Innovations for educational resilience

The Tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF10) will explore the theme of Innovation for Educational Resilience, with four sub-themes: building resilience; fostering lifelong learning; inspiring innovation; and promoting equity and inclusion.

The forum has drawn a record number of submissions from around the globe: nearly 700 proposals from 68 countries, with 90 per cent of them focused on the pandemic and the implications for practice in the post-Covid era. Each sub-theme has been covered well.

After a two-stage review process, the accepted proposals were developed into full papers. Out of the 352 papers accepted, many have a specific focus on inequality of access, including connectivity issues in online learning. They cover a wide range of ideas for innovations in areas such as online facilitation, better student engagement, online examinations, digitalising vocational education, using augmented reality in medical education, virtual laboratories, applying learning analytics to improve provision, and designing early intervention systems for at-risk learners.

Besides paper presentations and keynote speeches by leading policymakers and experts, special panels and workshops are being organised on relevant topics such as climate change and education. Several ministers have already confirmed their participation.

A two-month pre-conference online forum is underway to discuss the four sub-themes.

Discussion on Building Resilience was the first, running from 1 to 15 June and mediated by Professor Dr Zoraini Wati Abas from Malaysia. Participants reflected on leveraging existing capacities with various strategies for building resilience. Open and distance learning (ODL), using open educational resources (OER), and integrating technology in provision emerged as key strategies. The importance of continuous professional development for teachers to leverage the use of technology was highlighted. Some form of remote/distance learning will continue post-Covid in the education sector.

The second discussion, from 16 to 30 June, was on Lifelong Learning (L3), mediated by Professor Michael Sankey from Australia. Connectivity limitations continue to be formidable.

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The critical parts played by parents and role models in advancing L3 was recognised. For many, COL’s blended models of delivery offered the most viable options to bridge workplace learning and ODL.

The next discussion, from 1 to 15 July, was on Inspiring Innovations and was mediated by Dr Peggy Lynn MacIsaac from Canada. The education sector lags behind others in adopting emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, augmented/virtual reality, and the blockchain. Smaller countries may be well positioned to make rapid, agile shifts to reinvent their educational systems by adopting emerging technologies. Such adoption should be based on the goals of humanising education, reducing the carbon footprint, building resilience and training citizens for sustainable development.

The fourth and final discussion, from 16 to 30 July, will be mediated by Dr Schontal Moore from the University of the West Indies.
At the 21st Conference of Commonwealth Ministers of Education (21CCEM) in Nairobi, Kenya, the President of Kenya called COL an "engine of innovation" in the keynote speech.

The theme of the 21CCEM was Rethinking Education for Innovation, Growth and Sustainability Post Covid-19. COL's substantial work over the last few years was presented by Professor Asha Kanwar.

COL’s work over the last few years received recognition at CHOGM, with the Heads noting in particular its support to thousands of youths in acquiring new skills for livelihoods using the Web. The communiqué commended COL’s role in building teachers’ capacity and recommending technology solutions to reach the unreached. COL was also encouraged to scale up its activities to help Member States accelerate their progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 by promoting equitable and quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, especially women and girls.

In his speech at the leaders’ summit, the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, announced the renewal of support for COL for another three years.

The communiqué of CHOGM 2022 is available at:

Professor Kanwar also joined the ministerial roundtable on Lessons Learned from Covid-19 Mitigation and Recovery Strategies. This roundtable was conceptualised by COL and chaired by the Minister of Basic Education, South Africa, the Honourable Angie Motshekga, and Professor Asha Kanwar was a panellist. Copies of COL’s strategic plan 2021–2027, a compendium of country reports and a report on COL’s impact were circulated to all delegations.

COL’s contribution received recognition in the 21CCEM Ministerial Statement: “We appreciate COL’s focus on promoting learning for sustainable development through the use of technologies and took cognisance of its report and good work in support of distance education and learning, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, in training teachers to move online, forming alliances such as CommonwealthWiseWomen and in skilling large numbers using the Web.”

The full statement is available at:

“COL is an engine of innovation”: President Kenyatta at 21CCEM

At the 21st Conference of Commonwealth Ministers of Education (21CCEM) in Nairobi, Kenya, the President of Kenya called COL an “engine of innovation” in the keynote speech.

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CHOGM 2022: COL’s workforce recovery support appreciated by Heads

The theme of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM 2022) held in Kigali, Rwanda on 20–25 June was Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming. This was a wholly in-person event.

The Heads recognised global insecurities in food, energy and climate, and “underscored the importance of connecting, innovating and transforming in order to facilitate a full recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.” They “agreed to encourage public–private partnerships, to create high-quality digital jobs for young people across the Commonwealth … with the full participation of the Commonwealth of Learning.”

Professor Asha Kanwar delivered two presentations about COL’s work during lockdown to foreign ministers and senior officials. An impact report and a compendium of country reports were circulated. Professor Kanwar also spoke at the Youth and Women’s Forums, held alongside CHOGM.

