Commonwealth Secretariat Board of Governors

June 1, 2017

Report of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

<u>**Background**</u>

1. Created by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1987, COL is the world's only intergovernmental organisation with a mandate to promote and develop open, distance and technology-enabled learning in support of development.

2. COL's mission is to help governments expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using open and distance learning (ODL) and appropriate technologies. It assists governmental, non-governmental and community partners in developing policy, building capacity, refining models, creating materials and nurturing collaborative networks.

3. "Learning for Sustainable Development" is the title of the Strategic Plan 2015-2021 which began in July 2015. COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development. Learning must lead to opportunities for economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation.

4. COL's strategic goals are:
    a. human resource development in the Commonwealth;
    b. harnessing ODL/Open Educational Resources (OER) and technology to promote equitable access to learning for sustainable development; and
    c. promoting Commonwealth cooperation.

5. COL's priorities include:
    a. development and promotion of OER; and
    b. education and training for women and girls.

6. In six years, COL aims to improve the capacity of 470 organisations to leverage technology for education and training, increase quality learning opportunities for 1.4 million people mostly from marginalised communities, and strengthen the sustainable livelihoods of 300,000 people. COL believes that these activities will become reference points for governments and institutions to strengthen learning for sustainable development. As a small and specialised intergovernmental agency, partnerships underpin all COL's work. COL promotes cooperation and collaboration with Commonwealth governments, Commonwealth bodies, multilateral organisations, civil society, community-based

organisations and the private sector. The number of COL's partners has increased from 252 in 2016 to over 280 in 2017.

7. As of April 30, 2017, COL has reached over 372,000 learners.

8. COL received an excellent evaluation from the Department for International Development (DFID), UK and was given an A++ rating. Such a rating is given when an organisation exceeds both in outputs as well as in outcomes.

Reporting to Governments

9. In addition to annual reporting to the Commonwealth Secretariat Board of Governors and its own Board, COL presents its strategic plan, along with individual country reports, to Commonwealth education ministers when they meet triennially.

10. "COL in the Commonwealth", a compendium of individual Country Reports, is published at the end of each triennium and was presented to Education Ministers at the 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (19CCEM) in The Bahamas. The next report will be presented at the 20CCEM in Fiji.

11. COL has a network of Focal Points, nominated by Education Ministers, in each Member State and keeps them apprised of its work on an ongoing basis.

12. COL also participates in Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM) and presents its progress to Foreign Ministers. During the 24th CHOGM in Malta in November 2015, COL presented its progress report and highlighted how it 'adds global value'. As the Communique states, 'Heads commended COL's Strategic Plan 2015-2021, which they envisaged would add value to national efforts to accelerate progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through the uses of appropriate information and communication technologies'.

Six-Year Plan 2015-2021

13. The Strategic Plan is titled "Learning for Sustainable Development". COL is committed to realising its vision of seeing the achievement of human development goals through universal access to learning.

14. COL's mission is translated into a comprehensive Logic Model that specifies the outcomes and impacts COL aims to achieve through activities in two programme sectors – Education and Skills, with gender as a cross-cutting theme. Success is measured against a set of clearly identified performance indicators.

    The Education sector has five initiatives: Open/Innovative Schooling, Teacher Education, Higher Education, the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), and GIRLS Inspire.

The Skills sector works in both formal and non-formal learning and the four initiatives in this sector are: Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD), Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F), Technology-enabled Learning (TeL) and OER for Skills Development.

15. The **Education** sector initiatives are as follows:

Open/Innovative Schooling: Due to progress made in achieving universal primary education, secondary school places are grossly insufficient to absorb the surge of pupils now completing primary schooling. Open/Innovative schooling is increasingly recognised as a viable solution to the growing demand for equitable access to secondary education, especially for girls and marginalised groups, particularly in remote locations. Governments are seeking to redefine the way that secondary education addresses societal needs by diversifying the curriculum. This means making available technical and vocational programmes alongside academic offerings – something that open schools are well placed to do. In the current Six-Year Plan, the main focus is on girls education (www.col.org/OpenSchooling). This initiative is being implemented in **Bangladesh, Belize, India, Mozambique, Trinidad &Tobago, Vanuatu** and **Zambia.**

