More than 700 delegates from 70 countries attended the Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF5) at the University of London in July 2008. COL’s biennial forum has grown to become one of the world’s leading international conferences on learning and global development. This year’s forum was by far the largest. The theme of PCF5 was “Access to Learning for Development” and the unique contributions that open and distance learning (ODL) can make towards achieving international development goals.

There were more than 320 papers, workshops and discussions around the forum’s four main action themes:

• Children and young people;
• Governance, conflict and social justice;
• Health; and
• Livelihoods.

Three cross-cutting issues – appropriate learning technologies, institutions and learner support – helped to inform the discussions. Over four days, delegates discussed best practices, shared their experiences and were inspired by keynote speeches from leaders in ODL.

COL’s Excellence in Distance Education Awards were also presented at PCF5 (see “In Focus” on page 8).

THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

PCF5 was hosted by COL in partnership with the University of London, forming a part of the University’s celebration of the 150th anniversary of the establishment of its External Programme.

Vice Chancellor Sir Graeme Davies opened PCF5 with comments about the world’s first open access university – the University of London. While many people associate distance education with the Internet and modern technology, the University of London began offering distance education in 1858 to enable people to learn without having to come to London. They exploited state-of-the-art technologies of the day – the postal service (developed to take advantage of the new railways) and the printing press. The University of London worked with partner institutions that provided local support and in so doing, helped to develop universities throughout the Commonwealth.

Charles Dickens’ magazine, All the Year Round, called the University of London “the people’s university”. The External Programme’s many graduates include five Nobel Prize winners, many heads of state and prisoners of war during World War I and II.

OPENING KEYNOTES

The Right Honourable Apolo Nsibambi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Uganda, delivered the forum’s first keynote speech on behalf of His Excellency President Yoweri K. Museveni. His comments focussed on the role of formal and informal education in attaining development goals. The Prime Minister spoke about the need to provide equitable access to education for all people in order to unleash the potential for development. The process of development, he said, is a function of both formal and informal education.

“The opposite of development is poverty created by inability to attain relevant education,” said Prime Minister Nsibambi. “Poverty often deprives a person of spirit and virtue. It is difficult to make a man or a woman stand upright without education. The challenge for us as
EXPLORING ACCESS TO LEARNING FOR DEVELOPMENT

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leaders is to make education accessible, affordable, equitable and instrumental.

In his address to the forum, Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma spoke about the role of young people in meeting today’s challenges. “Safeguarded for so long, young people are now beginning to be seen as sources of wisdom and direction,” he said.

The Secretary-General pointed out pressing challenges such as the 70 million out-of-school children in the Commonwealth (a group that is predominately female), teacher student ratios that approach 70:1 in some African countries, the impact of the continuing HIV/AIDS crisis and limited progress in attaining Universal Primary Education.

Education is a right that leads to many aspects of development, said Mr. Nicholas Burns, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education in his PCF5 address. He spoke about the role of education in meeting the Education for All goals and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. While great progress is being made in Education for All, many countries will not achieve these goals. An acceleration of progress is needed, he said. “This is an optimistic time but it is not a time to relax.”

Mr. Barnett discussed education challenges faced by the developing world including enduring gender disparities, poor quality of education, poorly trained teachers and minimal attention to adult literacy.

He spoke about the need to increase access to education, pointing to solutions such as early learning programs for disadvantaged children, relevant learning for youth and adults, more and better teacher training, a renewed emphasis on quality, cross-border higher education and open educational resources (OERs).

ASA BRIGGS LECTURE

Professor Brenda Gourley, Vice-Chancellor of the U.K. Open University and Chair of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, delivered COL’s ASA Briggs lecture, “New technologies: new possibilities for reaching the unreached”. The ASA Briggs Lecture honours the founding Chairman of the COL Board of Governors and renowned British historian, the Rt. Hon. Lord Briggs of Lewes, who was instrumental in establishing the Commonwealth of Learning. COL invites renowned scholars speakers to deliver the Lectures on topics of interest and relevance to education in the Commonwealth.

She concluded with a message of optimism: “I am enormously encouraged by the dazzling advances in technology and the hope they give us for reaching people in ways that would have been impossible not so long ago.”

A response to the lecture was given by Lord Asa Briggs himself. He told forum participants, “These issues matter as much to me in old age as they did in my youth.” He spoke about his active role in social, economic and political decision-making as they transition to adolescence and adulthood,” said Ms. Bellamy. “As educated adults, they are more likely to have fewer children, be informed about appropriate child rearing practices and ensure their children start school on time and are ready to learn.”

There were 72 million out-of-school children in 2005, according to the Education For All report, and the situation has improved since then. One response is Teacher Education for Sub-Saharan Africa (Tessa), an initiative that brings together 18 institutions from nine countries to offer advanced educational resources (OERs) for teacher training. In his closing address at PCF5, Sir John Daniel referred to TESSA as “perhaps the most successful of all the OER projects we have heard about.” A large bank of OERs is available on the TESSA website, anyone can adapt and use them. Authored primarily by academics in Africa, the 750 study units include audio clips and guidance for teacher educators. Since most teachers don’t have Internet access, each study is available on CD-ROM in PDF format so they can be easily printed and shared. www.tessafrica.net

SPEAKING TO THE FIRST DAY’S THEME – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – Ms. Carol Bellamy, President and CEO of World Learning, discussed the role of ODL in providing access to education for young people.

“A quality basic education will better equip girls and boys with knowledge and skills needed to adopt healthy lifestyles, to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS and to take an active role in social, economic and political decision-making as they transition to adolescence and adulthood,” said Ms. Bellamy. “As educated adults, they are more likely to have fewer children, be informed about appropriate child rearing practices and ensure their children start school on time and are ready to learn.”

