The theme of COL’s Seventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF7, 2 – 6 December 2013 in Abuja, Nigeria) is Open Learning for Development: Towards Empowerment and Transformation. The theme becomes particularly relevant as many Commonwealth countries struggle to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) targets by 2015. In addition, the African Union has declared 2010–2020 the “African Women’s Decade”, with an emphasis on gender equality and women’s empowerment. PCF7’s co-host, the Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria, and the lead partner institution, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) are working to make the conference fruitful within the context of development in Africa.

COL’s goal is to help Commonwealth citizens acquire the knowledge and skills to lead productive and healthy lives. The use of open and distance learning (ODL) and appropriate technologies has increased access, improved quality and cut the costs of education in many Commonwealth countries. How can these approaches and methods be deployed to empower socially disadvantaged communities and groups, particularly women, to play an active role in the economic and social development of their countries?

Societies cannot be transformed without the empowerment of their different constituencies. Studies show that voicelessness and powerlessness are the major traits of poverty and underdevelopment. Empowerment is the process of expanding the freedom of choices among disempowered communities and groups such as women. According to the World Bank, empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. Such a process will help in transforming the quality of life and promote sustainable development.

The role of education in development has been well documented. It has the potential to trigger the process of empowerment by expanding the knowledge, understanding and scientific perspective of the people, thereby strengthening their self-confidence and life skills. However, education will not automatically...
support empowerment and transformation. Erin Murphy-Graham points out that “we must not equate empowerment with one’s years of schooling. Rather, we must look critically at whether students actually learn something, if their self-confidence grows, and if they learn to challenge instead of accept traditional gender roles.”* This becomes especially relevant as we see increasing violence against women and minorities. Experience shows that education which promotes critical thinking, respect and understanding is also needed to promote empowerment and transformation.

PCF7 aims to foster reflection on the role of ODL in the empowerment and transformation processes. A mere increase in access to courses will not suffice. The crucial question is whether such courses have enabled students, communities and groups – particularly women – to expand their assets and capabilities to participate in, influence and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. For example, COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) initiative shows that a combination of social capital and human capital (through ODL) and financial capital has enabled women from poorer communities in Kenya, Uganda and India to access developmental resources.

It is important to understand the niche for ODL in the development process. Innovation lies in placing ODL in an appropriate developmental context. PCF7 will discuss the successes and the challenges of education and ODL in enabling empowerment and transformation. COL invites the ODL and development communities to interact, participate, share various experiences and identify strategies for making ODL more effective in the empowerment and transformation of our societies.


PCF7: EMPOWERMENT AND TRANSFORMATION CONTINUED FROM COVER

COL is inviting submissions for its 2011–2013 Excellence in Distance Education Awards (EDEA). These awards will be presented at the Seventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF7) in Abuja, Nigeria in December 2013. The EDEA recognises excellence in three categories:

- Open and distance education materials
- Institutional achievement
- Distance learning experience awards in a degree-granting programme and in eLearning under difficult circumstances

This year COL is introducing a new sub-category for its open and distance education materials award, focusing on the development and use of open educational resources (OER).

Deadline for submissions: 31 May 2013

www.col.org/edea

PCF7 CALL FOR ABSTRACTS AND PROPOSALS CONTINUED FROM COVER

COL’s Seventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning is a dynamic event with a variety of formats to enable participation, knowledge sharing, learning and networking. Apart from paper presentations there will also be a variety of activities that address the interests and expectations of different participants. The idea is to promote dialogue, sharing, networking and collaboration among all participants. These activities include: plenary and parallel sessions, panel discussions, training workshops, open networking streams, social networking and online media, roundtables, marketplace, “show and tell”, etc. We welcome abstracts and proposals from individuals and organisations.

PCF7: 2 – 6 December 2013 in Abuja, Nigeria
Deadline for abstracts and proposals: 30 April 2013

www.col.org/PCF7
www.col.org/PCF7submissions
Lifelong Learning for Farmers leadership training in Uganda

GROWING MORE GINGER AND TURMERIC IN SRI LANKA

Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) activities in Sri Lanka started in January 2011 in a rural community in Kandy district. It is now expanding its outreach capacity on several fronts. Commitment and mutual co-operation within the project consortium members and farming community have enabled the acquisition of knowledge through ICT-facilitated ODL methods.

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) and the Department of Export Agriculture, along with SGS (Lanka) Pvt. Ltd., a certification firm, are the main knowledge institutions, and the Regional Development Bank is the financial partner. The project operates with the farmers who are cultivating crops such as ginger and turmeric. The preliminary survey carried out by the project team revealed that this farming community in the Wathurakumbura village of Kandy district has disadvantages due to lack of necessary knowledge and skills on crop management, disease prevention, post-harvest processing and marketing.

According to Mr. Prasad Senadheera of OUSL, the programme has significantly expanded the extent of cultivation and the number of farmers involved in ginger and turmeric cultivation since 2011. Mr. Senadheera sees clear signs of growing knowledge empowerment and community teamwork, while self-centred approaches, peer-competitiveness and lack of motivation are being “blurred down”. He says, “The project has transformed the rural farming community into a resourceful, social-learning capital.”

mLEARNING FOR FARMERS IN UGANDA

Makerere University has been implementing COL’s L3F model in southwestern Uganda. Significant information and experiences have been gained and shared through a training session that was organised in December 2012 for 26 staff of the National Agricultural Research Organisation, the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries and the National Agricultural Advisory Services. The training covered the various technologies used in mobile learning (mLearning), equipping participants with skills for content and collaborative development of strategies to integrate mLearning into the national extension system.