Teacher Education: One of the targets of SDG4 seeks to "substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States". Governments and the education sector want to increase teacher supply and improve teacher quality. COL's Teacher Education initiative has focused on school-based, in-service training models, which can cut costs and achieve scale. It has emphasised the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and OER in teacher training to improve the quality of teaching (www.col.org/TeacherEducation). COL is working with institutions in **Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Guyana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Trinidad & Tobago** and **Uganda.**

Higher Education: COL continues to support policy makers, institutions and leaders in higher education to harness the potential of ODL and technology and so enable them to cope with the increasing demand for quality higher education, rising costs and diminishing public funding. COL has developed action plans aligned to the priorities of specific countries to increase access to quality higher education and forges partnerships with international and regional organisations to leverage its impact (www.col.org/HigherEducation). Institutions in **Botswana, Cameroon, Fiji, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tonga, Uganda, Vanuatu** and **Zambia**, partnered with COL in this initiative.

Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC): Strengthening and improving the quality and scope of existing tertiary institutions is a key priority for small states. The VUSSC partnership represents 30 small states of the Commonwealth dedicated to expanding access to tertiary education. In the past few years, VUSSC has connected institutions through online technologies to promote eLearning and the sharing of

educational resources using collaborative and multi-institutional partnerships. COL's emphasis is now on the delivery of VUSSC courses and programmes and in promoting the use of the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) (www.col.org/VUSSC). Eleven institutions in 8 countries, **Barbados, Botswana, Brunei, Maldives, Mauritius, Samoa, Seychelles** and **Solomon Islands** are offering VUSSC courses.

GIRLS Inspire: This project aims to provide schooling and skills development to some of the hardest-to-reach girls in the Commonwealth. Research shows that education lowers the probability of early marriage for girls. COL is working in **Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Pakistan** and **Tanzania** to provide education and training to 45,000 girls to equip them for employment and entrepreneurship. This project is supported by Global Affairs Canada and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia. More than 29,000 girls and women have already been trained.

16. The **Skills** sector initiatives are as follows:

Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD): COL has demonstrated that using ODL and learning technologies can increase access to quality technical and vocational skills development equitably. The role of TVSD in creating a skilled workforce of lifelong learners for the informal and formal economies is constantly challenged by urban-rural and gender divides that exclude large numbers of learners from skills training systems. COL is working with institutional partners and governments in **Bangladesh, Barbados, Fiji, Ghana, Grenada, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Trinidad & Tobago, Tuvalu, Uganda, Vanuatu** and **Zambia** to create contextualised, high-quality models for using educational media and technology and flexible and blended approaches to scale up skills development (www.col.org/TVSD).

Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F): COL's L3F programme helps rural communities find appropriate technology-based solutions to improve their livelihoods. L3F empowers vulnerable rural women and their families to gain knowledge, create their own self-directed learning process, organise themselves to solve the challenges of food security and improve their living conditions. Under the L3F model, COL is a catalyst in bringing together institutions, civil society and the private sector to build the capacity of communities through gender-sensitive learning (www.col.org/L3F). Eleven countries, **Antigua & Barbuda, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Tonga** and **Uganda**, have adopted the L3F approach.

Technology-enabled Learning (TeL): This initiative aims to encourage more governments and institutions to integrate technology-enabled learning and OER policies and practices to improve teaching and learning for skills development. COL believes that for technology to have a transformative effect in teaching and learning, a focus on policy-technology-capacity is needed and practice must be based on research evidence (http://www.col.org/programmes/technology-enabled-learning). This initiative is being implemented in **Antigua & Barbuda, Bangladesh, Belize, Grenada, India, Malaysia, St. Lucia** and **St. Vincent & the Grenadines.**

OER for Skills Development: OER for Skills Development aims to encourage more institutions and governments to implement OER policies and strategies, guide institutions in integrating OER in teaching and learning effectively, and support institutions to develop good quality learning materials and share them as OER. This project, started in January 2016 with the support of The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, complements all other initiatives. This project has worked in **Botswana, Cameroon, India, Kenya, Nigeria, St. Lucia, Sri Lanka** and **Tonga.**

17. **Gender:** Gender is the cross-cutting theme that underpins and complements all the initiatives. COL recognises that the advancement of the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment is central to its agenda of learning for sustainable development. As a cross-cutting theme, gender equality requires that both women's and men's views, interests and needs shape its programmes. Gender mainstreaming is an organisational strategy for COL. A gender equality perspective is taken at all stages of the programme cycle – planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – to ensure that the initiatives offer equal opportunities, benefits and participation to girls/women and boys/men. COL has a Gender Policy, a Gender Action Plan and its website provides links to resources and research on gender and ODL and ICT (www.col.org/Gender).

