Reimagining education for a sustainable future

Widespread and dangerous disruptions caused by human-induced climate change are affecting the lives of billions around the world. People and ecosystems least able to cope are hardest hit, and immediate action is needed to secure our future. This urgent plea was recently voiced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and is particularly relevant for the Commonwealth — whose Member States include 32 of the world’s 42 small states.

Climate change education has a strong role to play in both human and institutional capacity development. It builds knowledge and triggers changes in attitudes and behaviours and can have a significant ripple effect. Yet it has not become a priority in either policy or practice.

In a recent UNESCO survey of teachers, nearly 95 per cent of respondents indicated it is “important” or “very important” to teach about the severity of climate change and its effects, yet fewer than 40 per cent were confident about being able to teach these topics.

For the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), environmental conservation is one of the key dimensions of learning for sustainable development, alongside economic growth and social inclusion.

Advancing climate change education requires aligning environmental and education policies, and mainstreaming climate change at all levels of education. Investing in teacher professional learning and championing inter-sectoral collaboration and policy coherence are other critical steps.

Last but not least, the relevant curricula must include indigenous perspectives, as these are crucial to ensuring that our response to climate change makes use of traditional and cultural knowledge.

With its focused expertise in distance learning and technologies, COL can add value to formulating mitigation strategies and strengthening resilience to climate change.

From blue economy MOOCs to green teacher curricula to building public awareness about disaster preparedness, COL is offering bold and innovative solutions to help reimagine education for a sustainable future.

“COL can add value to formulating mitigation strategies and strengthening resilience to climate change.”
COL has set up a high-level panel to identify a road map for building resilient education and skills-training systems fostering environmental conservation across the Commonwealth.

The panel is chaired by Dr Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, United Nations Environment Programme. Members include Commonwealth ministers and representatives of UNESCO and its institutes.

The panel will provide recommendations on ways distance education and technologies can be harnessed appropriately to mitigate the carbon footprint of education and training. It will advise on changes to school, college and university curricula urgently needed to address issues related to climate change and will highlight opportunities for research and collaboration. Another focus area will be building resilience in small island developing states.

In November 2021 and January 2022, COL hosted online meetings of the panel. The focus was on identifying key education stakeholders and drivers of change, as well as the concrete actions that COL can take to support Member States in advancing climate action (through policy, capacity, resources and research).

Some of the key takeaways were: the importance of investing in education for intergenerational, long-term impact; effecting behavioural change; engaging and empowering youths; building the capacity of teachers; and collaborating with the private sector.

The final report will provide recommendations for how the Commonwealth can advance a green learning agenda and contribute to global efforts to mitigate the impact of climate change.

Registration for PCF10 is now open

The early-bird, in-person registration rate of CAD 595 | USD 475 is available until 30 June 2022. For more information, visit: https://pcf10.org/registration/.

Travel sponsorship to attend PCF10

In an effort to broaden participation in the Forum, COL co-ordinates the allocation of subsidies for registration, fees, accommodation and/or airfare. These funds are provided to delegates who otherwise would not be able to participate in PCF10. The travel sponsorship application deadline is 15 April 2022.

For selection criteria and application details, please visit: https://www.col.org/news/travel-sponsorship-to-pcf10/.

Call for award nominations

COL recognises and honours excellence in open, distance and technology-enabled learning through the Excellence in Distance Education Awards (EDEA). The 2019–2022 awards will be presented at PCF10. Highly valued by recipients, the awards recognise institutional achievements, innovations in distance and online learning, as well as advances in the development of learning materials, including open educational resources. The nomination deadline is 30 April 2022.

For more details, please visit: https://www.col.org/about/pan-commonwealth-forum/excellence-distance-education-awards/.

UNESCO World Higher Education Conference

The conference, in a hybrid format, will be organised from 18 to 20 May 2022 in Barcelona, Spain.

Climate action challenge for Indian youths

In partnership with the UNESCO office in New Delhi, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) is hosting the 2022 edition of its community broadcast challenge for Indian students under the age of 25. The theme is “Climate Action: Climate Change for Sustainable Development.” For more details, visit: https://www.crvceemca.org/.

Podcasts for girls’ education

With COL’s support, female teachers in Northern Nigeria created 239 audio resources in the core subjects: Basic Science, Computer Studies, English, Mathematics and Social Studies. They were subsequently aired on Alheri Radio, a station in Kaduna state, with an estimated daily reach of about 1.3 million listeners.

OER policies for Mauritius and Seychelles

As a leader in promoting open educational resources (OER), COL is working with education ministries across the Commonwealth to help them achieve scale and sustainability. With COL’s support, the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, has adopted a national inclusive OER policy. In Mauritius, COL presented the highlights of a national OER policy to the Honourable Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Education, during an online ceremony. As well, a strategy for improving school education in Seychelles was completed and presented to the Honourable Dr Justin Valentin, Minister of Education.

Innovative leadership for open education

Professor Asha Kanwar delivered an online presentation at the ICDE Leadership Summit 2022. She noted that leaders shaping the future of open education post-Covid-19 will need to invest in the three Ps: philosophy, people and processes.

You can watch the presentation on COL’s YouTube channel at: https://youtu.be/z4xu4jiWShg.