Since the majority of the farmers cannot read or write, the use of the voice messaging platform in the L3F model attracted much attention from the World Bank-supported Agricultural Technology and Agribusiness Advisory Services (ATAAS) project Chief Information Officer Mr. Ben Mugisha, who committed to have the system integrated into the National Extension System under an ATAAS programme. “I did not know we had such exciting innovations around. I am going to do my best to see this integrated into the extension system,” remarked Mr. Mugisha.

PREPARING JAMAICAN FARMERS TO FACE HURRICANE SANDY

In Jamaica, the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) is actively involved with COL’s L3F initiative. When Hurricane Sandy forecasts were received, RADA prepared and delivered a basic course on Agricultural Disaster Risk Management to the L3F farmers. Text messages of 160 characters or fewer were prepared and sent to 2,480 farmers.

A survey conducted by The University of the West Indies showed that more than 70% of the farmers felt that the messages were timely and useful. Similarly, 70% of the farmers shared the information with their family members and neighbours, and 60% discussed the learning materials with others. The survey also showed that 30% of the farmers made preparations after receiving the text messages.

Mr. Philip Chung, RADA Training Director, noted that the experience and the study have enabled RADA to refine and strengthen its communication system between farmers and extension officials.
SUPPORTING HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

COL has partnered in several capacity building workshops for higher education institutions in Africa over the past months. A workshop to develop capacity in dual-mode provision was conducted in collaboration with the Centre for National Distance Learning and Open Schooling, Ghana, for six Ghanaian higher education institutions to enable them to offer their programmes through ODL. In addition, a workshop on the use and adaptation of OER, and related matters of sourcing, copyright and mainstreaming, was organised for the faculty of the Open University of Tanzania.

COL and the Association of African Universities (AAU) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate on capacity building in higher education by institutions in Africa. AAU is the apex organisation and forum for consultation, exchange of information and co-operation among institutions of higher education in Africa.

TVET IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Skills development is gaining in prominence in many Commonwealth countries as economies struggle to grow and youth are demanding more support and training for employment.

COL Vice President Mr. Vis Naidoo attended an international skills forum convened by the Asian Development Bank. The discussions focused on the policy requirements, global trends in the area, role of the private sector and regional case studies of best practice in skills development. In many of the presentations, there were important references to using technology and distance learning to support skills development. Forum participants agreed that these meetings should be held regularly as part of the knowledge-sharing process that enables countries and institutions to gain and improve their education delivery.

In Papua New Guinea, recognising the critical need to improve access to technical/vocational education and training (TVET), the country’s Education Ministry has recently taken the bold step to establish a TVET Flexible and Open Learning (FOL) branch.

Following the Superintendent’s participation in the Pacific vocational literacy workshop, COL was requested to assist with the development of a national strategy and capacity building plan for the newly created TVET FOL branch. The aim is to increase access to TVET, especially for the disadvantaged and those living in remote and rural areas. TVET FOL Assistant Manager Ms. Violet Gerega said, “TVET is the ideal provider for alternative pathways for students. It provides a brighter future for our youth through the flexible and open learning delivery mode.” COL partnered with Australia’s Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE to provide the institutional support requested, and consultant Mr. Clinton Smith worked with a range of TVET stakeholders to produce a situational analysis of where TVET is now in Papua New Guinea, and how flexible and open learning can help to produce access and quality gains.

ONLINE COURSE DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHER EDUCATION IN JAMAICA

There are about 9,000 teachers in Jamaica whose highest qualification is a teaching diploma and who must therefore, as per Government regulation, upgrade to a bachelor’s degree.

Dr. Marcia Stewart, head of the Joint Board of Teacher Education (JBTE), explains that although conventional face-to-face programmes are available, “the challenge is the fact that the country cannot afford to provide study leave for the number of persons who need to be upgraded.”

In response, COL and JBTE are working together to develop teacher educators’ capacity in online course development and in the conversion of existing face-to-face upgrading programmes for online delivery. A training workshop was held in Kingston in January for 30 lecturers from nine teacher-training institutions. The expected result of this initiative is that all of the 9,000 under-qualified teachers will have the opportunity to upgrade their qualifications to a bachelor’s degree through a mixed mode of online and face-to-face course delivery.
GIRLS GO FORWARD IN TVET

INVEST (Innovation in Vocational Education and Skills Training) Africa partners are focusing on gender equality in students accessing TVET programmes. Two new Women in TVET and Development (WITED) chapters have recently been established at Mombasa Technical Training Institute in Kenya and the Zambia Institute of Business Studies and Industrial Practice. The members meet regularly to plan activities to encourage more girls to consider technical and vocational careers, and to devise ways of making TVET colleges more female-friendly. Mbeya Institute of Science and Technology has also been successful with their access programme for girls, which is run through two outreach centres in Tanzania and has seen an additional 160 girls admitted to diploma programmes this year.

