

# LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING



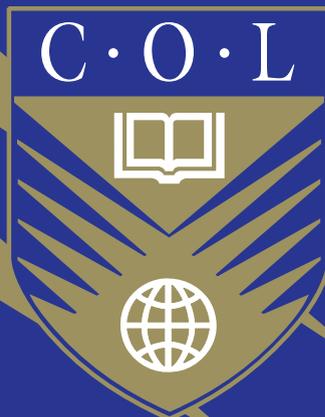
## Towards a Common Future

## COL AT THIRTY

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation established by Commonwealth Heads of Government thirty years ago when they met for CHOGM 1987 in Canada. The headquarters of COL are in Metro Vancouver, with a regional office for Asia in New Delhi.

COL was established to help Commonwealth Member States and institutions to use distance learning and technologies for expanding access to education and training. The Heads of Government defined **COL's purpose** as follows:

**“to create and widen access to opportunities for learning...COL's activities will aim to strengthen member countries' capacities to develop the human resources required for their economic and social development ...working in cooperation with Governments and other Commonwealth agencies and educational institutions ...consistent with the principles that have guided the Commonwealth.” (MOU)**



*Celebrating*  
**30**   
*Years of COL*



Over the years, COL has earned the reputation of being an effective and innovative organisation that is well respected around the Commonwealth.

COL is responsive, results-oriented and accountable. It has evolved to remain relevant to the needs of Member States. COL is a source of world-class expertise in open, distance and technology-based approaches. COL develops innovative models, quality resources and supports capacity-building.



COL believes that learning is our common wealth and will serve to create our common future.

COL's Strategic Plan 2015-2021, entitled "Learning for Sustainable Development," aligns closely with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aspires to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030.

In order to achieve this, COL has organised its work in two sectors — education and skills, with gender as a crosscutting theme.

**For COL, learning is the key to sustainable development and must lead to opportunities for economic empowerment, social inclusion and environmental conservation.**



## ● ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

COL's **Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme** is offered by universities in 11 countries. This high-quality distance learning programme enrolled over 30,000 learners, of whom 14,000 have already graduated. A recent study conducted at the Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan, indicates that the graduates of this programme saw an increase of 38% in their monthly income, and every dollar invested resulted in \$3.40 direct returns for the learners.



Raymond Loh, an alumnus of Wawasan Open University, Malaysia, completed this programme in his early fifties and started a moving and relocation service, which now has a presence in 40 countries.

Ministers of Education directed COL to establish a **Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)**. All 31 small states of the Commonwealth are active members of this consortium. Small states develop needs-based courses collaboratively that are available as Open Educational Resources (OER). Twenty-three institutions in 14 countries are offering these courses. As a result of shared courses, tuition fees for the VUSSC students have been reduced by 69% as compared to students at a campus institution in Botswana.

Leafaitulagi Vaaelua is one of the graduates of the VUSSC diploma in sustainable agriculture from the National University of Samoa and is in full-time employment.

**Non-formal learning is equally important. COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers' project has lifted thousands of farmers out of poverty in 11 Commonwealth countries. Women in India learnt agriculture and enterprise development skills using basic mobile phones. Every dollar invested has generated assets worth \$9.**

In Kenya, COL supported women to start agri-enterprises. A recent study concludes that learning leads to empowerment and for every 1% increase in empowerment, there is a 2.3% increase in profits.



**69%** REDUCTION  
IN TUITION FEES

**1%** = **2.3%**

EMPOWERMENT = PROFITS

## ● SOCIAL INCLUSION

As Member States achieve success in providing universal primary education, there are still significant barriers preventing many young people from entering secondary education. **Open schools** can provide flexible learning opportunities through the use of distance learning. In an open school in Belize, research shows that every dollar invested has resulted in \$8 worth of perceived benefits to students.



A COL study shows that open schooling costs well below conventional secondary schools.

The National Institute of Open Schooling, India, costs one-tenth and the Namibian College of Open Learning costs one-fifth of what it costs to put a student through a government secondary school. It is for this reason that 27 Commonwealth Member States have established open schools.

The first cohort of out-of-school youth in a remote fishing village in Trinidad & Tobago graduated through a COL-supported open school. The entire curriculum was structured around fisheries, which addressed the livelihood needs of the young people.



## GIRLS INSPIRE RESULTS

35,289



WOMEN AND GIRLS  
completed skills and  
vocational training

6,673



WOMEN AND GIRLS  
in income generating  
opportunities

177,568



COMMUNITY MEMBERS  
reached

453



CHILD MARRIAGES  
prevented



Even today there is a wide prevalence of **child, early and forced marriage** across the Commonwealth. Under GIRLS Inspire, COL is training girls and women in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mozambique and Tanzania for employment and entrepreneurship.

**Not everyone in the Commonwealth has Internet connectivity.**

To overcome this, COL has developed **Aptus** — a low-cost offline virtual classroom that provides learners in remote locations access to digital resources. Aptus has been deployed with effective outcomes in Pakistan, Kiribati, Samoa and Vanuatu and is a useful tool to reach the last mile. Aptus is being deployed in Tonga following Cyclone Gita.

## ● ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

**Environmental sustainability is a central concern for the Commonwealth, particularly the small states.**

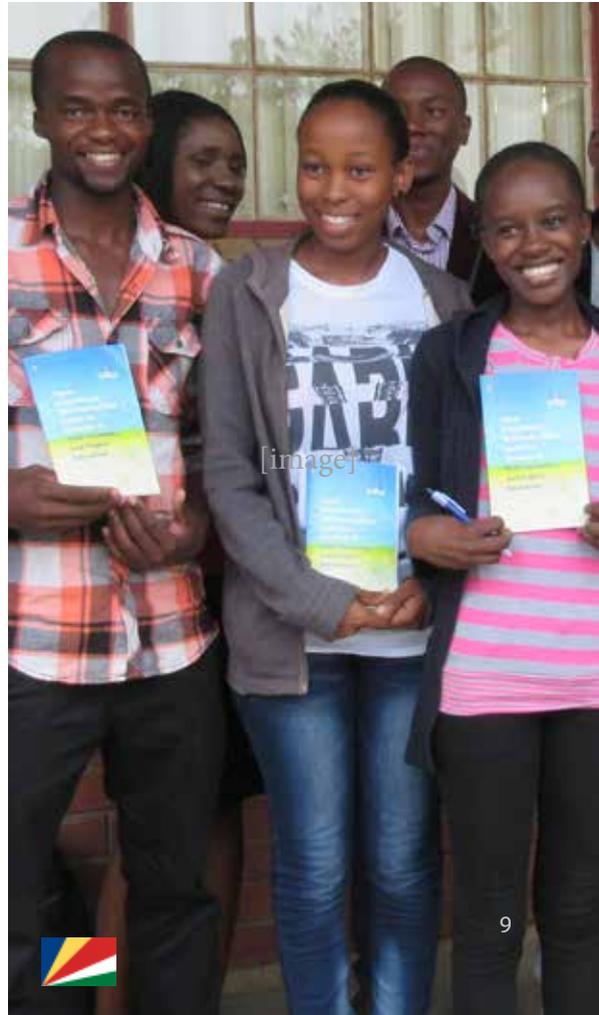
Working with the **Blue Economy** Institute in Seychelles, COL supported the development of an online course in this emerging field, which was offered free by the University of Seychelles. The first cohort attracted learners from 24 countries worldwide.





In partnership with the National Teachers Institute, Nigeria, COL has developed a **Green Teacher** course to ensure that teachers inculcate environmental concerns amongst school children from an early stage.

A recent study conducted in Botswana showed that the **carbon footprint** of a VUSSC distance learning student was only one-third of that of their campus-based counterparts. Since COL supports distance and technology-based approaches, environmental sustainability is integral to its operations.



LEARNERS FROM **24** COUNTRIES PARTICIPATED in Blue Economy course



CARBON FOOTPRINT REDUCED BY **1/3**



## ● GLOBAL COOPERATION

Collaboration and partnership are fundamental to everything that COL does. In the last two years, COL has worked with nearly 300 partners in the Commonwealth and beyond.



COL's triennial conference, the **Pan Commonwealth Forum**, was organised in partnership with the Open University of Malaysia, and attracted over 500 participants from 60 countries, including several Commonwealth ministers of education. This resulted in the 2016 Kuala Lumpur Declaration, which provides a clear roadmap of how distance and technology-based learning can lead to sustainable development.

COL is an acknowledged world leader in open educational resources and organised six regional consultations worldwide in collaboration with UNESCO, the government of Slovenia and Hewlett Foundation, leading to the **2<sup>nd</sup> World OER Congress** held in Ljubljana in September 2017, where several Commonwealth ministers of education were also present.





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COL's **eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO)** initiative helps organisations such as the Council of Europe, Norwegian Refugee Council, United Nations Agencies and the World Bank to build the capacity of their staff to respond to humanitarian challenges in the field.

**eLIO enables field staff to continue learning while working in some of the world's most dangerous conflict zones.**

## LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: OUR COMMON FUTURE

Education and skills development play a critical role in achieving sustainable development. Learning empowers citizens to take greater responsibility for their own well-being, as well as that of their societies and environment. Through its work, COL is building on its strengths and leadership in open, distance and technology-based approaches and working with global and national partners to transform the concept of sustainable development into a concrete reality.



**110+**

**INSTITUTIONS**  
Adopted COL models  
and materials



**370,000+**

**LEARNERS**  
(over 50% women)



**280+**

**PARTNERS in 42**  
countries



**2,200+**

**LEARNING RESOURCES**  
Collaboratively Developed



**A++**  
**RATING**

by DFID

*Data is based on COL progress reports 2015-2018.*



**COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING (COL)**

4710 Kingsway, Suite 2500

Burnaby, BC V5H 4M2 Canada

Phone + 604 775 8200 / Fax + 604 775 8210



info@col.org



www.col.org



@col4d



facebook.com/COL4D/



instagram.com/commonwealthoflearning/