EVALUATION OF THE 2003-2006 COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING STRATEGIC PLAN
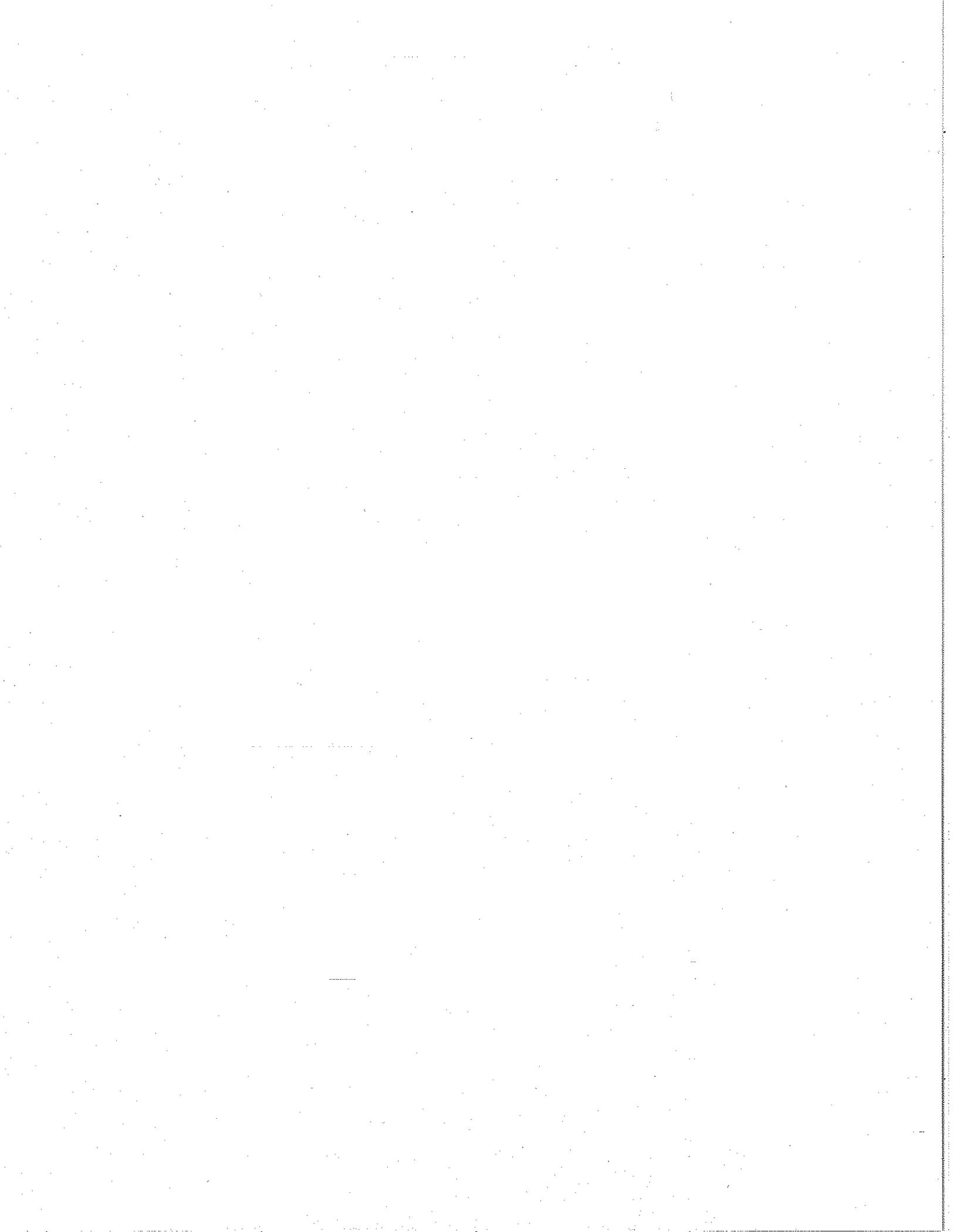
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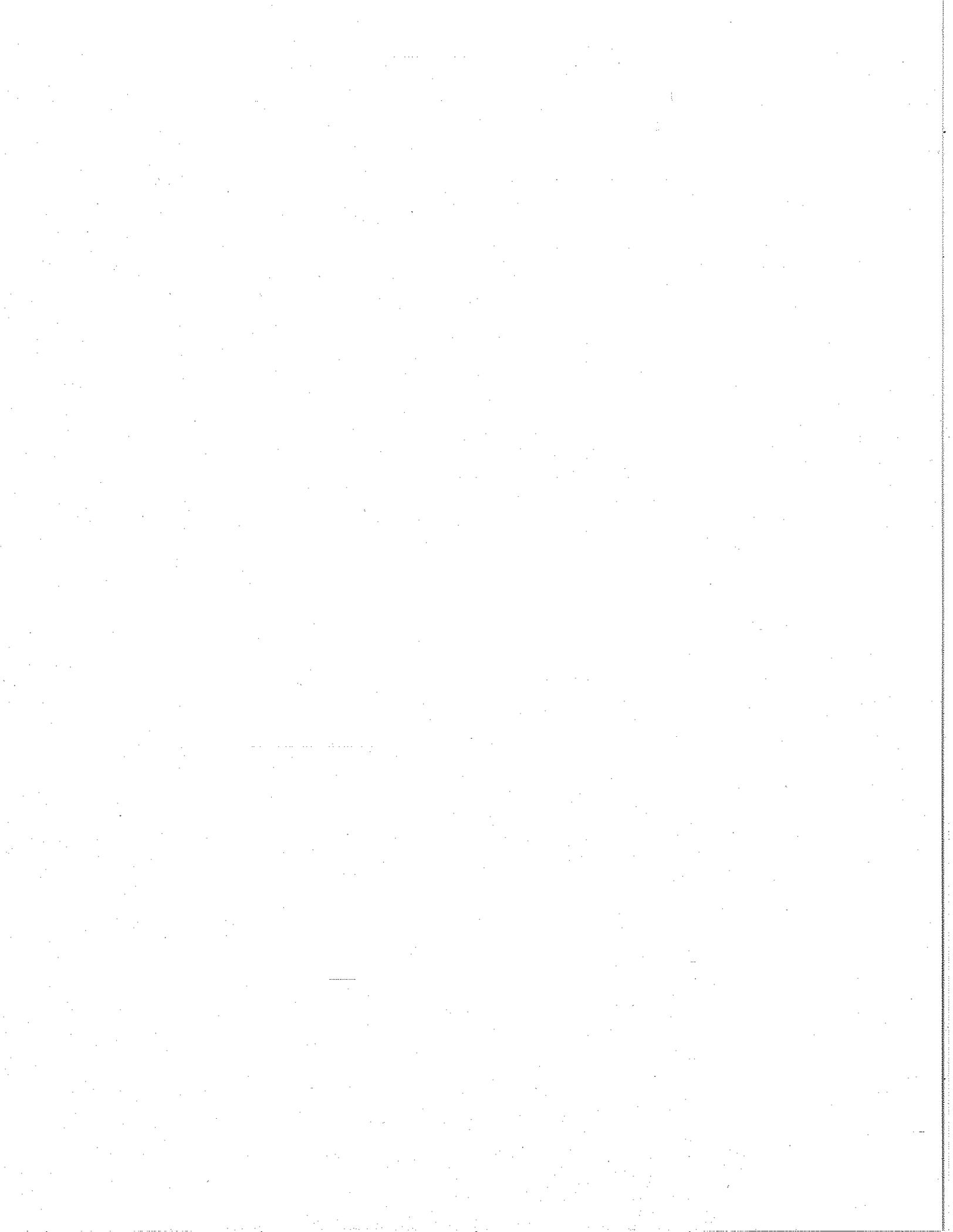
BY PATRICK SPAVEN

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organization created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning/distance education knowledge, resources and technologies. It has been operational since 1989 from its headquarters in Vancouver, Canada. COL's core operations are financed by voluntary pledges from Commonwealth governments. Its six major voluntary funding contributors – currently Canada, India, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa and the United Kingdom – each have a seat on COL's Board of Governors. Its average annual core budget over the last three years has been around $7m. It has also periodically undertaken fee-for-service consulting for international agencies and national governments, amounting to around $2m annually.

2. In its current planning period - 2003-06 – it has implemented programmes in the areas of
    *   ***ODL Policies*** – fostering the adoption and implementation of open and distance learning policies within the broader educational and human resource development strategies and policies of member nations.
    *   ***ODL Systems Development*** – assisting in the development of open and distance learning systems that build on existing capacity or assist in creating new capacity appropriate for the contexts of member states.
    *   ***ODL Applications*** – demonstrating how open and distance learning applications can benefit individual learners, institutions and member states by accelerating human resource development.

3. Since 2000, it has planned on a three year cycle to coincide with meetings of Commonwealth Education Ministers who are the most important decision-makers for COL's resourcing. COL has commissioned evaluations of its last two plans, this one being the second.

4. The full terms of reference (ToRs) for this evaluation are included at Annex C. The key points in the ToRs are:
    *   The overall purpose of the evaluation is to ascertain what difference COL has made to date (March 2006) during the 2003-06 plan period.
    *   The main client for the evaluation is COL and its Board of Governors. Interested stakeholders are the 53 Commonwealth countries and in particular the partner institutions with whom COL works.
    *   The 3 key questions that the evaluation should answer are:
        1. To what extent has COL made a difference in the life of its current 3 year plan?
        2. What lessons can COL, its Board of Governors and partners, take from the operation of the plan into future planning periods?
        3. How appropriate are the current sub-programmes in realizing the aims of the three strategic programmes, ODL Policy, ODL Systems and ODL Applications.

5. The following elements of the ToRs are also important coordinates for the evaluation:

- The evaluation should be guided by the OECD Development Assistance Committee's evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.
- The evaluation should consider both the overall strategy, and the programmes at the initiative level.
- Longer term impacts may be more difficult to ascertain for initiatives of less than five years duration, but this should be done where possible.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

6. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organization created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning/distance education (ODL) knowledge, resources and technologies. It is headquartered in Vancouver, Canada.

7. It has an annual budget of around Cdn$9m, $7m of which is provided by voluntary contributions from a number of Commonwealth member governments. Among its staff are 10 education specialists who lead the implementation of its programmes in support of ODL policies, systems and applications.

8. COL has commissioned a summative evaluation of its performance from July 2003 to March 2006, coinciding with most of its 2003-06 plan. This evaluation is largely qualitative, based on key informant consultations and case studies of 10 of COL's initiatives, at least one from each of its current 8 sub-programmes.

9. COL is a small organization with a small budget. Its sub-programmes – such as its support for ODL in teacher education – cost around Cdn$500,000 annually including direct staffing.

10. COL aims to be relevant to development priorities in the countries that it serves. It is achieving this aim with its increasing focus on the MDGs which is real and not rhetorical.

11. COL thinks strategically but has not always translated that into robust, practical planning. Its monitoring and evaluation have been weak. COL is conscious of this and has been discussing significant improvements for its 2006-09 plan.

12. COL has a mandate to apply technology to ODL where appropriate and in general it has not allowed this to lead it into inappropriate initiatives. It should however take steps to integrate its technology work more with other programmes.

13. COL's specialist staff are a very valuable resource. They are knowledgeable and committed. When they are new to the organization they bring valuable experience, expertise and networks from one or more field of ODL operation. COL staff need to work in a more integrated way, within a more pro-active performance management framework.

14. COL has had difficulties explaining to external stakeholders and even to itself, the logic of its programmes: what value it creates and how. COL needs to develop a more accessible and balanced narrative of its worth. This implies, amongst other things, better use of the knowledge management tools it has created.

15. Most of COL's work has been in small interventions rather than large projects, However, there has been a trend during the course of the 2003-06 period to concentrate interventions around themes or institutions. It should continue this trend while retaining a degree of flexibility and agility which are among COL's assets.

16. COL is a consummate networking agency. It has constructed an extensive informal network of networks in ODL spanning most developing Commonwealth countries with appropriate links to expertise in the developed world.

17. COL is sensitive to the environments in which it works. It draws its staff from many of those environments and they travel to them in listening mode. This is partly through corporate ethos and personal inclination, and partly out of necessity. COL does not pay for its place at the table, it has to earn it through offering appropriate solutions that are best constructed through a process of iterative dialogue.

18. COL engages with ODL at all levels from national policy down to applications. There is a consensus that it should move steadily upstream, engaging more with governments and major agencies over ODL in policies and development strategies. But this is a matter of balance and COL should continue to work on capacity-building for ODL systems and the application of ODL in capacity building. In the last area – applications – COL must be very clear, through appraisal of its proposed initiatives, that they are either likely to lead directly to good outcomes with wide reach, or to have powerful multiplier or self-replicating effects.

19. COL contributes to a wide range of outcomes, although most of them can be classed as increased or enhanced capacity in or through ODL. Among the initiatives studied for this evaluation, the following stand out:
    - Continued improvement and extension of the capacity of two very important ODL institutions: the National Teachers Institute (NTI) Nigeria, and the National Institute for Open Schooling (NIOS) India; and the mobilisation of NIOS as a resource for the development of open schooling systems in other countries.
    - The introduction of ODL capacity in institutions previously delivering training and education through conventional modes. Two of these institutions – the Centre for Environment Education (CEE) India, and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) - offer extensive reach or multiplier potential.
    - ODL policy development and implementation in Gambia and Sierra Leone.
    - A model with potential for adaptive replication, through which sustainable social and economic development appears to be taking place in rural communities in South India by means of a virtuous cycle of learning and productivity.

20. Some interventions have not led to positive outcomes or have not produced sufficient value for the time and other resources invested. Although this is inevitable in development, these examples should not be written off, as there is a big opportunity cost in nugatory work. Lessons should be learnt. The biggest disappointments in this period have been in COL's work in client-funded projects suggesting that this is an area that should be approached with caution.

21. Top-of-mind views of COL among informants were over 90% positive. Probing and challenging produced qualifications to the positives and some negatives, but with most people these were minor, relative to the positives. Its partners expressed a very high level of satisfaction. They regard COL as an organization of integrity.

22. The main groups that COL has to work harder to fully convince are some of its own Board members and representatives of bi-lateral and multi-lateral donor agencies.

METHODOLOGY

23. The evaluation is primarily pitched at the strategic level but is informed by study of a number of COL's "initiatives", the building blocks of its 8 sub-programmes.

24. COL is a difficult organization to evaluate. Its work is very diverse and dispersed. Its interventions tend to be contributory or facilitative rather than directive. That does not mean they cannot be decisive or pivotal - it is simply less easy to attribute outcomes to these interventions.

25. COL's work is rarely structured in detailed project format. Outcomes are defined by its results-based management (RBM) system, but these are pitched at a relatively high, generic level, and it is often not easy to draw direct links between a given activity and the RBM-defined outcome.

26. This does not mean it has been impossible to evaluate. But the evaluation is mostly qualitative rather than quantitative. It is based on three main sources:
    - Secondary descriptive and evaluative material including reports to COL's Board, staff trip reports, staff self-assessment of their sub-programmes, lists of outputs such as seminars and consultancies, and external evaluations of activities and initiatives. (A list of materials consulted is at Annex E.)
    - Case studies of 10 COL interventions – approximately 20% of their activity over this period - mainly through consultations with partners and participants. In some cases this also involved direct observation.
    - Consultations with 66 "key informants". These are significant stakeholders in, and informed observers of, COL's work, including current and former COL staff. (A list of all people consulted is at Annex D. Those who could be regarded as "key informants" are in bold.)

27. There has been a particular reliance on key informants. These are people who have experienced COL's work from the perspective of several interventions over time (e.g. from partner institutions); or who have experienced COL from a strategic point of view, rather than at the level of interventions (such as most Board members). Lists of proposed key informants were provided by COL, and these were supplemented by people suggested during informant interviews (a process known as snowballing) and others that seemed important to the evaluator.

28. Case studies were chosen by the evaluator after discussions with specialist staff and COL's programme director. At least one case study was chosen from each of the 8 sub-programmes. The case studies are:
    1. National consultative forums on ODL
    2. Schoolnets in Africa
    3. Regional centres of expertise
    4. Recent work in Mozambique
    5. E-learning for tertiary education
    6. Open schooling
    7. Quality assurance in tertiary education
    8. Lifelong learning for farmers in India
    9. Environmental education
    10. Media support for health.

29. The case studies are all in South Asia and Southern and Eastern Africa. These were the regions visited during the evaluation.

30. To make a strategic assessment of COL and its work, it has been necessary to apply a wide-angle lens. The evaluation has obtained basic information on all COL's current and recent initiatives through discussion with COL staff, research of secondary material, and occasional corroboratory interviews with partners. However, it has not been possible to make informed assessments of each and every initiative. There was insufficient scope in the evaluation to do that. Instead, research across the full range of initiatives has helped to inform the general findings and conclusions.

31. As anticipated in the terms of reference, it has not been easy to identify outcomes from many activities which began in the plan period. To provide some feedback on longer term outcomes, the evaluation has studied some activity which began prior to the 2003-06 planning period and continued into it. Support for schoolnets in Africa is an example.

32. The evaluation produced an interim report at the beginning of January 2006, based on research up to that point. This was used in discussions with COL which took place later in January in Vancouver as part of the final phase of the 2006-09 planning process. The report included a section on emerging conclusions and recommendations, many of which – for example in the area of planning, monitoring and evaluation - COL has already accepted and is working to implement. These conclusions and recommendations are included in this final report for completeness, but some are now a matter of history.

33. The report will normally use the term ODL for all aspects of open and distance education, training and learning.

FINDINGS

RELEVANCE

34. COL is concerned with "the promotion and development of distance education and open learning". Its focus is on the needs of developing countries. This raises two "relevance" questions:
    - How relevant is the promotion and development of distance education to the needs of developing countries?
    - How relevant is COL to this purpose?

The relevance of distance education

35. COL's mission during the 2003-06 plan period has centred on the application of open, distance and technology-mediated learning in support of development. A developmental purpose has been implicit in COL's work since its foundation, but it became explicit during the 2000-03 planning period, and even further after 2003.

36. COL's explicit developmental focus was chiefly a response to the Dakar Education for All (EFA) objectives and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Reducing or eliminating learning deficits – both in terms of quantity and quality - is either the subjects of these objectives and goals, or is complementary to them. There is a global consensus on this and there is no need to rehearse the arguments here.

37. COL believes that open, distance and technology-mediated approaches to learning are highly relevant to addressing these deficits, even more today than when COL was founded in 1988. Conventional face to face education and training cannot for the foreseeable future meet the growing demands for access, and have not consistently delivered quality. COL argues that with advances in expertise, experience and technology, ODL at its best can out-perform conventional face to face education and training either in terms of access, quality or cost, without losing ground in the other two dimensions. Sometimes two or even all three dimensions are improved through ODL.

38. In general the secondary and primary research for this evaluation confirms that view.
    - Over the last 20 years, ODL has substantially increased access to formal education, particularly at the higher levels, but in some countries also for schooling.
    - There are arguments about the details of some cost evidence put forward by ODL advocates, but the margins in most instances are great enough to conclude that cost savings are now the norm with ODL and will increase as learning materials become more mobile and adaptable through ICT.
    - Quality has not always been so clear-cut an issue. Much distance education - particularly traditional correspondence courses – has been of poor quality. Its reputation suffered in the 60s and 70s, and in some places this effect lingers. But there are now so many examples of high quality ODL - particularly but not exclusively technology-mediated – that some practitioners argue that this is where ODL's greatest benefit lies.

39. Technology-mediated ODL, often part of a blended package with a substantial face-to face component, is usually not cheap. ICT-mediation in particular often costs much more than conventional modes - radio less so. In many parts of the developing world, particularly in Africa and the Pacific, ICT is available only to small urban minorities, partly because there is no regular electricity supply. But both access to ICT – sometimes by-passing the need for a constant electricity supply - and its costs are improving so rapidly that it can no longer be ignored. There are moreover parallel cost savings to be made in the use of ICT which have to be seen alongside the additional expenditure on it as a delivery mode and mediator. The main costs of ODL are in the initial production of materials. ICT offers the opportunity for cheap transfer, updating and adaptation of these materials. This is particularly important in technical/vocational education and learning for livelihoods where content needs to be context-specific and up-to-date, more than in most other areas of learning.

40. There is another potential beneficiary: gender equity. Women and girls have tended not to be the main users of ODL in the past. But that is changing. In Namibia for example, which has a relatively high quality ODL infrastructure, around 70% of users are female. 60% of COL's L3 Farmers are women (Case Study 8). Potentially, most women and girls in rural areas, and many with less mobility in urban areas, have most to gain from it.

41. These conclusions have been drawn from the secondary sources. Most informants consulted concurred with them. Informants who concurred include people outside ODL communities of practice. Major donors and other international organizations, including the World Bank, UNESCO, DFID and the African Development Bank have recently committed - or are considering committing - funds to the promotion of ODL for development.

The relevance of COL

42. ODL may be relevant to development, but is COL central to this purpose? Arguments have been raised – both within COL and among outside informants - that some of COL's work is not central enough to development priorities. Typically these hover around three themes
    - COL's emphasis on ICT is irrelevant to the millions who cannot get access to it.
    - COL continues to work in university education whereas EFA and the MDGs place their stress on basic education.
    - The geography of COL's work is not optimal - it does not concentrate enough on the poorest countries, devoting a high proportion of its specialists' time to work in India and South Africa for example.

43. A fourth rather different point is that COL in some cases works in crowded fields – notably teacher training – and is in danger of duplication or not providing a clearly differentiated contribution.

ICT

44. The first point has been partially dealt with above. What also needs to be considered is whether COL's programmes are technology-driven rather than needs-led. Technology is mentioned several times in COL's general Memorandum

of Understanding, and its mission statement commits it to "assisting Commonwealth member governments to take full advantage of…. technology-mediated learning strategies" amongst other things. Technology-driven interventions do not have a good record in international development.

45. This evaluation concludes that in general COL has a balanced approach, and that the "amongst other things" in the mission statement prevails. COL's typical approach is to look for appropriate ODL solutions which are often still print-based, initially at least. But this applies to some of its specialists more than others. COL has two specialists who have technology in their job titles, and, shortly, three who have it as their prime area of expertise. The work of two of these technology specialists is not as closely integrated as the others. COL should ensure that the work of its technology specialists is sufficiently mainstream and integrated with that of other COL staff. **(Recommendation 1)**

University education

46. Although COL has reduced its work in university education significantly over the last 10 years, it still has a specialist post dedicated to this sub-sector. With the way COL's specialists tend to work, this ensures that around 15% of COL's activity is in higher education.

47. This is not necessarily inappropriate. Many informants argue that improved access to quality higher education is essential for the building of capacity in the knowledge economy which is relevant to developing countries' needs[1]. But this view is disputed – although not as stridently as 10 years ago - and COL needs to be clear about why it is working in higher education and not let its programmes be determined solely by the expertise and job designation of its specialists As with its work in any sector or sub-sector, it needs to appraise its proposed initiatives in higher education thoroughly in the light of their potential impact on development priorities. If this appraisal process leads it to continue to work in this sub-sector, COL needs to present the arguments to its stakeholders through this prism **(Recommendation 2)**.

48. What should be said is that COL is increasingly focusing its interventions in areas that address the highest development priorities, and in particular several MDGs. This is a challenging task for an organization that, for the major part of its 16 year history, worked almost exclusively in education and mainly at post-secondary levels. Despite this, COL has moved increasingly since 2001 towards a closer relationship with the MDGs.

49. This is partly through its work in health, agriculture, and the environment, but COL is also drawing closer connections between its work in education and the MDGs, particularly in its support for open schooling and teacher training. The shortage of qualified teachers is one of the greatest obstacles to the achievement of EFA and has implications for more than one of the MDGs. The interaction between education, environment and health is also something COL is conscious of, and has

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[1] This view is underpinned for example by a recent World Bank report: India and the Knowledge Economy: Leveraging Strengths and Opportunities, Carl Dahlman and Anuja Utz, 2005.

begun to inform its choices. The Green Teacher programme in India, one of the evaluation case studies, is a good response to this.

Geography

50. Some criticism, mostly mild, has been encountered of the balance of COL's work between the poorest countries and those that are middle income or approaching that status – such as India and South Africa. It is not possible, from COL's budget data, to ascertain how much is spent in each country, but from a scan of its initiatives, it does not seem that COL has maintained a very close focus on the poorest Commonwealth countries. Four qualifications have been made about this by COL and other informants.
   • COL has always seen itself bound to some extent to respond to the needs of all developing Commonwealth countries. This equity argument would make it difficult to focus exclusively on the poorest.
   • Less poor countries, such as India and South Africa, continue to have large sections of their populations living in poverty as dire as in the poorest countries.
   • Because COL has very few resources to use for programmes, it has to a great extent to work where there are sufficient other resources – human, infrastructural and financial. Otherwise its inputs may get little traction.
   • Its strategy includes giving priority attention to at least one of the poorest countries in each region.

51. The first point bows to pragmatism and to its MOU. It is not clear to the evaluator what scope COL has to change this.