ANNUAL PARTNERS MEETING

To coincide with the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa (CAPA) conference held in November in Zambia, 24 principals and “champions” gathered for the annual INVEST Africa partners meeting in Lusaka. On the agenda was a range of activities, including monitoring results, evaluation methods, change management, outreach centres, collaborative course design and distance TVET teacher training.

INVEST AFRICA WELCOMES 12TH PARTNER

Since the first workshop in Kenya in June 2010, Rift Valley Technical Training Institute principal Mr. Edwin Tarno has not given up his dream for his institution to join INVEST Africa, so as to develop open and flexible programmes to expand access to TVET in the region. They have now upgraded their information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and strengthened ICT skills amongst all their staff. COL is delighted to confirm their readiness for flexible and blended skills development and to invite Rift Valley Technical Training Institute to become the 12th institutional member of the INVEST Africa partnership.

ONLINE TRAINING FOR ONLINE EDUCATORS

More than 50 teachers, managers and policy makers from seven countries – The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia – completed INVEST Africa’s Flexible Skills Development online training in October and December 2012. Six cohorts have now completed this course, which is currently under revision before being offered again in 2013. The courses were facilitated by Ms. Nkiru Banjoko and Professor Sunday Reju, both from Nigeria. All INVEST partners are establishing Moodle platforms for their eLearning courses. Teachers and IT support staff from 11 institutions have just completed the Moodle Administration online course offered through INVEST Africa.

QUALITY CALLING AT MAKERERE

Makerere University Business School (MUBS), a long-time member of CAPA, has plans to substantially expand its distance learning programme to more than 4,000 students. To help staff evaluate current systems and services, COL commissioned Mr. Tony Mays, from the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE), to work with them on a quality review. This required the creation of a quality team which carried out an internal review and then an external verification of their findings. The result was a detailed analysis of where they are, where they want to be and how they might get there while maintaining and improving the quality of distance programme provision. Team leader Ms. Massy Nabasirye said, “We thank COL for identifying Tony to help MUBS. His visit opened our eyes to a lot of distance education experiences. Together with COL we shall go forward.”

www.col.org/tvsd/INVEST
India is a major producer of open educational resources (OER) in higher education. COL’s Knowledge Management and Technology group and COL’s regional agency, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), in association with Creative Commons, organised a one-day workshop on “Open Educational Resources and Open Licensing Policies in the Indian Context” in February in New Delhi.

Inaugurating the event, Mr. Anant Kumar Singh, Jr. Secretary, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, welcomed CEMCA’s OER initiatives and asserted that from a philosophical viewpoint, all educational resources should be available and accessible to everyone freely and beyond national boundaries. He said that the workshop would be useful by developing a roadmap to assist institutions with sourcing and using OER effectively.

Ms. Catherine Casserly, CEO of Creative Commons, gave an overview of the importance of open licensing and outlined the Creative Commons approach, which reduces the “permission request” process in the production of educational materials. She said, “This event organised in collaboration with CEMCA is a successful networking opportunity for Creative Commons to expand its partner base in India.”

Twenty-seven principals and chief administrators from several national and regional educational institutions participated. Dr P. Prakash, Vice-Chancellor of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU) was the Chief Guest. Dr. Sanjaya Mishra, Director, CEMCA facilitated the discussions and presentations.

The next steps from the workshop will consider what individual teachers should do to promote OER and open licensing, what academic institutions should consider and where interventions from the Government of India are needed to promote the use of OER.

www.col.org/km
www.cemca.org

Since inception, the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) has been engaged in building capacity in eLearning and information and communication technology to empower participating VUSSC institutions.

Thirteen VUSSC countries enrolled 64 learners in an online course, “Linux for IT Managers”. This course was developed by COL and is available as an open educational resource on the VUSSC website. Several learners completed the course despite the challenges of time, adverse weather conditions and connectivity. Learners gave the course favourable ratings.

A workshop to enhance the capacity of VUSSC interlocutors and implementers in monitoring and evaluation was held in Lesotho in December 2012. Fifteen participants representing six Southern African countries attended.

www.vussc.info
A training workshop for 40 female community radio broadcasters from across South Asia was held in New Delhi in January 2013. The event was organised by the UNESCO Chair on Community Media, AMARC Asia Pacific, and the Community Radio Forum of India, with financial and technical support from COL, CEMCA and local partners – the Maraa Media Collective and Ideosync Media Combine.

The four-day workshop enhanced participants’ skills in content creation for radio. COL made contributions in sessions related to formative research, audience engagement and story-based approaches to content. During the workshop, participants produced six 20-minute radio programmes that will subsequently be aired by the broadcast stations that the women represented.

The workshop launched an on-going process in Bangladesh and India of developing capacities and new participatory learning programmes on issues identified by women, with programme planning, design and delivery driven by women broadcasters.

“Participants had an especially positive response to discussions about audience engagement and storytelling because it allowed them to see things from a new perspective. While they have all been making programmes on health, gender and other issues, the workshop helped them realise that they need to deepen their engagement with their communities,” said Mr. Ian Pringle, COL’s Education Specialist, Healthy Communities. “The workshop was useful in helping women broadcasters to start structuring their approach more. They have now identified specific issues that the communities need to learn about and address locally.”

