REPORT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING TO THE
COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING (CHOGM)
KAMPALA, UGANDA, NOVEMBER 2007
At the 1987 Vancouver CHOGM, Heads of Government decided to promote co-operation in distance learning as a new expression of the vital Commonwealth spirit of partnership. They welcomed the Briggs Report *Towards a Commonwealth of Learning*, commending it as an imaginative and constructive approach to meeting urgent educational needs, and established the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) as a new intergovernmental agency.

The Heads of Government defined COL’s purpose as:

“to create and widen access to opportunities for learning, by promoting co-operation between universities, colleges and other educational institutions throughout the Commonwealth, making use of the potential offered by distance education and by the application of communication technologies to education…. COL’s name expresses its fundamental role: to help create a learning Commonwealth, a Commonwealth in which learning is the high road to greater freedom and a better life for all citizens. Learning is the key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the goals of Education for All and the Commonwealth values of peace, democracy, equality and good governance.
Traditional teaching methods cannot cope with the scale and diversity of learning needs, but rapidly evolving information technologies and media can bring quality learning opportunities to all Commonwealth citizens. COL has developed powerful models for applying technology to learning in all areas of life. COL has helped Commonwealth countries give millions of people new opportunities to learn by empowering governments, institutions and individuals to develop learning systems themselves without always relying on donors. This report shows how COL has expanded learning in support of the goals and aspirations expressed by Heads of Governments at their meetings over the last 20 years.

*COL’s activities will aim to strengthen member countries’ capacities to develop the human resources required for their economic and social development, and will give priority to those developmental needs to which Commonwealth co-operation can be applied.*
Traditional ways of delivering management programmes can be expensive and inconvenient. In 1989, COL began exploring ways to develop an affordable and accessible management training programme. It saw an opportunity to use open and distance learning (ODL) to overcome barriers of cost, time and geography. Four Open Universities in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka came together to develop and deliver a high quality ODL management curriculum for the Commonwealth to meet the need for management and public administration education at the postgraduate level: the

“[Heads of Government] were much attracted by the ... proposition that ‘any learner anywhere in the Commonwealth shall be able to study any distance-teaching programme available from any bona fide college or university in the Commonwealth.’”

Mr. H.S. Hettiarahchi, an experienced aviation/airports manager in Sri Lanka, was drawn to the CEMBA/MPA programme because of its international credentials, a strong global curriculum and a relevant regional focus. “The managerial concepts were blended with practical experience throughout the programme,” Mr. Hettiarahchi says, “This made it more interesting.”
Mr. Hettiarahchi’s discipline in completing the programme broadened his perspective and established him as a leader among his peers and business colleagues. “It was hard to earn but worth doing,” he reflects. His career options have now significantly widened after graduation and he is looking forward to progressively rewarding and challenging opportunities.

Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) programmes. In the last two years, the CEMBA/CEMPA Consortium has expanded to include partners in Ghana, Guyana, Jamaica, Malaysia and Nigeria.

In collaboration with Jamaica’s University of Technology (UTech), COL developed the Special Diploma in Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) for teachers. Cohorts have already graduated from the Bahamas and St. Kitts & Nevis. This programme has since migrated from the Caribbean to West Africa where it has been upgraded to a B.Ed degree and is now offered by the College of Technology Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.

The CEMBA/CEMPA degrees and the TVET programme for teachers exemplify networking and co-operation among Commonwealth institutions. They have attracted strong student enrolments and promoted inter-institutional mobility and credit transfer, economies of scale, knowledge transfer and capacity building.
COL has been consistently active in higher education (HE) even when it dropped off the agenda of other development agencies. Because HE is the strategic heart of education, investments there help developing countries to meet critical needs, and strong HE systems contribute substantially to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Countries look to the Commonwealth for support in developing HE and COL is ready to expand its work in this sector.

COL’s activity embraces many areas: policy, institutional development, professional development, quality assurance, capacity building and research. It puts a special focus on helping countries and institutions develop policy frameworks for the development of open and distance learning (ODL) and the deployment of information and
School into the mainstream, the university is able to draw upon the existing talent in the university for course development and delivery. Today the School has more than 140,000 students and has recently launched an FM radio station with technical support from the Commonwealth Electronic Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), COL’s regional office in New Delhi.

communications technologies (ICTs) at all levels. The mainstreaming of distance education into the national development agenda has led nine Commonwealth countries (Cameroon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guyana, Mozambique, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Zambia) to include ODL in their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers or development plans.