Communication skills for open learning

COL offered a short course to over 1,000 teachers from the Pacific, helping improve their communication skills in open, distance and flexible learning contexts. For course details, visit: https://tinyurl.com/4hw66rxc.

Upcoming MOOCs

- **Fluid Therapy and Management of Clinical Syndrome in Cattle and Small Ruminants**
  - 22 March – 2 May 2022
  - Register at https://www.agmoocs.in

- **Leading Change in Teaching and Learning for a Digital World**
  - 27 March – 24 April 2022
  - Register at https://www.lctl.org

- **Authentic Assessment for Online Learning**
  - 9 May – 3 June 2022
  - Register at https://www.mooc4dev.org/AAL
Dr B. R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU), Telangana state, India became the latest Indian open university to offer the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia’s (CEMCA) massive open online course (MOOC) on developing courses for the SWAYAM learning platform. In response to the Covid-19 disruptions, Indian universities and colleges were encouraged to make use of SWAYAM. Last year, India’s University Grants Commission initiated a call for educators to submit expressions of interest for creating undergraduate and postgraduate courses for the platform. Developed through a partnership between CEMCA and experts from the Netaji Subhas Open University, Indira Gandhi National Open University and Uttarakhand Open University, the MOOC introduces learners to a framework for course development and implementation and provides step-by-step guidelines. Over 240 BRAOU faculty participated in the latest course offering. Among its most significant outcomes has been an increased awareness about the Indian government’s digital initiative and a better understanding of open educational resources for learning, teaching and professional development. There are plans to promote the MOOC among other universities in India, so that a large number of teachers are trained to develop online courses for SWAYAM.

Nigerian apprentices studying mobile phone and computer hardware repair and maintenance are among the most recent learners to benefit from COL’s AptusPi. This low-cost device will help them gain a sustainable livelihood as they acquire the requisite skills to improve their productivity and service delivery. With COL’s support, Yaba College of Technology has been working with master craftspersons from Africa’s largest computer village, in Lagos, to develop open educational resources and upload them onto AptusPi. These resources are compliant with Nigeria’s National Occupational Standards. AptusPi will deepen the use of technology-enabled learning techniques in the training of Nigerian apprentices, thereby improving training quality. Learners who successfully complete AptusPi-based learning will be awarded the National Skills Qualification Certificate after assessment by the National Business and Technical Examinations Board.

Tribute to Hilary Perraton

(17 December 1934 – 15 November 2021)

Submitted by Peter Williams

Hilary Perraton, who died on 15 November 2021, has a place among Commonwealth “heroes” as the chief architect, with (Lord) Asa Briggs and Sir John Daniel, of the conceptualisation and creation of the Commonwealth of Learning. He was one of the unsung heroes of today’s Commonwealth — “unsung” largely because he was a person uninterested in either promotion or self-promotion, so that much of his superb professional work was undertaken out of the limelight and glare of publicity.

Many years after COL’s inception, Hilary played a prominent role in relation to the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP), becoming a Commissioner and Deputy Chair on the UK Commonwealth Scholarship Commission and writing the history of the CSFP, Learning Abroad: A History of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan.

Upon his retirement from the Commonwealth Secretariat in 1993, Hilary first took up an assignment in Barbados, helping the University of the West Indies to establish its distance education provision, and then returned to Cambridge in 1996 to establish the International Research Foundation for Open Learning, a specialist research agency with charitable status, whose purpose was to support and carry out research on open and distance learning. Hilary later became a research associate of the Von Hügel Institute of St Edmund’s College, Cambridge, in order to continue research in education and scholarly writing, for which the Cambridge University Library provided him a good base.

Hilary had great intellectual curiosity and could always be relied upon for a useful and honest critique of any document, proposal or plan. He was worth his weight in gold as a widely read, experienced and committed professional and loyal colleague, whom it is a privilege to have known.

Hilary is survived by Jean, their children Jonathan and Claire, and granddaughter Ruby.

For the full version, please visit: https://www.col.org/news/tribute-to-hilary-perraton/.
Improving livelihoods for smallholder farmers in Tanzania

With support from COL, the Tanzania Producers’ Microfinance Public Limited Company (TAPFICO) helps alleviate poverty in local communities and serves as an alternative “safety valve” for liberalised lending. TAPFICO facilitates access to financial credit for micro-entrepreneurs with no conventional collateral, educates them on entrepreneurship and links them to local and foreign markets.

COL has been supporting capacity building at TAPFICO through a local NGO, Matumaini Mapya. Key company stakeholders have been engaged in COL-led seminars and workshops, and assistance has been provided in drafting TAPFICO’s business plan.

Since its registration in June 2020, the company has brought together over 3,000 shareholders and mobilised a core capital of TZS 13,420,200 (USD 5,835). Recently, TAPFICO was granted a micro-banking licence by the national regulator.

Teacher professional learning through mentoring

Participants from The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Uganda joined the COL webinar titled Innovative Practices in School-Based Teacher Mentoring. Co-hosted by the Mauritius Institute of Education, the webinar introduced the institute’s newly developed Mentoring Competency Framework and an accompanying micro-credential course.