52. The second point has considerable validity, although it could be argued that less poor countries have more scope than the poorest to redistribute resources within their populations.

53. The third point is valid in some circumstances, but less so where donor resources are available for development work in which ODL can play a part. There are arguments for and against COL's involvement with donors and these are assessed at other points in the evaluation. A conclusion is that COL should pursue opportunities to partner donors, and governments in receipt of donor funding, in the planning and even implementation of capacity-building **(Recommendation 3)**.

54. The fourth point does not seem to take COL very far in the direction of a poor country focus.

Crowded fields

55. The argument that COL works in crowded fields has been heard from a small number of informants. Most of these are not ODL practitioners. This evaluation has been able to look closer than most outsiders at the full range of COL's work and does not find this argument very convincing, for two reasons. One is that there is room for many players in the fields in which COL works. The challenges are big enough. The other is that COL works in different ways from most other agencies and usually finds an unfilled niche. Because it does not have substantial resources to offer, it is usually drawn in only where there is genuine demand for its services.

56. There are two qualifications to make. First, COL has produced materials – both reference and instructional – that have not found markets sufficiently large or robust to justify the investment. It needs to be more rigorous in its marketing planning **(Recommendation 4)**. Second, ICT for learning is a dynamic field with large interests – public donor and private sector – in play. COL needs regularly to review what its niches are in this field. **(Recommendation 5).**

Concluding points

57. COL is increasingly focusing on its relevance, especially to the MDGs. Until recently, this was not the result of strong central direction. Like much of COL's work, it was the product of the initiatives of individual professional staff. Although this is testimony to the quality of it staff, it is a risky model. The increasingly purposeful and planned inclusion of MDG-focused initiatives – particularly in the current planning round - is an encouraging development.

58. The pace at which the changes are happening is governed to a large extent by the nature of COL's current specialist staff – their experience and competencies. Most key informants felt that it was appropriate that any transition in the nature of COL's work should be managed at a pace that the organization and its stakeholders can cope with. Several key informants urged COL not to "throw the baby out with the bathwater" by reducing its support to the education sector too drastically. COL's reputation and accumulated experience is greatest in education and it will take time to build up the equivalent assets in non-education sectors, even if its core expertise – its understanding of ODL – is relevant to any sector.

59. As with all aspects of COL's work, the further transition to non-education sectors must be accompanied by systematic research, a more consistent application of appraisal of proposed new work, and better monitoring and evaluation of initiatives once they are implemented **(Recommendation 6)**. The planning and management of the L3 Farmers initiative should be seen as a good model for COL's more substantial interventions **(Recommendation 7)**. The new sectors are a vast open field and these processes will help COL home in on areas where they can add most value.

60. There are several factors that need to be built into the appraisal process, the most important of which should be <u>need</u>. All other things being equal, it should concentrate its efforts where the latent potential of ODL to enable development is greatest, for example in many sub-Saharan African countries. However, all other things are never equal and factors such as implementability and sustainability must enter the equation. COL also has to balance to some extent the interests of all Commonwealth countries. This is a very difficult balance to strike. COL's approach to this would benefit from being more systematic **(Recommendation 8)**.

61. Even though COL is not generally technology-driven, it is constitutionally bound to be ODL-driven. The boundaries of ODL are becoming less distinct. It may in the future be inappropriate to talk in terms of "ODL solutions". COL should bear this in mind in how it defines itself and approaches its challenges (**Recommendation 9)**. L3 Farmers is a good example of a COL initiative where ODL plays an important role but does not insist on being centre-stage. L3 Farmers is concerned with

informal learning environments, and in these situations ODL blends in with other paths to social and economic development.

RESOURCING AND INTERNAL PROCESSES

62. The evaluation's terms of reference call for an assessment of COL's effectiveness and efficiency. The main emphasis is on how it performs in its programmes. But COL's internal processes - such as how it attracts and manages its resources, plans and evaluates its work - are relevant to its programme performance, and some assessment needs to made of its effectiveness and efficiency in these areas.

Financial resourcing

63. The size and reliability of COL's budget has been a matter of concern during this planning period. COL has had to make do with less funding than it had planned for, and has had to devote a lot of time to chasing pledged funding that has not been forthcoming in a timely manner. The main shortfall was caused by the withdrawal of Australia as a major contributor to COL's core budget. Because these shortfalls were partly unanticipated, there has not been an opportunity to make significant reductions in COL's fixed costs, and the main impact has been on COL's programmes. Initiatives that did not involve long-term activity, such as the grant programme known as COL-PROTEIN (Poverty Reduction Outcomes through Education, Innovations and Networks) [2], were suspended and some new activity has been delayed or cancelled. This is the normal response of organizations in this position and COL seems to have limited the damage satisfactorily. The ratio between COL's fixed costs and expenditure on its programmes is still positive compared to many similar organizations based in high-cost countries. If COL's specialist staff and their direct support are seen as programme resources and not fixed costs, programme expenditure amounts to about 80% of the total.

64. Two questions spring from the problems COL has experienced with its funding.
    - Could COL have anticipated the Australian withdrawal and either prevented it or given itself more time to manage the impact, thereby protecting its programmes more than it has?
    - Could COL do more to supplement its core budget with fee-for-service work or other non-core funding?

65. This evaluation has not had an opportunity to look closely at the first point. The consensus among the few key informants who expressed a view on this was that COL has not been in close enough touch with AusAID and other donor agency officials. Experience during the evaluation lends support to this. Several people interviewed from, or close to, other donor agencies were among the least positive

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[2] The main objective of COL-PROTEIN is to support projects that adopt open and distance learning and information and communications technologies (ICTs) to help build rural capacity in food security, environmental protection, rural development, nutritional education and micro-enterprise.

informants. This suggests that there is a donor viewpoint that has not been well managed by COL.

66. This is not an easy task. Donor agencies are large organizations, often opaque to outsiders. Officials change posts and roles with great frequency. It would be inappropriate for COL to devote a great deal of resource to donor engagement. But the consequences of donor disenchantment are so serious for COL that it should try to find a way of communicating more effectively with relevant people in these organizations **(Recommendation 10)**. This is particularly important with those that contribute to COL's core budget, but it also applies to multi-lateral agencies such as the World Bank. COL needs to improve the way it presents the value it creates, for example with coherent, relevant and evidence-based narrative reporting **(Recommendation 11)**.

67. The second point – COL's efforts to attract non-core funding – is dealt with at paragraphs124-131**.** The overall conclusion is that COL has not had a sufficiently strategic approach to this in the 2003-06 period and should develop for the next planning period **(Recommendation 12)**. Its recent success with the Hewlett Foundation offers encouragement to initiatives in this area.

68. A tangential issue arises from this. COL works with partners in most – if not all - of its initiatives. It creates value for these partners but often also for third parties. Partners bring resources to the initiatives which usually do not go through COL's budgetary systems and are therefore not counted. In some senses this does not matter, but if the overall balance of inputs, outputs and outcomes are to be compared from one initiative to another – or for benchmarking with other similar agencies - it will be necessary to find a practicable way of estimating partner inputs **(Recommendation 13)**.

Human resourcing

69. COL creates value largely through the efforts of its specialist staff. They are of course directed and supported by other COL staff and are equipped with knowledge, infrastructure, tools and funding that comes from COL's corporate services. But COL's effectiveness ultimately depends on the quality of the specialists.

70. The evaluation was not explicitly asked to assess individual staff and it would be invidious to single out any for attention. Some points need to be made however.
    - The most common observation from informants about COL has been praise for the quality of its staff.
    - By quality, informants most typically mean the specialists' expertise, knowledge of networks and sensitivity of approach.
    - No staff member was singled out for serious criticism by anyone.
    - Where there were criticisms of COL they almost always had their roots in COL's systems and processes – such as strategy, prioritisation and resource allocation, habitual ways of working, or administrative procedures.

71. The importance of COL's staff poses a challenge for succession planning. There is anecdotal evidence that COL has not always managed the succession of its

specialists very well. The risk of breaks in the continuity of programmes and partnerships is increased because COL staff have tended up to now to work on their own programmes, largely self-directed and not as part of teams. New staff bring new experience and networks, but they inevitably differ from those of their predecessors. The succession process needs to be managed pro-actively if the benefits of the predecessors' initiatives are to be consolidated and not put at risk **(Recommendation 14)**.

72. COL staff do not work in a vacuum and their scope is enhanced by COL's other resources, systems and processes. We will consider below the extent to which strategy and organizational performance management helps. Organizational performance management is ideally closely linked to individual performance management. COL has recently introduced individual performance management based to some extent on operational performance indicators. This is an important development that needs to be regularly reviewed and adapted in the light of feedback and other experience. COL staff are technically sound and self-motivated, reinforced by the high degree of autonomy they enjoy. But the staff also need direction through hands-on performance management to help them to more actively pursue new agendas. New staff need it to help them orientate to this unusual organization **(Recommendation 15).**

73. Above all COL's strategy must inform staffing policy, rather than the staffing profile dictate the shape of COL's programmes **(Recommendation 16)**.

Strategy, programme performance management and organizational learning

Strategy

74. At several points in this report, stress is laid on the need for a more strategic approach. This is not an unusual conclusion in institutional evaluations. Many organizations have well-crafted strategic plans. Others are good at strategic thinking. The difficulty usually lies in linking the plan to the thinking and going on to use it strategically.

75. COL's 2003-06 plan was preceded by a lengthy consultation process and showed many signs of strategic thinking. But it did not present strategy in a coherent and easily implementable form. Partly because of this, COL has not been acting as strategically as it should in some respects during this period.

76. The 2003-06 plan introduced the concept of programmes – specifically the trio of policy, systems and applications. This was the principal recommendation in the mid-term evaluation of the 2000-2003 planning period. The plan emphasised the importance of focus. Unfortunately, the plan did not create a workable framework for focus. Almost anything in ODL could have been sanctioned by the plan and in practice often was, even if it was packaged in more strategic terms.

77. In mitigation it should be stressed that strategic planning takes time to embed. COL has been learning how to do it during the current three-year period. COL is a centrifugal, can-do, organization that does not find central planning processes easy. The weaknesses of the 2003-06 plan are acknowledged by COL and they are clearly determined to make a step-change improvement this time. If they are to

achieve this, the new plan should be more prescriptive, should genuinely contain fewer initiatives – not just aggregate them in fewer, larger packages. It would be helpful if it said what COL will cease to do as well as what it will focus on **(Recommendation 17)**.

78. COL's three current programme areas – policy, systems and applications - are not seen as the most helpful way of structuring and articulating its work. There is too much overlap and ambiguity in this. Although COL will need to continue to be aware of the "levels" dimension to its work, the lead dimension in the new planning period should preferably be outcomes-based, with close links to the MDGs. It needs to be transparent to staff and outsiders **(Recommendation 18)**.

79. This evaluation has first hand experience of effective strategic thinking at COL, particularly in the last plenary workshop before the production of the draft strategic plan for 2006-09. There was a seriousness and urgency about it. The draft plan is the result of a highly consultative process involving around 15 regional or country forums and commissioned research for every developing Commonwealth region. At the time of writing (early March 2006), there is still work to be done on the plan, but it is beginning to look like a useful representation of the strategic thinking that is going on in COL.

Programme performance management

80. Beneath the three-year plan, COL has introduced rolling plans for its programmes, sub-programmes and initiatives. These are expressed in its RBM system which constructs a logical framework around each sub-programme. Planned outputs, medium term outcomes and long-term impacts are identified, activities listed, achievements recorded and sources of evidence specified.

81. There is no doubt that this system has made an important contribution. It has begun to change the culture within COL. It has helped people focus on the reasons for their work – how it fits into COL's purpose. All staff say that it has been an important development. It has the potential to engender more teamwork because specialist staff are now aiming at higher goals which transcend their sub-programmes.

82. Increased teamworking is evident in some areas. It mainly happens informally. In such a small organization, this is better than a rigid, imposed structure. But there needs to be more consistency in its application. Some staff work in a more collegiate manner than others. COL's reward and recognition system should be used to foster appropriate teamwork **(Recommendation 19)**.

83. The RBM system, as presently configured, seems to be most useful at the planning stage. It facilitates thinking around planned initiatives. It is less useful for monitoring and evaluation (M&E). The RBM documentation, despite more than one revision, is not viewed very positively by COL staff. They are not convinced it is used for anything other than budget control, which could be done more simply. The outcomes and to a lesser extent the outputs are expressed in terms that make validation difficult and comparison between initiatives virtually impossible.

84. This is always going to be a challenging area for COL because it usually works in complex environments with distant time horizons. Moreover, COL's predominantly light touch does not easily lend itself to evaluation – especially of quantified outcomes. Much of the evidence of COL's impact will be qualitative. The problem for COL is that qualitative evidence, even from authoritative sources, is not usually as credible to outsiders as the type of systematic quantitative evidence that is available from well monitored and evaluated formal projects. This in itself is not a sufficient reason for changing its predominant mode of operating. Instead, COL should find a way of systematically capturing, collating and presenting credible narrative and other qualitative material **(Recommendation 20)**.

85. COL's RBM system does not contribute readily to a balanced, coherent, evidenced, representation of COL's work in particular areas. This is important for better understanding of COL's work both within COL and for stakeholders outside. COL's plans should contain clear programme logic. They need to explain how the various interventions hang together, how for each intervention the inputs are expected to lead to outputs, and how the outputs are expected to achieve both short and medium term outcomes **(Recommendation 21)**. The current structure contains these elements at a high level, but the link with the individual interventions is weak at best, and the internal logic of the interventions is difficulty to piece together.

86. COL is ahead of many similar organizations in linking M&E to planning through its RBM. The principle and the broad framework are sound and appropriate. A few initiatives – particularly L3 Farmers and much of the external activity in the Knowledge Management sub-programme – have a systematic approach to M&E. In general, however, the content and the amount of use that is made of it need considerable development. It is not generally useful beyond the monitoring of financial inputs and the short term micro-assessment of events. Some of these evaluations are poor quality and of little or no strategic use.[3]

87. None of this is particularly surprising. M&E is a difficult area, requiring considerable input of resources and knowledge. The system is only about two years old and the staff have had little training. M&E training is planned for staff in July 2006, as a part of the professional enrichment programme. This should help to address the deficit. But more thinking should go into COL's M&E system and processes if the training is to be really useful **(Recommendation 22)**. Some pointers will be provided in a separate report to COL management.

88. The introduction of RBM-type systems, particularly in a green field, is never easy and takes time to bed down. They always need to develop iteratively. There is little evidence that RBM has so far led to significant change in the type of work done by COL. Several people have spoken of old wine in new bottles. Some Board members in particular are sceptical – they feel that COL's rhetoric is ahead of the reality. But the critics generally acknowledge how long change of this nature takes. If key stakeholders are to become confident in the RBM system, it is important that COL provides tangible examples of its benefits **(Recommendation 23)**.

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[3] See paragraphs 147, 179-180 for further discussion of M&E in relation to outputs and outcomes.

<u>Organizational learning</u>

89. Although COL staff now spend more time discussing with each other what they do, the level of reflective analysis seems quite low - the late stages of the 2006-09 planning process being an encouraging exception. There needs to be more systematic sharing of knowledge within COL. Its staff are still too atomised, despite the benefits of the RBM approach. There need to be regular small group events where learning is pooled in a more engaged manner feeding into a continuously evolving strategy process **(Recommendation 24.)**

90. COL has recently developed a system of on-line trip reports which are shared and searchable. This is important especially because staff are more often away than together face to face in Vancouver. These reports are used by senior management to keep themselves informed, but not consistently by other specialist staff.

Apex management

91. The evaluation was not asked to look at staffing structures, but it would be a missed opportunity not to record a conclusion about the direction of programmes that emerges from the analysis above.

92. COL's President has spent most of the time since his appointment in outreach. This so far has not left him with much time to nurture the organization. Even if he finds more time for this, there is no doubt that COL needs to continue with a programme director role which will oversee the new plan's implementation **(Recommendation 25)**. The rationale for creating the role in 2003 was sound and continues to be a necessary component of COL's apex management.

COL'S PROGRAMMES – HOW THEY WORK

93. The 2003-06 plan asserted that COL is "unique" and is "distinguished by several key characteristics". Amongst other things it claimed that COL is
    - Well connected, recognising that its strength resides in its ability to engage the talents and knowledge of the Commonwealth and beyond for the benefit of its member countries.
    - Responsive to priorities and needs as defined by its client states, offering solutions appropriate to prevailing conditions.
    - Committed to a work ethic and *modus operandi* that are based on engaging as many of the stakeholders as possible in defining, designing and implementing its activities.
    - Innovative, exploring the new opportunities for capacity-building offered by technological change and research on learning while remaining sensitive to developing economies' environment.
    - Sensitive to gender issues in all of its programme activities.

94. This section will assess <u>how</u> COL goes about creating value through its programmes.

Networking

95. In consultations with key informants, the characteristic of COL that was mentioned most often was networking. COL is valued for the diversity and quality of the networks that it has access to, the depth of knowledge it has of those networks, and the leverage it has with them. This corresponds to the first characteristic quoted above from the 2003-06 plan. COL is able to mobilise or recommend resource personnel from all parts of the Commonwealth and in some cases beyond, including importantly from developing countries. The largest single group is academics, but COL's networks include independent consultants, people in advisory, regulatory and delivery agencies in the public sector, NGOs and in a few cases private companies. Some are leaders in their fields and many work with COL for less than their market value.

96. COL mobilises the exchange of knowledge and experience between organizations. Often all the players are from developing countries. COL's ability to generate "south-south" exchange is one of the defining features of the organization and was mentioned, unprompted, by many consultees. South-south exchange is seen as highly appropriate in ODL because developing countries have needs and experiences, requiring tailored solutions, that the developed world cannot necessarily relate to.

97. COL not only uses networks, but also helps to create and enhance them. These will be considered in the next sections on outputs and outcomes.

98. The evaluation case studies bear out COL's ability to use its networks and the value that flows from that. From these we can see that COL has been able with its collaborators to:
    - Assemble tens – sometimes hundreds – of relevant participants in colloquia such as the 2003 Botswana schoolnet workshop.
    - Bring together a diverse range of organizations in the L3 Farmers initiative.
    - Link NIOS to open schooling movements in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Southern Africa.
    - Weld a consortium of Indian organizations with interests in sustainable development, that previously had no contact with each other.
    - Mobilise a Kenyan e-learning participant as a resource for workshops in Lagos and Trinidad.

99. COL is probably the world's most active networking organization in ODL, despite having a circumscribed geographical brief. It is also undoubtedly very effective in this role. What outcomes this leads to will be addressed in a later section.

Sensitivity to environments

100. The other most frequently mentioned positive aspect of COL was its sensitivity to the environments in which it works. This corresponds to the second characteristic quoted above from the 2003-06 plan. One important organizational partner in Africa

went as far as to say "COL, of all the organizations we work with, has the best sense of the environments it operates in".

101. It is clearly part of COL's ethos to work in this way. It has been encouraged and enabled by a number of factors, including:
    - The disposition of its CEOs over the last 10 years.
    - Its staff, the majority of whom have been drawn from the developing countries of the Commonwealth (currently 6 out of 9).
    - Its Board, which is also composed mostly of members from the developing countries of the Commonwealth (currently 7/8 out of 12).
    - The fact that it does not have large programme budgets. This obliges COL to work "with the grain" of its clients agendas.

102. The general view is that COL is at its best when it approaches institutions and governments in a listening mode, rather than with pre-defined prescriptions. This is typical of COL, but there are exceptions – such as occasional technology-driven tendencies - which stem from its desire to cover as much ground as possible. COL should find the right balance in this. It cannot provide perfectly tailored support to everyone. Some of its clothes have to be mass-produced. It must try to choose the right clothes to mass-produce and the most important partners to whom to offer the tailored solutions

Partnership

103. COL's 2003-06 plan talked of its ability to engage "as many of the stakeholders as possible in defining, designing and implementing its activities". This has echoes of the two previous characteristics – networking and sensitivity. It is also about working in partnership.

104. COL almost always works with partners – both as resources and as clients. It has the ability to interest and attract a wide range, particularly in the education field where it enjoys the highest and most coherent profile. It is regarded by the partners consulted in the evaluation as an organization of integrity that delivers on its promises – a key condition for effective partnership.

105. Several informants felt that COL could be even more effective in leveraging partnership, particularly longer-term strategic collaborations. This is a complex area, notoriously difficult to get right. Partnership should not be pursued for its own sake – as a trophy. But there is a grey area where regular dialogue and close relations between institutions are clearly mutually advantageous,s and to maximise that advantage, some form of structure and defined partnership process is needed **(Recommendation 26).**

106. COL is praised for the quality of the relationships it establishes with people at all levels. Relationships need to be managed, and COL's resource-stretch does not always enable it to maintain relationships as closely as it would like. COL's partner relationship management sometimes seems serendipitous and a more systematic approach would probably pay dividends. For example, having a regionally-based resource and a "one-stop shop" for partners has worked well in the Pacific and the decision to phase out these arrangements elsewhere should be revisited

(Recommendation 27). COL has regionally-based resources in the three centres of expertise – Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDAL) in West Africa, and Southern African Regional Distance Education Centre (SARDEC) - that are designed to serve this purpose but are not yet doing so in all respects.

107. In relations with national donors and multilateral agencies in particular, COL needs to be more systematic. It has been criticised for taking its eye off the ball with at least one donor. This does not mean regularly visiting donor HQs and routinely taking part in multilateral committees. COL probably doesn't have the resources for this. But it does need to establish and maintain meaningful contact somehow with key individuals within the main agencies. Informants in the World Bank, for example, feel that the Bank knows very little about COL and that it would be helpful if a roundtable exchange were set up, followed by more regular dialogue **(Recommendation 28)**.

108. COL also needs to monitor and internalise shifts in aid thinking and strategy at agency and country level. This also implies a closer relationship with key development agencies, both national and multi-lateral**(Recommendation 29)**. This could result in more collaboration and possibly fee-for service work, but the approaches to these agencies should not be focused only on getting work from them. They should be about establishing regular knowledge exchange, both through multilateral forums and bi-lateral dialogue. Knowledge should flow in both directions. COL should not underestimate its own knowledge assets. It needs to be involved proportionately in global sector debates in education, and even in other sectors where it aspires to add significant value **(Recommendation 30)**.

Innovation

109. Although, as was seen above, its 2003-06 plan committed COL to explore "new opportunities for capacity-building offered by technological change and research on learning", its attitude to innovation does not appear to have strong central direction. It tends to be pragmatic about innovation and choices are left to individual specialists. This is probably a sensible posture, as COL is faced with more capacity-building challenges than it can handle and does not have much scope for experimentation.

110. Even if COL does not generate much innovation in ODL, it keeps pace with it and is in a position to apply tested formulas, sometimes pushing the boundaries in a controlled fashion with trusted partners as in L3 Farmers and its work on e-learning and open educational resources. The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) programme is typical of COL's approach, aiming to combine recent innovation with down-to-earth objectives.

111. Some informants called for COL to be bolder in innovation. That is unlikely to be acceptable to its main stakeholders who are mostly looking for more assured value creation from COL.

Gender

112. COL has a mandate to promote gender equity in and through its programmes. COL staff are conscious of this, and many of its evaluation reports include some form of gender analysis. However COL does not at present have an active gender policy and consistent processes. It is aware of this and intends to develop one. This should be speeded up **(Recommendation 31)**. There are many good models around.

COL's footprint

113. Although there are important exceptions, COL's typical touch is light – it makes relatively short, facilitative interventions rather than the longer, intense, directive ones typical of many development projects. When COL's interventions are well-timed and appropriate, they can make important contributions despite their small and shallow footprint. There is evidence for this from the case studies of e.g. open schooling, and national ODL forums and a great deal of anecdotal evidence from other contexts.

114. Although COL's interventions are typically short and light, they are not normally one-off occurrences – or at least less so than in the past. The one-off training event was the subject of the greatest criticism in the 2002 mid-term evaluation, and COL seems to have taken serious note of this. Under COL's RBM system, institutions and themes are targeted for support over at least a year, mostly typically longer. At the beginning of the 2003-06 period, some of these themes were put together somewhat artificially. But COL is now pursuing themes and longer-term institutional capacity building in a more purposeful way. Several of the case studies bear this out. There are exceptions, but the planning for 2006-09 has clearly taken this need on board, and as COL staff find longer-term work more satisfying, the change should be sustainable.

115. Whereas there are fewer one-off events than in previous planning periods, the chains of interventions are mostly not planned long in advance, but usually take shape through an iterative, evolutionary process. This fits COL's style of collaborative working and is often appropriate, particularly in areas of relative innovation such as e-learning.

116. Nevertheless, there are some areas where COL needs to plan its engagement with institutions and themes more strategically. There are limits to this however. COL is valued for its flexibility and responsiveness. For example, it was able to help the Gambian government put together a National ODL policy forum three months after the request was received. This agility should not be lost. The important thing is that its response should be within a strategic framework. This often means planned, well-timed follow-up such as might have led to faster or more widespread positive outcomes in the case of the 2004 Kenya national ODL forum or the e-learning workshops **(Recommendation 32)**.