The communiqué of CHOGM 2022 is available at:
Transforming Education for Climate Change: COL’s high-level panel finalises report in Seychelles

The final meeting of the high-level panel on climate change and education was convened by COL in Seychelles to review the Recommendations to Commonwealth Ministers of Education to Transform Education for Climate Change report and make recommendations for policy makers in the education sector. This panel was set up by COL to develop an agenda for action to address how distance learning and technologies can foster environmental conservation.

The participants included the education ministers of Maldives, Seychelles, and Trinidad and Tobago, the Deputy Secretary General of the Commonwealth Secretariat, a representative from UNESCO, Seychelles’ Minister of Agriculture, and other senior officials from Seychelles and Trinidad and Tobago. Dr Rolph Payet, the Executive Secretary of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions and former Minister of Environment and Energy, Seychelles, served as the chair.

Professor Asha Kanwar highlighted the opportunities that the report will create for further discussion at national levels to develop context-specific approaches and actions. She expressed hope that the road map provided by the report would be useful in advancing a green learning agenda. The report will be shared with the ministers of education across the Commonwealth.

Members of the panel also visited the University of Seychelles and received inputs from the vice chancellor and faculty on a proposal for a climate literacy course.

Promoting global acceptance of online and distance education

During the third World Higher Education Conference (WHEC2022) in Barcelona, Professor Asha Kanwar spoke about the importance of online and distance learning (ODL) in higher education.

Professor Kanwar reminded the audience about the history of distance education, starting in 1728 via the Boston Gazette, which offered a shorthand course through weekly lessons, all the way through to the present. “Throughout history, the impulse behind distance education was to reach the unreached — those in remote areas, marginalised communities and persons with disabilities,” she said.

She further noted that due to the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, distance and online learning have gained greater appreciation all around the world.

Her call to action was for intergovernmental organisations such as COL and UNESCO to continue advocating the mainstreaming of ODL as a means of sustainable development, for governments to invest in ODL policies and the needed infrastructure, and for educational institutions to increase their adaptation of ODL.

Vice PM of Mauritius felicitates COL Skills for Work awardees

The Mauritius Higher Education Commission (HEC) organised an award ceremony to felicitate the learners of the first cohort of COL’s scholarship awardees for their achievement. The event was attended by the Honourable Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (MoETEST) Mrs Leela Devi Dookun Luchoomun and Professor Asha Kanwar.

As part of its Skills for Work Initiative, COL entered into an agreement in 2021 with the HEC and the MoETEST in Mauritius to offer 3,000 scholarships to learners between 2021 and 2023. This large-scale scholarship programme for the island offers a pathway for lifelong learning and growth, as well as enhancement of skills for employment and entrepreneurship. Each year, two cohorts of learners are admitted and provided with a licence that allows them to attend online courses from the Coursera, Udemy, and Grow with Google learning platforms for about six months.

The learners in the first cohort had enrolled in almost 8,000 courses, and at the award ceremony, they shared their experiences and appreciation for the scholarships.
TEL policy development in Sierra Leone

COL supported a policy development workshop at Freetown Polytechnic in June 2022, where participants contributed to the evolving policy for implementing open, distance and technology-enabled learning (TEL) at the institution.

Supported by the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education, the workshop attracted 35 deans of schools, heads of departments, and lecturers. The Principal of Freetown Polytechnic, Dr Samba Moriba appreciated COL’s support, saying: “Once we achieve a critical mass of students accessing online learning, the country will have crossed an important milestone.” Participants examined current TEL practices in the context of the National Digital Development Strategy, as well as TEL policy needs for efficient curriculum delivery.

Promoting distance education standards in Jamaica

With COL’s support, the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) hosted three workshops to disseminate standards in distance education. The workshops also provided an opportunity for administrators, academic managers and faculty of tertiary-level institutions to assess their institutions in relation to each standard. A total of 500 participants attended three workshops in hybrid and virtual modes in June 2022.

In her address to the participants, the Minister of Education and Youth the Honourable Fayval Williams commended UCJ and COL for promoting and disseminating the standards. She highlighted the significant role that distance education standards play in quality assurance.

Improving training materials in the Pacific

COL’s Technical and Vocational Education and Training Toolkit is an online service for TVET educators and policymakers. Over 200 practitioners and institutional leaders from nine Pacific countries joined an experience-sharing webinar hosted by COL in April 2022. This level of attendance was a demonstration of the significant need for new opportunities for skills training in the region.

The webinar was organised as part of the Pacific Partnership for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning project, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand and implemented in partnership with PACFOLD, a COL-supported regional centre hosted by the University of the South Pacific.

Creating a community of practice for TEL

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the important role of TEL in education and training. While the Pacific region has several such initiatives and projects, information sharing can always be improved. A community of practice is one way to increase information sharing to understand commonalities when planning new projects.