In January, 66 broadcasters from 40 radio stations in 11 Sub-Saharan countries concluded a 12-week online training course.

The course combined training and mentoring in programme development skills such as formative research and story design, and resulted in 45 designs for new or enhanced radio programmes dealing with issues ranging from combating coffee wilt disease, to family nutrition, to access to credit for farmers. The top designs are eligible for small start-up funding from Farm Radio International (FRI).

This is the third online programme that COL and FRI have run together, with earlier courses focused on scriptwriting skills. Now, with the addition of programme design training, results are more significant and potentially have far greater impact.

“The work involved in this course is at a whole new level compared to what they’ve done in the past,” said FRI Resources for Broadcasters Manager Ms. Blythe McKay. “People really invested in order to develop something practical for their audiences, and did so on their own dime. Participants went out into their communities – often for the first time in a structured way – to meet with farmers and to research their issues, needs and situations.”

Mentors reviewed the submissions and selected the best as winners. The top designs will receive seed money to help get their radio programmes up and running: http://tinyurl.com/FRI-DesignWinners

Fourteen mentors from Africa and Canada have contributed an estimated 280 hours to the programme thus far.

FRI is a Canadian-based, not-for-profit organisation that works in partnership with over 325 radio broadcasters in 39 African countries to fight poverty and food insecurity.
The Commonwealth of Learning has been leading the world open educational resources (OER) agenda by promoting the use and development of OER and helping to raise the awareness of the world educational community to the potential of OER.

COL’s involvement with OER actually goes back 13 years, two years before the term open educational resources had even been coined. (It was adopted at UNESCO’s 2002 Forum on Open Courseware.) In 2000, COL initiated the STAMP 2000+ project, which involved the development of 46 modules of science, technology and mathematics teaching materials for the primary and secondary school levels. All of the materials were made available as open educational resources.

Since those early days, COL has made OER a central part of its learning for development agenda because it recognises they have the potential to increase access to quality education for all Commonwealth citizens and, ultimately, to transform education to meet the needs of knowledge societies.

COL AND UNESCO

UNESCO has been a key COL partner in advancing the global OER agenda. In 2010, the two organisations collaborated to launch the initiative Taking OER Beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity, which was intended to raise the awareness of educators around the world to the potential of OER.

Seven advocacy and capacity strengthening workshops and three online forums on OER took place. In December 2010, UNESCO and COL convened a Policy Forum on OER to reflect on progress and chart the next steps in the process. The Policy Forum recommended that COL and UNESCO develop policy guidelines to support the integration of OER into higher education. As a result, UNESCO and COL developed the first of many OER resources (see list on page 9), *Guidelines for OER in Higher Education*. In parallel, *A Basic Guide to Open Educational Resources* was published. It includes a compendium of information and resources and is an important and very popular starter document.

Fostering Governmental Support for OER Internationally

Building on the momentum and success of Taking OER Beyond the OER Community, COL and UNESCO launched a second major OER initiative in 2012: *Fostering Governmental Support for Open Educational Resources Internationally*, with support from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. This initiative involved a survey of governments worldwide, six regional policy forums and drafting of the Paris Declaration on OER.

THE PARIS DECLARATION

Following extensive international consultation, COL and UNESCO received approval for the Paris Declaration on OER at UNESCO’s World OER Congress, in June 2012. The Paris Declaration is a commitment to supporting the use of OER to expand access to education. It was approved by an Expert Meeting at the World OER Congress and contains 10 recommendations to advance the development and use of OER (see list on page 9).

This Declaration is a significant step forward to improving the access, affordability and quality of education worldwide, according to Sir John Daniel, COL’s former President, who led the *Fostering Governmental Support for Open Educational Resources Internationally* initiative, which guided the drafting of the Paris Declaration.

BEYOND THE PARIS DECLARATION

Since the adoption of the Paris Declaration, COL has been actively working to implement the 10 recommendations, with a particular focus on five areas: awareness and advocacy, policy development, capacity building, research and sharing. The following are some of the key achievements in each of these areas:

1. Awareness and Advocacy

COL carried out advocacy for OER at the 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (18CCEM), held in Mauritius in August 2012. An outcome was the inclusion of OER in the ministerial Communiqué, which notes, “while there was a plethora of initiatives for the development of open educational resources (OER), such as scientific publications, eBooks and journals, there was a need to set up a common platform for OER materials for harmonisation and ease of access.” COL also published *Exploring the Business Case for Open Educational Resources* to strengthen its advocacy work.

The President of COL, Professor Asha Kanwar, and senior staff gave several speeches at various national and international forums to promote the use of OER. These are available at www.col.org/speeches.

2. Policy Development

COL commissioned the publication of a template to guide the development of national OER policies. This was then tested at a Caribbean regional OER policy workshop in Jamaica in November 2012 that brought together 27 participants from 11 Caribbean Commonwealth countries. National policy development workshops in Grenada and Antigua were held in March 2013.

