

Press for Progress

Video Message

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by

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Greetings from the Commonwealth of Learning on International Women's Day 2018. The theme this year is "Press for Progress," a call for the entire global community to come together to achieve gender parity. A top priority for COL is to close the gender gap by promoting women's economic empowerment by providing access to learning. We use appropriate technologies to achieve both speed and scale.

COL has adopted a targeted approach to reaching women and girls in remote areas and providing them with the knowledge and skills they need for employment and entrepreneurship. The results are very encouraging. Of the 35,000 women and girls trained in five countries—Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mozambique and Tanzania—nine thousand already have enhanced opportunities for livelihoods.

Take for example, Atia, in Bangladesh. Atia was married at the age of 12 to a 15 year old boy and was already a mother at 14. She participated in the COL-supported training in sewing and tailoring, and obtained a loan from her father to buy her own sewing machine. As a small business owner, Atia has now been able to make a significant change in her life, including opening a bank account where she deposits savings regularly. She has more confidence and an increased role in household decision making.

The prevalence of child, early and forced marriage is still a matter of concern. COL's advocacy efforts with communities is beginning to effect social change. In Mozambique, Flora's early marriage was prevented by the timely intervention of a member of the community who convinced the parents and the husband-to-be of the benefits of education. As a result, the marriage has been postponed until Flora completes school and is 18 years of age.

Because of the training COL is supporting, women and girls are seizing new opportunities. Shagufta, in Pakistan, is the first female reporter in her district. Shagufta completed life skills and vocational training with COL's partner SPARC, which encouraged her to pursue work in media, by enrolling in an internship at a local TV station.

These examples show how COL is pressing for progress, but much more needs to be done. Let me add two more 'Ps' to the theme of 'press for progress.' The first is passion. Let us have a strong desire to make a difference and let this passion be contagious. The second is perseverance. It is not easy to bring about social change and we will encounter many barriers and challenges on the way. But the point is to never give in. With strong determination and clear action, let us press on.