

Responding to the Nadi Declaration - Education for Resilience



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Chair, Ministers, Excellencies, Colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity to present the Commonwealth of Learning's response to the Nadi Declaration, the communique from the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers that was hosted by Fiji two years ago.

As you know, COL is the only Commonwealth intergovernmental organisation not in London.

Our mission is to help Commonwealth Member States and institutions to use technologies for expanding access to quality education and training.

COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development. Learning must lead to economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation.

Even though we are a small organisation, we leverage the potential of new and existing technologies to achieve both speed and scale. We have activities in 47 Member States.

How can technologies help us to address the question posed at the 20th CCEM—can education deliver for sustainability and resilience? Let me take six recommendations from the Nadi Declaration and give you examples of COL's response.

First, ministers stressed the need for quality education regardless of circumstances.

In Mozambique COL has worked with 15 schools in all regions of the country to develop quality content in Portuguese—staff have been trained in technology enabled learning and the courses will be piloted this February.

These young students go to a COL-supported open school in Belize. Research shows that every \$ invested has resulted in \$ 8 worth of benefits to students.

The Aptus device, a COL innovation, helped restore classes in the aftermath of a cyclone in Tonga. This device is now being deployed in the schools which were destroyed in the Bahamas.

Second, the Nadi Declaration identifies 'high quality teaching' as a priority.

Integrating technology into teaching is often a challenge for teachers in both developed and developing countries. In partnership with Athabasca University, Canada, COL recently offered a MOOC on

Technology Enabled Learning where teachers from 76 countries around the world participated, including from 42 Commonwealth member states.

COL is supporting school-based teacher development in The Gambia, Kiribati, Sierra Leone and South Africa to improve learning outcomes.

Nomalungisa Maxengana teaches in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. As a result of COL training, she learned how to download YouTube videos and create podcasts which she used to prepare learners for exams. She also shared videos via the messaging platform Whats App, and was amazed by the enthusiasm of the learners.

Third, the Nadi Declaration calls on the educational community to ‘enable success, future education and employment’

COL has established a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) and all 31 small states of the Commonwealth are active members of this consortium. Leafaitulagi Vaaelua is a graduate of the VUSSC diploma in sustainable agriculture offered by the National University of Samoa and is already in full-time employment in her country.

COL’s Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme is offered by universities in 11 countries. After graduating from this programme, Annelise, a former mathematics instructor in Mauritius is now a deputy rector of a school.

In Uganda, 95 boys and girls received advanced ICT skills training for six months—of these 74 are already employed or self-employed. One of them, a hearing impaired girl washed dishes in a hotel and is now a programmer with an NGO.

Fifth, the Nadi Declaration is firm in its commitment to ‘tackle gender disparities in education, whether that be boys or girls’.

With support from the governments of Canada and Australia, COL launched a project to empower women and girls.

COL has worked with partners in five countries, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mozambique and Tanzania, to skill girls for livelihoods. In the last three years, over 80000 girls have received skills training, more than 16000 have found new sources of income and 1181 child early and forced marriages have been averted.

COL supported the University of Guyana’s Symposium: Bridging the Gender Divide: Stemming the Tide of Male Underachievement in the Education System The Communique made seven recommendations for advancing boys’ education. The video relates the story of four young male teachers from Guyana who dropped out of school, and their journey back to education as teachers.

Fifth, the Nadi Declaration draws attention to the ‘need for climate change awareness and increased awareness of green and blue technologies’

COL worked with the National Teachers Institute, Nigeria, to develop a Green Teacher course which aims to ensure that teachers inculcate environmental concerns amongst school children from an early stage. This is being offered online to 20,000 teachers in the country.

Working with the Blue Economy Institute in Seychelles, COL supported the development of an online course which was offered free to anyone anywhere in the world.

Following the devastation of Hurricane Maria in Dominica, COL supported the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development to create locally-produced audio and video clips to empower citizens to be better prepared for future disasters.

Finally, the Ministers urged us to strengthen educational partnerships

COL is collaborating with COMSEC and the University of the West Indies to offer a joint qualification on youth development. This initial partnership has now expanded to include 18 institutions around the Commonwealth.

COL is working with ACU on a higher education project where it provides quality assurance expertise to 18 universities in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

COL's triennial Pan Commonwealth Forum was organized in partnership with the Open University, UK in Edinburgh last September. COL had 15 partners for this event which included UNESCO Paris, UNESCO IITE, Moscow and UIL, Hamburg.

The climate crisis is one of the defining issues of our times. How does the climate crisis effect the education sector? According to UNICEF, more than 3000 classrooms and over 330,000 students were affected when Cyclone Idai, hit Mozambique. Hurricane Dorian destroyed 90% of the infrastructure in The Bahamas and many schools were deemed unsafe for students.

The education sector too contributes to both direct and indirect emissions, with an impact on environmental degradation and associated economic costs.

In China, approximately 40% of the energy consumption in the public sector comes from higher education alone.

Komatsu and Rappleye observed that countries having "better" education tended to have more detrimental impacts on climate change. While education has many positive impacts, we must remember that economic development is associated with higher rates of construction, consumption, and energy use.

How can we leverage the power of education to support environmental sustainability? There are many 'green' models available. Let me just refer to one. The Open University UK supported a project to assess the environmental impacts of different modes of delivery in higher education. The findings showed that online and blended models had significantly lower environmental impacts than face-to-face teaching modes. COL conducted a similar study in Botswana, which found that the average carbon footprint of the face-to-face group is nearly three times greater than that of the distance learning group. Within the overall carbon footprint, emissions from travel were by far the greatest contributor to this disparity. This suggests that ODL or blended modes can decrease emissions by reducing face-to-face contact hours.

COL is your organisation and it works for you. Please draw on our resources and expertise to address your priorities. Thank you for your contributions and for your kind attention.