As HE expands rapidly in the developing world, quality must not become a casualty to quantity. COL has focused on enhancing quality by:

- developing context-specific and need-based quality assurance (QA) guidelines for Sri Lanka,
- developing QA guidelines in teacher education for pan-Commonwealth use,
- providing training workshops for the staff of open universities in India and Nigeria,
- assisting with institutional audits or reviews (e.g., Potchefstroom University and UNISA, South Africa; the University of Ghana), and
- improving practice, particularly in relation to correspondence and distance education courses, through workshops and publications.

More recently, COL has developed an annotated QA web resource with links to appropriate sites across the world.
Achieving gender parity in primary and secondary schools by 2005 is a goal that has eluded both South Asia and Africa. To achieve it by 2015, alternative delivery mechanisms such as open and distance learning (ODL) will have to be harnessed. Data shows that women prefer distance education. In South Africa, women make up 61% of distance students compared with 53% of contact institutions. In India, 35% of distance students are women compared with 29% in contact institutions.

With its emphasis on capacity building in ODL, COL is supporting the education and training of women at all levels. COL

Ms. Shahnaz Basheer, a young Pakistani woman, was married off to an illiterate taxi driver after she completed class 9. Beaten and abused, she was thrown out after the birth of her daughter. She wanted to study again. Her former teacher told her of the Women’s Secondary Education Programme at the Allama Iqbal Open University. The method of distance education was confusing at first, but she got used to it and started attending the tutorial sessions at the study centre. The study centre was far away and she failed in English and Mathematics. But Ms. Basheer did not give up.

“Heads of Government emphasised that the education and training of women in larger numbers was imperative … and all member governments should make this a matter of the highest priority.”
“Distance education provided me with a range of subjects,” she says. “When I failed, I could reappear.”

Ms. Basheer has now completed her matriculation and established a stitching centre where she trains other women and girls. Her daughter goes to an English medium school and Ms. Basheer has ensured that her sister is continuing at school instead of being married off. It is clear that education benefits not only the woman herself but the whole family. By sharing such success stories, COL inspires women to benefit from open and distance education.

guidelines for gender-inclusive distance education materials have helped institutions develop courses which encourage and motivate both women and men through the appropriate use of content, language and graphics.

Through the use of community radio, COL is helping rural women in India to enter the science stream. Geethalakshmi of Tiruchirappalli, one of a number of women in India who have been trained by the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, now holds audiences spellbound as she broadcasts live on the local FM station.

COL-sponsored research on women and information and communications technologies (ICTs) is helping policy makers and practitioners understand and surmount the barriers that contribute to the gender divide in this field. Access to education has empowered many women to overcome social, cultural and religious taboos and to take charge of their own destiny.
The wealth of information resulting from agricultural research and development often fails to travel the last mile to the villages of the developing world where it is most needed. COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3 Farmers) programme empowers vulnerable rural women and their families to gain knowledge, create their own self-directed learning process, organise themselves to solve problems of food security, improve their living conditions and increase their freedoms.

L3 Farmers is an innovative model involving four partners. First, farmers form an association and create their own vision of development for their village. It could be acquiring better livestock, growing new crops or improving the marketing of their produce. Second, a consortium of learning

“Heads of Government were of the view that resolving the related problems of poverty and food security must remain a strategic priority for the Commonwealth if sustainable development were to be achieved in member countries.”

Ms. S. Vallikannu, a 60-year-old illiterate and landless woman, is a member of the L3 Farmers programme in the Indian village of Uppukottai. Before the L3 Farmers project, she had never owned a cow and was paying interest rates of 60 percent to money lenders. Now she regularly visits a computer kiosk with peers to communicate with experts through video-CD and video-emails to learn about dairy farming. After reading...
FOOD SECURITY

Institutions brings together expertise in agriculture, veterinary science, open learning and technology. Third, commercial ICT kiosks are used to link the farmers to this consortium, as well as providing other useful information. Fourth, the commercial banks are encouraged to provide loans to farmers who have improved their knowledge and capability thanks to the information from the consortium and the ICT kiosks.