Discussion areas included resources available for mentors to enhance their own as well as mentees’ knowledge and skills in teaching; assessment and pedagogy; a research base for mentoring; and associated platforms for messaging, learning management and badging.

The webinar exemplified ways in which technology can be used to promote an environment that supports collaborative learning between mentors, mentees and tutors.

Design workshop on TVET in Vanuatu

Ituani Vocational Skills Centre (IVSC) in Vanuatu was one of three institutions in the Pacific to organise a design workshop on how to apply COL’s new online TVET Toolkit to their specific context. The toolkit aims to build the capacity of TVET teachers and leaders and those supporting TVET education to increase access to quality skills training at reduced cost. It has been developed as part of the Open, Distance and Flexible Learning in the Pacific project, with financial support from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

During the workshop, IVSC staff from the provinces of Torba, Malampa and Sanma assessed their needs and agreed on several key priorities, including internal capacity building, strengthening institutional quality management and establishing solid partnerships with industry. They expressed confidence that implementing the toolkit provisions will contribute to better service delivery in Vanuatu.

Similar workshops have been organised by Papua New Guinea’s National Department of Education and Fiji’s Pacific Polytech.

Semester Zero launched at the University of the South Pacific

With COL’s support, future students of the University of the South Pacific (USP) can now experience tertiary education from the safety and comfort of their homes. Semester Zero is an online programme that offers key information about the university and helps learners develop additional literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

Speaking at the official launch of Semester Zero, USP Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Pal Ahluwalia noted that it will help overcome the disruptions caused by Covid-19 and will ensure a meaningful transition to university life for prospective students.

The programme is managed by the USP Centre for Flexible Learning, which hosts the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development, and is run on a COL-sponsored Moodle installation.
University teachers trained in Maldives and Malaysia

How can educators quickly create interactive and engaging e-content? How can videos based on open educational resources be enriched using a simple technique? These were some of the questions addressed at recent online workshops organised by COL for the faculty of Quest International University (QIU), Malaysia and Villa College (VC), Maldives.

A total of 50 academics from various faculties of QIU and VC had a chance to practise creating more engagement via online learning. Using a COL Moodle platform, participants were introduced to the ways in which the HTML5 Package (H5P) open-source tool can be used to create, share and reuse content and applications without the need for programming or advanced authoring skills.

The training programme contributes to improving institutional efficacy in leveraging open and distance learning for effective teaching and instruction.

Supporting out-of-school children in Ghana

The recent launch of La Sapienza school in Kpassa, Ghana marked a new milestone for COL’s Open Schooling programme. The new school offers technology-enabled primary education to out-of-school students from three communities in the Nkwanta North and Nkwanta South districts.

Open educational resources (OER) pre-loaded on COL’s AptusPi devices are used during lessons, which are delivered in the afternoons and on weekends at several convenient locations. These OER are increasingly augmented by locally created resources.

The project arose after a request from the Nkwanta North District Office of the Ghana Education Service to support Kpassa’s Franciscan Capuchin Friars in offering “holistic, quality, basic education for marginalised children” as part of the Education Directorate’s “dream of quality and equitable education for our pupils.”

GREEN TEACHER NIGERIA

Dr Zainab Muhammad Shuaibu is a National Trainer at the National Teachers’ Institute (NTI), Kaduna, and serves as the secretary of the Green Teacher Nigeria (GTN) programme. GTN aims to foster positive attitudes, values and skills among young learners to support environmental protection and improvement. With COL’s support, close to 40,500 students have gained an in-depth understanding of how socio-economic, political and cultural activities relate to environmental issues.

Q. What have been the key programme outcomes?

A. GTN content has now been mainstreamed into the National Certificate of Education degree programme at the institute. Four self-instructional learning modules with accompanying guides for facilitators and students have been developed, and 65 institute staff have been trained.

Q. Have any programme components been particularly useful during Covid-19?

A. One of the programme milestones has been the creation of a Moodle platform to upload the GTN content, which was widely used during lockdown. As well, an online community of practice was established during that time.

Q. Are there any other innovations that could be replicated?

A. With COL’s support, the NTI team learned how to address community-specific environmental challenges using locally available resources. These problem-solving techniques could be used to scale up relevant activities further.

Q. What are your plans for the future?

A. There are plans to include GTN in the institute’s array of programmes for continuing teacher professional development. We are working towards creating a Green Teacher Safe Space in each school in the country, and we also hope to make Nigeria a regional centre for the implementation of GTN in West Africa.

Q. What has been the biggest take-away from GTN for you personally?

A. I have developed a passion for conserving my environment and always think about how to make it better. My own children now call me “Mommy, the green teacher.”
Advancing STEM education for girls in Kenya

COL has been supporting teachers in Malindi, Kenya to build capacity in gender-responsive teaching and learning in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The goal is to enhance the uptake of STEM education among girls and eliminate key barriers to their performance.

A training-of-trainers workshop was organised in partnership with the STEM Impact Centre and Elimu Resource Centre. It helped participants boost their understanding of the national Competency-Based Curriculum and enhanced their creativity in using local resources for STEM. Training highlights included aspects of inquiry-based and problem-based learning, as well as creative coding.