18. Recognising that the Commonwealth is a diverse and geographically dispersed association, COL has established regional centers to support capacity building in the field. Through an agreement signed with the Government of **India**, COL established a regional office, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) in New Delhi. In Africa, it supports the Research and Training Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL) hosted by the National Open University of **Nigeria** (NOUN) and the Southern African Development Community Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE) located in the **Botswana** College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL); COL-supported centres include the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD) at the University of the South Pacific (USP), **Fiji**, and the Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning (CCCL) at the Ministry of Education and Employment, **Malta**.

19. To adapt its programme to fit the unique needs of each country, COL develops individual Country Action Plans after extensive consultations with Focal Points and partner institutions. These are monitored and updated regularly (www.col.org/FocalPoints).

20. COL adds strength to its professional network by working with a group of eminent education and development professionals from across the Commonwealth who act as Honorary COL Advisors. COL-UNESCO Chairs have been appointed to work in specific research areas related to ODL and OER (https://www.col.org/about/unesco-col-chairs/unesco-col-chairs).

21. COL is results-oriented and constantly strives to achieve 'value for money'. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation are key components of COL's results-based management practice. COL's "Theory of Change" model helps to define its roadmap to achieve its goals. A Risk Management Matrix is reviewed regularly by COL's senior management and Executive and Audit Committees, and annually by its Board of Governors.

Examples of COL's work

22. Some examples of COL's work at the Pan-Commonwealth level and in the four regions are presented as follows:

Pan-Commonwealth

23. COL was able to strengthen its leadership in Open Educational Resources (OER) during the current year because of additional contributions from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. COL conducted six Regional Consultations on OER (RCOER) in collaboration with UNESCO and the government of Slovenia in the lead up to the 2nd World OER Congress. Eighty-five governments and over 700 stakeholders have responded to a survey to determine the status of OER worldwide.

24. COL signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UN Women. The partnership was a milestone for COL, establishing a linkage between SDG4 and SDG5.

25. The 8th Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF8) in **Malaysia** was a successful event due to the close relationship between COL and Open University Malaysia. More than 500 participants including seven ministers, Vice Chancellors, senior officials and civil society representatives participated in the event. PCF8 led to Kuala Lumpur Declaration which called for reinforcing the role of ODL in addressing sustainable development goals.

26. Ministries of Education in **Belize, Mozambique, Trinidad & Tobago, Vanuatu** and **Zambia** signed agreements to integrate open schooling in their education system, and in depth work will be conducted and the results tracked over the medium term.

27. The GIRLS Inspire Programme in **Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Pakistan** and **Tanzania** helped in building the skills of 29,231 women and girls and resulted in 5,260 girls accessing income generating opportunities. This programme is being supported by the Governments of Australia and Canada.

28. Under the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), 24 new courses were made available. The courses on Blue Economy and Environmental Management for Sustainable Development were developed in response to the needs of the Small Island Developing States as well as land-locked and coastal countries.

29. Under COL's eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO) a record number of 965 learners from UNICEF, Council of Europe, UNHCR, World Bank, Norwegian Red Cross, Norwegian Refugee Council, ILO and the **Guyana** Quality Assurance Council were trained with a completion rate of 88%.

Africa

30. The COL Review and Improvement Model was successfully implemented at the University of **Mauritius**. It built staff capacity to conduct a self-institutional audit and aimed at strengthening the internal systems for improved quality assurance. This exercise led to

in-depth introspection and resulted in 12 recommendations. One of them has moved the university in the direction of open access publishing and open educational practices.

31. A draft revision of the Lesotho Qualifications Framework was completed with the Council of Higher Education, **Lesotho**.

32. Four thousand, four hundred and seventy three children in **Kenya, Tanzania** and **Uganda** have benefitted from the Open Resources for English Language Teaching (ORELT) programme.

