LEARNING FOR DEVELOPMENT is the theme of the Commonwealth of Learning’s Three-Year Plan for 2012-2015. Through this plan, COL is committed to realising its vision – namely, that of seeing the achievement of human development goals through universal access to learning.

COL helps governments expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using appropriate technologies, particularly those that support open and distance learning. It assists governmental, non-governmental and community partners in developing policy, building capacity, refining models, creating materials and nurturing collaborative networks.
As a small and specialised intergovernmental agency, COL emphasises partnerships in all its activities, collaborating with other Commonwealth bodies and multilateral organisations and NGOs, as well as Commonwealth Governments, fostering communities of practice and nurturing regional bodies.

COL’s two programme sectors, Education and Livelihoods & Health, embrace seven initiatives that will help governments pursue the twin goals of expanding access to learning and using public funds cost-effectively. eLearning and Gender are COL’s two cross-cutting themes that underpin and complement all seven initiatives. COL’s programme is also supported by knowledge management and communications services.

Attaining the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All targets are major challenges in South Asia. All Commonwealth countries in the region are faced with limited resources of some kind. While several countries have well developed facilities for distance higher education, there is a need to transfer knowledge, skills and capabilities from the higher education sector to areas such as literacy, elementary and secondary education, teacher training and continuing professional education.

To meet the enormous information needs related to agriculture, food security and health, the region must use mass education and training strategies. At the same time, quality must not be compromised. COL has introduced several initiatives to support quality improvement in learning for development. Through partnerships with institutions in the region, COL is applying its expertise in open and distance learning (ODL) and information and communication technology (ICT) to help address needs in South and Southeast Asia.

COL’s regional agency, the Commonwealth Education Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), is also a resource for the region that organises training activities and provides ODL expertise and resources using its own staff and local experts.

www.col.org/3yp
EDUCATION

OPEN SCHOOLING: Secondary school places are grossly insufficient to absorb the surge of pupils now completing primary schooling, thanks to progress made in achieving universal primary education. Open schooling is increasingly recognised as a viable solution to the growing demand for equitable access to secondary education, especially for girls and marginalised groups, particularly in remote locations. Governments are seeking to redefine the way that secondary education addresses societal needs, by diversifying the curriculum. This means making available technical and vocational programmes alongside academic offerings – something that open schools are well placed to do.

COL works closely with the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), India’s apex organisation for open schools.

Throughout the Commonwealth, COL is working with 26 countries to expand open schooling and thereby increase learning opportunities for secondary education, particularly for girls, out-of-school youth and people in remote regions. The initiative has also provided training and produced several studies, action plans and resources, including a Quality Assurance Toolkit for Open Schools and case studies, entitled Open Schooling with Open Educational Resources: Opening doors, creating opportunities, for administrators and policy makers.

COL is strongly advocating the adoption of open schooling systems. It has helped to establish the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA), whose secretariat is hosted by NIOS in India. Thirteen open schools in Asia are members.

Open schools in South and Southeast Asia have access to quality learning materials through COL’s OER for Open Schools initiative. Master Teachers in six developing Commonwealth countries developed 20 new secondary-level courses that can be freely downloaded, adapted and re-used as open educational resources (OER).

COL assisted with the establishment of an open school in Bangladesh. The Open School of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is now adopting OER as the way forward.

www.col.org/OpenSchooling

www.col.org/OpenSchooling
TEACHER EDUCATION: Achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015 requires well-trained teachers of good quality. Governments want to increase teacher supply and improve teacher quality; and COL has a good record of helping them do this. COL’s Teacher Education initiative is focusing on school-based, in-service training models during this three-year period.

COL’s Quality Assurance Toolkit for Teacher Education is freely available on COL’s website – and COL continues to support institutions wishing to adapt this toolkit for use in their institutions. Teacher educators in India and Maldives have received training in instructional design and the integration of ICTs into teaching. www.col.org/TeacherEducation

HIGHER EDUCATION: COL continues to support policy makers, institutions and leaders in higher education to harness the potential of ODL and technology and so enable them to cope with the combination of increasing demand for higher education, rising costs, diminishing public funding and the need to maintain high quality levels.