Work is currently underway on designing and developing teacher manuals about gender-responsive practice, to be shared in Kenya and beyond.

Authentic assessment for Nigerian universities

COL has been working with dual-mode tertiary institutions in Nigeria to improve students’ experience of blended learning and relate it more directly to competencies and skills that are transferable to the workforce.

A series of sensitisation workshops were recently organised for five institutions. Participants reviewed current assessment practices and learned about aspects of authentic assessment relating to real-world experiences that will stay with students during their further studies or employment.

The workshops brought together a total of 289 participants from Ahmadu Bello University, Babcock University, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Modibbo Adama University and the University of Abuja. Follow-up activities to support the development and implementation of institutional authentic assessment frameworks are under discussion with these institutions.

TOP 5 USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR LEARNING

Education systems across the world are undergoing revolutionary changes as educational organisations adopt new technologies and media. Educators can use social media in several ways for effective teaching and learning:

1. SHARING INFORMATION IN REAL TIME
   Creating a professional social media page allows you to connect, interact and engage with learners by sharing domain-specific information, announcements and news in real time.

2. FACILITATING SOCIAL LEARNING
   With the help of social media, educators can easily organise information into topics, units and lessons. Learning features can be embedded, such as quizzes, videos and third-party links. Learners can comment on lessons and seek help from teachers and peers, building a strong foundation for social learning.

3. BUILDING COMMUNITIES
   Social media groups develop a strong sense of community among learners by bringing them to a common platform. Focused discussions and group activities improve learning and allow for deeper understanding and better learning transfer.

4. EXPANDING THE REACH OF LEARNING CONTENT
   Integrating e-learning platforms with social media can expand the reach of your content and help you connect with learners more effectively. Tools such as InsertLearning, Flipgrid and Edpuzzle, which are primarily used to make content more interactive and engaging, can easily be used in conjunction with regular social media platforms.

5. BOOSTING LEARNER ENGAGEMENT
   The in-built functions of social media platforms, such as polls in Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, can significantly boost engagement. Interaction can also be increased by liking, sharing or replying to content posted by learners.

Learn more at: https://www.mooc4dev.org/1SMM2.
Building resilient communities in Papua New Guinea

The majority of the population in Papua New Guinea (PNG) lives in rural areas, so building community resilience to shocks in agricultural production is a high priority. COL has been supporting the Servants of St Joseph (SSJ) to upskill vulnerable women, girls and young men for better livelihoods in PNG. A comprehensive training programme helps them acquire basic financial literacy, develop entrepreneurship skills and gain knowledge of sustainable agricultural practices — with a view to generating more income to support their families.

“Partnership with COL advances our resolve to work towards economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation,” notes SSJ’s Sister Aurora Yolanda Pugal.

Growing foods and then processing and selling the products in local markets is a traditional livelihood in PNG, with women being the key drivers of food and nutritional security for their families. A pilot training in Rabaul township on the island of New Britain has equipped women with the skills necessary to engage in organic gardening. The number of those who have taken up food production and processing has increased, and learners are now exploring the possibility of growing plants for medicinal purposes.

“We are constantly challenged to be innovative in our strategies and approaches,” says Sister Aurora, adding that developing SSJ’s capacity to meet the changing needs of women, girls and young men remains a key priority.

Kenyan widow learns sustainable agriculture, improves family livelihood

As a widow with seven children in her care, Millicent Achieng Onyango relies heavily on her farm for both sustenance and income generation. With support from COL, this 42-year-old farmer from Siaya County, Kenya learned about sustainable agriculture and improved her family’s quality of life.

Through training facilitated by COL’s local partner, the Siaya Seed Savings and Credit Cooperative, Millicent gained knowledge in horticulture and poultry management and was able to raise capital to buy 50 chickens and five bags of seed. She uses the birds’ manure as a natural fertiliser on her farm, and she has been selling vegetables to buy chicken feed. In just a year, Millicent has doubled the number of birds reared.

Millicent has now learned to plan her farming activities and can ensure a steady income flow to support both the poultry and the horticultural enterprises. She has become a role model for her community and regularly shares her knowledge with peers.

COL has been working across the Commonwealth to connect farmers with social and financial networks and provide them with lifelong learning opportunities. These initiatives have equipped them with knowledge that not only meets their day-to-day needs but also instils an understanding of the impacts of their activities on the environment.

“COL has been working across the Commonwealth to connect farmers with social and financial networks and provide them with lifelong learning opportunities.”

Millicent now wants to expand her vegetable and poultry farm to earn 10,000 Kenyan Shillings a month, which would enable her to support her children’s education and provide a balanced diet for them.
At 16 years of age, Kirti Shreya G was one of the youngest learners ever to complete COL’s Blue Economy: Blue Space MOOC. Despite living in Hyderabad, India, more than 800 km inland from the ocean, this Grade 12 student was eager to gain insights into the world’s marine ecosystems.

“We are all dependent on the oceans, regardless of where we live, and I have always been interested in the flora and fauna of the marine world,” she says. After reading through some of the course materials, Kirti’s interest in the blue economy has been heightened by what she sees as the potential for coastal adaptations to provide millions of jobs and lead to improvements in human development.