117. In many cases more strategic thinking about a series of interventions need not imply the use of significantly more time and other resources. It principally means being more rigorous in thinking through and articulating the programme logic: what

interventions are needed, in what circumstances, and what the expected results should be. This happens in COL, but not enough and without the full benefit of pooled knowledge.

118. In other cases, the programme logic will inevitably suggest a more intensive or extensive engagement and more resources – a deeper or broader footprint. COL occasionally does this. Its bi-ennial Pan Commonwealth Forums and its growing involvement with the VUSSC are examples of the broad footprint. Its "task-force" support for Nigeria and strategic help for ODL in the Pacific are examples of footprints that were both broad and deep. In the case of Nigeria and the Pacific, the results were good. The rationale for a concentration of resources in a particular set of circumstances may vary, but it should always be based on an assessment of the importance and potential impact of the interventions.

119. The examples of bigger footprints given so far have been initiatives taken with COL's core funding. There have been several examples with non-core client funding. This route is assessed in paragraphs124-131.

120. The question of whether or not COL should increase the size of its typical footprint has been widely debated within COL. The majority opinion favours such a move, although most do not relish having to disappoint more partners and clients. There is a greater consensus among key outside informants that concentrated effort, if carefully targeted, is something COL should do more of. This evaluation endorses that, although it should be a gradual, managed process and carefully monitored. Concentration need not imply work with many fewer institutions or countries. It may mean focus on fewer processes or issues, such as quality in ODL or poverty reduction, with wide application**(Recommendation 33)**.

121. A bigger footprint need not imply a move to full project mode in all cases. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) can be an appropriate form of road map. A well-designed MOU gives both sides a common vision and understanding of the collaboration, while leaving them the flexibility that is often necessary in a long-term relationship. COL and its partners need to build in appropriate work plans and monitoring and evaluation to their MOUs, to a greater degree than the ones seen in this evaluation **(Recommendation 34)**.

Regional centres

122. COL's support to the three regional centres of expertise that it manages or fosters is a further example of the bigger footprint, although they are more intermediaries than client organizations in the true sense.

123. The question of regional centres is addressed in one of the case studies. Generally the conclusion is that they have a role to play. COL would undoubtedly benefit from having competent, long-term regional partners it could work with. This could take the form of strategic partnerships with existing institutions or it might imply fostering new agencies as it has done in Africa and South Asia. COL has carefully avoided direct management of RETRIDAL and SARDEC, but there are still utility and sustainability issues that must be carefully monitored. There is an exit strategy for each and this should be front-of-mind over the next three years **(Recommendation 35)**. With CEMCA the decision has been taken to integrate it more closely with

COL. In this case, a more purposeful transformation strategy should be worked out and implemented **(Recommendation 36)**.

Client-funded projects

124. A more controversial area is the projects that COL undertakes on contract for donors and other clients. These contracts usually involve COL in work on a larger scale than it is used to. They usually imply involvement in implementation, with all the frustrations that that entails. COL becomes tied to the project structure and timing over which it may not have much influence. These are experiences and risks that are encountered by all organizations that enter this territory. These are not sufficient reasons for staying out of client-funded projects. If they are in line with COL's purpose and strategic direction, these projects can be an important way of extending COL's reach and the value it can create. There are also developmental benefits for COL in working in this territory as it helps COL stay in touch with the realities of implementation.

125. Competing for client-funded projects is costly and needs to be done professionally. When bids are unsuccessful there are large opportunity costs in the nugatory use of staff time. Organizations that are most successful in this field have dedicated specialist staff who pursue and put together project bids.[4] They are usually based geographically close to one or more of the major donors, providing them with an ear to the ground. Many also have field offices for close liaison with developing country partners and for implementation.

126. COL is not well equipped to compete for this type of project. It is geographically disadvantaged and has rarely reached a critical mass of project bids to begin to experience economies of scale and the accumulated knowledge of how to do it well. With fewer donor-funded projects in education, now is not a good time for COL to attempt to acquire critical mass expertise in donor-funded project pursuit **(Recommendation 37).**

127. COL has delivered some projects to its own satisfaction and to that of its partners. The COLLIT project in India and Zambia from 1999-2003 is an example. But even successful projects can distract COL from its core purpose and competencies. They can lead to mission creep. There is also a potential conflict of interest between COL's role as honest broker and that of a bidder for contracts, often with the same government institutions.

128. When projects go wrong – and this is regrettably quite frequent in international development - COL's reputation, one of its greatest assets, can be put at risk. The Mozambique Secondary Education through Distance Education (SEDE) project – part of one of the case studies - may be an extreme case, but its lessons are still relevant.

129. The distance courses in effective writing run by the COL Development Office for UN agencies have not arisen from competitive bidding and are managed as a discrete business stream, without drawing significantly on COL professional staff time. There is evidence that there have been crossover benefits for COL in terms of

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[4] COL's attempt at this in the 1990s - COL International - was not very successful.

increased profile in these agencies. COL's involvement with WHO in its health initiatives sprang from contact over the effective writing courses. No-one in this evaluation has advocated terminating this work, although there are concerns that any escalation could introduce distortion into COL's organization. This risk would need to be appraised appropriately.

130. COL staff are divided on the issue of client projects. This is understandable because these projects can be exciting and COL staff are not known to shrink from hard work. Most other key informants believe that COL should either withdraw from this area altogether or only get involved when it can perform the role of strategic adviser. This evaluation inclines to the second view and in fact positively encourages COL to become involved as a strategic partner in donor-funded projects **(Recommendation 38)**.

131. The size and reliability of COL's budget remains a great concern. But fee-for-service work would not seem to be the solution. An alternative may be funding from private foundations for work COL proposes to do anyway. COL has been exploring this ground for example with the William and Flora Hewlett and Ford Foundations. It has just been awarded $750,000 from the former for five pieces of work with open education resources over the next 21 months. The work that went into the application was not insignificant, but the activity it covers is central to one of COL's agendas. COL should continue to explore this type of non-core funding **(Recommendation 39)**.

Level of engagement

132. Another important issue is the level at which COL works. Its 2003-06 plan mandated it to work at every level from ODL policy to applications. Its programme structure reflects this.

133. Notionally, one in three of its programmes is devoted to fostering the adoption and implementation of open and distance learning policies. In practice, although boundaries are not easy to draw, and some initiatives have policy objectives along with others, less than one in ten of COL's initiatives is primarily aimed at policy. This is surprising as COL enjoys extraordinary access to decision-makers in many countries and it seems likely that it could have more influence on policy and strategy than it currently has.

134. The majority of people consulted feel that COL should move further upstream in the belief that it will achieve more impact for its scarce resources in this way. Although the logic for this is compelling, informants could not always support it with evidence and all conceded that it is important for COL to demonstrate through its own work, or through research in ODL environments, that policy does lead to timely and more effective implementation of ODL applications.

135. There is a consensus, endorsed by this evaluation, that where COL is involved in policy, it should ideally also be involved in advising on policy implementation. This implies more use of a vertical integration approach than at present with more detailed planning, more teamwork and the larger footprint discussed in the section above **(Recommendation 40)**.

136. The model most likely to prove fruitful, *prima facie*, is that of strategic adviser to governments seeking to:
    - Frame and implement ODL policies.
    - Introduce ODL within other policies.
    - Implement new ODL systems or major applications.

137. Where donors and other outside agencies are involved, COL should seek the role of intermediary, helping both sides to maximise the value from the development partnership **(Recommendation 41)**. As mentioned above, this role would be incompatible with COL as a competitor for donor-funded work.

138. A significant number of informants (including some Board members) felt that COL's most effective contributions are in capacity-building – both building ODL capacity and building capacity through ODL. They acknowledge however that scaleability is an issue at the lower levels. To maximise value for money, COL's contributions at the lower levels should be designed to lead to take-up by others - not just sustainability - preferably on a self-replicating or cascading scale **(Recommendation 42)**.

139. What most people are agreed on is that COL's capacity-building work must be set in a strategic framework. Two principal scenarios for this can be envisaged:
    - COL is involved with resource and implementation partners in significant-scale roll out or adaptation of a programme where its contribution, though small, is pivotal. Its work in open schooling is an example.
    - It develops a small-scale innovative application as an incubator or pilot initiative with either in-built self-replicability - such as in L3 Farmers – or a pre-planned strategy for promoting replication or cascading if it is successful. This implies that the initiative must be set in an institutional structure with an effective champion and apex support. Relying solely on the power of an idea and COL's own "megaphone" once a pilot has been seen to be successful, will struggle against institutional inertia and too much background noise.

140. There may be other scenarios where COL's work at the level of applications could be justified, but the rationale for the application, and the programme logic should be worked out and articulated in advance, not left to chance. The sustainability of applications, once they are up and running, should not be COL's responsibility. Regular use of COL specialist staff time to maintain applications is difficult to justify **(Recommendation 43)**.

Concluding points

141. However COL operates – long or short term; with a large or small footprint; at the level of policy, systems or applications; with its core funding or a client's - it needs to be evidence-based and discriminating. It needs to periodically undertake research to redefine the broad geographical and thematic focuses of its strategy. It needs to be thorough in its appraisal of initiatives - against agreed and well understood criteria - before getting involved. This applies both to products like teaching materials, and services like advice, training and consultancy **(Recommendation 44)**.

142. COL published a list of intervention criteria in its 2003-06 plan. There is not much evidence that they are being used. Some Board members are sceptical that they are used at all. The criteria in the plan seem generally sound. They should be revisited and updated regularly in the light of COL's experience and of current development thinking - and applied more systematically **(Recommendation 45)**. This process is underway in COL.

COL'S PROGRAMMES – OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

143. So far we have looked at COL' s **relevance** to development priorities, **how** it attracts and manages resources, and **how** it deploys those resources through its programmes. In the last section of Findings an assessment will be made of the value COL creates in terms of **outputs and outcomes**.

144. There are differing interpretations of the distinction between outputs and outcomes in evaluation and related fields. This evaluation uses the OECD's interpretation which makes a practical distinction, useful for general audiences:
    * Outputs are the goods or services which agencies provide.
    * Outcomes are the effects on society of these outputs.

Outputs

145. Using this interpretation, outputs can be seen as things that COL has a direct hand in producing such as courses, publications or events such as colloquia. This is very close, if not identical, to the concept of products and activities. What is important however is not so much the product or activity itself, but its **reach** - what type of people and organizations engage with it, and how many.

146. Because of the way COL works, its outputs are often other organizations' inputs.

147. COL's RBM documents contain data on what it does and produces - events, consultancies, knowledge products etc - under each initiative. This information is not recorded in standard categories and not collated. It also does not include much data about participants other than numbers. With knowledge products, user data is normally missing altogether. It has therefore been difficult to make a meaningful inventory of COL's outputs. Estimates have however been made where possible.

148. The 2003-06 plan defined COL's six output areas (in alphabetical order):
    * Advice.
    * Advocacy.
    * Capacity-building.
    * Fostering networks and partnerships.
    * Knowledge management.
    * Research.

149. Although some of COL's outputs do not fit easily into these categories, they will be used in an attempt to define the nature and scale of the outputs.

<u>Advice.</u>

150. Advice is a difficult output to capture evaluatively. It pervades all COL's activities and is usually part of a wider package of support. It is given formally and informally, by COL specialists and by consultants they commission. The more substantial outputs in this category are consultancies with a specific advisory brief pre-defined by terms of reference. These are usually outsourced by COL, although its specialists sometimes undertake them. They typically range from two days to two weeks and are delivered to a single institution. In the year ending June 2005, COL spent Cdn$1.24m on consultancy. How much of this was for advisory assignments, it is difficult to say with any accuracy, but probably more than half.

151. Much or even all of this could be classed as capacity-building, and it is often - although perhaps not yet often enough - part of a package with training and other structured types of capacity enhancement.

<u>Advocacy</u>

152. The amount of activity specifically designed for advocacy is easier to estimate simply because it was becoming unusual by the 2003-06 period. The need for advocacy for ODL in education generally has practically disappeared, although advocacy for particular approaches to, and applications of, ODL is still needed.

153. COL's national consultative forums are probably the last examples of advocacy at the general level still practised by COL, although they are designed to go beyond advocacy into policy capacity-building. There were policy forums in four countries in this period and also a small amount of other policy advocacy activity in another three.

154. Some "missionary" work for the introduction of ODL into new sectors and institutions can be identified, but it usually transforms itself seamlessly into capacity building.

155. COL has been active as advocate in a different way in relation to open source material and software and the lowering of copyright barriers. It has collaborated in awareness workshops and set an example – not entirely consistently – by making its own material available on the internet and negotiating access to that of other organizations.

<u>Capacity-building</u>

156. Using a broad definition of capacity-building, it could be said to encompass all the categories of COL's outputs - even advocacy[5]. In its 2003-06 plan COL appeared to be using a narrow definition - closer to the concept of training. Even with this narrow definition, it is a large category in terms of the volume of resources COL has devoted to it.

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[5] A recent DFID publication maintains that in some contexts the term capacity-building can encompass building the understanding and knowledge of people, organizations, institutions or communities, and enabling them to organize themselves to respond to this understanding. "Developments" DFID February 2006.

157. Most of COL's capacity-building of this type takes places in short courses, workshops, seminars, programmed attachments or visits. Sometimes these activities are targeted wholly or predominantly at a single institution – such as the e-learning workshops in Nigeria and Trinidad - other times they are more open-ended, drawing participants from a variety of organizations and countries. Some are organized by COL usually with partners, others by other organizations, with COL sponsoring certain participants.

158. Approximately 2500 people have been covered by these activities since the beginning of the plan period. Major regular capacity-building events include the Singapore Institutes[6], the Goa open schooling colloquia, and the Abertay Conversations[7].

159. COL has also supported longer education and training for individuals in an affordable way through distance programmes. The main example is its financial support for key individuals involved in ODL to take postgraduate courses in distance education at IGNOU through the Rajiv Ghandi Fellowships. The latest intake, in 2003, was exclusively for Nigeria and currently numbers 45 participants.

160. A substantial area of COL's work is the building of organizations' capacity to create distance education and training. Its work in environmental education with CEE and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), and postgraduate courses in teacher training at the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), are major examples from this period. A distance programme developed in the previous plan period through COL's networking and other support – the Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration/Master of Public Administration programme offered by four South Asian universities – currently has over 500 students enrolled.

161. COL also helps organizations adopt and adapt courses that are already in use elsewhere. For example COL has been helping several Caribbean countries make use of a suite of materials jointly developed with the University of Technology, Jamaica to train technical/vocational instructors in pedagogical skills.

162. COL occasionally engages in multi-layered capacity building for an institution or even a whole ODL system. These interventions usually take place over several years. The main examples from 2003-06 are NTI, NIOS, Schoolnet Africa, major elements of Mozambique's DE system (through DFID and Word Bank funding), ICRISAT and Zambia's distance teacher education system (through Danish International Development Agency funding).

163. An unusual form of capacity-building from COL is the Canadian International Internships which has placed young Canadians with COL partner institutions such as the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the African Virtual University, and the World Agroforestry Centre.

164. COL also produces courses, instructional or other materials itself. Examples from 2003-06 include the Schoolnet Tookit, the Practitioner Research and Evaluation

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[6] A workshop for senior staff in African teacher education institutions.
[7] A seminar for leaders of African higher education institutions.

Skills Training series, (PREST) and the Quality Indicators for Teacher Education. It is impossible to estimate with any accuracy how many people are using, or will use, these products.

Fostering networks and partnerships

165. COL networks people and organizations for specific short and medium-term purposes such as exchange of experience in a particular field or for collaboration in an education project. It also helps to create or enhance networks and communities for long-term interaction. Short/medium term networking on the one hand, and long-term networks on the other, are different types of output and require different approaches from COL. But they have the same goal: the exchange of knowledge, experience and expertise, a form of capacity-building by proxy on COL's part.

166. The short/medium term networking of people by COL is very extensive. It is probably safe to say that it is an almost constant activity. At its most informal it happens through the simple referral of people or organizations to another party e.g. by email or face to face. At the other end of the spectrum, COL brokers collaborations, organizational partnerships and consortia through structured inputs such as meetings or seminars. Conferences are another structured networking instrument. The biggest that COL organizes is the biennial PCF. It is the apex networking event for the Commonwealth ODL community, and is particularly valuable for providing development opportunities for younger practitioners. The biennial Cambridge International Conference on Open and Distance Learning, that COL helps to organize with the UK Open University (UKOU) and the International Research Foundation for Open Learning (IRFOL), is another important networking platform, which, like the PCFs, gives developing country practitioners opportunities to share experience and ideas with counterparts from developed nations.

167. Much formal networking coincides with capacity-building. Formal activity designed principally to network people has probably involved around 1500 people so far in the plan period. It is impossible to estimate how many people are informally networked.

168. The creation or enhancement of long-term networks and communities is less common. COL's contributions have included the brokerage, fostering and enhancement of regional ODL and other professional associations, and long-term consortia. The main examples in this period are continued support for the Pacific Association for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (PATVET) and the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA), and startup support for the Caribbean Regional Association for Distance and Open Learning (CARADOL) and the West African Distance Education Association (WADEA). COL has also supported several knowledge consortia in India.

169. COL's vision for the VUSSC is more akin to a network than a new institution. COL envisages a network with multiple nodes of activity based around existing institutions. It is expected that the network will be involved in mutual capacity-building, content development and sharing, and possibly standards and credit transfer mechanisms.

170. COL, surprisingly, does not manage much virtual networking. It developed several virtual conferences prior to the Dunedin PCF in 2004, and has hosted occasional temporary on-line communities, e.g. after the e-learning workshops in 2004-05. It continues to host the Commonwealth Electronic Network for Schools and Education which facilitates contact between national learning grids, schools and institutions. But compared for example to UNESCO's International Institute for Education Planning, it has not put many resources into virtual networking. It is an area that COL should consider developing, although the resources and expertise that are needed should not be underestimated and planning is paramount **(Recommendation 46)**.

Knowledge management

171. COL uses the term knowledge management to refer to its activity in capturing, processing and disseminating information and knowledge both internally and externally. Often the information and knowledge vehicles and products are targeted at both audiences simultaneously. It also includes in this category some types of publication it produces or commissions itself such as the Perspectives and World Series which could also be classed as research outputs. The main external audiences are ODL practitioners.

172. Most of these information and knowledge vehicles and products are accessible through COL's website. The website is receiving necessary attention from COL. It does not function well as an integrated knowledge portal which many people in the ODL practitioner community expect it to be. The most popular on-line knowledge vehicles and products are believed to be:
   • Knowledge Finder, a specialized search engine for ODL set up and maintained by COL, which is accessed by about 5000 users per month.
   • Practical handbooks and guides, including the Knowledge Series, available on-line.

173. One of COL's most recent outputs has been the provision on-line of free LOR software, and it is collaborating with the African Virtual University to upload and make available open source courseware that Commonwealth countries can access free of charge.

174. COL also partners, or provides content for, other organizations in external knowledge platforms. The main ones are
   • The Global Distance Education Network's ODL Knowledge Base, produced in partnership with UNESCO and the World Bank.
   • Development Gateway - an interactive Internet portal for information and knowledge sharing on sustainable development and poverty reduction - for which COL supplies content on developments in the field of e-learning.

Research

175. COL does not attempt to be a major force in ODL research. Apart from the secondary works in the Perspectives and World Series, its research does not have a long-term strategy. It arises out of specific needs of COL itself or its partners. Its website contains only 9 significant COL research or evaluation reports on diverse

topics completed since July 2003. COL does not have a concerted approach to disseminating its research publications. Again it is impossible to know how many people have used this material. For several years, COL had a research commissioning arrangement with IRFOL. This ended in 2004 which partly explains the low level of output from COL in the plan period. Some of the most useful research produced in the last two years has been the regional scans commissioned for the development of COL's new 3-year plan.

176. An area of COL's work that could be classed as research, although also as capacity building, is its model-building. In L3 Farmers, COL has adopted a quasi-experimental approach in designing and applying a set of linked inputs to empower farmers and rural workers to improve their social and economic conditions through learning. The aim is for the model – or adaptations of it – to be adopted on a wide scale if it is seen to work. This is the purest example of model-building in this period. There are other examples of action research which may lead to model-building such as several of COL's learning and livelihoods initiatives.

Concluding points

177. The main questions to consider in assessing COL's contributions at the level of outputs would seem to be:
    • How many people and organizations is it reaching with its activities? How big a wave does this amount to, or is it a drop in the ocean (or to put it in other terms - what is COL's market share)?
    • What type of people and organizations are they? How much potential do they have for bringing about positive change either directly or through relication or cascade effects?
    • Is COL's activity significant, appropriate and of the right quality?
    (A further very important factor that will be discussed in the second part of this section is what outcomes do these outputs contribute to.)

178. It is difficult to address these output questions comprehensively in the absence of more finely tuned data and evaluations. What can be said with confidence is:
    • The evaluations that exist indicate a high level of satisfaction with events such as workshops, and anticipation of good learning outcomes.
    • The case study evidence suggests that the participant institutions are carefully chosen by COL and are usually of high or medium potential in their countries.
    • COL does not always have much control over individual participants, and the case studies and informant consultations suggest that they are not always the most appropriate.
    • COL has probably been trying to doing too much in output terms. A small organization like COL cannot be expected to have such a wide reach. The indications are that COL's increasing strategic focus is leading to more significant activity but with fewer partners. This is a more effective balance than the one at the beginning of the period.

Outcomes

179. Researching outcomes is usually the most challenging part of any evaluation and this one is no exception. Data on outcomes of COL work are available from its monitoring and evaluation processes in the following ways:

- In COL's RBM system, its specialists are asked to record their achievements each quarter. This mostly consists of outputs, but sometimes also outcomes - such as what a partner organization has gone on to do after a COL intervention. The outcome information available from this source is very patchy.
- Once or twice a year, COL staff complete self-assessments of their initiatives. They are asked to what extent the pre-defined outcomes for each initiative have been achieved and what evidence exists for these assertions. They are also asked to self-score the initiative against 7 universal outcomes[8] and an overall four-point success scale. This is a bold attempt to introduce discipline into outcome reporting and assessment. The main weakness is the lack of systematic evidence for the assertions and the self-scoring. This evaluation has therefore not been able to make much use of data from this source as such, although the self-assessments were useful as touchstones in interviews.
- External evaluations. These are mostly immediate evaluations of events which give few pointers to any outcomes other than satisfaction with the event and perceived immediate benefits such as new knowledge. A small number of evaluations exist of longer term activity, particularly where client funds have been involved. These were much more useful for assessing outcomes.

180. These sources of data are not sufficient to obtain a comprehensive and reliable picture of the outcomes of COL's work. Reliance has therefore had to be placed chiefly on the case studies which the evaluation has researched first hand, supplemented by triangulation on a small number of other initiatives – such as work with NTI and ICRISAT - that has been possible through interviews with key informants. What follows is therefore a partial picture of outcomes, but one which appears to be reasonably representative of the whole.

181. From a trawl of the RBM documents, the main types of short and medium term outcome on which COL can hope to have significance influence are:

- Increased awareness of ODL, its uses and benefits.
- The creation or enhancement of policy for ODL.
- The creation or enhancement of ODL institutions and systems.
- The development of open and distance approaches to education and training in conventional mode institutions.
- Increased competencies in, and knowledge of, particular aspects of ODL.
- Effective networks for ODL practitioners and stakeholders.
- Innovation through models.

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[8] These universal outcomes are:
  Broken new ground
  Engaged people in a process
  Connected organizations to a process
  Built on existing initiatives in the Country/Region
  Built an awareness
  Provided knowledge
  Increased Access

182. COL expects that these short and medium term ODL outcomes will lead to the longer term outcome of more educated, trained and knowledge-equipped people, who in turn will impact positively on their own and other people's social and economic development.

183. This evaluation confines its focus principally to the short and medium term outcomes. It has not had the resources or the time-lag necessary to research longer-term outcomes or impact.

<u>Increased awareness of the uses and benefits of ODL</u>

184. There is no doubt that COL has over its life been a major force in advocacy for ODL. Its activities, both directly and through ripple effects, have raised awareness of the relevance and efficacy of ODL - at the level of governments, in education communities, and increasingly in other sectors and programme areas. Some experienced informants believe that COL has been <u>the</u> major force in advocacy, which given its small size and the fact that advocacy has been only part of its brief, is remarkable. This carries a very positive message about the credibility of its leaders and staff.

185. Much of COL's success in advocacy has been due to its own positive and high profile. This gives COL access to decision-makers. It also has a halo effect for partners seeking to influence governments or other institutions. Several informants said it is sufficient to say that COL is a partner to get other people to listen.

186. As mentioned in the outputs section, COL now designs little activity solely with advocacy in mind. The outcomes of most of the ODL forums (Case Study 1) show that COL can successfully mix advocacy with policy capacity building where conditions are right. This has not yet worked in Kenya, because it seems that some of the institutions needed time to embed their awareness.