To explore the feasibility, a virtual meeting was held, called TEL in the Pacific and Its Increasing Importance: Towards a Regional Community of Practice. It was organised by the University of the South Pacific in partnership with COL. Twenty six leaders in TEL — including from the Asian Development Bank, New Zealand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the United National Regional Coordination Office for the Pacific, UNESCO, UNICEF and Catalpa, an international NGO — considered opportunities to strengthen co-ordination and collaboration. Each organisation presented an overview of ongoing regional activities. There was a group discussion on commonalities in technology platforms, deployment strategies and challenges for greater harmonisation.
Botswana Open University (BOU) Centre for Open Schooling, supported by COL, successfully assisted girls and young women in the remote regions of the Kgalagadi District in improving access to learning resources. This area is located in the Kalahari Desert, where enrolment and success rates for girls have been lower than expected. BOU’s in-house media team burned 1,000 audio lessons to CDs, which were successfully distributed to the whole of the Kgalagadi — covering conventional day schools and BOU open schooling centres and impacting nearly 500 students specialising in commerce, accounting and office procedures.

Learners were orientated in using the CDs to improve their access to learning resources in the e-learning portal. The initiative ran from January to May 2022 and received tremendous community support. The chief of Kang, Kgosi Basadi Seipone, participated in some sessions with students. BOU’s Centre for Open Schooling is hopeful the CDs will increase student retention and pass rates. While the trend is increasingly towards virtual open schooling, many countries continue to use older forms of technology, such as CDs, flash drives and printed materials. Open schooling must respond flexibly to the needs and circumstances of learners.

Leadership training for women

As part of COL’s commitment to gender mainstreaming and transformational leadership, the third Pan-Commonwealth Training Programme on Women and Leadership in ODL engaged 18 women leaders from 14 Commonwealth countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific. This virtual event was organised in partnership with Wawasan Open University, Malaysia.

The three-day training programme was designed for mid-career women from Commonwealth institutions who are interested in assuming leadership in ODL and ICT-based fields. Expert panellists included Professor Asha Kanwar; Dr Lily Chan, Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor of Wawasan Open University; Dr Melinda dela Peña Bandalaria, Professor and Chancellor at the University of the Philippines Open University; Professor Zoraini Wati Abas, former Dean of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia and Adjunct Professor at Asia e University; Ms Frances Ferreira, COL’s Acting Director for Skills; and Ms Mig Alphonso, COL’s Gender Adviser.

This programme will serve as a launching pad for women to acquire new knowledge, sharpen skills and to craft a strategic plan for advancing them in leadership at their home institutions.

COL gives marginalised girls wings to fly in Botswana

Botswana Open University (BOU) Centre for Open Schooling, supported by COL, successfully assisted girls and young women in the remote regions of the Kgalagadi District in improving access to learning resources. This area is located in the Kalahari Desert, where enrolment and success rates for girls have been lower than expected. BOU’s in-house media team burned 1,000 audio lessons to CDs, which were successfully distributed to the whole of the Kgalagadi — covering conventional day schools and BOU open schooling centres and impacting nearly 500 students specialising in commerce, accounting and office procedures.

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Learning yoga through community radio

In partnership with the Ministry of Ayush, Government of India, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) implemented the International Yoga Day 2022 project at the community level through a network of 200 community radio stations.

Aligned with CEMCA’s objective of “turning listeners into learners,” the project helped children, senior citizens, pregnant women, persons with disabilities, children with special needs and indigenous community members to learn the Common Yoga Protocol as a basis for improving their physical and mental health. This is the second year in a row that the Ministry of Ayush and CEMCA have partnered with community radio stations in India in this annual campaign.

Unique training improves job placement for Indian youths

A unique job-readiness and mentorship programme conceptualised by CEMCA, COL’s regional office in Asia, together with the GMR Varalakshmi Foundation, has placed its participants in remunerative and decent jobs in India. During the pandemic, 133 young men and 69 young women received industry-specific and demand-oriented job preparedness training during ten days of mentorship and five days of placement assistance between November 2021 and May 2022.

Participants were prepared for five distinct job roles: data entry operators, customer service associates, front office executives, refrigeration and air conditioning technicians, and basic electricians, per the industry standards outlined by sector skill councils in India. A mixed method of enhancing domain-specific and soft skills within the National Skills Qualifications Framework equipped them to find placements immediately.

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Creative initiatives for promoting gender equality in Pakistan

COL has supported Bedari, its partner in Pakistan, in developing creative ways to raise awareness about the prevention of child, early and forced marriage and to empower young women and girls to become agents of change. As part of the GIRLS Inspire programme, Bedari produced a series of wall murals displayed in high-traffic areas of the Chakwal District in Punjab. “These 20 murals can help change the attitude of society towards women and girls and inspire them towards education, social justice and economic development,” said Raffat Shuja, Bedari Programme Manager. She added that choosing images of women that resonated with local social norms helped in proliferating these important messages.