The MOOC helped participants discover how and why the blue economy concept is driving innovative thinking about how we engage with the ocean and how it supports societies. For young people, it was also a way to see whether this is an area they would like to pursue in the future.

Kirti, who enjoys studying biological and earth sciences at school and is considering a career path in marine science, notes that the course offered a good foundation for her to build on. “Learning about maritime security and activities at ports helped me enhance my knowledge about the blue world and its dependents,” she adds. “I look forward to becoming part of the scientific community and contributing to the well-being of nature and our planet.”

Ubaida Shehu Faruk is passionate about environmental education. She credits COL with not only her improved knowledge in environmental concepts but also her skills in using technology for teaching and learning.

Ubaida is among the many educators in Nigeria who have participated in Green Teacher Nigeria, an environmental education programme offered by the National Teachers’ Institute in Kaduna, with support from COL. “My exposure to so many learning strategies, and my improved skills in the use of technology, have had a positive impact on my capacity to deliver learning anytime, anywhere,” she says. As a Principal Education Officer at her institution, Ubaida has been instrumental in imparting pedagogical content knowledge among teacher candidates, as well as problem-solving skills and environmental awareness among learners in the region. She is particularly proud of the support she has received from her students’ parents, the local authority and the State Ministry of the Environment to start a tree-planting campaign. “The schoolchildren and their parents donated more than 200 trees, which we planted along the road to the school.”

As a champion of environmental education, she believes that teachers have a key role to play in building climate resilience. “We need to be trained to integrate relevant knowledge into teaching and learning activities to mitigate climate change,” states Ubaida.
The blue economy is a concept that focuses on advancing efforts to utilise coastal and ocean resources and services innovatively, sustainably and for the benefit of all, through ocean-based sustainable development agendas. Development in this area needs to be conducted through informed decision-making, policies and management plans supporting healthy ecosystems that will continue providing for future generations. The concept is of particular importance for an island nation such as Seychelles, which depends on these complex and interlinked ecosystems for its survival.

The advantages of supporting a blue economy are relevant not only to coastal and ocean nations but also to landlocked countries who indirectly benefit from (and have an impact on) these resources. Development of the blue economy has the potential to support various efforts to tackle poverty, food insecurity, inequality and climate change. Seychelles is one of the global leaders in advancing the blue economy agenda — for example, through the Marine Spatial Planning initiative, the Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust, and the Blue Economy Roadmap and Action Plan.

Realising an equitable and sustainable blue economy requires careful and inclusive consideration of the frameworks and diverse agendas driving blue economy progress, as well as innovative and proactive business models that meet the needs of current and future populations. The University of Seychelles (UniSey), founded in 2009, has developed a range of internationally accepted qualifications, including an undergraduate programme in Environmental Science and a post-graduate programme in Marine Science and Sustainability.

In March 2015, UniSey established the Blue Economy Research Institute (BERI) to support environmental science research specifically relating to the blue economy. BERI aims to host a strategically designed interdisciplinary team to allow for the cross-fertilisation of knowledge and the evolution of transdisciplinary research projects that embrace collaboration with national stakeholders, including decision-makers, the private sector and the wider community.

BERI has formed an extensive international network to support national development in relation to the blue economy and continues to create an enabling environment for research. The team assists with national and international education and outreach and advances joint work in key areas. As part of this, BERI started its collaboration with COL’s Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) in 2017 with the launch of the first blue economy massive open online course. The MOOC was popular across various countries and island nations, attracting about 270 participants.

In 2020, a more comprehensive series of four MOOCs was developed to include an introduction to core areas of the blue economy, such as fisheries, aquaculture, marine biotechnology, shipping, and coastal and marine tourism. Some of the other cross-cutting themes were ecosystem services, climate adaptation, integrated ocean management, knowledge co-creation, human rights and gender equality.

Each of the four MOOCs attracted over 1,500 participants from across the world, including many island nations. The synchronous webinars and online group chats allowed participants to share their particular experiences and contexts, supporting the emergence of a wider network of individuals literate in the blue economy. The participants offered interesting examples and questions that stimulated a broader understanding, and they provided windows into the specific challenges that individuals face in their own countries and situations. This collaboration with VUSSC allowed BERI to explore new models of blue economy literacy and supported further realisation of the internal potential and external impact that such work can have.

UniSey has valued the institutional support and capacity development that programmes like this provide, as they strengthen its network and capability for outreach and impact.
Teaching and learning in marginalised communities is fraught with many challenges, including low literacy among parents and lack of access to technologies. COL’s Parental Learning for Uninterrupted Schooling (PLUS) project has been designed to improve familial involvement in children’s learning, as well as support parent–teacher engagement. COL is using in-person capacity building as well as technology-based distance learning, counselling, communication and other forms of engagement to achieve this goal. In collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, COL has developed resources on family and intergenerational learning.

In Kenya, a recent stakeholder engagement workshop brought together education officers, teachers and parents from Kilifi and Marsabit counties, which are located in the country’s Arid and Semi-Arid Land region. For families leading nomadic lives, involvement in children’s learning is challenging in many ways. The workshop was conducted by COL’s local partner, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, with a focus on the current Basic Education Curriculum Framework and the practice of parental involvement for its successful implementation.