3. Capacity Building

Several face-to-face and online workshops were held across the Commonwealth. Some of them include:
Two online workshops on OER, held for members of VUSCC

Online workshop on OER adaptation, for staff at Bangladesh Open University and Allama Iqbal Open University

Workshop on OER development, use and re-use in Sri Lanka for 15 higher education institutions

Workshop on OER use and re-use for teacher educators in Jamaica

4. Research
COL is contributing actively to the growing body of research on OER. The most recent publications include Open Educational Resources and Change in Higher Education: Reflections from Practice (Jenny Glennie, Ken Harley, Neil Butcher and Trudi van Wyk, Eds.) and Open Educational Resources: An Asian Perspective (Gajaraj Dhanarajan and David Porter, Eds.).

5. Sharing
COL has put together a Directory of Open Educational Resources for Higher Education which provides access to nearly 1,200 courses from Commonwealth universities.

In addition, most COL materials are available as OER, some of which have been translated by institutions in non-Commonwealth countries such as China and Ukraine.

COL’S OER RESOURCES
• A Basic Guide to Open Educational Resources (OER)
• Guidelines for Open Educational Resources (OER) in Higher Education
• Exploring the Business Case for Open Educational Resources
• Perspectives on Open and Distance Learning: Open Educational Resources and Change in Higher Education: Reflections from Practice
• Perspectives on Open and Distance Learning: Open Educational Resources: An Asian Perspective
• Survey on Governments’ Open Educational Resources (OER) Policies
• OER Government Policy Development Template
• ICT Competency Framework for Teachers Toolkit (UNESCO)
• A Report on the Re-use and Adaptation of Open Educational Resources (OER): An Exploration of Technologies Available

www.col.org/oer
www.col.org/publications
www.col.org/coursematerials

2012 PARIS OER DECLARATION RECOMMENDATIONS
1. Foster awareness and use of OER.
2. Reinforce the development of strategies and policies on OER.
3. Facilitate enabling environments for use of ICT.
4. Promote the understanding and use of open licensing frameworks.
5. Support capacity building for the sustainable development of quality learning materials.
6. Foster strategic alliances for OER.
7. Encourage the development and adaptation of OER in a variety of languages and cultural contexts.
8. Encourage research on OER.
9. Facilitate finding, retrieving and sharing of OER.
10. Encourage the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds.

NEXT STEPS
COL and UNESCO have received additional funding from the Hewlett Foundation to support the development of national OER policies, capacity building of teachers to develop and use OER and implementation of the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers. Promoting the use of OER is a top priority for COL during this triennium, as it seeks to pursue its goal of providing quality education to all Commonwealth citizens.

www.col.org
www.col.org/publications
www.col.org/coursematerials

The 2012 Paris OER Declaration drafting group at UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France
Many institutions working in the field of open and distance learning (ODL) claim social justice as part of their mission. But how deeply have we thought about what it really means? This was one of the questions that brought me to COL for an attachment for the month of January this year.

For many individuals working in this field, a significant element in our commitment has been informally or formally to frame ODL programmes as interventions to deliver social change – that is, some change in social or economic relationships that shifts the balance of rights, livelihoods and well-being, in a given context – and in particular to deliver increased equity.

This is true in the richer countries as well as in the poorer ones. It is not always easy for educators to see education not as a thing in itself but as a set of activities that deliver outcomes for individuals and societies, although the discourse in the Millennium Development Goals, where education has a core place, clearly directs us in this way. If as educators we take on the identity of workers in development, we very soon have to ask ourselves how we understand the process of development.

The Commonwealth of Learning clearly sets out its position on both how development is to be framed and how education for development can be understood. COL’s current Three-Year Plan: Learning for Development states:

Following the ideas of development economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, COL understands development as freedom. Increasing the freedoms that men and women enjoy is a definition of development, and greater freedom empowers people to be more effective agents of development.

Sen’s use of the term “freedom” intends it to be understood not simply as an absence of constraint but as capacity, or as he calls it, “capability”, to pursue the forms of life women and men want for themselves. Sen’s ideas centre on the proposition that development is about more than economic growth, and that it should include a commitment to individuals to enhance their capacities “to be and to do”, and to have choice in how they realise these aspirations. His ideas construct those in the development process as subjects, not objects. Since their first appearance in the 1990s, it has taken some time for these ideas to be discussed in the education sector, but over the last decade they have gained increasing acceptance.

What does all this mean for ODL and the range of other technology supported innovations for learning? ODL in its discourse is about inclusion: the flexibility that ODL provides in terms of time and place diminishes the limitations of managing study along with work and family; it includes people in geographies that otherwise would be excluded; it supports the inclusion of women where their independent movement is not possible; it permits participation by groups otherwise shut out by cost; and through scale it provides opportunities for far more people than would otherwise be possible. As we know, ODL is supplementing the functionings of participants – functionings in Sen’s terms being the range of activities that make up the capability to be free to change what they do and who they are.

There is an existential commitment to freedom for individuals to choose in Sen’s work – critiqued, it is true, by some as being naive about the power structures that make such freedoms an ideal rather than a reality. Nonetheless, top-down development models which do not see participation as fundamental have long been rejected. If taken seriously by those of us in ODL, this means we have to think through the implications for pedagogy, in terms of curriculum and of learning and teaching, to embed such values in our practices.

For example, Sen’s insistence on discussion as fundamental to the process by which individuals make choices provides a framework in which we can consider the territories of tutoring and peer-conferencing, and their integral place in ODL practice. Equally, the use of open educational resources enhances the increasingly important functioning of learners, and indeed educators, to manage effectively in an information-rich digital world.