The collaborative Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programmes have attracted a cumulative enrolment of over 24,000 students studying through one or more of the participating institutions in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Pakistan’s Allama Iqbal Open University (Pakistan), the Bangladesh Open University, the Open University of Sri Lanka and Wawasan Open University in Malaysia are members. Designed for senior and middle managers working in developing Commonwealth countries, the newly revised courses help developing nations meet the need for professionals who can contribute to economic growth and good governance. The programmes have over 10,000 graduates.

COL’s regional agency, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), has worked with several higher education institutions in South and Southeast Asia to build capacity in ODL and the use of OER.
India’s Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) offers COL’s Graduate Diploma in Legislative Drafting, which builds capacity in planning and writing laws and policies.

COL worked with institutions in Sri Lanka to help develop and approve a national ODL policy.

The COL Review and Improvement Model (COL RIM) for effective institutional quality audits is freely available to all institutions and provides a cost-effective approach to quality assurance. It has been used at several institutions in South Asia.

www.col.org/HigherEducation

VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH: Brunei Darussalam and Maldives are members of a collaborative network of over 30 small states that are part of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). VUSSC was initiated by COL and is now led by an independent Management Committee, with support from COL. Hundreds of educators from South and Southeast Asia have taken part in VUSSC boot camps and online courses, some sponsored and hosted by the Governments of Singapore and Maldives.

Fourteen courses and programmes are now being delivered by nine institutions in eight Commonwealth small states. In 2013, the first group of VUSSC students graduated with a Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture from the National University of Samoa.

Primarily through online collaboration, VUSSC countries have chosen to focus on creating postsecondary, skills-related courses in areas such as tourism, entrepreneurship, professional development, disaster management, the fisheries industry, port management, construction safety and agriculture. These non-proprietary, digital course materials (OER), which can readily be adapted to the specific context of each country, are used in offering credit-bearing qualifications in post-secondary institutions, strengthening their capacity and outreach. The programmes developed under VUSSC include a Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture for Small States, a Bachelor’s Degree in Business and Entrepreneurship and a Master’s in Educational Leadership.

VUSSC has also developed a Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) to show how qualifications from one region translate to those in another and it has now been mapped against national and regional frameworks including those in use in Asia.

www.vussc.info
LIVELIHOODS AND HEALTH

TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: COL has demonstrated that using ODL and learning technologies can increase access to quality technical and vocational skills development equitably. The role of TVSD in creating a skilled workforce of lifelong learners for the informal and formal economies is constantly challenged by urban-rural and gender divides that exclude large numbers of learners from skills training systems. COL is working with institutional partners and governments to create contextualised, high-quality models for using educational media and technology in TVSD.

COL is working with UNIVOEC-Sri Lanka in staff training toward a new distance-taught Diploma programme in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) teaching in development.

The State Resource Centre in Kerala is developing a distance Certificate in Community Development to train volunteer community development workers or ‘preraks’. COL has supported the team with capacity building in materials development and learner support systems.

Dhaka Ahsania Mission developed five skills-training courses in partnership with COL and has trained over 1500 adult learners through Community Learning Centres. A third of these learners started their own small business as a result of the training.

COL’s regional agency, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), is also working with institutions in the region that offer TVET, promoting flexible curriculum and the use of ICTs for teaching and learning.

LEARNING FOR FARMING: The L3F approach strengthens livelihoods and empowers the poorer sections of rural societies by linking social capital and financial capital with human capital. So far, COL has promoted networking and capacity development in livestock, horticulture and agriculture, leading to higher incomes. It continues to facilitate self-replication and scaling-up so that L3F can reach marginalised communities in many more countries. Under the L3F model, COL is a catalyst in bringing together governments, institutions, civil society, financial institutions and the private sector to build the capacity of the communities through gender-sensitive ODL.

