

Women in the Changing World of Work

Video Message

International Women's Day

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by

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Greetings from the Commonwealth of Learning on International Women's Day. The theme this year is "Women in the Changing World of Work". It highlights the commitment of the international community to the empowerment of all women and girls, as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals. We at COL believe that women's economic empowerment will not only support sustainable development, but that it is essential to its achievement.

Globalization, technological advances and the digital revolution have provided positive changes, but not everyone has benefited from these equally. According to the 2016 Global Gender Gap Report, only 54 percent of working-age women take part in the formal economy, as compared to 81 percent of men. The report also shows that the rate of women's unemployment is nearly 2 percent higher, on average, globally.

How do we foster women's economic empowerment, and ensure they are prepared for the changing world of work? This can be done in two ways: one, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills for employment and entrepreneurship; and two, using innovative technologies to increase access to education and training.

Thanks to grants from Global Affairs Canada, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia, COL is supporting the schooling and skilling of girls and women using distance learning and technology. Under this initiative, 45,000 girls and women will have the opportunity to either complete secondary school or be trained in a skill for employment or entrepreneurship.

One of these girls is Marjorie, who lives in India. She lost both parents at the age of two and was raised by her grandmother. At 14, Marjorie left school to help support her family. She found work cleaning homes and was able to earn some money, but she aspired to do more. Through COL's partner Mann Deshi, Marjorie received training in macramé, life skills and financial literacy. She has since opened her own bank account and supplements her income through her own small business of making macramé hangings. She plans to complete her secondary school and then go in for tertiary education.

Marjorie is not alone. Shathi in Bangladesh has started her own mobile phone servicing business after undertaking a short course through our partner Centre for Mass Education in Science. In Pakistan, Nadia learned tailoring and curtain making and now has a steady demand for her services. She even spends her spare time helping other women with their vocational training. A group of girls in Tanzania have started their own baking enterprise after receiving

COL-supported training.

Education and training are leading to economic empowerment. However, this is not a simple equation and economic empowerment does not necessarily lead to household empowerment where women are able to take decisions. Even economically empowered women are vulnerable to violence and abuse. And often at the hands of disempowered men. Therefore much more needs to be done. COL has developed an Empowerment Index to measure empowerment at the economic, household and community levels. This will help both policy makers, civil society and the private sector to take appropriate measures to achieve gender equality.

We can achieve much more by working in partnership rather than alone. We have signed an MOU with UN Women to collaborate on ensuring that all these challenges are addressed. The ultimate satisfaction is in seeing the hope in the eyes of women and girls as they achieve their full human potential. Let's all, women and men, be the agents of change to make this happen.