Introduced in two rural areas in South India in 2004, L3 Farmers enables communities to move away from donor dependency towards a development process that is both sustainable and self-replicating. It is nothing less than a new approach to agricultural extension that helps L3 communities to enhance their knowledge, productivity and livelihoods. The banks are realising that investing in L3 Farmers and building capacity in rural communities can help expand their business by reaching out to the bottom of the economic pyramid. L3 Farmers is being adapted and introduced in Jamaica, Kenya, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka. COL plays a catalytic role by mobilising the communities, the banks and micro-credit agencies to engage with the process and integrate it into their business strategies.

about mineral salt in learning materials, Ms. Vallikannu sent a video-email asking an expert about the role of mineral salt in animal nutrition. She was then advised how to use a less expensive mixture of common salt and minerals. Through L3 Farmers, she has gained self-confidence and learned to negotiate with the bankers, cattle traders and dairy companies.
Achieving universal primary education is a key development goal. As more countries provide free primary education, the demand for secondary schooling will increase dramatically. Many governments will struggle to meet this demand by building conventional schools and must seek out alternative approaches.

Open schooling uses high quality self-instructional materials and provides tutorial support to learners at local study centres. It increases access to schooling in a flexible and cost-effective manner and is especially helpful to girls, women and other disadvantaged groups.

Open schooling is making a difference to the future aspirations of children in the Commonwealth. Mr. Wilfred April of Namibia is a recent success story. “After completing conventional school, I did not achieve the minimum requirement to enrol at university, so I decided to enrol at NAMCOL as I was...”

“Heads of Government reiterated their commitment to pay special attention to the rights and needs of children and to the importance of protecting their rights and needs.”

CHOGM AUCKLAND 1995
The Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) annually enrolls 48% of the total Grade 12 candidates who sit the national examinations. Denying such a large number of secondary students the right to education could disrupt social stability, as recently stated by the Prime Minister, the Honourable Nahas Angula: “We would have had a national disaster on our hands with uneducated and unemployed youth roaming the streets, if there was no NAMCOL.”

India has a network of 11 open schools which cater to approximately two million secondary school students in the country. Students learn at their own pace and convenience and can opt for on-demand exams at the National Institute of Open Schooling.

COL is helping with the establishment and development of open schools in Bangladesh, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia. It emphasises south-south co-operation in improving access to quality schooling at the secondary level in this way.

determined to continue my tertiary education,” he explains. Mr. April went on to complete three degrees in Namibia and at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, after which he received a scholarship to continue his studies in the U.K.
Education for Sustainable Development is the educational process of achieving human development in an inclusive, equitable and secure manner. Sustainable development requires people to learn about the effective use and management of natural resources and also to develop skills and values to change their behaviour. This cannot be achieved through formal classroom teaching alone. Education must take place in the home environment for which open and distance learning (ODL) and information and communications technologies (ICTs) offer exciting options.

Ms. Shruti Shukla, Ms. Biji Varghese and Ms. Pintueli Gajjar are Green Teacher graduates who have gone on to make significant progress in environmental education. Ms. Shukla, who co-ordinates the training programme for Government Teachers in Environmental Studies, received a State Award for Excellence. Ms. Varghese moved from teaching mathematics to running Global Communities for Sustainability, an exchange programme between

“Heads of Government reaffirmed their commitment to the fundamental values of the Commonwealth … and emphasised that democracy, good governance, sustainable development and respect for human rights and freedoms were interdependent and mutually reinforcing.”
Green Teacher, a one-year Diploma in Environmental Education for educators, is a first in India. Seventy teachers have graduated in the pilot of the ODL programme, which is now being scaled up massively. Green Teacher is distinctive because of its instructional design and innovative delivery mechanisms. Learners tackle environmental concerns in their classrooms, engaging students in action-oriented environmental education activities/projects. The course was designed by the Centre for Environmental Education (CEE) in India in partnership with COL, following a Supreme Court ruling stipulating that environment be a compulsory subject in the Indian education system.

Green Teacher is now being translated into other Indian languages, and other South Asian and African countries have asked to use it. An online version of Green Teacher will be ready by 2008 to accommodate growing interest in the course.
Recruiting and training teachers is critical to the achievement of Universal Primary Education. Africa alone must train four million additional teachers in the next 10 years to achieve that goal. COL has contributed substantially to this effort in a number of ways.

Teacher education at a distance goes back to the 1960s and 1970s. Today, it is a vibrant movement that has contributed to the training of tens of thousands of teachers in Africa and South Asia. COL is helping to increase capacity for distance learning.

STAMP 2000+ is a success story of networking eight southern African countries — Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe — to achieve effective capacity building and materials development for teacher training. This was done by bringing together education professionals to collaborate on a five-year distance education project to train upper primary and junior secondary school teachers and administrators following the call for large numbers of better trained teachers.