COL has been working with Bedari to reduce gender-based violence in 20 villages in the district and improve the livelihoods of 1,000 women and girls through vocational and business development skills training. The two partners are also building the capacity of 406 policymakers to enforce laws against gender inequality.

ODL strategies for TVET in The Gambia and Zambia

In partnership with UNESCO-UNEVOC, COL conducted two online courses on technology-enabled learning and assistive technologies in technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Workshops were held in Banjul in partnership with the Gambian Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology and the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority, and in Lusaka with the Zambian Ministry of Technology and Science and the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority.

Leaders of TVET institutions, as well as teachers and trainers built their capacity in policy development for the effective use of open and distance learning. They validated 16 institutional strategies and learned how Covid-19 has impacted TVET stakeholders and provision in The Gambia and Zambia.

Inclusive design for learning: creating flexible and adaptable content with learners

As educators, we help students discover, explore and value their own uniqueness, optimise their individual skills and differentiate themselves. To create flexible and adaptable learning experiences that are inclusive of student differences, consider the following five approaches:

1. SUPPORT MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES
   Support unheard perspectives. We all make mistakes and have inner strengths, weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Recognising these commonalities fosters a dynamically resilient learning community. Create an environment of collective responsibility and respect, not competitive division.

2. VALUE MISTAKES AND UNCERTAINTY
   Encourage students to take risks and understand the value of productive struggle. Create environments that celebrate trial and error. Foster creative risk-taking through opportunities for students to redo work.

3. DESIGN INTEGRATED LEARNING EXPERIENCES
   Consider students who are marginalised or struggle, first and from the start. Integrating considerations for them results in education systems that can adapt to unexpected change and benefit everyone. For example, multiple formats, captioning and multilingual translation benefited everyone during the pandemic, when we all faced barriers.

4. FOSTER SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING
   Support students to become experts in their own learning and to self-advocate for what they need. Encourage students to guide and propose evidence of their individual progress. Emphasise formative feedback, including peer and self-assessment, over standardised evaluation.

5. CREATE ACTIVE LEARNING COMMUNITIES
   Engage students in purposeful learning experiences and in co-creating, adapting and sharing open educational resources. Teach collective responsibility and reciprocity by engaging students in supporting their peers. Share with and connect to communities globally.

To learn more, check out COL’s publication Inclusive Design for Learning: Creating Flexible and Adaptable Content with Learners, available at: http://hdl.handle.net/11599/3690
From begging to furniture making

Anwar Bibi, her polio-stricken husband and their two daughters aged 13 and 17 had been living on daily begging until she learned about a skills training programme jointly run by Bedari and COL. The acquaintances whose homes she used to visit introduced her to different courses. Anwar Bibi chose the furniture-making course and quickly learned the basic skills, which she also taught to her husband and daughters.

"Right now, everyone in the house contributes to making cane furniture," she exclaimed. With their new abilities, the family is inching towards financial independence. "I don't want my two daughters to have a life like mine," she firmly states. The basic principles of making chairs from cane are simple, and the final products are sold at a lower price than at the market. Bibi hopes that with time and hard work, the pieces will start looking more professional and sell at better prices. She notes, "I am still working hard to sharpen my skill and expand my business."

Dominica: Disaster preparedness is better than relief

Dominica has an open-source online platform on comprehensive disaster management. Developed with COL’s support, it was launched earlier this year before the start of the hurricane season in the country. It is hosted by the Office of Disaster Management (ODM).

The platform provides key information related to emergency readiness and disaster preparedness. Its features include a dedicated section for youths, a hurricane shelter map, and a collection of relevant policy documents.

The new platform is also a learning resource to help citizens understand the importance of disaster preparedness. It provides links to activities and other resources that also champion disaster preparedness, and it marks an important step in Dominica’s commitment to be fully climate resilient by 2030.

COL has also supported the Climate Resilience Execution Agency for Dominica (CREAD) to carry out a public awareness campaign to strengthen community capacity in disaster preparedness, focusing on maximising local buy-in.

Ambassador Francine Baron, CEO of CREAD, is the impetus behind this initiative. She says that the new platform “serves, among other things, as an official news and information source on climatic events, emergency readiness, disaster preparedness and response. It will go a long way in the search, selection and distribution of critical data.”

She is one of 76 women who learned to make cane furniture with help from Bedari, a non-governmental organisation in Pakistan working in partnership with COL’s GIRLS Inspire initiative to protect the human rights of women and children.

As a part of this project, over 500 women have received training in various skills, including in tailoring, computing, jewellery making, nurseries and agriculture, and hair and makeup styling.
Virtual labs provide real experience for students

As laboratory experiments are an integral component of science and engineering education, their unavailability during the Covid-19 pandemic became quite a challenge for science teachers and students. During the lockdown, teaching and learning activities were severely impacted in many countries.