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PCF5 ON PAGE 4

PCF5: WEAVING A TAPESTRY OF MOBILES FOR LEARNER SUPPORT IN LESOTHO

How do you provide learner support in a country where only three out of every 1,000 people have Internet access? Even more of a challenge, how do you support learners who live in remote areas where they have no electricity? These are some of the challenges faced by the Distance Teacher Education Programme at the Lesotho College of Education. Mrs. Lionel Clementina Kokoza tells a PCF5 session about how the College found a way to communicate with learners in the rugged mountainous area of the country. A survey revealed that none of the 200 learners had electricity, they study by light provided by gas, paraffin (kerosene) or candles. Only 14 per cent have televisions and none have computers, but 80 per cent of them have radios and 82 per cent of them have access to a mobile phone (they are charged by car batteries owned by local entrepreneurs). By gaining a clear understanding of learner characteristics, the College is able to use appropriate information and communication technologies (ICT) to provide learner support and enable people to learn in remote environments.

INNOVATION

LEARNING THROUGH MoBILE PHONE GAMING

The non-profit group Mindset Network has partnered with Nokia and the South African Department of Education to introduce an innovative mobile phone programme to teach math. The pilot programme serves grade 10 students in two schools receive handsets loaded with educational games. In one game, Fashion Empire, students create a business and to bring them to as many people as possible. That is the essence of open and distance learning; and that is the essence of providing Access to Learning for Development.

Education is a right that leads to many aspects of development, said Mr. Nicholas Burns, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education in his PCF5 address. He spoke about the role of education in meeting the Education for All goals and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. While great progress is being made in Education for All, many countries will not achieve these goals. An acceleration of progress is needed, he said. “This is an optimistic time but it is not a time to relax.”

Mr. Barnett discussed education challenges faced by the developing world including enduring gender disparities, poor quality of education, poorly trained teachers and minimal attention to adult literacy.

He spoke about the need to increase access to education, pointing to solutions such as early learning programs for disadvantaged children, relevant learning for youth and adults, more and better teacher training, a renewed emphasis on quality, cross-border higher education and open educational resources (OERs).

Professor Gourley discussed how technology is a major catalyst for change. A full 50 percent of the world’s population use mobile phones, she said, which provides many people with a window on the world of knowledge. However, the benefits of technological innovation are massively inequitably distributed. Poor infrastructure is a continuing barrier; for instance, universities in Sub-Saharan Africa pay 50 times what American universities pay for bandwidth. The resulting isolation of African students is an impediment to education and development.

She also talked about OERs, saying that 110 universities have now placed educational resources on the web. The U.K. Open University’s OpenLearn website is being accessed by millions of users from virtually every nation.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

All Global Monitoring Report. This number could be as high as 95 million, according to Ms. Bellamy. There is no single solution to this problem; the answer lies in thousands of local solutions worldwide – “a tapestry of innovation”, she said.

Success in providing Education for All means working it from every angle, said Ms. Bellamy. That includes shifting the perspective from getting kids to school to getting schools to kids. Technology alone isn’t going to be the hero, nor should it be the villain.

The theme of Children and Young People grew from one session at PCF1 in 1999 to a major element in PCF5, with sessions that explored everything from open schools and teacher education to women’s literacy and innovative uses of technology. Some of the recommendations from these sessions were to ensure appropriate technologies are used, to take advantage of public-private partnerships, to exploit the potential of open educational resources and to explore the possibilities of South-North collaboration especially in open schooling.

GOVERNANCE, CONFLICT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Day 2 of the forum focused on the “Governance, conflict and social justice” theme, a new area of work for COL. Some of the discussions in the Governance sessions focused on increasing access to education in tertiary institutions for women, indigenous peoples, incarcerated in prison, elderly and young people. Some of the recommendations from these sessions were to ensure appropriate technologies are used, to take advantage of public-private partnerships, to exploit the potential of open educational resources and to explore the possibilities of South-North collaboration especially in open schooling.

While Mozambique offers programmes such as health education, day clinics, anti-retroviral drugs and research, it’s not working. It is still the seventh worst affected country in Africa. Professor Brito spoke about the need to integrate education with social and economic practices, to involve all actors in order to capture and mobilise social energy. “Access to learning for health is both a right and a duty,” she said.

The Health workshops and discussions explored pressing issues such as using ODL for HIV/AIDS prevention and building public health capacity using OERs. There was encouraging news about innovative programmes that are making significant improvements in health promotion in developing countries.

The sessions concluded that more holistic and culture-centred approach is required, we must raise community awareness and discuss values, simple technology works best, and ODL and OERs have great potential in promoting health.

LIVELIHOODS

Learning for Livelihoods was a major theme at PCF5. The 23 sessions on Livelihoods generated many examples of good practice and also explored the barriers to ODL for livelihoods, potential solutions and considerations for the future. A key recommendation was that access to finance (such as micro-credit) is a crucial element in improving livelihoods. Another important point is the need to focus on community learning as much as on individuals; one way to do this is to work with existing self-help groups.

Some of the future directions suggested for improving livelihoods through ODL include a greater focus on disadvantaged communities, developing capacity especially among youth and girls, facilitating partnerships and creating OERs for livelihoods.

ACCESS TO LEARNING FOR DEVELOPMENT

The final day of the conference concentrated on the overall conference theme, “Access to Learning for Development”. In his keynote address about the promise of ODL in Africa, Professor Barney Pityana, Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Africa (UNISA), said that while there is an unrelenting hunger for education in Africa, higher education is dismal.

Professor Pityana outlined some of the perils of ODL in Africa, including an emphasis on increasing enrolment with little regard for quality, throughput and outputs. He also expressed scepticism about OERs, saying that Africans should be interrogating and engaging their own knowledge resources.