In summary, I propose that learning for development needs to be framed effectively by ideas about how development works just as much as by how ODL works.

“Learning for development needs to be framed effectively by ideas about how development works just as much as by how ODL works.”

Alan Tait is a Professor of Distance Education and Development and former Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at The Open University, U.K.
25 YEARS OF OPEN SCHOOLING IN INDIA

COL President Professor Asha Kanwar delivered the Silver Jubilee Lecture at the 25th anniversary celebrations of India’s National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).

India and its NIOS are world leaders in reaching young adults who would otherwise never have been able to access secondary education, bringing them back into the fold to benefit from further formal education and skills training.

Professor Kanwar’s lecture topic was “Scaling Schooling for the Secondary Surge: What are the Options?” She noted that:

- Open schooling can be part of the answer to address the challenge of accommodating the surge resulting from the achievement of universal primary education (UPE).
- Open schooling is a powerful way of addressing issues of equity and social justice.
- Its features are: the physical separation of the learner from the teacher for much of the time; the use of unconventional teaching methodologies, and information and communications technologies (ICTs); and in general a flexible approach.
- Its flexibility also makes it suitable for young adults who need further schooling but either cannot or do not wish to return to the conventional classroom.
- It is a response to the rapidly increasing demand for secondary education, both as an end in itself and as a route to tertiary education, because it can be conducted at scale and cost-effectively.
- It uses self-instructional materials and, indeed, the preparation of such materials also provides an asset to the conventional school system, which in developing countries is usually short of materials. Students get local personal support at study centres, which at secondary school level are relatively more important than they might be at tertiary level. Organising the networks of study centres provides opportunities for partnerships with other state networks or with NGOs that have a special interest in children and young adults.
- The Commonwealth of Learning will continue to make the promotion and support of open schooling a key plank of its work. We are also supporting the development of open educational resources for use in open schools. In addition, we are looking for new models and technology options to scale up secondary schooling.

NIOS is a key partner in COL’s work, and NIOS Chairman Dr. Sitansu S. Jena is the chair of the Commonwealth Open Schools Association (COMOSA), a consortium of 21 countries, which was established with support from COL.

In his remarks at the event, the Honourable Shri Jitin Prasada, Minister of State for Human Resource Development, confirmed that “NIOS has emerged as the leader in open schooling, not only nationally but internationally, [and] is looked upon by institutions in developing countries for academic and technical support.”

www.nios.ac.in
“LIVES” TOUCHES AFGHANISTAN PARENTS

COL has supported the University of British Columbia, Canada, in developing a learning management system for audio-based learning through mobile phones, called LIVES (Learning through Interactive Voice Educational System).

Partnership Afghanistan Canada, a Canadian non-profit organisation, has now been working in partnership with the LIVES Mobile Corp. to use LIVES in a pilot project to deliver a course on early childhood development via mobile phones. The pilot project targeted 100 parents in remote regions of Afghanistan, helping them understand childhood physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development.

There has been positive feedback on both the content and the LIVES mLearning platform. Preliminary results showed significant improvement in parents’ ability to identify their child’s needs and improve their development experience – and indicated that parents shared their knowledge with other families.

www.livesmobile.org

COMMUNITY RADIO AWARDS IN INDIA

India’s Central Ministry for Information and Broadcasting held its 3rd National Community Radio “Sammelan” and awards ceremony in New Delhi in February. In the category which recognises stations for their efforts in making community-relevant programmes, Pondicherry University’s Community Radio Station, Puduvai Vaani, received first prize for its programme Unagalai Thedi (In Search of You). COL, through its regional agency, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), has been working with Puduvai Vaani and provided technical and programming support. This is an important initiative for CEMCA to promote community radio to support social and economic development in the Asian region.

www.cemca.org

NON-FORMAL SKILLS TRAINING, BANGLADESH

Long-time COL partner Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), Bangladesh, recently completed the development of five non-formal skills training courses in print and animation video format to provide livelihoods training. From the left are representatives of UNESCO, COL, DAM, the Directorate of Technical Education and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation at the launch of the materials in Dhaka in February. All are stakeholders in skills development training in Bangladesh.
UNESCO-COL CHAIRS

COL has established a network of Honorary COL Chairs in Open and Distance Learning, most of them in collaboration with UNESCO, which has a longstanding programme of Chairs in various disciplines.

Working with national agencies and educational institutions, the Chairs conduct studies, surveys and research on the current status and emerging trends in ODL and technology-enhanced education and training at all levels.

UNESCO-COL Chairs:

Professor Chandra Gunawardena, Open University of Sri Lanka, has carried out a research study on teacher education.

Professor Vincent Ado Tenebe, National Open University of Nigeria

Professor Tolly Mbwette, Open University of Tanzania

Dr. Rory McGreal, Athabasca University, Canada, is working on two research projects relating to OER.

Dr. Fred Msiska, Mzuzu University, Malawi, is leading a study on the effectiveness of ODL delivery in Malawi.