Since the lockdown, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) has initiated online awareness programmes about virtual labs. A virtual lab is available via an open website that can be accessed by anyone, anywhere in the world, using a browser connected to the Internet. A variety of laboratory experiments can be conducted virtually using animation, simulations or remotely triggered hardware, making teaching and learning more accessible to teachers, students, researchers and lifelong learners. They are especially useful to learners and teachers in remote locations. CEMCA partnered with the Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham University in India, which leads the national project on virtual labs.

CEMCA organised online training sessions for teachers in open and formal universities and schools across Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and Maldives with a total of 468 teachers. A follow-up evaluation found that more than 85 per cent of teachers are using virtual labs, incorporating diverse features.

Anish Kumar — a teacher at Baa Atoll School in Maldives, underwent training in virtual labs and implemented them into his regular practice. He said, “Our students do not have a proper school lab facility. When we introduced virtual labs to the students, they felt these were real labs; they explained to the others that they had performed virtual lab experiments, which motivated other students.”

Ayesh Afrin at the University of Chittagong, in Bangladesh, echoed Anish’s views. She said, “I am teaching lab courses from home. I have used virtual labs for inorganic chemistry. Students are very satisfied. Once they go through it, they enjoy virtual lab experimentation.”

Championing inclusive education in Tonga

Disabled Pacific people are less likely to have received a disability needs assessment than non-Pacific people with a disability. According to the Tonga National Disability Survey Report 2019, students with disabilities have lower rates of participation than those without. The report suggests that one in every 12 persons with a disability has never attended school, while 61 per cent drop out, compared to 30 per cent without a disability.

As a primary school teacher for 14 years prior to her current role, Matelita Taufa has witnessed barriers to learning that those with a disability face. In 2022, Tonga battled a triple disaster: a volcanic eruption, a tsunami and a serious outbreak of Covid-19. Life for those with disabilities was further complicated because access to education, the Internet, transport and many other everyday things was restricted.

As the Ministry of Education and Training representative on the Tonga National Disability Steering Committee and Principal Education Officer for Inclusive Education, Matelita is well aware of these discrepancies and the challenges many Tongans with disabilities face as they strive for equal education opportunities.

Her long-standing commitment to improving education accessibility and quality prompted her to enrol in COL’s Introduction to Assistive Technologies and Introduction to Disability Needs Assessment courses. She also co-ordinated a cohort of 30+ stakeholders in Tonga to complete the training.

Her biggest surprise after completing the course was that so many tools to help learners are freely available on her own laptop. “From Natural Reader to dictation capabilities and low vision-friendly fonts, I discovered I was only using a very small percentage of the functions of my existing computer.” Tools like Natural Reader — a text-to-speech application that converts any written text into spoken words — are vital for enabling learners to read and navigate the curriculum.

Matelita is committed to using inclusive education to address inequalities in education for learners with disabilities — a focus she will continue to champion within Tonga’s Ministry of Education and Training, now with a new understanding of the tools available to help.
The Kenya Technical Trainers College (KTTC) opened in 1978 through funding from the Canadian International Development Agency, with the primary objective of training technical trainers in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions.

The core functions of KTTC include: training technical trainers to teach in secondary schools and tertiary institutions; developing and implementing various syllabi within TVET programmes, in collaboration with stakeholders; developing, administering and processing examinations and awarding certificates, diplomas and higher diplomas; developing and implementing curricula in response to labour market demands; promoting entrepreneurial skills and culture for KTTC staff and students; conducting applied research; and promoting innovation.

Efforts to formalise distance and open learning at KTTC were made in the early 1990s, when evening classes were organised for employed people wanting to further their skills and formal education in technical and business areas. KTTC introduced learning programmes in the mid-1990s to create access for untrained teachers with diplomas in technical education wishing to pursue diplomas in technical teacher education. In 2002, KTTC established the Learning Resource Centre to introduce the Higher Diploma in Education Management (HDEM). Although the learners were on campus, a total of 14 printed distance learning manuals were developed for the HDEM course, and 20 computers were made available, equipped with Internet connectivity so staff could make use of online educational resources. Staff were then trained on integrating ICT in teaching, learning and administration.

In 2005, the college introduced a mixed-mode learning programme to provide pedagogical skills to untrained technical teachers in the national polytechnics, technical training institutes, technical and vocational centres, secondary schools and youth polytechnics. The course was flexible, and learners were engaged at campuses closest to their residences. Learning took place during evenings, weekends and holidays, and learners could attend classes on campus two weekends a month.

The Commonwealth of Learning has supported TVET in Kenya since 2010. Partners include the Ministry of Education, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority, the National Industrial Training Authority, and several TVET institutions, among these KTTC. Through COL’s support, KTTC established its Open, Distance and eLearning Department in 2013 and subsequently developed its Online and Distance eLearning Policy and Strategy, which has a robust capacity-building element, making KTTC the country’s prime institution for blended TVET.

