

With Her: A Skilled GirlForce

Video Message

International Day of the Girl

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by

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Greetings from the Commonwealth of Learning on International Day of the Girl. The theme this year is “With Her: A Skilled GirlForce.” It calls on the global community to work with and for girls to expand learning opportunities and equip them with the required skills to successfully transition into the world of work. COL has been at the forefront of providing opportunities for girls to attain skills for employability and entrepreneurship.

Young people are a key resource for the future of our society, accounting for over 15 per cent of the world’s workforce. According to the [2017 Global Employment Trends for Youth](#), 34.4 per cent of women and girls globally are neither in employment, education or training as compared to 9.8 per cent males.

How is COL contributing to the development of a skilled girlforce? By harnessing the potential of technologies and using innovative approaches to increase access to education and training. Thanks to grants from the governments of Canada and Australia, COL has trained thousands of marginalised girls in skills for livelihoods in five countries: Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Pakistan and Tanzania. In the last two years, we have trained over 47,000 women and girls, of whom nearly 9,000 have new sources of income generation.

One of these girls is Sidra, from Pakistan. Sidra, a school dropout, learnt sewing machine operation with COL’s support and upon completion, started her own tailoring business at home. She earns an average of 40,000 Pakistani rupees monthly and has now enrolled in a secondary school. Sidra is paying her siblings’ tuition fees and also supporting her family.

COL is also contributing to breaking gender stereotypes and harmful social norms by training girls in non-traditional skills such as computing, mobile repairs and electrical installation. Zinha, in Mozambique, was already being prepared by her father for marriage to a well-off man when she enrolled in a COL-supported

electrician's course. She has completed her training and has become a powerful advocate against child, early and forced marriage.

In Tanzania, Agatha became pregnant while in form one and this marked the end of her formal schooling. Many girls like her have their dreams cut short and lose the chance to acquire the necessary skills to enter the job market. However, after enrolling in COL's project, Agatha gained the skills of food processing, soap and batik making. She has now registered to continue with her secondary education. And hopes to go on to study engineering at the university. Zinha is inspiring more girls in her community to get an education.

These are but three examples of how girls from the remotest communities have gone from dependency to becoming members of a productive girlforce. COL not only supports the skilling of girls but links these learners with employers and financial institutions in their communities.

One of the reasons for the success of COL's project is that it actively involves the girls, their families and communities. COL works with the girls to define their needs and catalyses the linkages between key stakeholders. This is a participatory approach that works with the community to support girls' learning for sustainable livelihoods.

On this International Day of the Girl, let us celebrate our successes and resolve to take up the many challenges that still remain. Our mothers, had limited options. Today girls know that the world of endless opportunities awaits them. The sky is the limit and the only limitation for girls today is if they limit their imagination! Let your imagination soar and work hard to make your dreams a reality. This is what girlforce is about!