COL Chair:

Dr. Wayne Mackintosh, Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand, is working on OER.

www.col.org/chairs

OER IN NIGERIA

The COL-supported Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL), based at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), organised a three-day national workshop for 30 academic staff of tertiary institutions in Nigeria to develop capacity in the use and adaptation of open educational resources. The training was held in Lagos in November with participants drawn from NOUN, the National Teachers’ Institute Kaduna, Obafemi Awolowo University, the University of Abuja and the University of Lagos.

Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma and Commonwealth Chair-in-Office Prime Minister Julia Gillard of Australia announced the adoption of a Charter for the Commonwealth, as part of a wide-ranging package of reforms to the 54-member association. This was done during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Perth, Australia in November 2011.

The Charter brings together the values and aspirations which unite the Commonwealth – democracy, human rights and the rule of law – in a single, accessible document. It expresses the commitment of member states to the development of free and democratic societies and the promotion of peace and prosperity to improve the lives of all peoples of the Commonwealth. The Charter also acknowledges the role of civil society in supporting the goals and values of the Commonwealth.

The Charter is wide-ranging and captures the essential aspects of what each Commonwealth country strives to achieve. All signatories to the Charter note the need for sustainable development as important for social and economic progress. The Charter further notes the importance of education, health and gender equality to lay the basis for such development.

Mr. Sharma introduced the Charter as a defining document for an inclusive and accountable Commonwealth. “We are now better placed to respond to the needs of our citizens,” he said.

Prime Minister Gillard said the Charter belongs as much to the people of the Commonwealth as it does to member governments.


www.thecommonwealth.org/CommonwealthDay

Photo: Commonwealth Secretariat

COMMONWEALTH CHARTER

OPEN UNIVERSITY LAUNCHES MOOCs

In a move paralleling a recent one in the United States, students from the U.K. and around the world will have free access to some of the U.K.’s top universities through Futurelearn Ltd., a new company launched by the U.K. Open University late last year. The universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, East Anglia, Exeter, King’s College London, Lancaster, Leeds, Southampton, St. Andrews and Warwick have all signed up to join Futurelearn, which will use a massive open online courses (MOOCs) platform to increase accessibility for higher-education students in the U.K. and abroad.

www.futurelearn.com
OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES: AN ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

Gajaraj Dhanarajan and David Porter, Eds.

This book, the newest in COL’s Perspectives on Open and Distance Learning series, is the result of an OER Asia research project hosted and implemented by the Wawasan Open University in Malaysia, with support from Canada’s International Development Research Centre. Open Educational Resources: An Asian Perspective brings together 10 country reports and 10 case studies on OER in the Asian region that highlight typical situations in each context. China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines and Vietnam all receive extensive treatment.

The 25 contributors to this book bring an impressive level and breadth of expertise, innovation and dedication to researching, developing and advocating for OER. Through a combination of quantitative studies and qualitative analyses, they provide valuable, instructive information and insights from throughout Asia. Open Educational Resources: An Asian Perspective demonstrates that OER development is thriving in Asia – in different economies, amongst different types of stakeholders and with varied approaches to open licensing.

The book is published jointly by the Commonwealth of Learning and OER Asia as CC-BY-SA and is freely available online.

Also in COL’s Perspectives on Open and Distance Learning series: Open Educational Resources and Change in Higher Education: Reflections from Practice; Jenny Glennie, Ken Harley, Neil Butcher and Trudi van Wyk, Eds., June 2012.

www.col.org/psOERAsia
www.col.org/publications

There is growing awareness that individual inputs regarding aspects of distance learning methodology – e.g., learning resources or new technology – are very unlikely on their own to have sustained impact without sound leaders and managers who understand not only the context of the learners but also the full requirements for successful distance learning provision.

These leaders/managers also need to have the capability (authority and resources) to integrate all the aspects required to implement such a different methodology of learning.

This Distance Education Leadership and Management video series brings together several successful leaders/managers to talk about what they do and what they say are the critical ingredients for sustainable, quality distance learning. The participants are all highly accomplished and provide different perspectives from their different roles in various types of institutions.

Ms. Helen Lentell, a Fellow in Distance Learning at the University of Leicester, U.K., and former COL staff member, co-produced this video series with COL through conversations held last year at COL’s offices in Vancouver, Canada.

The videos are OER and available for download and use by anyone.

www.col.org/videos

Freely available online as OER, this new Course Design and Materials Development Guide is an ODL resource published by the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE).

The SAIDE Guide provides step-by-step assistance for education practitioners in using key principles to design and develop their programmes, courses and materials.

The Guide is learner focused and intended to assist education practitioners who are designing and developing education and training programmes, courses and materials. This resource suggests practical design and development steps, and identifies tools and methods for evaluating the resulting programmes, courses and materials.

www.saide.org.za/design-guide
COL is preparing to launch the *Journal of Learning for Development*. The new journal will provide a forum for the publication of research with a focus on innovation in learning, in particular but not exclusively open and distance learning, and its contribution to development. Content will include interventions that change social and/or economic relations, especially in terms of improving equity.

With a view to showcasing practical application to development contexts, the new e-journal will publish empirical research and case studies from researchers, scholars and practitioners, and will seek to engage a broad audience across that spectrum. It aims to encourage contributors starting their careers, as well as to publish the work of established and senior scholars from the Commonwealth and beyond.