As an immediate response to the Covid-19 pandemic, COL supported the establishment of a TVET Learning Resource Catalogue at the college, using a cost-effective model for developing and sharing OER. Open courses and OER from COL were adapted and used in the professional development of 6,000 trainers. Examples of course subjects are: disability needs assessment and assistive technologies; facilitating online courses; blended learning in the classroom; flexible skills development; Moodle Learning Management System implementation strategies; and facilitation using Microsoft PowerPoint.

Using blended learning approaches, COL is building the capacity of subject matter experts in engineering and textiles to develop competency-based OER aligned to the national occupational standards approved by Kenya’s Technical Vocational Education and Training Authority. COL is also supporting KTTC and industry partners to skill, reskill and upskill master craftspeople in the informal sector for blended apprenticeship training.

In April 2022, KTTC opened the Professor Asha Kanwar ODeL Centre, marking a new phase in strengthening the capability of trainers to integrate online and blended learning in their practices. This will go a long way toward skillling and reskilling Kenyans for employment and entrepreneurship. With the transition of KTTC to the Kenya School of TVET, the college will now offer degree programmes as well.
**Open schooling in Malawi for OER without Internet**

An open schooling pilot was launched through a collaboration between COL and the Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE). MCDE is responsible for using open and distance learning to provide access to secondary education, especially for learners unable to secure places in public institutions. These learners are enrolled in open secondary schools, normally situated in conventional secondary schools.

It was observed that developing and using digital resources could augment the quality and effectiveness of provision, but the cost of Internet access in Malawi required an offline solution. To address this, a pilot project was initiated using COL’s AptusPi device, which enables access to digital learning materials without the need for Internet connectivity. The resources on the AptusPi devices are also available for use by day-school teachers and learners. MCDE is putting in place a process to monitor and evaluate the pilot, with a view to scaling it up.

**Ethical and Inclusive Reporting for communicators**

Thirty-eight journalists, media practitioners and disability communicators from six small states in Africa took part in Ethical and Inclusive Reporting, a professional development course for communicators on how to effectively portray persons with disabilities (PWD) and to be more inclusive of the disability community. The 21-hour online course ran for seven weeks. The course raised awareness among professional communicators about how media representations impact the rights of PWD, while empowering participants to improve media coverage of disability-related issues. During the course, participants assessed their own and others’ representations of PWD.

COL partnered with the Global Rainbow Foundation in Mauritius to develop and offer this course.

**OER capacity building**

CEMCA, COL’s regional centre in Asia, organised a workshop in June 2022 on the theme Developing OER for Faculty Members of Directorates of Distance Education and Open Universities in India. The two-day event offered a hands-on learning experience for the participants to engage with OER online, and to work with the necessary tools for sourcing, remixing and contextualising learning materials.

A national consultation and validation workshop on OER policy was organised by COL and the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (MoETEST) in Mauritius. Several important suggestions were offered at the meeting to ensure the quality of OER and to focus on building teachers’ capacity.

COL conducted a workshop on OER, in collaboration with the MoETEST. Inaugurating the workshop, Dr Justin Valentin, Seychelles’ Minister of Education, thanked COL for its support in enhancing the quality of education and training in the country. Twenty-five teachers attended the workshop. The participants also had the opportunity to curate OER for a subject of their interest.

**COL ODeL Centre in Seychelles launched**

Supported by COL, a centre for open, distance and e-learning (ODeL) was inaugurated by Professor Asha Kanwar and Seychelles’ Minister of Education, Dr Justin Valentin. The centre will train teachers in creating OER and integrating ICT in education. It will have facilities for digital audio and video creation, an open access repository, and a learning management system that enables educators to create and curate learning materials for primary and secondary school subjects. Some of the centre’s first activities will include developing 37 open textbooks for secondary (O-level) and junior college (A-level) courses to be offered by the Seychelles Institute of Distance and Open Learning. These materials will prepare teachers to facilitate online learning, resulting in all secondary school students and teachers in Seychelles having free access to open textbooks.
It is with great sorrow that COL announces the sudden passing of Professor Narend Baijnath. The open and distance learning community is deeply saddened by the loss of this caring and dedicated champion of education.

In July 2020, Professor Baijnath was appointed as the Chair of the Commonwealth of Learning’s Board of Governors after having served as the South African representative on the Board since 2012. In addition, he served on the Board’s Executive committee and Audit committee (as a chairperson), and as the Deputy Chair. Professor Baijnath devoted his career to education through a range of roles. He was the Chief Executive Officer of South Africa’s Council on Higher Education, Pro Vice Chancellor at the University of South Africa, and in the same institution served as the Vice President of Strategy, Planning and Partnerships, as well as Vice President of Research and Planning.

Professor Baijnath will forever be remembered for his warm spirit, caring attitude and devotion to the betterment of education.