187. The mix of advocacy and capacity-building also works in another way. Most of COL's capacity-building activity is usually accompanied at an early stage by advocacy, designed to convince non-practitioners – typically apex management in non-ODL institutions and influential government officials – of the uses and benefits of the capacity that is proposed. This buy-in stage is usually crucial. From the case studies, it is clear that this worked very well in CEE for Green Teachers and with the South African Ministry of Education for schoolnets. It has been partially successful in Sarvodaya, (where successful outcomes have been limited, partly because Sarvodaya management was not prepared to give it a secure budget). In the Mozambique SEDE project, advocacy with the Ministry of Education was not effective after changes of key incumbents in 2001. COL needs to ensure that it does not pursue projects without adequate buy-in **(Recommendation 47).**

188. It is difficult to identify specific outcomes from COL's advocacy of open source. COL's involvement is relatively recent and the activity goes on across a broad front, usually in partnership with other organizations such as the African Virtual University. The goal is a very important one however and provided there are no major reverses – such as backlash from big business interests, COL's work should

be an important contribution to an escalating awareness of the developmental benefits of open source.

The creation or enhancement of policy for ODL

189. The national forums have been the main instrument for COL's support to the policy process. Of the four countries where forums have been held, Gambia and Sierra Leone moved quickly to the development of national policy frameworks. These are small countries where ministerial decisions usually get implemented more easily. The policy process following the forum in Kenya has been much slower and fitful. It has however led to the inclusion of ODL references in the Sessional Paper on Education – the long-term policy framework for the education sector - and the main ODL policy vehicle appears to be approaching the implementation stage. Policy development in complex political environments is usually a slow process.

190. Kenya however highlights the difficulties a small organization like COL faces outside its core area of expertise, even where it has traction with Ministers. Kenya's policy process for ICT in education appears to have been completely separate from the one for pure ODL that COL was involved in - and given much higher priority. This is partly at least because it has been supported by the World Bank which, rightly or wrongly, has much more power to turn heads in most countries. It is difficult for COL to claim credit for any significant developments in ICT policies for education policies anywhere in the Commonwealth. Its support for schoolnets in Africa may have contributed to awareness, but even here, attribution is difficult.

The creation or enhancement of ODL institutions and systems

191. The outcomes under this heading are of two types. One is the vertical channel where an institution is changed significantly in several respects. The other is the horizontal channel where many institutions are changed in a particular respect. There are examples of both vertical and horizontal channels combined.

192. Outcomes of this type flow from macro-scale capacity building, and COL does not usually have the resources to help in this area in a sustained way. However, by occasional intensive approaches, or a series of periodic interventions, it has made a difference in several cases.

193. There is a consensus among people consulted that the support COL has provided to NTI in Nigeria has been pivotal. Before COL began its partnership with NTI in 2001, the latter was languishing, and closure had been contemplated. It is now a very important institution in Nigeria – the world's only single-mode distance education institution dedicated to teacher training - with well over 100,000 teachers following courses at any one time.

194. COL's support began intensively and more recently has taken the form of periodic interventions identified through a long-term partnership process. COL has principally provided expertise in reviewing and improving NTI's course development and learner support systems. It has also supported the development of monitoring and evaluation systems, a quality assurance mechanism, and has brokered linkages with the Nigerian National Commission for Colleges of Education where relationships with NTI had not been very constructive. COL has facilitated

cooperation between NTI and Indian institutions with ODL capacity such as the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and CEE. NTI still has a number of hurdles to overcome, but COL's holistic approach to capacity building there has undoubtedly led to important positive outcomes. Several informants say that COL's interventions have been crucial to NTI's survival.

195. COL's capacity-building partnership with NIOS also began before the current plan period but has continued and intensified. COL's greatest contribution to NIOS has probably been the confidence it gave it to branch out from its core area of open schooling delivered through mainstream institutions, to develop partnerships with NGOs to deliver schooling for marginalised groups. Now COL appears to be having a similar effect with NIOS's plans to increases its involvement in technical, vocational and livelihoods education.

196. NIOS is a good example of how COL not only provides practical help but also brings its global perspective and reputation to bear on institutions that may be lacking in confidence and traction even in their own countries. COL can, through the power of its reputation, or through direct influence, also affect decisions favorable to the institutions it supports. NIOS credits COL with this positive effect for example on decisions by several Indian States to establish Open Schools. An initial broad front approach to Indian States by COL and NIOS did not produce immediate results, but COL support is believed to have been instrumental in subsequent years.

197. There are other examples of substantial vertical institutional support in the 2003-06 period, such as at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. There have also been approaches to institutions that have not led to significant positive outcomes such as at the dual-mode Delhi University and parts of the Bangladesh Open University. Conditions have to be favorable: e.g. commitment at the top, adequate resources, practitioner-level champions and timing. COL can expect setbacks, but should continue selectively to look for opportunities to support pivotal institutions where the need is evident and conditions are favorable. Ideally it should do this, as in the NIOS example, not just to enhance that institution's capacity for its own clientele but also to mobilize the institution in capacity-building elsewhere in the country and beyond (**Recommendation 48)**.

198. In the case of NIOS and NTI, COL's choices were strategically sound. They are among the most important ODL institutions in the developing Commonwealth non-university sector, and most conditions for progress were in place.

199. COL rarely has substantial involvement in the start-up phase of new institutions, preferring to work with those that have already demonstrated their potential to make a difference. The main exceptions in this period have been the establishment of regional centres of expertise in West and Southern Africa. Because COL has been the driving force, the establishment of these institutions should be regarded as outputs and not outcomes. COL's start-up work with regional networks and the VUSSC can also be included.

200. An example of COL working for outcomes in the horizontal channel – where a particular change is sought in many institutions – is in ODL quality assurance. The outputs of this work are training and guidance materials designed to develop quality

assurance culture, capacity and processes in both teacher training and university education across the developing Commonwealth. This is a relatively new series of initiatives and has not yet reached the outcome stage. COL intends to follow through with activity designed to help institutions make use of these materials, although firm plans are not yet in place. Follow-through is an important process in initiatives where materials are a major component. (**Recommendation 49**).The lack of follow-through with the Science, Technology and Mathematics Programme (STAMP 2000) course materials and the Schoolnet Toolkit may be a decisive factor in whether or not the use made of these products justifies the investment.

201. The only examples of substantial COL involvement in whole ODL systems capacity-building – combining the vertical and horizontal channels - in the current planning period are from Mozambique. The DFID-funded SEDE project piloted distance education for secondary school children in one province with a view to national roll-out. COL's management of the project ceased in March 2005 and has been continued by other agencies. It is seriously behind schedule and may not lead to roll-out at all. If so, it should be counted as a failure.

202. How much of the difficulty the project has experienced can be attributed to COL is arguable. COL staff are robust in their assertion that COL did the best it could, but was frustrated particularly by the lack of commitment in the Mozambique Ministry of Education. What is clear is that COL found itself in unfamiliar territory – it did not know the country well, had no effective champion and soon after the beginning of the project lost its buy-in at the top of the Ministry. It was having to work in full project mode in which it does not have great depth of experience. With no field presence, it was unable to deal effectively with a series of unfavorable conditions.

203. Any agency in this position would have had difficulties, although those with greater experience of managing development projects may have been able to adjust better. For COL, this has had repercussions on its reputation with some stakeholders.

204. The other, broader, ODL capacity-building project – funded by the World Bank - is more recent and it is less easy to assess the outcomes. The signs are not particularly promising. COL found itself delivering intensive training before the country was fully prepared. If it had not been propelled by the project timetable, it would almost certainly not have gone ahead when it did. As a result only one institution – ACIPOL (the Police Academy in Mozambique) - seems to have moved ahead to utilize the training on a significant scale. It is too early to judge how successful this has been.

The development of O&D approaches to education and training in conventional mode institutions.

205. There are several cases in the current period where COL has helped an institution that has previously offered education and training only in conventional mode, to develop ODL capacity. The case study in this evaluation is of CEE which has ventured into ODL with the Green Teacher programme. This is still at the pilot stage, but the results so far are very positive. The programme has potential to reach large numbers of teachers and schoolchildren in India – boosted by the Indian Supreme Court ruling about the supply of environmental education - and in other countries. The NTI are considering adopting it in Nigeria thanks to COL's

linkage activity. CEE is so encouraged by the partnership with COL and the early results of the Green Teacher project that it wants to extend ODL throughout the organization. CEE is an important and effective institution with a transnational brief. If this enhancement takes place, it will almost certainly impact positively in India and elsewhere.

206. Another example of COL's work in helping institutions to convert from the conventional mode of education and training mode is with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and ICRISAT in particular. The member institutions of CGIAR offer conventional training to professional and other practitioner groups in their fields. COL approached CGIAR to try to agree a long-term programme to introduce ODL capacity for its members. This proved to be too ambitious, so COL began at the member institution level, mainly with ICRISAT. ICRISAT has been converted into a committed provider of ODL in a number of ways and has been used by COL to develop ODL elsewhere in CGIAR and even outside (in the L3F project).

207. COL has directly supported ODL capacity at another CGIAR member institution - the World Agroforestry Centre in Nairobi - principally by providing Canadian interns to help it develop on-line learning systems.

208. These are the only major examples of capacity-building for dual mode that this evaluation has been able to look at. This is clearly a fruitful area for COL where its expertise and experience can make a significant contribution, often with potential multiplier effects **(Recommendation 50).**

Increased competencies in and knowledge of particular aspects of ODL

209. As we saw in the last section, COL engages in a considerable amount of capacity-building on a micro scale - small institutional development interventions or the training of specific individuals. Much of this is part of sequenced support to an institution or horizontal programme, in which case the outcomes have been considered earlier on this section. In those cases the outcomes are easier to trace.

210. Where the targets of the interventions are more dispersed – such as the RGFs and the Singapore workshops - it is has been difficult to assess outcomes because COL has not invested in follow-up evaluation during this period and there is no critical mass to analyse through a case study approach. COL usually commissions immediate or short-term evaluations of the training, but these offer few clues to longer-term outcomes.

211. The Kenya e-learning workshops are an example where COL aimed to develop competencies outside of an institutional framework. We know from a case study (No. 5) that it was successful in the case of the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT). It has had a multiplier effect in that institution and possibly outside. There may have been other examples of significant progress after the Kenya workshops, although the only other one that has come to light is at the University of Dar-es-Salaam. The e-learning workshops in Lagos and Trinidad each ended up being concentrated on one institution. We do not have reliable outcomes information from those workshops.

212. COL is doing less competency work outside an institutional or programme framework than it used to. As it has little evidence that the more dispersed approach works, this is probably right. There is a risk however that, if COL concentrates too much on a limited number of institutions or programmes, opportunities will be missed. JKUAT would probably not have taken off so quickly down the e-learning road if COL's net had not been cast wide for the Kenya workshops. COL should retain some capacity for wider competency building. But it should do this in a strategic framework with planned M&E and follow up. This is both to ensure that it produces positive outcomes and also to spot and build on encouraging developments such as the one at JKUAT **(Recommendation 51)**.

213. COL enables competency development for individuals – and sometimes groups – through its knowledge and information vehicles and products. There is little other than anecdotal evidence of outcomes from this. The anecdotal evidence is both positive and negative and there is not enough to reach a firm conclusion.

Effective networks for ODL practitioners and stakeholders.

214. In the previous section a distinction was made between networking and networks. Networking is not an outcome, whereas a functioning long-term network can be regarded as one. Networks can be capacity-building engines in their own right just as much as training programmes. When COL helps a network become self-sustaining, the value the network creates for its members can be seen as a COL-facilitated outcome.

215. At the highest level, COL is credited by informants with having built the biggest network - or community - of ODL practice in the developing world. Although it is the linking of developing country practitioners that has been the main contribution, COL has also been able to increase the frequency of north-south interaction as well.

216. This has happened cumulatively through hundreds of interventions, but the PCFs are also credited with playing a major role in consolidating and extending this network. In practice it is a network of networks linked through COL's actions. Both COL and other organizations and people help to maintain it and benefit from it.

217. COL has also helped to create and sustain formal, structured networks such as national and regional ODL associations – DEASA and WADEA - and PATVET in the Pacific. Not all of these have worked. In particular, attempts to create formal networks for the East Africa ODL community, and teacher training institutions trans-nationally, have been unsuccessful. Trans-national networks in any field are notoriously difficult to sustain long-term, although most Commonwealth countries have the benefit of a common working language. Small regions with a strong sense of identity and a history of institutional cooperation are more fertile ground. Research has shown that long-term sustainability of networks seems to depend on opportunities for face-to-face interaction.[9]

218. COL has mostly worked with networks of ODL practitioners and stakeholders. The capacity building that they engender is therefore in ODL. PATVET was different. It is a network of technical/vocational institutions and therefore not strictly an ODL

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[9] Unpublished British Council research into the fostering of professional networks, 2003.

network. But because of the geo-political nature of the Pacific region, the glue that keeps it together is partly applied through ODL instruments. PATVET seems to have been a considerable success – it is praised by current and former Board members from the Pacific and is said to be enthusiastically supported by Pacific Education Ministers.

219. The VUSSC is a bigger trans-national networking challenge. If the VUSSC is as effective and sustainable as its stakeholders hope, COL will deserve a great deal of positive recognition for its role.

220. Networks are an area that would benefit from an overall evaluation by COL to identify good practice not just for COL but wider audiences **(Recommendation 52).**

<u>Innovation through models</u>

221. Innovation is an elusive outcome to define. It could be argued that much of what COL does leads to innovation in ODL. This is because it often works at the leading edge of ODL thinking and practice, and its networking events and some of its applications lead to new ways of working. It is difficult to separate this from capacity building and in some ways not helpful to do that, because capacity-building often needs to take advantage of new thinking. Where COL promotes or practises innovation, it does it for use and not for innovation's sake.

222. Probably the nearest COL has come to an experimental approach to innovation in this period is the L3 Farmers project where a model, designed through secondary and action research is being piloted in several different communities to see if it can lead to sustainable social and economic development. The main pilot is in South India, but there are other linked initiatives under way in Nigeria and in planning elsewhere.

223. L3 Farmers does not constitute an experiment in the strict sense because there is no control group factored into the project. It is however being systematically monitored and evaluated. The aim, if the pilot is successful, is for it to be adopted on a wide scale both in India and other countries. There are two principal types of innovation in the initiative: the unique set of institutional linkages, and new approaches to ODL instructional design for informal groups.

224. An example of a similar model-building approach from the previous plan was COL's effort to promote widespread adoption of a suitcase radio station that it had developed from earlier prototypes. This was not successful for a number of reasons, but mainly because COL's strategy for adoption depended on donor support which failed to materialise. L3 Farmers importantly does not depend on donor support, other than the modest seed-corn funding that COL is already supplying.

CONCLUSIONS

225. COL is a small organization. It has an annual budget of around $9 million and only 10 or so front-line staff. It is charged with an extremely ambitious mission[10] on which it can expect only to make a modest impression. The initiatives reported in the case studies for this evaluation involve programme expenditure of around $100,000 or less each - or under $150,000 when staff and other direct costs are taken into account. Whole sub-programmes, such as its support for ODL in teacher education, cost around Cdn$500,000 annually. It is important to bear these points in mind when assessing COL's value.

226. The first test COL has to pass is to show that what it does is relevant to development priorities in the countries that it serves. This is the test it set itself in its 2003-06 plan.

227. COL passes this test. ODL is universally accepted as an important instrument for development provided it is of the right quality, is affordable and is applied where needs are greatest. COL helps countries create and improve ODL with both cost and quality in mind. In the last 10 years it has steadily moved its focus from university education, where there is less of a consensus about the development dividends, towards areas such as teacher training, open schooling and poverty reduction where the need is not generally disputed.

228. This has been part of COL's strategic thinking for several years. As with other aspects of its strategic thinking, this has not been translated into robust implementation planning. Mostly this hasn't mattered because COL's staff are well aware of the key development issues and are usually very effective in addressing them. But it is a risky way of operating and improvements need to be made in organizational and individual performance management.

229. COL has a mandate to apply technology to ODL where appropriate and in general it has not allowed this to lead it into inappropriate initiatives. It should however take steps to integrate its technology work with other programmes.

230. COL does not have a clear strategy for where it works geographically. With its focus on the MDGs, it should logically target the poorest communities in the Commonwealth. This is less easy for COL than for well-resourced development agencies because it cannot kick-start capacity-building – there has to be some momentum and other favourable conditions in place before it can achieve traction. Often this makes working on its own with the poorest countries very difficult. This however strengthens the argument for COL to work more than at present with development agencies and developing country governments and institutions – not as a contractor but as a partner or mediator.

231. The evaluation has not found any significant evidence that COL inappropriately duplicates the work of other agencies, though this is a factor that should be part of

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[10] COL's mission statement : "Recognising knowledge as key to cultural, social and economic development, The Commonwealth of Learning is committed to assisting Commonwealth member governments to take full advantage of open, distance and technology-mediated learning strategies to provide increased and equitable access to education and training for all their citizens."

the appraisal of all substantial initiatives it plans. COL should ensure that it is up-to-date with the thinking and direction of other agencies operating in its fields.

232. COL's specialist staff are a very valuable resource. They are knowledgeable and committed. When they are new to the organization they bring valuable experience, expertise and networks from one or more field of ODL operation. While with COL they extend these networks and broaden their experience. They enjoy a great deal of autonomy which is a strong motivator.

233. It is proposed that COL staff should work in a more integrated way, within a more pro-active performance management framework. This will mean some reduction of autonomy, but not necessarily of motivation if it is handled well.

234. COL thinks strategically but has not always planned and acted strategically. Its 2003-06 plan was wide open. Its earlier reputation for being a whimsical organization is no longer deserved, but has not entirely disappeared.

235. COL's introduction of RBM in the last three years has set it on the road to becoming more outcomes-focused. This has led to more consensual and strategic thinking, and in some respects more teamwork. There is an important opportunity now to ensure that the research and strategic thinking that has gone into the 2006-09 process is translated into an effective implementation plan; and that this plan is translated into strategic action by its staff through improvements in its RBM system.

236. The main improvement that is needed is in monitoring and evaluation. COL's RBM system provides a structure for it. It is the content and use that are missing. Effective experience of M&E will in turn help COL to improve the planning part of the cycle by providing more clarity about its outputs and outcomes. COL is planning to improve its M&E, beginning with a workshop in July 2006.

237. COL has had difficulties explaining to external stakeholders and even to itself the logic of its programmes: what value it creates and how. M&E at its best can contribute to better understanding and more convincing representation of this programme logic. It should also give audiences a perspective on how many, and what types of people and organizations benefit from COL's work.

238. This will help to reduce the scepticism about the value of COL that the evaluation encountered among a small minority of informants. It will also help COL itself to develop more coherent processes of organizational learning. COL has good knowledge management tools but not always the space and accessible content to make good use of them.

239. COL has struggled to manage with a lower than projected budget in the 2003-06 period. The evaluation has not been able to assess whether this loss could have been avoided. Informants have left the impression that COL needs to find a way of liaising more purposefully with development agencies. This may lead to a larger or more secure budget; and it may open up new partnership opportunities. It should also be seen as a channel for knowledge exchange. With better internal knowledge processes, COL will have more confidence to enter into exchange as an equal partner with agencies like the World Bank.

240. COL works in a range of modes from structured projects of 2-3 years to micro-interventions such as ad hoc advice or contact brokerage. Most of its work has been towards the smaller end of the scale, although there has been a distinct trend, during the course of the 2003-06 period, to concentrate interventions around themes or institutions. This tendency has the support of most informants and seems appropriate. Isolated interventions stand less chance of leading to sustained outcomes. Nevertheless, COL should retain the flexibility to provide some small, well timed and placed support provided it is designed to plug a gap in an effective pre-existing development process or institutional framework. Larger agencies tend not to have this flexibility and agility and it is one of COL's assets.

241. COL is a consummate networking agency. It has constructed an extensive informal network of networks in ODL spanning most developing Commonwealth countries, with appropriate links to expertise in the developed world. COL itself makes use of these networks in its initiatives and they have also acquired their own momentum, with south-south exchanges happening without COL's intervention. Some of this networking takes place in formal structured communities such as PATVET that have been established or enhanced with COL's help. Not all attempts have succeeded.

242. COL is usually sensitive to the environments in which it works. It draws its staff from many of those environments and they travel to them in listening mode. This is partly through corporate ethos and personal inclination, and partly out of necessity. COL does not pay for its place at the table, it has to earn it through offering appropriate solutions that are usually constructed through a process of iterative dialogue.

243. COL engages with ODL at all levels from national policy down to applications. It has successes and disappointments at every level – mostly successes. There is a consensus that it should move steadily upstream, engaging more with governments and major agencies over ODL in policies and development strategies. But this should be a matter of balance and COL should continue to work on capacity-building for ODL systems and the application of ODL in capacity building. In the last area – applications – COL must be very clear, through appraisal of its initiative proposals, that its interventions are either likely to lead directly to good outcomes with wide reach, or to have powerful multiplier or self-replicating effects.

244. COL produces a wide range of outputs from information and knowledge products to multi-layered capacity building. Most are produced with dedication, up-to-date thinking and methodologies, and quality-consciousness. Evaluations of events such as workshops and conferences indicate a high level of satisfaction and anticipation of good outcomes.

245. Not all of COL's instructional materials and knowledge products are marketed well or followed through to ensure an optimum level of take-up. This is partly due to a lack of planning and partly a lack of resources, particularly time. COL tries to do too much. It ends up not doing everything as well as it could. It should focus more and plan to follow-up and follow-through with its interventions more than at present.

246. COL contributes to a wide range of outcomes, although most can be classed as increased or enhanced capacity in or through ODL. It was beyond the scope of this

evaluation to produce a full inventory of these outcomes. COL has not systematically evaluated outcomes, and the wide range of COL's interventions mean that only a small proportion could be researched in any depth. The case studies researched, and informant triangulation around a number of others, indicate that COL's interventions in the 2003-06 period have led – or seem likely to lead – to outcomes of significant value to tens of institutions serving millions of people. The following stand out:

- Continued improvement and extension of the capacity of two very important ODL institutions: NTI and NIOS, and the mobilisation of NIOS as a resource for the development of open schooling systems in other countries.
- The introduction of ODL capacity in institutions previously delivering training and education through conventional modes. Two of these institutions – CEE and ICRISAT - offer extensive reach or multiplier potential.
- ODL policy development and implementation in Gambia and Sierra Leone.
- A model with potential for adaptive replication, through which sustainable social and economic development appears to be taking place in rural communities by means of a virtuous cycle of learning and productivity.

247. The evaluation has been able to validate several other examples of successful outcomes from COL's initiatives, mostly on a smaller scale or with less potential than the ones singled out above. It is likely that there are others not researched for this evaluation that have also produced positive outcomes. It is very difficult to make a useful assessment of the hundreds of micro-interventions that COL has made in this period.

248. Some interventions have not led to positive outcomes or have not produced sufficient value for the time and other resources invested. Although this is inevitable in development, these examples should not be written off as there is a big opportunity cost for COL and its clients in nugatory work. Lessons should be learnt. The biggest disappointments in this period have been COL's client-funded work in Mozambique.

249. A final contribution to this assessment of COL comes from an overview of informants' top-of-mind views of COL – often a good indicator of worth. Top-of-mind associations were over 90% positive. Moreover the consultees implied that their views were widely shared in their circles. Probing and challenging produced qualifications to the positives and some negatives, but with most people these were minor, relative to the positives. COL's partners expressed a very high level of satisfaction. They see COL as an organization of integrity.

250. Amongst the key informants, only three groups voiced criticisms of COL on a significant scale: several Board members, a representative of apex management at IGNOU, and staff of donor agencies consulted. The first group's reactions were not unexpected. It is the job of a governing board to be a critical friend to help the organization improve. Unlike most people consulted, the Board have to be conscious of the cost side of COL. Although some Board members represent communities that are recipients of COL services, they as a group – and some individually – represent the contributors. In consultations most Board members reflected a strong desire to ensure that COL is providing value for these contributions.

251. There is another factor in the Board's perspective. The majority of Board members have little direct experience of COL's work in the field. Their engagement with COL tends to be in the context of organizational issues where there is usually more scope for criticism.

252. COL has had a difficult relationship with apex management at IGNOU for several years. This applies both to COL corporately and to its regional centre CEMCA. The reaction of IGNOU was therefore not unexpected. It is obviously better that COL has good relations with such an important institution, but it may be difficult to do much about this in the short term. Meanwhile, COL has many other important institutions to partner in India.

253. The reaction of the third group was not anticipated and is a serious problem for COL. The most likely explanation is lack of contact with COL's successful initiatives, and of understanding of COL's modalities which are not like those of typical development agencies. COL needs to address these issues with some urgency.

254. It would be unfortunate if COL were to reduce its potential through the loss of donor funding simply because it failed to convince donor agencies of this potential.

ANNEX A

RECOMMENDATIONS
(In the order in which they appear in the Findings)

Relevance

1. COL should ensure that the work of its technology specialists is sufficiently integrated with that of other COL staff.

