBM) framework, aims to achieve developmental impact through open and distance learning methodologies and the use of appropriate technologies. Overall organisational objectives, medium term outcomes and long term impacts were identified. These are reflected in COL’s programmes, which have two sectors (Education and Livelihoods & Health), 7 initiatives and two cross-cutting themes. Performance Indicators were identified at the outcome level and are expressed in the Plan’s Logic Model.

THE REASONS FOR AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

3. Monitoring and evaluation is an integral part of results-based management. COL is committed to monitoring and evaluating its work through the identification of performance indicators with targets. Various data sources are identified and instruments developed for the collection of data and tracking of progress towards the outcomes.

4. COL is seeking to have an evaluation of the current three-year plan against the objectives set at the start of the plan and to provide a report to the Board of Governors. The overall purpose of the evaluation is to:
   i. ascertain what difference COL has made over the past two years, moving into the third and final consolidation year, and
   ii. provide recommendations that can be incorporated into the next Three-Year Plan 2015-2018.

5. The evaluation should consider both the strategy and the activities at the initiative level, which have been summarised in the RBM logic framework for each initiative and activity. An 'evidenced-based' assessment of outputs and outcomes is needed with both quantitative and qualitative data.

6. The evaluation should be guided by the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee’s international criteria of Relevance; Effectiveness; Efficiency; Impact; and Sustainability1.

7. The four key questions that the evaluation should answer are:

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i. What has been the performance of COL in this triennium against the identified outcomes and indicators?

ii. How appropriate are the two strategic sectors, Education and Livelihoods & Health in realising the aims of the current Three-Year Plan?

iii. Have the core strategies and strategic goals been useful in support of achieving the aims of the current Three-Year Plan?

iv. What lessons can COL, its Board of Governors and partners, take from the operation of the plan into the next Three-Year Plan?

THE MAIN CLIENT AND INTERESTED STAKEHOLDERS

8. The main client for the evaluation is COL and its Board of Governors. Interested stakeholders are the 54 Commonwealth countries and those organisations and institutions with whom COL works. It would be necessary to consult with Board members and a small number of other key stakeholders to ascertain their views on the evaluation.

DATA AND METHODOLOGIES

9. The evaluation should consider both the strategy and the activities at the initiative level. In preparation for this latter examination, COL has conducted baseline studies together with evaluations of all initiatives and identified key activities. It is envisaged that the evaluation will consider COL’s work over the life of the plan largely through these studies.

10. There has been constant monitoring over the life of the plan. Therefore considerable baseline and other data on how the plan is progressing.

11. It is envisaged that the methodology would employ a desk study of the data produced by the initiatives; and interviews with the key stakeholders and COL staff. The main sources of data for the evaluation will be:

- External evaluations at the Initiative level;
- Phone interviews with external evaluators;
- Phone interviews with key partners;
- Relevant internal baseline and monitoring data where it exists;
- Internal reports, such as the President’s quarterly reports and the annual reports to the Board;
- Interviews with COL staff; and
- Interviews with selected Board members.

DELIVERABLES

12. A final report will be needed by 15 May 2015. An interim report should be available by October 1, 2014 in order that the interim results are considered when constructing the next Three-Year Plan, starting July 1, 2015.
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIZE AND FORMAT OF THE REPORT

13. The report should be no more than 50 pages plus appendices in length. Its structure should be:

Title Page
Preface and acknowledgements
Contents page
Acronyms and abbreviations
Executive summary

The main report
• Introduction
• Methodology
• Findings
• Conclusions
• Recommendations

Appendices/Annexes

NAME AND CONTACT DETAILS OF THE EVALUATION MANAGER AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS DURING THE EVALUATION AND WHOM THE REPORT SHOULD BE SENT TO.

14. The Evaluation manager is
   Mr. Vis Naidoo
   Vice President
   Commonwealth of Learning
   Suite 1200, 1055 West Hastings Street
   Vancouver BC V6E 2E9 Canada
   Email: vnaidoo@col.org.

15. The final report should be sent to Professor Asha S. Kanwar, President and CEO, Commonwealth of Learning.