COL President Professor Asha Kanwar states, “The journal will be open access and available to all. We believe it will make a difference across the Commonwealth and more widely in encouraging the scholarship needed to take forward the contribution that innovation in learning makes to development.”

COL has appointed Professor Alan Tait of the U.K. Open University to be Editor-in-Chief, in partnership with Dr. Mark Bullen, Education Specialist for eLearning at COL, who as Associate Editor, will manage the operation within COL.

The *Journal of Learning for Development* is seeking submissions for its inaugural issue. More information is available at www.col.org/JL4D.

**BOARD NEWS**

COL welcomes two new members to its Board of Governors. The Government of India has named Shri Ashok Thakur, Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, as its representative, and the Government of South Africa has placed Professor Narend Baijnath, Pro Vice-Chancellor at the University of South Africa, to represent it on the Board.

Board Chair, the Honourable Burchell Whiteman, has expressed his appreciation for the consistent support and contributions of the two government representatives who are stepping down: Ms. Vibha Puri Das of the Government of India, and Ms. Jenny Glennie of the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE). Ms. Glennie had been an active member of COL’s Board since 2005 and has served terms as Audit Committee Chair and Deputy Chair.

**STAFF NEWS**

COL President Professor Asha Kanwar was made a Fellow of Nigeria’s National Teachers’ Institute Kaduna (NTI) during its graduation ceremony in November 2012, an honour shared with former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and the late Abubakar Mahmud Gummi. Also during the same month, at The Open University of Tanzania’s convocation ceremony, Vice Chancellor Professor Tolly S.A. Mbwette presented COL with an Appreciation Award for COL’s “outstanding contributions.”
The global education community is harnessing advances in mobile computing to improve the quality and accessibility of learning. A variety of efforts in this sector are directed towards the development of “apps”, small software applications that work exclusively in a tablet computing environment. Most apps require connectivity to the Internet.

In developing countries, these advances present a great challenge, as most learning takes place in settings with no access to the Internet and often with limited or no access to electricity. Deploying tablet computers and apps in such situations has clear limitations. This is where COL’s concept of a “Classroom Without Walls” becomes relevant.

The Classroom Without Walls is premised on the opportunity for learners to interact with locally hosted learning materials and assignments, circumventing the need for Internet connectivity. The only requirements are a local server and a local area network to which learners can connect their tablets.

Thanks to the rapidly advancing power of tablet computers, and the availability of low-cost devices to create viable local WiFi networks, this concept can be put into practice in an affordable manner.

A tablet is normally viewed as a personal consumer device. We have, however, used it as a server to host a variety of learning or content management systems such as Moodle, whereby learners may interact with educational content. Users can also be given unique IDs, which can be used to track their individual progress as they interact with materials, instructors and each other.

How does a learner connect to this service? The user or learner must have a mobile device or tablet. This can be a generic, non-branded device with a standard configuration. We used ones with 512 MB RAM, 4 GB memory and an A9 processor. This same configuration was used previously by COL and its partners to distribute documents and conference publications during last year’s 18th Conference of Commonwealth of Education Ministers (18CCEM), in Mauritius.

In our test, we created a local WiFi network using a readily available WiFi hotspot device manufactured by Asus. The WiFi hotspot device can be powered using a battery rather than line power, eliminating the need for connection to an electrical grid (the accompanying photo shows the server tablet with the WiFi hotspot device and the battery). The server tablet and user tablet(s) can then connect to this local network and thus interact with each other. If the server tablet and user tablets are already charged, the classroom does not need any electricity to power and sustain this interaction.

The class does not need to be connected to the Internet either – it could be conducted under a tree! In our tests, we also uploaded lessons to Moodle, and several learners were able to post and reply to discussions there.

Prices of powerful multi-core processors in tablets are continually falling. Our hope is that the basic package comprising a tablet, a battery and a WiFi hotspot can be bundled for just under US $150 during this year.

A tablet with such processor power and RAM can help institutions drastically improve the experiences of learners in contact centres or in the classroom. Generic tablets with dual-core processors are already available for less than US $120. These have made it possible to convert a tablet into a full-fledged server in an affordable way.

At COL, trials have been conducted using the Google Nexus 7 Tablet as a server. Its native operating system was changed to Ubuntu 13.04, and both Moodle 2.4 and Wordpress 3.5 were loaded onto it. These can be a strain on the processor and memory, but in our trials they worked without crashing. We also experimented with another open source learning management system (LMS), Canvas.

When Professor Rajesh Chandra, Vice Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific, visited COL in August 2012, he and his staff sought COL’s advice on device configurations. As of January 2013, they too have acquired 600 tablets for their students. As more governments distribute tablets to learners, the Classroom Without Walls can present a real opportunity for converting the digital divide into a digital dividend.

Canvas is rapidly emerging as a viable open source learning management system (LMS). It is offered by Instructure, a U.S.-based company which has made Canvas available as an open source LMS platform since last year. It is a full-featured LMS with a good e-portfolio management feature. It can be downloaded using instructions at https://github.com/instructure/canvas-lms/wiki. Canvas also offers a cloud service at http://canvas.net, where anyone can sign up to offer a free course using the Canvas platform.

COL has made a trial installation of Canvas on the cloud and also installed it in a Google Nexus 7 Tablet that runs Ubuntu (see “Classroom Without Walls”, above).