“Nothing one can convince a few people anymore about the merits of ODL in enhancing the provision of higher education, driving the development agenda, skilling Africa for sustainable development, and for meeting Africa’s needs in technology and economic development,” he concluded. The challenge Africa faces is to be creative in planning and development, willing to share resources across the continent and to understand the power of African initiatives, rather than generate competition for resources.

Following summary remarks from leaders of the conference’s final three main strands, COL President Sir John Daniel provided a closing address. He paid tribute to PCF5 Programme Chair Dr. Roger Mills and the four CEOs to whom he gave a special thanks for their leadership. He also paid tribute to three leaders for putting together “an incredibly rich programme”.

“Remember that PCF5 is not over when you leave London,” Sir John told delegates. “Now is when you start working to sustain the networks that you have developed here. For our part, the Commonwealth of Learning will reflect deeply on the conclusions and recommendations arising from your discussion as we prepare our next Three-Year Plan for the period 2009-2012.”

Major sponsorship support for delegate participation from developing countries was provided by COL, the UK’s Open University, the UK Department for International Development, the University of London External Programme, Nexus Strategic Partnerships and AusAID – the Australian Government’s overseas aid programme.

“Access to Learning for Development” is a major programme and will continue to be a major programme and will continue to support efforts to meet the Unit ed Nations Millennium Development Goal of Universal Primary Education, many nations are unable to accommodate the corresponding increase in potential capacity for education. For instance, the Gross Enrollment Ratios for secondary education in Sub-Saharan Africa is just 30 percent, less than half the world average of 65 percent. By providing teachers in developing countries with new technologies, tools and skills, COL is helping to increase access to quality education while increasing student achievement.

www.col.org/OpenSchooling

The OERs for open schools initiative complements several ongoing research activities and the development of resource materials for open school managers and policymakers that COL has recently undertaken as part of its open schooling programme (see “New Resources” on page 15).

Open schools are increasingly recognised as a solution to the growing demand for secondary school education in developing countries. As primary school enrollments grow due to successful efforts to meet the United Nations Millennium Development Goal of Universal Primary Education, many nations are unable to accommodate the corresponding increase in potential school capacity. For instance, the Gross Enrollment Ratios for secondary education in Sub-Saharan Africa is just 30 percent, less than half the world average of 65 percent. By providing teachers in developing countries with new technologies, tools and skills, COL is helping to increase access to quality education while increasing student achievement.

www.col.org/openSchooling
COL contributes to professional development and training in open and distance learning (ODL) knowledge and skills by providing professionals with experience outside their normal working environment. This could be with COL, in another institution or through conference participation.

**Attachments Programme:** COL provides financial support for ODL professionals who are at an early stage or mid-point in their careers and would benefit from a short-term attachment to another institution. All attachments are within Commonwealth member states. Applicants are responsible for finding their own attachment institution and for organising their own travel and professional development activities.

**Executive Secondment:** COL offers secondment opportunities for senior officials/academics in Commonwealth governments or institutions to live in Vancouver, Canada, working out of COL’s offices for up to three months on specific projects related to COL’s mandate.

Dr. Gamini Kulatunga, Coordinator of the Rural Research Unit at the Open University of Sri Lanka, took part in an executive secondment at COL in June 2008. During his one-month visit, Dr. Kulatunga studied COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme, which relates to his work at OUSL’s Rural Research Unit. He met with COL staff about their initiatives in different sectors, consulted with COL experts about monitoring and evaluation of rural development projects and visited local universities to broaden his understanding about the application of ODL, information and communication technology (ICT) for rural development projects.

“The time I spent at COL was useful to obtain firsthand experience of COL’s work especially in the livelihood area,” said Dr. Kulatunga.

“Aim of assisting the Open University of Sri Lanka in implementing the milk-farmers project under Lifelong Learning for Farmers, and I will look at the possibilities of combining rural radio with mobile phone technology for communication.”

www.col.org/Internships

**ODL FOR GOVERNANCE IN BANGLADESH**

COL is working in partnership with Rupantar, a non-governmental organisation, to strengthen the skills and knowledge of elected local government representatives in Bangladesh. Because of varying literacy levels and time commitments, this group is not well suited to conventional, culture through drama productions, folk music and popular publications.

With COL’s support, Rupantar has developed four training modules that focus on:

- The role and responsibilities of local government,
- Participation in the government system,
- Accountability and transparency, and
- Ensuring the participation of women in government systems.

The modules, which include print materials supplemented by folk songs and drama on DVD, will be piloted with local government offices in the southwest region of Bangladesh in early 2009. The next steps include ODL for good governance using radio. Rupantar has applied for a community radio station licence and hope to deliver programming within the next year, supported by the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMAC).

www.rupantar.org

**AFRICAN FOCAL POINTS MEET**

COL hosted a meeting of its country Focal Points from the African and Mediterranean regions in Lilongwe, Malawi in May 2008. Sixteen representatives attended the two-day meeting, which focussed on:

- reviewing the progress of COL’s Country Action Plans,
- gathering input for COL’s Three-year Plan 2009-2012,
- providing a platform for network and future collaboration among Focal Points and COL staff, and
- providing a professional development opportunity for all participants.

The Focal Points provided reports about the status of open and distance learning in their countries, key priorities and how COL can help further their agenda. There was general endorsement of COL’s current direction and a call for greater support for research, capacity building and implementing open universities.

**LEARNING4CONTENT BUILDS CAPACITY**

More than 700 people have been trained in wiki skills for content editing through COL’s Learning4Content initiative. Since the beginning of 2008, 80 online and face-to-face workshops have been held, drawing participants from around the world. In return for the free training, participants are asked to sign a “learning contract,” pledging to contribute one learning resource to COL’s library of free learning materials.