33. A Lifelong Learning for Famers study in **Kenya** showed that a 1% increase in empowerment can increase the profits of enterprises by 2.3%. The study also revealed that L3F farmers have higher average empowerment scores than their non-L3F counterparts. The combination of learning with social and financial capital is the critical success factor for empowerment.

34. In a tracer study conducted by COL partner Koforidua Polytechnic in **Ghana**, graduates from the COL supported artisan programmes reported increases in quality of life indicators including confidence and self-esteem, living conditions and ownership of goods as a result of the training.

35. A comparative study of VUSSC ODL students with regular face-to-face students in **Botswana** showed that none of the ODL students' parents had attended university. VUSSC is enabling first generation university learners to access tertiary education. The same study shows that ODL learners, on average, have a significantly smaller carbon footprint than their campus-based counterparts.

36. COL worked with the Ministries of Basic Education (MINEDUB) and Secondary Education (MINESEC) in **Cameroon** to launch a national advocacy and sensitisation project introducing OER to 393 policymakers in the ten regions of the country. Regional OER guidelines were developed for mainstreaming OER into the local education system, considering the unique linguistic, cultural, economic and social contexts of each region.

Asia

37. At the end of the 'Reaching the Unreached' project, supported by the Government of Australia, for skilling girls in **Bangladesh, India** and **Pakistan**, the community and family members felt that employment opportunities had increased by 47% and perceptions of access to health resources had improved by 74%. The project aimed to reach 20,000 girls and women but benefitted 25,284.

38. The Ministry of Telecommunication and Digital Infrastructure, Government of **Sri Lanka** integrated L3F into its three-year plan and signed an MOU with COL.

39. The women-run Theni District Farmers Goat Producer Company in **India** received an equity grant from the Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium, a society sponsored by

India's Department of Agriculture Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare. Popularly known as the 'voicemail farmers', the women received training in goat farming, business management and corporate literacy and launched their registered company. More than 1,000 women are now shareholders, showing a nice example of empowerment at the bottom of the pyramid.

40. Nine provincial policies on OER were drafted and implementation plans finalised, potentially affecting four million learners in 10,000 schools in **Sri Lanka.**

41. Three universities in **Sri Lanka** conducted gender audits and developed gender roadmaps using COL's Institutional Gender Scorecard. This prompted the Sri Lanka University Grants Commission to request COL to support this process in 12 additional universities in the country.

42. CEMCA supported the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in **India** to evolve a discussion paper on OER policy. The discussion paper, developed in consultation with various stakeholders nationwide, is expected to help MHRD in developing a national OER policy.

43. Rupantar, in **Bangladesh**, launched a programme with five community radio stations to impact sustainable livelihoods. It is conducting a baseline survey amongst 1,000 youth in the community to understand their aspirations, level of education and exposure to opportunities in vocational education. This survey is identifying traditional skills of the community and the challenges in finding employment or becoming entrepreneurs.

44. Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in **Pakistan** enrolled 4,755 students in the Commonwealth Executive MBA (CEMBA) programme and 1,266 have graduated. Around 44% of the enrolled students are women.

Caribbean

45. The first cohort of students graduated from the Matelot Innovative Community Open School (MICOS) in a remote fishing village in **Trinidad & Tobago**.

46. In **Antigua & Barbuda**, the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Fisheries and Barbuda Affairs, and Ministry of Social Transformation and Human Resource Development adopted L3F. In **Jamaica**, extension officers are undergoing a 12-week online course on L3F and 550 potato farmers are involved in mobile phone-based learning.

47. The Governments of **Belize** and **St. Lucia** requested COL's support to develop ICT in education policies and strategies to improve integration of appropriate technology in teaching and learning. In consultation with the respective ministries, these policies were developed and are to be adopted by the two countries.

48. Diagnostic instruments (reading, language and mathematics) for identification of children with special needs education in the Caribbean have been drafted and are being pilot tested.

49. The online Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) Assessor Training was launched with 43 participants from **Barbados, Grenada** and **Trinidad & Tobago**. The aim is to improve the efficiency and affordability of this basic training, which all teachers and trainers working in CVQs are required to have. The materials were adapted from workshop resources in the three countries and are now available as online OER training resources.