“Heads of Government reaffirmed their commitment to education and training as essential foundations for human development and emphasised the central importance of equipping people with the knowledge and skills to meet the challenges of development and to take advantage of the opportunities presented by globalisation.”

CHOGM DURBAN 1999
ND TRAINING

Learning in countries such as The Gambia, India, Lesotho, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Zambia. The emphasis is on strengthening single- and dual-mode distance education systems and influencing policy makers and administrators in the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) for teacher development.

The Singapore-COL Joint Management Development Institutes, organised annually from 2001 to 2005, trained 100 teacher education administrators from Sub-Saharan Africa. More recently, the focus has been on sustained engagement with teacher education institutions through a capacity building approach, networking and consortium building within and across countries. COL's current Three-year Plan, 2006–09, seeks to build capacity in the use of eLearning for teacher development and quality assurance in teacher education institutions.
“Heads of Government reaffirmed their view that small states are particularly vulnerable to international developments and natural disasters and confront a range of structural challenges to sustainable development.”
Ms. Gunness has become a well-known name to educators around the globe. Now, a year later, she is being called on by other small states to help them because of the network, skills and experience she developed through the VUSSC initiative.

• enhancing the professional capacity of educators,
• developing new course materials and enabling the transfer of courses, and
• facilitating the movement of qualifications across borders.

Ministers of Education wanted their countries to become equal partners in the world of education and information and communications technologies (ICTs). Thanks to VUSSC, their educators have acquired new skills in immersion workshops where they learn online skills and develop learning content using Web 2.0 technologies. The workshops, which each attract a group representing about 20 countries, have been hosted by the Governments of Mauritius, Singapore and Trinidad & Tobago. After returning home, participants maintain contact online and continue to collaborate in developing course content. An important spin-off is substantial capacity building in ICTs and instructional design within the participating small states.

VUSSC is also facilitating the transfer of courses and qualifications among countries. Existing frameworks and standards from the participating countries are being assembled into a Transnational Qualifications Framework with the help of the South African Qualifications Authority.
Raising awareness of health information is one of the most effective ways of meeting health challenges in the developing world. Open and distance learning (ODL) using mass media is a powerful tool that can be used to inform and educate those who might otherwise remain unaware of issues that directly affect them. COL’s Media Empowerment (COLME) programme is demonstrating how low-cost media applications can make a significant impact on health problems such as HIV/AIDS.

The COLME approach to addressing HIV/AIDS prevention and stigma has been to work with different partners such as the World Health Organization, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government ministries. Stakeholders are provided with audio and video technology and

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Ms. Thobile Ndawonde from KwaZulu Natal was only 23 years old when doctors diagnosed her with HIV/AIDS. Her family, uneducated as to how the disease is contracted and fearful for their own health, isolated her in a small hut away from the family house and left her to die — unattended, alone and stigmatised.

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CHOGM ABUJA 2003

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training, empowering them to create content customised to the linguistic and cultural context of the target groups.

The Valley Trust Media Unit in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, created as a result of COLME, uses radio, television, video and audio media to disseminate messages about health, education, environment and agriculture. The programme addresses the health Millennium Development Goals by providing local communities, organisations and institutions with appropriate technology and media skills to develop appropriate content.

In Papua New Guinea, a village cinema kit is carried, paddled, driven or flown to the remote villages of the country so that large groups can view HIV/AIDS information in local dialects. In Sierra Leone, the health cinema events are so popular that villagers follow a cinema troupe from village to village to view the videos repeatedly. In The Gambia, COL partnered with the Nova Scotia Gambia Association to bring village cinema events to 1,000 villages, contributing significantly to the Government’s fight to decrease HIV infection rates. COL is currently working on HIV/AIDS initiatives in Barbados, Guyana, India, Malawi, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Swaziland.