Learning4Content is supported by COL and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. An honorarium of US $1,000 is available for each workshop to support the costs of facilitation and/or hosting. The initiative seeks to train 2,500 educators and is actively seeking new participants.

For more information about facilitating a workshop, organising a workshop in your country, taking part as a learner or contributing funding to Learning4Con- tent, contact Dr. Wayne Mackintosh, COL Education Specialist, eLearning and ICT Policy at wmackintosh@col.org or visit the WikiEducator website: www.WikiEducator.org/Learning4Content.

**DECIPHERING CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCES**

COL continues to work with experts in copyright law to help Commonwealth member states increase access to learning content. Recent discussions have clarified two frequently used Creative Commons restrictions: No Derivatives (ND) and Non-Commercial (NC).

The ND restriction in Creative Commons licenses means that users may download, copy, and distribute the work as long as they don’t change it in any way. If they want to translate it into another language, make changes or copy substantial excerpts, they need permission from the rights holder.

The NC restriction in Creative Commons licenses means the work may only be used where the project (or the new work) is planned to not generate a profit. Costs, including salaries and overhead expenses, may be recovered, and any kind of organi- sation may use the materials.

Complete details about ND and NC restrictions and other copyright information are available at www.col.org/copyright.
EXCELLENCE IN DISTANCE EDUCATION AWARDS 2008

The winners of COL's 2008 Excellence in Distance Education Awards were announced on London on 14 and 15 July at the Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning. Through these awards, COL gives due recognition to remarkable achievements and endeavours to benefit those who seek to emulate examples of good practice in the field. The Awards acknowledge that excellence is achieved at many points in the learning process: at the institutional level, in the development of learning materials and in terms of individual educator and student attainment.

AWARD OF EXCELLENCE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION MATERIALS

Category A: Print or other “low-end” media materials, such as audio/video tapes, or a combination of these.

Master of Arts in Teacher Education (International Programme), Faculty of Education, Open University of Sri Lanka

This programme is recognised for providing a programme brochure that is nicely designed and easy to read, as well as an accompanying resource pack with sufficient reading reference and a user-friendly student guide.

AWARD OF EXCELLENCE FOR INSTITUTIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL)

NAMCOL is recognised for increasing enrolment by 70 percent and improving student achievement while providing high quality, low cost vocational and professional courses. NAMCOL's future plans include offering pre-entry courses to support new learners, expanding its course offerings into technical and vocational education, and conducting a survey on Web-based literacy and best practices.

University of Papua New Guinea

The University of Papua New Guinea's Open College was saluted for overcoming the “teryanny of terrain” (the country's formidable topography) and the challenge of delivering distance education in a country where there are several hundred languages. The Open College offers award-winning course materials and delivers learning to everyone from teachers and community workers to school drop-outs and prisoners.

The Open College has played an important leadership role in increasing awareness, access and confidence in ODL in Papua New Guinea. Their programmes are providing learning to local government staff, traditional students and disadvantaged people. Some of the challenges they have overcome include making the transition to a dual-mode institution and motivating staff to accept the ODL concept and participate in the development and delivery of programmes. As well, the challenges of delivering distance education through an unreliable transportation and communication system are significant.

“ThEsE in EXCELLENCE in DiSTANCE EDUCATION ARwArd”

The designation of Honorary Fellow of COL acknowledges individual contributions to open and distance learning through leadership/service, works published (including coursework), lectures/presentations, international/national presence and mentorship.

COL salutes its 2008 Honorary Fellows:

• Professor Tan Sri Anuwaz Ali, Vice Chancellor, Open University Malaysia and former Vice Chancellor of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

• Professor Uma Coomaraswamy, Programme Accreditation Analyst, Distance Education Accreditation Project, Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka and former Vice Chancellor, Open University of Sri Lanka

• Professor Brenda Gourley, Vice Chancellor, The Open University U.K. and former Vice Chancellor and University Principal, University of Natal, South Africa

• Mr. Myra Harrison, Education Advisor, Advisory and Evaluation Group, New Zealand Agency for International Development and former member of COL's Board of Governors

• Mr. Abdul W. Khan, Assistant Deputy General for Communication & Information Sector, UNESCO and former Director, Development and Training at COL and Vice Chancellor, Indira Gandhi National Open University, India

• Mr. M.C. Pany, Chairman, National Institute of Open Schooling and former Director of Education, Uttaranchal State, India

• Professor Barney Pityana, Vice Chancellor, University of South Africa and former Chairperson of the South African Human Rights Commission

• Mrs. Esi Sutherland-Addy, Research Fellow, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana and former member of COL's Board of Governors

The Open College

Mr. Kelly Yapa, Papua New Guinea

Distance education provided a critical turning point in the life of Mr. Kelly Yapa. Without access to learning from the College of Distance Education in Papua New Guinea, Mr. Yapa would have spent his life as a subsistence farmer. After graduating Grade 10 at a school several hundred kilometres from his home, Mr. Yapa was unable to find a space at a senior secondary school to continue his education. He returned to his village to farm with his parents, selling cabbages to save money and pursue his dream of becoming an accountant or lawyer.

Mr. Yapa improved his Grade 10 marks through the College of Distance Education and entered at the University of Papua New Guinea's Open College. Mr. Yapa was the only graduate of the Diploma in Commerce programme in 2002. He was shortly after being hired in an accounting job, he was made redundant. But, after joining the country's Defence Forces, he was then hired as an accountant with the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Yapa is recognised for his perseverance and dedication to pursuing his education. “He had an unstoppable drive and passion to strive, as circumstances around him unfolded and crumbled, he re-orientated his focus and artfully accomplished his dreams,” according to university authorities.