In Memoriam: COL Board Chair, Professor Narend Baijnath

WALE ADEKUNLE
COL welcomes Professor Wale Adekunle as Adviser: Lifelong Learning for Farmers. He has many years of professional experience in agricultural development and livelihoods as well as international development, obtained across several international organisations.

JANE-FRANCES AGBU
Professor Jane-Frances Agbu has joined COL as Adviser: Higher Education. She has over a decade of experience in higher education and ODL in the African region. She previously served as Centre Director of the Abuja Study Centre at the National Open University of Nigeria.

MIG ALPHONSO
COL welcomes Ms Mig Alphonso as Adviser: Gender. She has experience both in Canada and internationally in gender equality and social inclusion. She holds a Master of Arts, Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies and a Bachelor of Environmental Studies and Political Science.

ROBERT OKINDA
Mr Robert Okinda joined COL as Adviser: Skills and has a wide range of experience in open and distance learning in the TVET sector in Africa. He holds a Master of Education and a Bachelor of Education.

NATALIA ANGHELI-ZAICENCO
Farewell to Dr Natalia Angheli-Zaicenco, who joined COL as Stakeholder Engagement Manager in 2019. We are thankful for her contributions to COL and wish her all the best in future endeavours.

JL4D seeks contributions

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.
Mainstreaming OER in Nigeria

COL and the National Universities Commission (NUC) of Nigeria, in partnership with the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), organised a high-level workshop in Abuja on mainstreaming open educational resources (OER) in the country’s higher education institutions. The workshop intended to build capacity for implementing the national OER policy in higher education institutions, with a focus on inclusivity and skill development. About 150 senior faculty members from 22 institutions participated in this hybrid event.

Dr Chris Maiyaki, Deputy Executive Secretary of the NUC, stressed the importance of partnerships and international collaboration. A presentation by Mr Eloka Odua on his experience using accessible OER highlighted the critical importance of inclusivity in Nigeria, where about 19 million persons have disabilities.

Discussing graduate employability at Kenyatta

In the continuation of COL’s partnership with Kenyatta University, Professor Asha Kanwar met with the deputy vice chancellor, deans and directors of the university. They discussed the role of education and skills in graduate employability, as well as the enhancement of COL’s support for virtual labs and micro-certifications. These enhancements aim to further improve the quality of education at Kenyatta University, increase their students’ employability, and boost the faculty’s capacities. Professor Waceke Wanjohi, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) at Kenyatta University, highlighted how the leadership course developed for increasing employability has gained popularity.

Learning to fight pests using a simple mobile phone

Kalyani, 40, is a farmer from Alathuranpatti village in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Like most farmers in her area, she had been finding it difficult to deal with pests and insects damaging crops. She found a zero-cost solution that is effective and sustainable through a MobiMOOC.

In a MobiMOOC, the course content is in an audio format. It is delivered as short clips that require basic cell phones for participation. A farmer can listen to the learning materials at her own convenience. Flexibility is built in by design.

Kalyani attended a course on Integrated Pest Management, learning the use of simple biological methods to prepare effective pest repellents without additional costs. She said that “the audio lessons of the MobiMOOC were simple, easily understandable and comprehensive.” She appreciated the audio format, which provided flexibility to learn while she was in the field or at home.
When we gather this September in Calgary, Canada for our tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF10), we will be exploring the theme of innovations for educational resilience, an idea I have been thinking about quite a lot, given the rapidly changing state of our world.

Resilience has been the subject of much discussion over the past two-and-a-half years of life during a global pandemic, in education as in other spheres. Personal resilience is a tall order for people who have every right to feel the pressure and challenge of forced change. But when we talk about educational resilience, what we are really describing is systemic flexibility — the ability and opportunity for institutions to adapt to ongoing disruption. As the world continues to be disrupted, learners demand increased flexibility in their educational options while they personally adjust to ever-evolving pressures in life and in the workforce.

For too long, we have been locked into thinking of education as the full-time pursuit of a rigidly curated curriculum. Resilience in education systems is about broadening our view of learning, not only for the constant stream of teenagers heading out of high school to university, but also for people both younger and older who need learning in their lifelong journey.

An example of this flexibility lies in a growing focus on micro-credentials, which offer a stackable, custom alternative to the traditional programme curricula offered by universities and colleges. At Athabasca University, we are offering such micro-courses through our entrepreneurial arm, PowerED™, partnering with external organisations, with government, and with experts from our own faculties. For example, together with the Rick Hansen Foundation, we offer certification in designing and building accessible spaces for people with disabilities. With our own Faculty of Science and Technology, we are developing micro-credentials in Ethics and Artificial Intelligence, Innovative and Diversified Energy Resources, and Energy Efficiency in Architecture, Engineering and Construction — areas of particular interest to business and industry.