Another workshop organised in partnership with Inspire, Educate and Empower, in Rwanda, sensitised stakeholders on the benefits of parental and familial involvement in the education of their children. It drew participants from 20 school communities in Burera and Gatsibo, two districts that are considered disadvantaged and have a combined adult literacy rate below the national average.

COL is supporting the Commonwealth Member States to prepare their university graduates for employment, entrepreneurship and the jobs of the future. Following a series of capacity-building workshops for Zambia Qualifications Authority staff and institutional partners, employability attributes have been incorporated into the Zambia Qualifications Framework and Level Descriptors, and representatives from 32 awarding bodies have been trained in implementing COL’s employability model in their own institutions. Zambian graduates are now expected to exhibit a series of employability attributes, which will boost international recognition of the country’s qualifications.

Policy dialogues to strengthen gender equality

COL’s partners BEDARI, Pakistan and YAPO, Tanzania engaged 260 government officials in policy dialogues relating to gender equality, women’s empowerment and the prevention of gender-based violence. As a pioneer in the Alliance Against Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, BEDARI has facilitated the adoption of a legislative amendment that holds current and previous employers accountable and addresses the needs of transgender persons. As well, BEDARI is working to strengthen the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus to highlight the issues faced by women in Punjab.

The policy dialogues organised by YAPO for local and regional government officials in Tanzania had a special focus on marginalised groups of women and girls and persons with disabilities. Several barriers to the empowerment of out-of-school girls have been removed as a result of these dialogues. There are now opportunities for girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy to resume their studies, and provisions for a referral system for victims of gender-based violence. YAPO is also working to create an enabling environment wherein women and girls are able to pursue productive livelihoods.

With COL’s assistance, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) developed an institutional employability framework, which was approved by its Senate in February 2022. The document maps key employability competencies that NOUN should impart to students, as well as methodologies for measuring progress towards attaining them.
COL's Regional Centres advance open learning

RETRIDOL, COL’s Regional Centre hosted by the National Open University of Nigeria, has been supporting tertiary institutions to become dual mode. Staff from the Distance Learning Institute, University of Lagos were trained in institutional design, while lecturers from Igbinedion University, Okada participated in a workshop on open and distance learning (ODL) skills development.

In partnership with the Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning, Malta, COL has organised a MOOC on digital training and learning for over 870 participants, including 171 government officials. They were introduced to the critical framework for leveraging digital tools to turn education hopes and ambitions into reality, while ensuring that “education” comes before “technology.” The massive open online course is a companion initiative to the Digital Literacy Lab for Educators, with course videos available from COL’s YouTube channel: https://tinyurl.com/yfa4cpwu.

The Southern African Development Community Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE) hosted a blended workshop for the staff of Universidade Púnguè, Mozambique. Participants learned about ODL models and institutional practices and discussed teaching, learning and support service provision in ODL. With COL’s support, SADC-CDE has also built staff capacity at Botswana Open University’s College of Open Schooling to develop its Technology-Enhanced Learning Strategy.

Open schooling for Africa

COL has assisted the Institute of Adult Education, Tanzania to develop a bridging course to help girls get back into schooling. The course targets learners currently involved in non-formal learning who wish to transition back into formal learning but lack the requisite knowledge and skills to access advanced secondary education.

With COL’s support, the Emalatini Development Centre (EDC), Eswatini developed curriculum-based OER in nine subject areas. EDC regional support centres will now roll out 1,832 digital lessons across the country. A process is under way for these resources to become available to learners and teachers in other countries as well, through an open educational resources library or repository.

In partnership with the University of Mauritius, COL has offered a course titled Developing and Teaching Online Courses to open-schooling practitioners from Eswatini, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Trinidad and Tobago and Zambia. In total, 63 per cent of participants earned a certificate of completion.

Contributions are invited for the Journal of Learning for Development, which focuses on innovations in learning — in particular, but not exclusively, open and distance learning and its role in development. Contributions can take the form of research articles, case studies, commentaries, and reports from the field. Please visit the journal’s website for more details and to submit work: www.jl4d.org.
For COL, it is critical that women and girls have access to technology-related education and career opportunities to narrow the gender digital divide. Through a joint project with TechHer, a non-governmental organisation in Nigeria, 700 students from ten secondary schools in Abuja will be able to build basic digital literacy and learn about online safety, digital citizenship, and careers in technology. TechHer is keen to create digitally literate communities, especially among disadvantaged groups, including women and youths. The “school tour model” will help build volunteer networks and digital literacy clubs, in addition to developing a training curriculum for selected secondary schools.

COL has partnered with Coursera, Google and Udemy to offer scholarships to learners across the Commonwealth in courses that build skills for work. Since the launch of the programme in April 2021, over 32,000 learners have gained free and unlimited access to employability-oriented courses taught by professors from leading universities and top industry leaders. The most popular courses are in business management, data and computer science.