Launched in India (Tamil Nadu) in 2003, L3F is now also established in Gujarat and Maharashtra states and in Sri Lanka as well as in other countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Augmenting the L3F programme, 65,000 rural workers in India are receiving short educational...
messages daily through their mobile phones, as well as through community radios. The content, which is delivered in audio-mode (not text) is aimed at improving agricultural practice (e.g., goat rearing) and those participating are small/marginal farmers or landless labourers.

In Sri Lanka, as with many other L3F locations, women make up the largest percentage of participants. L3F has the potential to provide rural women with information and access to credit. With small, low-interest loans, women can engage in self-employment projects that generate income and improve livelihoods for families and entire communities.

Recent studies conducted in Asia and Africa have confirmed the effectiveness of COL's L3F initiative and the impressive social and financial rates of return for both participants and partners such as financial institutions.

www.col.org/L3Farmers

**HEALTHY COMMUNITIES:** Communities across Commonwealth Asia have urgent needs in community health and development, which conventional top-down approaches to education generally fail to meet. COL's Healthy Communities initiative addresses the gap. By emphasising collaboration, participation and blended and multichannel approaches, the community learning programme model enables better individual and collective responses to local issues – from girls' and women's sexual and reproductive health to diabetes to suicide and mental health. Healthy Communities pays special attention to issues faced by women and youth in resource-poor areas.

COL's Healthy Communities initiative is working with individuals and groups in Bangladesh and India. The initiative works with national and regional partner agencies to build capacities among local communication and development groups using both face-to-face and distance training and mentoring methods. COL builds local capabilities to plan, design and deliver community-based learning and social behaviour change programmes using a participatory and collaborative approach. Community partners assist with research and facilitate active participation by target audiences in design and delivery. Local experts provide subject information and lend credibility. Community leaders and policymakers link local programmes to national priorities, in terms of both inputs and feedback. Media technologies help enable scale, creative approaches and dialogue, e.g. through the use of radio, mobiles, and social media.

New community learning programmes (CLP) in Bangladesh (adolescent reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, diabetes, first aid, suicide, and maternal health) and India (women's awareness of the importance of home toilets, absenteeism among primary and middle school students, malnutrition, alcoholism, women's sexual & reproductive health, fatigue among working women, adolescent mental health), have been designed through a blended training and mentoring process jointly developed and offered by the Maraa and COL-CEMCA in

COL’s regional agency, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) has been promoting use of community radio for empowerment of women and local communities through the development of community learning programmes. It is providing support to community radio stations to improve the quality of programming. During 2011–2013, CEMCA facilitated licensing of community radio stations in India with financial support from the Ford Foundation.

COL also provides technical advice to Commonwealth governments, institutions and organisation concerning the use of information and communication media to support learning for development.

www.col.org/HealthyCommunities

**CROSS-CUTTING THEMES**

**GENDER:** COL recognises that the advancement of the goals of gender equality and women’s empowerment is central to its agenda of learning for development. As a cross-cutting corporate goal, gender equality requires that both women’s and men’s views, interests and needs shape its programmes. ODL can be especially helpful in enabling women and girls to access educational opportunities while also fulfilling other responsibilities. COL has a Gender Policy and a Gender Action Plan – and a Gender Microsite provides links to resources and research on gender and ODL and ICT.

www.col.org/Gender
www.col.org/GenderMS

**eLEARNING:** COL continues to raise levels of digital literacy and expertise in partner organisations, as well as the ICT competencies of teachers, and facilitates the creation of high-quality learning materials made available as open educational resources (OER). COL is also continuing its
partnership with UNESCO for the global advocacy of OER and the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds.

COL’s Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration (CCTI) uses ODL to train teachers in how to integrate ICT into school management, teaching and learning. An Instructional Design tool developed by COL is being used in developing countries to create quality courses and learning materials that use best practices in eLearning.

www.col.org/eLearning

REGIONAL PRESENCE

COL maintains strong relationships with many stakeholders in South and Southeast Asia, including member governments, partner institutions, donors and individuals. Three of COL’s Honorary Advisors and Honorary Chairs are from South and Southeast Asia.