Mr. Yapa represents the many people who have to overcome enormous adversity to get their education. Distance education gave Mr. Yapa a second chance, which he has taken and succeeded. An inspiration to others in similar circumstances around the globe, he vows to continue his education.

DISTANCE LEARNING EXPERIENCE IN A DEGREE GRANTING PROGRAMME

Mr. Kelly Yapa, Papua New Guinea

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eLEARNING EXPERIENCE IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

David Benthun Nthengwe, Public Information Officer, United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Democratic Republic of Congo

Mr. Nthengwe completed COL's “Writing Effectively for UNHCR” course in 2007. When violence between warring factions broke out in Kinshasa in March 2007, Mr. Nthengwe and his colleagues were relocated to Kinshasa. The city came under heavy bombin

Although his whole life was disrupted, Mr. Nthengwe was determined to continue his studies and eventually successfully completed the course. As he explains, “With the improvement in his writing skills the refugees he is serving. “With stronger writing skills, my reports are more likely to get the response we need,” he explained. “Many times I wondered how I’d manage to continue with my studies, but I didn’t want to disappoint my tutor. Greg was so kind that I wanted to pay him back by continuing the course – which I did!”

This award acknowledges Mr. Nthengwe's perseverance in continuing his eLearning under most difficult circumstances.

Full award citations and further details are available at www.col.org/edea/2008. Professor Asha Kanwar’s remarks are available at www.col.org/speeches.
**Promoting Gender Mainstreaming**

Creating greater awareness of gender issues for the public service through open and distance learning (ODL) was the focus of a two-day meeting in London in July 2008 organised by COL and the Commonwealth Secretary-General’s Gender and Governance sections. The meeting brought together representatives from government, management development institutions and distance learning universities from Ghana, Lesotho, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, Uganda, the U.K. and Zambia.

Participants drafted an action plan to implement ODL for gender mainstreaming in up to four pilot African countries. COL will be involved in guiding the development of ODL materials for gender mainstreaming at all levels of government. These materials will be work-based so that learners can immediately apply new knowledge and skills to their work context.

Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men for any planned action. It involves making the concerns and experiences of both women and men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally.

**COL Launches Gender Micro-Site**

COL's new Gender micro-site provides a comprehensive platform to access print and electronic resources on gender and open and distance learning (ODL) with a special emphasis on information and communication technology (ICT). The main purpose of this website is to promote gender equality and to increase awareness, knowledge and skills specifically related to gender and ODL/ICT.

The micro-site is organised into three sections:
- **Online resources**, which include journals, bibliographies, distance education associations, etc.
- **Mainstreaming gender**: examples of policies and curricula.
- **Participation in society**, with a special focus on the participation of important players in gender and ODL/ICT.

**Where Have All the Flowers Gone?**

The challenges facing women in open and distance learning (ODL), was the focus of the introductory session on gender at the Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in London in July 2008. Organised by COL Vice President Professor Asha Kanwar and chaired by COL President Sir John Daniel, “Women, gender and distance education: Where have all the flowers gone?” featured three presentations by leaders in the field of gender and ODL.

In her presentation, “A personal perspective on women in open and distance learning”, Ms. Janet Jenkins proposed that there is decreasing attention paid to the specific needs of female learners in ODL. Since the turn of the century, there has apparently been a tapering off of initiatives with a specific gender perspective, she said.

Ms. Jenkins reminded delegates that the bedrock of ODL is its capacity to offer wider access to learning, particularly for those otherwise unable to participate, including women.

In “Reflections on Gender Issues in Open and Distance Learning”, Dr. Christine von Preammzer of FernUniversität in Germany looked at the impact of technology on ODL and how to promote gender equity in distance education. Dr. von Preammzer challenged the belief that gender differences have all but disappeared with regard to the use of information and communication technology (ICT), pointing to research that shows women often have less access to the technologies, less control over the ICT in their homes and places of work, and less confidence and competency in using the technology.

She concluded with a call to action. “In order to ensure that the virtual campus will not be a place without women or a place in which women are passive participants who ‘consume’ the education they cannot get any other way, women themselves must be prepared to embrace the new world of ICT, to take a critical look at the dangers but also at the advantages inherent in virtual teaching and learning processes, and to be involved in shaping their own new learning environments”.

Dr. Rekha Sharma Sen, in a paper developed jointly with Dr. Pema Samdup, looked at the impact of gender on learning through distance mode by conducting a study of learners and counselling in five distance education programmes at Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). While it is commonly believed that distance education is especially suited to women who want to pursue education while rearing a family because of its twin features of flexibility in learning schedules as well as little or no requirement for attendance, this study explored whether these features of the system always work to the advantage of women.

The findings of their study include:
- Different approaches to study and learning styles are not necessarily related to gender.
- The amount of learner support needed is not determined by gender, and
- Gender perspectives in course materials do not correlate to the learner.

Some of the key recommendations that emerged in this session include:
- Increase access for women to all components of learning.
- Ensure we do not create new barriers to access for women through use of technology;
- and
- Provide adequate emotional and academic support to ODL learners.

The papers are available along with all papers presented at PCF5 at www.WikiEducator.org/pcf5.

**BOARD NEWS**

Following his nomination by Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr. Ramadath Sharma, COL’s Board of Governors has appointed Jamaica’s High Commissioner to the U.K., His Excellency, the Honourable Burchell Whitman, OJ, as its new Chair. He White-
man has been a member of COL’s Board since 2002 as the representative for the Car-
ibbean, has been Vice-Chair since 2007 and has served as Acting Chair since the death of Dr. Lewis Perinbam in December 2007. Starting his professional career more than 40 years ago as a teacher, he became a politi-
cian in 1989, served as Jamaica’s Minister of Education for 10 years and then as Informa-
tion Minister and Government Leader in the Senate. In 2006 he was awarded the Order of Jamaica for his outstanding contribution to education and the legislature and was also named an Honorary Fellow of COL. He took up his current London posting in early 2007.