spent her last days recounting her story on camera so that others like her may not suffer. The new Valley Trust Media Unit also travelled to Ms. Ndawonde’s village to interview her aunt, uncle and grandmother on video. They confirmed that fear of contracting HIV/AIDS had goaded family and villagers to drive the young woman into isolation. Even after her admission to hospital, the family refused to go near her possessions.
The disparity in information and communications technologies (ICTs) access and use in developing countries compared with that in the industrialised world often prevents ICTs from achieving their full development potential. COL strives to bring the benefits of ICTs to all citizens and bridge the digital divide through initiatives such as the Commonwealth Computer Navigator’s Certificate (CCNC). This will widen access to basic skills training in ICTs for all citizens of the Commonwealth and, through collaboration with UNESCO, of the wider world. Inspired by the nautical history of the small island states that constitute half the Commonwealth’s membership, COL strives to bring the benefits of ICTs to all citizens and bridge the digital divide through initiatives such as the Commonwealth Computer Navigator’s Certificate (CCNC). This will widen access to basic skills training in ICTs for all citizens of the Commonwealth and, through collaboration with UNESCO, of the wider world. Inspired by the nautical history of the small island states that constitute half the Commonwealth’s membership, COL strives to bring the benefits of ICTs to all citizens and bridge the digital divide through initiatives such as the Commonwealth Computer Navigator’s Certificate (CCNC). This will widen access to basic skills training in ICTs for all citizens of the Commonwealth and, through collaboration with UNESCO, of the wider world. Inspired by the nautical history of the small island states that constitute half the Commonwealth’s membership,
the CCNC will equip learners on their voyage to become full participants in our knowledge society. The Certificate materials are designed to cover basic skills in word processing, spreadsheets, databases and Internet-based communication.

The CCNC course materials are distributed as free content for anyone to use, modify and repackage. The programme is taught using open source software so that prospective learners do not need to incur additional software licensing costs to participate, thus considerably widening the range of options for training in ICTs. The first offering of the courses in Commonwealth member states will be early in 2008 and the Certificate will be awarded by participating institutions around the Commonwealth.

Any institution will be free to use the CCNC materials. The module developers from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, North America and the Pacific are collaborating online using COL’s WikiEducator, a free website for developing open educational resources. By creating more opportunities to acquire ICT skills, the CCNC is throwing a wide bridge across the digital divide.

In South Africa, Ms. Juliet Stoltenkamp wanted to change the names used in the case study for demonstrating the requirements of a business letter. After consulting with the copyright office at the University of the Western Cape, she was pleasantly surprised to learn that the CCNC licence enables her to adapt the materials without the need for further permissions.
VISION Access to learning is the key to development. MISSION The Commonwealth of Learning helps governments and institutions to expand the scope, scale and quality of learning by using new approaches. COL promotes policies and systems to make innovation sustainable and works with international partners to build models, create materials, enhance organisational capacity and nurture networks that facilitate learning in support of development goals. WHAT COL DOES COL helps developing Commonwealth countries to increase access to learning using distance education and appropriate technologies. STAKEHOLDERS Governments, institutions and citizens of the 53 Commonwealth member countries benefit from COL’s work. FINANCES Core funding from voluntary contributions by Commonwealth member governments is supplemented by a variety of extra-budgetary resources in support of the programme. STAFF COL has some 40 employees distributed between its headquarters in Vancouver, Canada, and the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia in New Delhi, India. Its people reflect the cultural diversity of the Commonwealth, and senior staff members, who serve on rotation, are recruited from around the Commonwealth. PROGRAMME SECTORS The programme of work addresses some of the key learning challenges associated with the UN’s eight Millennium Development Goals, the six goals of Education for All (Dakar) and the Commonwealth objectives of peace, democracy, equality and good governance. These are grouped in three sectors of activity: • Education • Learning for Livelihoods • Human Environment. Gender is a cross-cutting theme as is “knowledge management technology,” which has close links to the development of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, a network requested by Ministers of Education. PROGRAMME RESULTS Each initiative seeks outputs and outcomes in one or more of three categories: • Policies • Systems • Models and Materials. The greatest impact COL has is in giving citizens of the Commonwealth better access to education and training through open, distance and eLearning, thereby enabling them to gain the freedoms of improved livelihoods and gender equality that promote economic, social and cultural development. MODE OF OPERATION COL is an agency in the service of all Commonwealth governments. It is not a funding body. It works with institutional and individual partners to give policy advice and to implement programme activities in consultation with governments. DEPLOYMENT OF RESOURCES Having a small and effective core staff allows COL to target resources directly to countries with activities that emphasise regional co-operation and south-south exchanges through collaborative networks. CONTACT COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING, 1055 WEST HASTINGS STREET, SUITE 1200, VANCOUVER, BC V6E 2E9, CANADA | PH: + 1-604-775-8200 | FAX: + 1-604 -775-8210 | EMAIL: INFO@COL.ORG | WEB: WWW.COL.ORG