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Your excellencies, it is a pleasure to be ‘virtually’ present at this model CHOGM.

I had the privilege of attending the CHOGM held last year where Heads of Government from 46 Commonwealth countries congregated in London to discuss the theme ‘Towards a Common Future’. They focused on how to achieve a future which is fairer, more sustainable, more secure and more prosperous. This links nicely with the theme of your model CHOGM—‘sustainable communities’.

Approximately 60 percent of Commonwealth citizens are under the age of 30. The London CHOGM focused on youth empowerment and discussed how our young people can lead their communities towards peace, prosperity, social cohesion and environmental conservation.

Heads also adopted the Commonwealth Blue Charter, setting out the principles by which Commonwealth member states will lead international efforts by sustainably developing and protecting our oceans. The pollution of our marine life and water resources has reached the point when the seafood on our plate may well contain traces of plastic. What can we do to reverse this troubling trend and keep our oceans pure?

Climate change is not only putting significant pressure on the world’s oceans. It is also a harsh reality for many Commonwealth countries, especially small states. In February last year, Cyclone Gita hit Tonga with devastating impact. Schools were washed away, roofs blown off, and learning materials lost. COL has developed Aptus, a mobile server with its own wifi and solar charger which can be used where there is no electricity or data connectivity and it costs only \$ 150. We uploaded secondary school materials including videos from Khan Academy, ‘Wikipedia for Schools’ and other sources on these devices and sent them with tablets to the Minister of Education in Tonga, so that children could resume school without further delay.

Supporting education in member states is the main reason why Heads decided to establish my organisation the Commonwealth of Learning or COL over 30 years ago when they met in Vancouver. COL is the only Commonwealth intergovernmental organisation hosted by the government of Canada. The other two intergovernmental organisations, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation are both in London. Our headquarters are in beautiful British Columbia, with a regional office for Asia in New Delhi.

COL’s mission is to help Commonwealth member states and institutions to use technologies for expanding access to education and training. COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development. Learning must lead to opportunities for economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation.

First, how has COL supported economic growth? COL's Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme is offered by universities in 11 countries. 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. Non-formal learning is equally important. These women in India have learnt agriculture and enterprise development skills using basic mobile phones. Every dollar invested has generated assets worth \$9.

Two, how does COL's work support social inclusion? COL provides skills development to some of the world's most vulnerable and hard-to-reach-girls. Thanks to additional support from the government of Canada, we offer training for improved livelihoods in five countries Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mozambique and Tanzania. In the last three years, nearly 49,000 girls have been trained and over 11,000 are now in income generating activities. Many girls across the Commonwealth are not as privileged as the young people here in Canada. Girls as young as 12 are often married off to older men. Because of this skills training, over 1100 child marriages have been prevented in these five countries. Girls are receiving training in mobile phone repairs, technology, carpentry, baking, tailoring, and financial literacy. Some of them are also going back to school.

Third, what is COL's contribution to environmental conservation? Environmental sustainability is a central concern for everyone, 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 to anyone anywhere in the world.

These are some examples of how COL promotes learning which leads to sustainable development. Access to education is viewed by many as the single most powerful solution for building sustainable communities.

The next CHOGM will take place in 2020 in Rwanda. The meeting is expected to focus once again on youth empowerment, as well as innovation, trade, arts and culture.

If we are to address the magnitude of the challenges facing the Commonwealth today, we need to go beyond the 'business as usual approach' and think about innovations and alternative approaches. As Heads of Government, please focus on innovations in your deliberations.

Do we need to be born innovators or is this a skill that can be acquired? After studying thousands of innovators, Dyer et al (2013) in their book *The Innovator's DNA* have distilled the skills that all innovators share. These are simple skills: questioning, observing, networking and experimenting. What does this mean? Innovators ask questions all the time. Asking simple questions can often lead to profound discoveries. Steve Jobs wanted to know why computers needed a fan in the first place and the rest is history. Observing closely is a skill that all innovators share—they try to carefully understand how people, technologies and systems work and arrive at insights and lessons that can be helpful in their own situation. In addition, innovators are great networkers—and here we don't just refer to social networking but meeting with people from different backgrounds and disciplines to explore ideas, which can further trigger new ideas. And finally innovators are always trying out new experiences and solutions. So innovation is a skill that can be mastered by all of us.

You are our common wealth and the future lies in your hands.