Whilst most world micros are still non-credit, a range of frameworks to leverage the combined or “stacking” value of micros are being developed internationally, for example, by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Commission. (See, for instance, this article in *University Affairs*: https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/are-microcredentials-the-future-of-higher-ed/). Some countries, such as New Zealand, have leapt ahead and embraced stackable micro-credentials nationally as part of their regulated education and training system, making them fit smoothly with already recognised credentials and awards.

Looking at micro-credentials and the needs of the workforce moves post-secondary leaders away from curriculum thinking to outcomes thinking — a focus on what we are trying to achieve with and for learners. This work is beginning in pockets throughout the system; but how much more effective would these efforts be if they were supported and recognised for credentials across the broad expanse of Commonwealth universities?

For some of us, the longer-term vision is a fully resilient world system that can respond constantly and quickly to changing individual needs via universal credit. In this world, any programme of study or sub-, micro- or nano-credential can find a common way to fit together under learners’ control, to suit their learning outcome needs rather than the system’s convenience. For our learners, that is resilience worth having.
Learning for Sustainable Development: COL’S Impact 2015–2021

The Commonwealth of Learning’s Strategic Plan 2015–2021 sought to leverage open and distance learning (ODL) and contribute to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 4 by generating three long-term outcomes: better organisational capacity in ODL, increased opportunities for quality learning, and improved sustainable livelihoods. This report contains examples of impact from COL’s work during the plan period.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4045

Out-of-School Children and Youth: A Contemporary View from Selected African Commonwealth Countries

This publication on out-of-school children (OOSC) in Commonwealth Africa is already informing priorities in COL’s work in open schooling. The report provides an overview of key indicators for all 19 Commonwealth African countries as well as contextual case studies of eight countries for which representatives were available to verify or update the data that had been collected. While significant progress has been made towards universal primary education, there remain challenges in primary and secondary completion, and in the key transitions from primary to secondary and from lower secondary to senior secondary.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4057

COL’s Report to the 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM): Delivering a Common Future

This report illustrates how COL connects a network of partners, delivers innovation and transforms communities through education and training in the Commonwealth and beyond. It also includes a message from Her Majesty The Queen and highlights COL’s origins.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4058

Reversioning OER: A Guide for Teachers in the Pacific

This guide to reversioning open educational resources (OER) is intended to help teachers in the Pacific adapt OER to their own teaching situation. The guide contains five units: (1) what are OER; (2) licensing open educational resources; (3) aligning OER with a national curriculum; (4) ensuring your content is appropriate and relevant; and (5) building appropriate learning activities, reflection activities and assessment tasks. This guide was developed as part of the Pacific Partnership for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning Project, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4015

Latest JL4D issue explores lessons from diverse contexts

The July 2022 issue includes submissions from multiple countries and explores contemporary challenges and opportunities as they affect parents, students, teachers, teacher educators, university lecturers as well as policymakers. It contains a provocative invited article, seven research articles, seven case studies, a report from the field and two book reviews.

http://jl4d.org
Can “augmented intelligence” be effective in education?

The extensive lockdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic have compelled leaders in education, training and lifelong learning to experience the utility of technology-enabled learning. The pandemic has led to noticeable learning losses globally, which may have an impact on governments’ ability to achieve SDG4 in the next eight years. In this context, can artificial intelligence (AI)-based services offer support and help in achieving the goals at hand?

The application of AI in education has been around for a reasonably long time, beginning as early as the 1980s, and a wide range of its uses have been recorded in research as well as in commercial literature. Better-known uses of AI in more recent times are intelligent tutor systems (ITS) and AI-powered teaching assistants. Investment in ITS has resulted in over 60 systems being available commercially.

The use of AI in the remote proctoring of examinations during lockdowns was reported to be successful during the last two years. AI has been deployed for mining data from learning analytics on a pilot scale. There was an early effort to curate thousands of online educational resources using AI to render them easier for adaptation and reuse. Every major international technology company is now offering “AI-as-a-service,” reducing or eliminating the need for user organisations to invest in algorithm development. However, a large proportion of AI applications in education are still being tested. A sizeable number among them are student-facing applications, with very few being teacher centred.

Just as the World Economic Forum has provided a global framework for AI in business, the Beijing Consensus (2019) can be thought of as providing a global framework for AI in education. The consensus is that the ethics of AI, equity and inclusion should be the core considerations in planning for AI in education. The teacher should be the principal stakeholder.

Augmented intelligence — the blending of human and artificial intelligence — is considered stronger than either working alone. It should be possible to design applications where the teacher’s agency is blended with AI to make learning and delivery even more effective. This is also important in making learning more scalable while offering a personalised experience. A well-developed framework for a hybrid of human and machine intelligence is already available. This has been developed using a range of theoretical and practical AI approaches, including big data and advanced machine learning. In COL, an effort is underway to build a prototype whereby a teacher can use AI to recommend appropriate and relevant OER for a particular context.

AI can contribute more towards achieving SDG4 if the Beijing Consensus facilitates teachers and AI functioning together using augmented intelligence approaches.