2. COL needs to be clear about why it is working in any sector and not let its programmes be determined solely by the expertise and job designation of its specialists. It needs to appraise its proposed initiatives thoroughly in the light of their potential impact on development priorities. If this appraisal process leads it to continue to work in a sector, COL needs to present the arguments to its stakeholders through this prism.

3. COL should pursue opportunities to partner donors and governments in receipt of donor funding in the planning, and in some cases implementation, of capacity-building involving ODL.

4. COL needs to be more rigorous in its marketing planning for the materials – both reference and instructional - that it proposes to produce.

5. ICT for learning is a dynamic field with large interests – public donor and private sector – in play. COL needs regularly to review what its niches are in this field if it is to add sufficient value.

6. As with all aspects of COL's work, its further transition to non-education sectors must be accompanied by systematic research and better monitoring and evaluation of initiatives once they are implemented.

7. The planning and management of the L3 Farmers initiative should be seen as a good model for COL's more substantial interventions.

8. There are several factors that need to be built into the appraisal process, the most important of which should be <u>need</u>. All other things being equal, it should concentrate its efforts where the latent potential of ODL to enable development is greatest, for example in many sub-Saharan African countries. However, all other things are never equal and factors such as implementability and sustainability must enter the equation. COL also has to balance to some extent the interests of all Commonwealth countries. This is a very difficult balance to strike. COL's approach to this would benefit from being more systematic.

9. The boundaries of ODL are becoming less distinct. It may in the future be inappropriate to talk in terms of "ODL solutions". COL should bear this in mind in how it defines itself and approaches its challenges.

Resourcing and internal processes

10. The consequences of donor disenchantment are so serious for COL that it should try to find a way of communicating more effectively with relevant people in these organizations.

11. COL needs to improve the way it presents the value it creates. It needs coherent, relevant and evidence-based narrative reporting.

12. COL has not had a sufficiently strategic approach to attracting non-core funding in the 2003-06 period and should develop one fot the next planning period.

13. If the overall balance of inputs, outputs and outcomes are to be compared from one COL initiative to another – or for benchmarking with other similar agencies - it will be necessary to find a practicable way of estimating partner inputs.

14. The succession process for specialist staff needs to be managed pro-actively if the benefits of the predecessors' initiatives are to be consolidated and not put at risk.

15. COL has recently introduced individual performance management based to some extent on operational performance indicators. This is an important development that needs to be regularly reviewed and adapted in the light of feedback and other experience. COL staff need direction through hands-on performance management to help them to more actively pursue new agendas. New staff need it to help them orientate to this unusual organization.

16. COL's strategy should inform staffing policy, rather than the staffing profile dictate the shape of COL's programmes.

17. The new three year plan should be more prescriptive, should genuinely contain fewer initiatives – not just aggregate them in larger packages. It would be helpful if it said what COL will cease to do as well as what it will focus on.

18. Although COL will need to continue to be aware of the "levels" dimension to its work, the lead dimension in the new planning period should preferably be outcomes-based, with close links to the MDGs. It needs to be transparent to staff and outsiders.

19. There needs to be more consistency in the application of teamwork. Some staff work in a more collegiate manner than others. COL's reward and recognition system should be used to foster appropriate teamwork.

20. COL should find a way of systematically capturing, collating and presenting credible narrative and other qualitative material about its performance.

21. COL's plans should contain clear programme logic. They need to explain how the various interventions hang together, how for each intervention the inputs are expected to lead to outputs, and how the outputs are expected to achieve both short and medium term outcomes.

22. More thinking should go into COL's M&E system and processes if the forthcoming training is to be really useful.

23. If key stakeholders are to become confident in the RBM system, it is important that COL provides tangible examples of its benefits.

24. There needs to be more systematic sharing of knowledge within COL. Its staff are still too atomised, despite the benefits of the RBM approach. There need to be regular small group events where learning is pooled in a more engaged way, feeding into a continuously evolving strategy process.

25. COL needs to continue with a programme director role which will oversee the new plan's implementation.

COL's programmes – how they work

26. To maximise the advantages of regular dialogue and close relations with partners, some form of structure and defined partnership process is needed.

27. Having a regionally-based resource and a "one-stop shop" for partners has worked well in the Pacific and the decision to phase out these arrangements elsewhere should be revisited.

28. COL needs to establish and maintain meaningful contact with key individuals within the main agencies. Several informants in the World Bank, for example, feel that they know very little about COL and that it would be helpful if a roundtable exchange were set up, followed by more regular dialogue.

29. COL needs to monitor and internalise shifts in aid thinking and strategy at agency and country level. This also implies a closer relationship with key development agencies, both national and multi-lateral.

30. The approaches to key development agencies should not be focused only on getting work from them. They should be about establishing regular knowledge exchange, both through multilateral forums and bi-lateral dialogue. Knowledge should flow in both directions. COL should not underestimate its own knowledge assets. It needs to be involved proportionately in global sector debates in education, and even in other sectors where it aspires to add significant value.

31. COL does not at present have an active gender policy and consistent processes. It is aware of this and intends to develop one. This should be speeded up.

32. COL needs to do more planned, well-timed, follow-up such as might have led to faster or more widespread positive outcomes in the case of the 2004 Kenya national ODL forum or the e-learning workshops.

33. There is a consensus among key outside informants that concentrated effort, if carefully targeted, is something COL should do more of. This evaluation endorses it, although it should be a gradual, managed process and carefully monitored. Concentration need not imply work with many fewer institutions or countries. It may

mean focus on fewer processes or issues, such as quality in ODL or poverty reduction, with wide application.

34. A bigger footprint need not imply a move to full project mode in all cases. The MOU can be an appropriate form of road map. A well-designed MOU gives both sides a common vision and understanding of the collaboration, while leaving them the flexibility that is often necessary in a long-term relationship. COL and its partners need to build in appropriate work plans and monitoring and evaluation to their MOUs, to a greater degree than the ones seen in this evaluation.

35. The exit strategy for each of the African regional centres of expertise should be front-of-mind over the next three years.

36. The decision has been taken to integrate CEMCA more closely with COL. In this case, a more purposeful transformation strategy should be worked out and implemented.

37. With fewer donor-funded projects in education, now is not a good time for COL to attempt to acquire critical mass expertise in donor-funded project pursuit.

38. Most key informants believe that COL should either withdraw from donor-funded projects altogether or only get involved where it can perform the role of strategic adviser. This evaluation inclines to the second view and in fact encourages COL to become involved as a strategic partner.

39. COL should continue to explore private foundations as a source of non-core funding.

40. There is a consensus, endorsed by this evaluation, that where COL is involved in policy, it should ideally also be involved in advising on policy implementation. This implies more use of a vertical integration approach than at present with more detailed planning, more teamwork and a larger footprint.

41. The model most likely to prove fruitful at the policy/strategy level, *prima facie*, is that of strategic adviser to governments seeking to
    - frame and implement ODL policies
    - introduce ODL within other policies
    - implement new ODL systems or major applications.
    Where donors and other outside agencies are involved, COL should seek the role of intermediary, helping both sides to maximise the value from the development partnership. This role would be incompatible with COL as a competitor for donor-funded work.

42. To represent value for money, COL's contributions at the lower levels should be designed to lead to take-up by others - not just sustainability - preferably on a self-replicating or cascading scale.

43. There may be other scenarios where COL's work at the level of applications could be justified, but the rationale for the application, and the programme logic should be worked out and articulated in advance, not left to chance. The sustainability of applications, once they are up and running, should not be COL's responsibility. Regular use of COL specialist staff time to maintain applications is difficult to justify.

44. COL needs to be thorough in its appraisal of initiatives - against agreed and well understood criteria - before getting involved. This applies both to products like teaching materials, and services like advice, training and consultancy.

45. The intervention criteria in COL's 2003-06 plan should be revisited and updated regularly in the light of COL's experience and of current development thinking - and applied more systematically.

COL's programmes - outputs and outcomes

46. On-line networking is an area that COL should consider developing for its communities, although the resources and expertise that are needed are considerable and planning is paramount.

47. COL should ensure that it does not pursue initiatives without adequate buy-in from key stakeholders.

48. COL should concentrate resources on an institution, as in the NIOS example, not just to enhance that institution's capacity for its own clientele but also to mobilize the institution in capacity-building elsewhere in the country and beyond.

49. COL should follow through with activity designed to help institutions make use of materials produced in partnership with COL.

50. Capacity-building for dual mode seems to be a particularly fruitful area for COL, where its expertise and experience can make a significant contribution, with potential multiplier effects.

51. COL is doing less competency enhancement outside an institutional or programme framework than it used to. As it has little evidence that the more dispersed approach works, this is probably right. There is a risk however that, if COL concentrates too much on a limited number of institutions or programmes, opportunities will be missed. COL should retain some capacity for wider competency building. But it should do this in a strategic framework with planned M&E and follow up. This is both to ensure that it produces positive outcomes and also to spot and build on encouraging developments such as the one at JKUAT.

52. Network creation and enhancement is an area that would benefit from an overall evaluation by COL to identify good practice not just for COL but wider audiences**.**

ANNEX B
CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1
NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE FORUMS ON ODL

Background

1. COL has recently developed a systematic approach to the advocacy and facilitation of ODL policy at national level. It has for several years advocated the creation of policy to guide and underpin ODL institutions, systems and applications. It was involved with this process in Mozambique (Case Study 4), and to some extent in Nigeria in 2002. Its efforts in this area have intensified during the current planning period.

2. The basic formula is to bring together policy makers and institutional leaders from education and other sectors that can benefit from ODL solutions. The aim is to produce a consensus on the need for policy, and an understanding of how to move forward in the light of the needs and conditions prevailing in the country.

3. COL helps to design these national consultative forums and provides funding mainly to support the participation of people with experience and expertise from other parts of Africa.

4. The first forum in the current series was in Cameroon in December 2003. It was attended by all three Education Ministers and about 200 other policy makers and practitioners. The forum produced recommendations and an action plan endorsed by the Ministers. It has led to the inclusion of ODL references in the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

5. The series was given momentum by the Conference of African Education Ministers (CAEM) on Open Learning and Distance Education, organized by the South African Department of Education in partnership with COL and UNESCO, and held in Cape Town in February 2004. The conference advocated the inclusion of ODL in national plans and policies.

6. Policy forums have subsequently been held with COL's help in Kenya (September 2004), Sierra Leone (February 2005) and Gambia (April 2005).

7. This case study concentrates on the Kenya forum.

Kenya

8. COL's help with this forum was requested by the Kenya Minister for Education. Both he and his Director for Higher Education had been at CAEM and were said by colleagues to have come back "on fire" about the importance of ODL. The Director for Higher Education and another key official had participated in the COL Pan Commonwealth Forum (PCF) in Dunedin in July 2004 where they said they had a

chance to develop further their understanding of ODL issues. The COL President had also visited Kenya soon after Dunedin to propose the idea of the forum.

9. Kenya had a relatively successful experience of introducing ODL in teacher training in the 1980s with donor funding, but has not replicated that experience in any other area. Officials told the evaluator that the government was concerned about being overtaken by other African countries and wanted to do something about that.

10. Informants in Kenya were very positive about COL's contribution to the 2004 forum, especially the value of the participants from other African countries. There was however criticism by one of the non-Kenyan resource persons that it had been too focused on higher education. This criticism is supported by the higher education bias of the forum recommendations.

11. The workshop was not attended by the Minister for Education but throughout by the Permanent Secretary (PS), who was said to be highly committed to ODL, having himself studied through distance mode.

12. The workshop produced an ambitious set of recommendations including
    • the creation of a national policy for ODL
    • a feasibility study for a national open university
    • administrative infrastructure and quality and capacity-building mechanisms.
    A planning committee was established to draft the forum's full report and chart the way forward.

13. Soon after the forum, there was a major reshuffling in the Education Department which saw the two key officials move to other roles. Their successors had not been at the forum and had no significant experience with ODL. This and the continuing lack of an ODL desk in the Ministry were blamed by Kenyan informants for a long delay in the implementation process. The forum report has however been completed since the evaluation visit in February 2006 and is awaiting approval by the PS.

14. Some progress has been made despite the delay in the report. Informants told the evaluator that most of the "mental work" had been done. The Kenya Commission on Higher Education has been addressing two of the recommendations: quality issues in ODL and the question of an open university. The evaluator was told that policy papers on these, and other recommendations are likely to emerge quickly for Cabinet approval once the forum report is approved and disseminated.

15. Importantly, the Kenya government approved a Sessional Paper – a long-term policy statement - in September 2005 which includes reference to mainstreaming ODL and the establishment of an enhanced ODL resource centre in an existing university. Although this did not go as far as Kenyan informants would have wanted, it was still regarded as a significant milestone.

16. COL's interaction with the post-forum process has been restricted to emails, mainly enquiring about progress with the Report. These do not seem to have made any difference to the pace of the outcomes. Although the Kenyan informants emphasised that they did not need intellectual support with this stage of the process, they felt that a follow-up visit would have helped to speed it up – injecting an "embarrassment" factor.

17. The Kenyans said that COL is their advisor of choice for implementation once they have more detailed action plans for each area. It was COL that "opened Kenya's eyes" to the fact that they had gone off track. In late February 2006, COL was approached by the Kenya officials to provide sample ODL policy frameworks.

18. COL's programme expenditure on the Kenya ODL Forum was $38,000.

Conclusions

19. The impression is that the post-forum process is moving forward in the planned direction, even if slowly and fitfully. The inclusion of ODL in the Sessional Paper is a significant step forward. The main reasons for the delay are structural and do not signify a serious lack of commitment. An informant claimed that the road map was, and still is, clear to those who were active in the forum. Conditions seem to be favourable: the Minister of Education has been re-appointed after a recent reshuffle; the PS is also in still post and "asking questions"; and there is said to be growing impatience in the wider stakeholder community.

20. It is unfortunate that in Kenya there is a policy process for ICT in Education, supported by the World Bank, that appears to be completely separate from the one for ODL and given higher priority. It is supported by the World Bank. It is surprising that this was not picked up during the Forum and that the two processes have not converged. COL's lack of engagement with the World Bank in Africa may be one of the reasons.

21. Of the four countries where forums have been held, Kenya is the biggest and most complex. The forums in Gambia and Sierra Leone have led more quickly to the development of national ODL policy frameworks and to concrete steps towards the establishment of new central ODL institutions.

22. National forums are not the only vehicle for COL's promotion of and support for ODL policy at the tertiary level. The 2004 Cape Town conference led to collaborations, including official dialogues between South Africa and other participant countries, although the hoped for pan-African follow-up process stalled for want of a coordinator. It would have been difficult for COL to lead the process, given that, as presently constituted, it only has a Commonwealth mandate. UNESCO's help with this failed to materialise. The idea of a pan-African process at that juncture was probably too ambitious.

23. Other less comprehensive support for the development of national policy has been given in Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Some of this seems to be progressing satisfactorily. In India, while COL's work on ODL policy in education has been at the level of institutions and not government, it advocated a policy framework for ODL in agricultural education which has moved from the institutional to the governmental level.

24. Policy is important if ODL is to establish firm roots. It has worked in India where it has figured in national planning since the 80s. There is a case for tackling policy for ODL separately. Forums can work, although we have seen from Mozambique that they are not necessarily a sufficient condition for success. The pace can be slow, but if

momentum is not lost altogether this may be a virtue. Policy development and implementation is a long-term process and sometimes benefits from being taken slowly.

CASE STUDY 2
SCHOOLNETS IN AFRICA

Background

1. The use of ICT in schools, particularly where there is internet access and the possibility of networking with other schools, offers great potential to expand the available knowledge resource base, facilitate interaction among students and teachers, and offer opportunities for curriculum development. It can empower the learner, putting her or him at the centre of the learning process instead of being a passive recipient of often poor-quality instruction.

2. Access to ICT resources alone does not make them effective learning tools. An enabling environment is needed and this in turn requires the nurturing of skills both on the part of the learner and the learning facilitators (usually teachers). Resources also need to be relevant to the learner and often translated into local languages.

3. The schoolnet movement, with over 10 years experience, is immersed in these issues. It aims to provide the organization and knowledge to help schools begin or enhance their use of ICT and network with other schools. It lobbies governments and other powerful organizations to create enabling policies and release resources. Where breakthroughs are made in these areas, it tends to focus on capacity development of teachers. The schoolnet movement aims to narrow the digital divide, or at least reduce the rate at which it is widening.

COL's involvement

4. Schoolnets have been established in Africa since the mid 1990s, the majority by NGOs. They have attracted a considerable amount of donor support. COL played a part in this from 2001 to mid 2005. The specialist responsible for this initiative in COL was formerly the Director of the Centre for Educational Technology and Distance Education (CETDE), a directorate of the South African Department of Education. South Africa has been the most active sub-Saharan African country in ICT for education, and CETDE was the most active driver. The majority of COL support was channelled through SchoolNetAfrica (SNA) which was founded in 2001.

5. SNA is an African-led NGO which has adopted roles in advocacy and lobbying as well as support and resourcing for national schoolnets. It has a network of about 200 schoolnet practitioners in 35 countries. About 3000 teachers are currently involved in SNA teacher-development programmes. In turn this Africa-wide network is linked to national schoolnets that have wider interactions within their countries. For example Schoolnet Uganda works with about 30 schools.

6. COL's contribution to schoolnets in Africa has been a series of interventions, mainly within the frame of an MOU with SNA. COL's strategic goal has been to attract interest in, and leverage action towards, national policies for ICT in school education.

7. COL has provided various kinds of support to SNA, mostly small-scale: contacts, ideas, advice, small amounts of funding mostly for participants in workshops. There have been two more substantial initiatives since 2003:

- Co-organizing with SNA a five day workshop in Botswana in 2003 on ICT in African schools for around 200 practitioners and policymakers from 25 African countries and a number of international agencies including World Bank, NEPAD, IDRC, DFID and CIDA.
- The production through a consultant in 2005 of a toolkit for organizations developing schoolnets in Africa, based on a template created by UNESCO Bangkok with support from COL. The toolkit is aimed at both policymakers and practitioners. It has been widely distributed in COL's and SNA's networks, and among delegates at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis in November 2005.

8. The 2003 workshop was the first time that African practitioners involved in the grassroots application of ICTs in schools engaged with policymaker counterparts in government ministries of education, and international organizations. The workshop was designed to help these groups communicate experiences, share ideas, and explore their policy implications. It was supported by research commissioned by SNA and its partners. The workshop produced a detailed action plan for follow-up by SNA and other groups.

9. The workshop evaluation, in which the World Bank Institute participated, concluded that it could be "considered successful particularly in consolidating a pan-African and international network of schoolnet practitioners and policymakers, donor organizations, development agencies and private sector representatives. It has opened the way for coordinated interventions in Africa over the next period, particularly in view of the WSIS processes currently under way."

10. COL has also offered occasional support to country schoolnets such as in South Africa and Kenya. In Kenya, COL was the major start-up partner, providing advice and funding. SchoolNet Kenya (SNK) however has not developed into a sustainable organization. It is entirely dependent on voluntary inputs of time and infrastructure and in February 2006 was not active on any front. One reason for this seems to have been a misplaced expectation on the part of SNK that COL would continue to offer support for its activities. COL usually manages to avoid this type of dependency. COL rarely positions itself as the dominant funder and long-term partner of organizations; but it seems that this was not fully understood by SNK.

11. To complement schoolnets, COL has tried to network Africa's pre-service teacher training colleges. This has not yet taken off, mainly because of the degree of organization required, as well as the lack of ICT infrastructure in these colleges. Unlike schoolnets, there are no NGO partners already networking teacher training colleges, and COL is not equipped to sustain an initiative like this on its own.

12. A more promising complementary initiative has been collaboration with SNA and other partners in Africa to develop online databases of learning content - Learning Object Repositories (LORs) – to help teacher trainers, teachers and ultimately learners. For example COL, SNA, and other partners organized a workshop on LORs in Botswana in 2004. COL now hosts LOR software and is collaborating with the African Virtual University, headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya to upload and make available open source courseware that Commonwealth countries can access free of charge.

13. Another, recent, development has been COL's involvement with the NEPAD e-Schools Initiative. NEPAD has identified ICT development, as a priority action area in order to promote sustainable development. The NEPAD e-Africa Commission is the NEPAD Task Team responsible for leadership in this area in cooperation with a range of ICT private sector organizations.

14. The NEPAD e-Schools Initiative is the first of the Commission's initiatives. It is a multi-country, multi-stakeholder, initiative, intended to impart ICT skills to young Africans in primary and secondary schools and to use ICT to improve the provision of education in schools.

15. In early 2005, COL was chosen by NEPAD to monitor and evaluate the NEPAD e-Schools demonstration project. The demonstration project is the first phase of the e-Schools Initiative and focuses on six schools in each of 16 countries. The monitoring and evaluation is being managed by an associate of COL's, operating from its offices in Vancouver.

16. Outside Africa, COL directly supported the development of an ICT in Education policy for the Trinidad and Tobago government, mainly through the provision of a consultancy.

17. The programme expenditure for schoolnet activity in Africa in the year to June 2005 was $42000. This does not include COL's contribution to the NEPAD e-Schools evaluation.

Conclusions

18. Considerable donor funding has been directed at ICT for school education in Africa in the last 5 years or so, through for example DFID's Imfundo programme, the World Bank's World Links for Development and the IDRC's Acacia programme. Despite this, progress towards the common goals is recognised to have been very slow so far. This is mainly explained by the slow acquisition of ICT in African schools. SNA estimates that only around 5% of Africa's schools have computers and most of these are in Egypt and South Africa.

19. In relatively ICT-advanced South Africa, where the schoolnet movement has been most active, only about one school in five currently has a computer, and one in 13 internet access. Even where access is provided, usage may not be maintained where support systems are lacking. SNA provided an example of an urban school in South Africa where an entire computer laboratory was out of action because the school no longer had a teacher responsible for it.

20. The position on policy - the main target of COL's efforts in this area – is on the face of it a little better. Ten years ago, no African country had policies for ICT in education. By 2003, four countries had policies, with another four with policy processes underway. SNA has been involved in this, but so have much bigger players such the World Bank. It is difficult to say how influential SNA has been, still less COL which has not taken a front-seat role in ICT policy.

21. The reality of much of this policy formation is that it has had little impact on the ground so far. SNA say that African schoolnet practitioners are often swimming

against a tide of scepticism from donors and limited government buy-in. SNA itself has had persistent funding problems and is uncertain about its future. Its partnerships with private sector organizations – such as Microsoft – have not produced significant results and have at times been controversial.

22. Despite the odds stacked against progress, SNA continues as a coordinating force in Africa. It is now the local partner of choice of NEPAD's e-Schools Initiative. SNA is optimistic that momentum is gathering in the form of increased recognition of the need for a strategic approach to ICT in education in Africa which has suffered from fragmentation and short-termism.

23. SNA attributes much of its success as an organization to COL's mentoring, and what it regards as timely and relevant interventions. Although in money terms, COL has been a minor partner – just 4% of SNA's funding over the last 4 years - SNA assessed COL's interventions in their area very favourably compared with much more substantially resourced donor programmes, whose interventions SNA felt were not always well-timed and appropriate.

24. The 2003 Botswana workshop was a major milestone. It was very ambitious in its scope and vision. It gave SNA a platform which
    • enhanced its credibility and that of the schoolnet movement;
    • helped it to consolidate its networking and push forward with some of its initiatives such as its Knowledge Warehouse and Champions training programmes, which COL subsequently supported.

25. The coordinated interventions in Africa foreseen by the 2003 workshop's evaluation however have not happened. As with the 2004 Cape Town policy-makers conference (Case Study 1), there was no clear ownership of the follow-up process and this may have contributed to the lack of momentum. A counter-argument is that in much of the developing world, progress tends not to be linear. It is necessary to scatter seeds widely, wait to see which will germinate and nurture those that do. However, even if this argument has some evidential credibility, there is still the impression that an important opportunity may have been lost.

26. SNA and SchoolNet South Africa have received particularly close attention because of the COL specialist's strong association with the early years of the movement and with South Africa in general. There is no doubting the quality of this support. It is an example of how, when COL recruits an education specialist, it imports ideas, a track record of achievement, and often a new or expanded network in one or more aspects of ODL. In some circumstances, the recruitment of professional people from developing countries by international organizations deprives those countries of their contributions and can be counter-productive to development. In this case, the reverse was true: COL gave him a wider perspective and mobility to continue to contribute in his region but also in other parts of the world.

27. The COL specialist left the organization in July 2005 and is now working in South Africa in close collaboration with SNA and other players in the ICT in Education movement. This is good for the region. However it may have contributed to a loss of momentum in the promotion of the Schoolnet Tookit. No-one at COL picked up that tab, and SNA was not in a position to take sole charge of it. Another reason for the lack of momentum is that, unlike the original South-East Asian version of the

Schoolnet Toolkit, it was not developed with institutional buy-in. This will make it much harder to "sell". Experience from other materials development programmes suggests that to maximise their take-up, they need powerful institutional owners combined with capacity-building in their use. There is not much time left – an authoritative source has suggested that substantial parts of the Toolkit will be obsolete in another 12-18 months.