Here is what learners had to say:

“Learning new skills [through COL’s initiative] has helped me get into a better graduate school with a fully funded scholarship.”
- Faisal (Bangladesh)

“Being a young business owner is challenging. I have learned a lot about [how] social media marketing can grow my business.”
- Claudia Garraway (Guyana)

“These courses present a great advantage to those of us who are using mobility aids and want to upgrade our knowledge and skills. I was able to take several courses on my smartphone and learn how to build a personal brand.”
- Esther Nyakiuru Njuguna (Kenya)

“I started the course [IT Support] with no previous knowledge, and here I am today, feeling confident enough to change career. Though there is still a lot more to learn, if you believe in yourself, nothing is impossible.”
- Neervana Burgus (Mauritius)

“After participating in the programme, my data analysis skills have significantly improved, and I am beginning to bring data to life.”
- John Palolen (Papua New Guinea)

_Narrowing the gender digital divide in Nigeria_

Building professional development for nurses in Eswatini

Building on the success of an online continuing education programme for nurses in Botswana and Seychelles, COL is now supporting more than 3,700 nurses and midwives in Eswatini to upgrade their knowledge and skills. COL’s partnership with the Eswatini Nursing Council and the World Continuing Education Alliance (WCEA) provides free access for nurses and midwives to short, context-specific, professional-development modules available on the WCEA online training platform and mobile app. Online journal articles and webinars are also available to learners at no cost. Enrolled participants have taken an average of five modules each. Covid-19 Infection Prevention Control, Personal Protective Equipment for Covid-19, and Safe Storage and Handling of Vaccines are among the most popular modules.

Training in assistive technologies for TVET in Kenya

COL has hosted two courses for educators from technical and vocational education and training organisations in Kenya to help them support the needs of learners with multiple disabilities. The first course boosted participants’ understanding of how to integrate assistive technology into teaching, while the second focused on aspects of disability needs assessment. The training was organised in partnership with the Government of Kenya, the Kenya Technical Trainers College, as well as the country’s Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority. It was led by representatives of Diversity and Ability, UK. Among the critical outcomes, participants noted increased confidence in their ability to identify free and accessible technologies to overcome specific learners’ barriers.
The small island perspective | Let’s talk and teach more about climate change and 1.5 degrees

As a climate scientist from a small island developing state (SIDS), I cannot emphasise enough how important it is to talk and teach widely about climate change. SIDS, like mine in the Caribbean, are among the most vulnerable to present and future climate change. This is due to several factors, including limited land mass, location in extreme weather alleys, and our strong dependence on climate-sensitive economic activities such as tourism and agriculture. Increased awareness of climate and its impacts is critical in creating global advocates for different approaches to tackling the issues.

In talking and teaching about climate, one of the issues requiring urgent and sustained discourse is “1.5 degrees.” In a nutshell, the world has already warmed by just over one degree Celsius from pre-industrial times. This is responsible for the climatic changes already seen, including the stronger storms, longer droughts, more frequent land and ocean heat waves, and higher sea levels being experienced in the Caribbean. SIDS have strongly advocated for limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees by the end of the current century — i.e., allowing for only half a degree or less of further warming. Unfortunately, the world is not presently on course to achieve this. At the current emission rates of greenhouse gases, and even accounting for reduction pledges, the world will be two to three degrees warmer than in pre-industrial times by the end of the century, and this poses a serious problem for SIDS.

There is need, then, to talk and teach that 1.5 is not an abstract target but rather a chance for a liveable future for the most vulnerable. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the United Nations body tasked with periodically collating and disseminating the latest science on climate change. Its 2021 report suggests, for example, that a once in ten-year extreme temperature event observed in pre-industrial times will likely occur 4.1 times for 1.5 degrees but 5.6 times at two degrees. Caribbean research likewise indicates reduced damage from extreme weather, less drying, and greater agricultural productivity at 1.5 versus higher levels of global warming. The IPCC’s newly released 2022 report carries a starker message. It notes that for every tenth of a degree of warming beyond 1.5 degrees, climate impacts, loss and damage escalate, and the likelihood of the most vulnerable countries achieving climate-resilient development rapidly diminishes.

Equally important is communicating that notwithstanding the chance it offers for a liveable future, 1.5 degrees will also represent a significant challenge for SIDS. The IPCC reports mentioned above also indicate an intensification of impacts at 1.5 degrees compared to the present. For example, in the Caribbean at 1.5 degrees, agriculture will be challenged by more frequent droughts, beach erosion and coral bleaching will accelerate, new water sources will be required, and port cities will need fortifications to withstand more-intense hurricanes. It is also important to convey that 1.5 degrees does not equate to a “safe” point at which our present climate woes will normalise or disappear.

Finally, in light of the above, we must also talk and teach about choice. The choice is not, as is often portrayed, between reducing greenhouse gases (termed mitigation in climate science) and adapting to future change. Both actions must be pursued. A globally agreed mitigation agenda is necessary to make the 1.5 goal achievable and unlock the chance it affords for a liveable future. But mitigation pursuits must co-exist with adaptation plans that confront head-on the challenges a 1.5 degree world will pose. The choice is also not between action and inaction — the latter is not an option. Rather, for each nation, the choice lies in the mix and magnitude of the mitigation and adaptation responses. These must take into consideration situation and context, responsibility and requirement, equity and justice, opportunity and sustainability, transition rate (to carbon-neutral economies) and transformation goals, shielding the already vulnerable and pursuing the common good.

