

Remarks at COL Board of Governors' Reception



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Pan Pacific Hotel
Vancouver, BC

Professor Asha Kanwar
President & CEO, Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

Chair, Members of the Board, Friends of COL, Distinguished Guests,

Thank you all for joining us, and I hope that you are having a wonderful time. I am especially grateful to the members of our Board for travelling thousands of miles from all corners of our Commonwealth. We are fortunate to have a very eminent and committed board that inspires us with innovative ideas to keep raising the bar. I hope they are as proud of us as we are of them!

COL may not be so well known to some of you, but our stakeholders in the 53 Member States that we serve, know us well. This is all because of the hard work of our diverse and dedicated staff that comes from the different regions of the Commonwealth—right from the Pacific to Asia, Africa, Europe, the Caribbean and our host country Canada.

COL works with governments to develop policy-level interventions. But we also work with institutions and grassroots communities. COL supported the National Universities Commission, Nigeria to develop an Open Educational Resources (OER) policy as a result of which 165 universities are now making use of OER with an impact on tens of thousands of students. Edward Eterika, a young professional from Fiji, completed a COL diploma in legislative drafting and is already re-writing three legislative acts in his country.

Thanks to the generous contributions from Australia and Canada, COL has worked with the most marginalized communities in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mozambique and Tanzania to train 63000 girls. Rupali from India who had dropped out of school enrolled in a COL-supported training and today she is known as a 'goat doctor' and earns her livelihood through goat rearing. She is but one example of the thousands of girls like her who now have enhanced economic opportunities.

Skilled human resource is a key priority for Commonwealth governments. Mugeni Prossy from Uganda used to wash dishes in a hotel. Through a course supported by COL, she discovered a passion for software development and graphic design, and now knows that a hearing impairment does not have to limit her career options and is currently a programmer. Ethan Henry, a farmer from Antigua and Barbuda, benefited from COL's lifelong learning for farmers programme and is now able to turn his subsistence farming into a profitable business. These stories give you a

flavor of what we do. And all this is possible because of the support from Commonwealth Member States.

As a small organization, COL is able to punch well above its weight by investing in innovations. But innovation can become a cliché if we do not raise the questions ‘innovation for what’ and ‘innovation for whom’? We need to contextualize innovation in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals and the diversity of our Commonwealth. The focus must be on transformative learning which leads to the 3 Es; Economic growth, Equity, and Environmental conservation. COL’s role is to use technologies and innovation to help countries accelerate progress towards achieving sustainable development.

In fact innovations for quality education and lifelong learning is the theme of the 9th Pan-Commonwealth Forum that we are co-hosting with the Open University, UK in Edinburgh, this September. This forum provides an opportunity to tap into the vast knowledge and unique perspectives from the Commonwealth and beyond, to better serve the last person in the queue.

We have come a long way but much more remains to be done. Thank you for your continued support!