28. Because COL has worked mainly through SNA, it is difficult to assess its contribution to outcomes, as modest as they are. COL could have chosen to influence national policies directly, but hasn't done this in Africa except where ICT in education has been included in the general ODL policy forums it has facilitated. In Kenya and Mozambique for example, which have ICT in education policies in operation or at the draft stage, COL has not had any significant involvement despite being active in both countries during the gestation period for these policies.

29. In July 2005, the specialist responsible for schoolnets advocated their inclusion in the 2006-09 plan for the same reasons that it was included in the 2003-06 programmes. The rationale has not changed and there is much work to be done. Some COL staff are sceptical about schoolnets. One described them as a luxury. Another said they actually increase the digital divide. This is an important debate that COL needs to work through.

30. Despite the poor track record so far and the problems it faces, ICT in education in Africa is not going to drop off the agenda. On the contrary, interest and concerns are bound to intensify, especially as other regions, such as South Asia, make accelerated progress. The NEPAD e-Schools Initiative is a response to this. COL needs to be very clear where it can add most value in this field. There are high expectations, big challenges, many players, and considerable amounts of funding. The field has experienced several false dawns.

31. Policy – based on state of the art evidence - would seem to be the most appropriate target for COL's efforts. COL has broadly pursued this goal but without an optimum amount of focus and coordination. Surprisingly, no COL staff participated in WSIS 2005. COL needs to maintain continuity of engagement in areas of perceived strategic importance despite changes of staff.

32. COL has a lot to offer the field of ICT for school education. More than most areas, it needs a clearly articulated strategy and a robust process for implementation.

CASE STUDY 3
REGIONAL CENTRES OF EXPERTISE

Background

1. In the 2003-06 Plan, COL emphasised the importance of being "sensitive to the environment confronting governments and their institutions in the various regions of the Commonwealth". It has a number of mechanisms for doing this, including regional representation on its Board, membership of regional groupings and the peripatetic activity of its staff, who are also themselves drawn from several Commonwealth sub-regions. It used to have regional representatives at the programme level but this arrangement has been wound up except in the Pacific where it continues on a part-time basis.

2. The 2003-06 plan envisaged COL becoming involved in the development of regional centres of expertise "that could provide it with greater regional visibility and presence". This had been one of the major recommendations of the Mid-Term Evaluation of the 2000-03 Plan. It recommended:
    *   Long term plans to support regional centres of expertise in a variety of ways. The approach could differ from region to region but should contain the development and/or collection of learning resources and their widespread dissemination.
    *   Plans to link the regional centres to the development of the capacity of particular institutions in the region.

3. In 2003 COL had, in the Commonwealth Education Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), an existing regional centre which it had managed and funded directly for nearly ten years. It also had the regional representative in the Pacific.

4. The plan saw opportunities for two new centres – both in Africa. One would be in Nigeria designed to serve the needs both of that large country and the wider West Africa region. The other would be a centre for Southern Africa "in partnership with SADC [the Southern African Development Community], perhaps located in Botswana, home to the SADC secretariat."

5. The 2003-04 and 2004-5 planning frameworks included sub-programmes for "Regional Centres of Expertise". In both years the vision was:
    > "The establishment of regional centres of excellence in India and Africa which provide or facilitate the provision of effective, high quality training and resources and services in all facets of ODL".

6. The implication of this was not only the establishment of the Africa centres, but the "transformation of …CEMCA into a coordinating ODL regional centre for Asia."

7. In this evaluation, it was not possible to visit the Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDAL) and contact with CEMCA was brief. The analysis of these two organizations is largely based on data about their work output and impressions from key informants. The Southern African Regional Distance Education Centre (SARDEC) receives more attention because it was possible to gather primary evidence of its performance.

SARDEC

8. By May 2004 COL had obtained agreement from the Botswana government to locate SARDEC there. COL convened a regional consultative meeting in Gaborone which was designed to create awareness of the forthcoming centre, to get buy-in from regional and national organizations and put together a draft programme of activity. All of this was achieved, except some aspects of buy-in.

9. A Memorandum of Agreement for the establishment of SARDEC was signed in June 2004 by the President of COL and the Botswana Minister of Education; however there was a year's delay before a Director was appointed and the centre physically established. COL held another meeting in Gaborone with Botswana-based stakeholders in March 2005 to revisit the draft SARDEC programme and to try to move things along. The meeting coincided with interviews in the Ministry of Education for the Director post, although it was another three months before the successful candidate was appointed.

10. It seems that that the main cause of the delay was a change in Ministers and in the Permanent Secretary post in the Ministry of Education (MOE). ODL was not high on the Education agenda at this level and the timely establishment of SARDEC was a casualty of the handover. The Botswana MOE is highly centralized and, in SARDEC's case at least, even relatively small resourcing issues are referred to senior levels, inevitably encountering a queue.

11. Following the appointment of the Director, a senior staff member of the host institution the Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL), a work plan was finalized and activity began immediately. To date this has consisted principally of:
    - A regional needs assessment through secondary research and face to face consultations in most of the countries in the region.
    - The adaptation and rollout for the region of a pre-existing COL course *Supporting DE through Policy Development*, initially at a distance but with a face-to-face component scheduled for later in 2006.
    - A web site engineered and hosted by the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE).
    - A regional course on copyright.

12. Further projects are planned for 2006 matching the programme budget of $100,000 provided by COL. COL's commitment is to provide programme funds at this level for three years. It has a degree of control over what the funds are spent on. The salary of SARDEC's Director is paid by BOCODOL, and the Deputy's by the Ministry of Education. Infrastructure and overhead running costs are also met by BOCODOL and the Ministry.

13. UNESCO agreed to contribute to SARDEC's budget, reflecting the fact that its regional remit includes several non-Commonwealth countries. To date it has been

difficult establishing how UNESCO intends to provide this contribution. It did not help that UNESCO failed to send a representative to the first SARDEC Board meeting in November 2005.

14. The Board meeting was attended by representatives from four countries (including the hosts Botswana) and from two important potential partners: SADC and the Distance Education Association for Southern Africa (DEASA).

CEMCA

15. CEMCA was evaluated externally in 2004. The evaluation endorsed COL's proposal for its transformation from a functional specialized agency to a regional centre. An action plan to set this transformation in motion was agreed.

16. CEMCA has been active in training and publication throughout the 2003-06 period. The training activity that it designs itself is largely in its traditional area of expertise - education media – but it is also managing and contributing in other ways to workshops in mainstream ODL topics on behalf of the parent body. It has begun to become involved in a certain amount of outreach work with regionally significant institutions, particularly NIOS. Its programme funding is $120,000 per year, and unlike the other centres, COL also pays for staff and infrastructure.

17. CEMCA staff have received training in preparation for their wider role. It has also moved its premises from the Indira Ghandi National Open University (IGNOU) which had hosted it until late 2005. The decision was made partly on practical grounds – the IGNOU premises were unsuitable – and partly strategic. Relations between CEMCA/COL and IGNOU have not been particularly constructive in the last few years.

RETRIDAL

18. Of the two African centres, the one in Nigeria, RETRIDAL, was first off the mark with an MOU signed in September 2003. A regional needs analysis was conducted in 2004 and RETRIDAL staff received training in 2004 and 2005. In 2005 and early 2006 over 300 other people participated in training in aspects of ODL through RETRIDAL. Most of this activity has been in Nigeria and much centred on the needs of its host institution the fledgling National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) which has been suffering resourcing problems.

19. RETRIDAL will have received $400,000 programme funding over the three years 2003-2006.

Pacific

20. For five years, COL has had a single Pacific regional representative – known as the Pacific Project Manager – based in New Zealand. She was originally seconded to COL on a short term basis from The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand to help develop a programme of regional cooperation, but this evolved into a more permanent arrangement. Last year COL reduced the funding for the position by about 60%.

21. The Project Manager, working with COL specialists, has been involved in a wide range of activity in the region. Much of it is networking and liaison which is logistically difficult and expensive in this region. Technical and vocational education has been the main focus, and the most concrete output to which she has contributed has been the development and ongoing facilitation of the Pacific Association of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (PATVET). She has no programme budget of her own.

Conclusions

22. ODL has come a long way in the last 20 years but there is still a shortage of mechanisms for promoting, supporting and sharing practice in ODL in developing and middle income countries, the parts of the world that need it most. This is true nationally in most of these countries and also regionally. COL operates on a global scale within the Commonwealth family, but it cannot have its ears and feet to the ground and in every part of the world all the time. The logic of helping to establish, and initially to sustain, regional centres for coordination and knowledge sharing seems sound and is supported by most informants interviewed.

23. Inevitably, conditions must apply to this, including the following which have emerged from discussions with various informants:
    - The centres should work in partnership with existing relevant regional and national institutions.
    - They should be primarily facilitative and not try to empire-build and duplicate activity available elsewhere in the region or within reach
    - They must establish widespread credibility if they are to be useful. This probably implies a certain amount of high-profile, well-planned and executed activity.
    - They should be developed with all the usual capacity issues in mind such as competent, committed leadership and adequate resources.

24. SARDEC has had problems getting buy-in from SADC and DEASA. There is evidence that both organizations feel that, despite the May 2004 meeting, they were not involved sufficiently in the establishment of SARDEC. There have also been criticisms that the process of selecting Botswana as the host country was not transparent, and at least one other important ODL institution in the region feels insufficiently involved.

25. It is difficult to please everyone when a new institution is created in their midst. In some ways these concerns point to the significance of SARDEC and of COL in the region. If SARDEC's birth had been ignored it would have been more worrying. But COL and SARDEC's difficulties in finessing these partner issues are probably a consequence of COL not having a representative on the ground to maintain a more regular dialogue with these organizations – the very constraint that the establishment of SARDEC is designed to remove.

26. It is essential that good relations are established between SARDEC and important organizations like SADC, otherwise SARDEC could be sidelined. This is particularly important given that SADC is likely, within the next year or so, to be the hub for an African Development Bank (AfDB) ODL capacity-building programme for which SARDEC could provide useful services. SARDEC is mindful of this and has asked

the Botswana PS for Education for help in building the relationship. It was encouraging that SADC and DEASA were represented at the November Board meeting.

27. SARDEC is located in BOCODOL rather than the Botswana MOE which had been suggested as an alternative. This seems to have been a good choice. BOCODOL has operated successfully for over five years. It has acquired a healthy degree of autonomy from the MOE. It is well led and relatively well resourced. It is very supportive of SARDEC without breathing down its neck. SARDEC is dependent on the MOE for some funding – it is the only regional centre in this position. This is an indicator of Ministerial commitment, at the same time as making SARDEC vulnerable to any bureaucratic delays.

28. There does not appear to be any serious danger of empire-building at SARDEC. With only two staff, one of whom has virtually no experience in ODL, the opposite is lilely to be the case. Its capacity may well be too restricted to meet the expectations that are being created for it. The Director is advised by a group of five BOCODOL practitioners on an informal basis, but this may not be enough. COL is playing a hands-off role which is certainly right in the medium term and beyond. It would seem to be appropriate to provide more intensive support in the short term, such as mentoring and consultancy visits from elsewhere in the region, if the resources can be found. SARDEC probably has a relatively narrow window to establish its credibility through a few decisive interventions. It is in COL's interests to ensure these go as well as possible. SARDEC and COL between them should develop an external partnering strategy that will provide a degree of sustainability and help COL to exit.

29. There are pros and cons in the decision to locate RETRIDAL in NOUN. On the one hand it is an important new ODL institution in the biggest country in the region. On the other, partly because it is a new institution, NOUN is experiencing teething troubles. It is too early to say whether the current difficulties being experienced at NOUN are likely to be chronic and what effect they will have on RETRIDAL.

30. COL's commitment to support RETRIDAL is to September 2006 when a review is planned. Any continuation of support should be accompanied by perrformance indicators and regular monitoring.

31. The proposed transformation of CEMCA has not progressed very far, other than the premises move and the development of a staffing plan. In April 2005, CEMCA's Director reported that it was not yet functioning as a regional centre of ODL expertise. CEMCA has not enjoyed a supportive relationship with its host institution, IGNOU, but this is not the main reason for the slow pace of change. It principally a matter of the scale of the proposed change and the resources needed to bring it about. Transformational change is a challenging process in any circumstances – even in a small organization like CEMCA.

32. The agreed plan is a step in the right direction, but it is not as substantial and long-term as transformational change plans need to be. Most important, CEMCA has not received the necessary close collaborative attention from COL over the last 18 months. Responsibility for CEMCA's transformation has not been firmly anchored in COL, partly because of an unexpected staff change in Vancouver. It is very important that the process is properly resourced and managed in the new planning period. This

is not easy for COL, operating at a distance, but it needs to find a way to overcome this.

33. In these four regional arrangements, COL has 3-4 separate models. This may be appropriate, but it is too early to say. COL needs to coordinate the management of the four arrangements – at present they are overseen by different specialists with little apparent liaison. It needs to have common criteria against which to monitor progress, and it should commission a coordinated evaluation of all four models, probably in 2007 or early 2008, with a view to making strategic decisions for the future planning period.

CASE STUDY 4
RECENT WORK IN MOZAMBIQUE.

Background

1. It was agreed that COL's recent work in Mozambique as a whole should form one of the case studies, mainly because it is one of the countries where COL found itself working intensively to achieve significant impact. Another factor is that most of this work has been directly funded by clients rather than from COL's core budget. The case study therefore provides some evidence of COL's performance under client-funded contracts.

2. Mozambique is one of the world's least economically developed countries and suffered catastrophic destabilisation and war for many years until the early 1990s. More recently it has been developing rapidly, despite disastrous floods in 2000-01. It has invested heavily in primary education and has increased its adult literacy rate from single figures at independence to nearly 50% today.

3. Mozambique was also been one of the first countries in Africa to adopt a policy and strategy for the systematic application of ODL, now embedded in its Education Sector Strategy Plan. COL has played a major role in this from the outset. Mozambique joined the Commonwealth in 1995 and in 1997 its then Minister for Education attended a COL Board meeting to discuss how COL could partner his country in the development of ODL capacity. This was the beginning of a process of engagement with COL that led rapidly to a needs analysis and a policy forum in 1998. In 2000, COL was commissioned, with two partners, by the African Development Bank (AfDB) to conduct a feasibility study for a national ODL "system". The country's ODL policy and strategic plan emerged from this.

4. Since then, COL has undertaken two relatively large projects, in line with Mozambique's ODL policy. Both were funded by donor. The projects were:
    *   Secondary Education by Distance Education (SEDE), funded by DFID.
    *   Training and Capacity Building in Distance Education, funded by the World Bank.

SEDE

5. One of the areas that was highlighted in the 1998 analysis was an ODL approach to meeting the lack of provision for secondary education. Mozambique is addressing Education for All goals for its estimated 4.5 million school-age children. In 1998 when the SEDE – then called Out of School Secondary Education - project was conceived, it already had a relatively large number of out of school children and youth of secondary age. With the post-conflict expansion of primary education, this number was projected to grow considerably.

6. The SEDE project was designed principally around the training and supervision of distance education writers to create course modules for Grades 8-10. The training of local tutors, who would operate from district learning centres, was also part of the plan. The courses were to be piloted in five districts in Nampula province, around 2000 km from Maputo in the north of the country. The project was allocated DFID funding of £800,000 and ran from late 2000 to March 2005.

7. The project was the result of direct approaches to DFID by the then Mozambique Minister for Education, first to its Harare office which did not respond positively, and then to the UK Secretary of State who approved the support. DFID HQ also agreed to the Minister's request that COL should manage the project, waiving the normal tendering conventions for a project of this size. The difference of views within DFID is unlikely to have been helpful to relations between the local DFID representatives and the project partners.

8. The project encountered other difficulties. The Minister for Education who had been committed to the project left office in 2001. The new Minister was not opposed to the project, but did not give it high priority. The country at the same time was hit by disastrous flooding, diverting resources from most spending ministries.

9. There were several serious consequences of this reduction in political support. One was a severe limitation on the availability of teachers to write materials. At no time in the life of the project were teachers released from their duties to work with the project staff. Teachers became available intermittently, in their spare time.

10. Another was the lack of an institutional base and shortage of local project personnel. This compounded the difficulties with project administration and throughput, and reduced the possibility of local ownership. The fact that COL was managing the project from Vancouver made things even more difficult. COL was reliant on one instructional designer who was also based in Vancouver and was deployed intermittently to Mozambique. A part-time project manager was nominated early in the project. He became full-time in 2003. But as he continued to be an Adviser to the Minister, his attention was often divided. Local support staff did not materialise until very late in the project's life.

11. There may not have been much that COL could have done about the lack of political support, but as two external evaluations points out, this risk was not identified in the project plan. Both the summative and interim evaluations contain serious criticisms of other aspects of the project design. Some of these have been echoed by informants for this case study. COL does not seem to have had appropriate controls over the project, even bearing in mind the exogenous nature of most of the difficulties it faced.

12. The outputs of the SEDE project have been well below expectations in most respects. The most obvious shortfall has been in timeliness. It took about four times as long as anticipated to complete the first year (Grade 8) materials. The first intake of students was originally planned for February 2001. It took place four years later with 250 students in Nampula province. Unfortunately even this looks like being a false start. The second year (Grade 9) materials were not completed in time for the transition of the Grade 8 intake to the next academic year in January 2006, despite materials production work being handed over collaboratively by COL to a parallel DFID-funded technical assistance project led by the British Council. Grade 10 materials have hardly been started.

13. An even greater problem is that SEDE has not led to any progression beyond the pilot stage. In 2006, 40,000 young people in Mozambique who graduated from primary school at the end of 2005 have no opportunity to either attend secondary school or receive effective instruction through distance means. Unsurprisingly there

is renewed political interest in the distance programme, but there is no infrastructure in place to support the students, even if the production of the Grade 8 materials is completed and some way is found to get them to the students. It is by no means certain that the SEDE programme will progress beyond the faltering pilot stage.

14. In contrast to the organizational weaknesses of the project, there has been general praise for the quality of the training inputs and the materials produced. The materials are in fact being used enthusiastically by classroom teachers elsewhere who have acquired copies. Student performance among the pilot intake was also relatively good. The drop out rate in the first year was lower than in many similar programmes in Africa.

15. The trainer that COL contracted, a Portuguese native speaker, adapted well to the local project conditions and proved to be both sensitive and resilient. She has subsequently been used both the British Council-led consortium and on COL-funded training.

Training and Capacity Building in DE

16. This project had its roots in the AfDB-funded ODL infrastructure feasibility study conducted in 2000, in which COL was a partner. That study led to a national strategic plan for ODL which included capacity-building across a broad spectrum of education and training institutions. The study had recommended among other things the establishment of an ODL delivery institution along the lines of NAMCOL in Namibia and BOCODOL in Botswana, but the Mozambicans' approaches to donors for support for this were unsuccessful. One of them, DFID, instead agreed to fund a project for technical assistance to support the establishment of a Department of Distance Education in the Ministry of Education.

17. A task force - or Commission (CIINED) - was established by the Ministry of Education to develop an implementation strategy for the ODL plan and to pave the way for a permanent national distance education institute (INED) with promotional, coordinating and accreditation roles. CIINED has been led throughout by the Minister for Education at the time of the SEDE project's inception, a man with considerable knowledge of, and commitment to, ODL. Its resources however are extremely limited (it has only three staff). INED has not yet been fully established.

18. Despite this lack of basic infrastructure the Mozambicans, with World Bank funding, pressed ahead with a project for training of staff in a number of institutions that had, or were planning, distance education programmes. COL won the contract through a competitive tendering process, and was asked to form a consortium with two of its competitors: the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) and, initially, the UK Open University (UKOU). The intervention consisted principally of a 9 month full-time face-to-face course in distance education beginning in September 2003. The original proposal was to follow this with a Masters course, but the World Bank withdrew funding for this and the proposal was dropped (as was the UKOU input to the project). This is said to have adversely affected morale among the participants.

19. The course had 51 original participants from a range of institutions, 40 of whom completed the course. A summative evaluation of the course, commissioned by COL, concluded that it had met its basic objective of preparing those participants who

completed the course to develop distance education in their institutions, and that it was worth the investment. Although some of the participants did not match the ideal profile drawn up in the course planning, a number of them are in important multiplier positions, potentially providing a core of knowledgeable ODL practitioners on which the country can build.

20. The course evaluation identified a number of serious weaknesses, some of which were endorsed in this evaluation by informants both local and in COL itself. Chief among these were:
    - A lack of buy-in from some of the institutions supplying participants and an absence of infrastructure and strategy for building on the benefits, both within the institutions and at a higher level.
    - Major problems in course delivery due to an inappropriate choice of tutors in the early part of the course; followed by difficulties imposed by language interpretation once these tutors were replaced by non Portuguese-speaking trainers.
    - Insufficient practical content; for example it was generally felt that part of the course should have been delivered at a distance to give participants direct experience of the DE mode.

21. COL subsequently provided two more practical short workshops for some of the participating institutions and direct support for one, the Police Academy (ACIPOL), which was first off the mark with the creation of a major distance mode component to an important in-service training programme. The quality of these inputs from COL has been praised by all informants.

22. There are some reservations however that ACIPOL is insufficiently prepared to run the distance component. The Academy is reported to have been "bounced" by political forces into moving ahead with the course. The materials for the course are complete but tutors had not been trained b y the end of 2005.

Conclusions

23. The SEDE project is on a knife edge. If everything works in its favour, it could turn out to be the foundation – albeit belated - for the staged introduction of distance mode for secondary education and make a major contribution to tackling the problem of the shortage of conventional secondary education infrastructure. But there is a long way to go and the possibility of all the favourable conditions occurring are certainly less than 50:50. If it collapses, ODL momentum in the schooling sector in Mozambique will probably be put back several years.

24. COL should draw lessons from this.
    - It could have speeded up the process in the SEDE project by closer supervision and regular review.
    - By contracting to deliver the project according to set specifications, COL denied itself the option of suspending inputs until conditions became favourable, something it might have chosen to do if it had been a COL-funded initiative.
    - It could be argued that even though the project has not been successful, COL has still emerged as a favoured partner among the professional ODL community in Mozambique and has gained valuable experience.

- Set against that is the loss of reputation with other stakeholders and collaborators such as DFID and parts of the Mozambique MOE. This has been a serious problem for COL.

25. Could another organization have produced a better outcome for Mozambique? It is not easy to say. The British Council-led consortium is also making heavy weather of it, although they argue that what they inherited was not of their design.

26. The Training and Capacity Building in DE project has produced outputs that probably stand more chance of being useful. The main issue for COL is that, as with SEDE, because it was on contract, it had less control over the timing and shape of the project. Once the project had been approved, there was considerable pressure to launch the course as soon as possible. It is likely that, if COL had had the discretion it normally exercises in its programmes, it would not have acted without evidence that the institutions providing the participants were prepared for the capacity building. It is possible that much of the training will not produce much impact because of the lack of readiness.

27. It could be argued that if COL had not undertaken the project, another organization would have been faced with the same problems, and that it is better that COL was involved because it is in a position to stay for the longer term, providing supplementary inputs such as the follow-up workshops. There is some strength in this argument, but the danger is that COL is being drawn into an extensive series of interventions that it had not planned to deliver. On the Mozambique side, there are dangers of dependency on COL.

28. This case study of Mozambique, although it does not cover all aspects of the country's efforts in ODL over the last few years, suggests that having a national policy and an implementation strategy does not of itself ensure good outcomes. It might have been better if COL had stayed out of implementation projects and continued to offer the MOE strategic advice. There is no guarantee that the new ministerial regime would have listened to COL, but COL's track record at that level is better than its record in implementation projects. In becoming a client-funded project agency, it may have lost most of the leverage it had as a trusted friend of the MOE in Mozambique.

29. Some general conclusions about client-funded projects are drawn together in the main part of the evaluation report. It is important to note that a client-funded project that ran parallel to SEDE for much of its life – the COL Literacy Project – avoided most of the problems that SEDE experienced, to a large extent it seems because of better project design.

CASE STUDY 5
E-LEARNING FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION

Background

1. E-learning was seen by many in the second half of the 1990s as a whole new paradigm in education that would soon enable millions of people to acquire quality learning at their fingertips. Two principal factors have dampened these expectations. One is that growth in access to the internet in many developing countries, particularly in Africa, has been much slower than anticipated. The other is that it has been hard to find effective and affordable ways of making the on-line learning experience work for most people. In fact e-learning is now usually developed as part of a blended package, making it more relevant to quality than increased access.

2. COL has recently stepped up its work in e-learning and folded it into a broad initiative called Knowledge Management Technology. This includes the development of its Knowledge Finder instrument, collaborative work on Learning Object Repositories, better understanding of the parameters of copyright, and early work on the application of e-learning to the developing Virtual University of the Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) initiative. This case study focuses on COL's e-learning workshops and follow-up, particularly the pioneer events in Kenya.

COL's involvement

3. COL planned its e-learning workshops for tertiary level education as an open-ended series. The series began with a workshop in Nairobi in August 2004, in partnership with the Nairobi-headquartered African Virtual University (AVU). A second workshop was held in Lagos in August 2005 organized through the COL-supported regional centre RETRIDAL (see Case Study 3); and a third in Trinidad in partnership with the University of the West Indies (UWI) in November 2005. A workshop in Namibia has been postponed until later in 2006, and there is the prospect of one soon in Tanzania.