“COL is truly fortunate to have such an experienced educator, politician and diplomat in this vital post,” said COL President Sir John Daniel. “Burchell gained a tremendous reputation for his work as Minister of Edu-
cation in Jamaica and was highly regarded by his fellow Ministers around the Com-
monwealth. With his thorough knowledge of information and communications technology and his familiarity with international development matters he is ideally equipped to lead COL in developing and implementing its Three-year Plan for 2009-12.”

Ms. Jenny Glennie, Director, South Afri-
can Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) and South Africa’s representative on the COL Board, has been elected Deputy Chair.

Professor Akilagpa Sawyerr has been ap-
pointed to the COL Board as the representa-
"tive for Africa. A distinguished Ghanaian and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana, Professor Sawyerr was until recently Secretary-General of the Association of Af-
rican Universities. He has held teaching and research appointments at universities and re-
search institutes in Africa, Europe, Asia and the U.S. and has authored numerous publica-
tions. Professor Sawyerr succeeds Professor Penina Mlamu on COL’s Board.

Maldive Minister of Education, the Hon-
ourable Zahiga Ali, is the Board’s new repre-
sentative for Asia. She is a former Chair of the Maldive National Commission for UNESCO and Minister of Gender, Family Development and Social Security. Her father was a minister in the former govern-
ment, her mother sat in the parliament and her uncle is the current Foreign Minister. The Board’s previous representative for Asia was Dr. Tara de Mel of Sri Lanka.

**Staff News**

Dr. Pema Ema Samdup has joined the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) as Programme Officer. She comes to CEMCA from the Indira Gad-
dhi National Open University where she was a Senior Lecturer in English and was also involved in curriculum design and course development.

Ms. Amy Monaghan has been appoint-
ed Manager of COL’s Information Resource Centre (IRC). She is responsible for manag-
ing COL’s physical library and maintain-
ing online resources such as news feeds and COL’s Knowledge Finder. Prior to joining COL in 2005, Ms. Monaghan was Library Manager with the City of Kalgoorlie-Boul-
der in Western Australia. She succeeds Mr. Nick Gao who left COL earlier this year.

COL’s new Information Technology Manager is Ms. Anna Lee. Prior to joining COL, Ms. Lee was Manager of Information Systems and Technology at the University of British Columbia Library in Canada and Di-

**People**

Mr. Peter McMechan has been appoint-
ed Manager of COL’s Knowledge Finder. Prior to joining COL in 2005, Mr. McMechan was Library Manager with the City of Kalgoorlie-Boul-
der in Western Australia. He succeeds Mr. Nick Gao who left COL earlier this year.

COL’s new Information Technology Manager is Ms. Anna Lee. Prior to joining COL, Ms. Lee was Manager of Information Systems and Technology at the University of British Columbia Library in Canada and Di-

**PEOPLE**

For information about current employment opportunities with COL, go to www.col.org/opportunities.
AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

The African Council for Distance Education Conference and General Assembly was hosted by the National Open University of Nigeria in July 2008. The conference attracted over 350 participants from five continents and 29 countries, and featured 15 distinguished speakers, including COL President Sir John Daniel and COL Board member Professor Michael Oromoena, Nigeria’s Ambassador/Permanent Delegate to UNESCO.

The theme of the conference, “Open and Distance Learning for Sustainable Development”, was addressed from a wide range of perspectives including national development, information technology, capacity building, quality assurance, teacher development and contribution to realising international development goals. The conference confirmed that open and distance learning (ODL) has taken centre stage in Africa and that the foundation has been laid for ODL to be included as a vital tool in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All agenda, eradicating poverty and bridging gender and digital gaps.

COL hosted a Governance Think Tank in London in July 2008 that included representatives from the Commonwealth Secretariat, the World Bank Institute, non-governmental organisations, universities and other Commonwealth organisations. The Think Tank provided an opportunity for participants to articulate governance visions and priorities, to validate perceived gaps and to explore synergies. Following the meeting, many of these organisations are continuing to explore opportunities for collaboration in the area of governance.

A SHARED ROADMAP FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

Prior to this year’s eLearning Africa conference, held in Accra, Ghana in May, UNESCO-UNEVOC and COL hosted their second annual Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Summit. This day-long meeting tackled the issue of the limited use of information and communication technology (ICT) in TVET in Africa. Some of the issues that were addressed were developing capacity in the use of ICT in TVET learning and teaching, increasing access and connectivity, and the need to locate content. At the Summit, Mr. Joshua Mallet, COL Education Specialist, Learning and Livelihoods, presented Certificates of Achievement recognising Good Practice in Use of ICT for TVET to:

- Global Learning, Vacuos Mauritius,
- Help a Needy Child in Sierra Leone and
- The Research Laboratory UTIC, Higher School of Sciences & Technologies,

“Development of an e-Learning Curriculum for Basic Training in Computer and Internet dedicated to Disabled Students and Students with Special Needs”

TVET SUMMIT AT eLEARNING AFRICA

COl, UNESCO and ICT4D Jamaica sponsored a community media development workshop in July 2008. The workshop was hosted by the Jeffrey Town Farmers Association in St. Mary. The Association operates a community radio station, JET FM, as well as a telecentre with the goal of increasing community learning and awareness about farming, livelihoods for young people and other relevant issues. The Jeffrey Town workshop was linked to COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme, which is launching in Jamaica, and was organised in conjunction with the Caribbean Agricultural Research Development Institute (CARDI).