The world is at a “climate crossroads,” with its future state dependent on decisions and actions taken today. Changed attitudes reflected in radically different behaviours are needed now to ensure that the net-zero-emissions goal (where greenhouse gas emissions are matched by their removal) is globally attained by mid-century. This, according to the science, represents the narrow but rapidly closing window of opportunity for achieving 1.5 degrees. So we must talk and teach even more about climate change — the chance, the challenge, and the choices to be made in relation to 1.5 degrees.

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Making Digital Assessment Count: Designing for Engagement, Integrity and Authenticity

This publication shows that at the heart of making digital assessment count is purposeful, strategic design that is learner centred, builds academic integrity into the fabric of the learning experience, and uses authentic assessment tasks.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4017

Practical Guide for WITED Chapters and Individual Champions for Increasing Girls’ and Women’s Participation in STEM-TVET

This new publication offers practical steps to trainers in technical and vocational education institutions for increasing girls’ and women’s participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The guide summarises where, when and how exclusion happens at the different stages of STEM training and employment and then identifies relevant opportunities for girls and women.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4001

Open Educational Resources in the Commonwealth 2021

This report is an outcome of a study conducted in late 2021 on the status of OER in the Commonwealth. Based on survey responses received from 38 countries, it aims to help Commonwealth Member States and their educational institutions implement the 2019 UNESCO Recommendation on OER and develop strategies and action plans for mainstreaming OER.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4009

Integrating OER in Teaching: A Guide for Teachers in the Pacific

This guide was developed as part of the Pacific Partnership for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning project. It shows specific ways that teachers can use OER in their classrooms and support remote learners. The guide describes how to develop a framework for hybrid/blended learning in school and offers practical tips for customising OER to meet students’ needs effectively.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4014

Reaching the Unreached: Scale-Up Empowerment Study

The three-year Reaching the Unreached – Scale-Up (RtU-S) project, completed in 2021, sought to expand the success of the initial RtU project by providing hard-to-reach women and girls with education and economic opportunities. This study explores women’s and girls’ empowerment from the start of the project to its completion, using the Measuring Empowerment Index framework developed by COL.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4006
Blockchain for education

The forced move to online learning due to the pandemic has imparted an unprecedented momentum to this mode of education. For example, Coursera, a partner of COL, had 189 million course enrolments in 2021, compared to 79 million in 2019. Despite bandwidth limitations, smaller developing countries, such as Guyana, have registered a truly high growth in online learning. In some nations, regulatory authorities have decided to grant credit for online courses in degree programmes conducted in the on-campus mode. The need to move certification processes across the traditional boundaries of institutions is overwhelming. This is where the blockchain could be an ally.

As a digital infrastructure for identity verification, the blockchain is particularly useful when one needs to verify claims without having to approach a third party that may have issued the relevant assets, such as certificates and credentials. It can be useful in education and lifelong learning in several areas, such as validating credentials and qualifications, enabling payments for services under contractual obligations, and facilitating user-controlled storage of digital credentials.

It is not easy to define the blockchain in non-technical terms. Its basis is a technology called distributed ledger. An analogy from a 2017 World Bank publication is useful for understanding what this means. Imagine a ledger that is presented as a digital spreadsheet whose numbers of rows and columns are unlimited or infinite. Imagine also that a very large number of users can access it, and some of them maintain a full copy of the spreadsheet. We can think of the super-large spreadsheet, the users, and the devices they use to access the spreadsheet as one ecosystem. Further, any entry or change in the spreadsheet requires validation or approval by every user. With consensus at the root of this ecosystem, the implication is that any entry or change in the spreadsheet is wholly authentic. This is one way to understand the concept of distributed ledger technology. The blockchain is a technology to create and manage the distributed ledger. Users of the blockchain system can cluster in a network of computers called nodes, which can communicate with each other. A university can set up its own node, or a consortium of training agencies can do so.

Blockchain can be employed in niche areas within education and lifelong learning. Implementation is limited at present to a few countries, and the scale is not large. However, with increased interest in mobility (within and across national boundaries) and in flexibility (stacking micro-qualifications), the blockchain could be useful for overcoming some of the known limitations.

As learners’ interest in transnational mobility grows, the blockchain could be used to create the equivalent of a public registry of accredited institutions. The workflows involved in accreditation could be recorded in detail, which would make it easier to verify a qualification or certificate issued to an individual, while also confirming the accreditation status of the issuing institution. All this could be done in a single step.

COL has introduced the concept of blockchain to non-technical audiences through a dedicated MOOC and is currently finalising a joint publication with UNESCO on the applications of the blockchain in education. Learners who have participated in courses offered under the MOOCs for Development umbrella have been offered blockchain certificates.

There is an emerging view that the blockchain can be called Web 3. In contrast to Web 2.0, which has highly centralised controls (such as global social media companies), the blockchain is totally decentralised. Payment transactions effected via the blockchain cannot be controlled or revoked by centralised entities. This does have implications for national regulators.

The decentralised architecture of the blockchain poses another challenge: it requires an extremely large amount of computing power at the nodes, which theoretically can number in the millions. The demand for power to run the blockchain therefore could greatly add to the load on grids globally and could significantly increase humanity’s carbon footprint.

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