4. The main objectives of the Nairobi workshop were to present and explore issues relating to e-learning and online educational applications relevant to tertiary education institutions in Africa. The initial two days were spent in plenary sessions bringing together policy-makers and practitioners to discuss examples of technologies, policies, capacity development, online resources, and steps in the process of creating e-learning content. The participants produced a draft institutional policy template for e-learning and a statement of intent to implement good e-learning practices in their institutions and countries. They also explored ways in which e-learning can be used to support tutors who, in turn, can support learners who may not have regular access to computers and the Internet.

5. After the initial two days in plenary sessions, the participants were organized into two groups: institutional decision-makers/policy-makers (Track 1) and e-learning practitioners (Track 2). The Track 1 group participated in a further two-day workshop focusing on decision-making support tools, institutional implications, and a group action plan. The Track 2 group met for another 8 days in the form of a "laboratory" on e-learning focusing on open source learning management systems (LMS) - online

environments where students can access study material, share information with other students, chat online with classmates and submit assignments.

6. An online discussion forum was also set up for the workshop participants; and COL and the AVU provided email support to a couple of institutions that moved ahead quickly in applying the lessons from the workshop.

7. In the workshop, it became clear that a critical success factor for cash-poor institutions aiming to develop e-learning is the ability to use open source LMS. This requires the building of technical capacity to support these systems. There are about 40 free open source LMS available, but technical staff must first be proficient in the open source Linux operating system before an institution can take advantage of them. COL therefore held a separate five day workshop for 25 technical staff in Nairobi in May 2005, also in partnership with the AVU. Most of the participants were from Kenya as, unlike the main workshop, funds were not provided for travel. The technical track was subsequently integrated into the main structure for subsequent workshops.

8. The Kenya workshop, augmented by the technical track, was intended to be the model for future events. The Lagos workshop followed this principle in general, but differed in one important respect: all but two of the 57 participants were from Nigeria, and 50 were from the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Five institutions outside Nigeria failed to send participants when it became clear that COL would not provide air fares and accommodation.

9. The Trinidad workshop also had a narrower geographical focus than planned. No participants materialized from Jamaica or Barbados. The UWI had opted for commercial e-learning software posing challenges for some aspects of the workshop's methodology, which assumes the use of open source. But the event nevertheless was judged to be successful as far as immediate outcomes are concerned.

10. One of the participants in the Kenya workshop – the Director of the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology's (JKUAT) Institute of Computer Science & Information Technology (ICSIT) - was recruited by COL to facilitate the workshops in Lagos and Trinidad, following successful outcomes at his institution. This is a good example of COL-facilitated south-south cooperation.

11. JKUAT's offer to host the subsequent technical track workshop was accepted, and five of its technical staff were involved.

Conclusions

12. This initiative is probably the first time that a holistic approach to e-learning – including both policy and practice - has been provided for developing country institutions. Much e-learning is introduced in a policy vacuum. This is a particular problem in countries with limited resources and limited access to computing. The COL workshops were designed in particular to address this.

13. The independent evaluation of the Nairobi workshop states that it was considered to be a "highly worthwhile experience" by participants. The principal facilitator[11] was extremely positive about it. The quality of the workshop was also highly rated by the AVU collaborator. He was struck in particular by the value of integrating policy into the workshop and has since persuaded his colleagues to include a governance and strategic management strand in the AVU's standard design for capacity-building interventions.

14. The technical track workshop was reported to have provided a unique opportunity for technical staff in the region to receive intensive training and to exchange practice in open source software.

15. The on-line discussion site attracted a relatively large volume of postings for 2-3 months, but most were Q&A, rather than exchange of documents or narrative about outcomes from the workshop. The AVU feel that the on-line forum would have been more useful to participants if it had been more pro-actively moderated.

16. No systematic follow-up monitoring has been done, so evidence of outcomes is incomplete. The clearest successful outcome from the workshop is the implementation of an e-learning strategy at JKUAT. Three staff from JKUAT attended the original Nairobi workshop, including the Director of ICSIT. This was not JKUAT's first attempt at introducing e-learning. An IDRC-funded project to introduce the KEWL LMS began several years ago, but had stalled with little progress to show for it.

17. The COL workshop seems to have provided the right formula to kick-start the e-learning process. JKUAT now has an e-learning strategy committee and implementation unit. 42 JKUAT staff were trained by the three colleagues who had attended the COL workshop. Most departments at JKUAT have begun on-line programmes and there is confidence that they will meet their target of having 60% of courses on-line by the end of 2006.

18. There is said to be a marked increase in motivation amongst the JKUAT students already accessing the on-line materials. The driver for this seems to be the individualized relationship with the materials that is typical of well-designed e-learning processes - compared with the one-way, rote learning that is still prevalent elsewhere. Resources have been provided for a work room where e-course writers are able to use equipment and receive support.

19. At the beginning of 2006, JKUAT launched an e-government initiative in partnership with the Kenya Government and a Nairobi-based Linux training & support company that COL used for its technical track workshop. It is safe to conclude that this is an outcome of JKUAT's new-found confidence and competence in e-learning that COL was instrumental in building.

20. The progress made at JKUAT has not been all plain sailing, but without doubt it has produced some very successful medium-term outcomes. The conditions have been favourable:
   - An able, committed internal project leader

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[11] This probably could not be put down to self-interest as he was working at a fraction of his normal fee.

- Enthusiastic high level support for the strategy (particularly from the Deputy Vice Chancellor with responsibility for this area[12])
- A small, relatively non-hierarchical institution.

21. It is not known for sure whether there are similar outcomes in other institutions participating in the Nairobi workshops, but if any was as transparently successful as the one at JKUAT, it is likely it would be apparent to COL and the AVU by now. There has been a less clear-cut but still positive development at the University of Dar-es-Salaam which has recently finalised an e-learning strategy in the pipeline before the workshop. The workshop undoubtedly contributed to it. To what extent is impossible to judge at a distance. What is known is that the University of Dar-es-Salaam has asked to host another COL e-learning workshop.

22. There have been some disappointments following the Kenya workshop. For example, no apparent progress has been made at Kenyatta University, the host institution for the main workshop. A contributing factor there may have been an inappropriate choice of participants from this institution.

23. The Lagos workshop took place in a very poor training environment. It also included a number of delegates who had no experience of IT at all. Nevertheless, the consensus is that it engendered considerable enthusiasm and learning. Most participants were from one institution – NOUN. This was unintended at the planning stage. But the lead facilitator believes, with hindsight, that concentrating on a single institution is the most effective context for the e-learning workshops. It provides a sharp focus and creates expectations which are difficult to ignore by the institution's leadership. Clearly institutions need to be important – and prepared - to justify this type of attention from COL.

24. It is too early to tell what lasting benefits will follow from the Lagos workshop. NOUN, as reported in Case Study 3, is facing resourcing problems which may impede progress with e-learning.

25. The participant funding issue in Lagos suggests that COL needs either to have a consistent policy on workshop expenses or to make it very clear in advance of each occasion what it will provide.

26. To sum up, the market for the workshop series was well-researched, and the timing, shape and content appropriate. There are issues that COL should address about the choice of participants, necessary conditions for participation, and the amount of follow-up. The outcome at JKUAT offers an excellent model, not impossible to replicate elsewhere.

27. There is a wider question about the relevance of e-learning to development, in particular to the MDGs. E-learning for tertiary education does not directly contribute to any of the MDGs. The education goals focus on the primary level. Moreover even at the tertiary level, e-learning interventions typified by these workshops do not necessarily lead – in the short term at least - to significantly increased access to education, although they can in the longer term through relieving pressure on university teachers.

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[12] Importantly, the strategy has survived a change in the incumbency of the Deputy Vice Chancellor position.

28. What the workshops were mainly designed to do is improve the <u>quality</u> of tertiary education and thus contribute to the growth of the knowledge society and economy, potentially benefiting everyone. Moreover this type of intervention is designed to contribute to the momentum of affordable access to open educational resources and to reducing the digital divide. There are of course many exacting conditions attached to this and there are many people with reservations about the process. This evaluation is not the place to rehearse the debate, although it is briefly considered in the Findings sub-section section on Relevance.

CASE STUDY 6
OPEN SCHOOLING

Background

1. Open Schooling is most commonly understood as the process that extends formal schooling to learners outside traditional school environments[13]. The most common scenario is where learners study specially designed open learning materials on their own – at home, in their workplace, wherever it is convenient for them – and then meet together with a tutor or facilitator on a fairly regular basis. Open schooling using this model has been taken up most systematically by countries with large rural populations such as India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Mexico.

2. The largest of these programmes is run by the India National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) which began as a pilot project in 1979. It became an autonomous institution in 1989 and now has around 1.3 million students enrolled at any one time. Self-instructional print materials are its main mode of delivery, backed by audio and visual material broadcast at study centres. Student support is provided through a network of centres run by both public and non-government organizations. Limited use of ICT is made, mainly to disseminate materials.

3. NIOS encourages and supports State Open Schools in India, of which there are now 11 with about 300,000 students enrolled. It hosts the Open Schooling Association of the Commonwealth (OSAC) which publishes a six-monthly Journal of Open Schooling. It has also set up an International Centre for Training in Open Schooling (ICTOS) which began advertising certificate and diploma courses in November 2005, although none has yet attracted enough participants for take-off.

COL's involvement

4. COL's first intervention in open schooling, and its first collaboration with NIOS, was the joint publication in 1994 of a number of case studies entitled *Open Schooling: Selected Experiences.* What became a long-term partnership began in 1998 with a jointly organized event designed to build awareness about Open Schooling's potential for harder-to-reach groups such as girls and women, the rural poor and the differently-abled. This has been COL's main focus in its open schooling activity and is now explicitly that of NIOS too.

5. Between 1998 and February 2006, COL collaborated with NIOS in about 15 events - workshops, conferences and advocacy seminars - and a number of inward and outward people assignments. Although a few were exclusively capacity building for NIOS itself, the principal targets of most of these activities were other institutions, in India and elsewhere. NIOS performed two main roles:
   - As an exemplar for advocacy for open schooling internationally.
   - As a resource for capacity building of open schools within India and internationally.

NIOS contributes significant funding and staff time to the joint activity with COL.

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[13] See for example Janet Jenkins and Arief Sadiman, in Yates and Bradley, 2000.

6. Five events and several people assignments have taken place in the 2003-06 planning period.
   - A two week colloquium for educational practitioners from Africa and Papua New Guinea (August – September 2004 Delhi).
   - A three day international conference on the promotion of Open Schooling (January 2005 Goa).
   - An 8 day international workshop on instructional design (March 2005, Delhi, India).
   - A study visit for two NIOS staff on open vocational schooling to The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (TOPNZ) (July 2005).
   - A two week colloquium for education practitioners and administrators from Bangladesh, Ghana, Nigeria, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (September 2005 Delhi). The participants were either from existing open schools or organizations planning to start an open school in their countries. The event was designed to provide the participants with a first-hand view and experience of an operational open school.
   - A three day international conference on vocational education and training through open schooling for educational administrators and practitioners (Kerala, February 2006) with participants from a wide range of Indian Institutions and from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, New Zealand and Canada.
   - NIOS senior staff have been used by COL as resource persons in open schooling workshops in Nairobi and Botswana; and as consultants to help Sri Lanka and Bangladesh draw up project proposals for open schooling.
   - NIOS staff have attended COL developmental events such as the January 2005 e-learning workshop in Delhi.

7. For Bangladesh, several of these activities have formed part of a programme of support by COL for their efforts to bridge a national open schooling gap – for grades 6-8. This support began in 2002 with a consultative meeting in Dhaka and also included a familiarization trip to NIOS for 10 project personnel in 2003; and will continue with an instructional design consultancy through COL in May 2006.

8. At an early stage, COL tried unsuccessfully to help Bangladesh make more rapid progress by enlisting support from CIDA and DFID. Bangladesh has of its own accord enlisted funding from Netherlands and Switzerland.

9. Sri Lanka came into the COL-NIOS arena at a later stage. Unlike Bangladesh, it has no history of open schooling; but, faced with dropout rates of around 75% before reaching upper secondary stage, the Sri Lankan National Institute of Education (NIE) decided in 2004 to explore the possibility of creating an open school. Staff attended the January, March and September 2005 events, and received consultancy support for their planning in May that year. NIE plans to begin its open schooling activity on a pilot base, with a foundation course for school dropouts.

10. The Allama Iqbal Open University in Pakistan is interested in introducing open – or more accurately, alternative - schooling in technical and vocational areas. It has participated in NIOS events and intends to seek further, tailored, support from COL.

11. COL's programme expenditure on open schooling activity in association with NIOS in the year to June 2005 was about $115,000.

CONCLUSIONS

12. There is now a global consensus that open schooling is an effective way of filling the gap caused by the lack of qualified teachers and conventional school infrastructure in many countries in the developing world, particularly at secondary levels. Scepticism about quality, stemming from the failed open schooling in Africa of the early 1960s, is evaporating thanks to greater awareness of later successful models, including that of NIOS. Increasingly attention is being turned to open technical and vocational schooling.

13. The challenge of bringing schooling to the tens of millions of young people who are currently unable to attend conventional schools and colleges is enormous. At least in the short and medium term it is beyond the capabilities of the combined efforts of the world's development agencies and their country partners. The Mozambique case study shows what obstacles can lie in the path of well-intentioned efforts. But efforts should continue and COL has the experience and expertise to contribute.

14. COL's contribution is inevitably small. An important question is whether its impact is greater than could be expected given the scale of its inputs. In the case of COL's work in partnership with NIOS the answer is certainly yes.

15. Increased awareness of the potential of open schooling is an important impact. Without it, countries, particularly those in Africa whose view of open schooling was coloured by the unsuccessful early '60s experiments, would not be attracted to explore this solution. COL has promoted awareness of open schooling in a low-key way. It has worked mainly below the fanfare of publicity, but consistently and persistently, mainly through its networks. COL is credited by its working partners with a significant increase in awareness and interest in open schooling in Asia and Africa. NIOS is an influential organization in its field in India and in other countries, and it gives COL credit for raising its profile and increasing its credibility in both national and international arenas. It was originally not sure that its own model and experience were replicable elsewhere. COL gave it the confidence to look and reach outwards. Open school partners consulted from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan traced their current efforts back to awareness of the activities of COL and NIOS.

16. The next stage after awareness and interest is usually capacity-building. Here COL's contributions are inevitably more constrained. Capacity-building requires much more intensive use of resources than awareness. COL has not been drawn into intensive project-scale capacity-building in open schooling with its own funding. Instead COL has provided periodic, targeted, capacity-building to NIOS itself, and to countries like Bangladesh which are developing new open schooling capacity. NIOS also believes that it benefits from its activity with other countries, even if the transfer of knowledge and experience is mainly outwards from NIOS.

17. COL's main contribution has been the use of its partnership with NIOS as a platform for creating ripple effects - mainly through colloquia - in India's State open schooling movement, among India's immediate neighbours, and in Africa. The impact of the ripples has been significant in India and Bangladesh, and is promising in Sri Lanka. In Africa, progress has been slower. As sound as the model would appear to be, COL should consider other, parallel approaches, such as structured round table discussions with national and international development agencies. It has enough

experience and expertise to make a major contribution to global debate on open schooling. NIOS would like COL to generate more research and stimulate knowledge sharing about open schooling on a wider scale. This seems a sound proposition, provided it remains focused on need and results.

18. NIOS is a hierarchical organization with many of the typical strengths and weaknesses of medium sized public organizations. Its own efforts to internationalize have been modest. OSAC has a low profile and ICTOS is till an embryo organization. But COL's partnership with NIOS is sound. It is based on a high level of trust and familiarity which enables COL and NIOS staff to circumvent some bureaucratic obstacles in for example organizing events and receiving inward delegations.

19. The ease with which the partnership operates may be tested when the COL specialist who has been at the centre of the initiative from the start leaves her post in a year or so. The handover should be carefully managed and monitored. The current MOU should be reviewed and the workplan projected 2-3 years ahead. There are obvious linkages with COL's burgeoning work on learning and livelihoods, and COL should ensure that opportunities for cross-fertilization and possible convergence are not lost.

20. Open schooling – and the partnership with NIOS - is probably COL's longest-running sub-programme[14]. It is surprising therefore that there has not been a comprehensive evaluation of this work, and it is recommended that there should be, given its scale and its continued relevance.

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[14] Technically, it has only been classified as a sub-programme since 2005, but it has resembled one for several years.

CASE STUDY 7
QUALITY IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

Background

1. The original core rationale for the creation of COL was to help increase access for people in developing countries to higher education. In the last two planning periods COL has reduced activity where <u>access</u> to higher education is the principal objective. This reflects the advances that have been made in understanding how open universities can effectively extend the reach of higher education. Where COL continues to work in higher education, improving quality is more often than not the principal objective.

2. In much of what COL does, quality is an implicit factor. Its capacity-building activity is designed to help the target institutions deliver good quality education and training. The learning materials it produces are meant to be exemplars.

3. The e-learning workshops and schoolnet support for example, which feature as other case studies, are aimed primarily at providing good quality educational experiences for the students, rather than increased access, although this may follow.

4. Recently COL has turned its attention to means of leveraging quality in ODL on a broader front – through support for national and institutional quality assurance (QA) systems and tools. QA was not defined as an initiative in its own right until the 2005-06 planning year, although activity directed at quality systems began before that. In 2005-06, there were two initiatives:
    *   QA for teacher education.
    *   QA and qualifications frameworks for university education.

5. All the activity in the first initiative and some in the second has involved a partnership with the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in India. Like NIOS, NAAC is an apex institution in its field and is regarded by COL as effective and robust – an institution that can be used as a developmental resource both within India and further afield. NAAC is dedicated to higher education in general, but that is not seen by COL as a barrier to partnership. There are many QA institutions and frameworks for higher education in the developed world but, COL argues, the quality challenges faced by the developing world benefit from developing country perspectives.

6. NAAC is an autonomous body established by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India in 1994 to assess and accredit institutions of higher education in the country. Although it has statutory powers to assess and accredit, it prefers to work with institutions on a voluntary basis. It defines its role as performance support not inspection.

7. NAAC is an outcome of the recommendations of the National Policy in Education (1986) that laid emphasis on upholding the quality of higher education in India. The system of higher education in India has expanded rapidly during the last fifty years. In spite of regulatory mechanisms, there is ample evidence that standards are insufficiently robust and often inappropriate, and quality has suffered.

8. NAAC originally had no brief for quality in teacher education, but had agreed to take on this role in 2000 "under licence" from the National Council for Teacher Education the regulatory body for teacher education in India.

9. As with several other COL initiatives, the partnership with NAAC was catalyzed by earlier close relations between COL specialists and a key member of staff. In this case all had held senior positions at IGNOU. Also characteristic of COL is that the quality initiative sprang from activity designed for a different purpose. This was a dialogue largely between COL and the India UGC, but also with other participating organizations, on "Enhancing higher education through e-learning", held in Delhi in November 2003. The need for QA in e-learning emerged at this event as one of the main areas for development.

Teacher education

10. The collaboration between COL and NAAC stemmed from the Delhi event. The collaboration began with a jointly organized three day international roundtable in March 2004 with the theme *Innovations in Teacher Education: International Practices of Quality Assurance.*

11. There were 48 participants including 13 from countries outside India. Some participants had interests in conventional rather than ODL approaches to teacher education. An assumption had been made that at an institutional level, quality issues in conventional and ODL modes of teacher education would not be significantly different, as the basic training processes involved are comparable irrespective of the mode.

12. The consensus in the workshop was for a process which would lead to agreement on a set of quality indicators for use at the institutional level in teacher education, both distance and face to face. It also recommended the continuing exchange of best practice and capacity building for the leaders of teacher education institutions. There was a realization that the partnership between COL and NAAC was pivotal if these objectives were to be achieved through international cooperation. NAAC already had bilateral dialogue with, for example, the South African Quality Assurance Agency. But COL was seen by them as the best organization to facilitate both multi-lateral processes, such as the one that was to lead to the quality indicators, and bi-lateral, such as the spin-off cooperation between two apex Nigerian teacher training organizations – the National Commission for Colleges of Education and the National Teachers' Institute - and NAAC.

13. An MOU was signed between COL and NAAC in November 2004 underscoring this partnership. November 2004 also saw the first workshop organized specifically to develop the quality indicators. There were 21 delegates from eight countries: Botswana, Namibia, Nigeria, Mauritius, Singapore, Sri Lanka, the UK and India. A set of draft indicators was produced which were refined mainly through virtual interaction among about 60 teacher education practitioners, with a small COL-led group doing the detailed work.

14. The final package was released at another workshop attended by members from this network – representing 10 countries - in Bangalore in February 2006. The workshop

centred on the complementary process of producing best practice case studies in quality for teacher education. A number of case studies were reviewed at the workshop and are to be disseminated across the Commonwealth.

15. The indicators are to be tested in the field by members of the current network and interest has been shown by other countries. COL plans to interest the Caribbean during the forthcoming Pan Commonwealth Forum in Jamaica. COL and NAAC plan to review them in the light of early experience.

Higher Education

16. Another COL specialist has been developing COL's involvement in QA in higher education. In the early part of the 2003-06 period COL played a minor role in international processes for the development of standards for cross-border higher education (CBHE), namely the revision of the Arusha Convention and the UNESCO-OECD Guidelines for CBHE.

17. In the previous plan period COL had collaborated with UNESCO and the AAOU in producing guidelines for higher education through ODL. Through a workshop process in November/December 2005, COL facilitated the adaptation of these guidelines for use in Sri Lanka. The timing is important because of a current major Asian Development Bank-funded programe designed to enable Sri Lanka's tertiary institutions to convert to dual mode delivery. The guidelines have been produced for use by the OUSL and the emerging distance education system in the country. The Sri Lanka University Grants Commission accepted the guidelines as 'official' in December 2005. It seems likely that a version will also be adopted by the Pakistan Higher Education Commission, after engagement with COL in the early part of 2006.

18. COL's work with NAAC in higher education is also aimed at the development of capacity in higher education institutions to assure quality. It began with a meeting of experts who identified the development of two sets of materials as the main priorities. One is an awareness-raising course aimed at a general readership. It is being developed by an IGNOU-based consultant and is designed for self-study. It will be promoted by NAAC in India and will also be available as open source with a view to use in other countries. Sri Lanka has offered to launch this course with adaptations in their jurisdiction. The other is a toolkit for quality assessment. Although these materials are aimed at higher education in general, COL is ensuring that the ODL mode is covered.

19. Both these documents were reviewed at the workshop in Bangalore in February 2006 running parallel to the one in teacher education. Five leaders and other senior staff from open university institutions in Sri Lanka and Nigeria participated, along with 11 from India.

20. The programme costs of the two strands to the quality assurance initiative in the 21 months to March 2006 are expected to be around $100,000.

Conclusions

21. There are some voices that insist that access is the still the most important issue[15] for ODL to address - and until this is improved, agencies like COL should devote resources to this and not to improving quality for the few. The counter arguments are:
    - Access to tertiary education over the last 10 years has been increasing more rapidly than at any other level.
    - There is no point – and it could even be counter-productive – to increase access to poor quality higher education that leads nowhere but to failure.
    - All COL can realistically do for access is advocate, and this is no longer needed as understanding is already global. The continuing shortfall is mainly due to lack of resources or lack of political will.

22. Other voices insist that the real challenges remain below the tertiary level and that development agencies should concentrate on this. COL is mindful of this and most of its resources are devoted to levels below tertiary. However, poor quality higher education leads to poor use of human resources which impacts on development in all sectors. In the specific case of poor quality teacher education, it impacts on schools and children, the world's future human resources.

23. The failure of much early ODL – and the bad name it acquired – was often due to the inferior quality of the education – particularly inappropriate content, poor instructional design, and lack of student support. Building QA capacity is probably the best way of achieving a multiplier effect. But it is a difficult process, not so readily understood and accepted as more concrete capacity-building such as instructional design. Moreover it cannot succeed in a vacuum. It needs to be accompanied by other improvement initiatives - whether COL-supported or not - in the institutions concerned.

24. COL's expertise and experience are relevant to this challenge. Some informants have said they were surprised that COL had not taken it up before now.

25. The teacher education quality indicators have been favorably received by the organizations taking part in the process. This was made more likely by the highly participatory nature of the process. It also seems to have been an efficient process which kept to its planned timetable.

26. The teacher education strand to the quality initiative is beginning to look like a programme, with broad, long-term objectives, summed up by a NAAC spokesperson as "quality empowerment for school improvement". This is important because experience shows that products like those emerging from the initiative run the risk of ending up gathering dust on shelves unless they are followed up in a planned way with dissemination and capacity-building processes. The participating institutions and other intended partners and users need to be engaged in a continuing developmental process where capacity for their effective use is built and use of the materials are monitored and evaluated for further improvement and adaptation.

