

# Opening Remarks: Latin America and Caribbean OER Regional Consultation



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Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies & Gentlemen

A very warm welcome to each one of you joining us for the regional consultation on Open Educational Resources for Latin America and the Caribbean. This is the fifth in the series of six consultations. The Commonwealth of Learning is organising these in partnership with UNESCO and the government of Slovenia with generous support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Let me begin by thanking Prof Tel Amiel, University of Campinas for all his support and guidance without which we would not have been able to host this meeting here in Sao Paulo. We are also very grateful to Priscila Debora of EducaDigital Institute and UNESCO, Brasilia for the various ways in which they have provided advice and support to us.

The Commonwealth has 52 member states that span all regions of the globe, representing the rich diversity of our world. We have 12 Commonwealth Member States in the region and six of them are here today. But it's good to see a representation from the non-Commonwealth states as well. As you know, the Commonwealth of Learning or COL is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government with our headquarters in Metro Vancouver and a regional office in New Delhi. Our mission is to help Commonwealth member states and institutions to use technologies for expanding access to quality education and training. COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development.

In 2015, the world community adopted the 17 SDGs. SDG 4 aspires to promote equitable and quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030. Early reports indicate that many countries will fall way behind this target. Therefore innovative approaches are needed to achieve both speed and scale. We believe that Open Educational Resources or OER have tremendous potential for increasing access and lowering the costs of quality education. The theme of these consultations then is 'OER for equitable and quality education: from commitment to action'.

COL was promoting the development and sharing of open content long before the term OER was coined in 2002. For example, COL worked with 140 teachers in 8 southern African countries to develop 46 teacher training modules. This content was uploaded on Afristar and could be downloaded for free use and reuse by anyone anywhere in Africa. COL's approach has been to open up education by sharing content, developing capacity and promoting collaboration. Openness has always been part of COL's DNA.

This is something that we share with our partners UNESCO. Many of you will recall the World OER Congress that we organised jointly in 2012. We share a long-standing partnership based on complementarity and clear division of labour. For example, UNESCO has a high level Competency Framework for Teachers and COL created the open educational resources to develop these competencies. These resources were then deployed for teacher training in Guyana. The joint UNESCO-COL publications on OER are used globally and available in a number of languages. It's good to see Joe Hironaka here today.

Slovenia is a more recent partner. Gaspar and Mitja have been working closely with us in planning the regional consultations and played an active role in the previous meetings. Slovenia has been an early champion of the OER movement and their 'Opening up Slovenia' initiative establishes their leadership in the field.

Without the support of Hewlett, the 2012 World Congress would not have been possible. Nor would these regional consultations, if it had not been for the active support of Hewlett Foundation.

Latin America and the Caribbean have been at the forefront of the OER movement and have much to share with the rest of the world. When we carried out a governmental survey in 2012, we found that OER activity in the region was spread across the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of education. OER projects were already being implemented in Costa Rica and Jamaica. Paraguay and Uruguay were opening up educational materials under open licences. Trinidad and Tobago was active in capacity building and content development on OER. Brazil even then, had several key OER initiatives such as Condigital, Portal do Professor, TV Escola etc. Mexico too had initiated the production of digital learning resources. Now five years later, what is the status? The consultation will help us share the OER developments in different countries and suggest concrete actions that we need to take to mainstream OER.

It is significant that our meeting is taking place in Sao Paulo which approved a Bill in 2011 stating that all resources and materials with 'educational, pedagogical and similar purposes' (Rossini & Castro, 2016, p.52) must be openly licensed. Brazil not only has government-led initiatives but also several private and community-led projects in OER.

Thanks to each one of you for being part of this important initiative. Let me once again thank our hosts, the University of Campinas, our partners UNESCO, Slovenia and Hewlett who have all contributed generously to making this event possible.