In addition to membership on COL’s Board of Governors, the South and Southeast Asian region is also represented by a network of individuals, selected by member Governments, who liaise directly with COL as Focal Points. In-depth meetings of Focal Points take place once every three years in all four regions of the Commonwealth. These meetings provide an opportunity for Focal Points to share information about the status of ODL in their countries, receive a report on what COL has done in their country and identify education and training priorities COL can support in COL’s next Three-Year Plan. COL creates specific country action plans and country reports to ensure the region’s needs are addressed.

COL’s regional agency, the Commonwealth Education Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), helps to implement COL’s mandate in the eight countries of Commonwealth Asia. CEMCA has been active in promoting OER and community radio in the region. In collaboration with NGOs and the governments of Commonwealth Asia, it provides support in policy formulation and capacity building of institutions. Recently, CEMCA has promoted and/or developed virtual open schooling, a “community of practice” for teacher educators, OER-based eLearning, a certificate course on community radio technology, a Community Radio Continuous Improvement Toolkit, and a web
radio manual. It is also implementing projects in partnership with UNESCO and Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and is helping institutions in India to align their vocational courses to the National Skills Qualifications Framework.

www.cemca.org

ELEARNING FOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

UN and international agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF, ILO, the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth Secretariat, The World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank are using COL’s eLearning for International Organisations programme to provide customised communications, programme and data management skills training for their headquarters staff and field-based workers located throughout the world.

www.col.org/COLeLIO

PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING

COL’s Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning is co-hosted with partners in different regions of the Commonwealth every three years. The programme is designed to explore applications of open and distance learning in widening educational access, bridging the digital and information divide and advancing the social and economic development of communities and nations at large. The Forum’s focus is on topics relating to developing countries and participation of practitioners from these countries.

Officials from nearly all of the Commonwealth countries and others, including many subsidised delegates, explore how open and distance learning can help achieve international development goals and education for all. COL’s Seventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF7) was held in Abuja, Nigeria in December 2013, co-hosted by the Federal Ministry of Education. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was the lead partner institution. The Forum addressed “Open Learning for Development: Towards Empowerment and Transformation” through five themes: “Girls’ and Women’s Education”, “Skills Development”, “Promoting Open Educational Resources”, “Innovation and Technology” and “Institutional Development”.

COL’s Excellence in Distance Education Awards are also presented at the Forum. Several people and institutions from South and Southeast Asia
are among the past award winners. In 2013, in Abuja, COL awarded eight distinguished individuals with the designation, Honorary Fellow of COL, including one from Malaysia. South and Southeast Asian institutions also won awards for institutional achievement (Krishna Kant Handiqui State Open University, India, and Wawasan Open University, Malaysia) and distance education materials (Wawasan Open University, Malaysia).

www.col.org/pcf
www.col.org/edea

TECHNOLOGY, KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES AND COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA

As a leader in the fast-evolving field of knowledge management, COL continues to develop its internal systems to organise information from its own work and to support partners. COL also maintains an Information Resource Centre and collects ODL news, policies, resources and statistics from large variety of sources. It is also developing directories of open educational resources (DOER), researching the use of OER and mobile devices in education and conducting MOOCs (massive open online courses). In 2013, COL partnered with the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT Kanpur) offering a six-week MOOC on Mobiles for Development. The course attracted 2,255 registrants from 115 countries.

www.col.org/KnowledgeServices

Aptus is COL’s prototype “Classroom Without Walls” system that it is currently testing with a number of partners. Combining low-cost technology and OER, the system facilitates content sharing and learning interaction through WiFi, without requiring internet connections.

www.col.org/Aptus
COL is a firm advocate of creative commons (CC) content licenses through OER and OpenAccess. OER repositories and directory services that COL offers to partners and the public are being enhanced to take advantage of the latest technologies and tagging methods.

www.col.org/oer
http://doer.col.org

COL employs a variety of media to communicate with and provide resources for stakeholders and the wider public. COL's website, newsletters (Connections/EdTech News and EduComm Asia), journal (Journal of Learning for Development), blog and electronic resources are among the world's foremost sources of knowledge on ODL. Most of COL's recent publications are available on CD-ROM; all are available on the COL website.

www.col.org
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