The four-day workshop drew more than 30 participants who learned how to develop effective learning programmes. Sessions focused on addressing community educational needs with local resources, interviewing techniques, creating radio drama, radio production skills and programming. Workshop leaders included resource people from ICT4D, inner city Kingston community radio station ROOTS FM and the University of the West Indies’ Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication.

Part of COL’s Media for learning programme, this was the first in a series of five-day workshops on open and distance learning (ODL) design, planning and implementation for policy makers and practitioners from Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam. The workshops used freely available COL learning materials, such as the Knowledge Series, and were sponsored by Canada’s International Development Research Centre. Wawasan Open University is Malaysia’s first private not-for-profit tertiary institution dedicated to working adults.

ODL TRAINING FOR NINE ASIAN COUNTRIES

Wawasan Open University hosted two five-day workshops on open and distance learning (ODL) design, planning and implementation for policy makers and practitioners from Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam. The workshops used freely available COL learning materials, such as the Knowledge Series, and were sponsored by Canada’s International Development Research Centre. Wawasan Open University is Malaysia’s first private not-for-profit tertiary institution dedicated to working adults.

IGNOU ONLINE

India’s Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) launched IGNOU Online in June 2008. The portal offers all of the university’s knowledge resources online, including audiovisual materials, live webcasts of radio and TV channels, eGyanKosh (digital repository of knowledge resources), virtual classrooms and Sakshat (The Ministry of Human Resource Development’s one-stop educational portal). IGNOU Online enables the university’s students in 35 countries access live telecasts and extensive digital resources.

www.ignouonline.ac.in
The growing phenomenon of cross-border higher education will not help developing countries unless it is accessible, affordable, relevant, and of acceptable quality. This latest edition in COL’s Perspectives on Distance Education series focuses on the trends of cross-border higher education in the Caribbean, which has its own unique characteristics. The nine commissioned case studies provide an in-depth analysis and insights into a very complex and dynamic phenomenon. Are the foreign providers in the Caribbean pillagers or preceptors? Do they threaten existing institutions or further the developmental objectives of the countries they operate in? Are they a financial threat or an opportunity? Can the subjects they teach address both global and local concerns? Or is this a new form of cultural imperialism? These are some of the questions that this timely publication invites you to examine. The book can be downloaded for free from COL’s website.

www.col.org/ForeignProviders

CIVIL PATHS TO PEACE: REPORT OF THE COMMONWEALTH COMMISSION ON RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING

The Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding was established in response to the 2005 request of Commonwealth Heads of Government for the Commonwealth Secretariat-General to “explore initiatives to promote mutual understanding and respect among all faiths and communities in the Commonwealth”. “Civil Paths to Peace” contains the analyses and findings of the Commission. This report focuses on issues of terrorism, extremism, conflict and violence, and argues that cultivating respect and understanding is both important in itself and consequential in reducing violence and terrorism. Cultivated violence, it argues, is generated through fomenting disrespect and fostering confrontational misunderstandings. The report looks at the mechanisms through which violence is cultivated and presents methods of countering disaffection and violence, including general policy recommendations. This book presents civil paths to peace for use both inside the Commonwealth and its boundaries. The Commonwealth has survived and flourished, despite the hostilities associated with past colonial history, through the use of a number of far-sighted guiding principles. The Commission argues that those principles have continuing relevance today for the future of the Commonwealth – and also for the world at large.

“Civil Paths to Peace” is available for purchase through the Commonwealth Secretariat website.

www.thecommmonwealth.org/publications

A PROSPECTIVE VISION FOR UNIVERSITIES: THE ROLE OF THE TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER UNITS AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

By Dr. Luis Miguel Ramon Fernandez, Rector, Universidad Tecnica Particular De Loja, Ecuador. Translated from Spanish and published in English by COL.

In this thoughtful essay, the Rector of a thriving university in a remote area of Ecuador explores the crisis of the Latin America university (a situation that applies to many other developing countries), his response and a vision for the 21st century. In the words of COL president Sir John Daniel, “COL is publishing his essay in English so that it can inspire university leaders in other developing countries to escape from the stigma of the mental framework in which they are trapped and galvanise their institutions into effective action.”

www.col.org/Loja

The role of the technology transfer units and distance education

A perspective vision for universities: the role of the technology transfer units and distance education

By Dr. Luis Miguel Ramon Fernandez, Rector, Universidad Tecnica Particular De Loja, Ecuador. Translated from Spanish and published in English by COL.

www.col.org/DigitalWorld

EDUCATION FOR A DIGITAL WORLD, COLLABORATIVE RESOURCE AND COURSE MATERIALS

Co-published by COL and IICampus

This helpful guide, resource, textbook and manual for policymakers and practitioners in developing and developed countries explores how the digital revolution is transforming hierarchal, industrial-based models of teaching and learning. It offers a comprehensive collection of proven strategies and tools for effective online teaching. Through practical advice, real-life examples, case studies and useful resources, this book supplies in-depth perspectives about restructuring and fostering socially engaged learning in an online environment.

www.col.org/DigitalWorld

PERSPECTIVES ON DISTANCE EDUCATION:
FOREIGN PROVIDERS IN THE CARIBBEAN: PILLAGERS OR PRECEPTORS?