Pacific

50. With the help of COL and other agencies, Matuaileoo Environment Trust Inc. in **Samoa** is providing local solutions to national challenges. COL's interventions have improved their organisational capacity, through support for resource-based, flexible learning, which blends carefully designed materials with collaborative community learning, under the guidance of a facilitator. Learners have reported that the training is impacting their livelihoods through improvements to health, income and empowerment.

51. The **Tonga** Business Enterprise Center (an institution of Tonga Chambers of Commerce and Industry), launched a financial literacy programme with the support of COL. The National Reserve Bank of Tonga is playing an important role in this initiative.

52. The Pacific Centre for Flexible & Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD) has been engaged in various activities in the region including advocacy, capacity building, developing a regional policy framework for ODFL, and establishing a community of practice.

53. COL has been supporting the development of skills training courses in **Tuvalu**. Courses in Horticulture, Working with Concrete, Basic Sewing and Basic Painting were developed using OER and are being used in Funafuti.

54. COL is supporting staff from **Solomon Islands** National University to participate in an institutional attachment at the University of **Papua New Guinea**, in order to strengthen their knowledge, systems and practices in open and distance learning. This is an example of COL supporting south-south collaboration.

55. Fourteen COL-sponsored students from the Pacific completed the Legislative Drafting Programme through the University of the South Pacific.

Knowledge Management

56. COL is recognised as a foremost source of knowledge on open, distance and technology-enabled learning. A wide range of start-up guides, quality assurance toolkits, consultant reports and other resource material was developed and is freely available on COL's website (https://www.col.org/resources).

57. The *Journal of Learning for Development* (JL4D) is an open online scholarly journal which provides a forum for practitioners and academics working in international development to share knowledge and experience. This year the journal has attracted 41,073 downloads,

averaging 136 downloads a day (www.jl4d.org). The Journal is indexed in Bielefeld academic search engine and the Directory of Open Access Journals.

58. As a key player in the fast-evolving field of knowledge management, COL continues to develop its internal systems to organise information of its own work and to support partners. COL also maintains an Information Resource Centre (IRC) and collects and disseminates ODL news, policies, resources and statistics from a large variety of sources.

59. COL is a leader in advocating creative commons (CC) content licenses through OER and Open Access. The OER repositories and directory services that COL offers to partners and the public are being enhanced to take advantage of the latest technologies and tagging methods. The Directory of Open Educational Resources (DOER) is a widely acknowledged repository of free resources in the Commonwealth. The top providers of materials for this site are **India, Nigeria** and the **United Kingdom**.

60. COL is present in many forums that explore the leading edge of new media. COL's formal communications media such as its website and newsletter, *Connections*, are supported by other electronic communications such as broadcast messaging, Facebook, Twitter, videos and blogs.

Funding

61. COL's core budget comes from voluntary contributions of Commonwealth Member States.

62. COL's financial strategy is based primarily on two sources of revenue. Voluntary contributions from approximately 45 Commonwealth Member States provide the resources for over 80% of the annual budget. While the seven largest major donors currently are Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa and the United Kingdom, COL appreciates the financial support that it receives from all contributing Commonwealth countries. Additional contributions from grants and fee-for-service work account for close to 15% of total revenues. On the expenditure side, a minimum of 85% of the budget is directed to the programme and the balance to organisational management and governance.

63. Forty-one countries have contributed as at the end of April during this fiscal year, which ends on June 30, 2017. In the previous fiscal year, COL received financial contributions from a total of 44 countries.

Conclusion

64. COL is a small but well-respected organisation. It continues to: i) be responsive and relevant to the needs of Member States; ii) be results-oriented and demonstrate value for money; and iii) leverage partnerships to achieve a high level of impact. COL has completed the second year of the current Six-Year Plan, and will focus on supporting Member States in their efforts to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all' (SDG4).

Further Information

Web: www.col.org.
Twitter: www.jl4d.org.
Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/COL4D/.
Blog: www.col.org/blog.
Videos: www.col.org/videos.

Six-Year Plan 2015-2021 (Learning for Sustainable Development) and Logic Model:
http://hdl.handle.net/11599/826.
Board of Governors: www.col.org/board / Staff: www.col.org/staff.
President's Quarterly Progress Reports to the Board: http://hdl.handle.net/11599/2337.
Publications: https://www.col.org/resources.
Speeches and presentations: https://www.col.org/news/speeches-and-presentations.

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