Edited by Stewart Marshall, Ed Brandon, Michael Thomas, Asha Kaurwe and Tore Lynga;
published by COL.

www.thecommonwealth.org/NOSTT_Handbook

www.thecommonwealth.org/CD-ROM

COSTS AND FINANCING IN OPEN SCHOOLS

By Ed Du Vivier; published by COL

This self-instructional resource book and CD-ROM were developed as a result of a COL-hosted workshop on the costs and financing of open and distance learning (ODL) in Gabarone, Botswana in 2007. The aim of the workshop was to build capacity to plan, negotiate and manage appropriate financial arrangements for the development and maintenance of ODL. These resources will support managers of open schools and open universities, policymakers, government representatives and other staff in ODL institutions. The 11 units cover important financial issues related to the costs and funding of ODL.

www.col.org/CoS_OpenSchools

www.thecommonwealth.org/ CostsofOpenSchools

TOOLs FOR OPEN sCHOOLS

MANUAL FOR THE TUTORS OF LEARNING CENTRES IN OPEN SCHOOLS

By Dr. Sudamita Mitra; published by COL

This self-instructional manual is for all those who would like to take up the challenging task of acting as a tutor in an educational programme following open and distance learning (ODL) methodologies. The five units explore the basics of ODL, curriculum and learning materials, tutoring in ODL, the process of monitoring, evaluation and monitoring.

www.col.org/Tutors_OpenSchools

GIRLS’ EDUCATION: A FOUNDATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

By Malakarim Wijayawardene

Published by the Commonwealth Foundation

An estimated 75 million children, the majority of whom are girls, are being denied their right to an education in the Commonwealth today. Despite several Commonwealth countries making some headway with the enrolment and retention of girls in education, overall progress remains patchy and many countries will not meet the education Millennium Development Goal (MDG) by 2015 if trends continue. This report from the Commonwealth Foundation provides an overview of the work being carried out with respect to the MDG focusing on eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education at all levels by 2015. The report analyses initiatives being taken on the ground by civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations in four Commonwealth countries that appear to be off-track from achieving the MDG target – Cameroon, India, Pakistan and Papua New Guinea – and offers recommendations for where governments and civil society organisations can go from here.

www.thecommonwealth.org/publications

UPDATED COL CD-ROM

COL has updated its CD-ROM of our most popular resource publications, news, and software. It now contains over 70 publications including training manuals, start-up guides and research, including all 25 titles in COL’s popular Knowledge Series, as well as free and open source software. While most of the contents are available in prior or on our web site, the CD-ROM provides a convenient, fast-loading compilation of the open and distance learning resources that COL has produced for public distribution and use. It is available upon request.

www.col.org/CD-ROM

HANDBOOK ON IN-HOUSE STYLE FOR COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Developed by Profsa Sandivanda Prabu; published by COL and the National Open School of Trinidad & Tobago

This Handbook provides the basics on how to create new curriculum or adapt existing classroom curriculum for open schooling, as well as how to acquire the required knowledge and skills to develop self-learning materials for school level distance learners. It is intended to be used by course writers and editors to give shape to their distance education curriculum and course units, and by trainers working with faculty who are new to distance learning.

www.col.org/NOSST_Handbook

The Commonwealth

The Commonwealth of Learning

The Commonwealth – and also for the world at large.

The Commission argues that those principles have continuing relevance today for the future of the Commonwealth – and also for the world at large.

“Civil Paths to Peace” is available for purchase through the Commonwealth Secretariat website.

www.thecommmonwealth.org/publications

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COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING

1005 West Hastings, Suite 1200

Vancouver, BC V6E 2S9 Canada

TEL: +1-604.775.8210 | FAX: +1-604.775.8210

E-MAIL: info@col.org | WEB: www.col.org

Edit-in-chief: Dave Whelan
Managing editor: Karen Speirs

Contributing writer: Grace Chin

Layout: Alex Hering

www.thecommonwealth.org/publications
Podcasts are digital audio files that are distributed over the Internet, often using syndication feeds, for playback on portable media players and computers. The term is a blend of “iPod” and “broadcast”, because the first podcasting scripts were developed for the Apple iPod. Today, people are producing and listening to podcasts about a wide range of topics. In the main, podcasts are simply .mp3 files, which have been around for years. The real value addition of podcasting is the automation of the content download process - once subscribed, you no longer need to go to a website to retrieve content, it comes to you automatically. The recent popularity is due to higher bandwidth availability, increased storage capacity and the proliferation of portable media players.

Podcasts offer interesting possibilities for the developing world because they offer a way for anyone, anywhere to get their voice heard. Audio offers an excellent medium for communicating complex ideas, and it overcomes literacy issues. While radio plays an important role in developing countries, and particularly rural areas, it is often a one-way medium. When people are taught how to make audio files, they can create their own podcasts, communicating information in the local context. And while radio stations require licenses and costly equipment, podcasts are low cost and logistically simpler.

Practical Action is a non-governmental organisation that has been working on podcasts for a rural area in northern Peru. Their podcasts provide practical information such as advice on grape cultivation or raising cattle. The information was gathered from experts and recorded as digital audio files that are sent to telecentres via the Internet. Since most people don’t have digital audio players, the telecentres broadcast the materials over loudspeakers.

While iPods and other portable media players have increased the popularity of podcasts in the developed world, lack of electricity is a barrier to the adoption of audio players in remote areas. As innovative solutions are created, the developing world stands to benefit from the learning potential of podcasts.

Organisations or individuals who are looking to advance podcasts or other community media projects are invited to contact Mr. Ian Pringle, COL Education Specialist, Media at i.pringle@col.org.

International roaming fees cost U.S. businesses $693.50 per trip for every global traveller – 12 times more than the average monthly wireless bill, according to a recent study by Brightroam.

There are several ways to reduce roaming charges if you use your mobile when travelling:

• Purchase a local SIM card. If you have a Global System for Mobile (GSM) phone, you can simply change the chip that slips into your phone so that you pay local rates.
• Use a “world phone”. You can purchase a special phone that can switch to GSM. However, connections are still expensive.
• Hire a phone at your destination. This can be an uncertain proposition, both in terms of costs and availability.

The bottom line is that acquiring a SIM card at your destination is the easiest way to control your mobile phone costs while travelling. The surest way to minimise costs? Leave your mobile at home.