27. COL and NAAC have this in mind. For example, they have discussed adapting for this initiative, COL's Singapore workshop for leaders of African Teacher Training

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[15] Africa's gross tertiary education enrolment ratio is 13% - and India's 20% - of Europe's. UNESCO 2002-03.

institutions which ran annually for five years. But there is very little yet in concrete form. Now is an appropriate time to agree a strategic approach for the next three years or more. Quality development is a long-term process. The plan should include overall monitoring and evaluation.

28. If the programme does maintain its momentum, it has the scope to reach wide audiences across the Commonwealth. There have been very few sustained initiatives in quality for ODL at any level in developing countries. There is a huge latent market, although there will probably need to be a strong advocacy component to the programme to ensure the full potential of the market is achieved.

29. The higher education strand is at an earlier stage and has not yet enjoyed such a high level of exposure. NAAC has discussed further steps. These should be agreed and planned before the COL specialist moves from her position in April. One option would to integrate the two strands of the quality initiative. There has been some cross-fertilization already and this should continue under any future regime. Where NAAC and COL interests converge in particular is in creating institutional 'cultures of quality' which will complement and buttress external QA processes such as assessment and accreditation.

30. COL's partnership with NAAC and the work with OUSL are not COL's only initiatives in quality for higher education in this period. But they are the ones with the most concrete outputs along with a forthcoming publication in COL's Perspectives series entitled *Towards a Culture of Quality* with 12 case studies on institutional QA from the Commonwealth.

31. NAAC has strong human resources and appears to be a well-run, agile organization. It is respected in India and in other countries where it is known. It has an internationalist outlook. The CEO is on the Board of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. The partnership with NAAC is a harmonious one. NAAC contributes significant resources to the collaborative events in the form of infrastructure and expenses of most of the Indian participants.

32. COL' s partnership with NAAC was not planned strategically. It emerged pragmatically – even serendipitously – from an activity designed for a different purpose. Given the prior relationship between three of the principals involved, it probably would have happened sooner or later. What may have delayed the start of the partnership is that NAAC is not primarily an ODL institution – there are many others in India that are - and it took some out-of the box thinking by both partners to work out that there was sufficient overlap of interest to merit collaboration.

33. How big an overlap of interest there is remains an issue. COL's mandate is in ODL not general education. The quality indicators and the awareness course are at a high enough generic level for the special needs of ODL not to be a major factor. Further work on quality indicators will move to the programmes level where the need for ODL-specific materials and activity will increase. COL must ensure that it does not compromise the needs of ODL simply to retain NAAC as a partner in the process. IGNOU is the apex institution for ODL in India and, like NAAC, has shown that in partnership with COL, it can perform as a global catalyst and resource. Relations with IGNOU will improve and COL and NAAC should look for opportunities to harness its experience and expertise in the quality programme.

CASE STUDY 8
LIFELONG LEARNING FOR FARMERS

Background

1. COL began to explore opportunities for applying ODL in the context of the rural economy in the late 1990s. As with much of COL's work, it was not the result of a strategic decision, but the initiative of a particular specialist with experience and expertise in the area. Because the majority of the world's poor are in rural areas, improving the rural economy is critical to achievement of the MDGs, and this work is an important part of COL's current strategy.

2. In the 2003-06 Plan, rural economy work was included in the sub-programme *ODL Applications for Poverty Reduction*. The sub-programme includes contributions to education for environmental sustainability (see Case Study 9), which is aimed at urban as well as rural targets, but otherwise focuses on the rural economy and food security in particular.

3. Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) is one of four current initiatives in this sub-programme. The main L3F intervention is currently centred on Tamil Nadu in South India, although there are offshoots in Africa and discussions about interventions in other parts of South Asia. COL also envisages L3F interventions in the Caribbean and the South Pacific as part of an integrated long-term programme.

Origins

1. COL has a strong belief that ICT has an important role to play in facilitating self-directed learning among poor and marginalised sections of rural communities. It recently decided to explore possibilities in a systematic way.

2. L3F began as action research. COL convened a discussion about possible new ODL initiatives for the rural economy at the 2002 Durban Pan Commonwealth Forum (PCF). It consisted mainly of a group of Indian educationalists with interests in this area. COL converted this group into a network linked through electronic consultations. Largely through a COL-commissioned facilitator - who was already a member of this network – face to face consultations were then conducted with more people and groups with interests in agriculture, education, ICT, community development and financing.

3. In early 2004, to support the action research, COL commissioned a review of ICT for development initiatives in India, homing in on four in particular. The review suggested there was scope for integrating the best practices from these and other rural ICT programmes, and COL put together a plan for what became the L3F initiative. At the next PCF, at Dunedin in autumn 2004, the networked organizations met again to review the plan and agreed to form a consortium to take it forward. There was agreement that COL would take the lead in implementing L3F.

4. The long-term plan envisages four interrelated ICT-enabled learning projects in rural communities, with the aim of developing a self-sustaining and self-replicable model (or set of models). COL would lead the projects in four Commonwealth regions:

South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and the South Pacific. The aim is to create a framework capable of "reaching millions of small farmers and marginalised sections of rural community" in the developing Commonwealth.

5. The stated objective of L3F is:

    "to empower and liberate agricultural communities from socio-economic constraints by facilitating the communities to create socially and financially sustainable self-directed lifelong learning systems that will enable them to gain new knowledge and skills for increasing their farm production and productivity and for accessing local and global markets more equitably".

    To paraphrase: L3F is designed to help poor rural communities acquire relevant knowledge in a sustainable manner for economic advancement. Although the objective is essentially poverty-related, it has complementary social, educational and health dimensions.

6. India was chosen for the first project for the following reasons:

    -   There is a demonstrable need in India for new approaches to information and knowledge for farmers and other workers in the rural economy. Indian mainstream agricultural extension services are under-resourced and failing to reach vulnerable sections of the rural community, particularly landless women labourers.
    -   Rural credit is under-developed. Reaching the rural sector requires development communication and extension approaches, and very few banks have evolved strategies in these areas. The public banking sector has government-imposed targets for credit to the rural economy which it is failing to meet mainly because of poor marketing, high transaction cost ratios and high credit default levels. Banks that fail to meet the targets suffer financial penalties as a result. Meanwhile many rural households resort to informal credit at ruinous rates of interest.
    -   COL does not have the resources to start and implement a project like this on totally new ground. It has to build on existing programmes and infrastructure. Many parts of India have experience of ICT for development initiatives. The pace of ICT development in rural India is rapid and is encouraged by government.
    -   COL itself has recent direct experience of two ICT for development initiatives in India - the COLLIT Project funded by DFID, and a project in partnership with the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF).
    -   Similarly COL has a number of linkages with agricultural and veterinary science universities and institutions with expertise in ODL and ICT applications. It was easier to plan and develop L3F on these foundations than try to work on completely new terrain.
    -   India offered an appropriate "laboratory" for the first test of the model because even in the small area chosen for the project – two districts in Tamil Nadu – there is a range of socio-economic and cultural differences as well as more than one agro-climatic zone. If the model works across these differences, it will reduce the possibility that the results are too narrowly context-specific.

The Tamil Nadu L3F model

7. The Tamil Nadu project is facilitated and guided by the consortium that COL began to put together in Dunedin. It currently has five academic members - representatives of four conventional and one open university, all from Tamil Nadu:

- Tamil Nadu Agricultural University
- Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University
- University of Madras (social science inputs)
- Anna University (technology inputs)
- Tamil Nadu Open University.

8. The main role of the educational members of the consortium is to create learning materials and knowledge services for the communities. The learning centres around both generic areas such as literacy, quality and credit management; and immediate and context-specific issues relating to agriculture, animal husbandry and buy-back arrangements. The consortium has enlisted the help of another COL partner, the Hyderabad-based International Centre for Research in Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), in capacity building for learning management systems appropriate to these circumstances – especially ones that are suitable for small, context-specific, learning objects.

9. The consortium has a social sector "grassroots" NGO - MSSRF - with which COL had already been involved. It also has a Chennai-based ICT company – nLogue – a spin-off from the Indian Institute of Technology. nLogue supplies wireless internet connectivity and other ICT services to rural communities in several Indian States through local service providers (LSPs) and has shown a strong interest in development and research. For the L3F project it has created an intranet portal for use through the LSPs. The portal presents the learning and other content for use by the farmers in an easily accessible form.

10. Another critically important partner in the initiative - although not a formal member of the coalition - is the State Bank of India (SBI). It is one of the biggest commercial banks in India with 9000 branches. Nearly 65% of its branches are in rural and semi-urban areas. SBI is looking for opportunities to expand its rural credit, in line with government policy, and is actively involved in developing contract farming. SBI joined the initiative after negotiations with COL.

11. COL is represented on the ground most regularly by its consultant facilitator who is based in Chennai. The COL specialist also participates periodically in person and almost continuously by email.

12. The logic of the L3F Tamil Nadu model is as follows:
- Farmers[16] are encouraged to organize and to take part in a learning process designed to improve their productivity, initially because taking part is a pre-condition for fast-track credit.
- The bank (SBI) is prepared to fast-track the credit because of the lower risk of loan-default offered by the learning-productivity process, and lower transaction costs offered by the farmers' organizations. A condition is that the farmers make full use of their productivity by entering into contracts with suitable organizations – such as local dairies - to market their produce.
- These contracts are negotiated with the bank's help to reinforce the virtuous productivity-credit repayment cycle.

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[16] The project participants at village level are a mixture of farmers with land, and landless labourers. The case study will use the term farmers as shorthand to cover both groups, unless it is clear from the context that only one is the subject of the reference.

- The farmers' learning is centred principally on village ICT kiosks whose owners play a vital role in mobilising the community and facilitating the learning. The owners' incentive to play this role derives partly from the income they obtain from increased kiosk usage. The bank is also willing to fast-track their loans. The kiosk owners are coordinated and supplied through LSPs which in turn are enabled by the ICT company (nLogue).
- Learning content is created and delivered by the consortium of educational and social organizations that are institutionally committed to serving communities like these. Initially the learning content is relatively generic, but increasingly is created in response to the expressed interests and needs of the communities. The learning becomes self-directed which is known to be more sustainable than an externally-directed mode.
- To reinforce this, participation by the farmers in the learning process becomes self-incentivizing because it leads to tangible improvements in their lives. They are likely to be willing to pay for internet access to the learning.

13. The advantage of this model is that it plays to all the stakeholders' interests and is based on economic incentives. There is no reliance on donors apart from initial mediation and a modest amount of seed and consultant funding – about $60,000 in the 12 month project period - from COL.

Implementation

14. Two districts in southern Tamil Nadu - Theni and Sivaganga - with different agricultural regimes were chosen after consultations with the stakeholders. Within each district, villages were selected with different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds after consultations with the communities themselves. Necessary conditions included the pre-existence of ICT infrastructure and willingness of the local communities to take part. Groups in five villages agreed to take part, with around 1000 people in total. 60% are women.

15. The project implementation began formally in December 2004 with
    - Training of kiosk operators.
    - Mobilisation and organization of the communities.
    - Participative planning at village level to determine, for example, initial agricultural strategies.
    - Negotiations between the communities, the SBI, and the marketing linkages.
    - Preparation and testing of the initial learning materials.
    - Establishment of project management structures and processes.

16. All of these components are important but perhaps the most is mobilisation. In the pilot project villages the farmers and agricultural labourers were mobilised into farmers associations and self-help groups (SHGs). These groups were linked with the SBI which gives preference to credit under a contract farming system and then with the potential buyers identified by the bank. Once the groups and the buyers reached a trade agreement, the bank was willing to give fast-track credit to the members. The contract farming system in turn creates new learning needs – issues such as effective inputs, management and marketing – which stimulate the learning process.

17. The people's involvement in the learning process began with relatively formal study which takes place in small groups of about 10 members involving peer interaction and a facilitator (the kiosk owner). They use learning materials specifically prepared for the community by the consortium members in line with the agricultural strategies they have chosen. These are accessed from the nLogue Intranet portal. Content is also downloaded from the Internet by the facilitators. The materials are made available as CD-ROMs. The small learning groups go through a 60 minute programme once a week. Each village has 200-250 members undergoing the formal classes in the ICT kiosks. The full formal learning process is designed to last eight months. An important objective is to leave the rural community with the ability to develop self-directed learning strategies.

18. The Intranet and Internet are used for synchronous and asynchronous web conferencing with consortium members over specific questions and issues that the farmers raise. Other uses include study of the dynamic aspects of agriculture such as fluctuations in market prices, weather etc; and in one village telemedicine through which villagers can check their blood pressure, ECG, pulse and consult doctors. Discussions about other uses such as e-governance are underway.

19. The kiosk owners are key figures in the project. They are young entrepreneurs who, to take part in the project, have to have a minimum level of education, be in touch with their communities culturally and linguistically, and have skills to mobilise them. Each kiosk is equipped with a Pentium computer, digital camera, UPS and printer.

20. The kiosk owners are members of local Project Management Groups (PMG) which are constituted in each of the two districts and meet monthly. Other members consist of representatives from the villages and of the LSP. Invited members attend from the consortium and SBI. The PMGs monitor progress and take action where necessary.

21. The main project processes - e.g. the structured learning phase, loan transactions, and new agricultural practices - began in some villages in April 2005 and others several months later, delayed by flooding. By December 2005, the majority of farmers were regularly attending the learning sessions. Every village group had agreed its agricultural strategy. The initial priority for each was dairy farming. This was particularly strong among the women landless labourers because their options are extremely limited and the immediate returns it gives through milk sales promise economic empowerment which they had not enjoyed up to then. For those with crops, the introduction of locally sustainable bio-pest control was also a popular choice.

22. By December, marketing linkages had been agreed with three dairies. The majority of farmers had had their loans approved – about $200,000 worth - and most others were in the pipeline. Loan approvals were happening at a much faster rate, and with a much greater success rate, than normal. Repayments had begun at a rate that met the SBI's approval.

Conclusions

23. L3F is the most ambitious, highly structured and innovative of COL's initiatives, with the possible exception of the emerging Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth.

24. For anyone, like the evaluator, who met the stakeholders and visited the villages once the Tamil Nadu project was fully up and running (in this case in February 2006), it would be difficult to come away without a very positive impression. The optimism and excitement among the stakeholders was palpable. This even included hard-nosed banking officials. The interests of all the stakeholders are being addressed and the mutual awareness of this among the consortium members underpins their confidence in the project.

25. Meetings with farmers in four of the villages produced a wave of personal accounts of benefit, ranging from improvements in milk yields, to attitude change such as a determination to plan for, rather than be resigned to, the future. Some women in particular appear to be experiencing transformational change in their lives.

26. The farmers and other project stakeholders are already exploring new agricultural strategies for the future based on non-traditional crops such as jatropha (biodiesel), aloe vera, and gherkins. Landless labourers are beginning to negotiate the purchase of small parcels of land for fodder. Non-agricultural community improvements – such as better housing – are also being discussed.

27. Driving all this is the confidence and empowerment that the learning process, the expanding access to information through ICT, and the prospect of financial independence are generating.

28. Self-replication is beginning. Three neighbouring villages have formed associations for implementing the model in their villages with minimal help from the project. Vidiyal, a local cooperative-model NGO with 5000 women members already organized in SHGs, has asked to join the L3F process. A possible new type of stakeholder has been attracted: a local autonomous community college – Arul Anandar – has begun discussions about joining as a content and facilitation partner.

29. Stakeholder optimism is not unusual in the early stages of development projects. It is not always sustained. What are the factors that suggest the optimism about L3F may be justified?

30. Most of these factors are explicit or implicit in what has been said above.
    - The project is designed around the interests of all the stakeholders; they have ownership and mutual trust.
    - The stakeholder interests are mutually supportive.
    - The model is centred on self-directed learning which is known to be a powerful motivator.
    - There is a very important gender equity component to the project which is central to sustainable development. 60% of the L3F participants are women, and all the evidence so far points to the project impacting most strongly on them.
    - Apart from COL's mediation and modest seed funding, there are no exogenous variables, such as major donor intervention, on which the model depends.
    - The project works with the grain of national policy and practice in ICT and development of the rural economy.

- The project was well-researched, was developed consultatively, has well-structured planning, monitoring and evaluation built in. It is competently managed.

31. Many of the problems of agricultural and rural development stem not from lack of potential in the rural economy, but from rural communities' inability to negotiate effectively with other potential stakeholders in their development. They need mediation to get them over these first hurdles. The challenge for them is to acquire the ability to jump future hurdles on their own. COL's mediation was initially, and continues to be, a decisive factor, but it is expected that it will cease to be needed once the model gathers full momentum and begins to be adopted widely elsewhere.

32. The main area of doubt ironically stems from the Tamil Nadu project's strengths. It is unlikely that this mix of positive factors will be found everywhere. COL has begun to build on the encouraging L3F experience in Tamil Nadu to develop the programme in other Commonwealth regions – starting with West Africa. It is aware that conditions there are different, with weaker credit and knowledge infrastructures. It accepts that there will not be one single model that works everywhere. COL will need to use the summative evaluation of the Tamil Nadu project to distil out a set of factors which may be transferable to other environments – but which will need to be selected, mixed and adapted, with carefully researched local circumstances in mind.

33. COL intends to continue with, and expand the L3F process in its new strategic Plan. Even if the Tamil Nadu model acquires its own momentum – which it shows signs of doing – COL will need other partners to diversify the approach. It should share its experience with other players in this burgeoning field. It should not be shy of involving other international agencies, while bearing in mind the critical need for sustainability, and the threat that major donor funding can pose to that.

34. L3F is a very good showcase for COL's performance. In particular it shows
- The value of COL's networks and how diverse they can be.
- COL's ability to mobilize people and organizations through a highly consultative approach and the building of trust.
- That COL can address the MDGs and work effectively outside the mainstream education sector.
- That COL can research, plan, deliver and evaluate in project mode, with the help of the right resource people.

35. It is an important model from which COL itself can draw lessons, some of which are transferable to other COL programmes.

CASE STUDY 9
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION THROUGH ODL

Background

1. Environmental education as an ad hoc component of schooling is not new to developing countries. The Nehru Foundation for Development for example has been promoting and delivering it in India since 1966. However, in the wake of a Supreme Court of India ruling in 2001, it has found a permanent place in the curricula of schools and colleges in that country. This has created opportunities for ODL to demonstrate its cost-effectiveness on a large scale.

2. COL began its first interventions for the delivery of environmental education through ODL in 2002. These were operational rather than a strategic decisions. They predated COL's systematic orientation towards the MDGs.

3. It approached the Centre for Environmental Education (CEE) in Ahmedabad, India, and independently, the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore. The case study is mostly about the collaboration with CEE as there was less time to cover the IISc initiative.

CEE

4. CEE is a national institution that creates programmes and materials to increase awareness about the environment and sustainable development. CEE was established in 1984 and is affiliated to the Nehru Foundation for Development. It has been consistently supported by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India. It has around 400 staff, 6 regional centres, 24 smaller offices and centres in Sri Lanka and Australia.

5. CEE's primary objective is to improve public awareness and understanding of the environment with a view to promoting the conservation and sustainable use of nature and natural resources, leading to a better environment and a better quality of life.

6. The COL specialist responsible for the CEE initiative had been acquainted with the organization for several years and saw its potential as a partner. The timing was fortuitous. The India Supreme Court had ruled in 2001 that environmental education must be introduced at all levels of education throughout the country by 2007. In the wake of this, CEE was expanding its involvement in environmental education through teacher development, and had feedback that the short courses were not generally enough to produce a sufficient level of competence. Longer courses on the other hand were not sustainable face to face. It occurred to them that ODL might provide the solution.

7. CEE had considered partner institutions in India to help them develop ODL capacity. What particularly attracted them in COL was its international orientation. CEE has an institutionalised regional as well as a national brief. It is also involved with UNEP and UNESCO in wider international contexts, such as membership of the UNESCO

consultative group for planning the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

8. The partnership began with discussions aimed at identifying the best vehicle for in-service teacher development. The eventual choice was a one year part time diploma course – to be known as the Green Teacher Diploma - and some details were sketched out. CEE became aware of the considerable implications of adopting the ODL mode and took nearly a year to make a firm decision to go ahead. Once they had, intensive planning and preparation began with multi-layered support from COL which was formalised in an MOU.

9. COL provided
   - 4 training workshops in instructional design, content production, learner support etc, led by experts from India and Australia.
   - Individual staff training opportunities.
   - Periodic expert support.
   - Funding for course development expenses (excluding CEE staffing and infrastructure).

10. CEE ran its own internal training for about 25 student support personnel in 6 CEE regional and state offices involved in the early stage of project. A facilitators' handbook was produced for their guidance.

11. The course package that emerged consisted of four modules – two predominantly content-based, the others, mainly about skills/methodology. The modules are presented in the form of self-instructional hard-copy manuals.

12. CEE launched a pilot run in May 2005. It was decided to aim it not only at teachers but also other environment professionals who communicate with children and other publics. In addition to following the modules through the handbooks, participants attended two contact sessions and are also undertaking a six-month project. They were offered counselling throughout the course.

13. 60 participants signed up for the pilot run. Norms were set for suitable candidates, but no applicant was excluded. The fee of 3000 Rupees (roughly US$ 35 - above average for a distance diploma course in India) was mostly paid by the participants themselves, although some were part-sponsored by their schools.

14. Six months later, Navodaya Vidyalaya Sansthan, a government agency which operates around 450 model rural residential schools, enrolled another 60 teachers who are following the course within their own timeframe.

15. All 120 participants have attended two contact sessions and are expected to complete the examination.

16. Feedback has been regularly gathered from the students by CEE, and on the basis of this and other indicators, including interest from teachers and institutions, they have decided to run the course again with from 300 to 500 participants. Material is being printed. COL has provided resource people to evaluate the pilot more formally. This is due to be completed in April.

17. COL and CEE agree that the best way to meet the potential demand for this course, both nationally and internationally, would be to put the course on-line, and the first steps have been taken. COL has helped CEE purchase the license for an India-produced Learning Management System (LMS) and also funded some initial orientation for CEE in its use. Acquiring the capacity to convert this and other courses to on-line mode is a major undertaking for CEE and they are finding it challenging as it requires investments in human resources and infrastructure. The aim is to go on-line in 2007.

18. COL's programme expenditure on its work with CEE in the year to June 2005 was about $40,000.

IISc

19. Initially independent of the Green Teacher initiative, and led by another specialist, COL has been pursuing two separate collaborations with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bangalore in environment education. The IISc is a research and teaching university which also plays an active part in offering short-term courses to around 1500 serving scientists and technologists in service each year.

20. One of the collaborations is for the professional development of serving environmental engineers – five distance mode environmental engineering modules that will be run directly by IISc and adapted for use by Karnataka State Open University in postgraduate certificate and diploma programmes.

21. The other is the production of environment education distance learning materials for secondary school children and teachers developed to supplement the current curriculum.

22. Both of the collaborations with IISc began with COL's approach. In the case of the environment engineering courses, the materials (developed for face to face) already existed from an earlier collaboration between COL and UNESCO. They were not in use, and COL was seeking to resuscitate them with a suitable partner for wider dissemination through ODL. The module content was adapted for India by IISc, with instructional design inputs through COL from a West Indies-based Indian consultant. The development process was highly structured with moderation by an international expert group.

23. The piloting of the engineers' course is complete and has been evaluated. The conclusion is that it has been a success and plans have been developed to launch it in India, and eventually elsewhere in the developing Commonwealth. It is designed to be accessed on-line and incorporates real-time "chat" interaction among faculty and students as well as mail group networking. There is also a face to face contact session.

24. The school environment education materials – 15 modules - are being put through a similarly rigorous development process involving several Indian partners. The process began in 2002 but is not as far advanced as the engineers' course, partly because the material is more diverse and involves both content development and

instructional design for ODL. Pilot testing of the first five modules is due to finish in June 2006. The remaining ones are scheduled for 2006-08.

25. COL's programme expenditure on its work with IISc in the year to June 2005 was about $45,000.

Conclusions

26. There is no doubting the relevance of the Green Teacher initiative. The global environment is in the hands of people as much or more than governments. Moreover what governments do tends to be led in this area by popular interest and demand. The best way to create public awareness and commitment is through education, and school teachers are obviously central to this. Reaching teachers on a large scale needs ODL, if there are not to be huge costs – including the opportunity costs of withdrawing them from service for face to face training.

27. In all important respects this looks like an effective project to date. The CEE is a good partner. It is an established, well-run organization with committed staff. It did not need to be persuaded to collaborate because it was looking for the type of partnership that COL was offering. Green Teachers is an example of a sound operational idea which had some good fortune in its timing.

28. The partnership has been harmonious. CEE is now very satisfied with COL's inputs. This was not always the case. There was a stage in the development process when CEE was disoriented by a polarity of approach among the resource people COL provided. This was an unintentional feature of the programme which led to anxious debate among the team members on different options. The COL specialist however was able to resolve the conflict, and CEE feels it has a deeper understanding of ODL processes as a result.

29. The course concept, materials and methodology are of high quality. They encourage an interactive, multi-disciplinary, locally-relevant approach to studying the environment and sustainable development. This is unusual in Indian schools. The evaluator met a group of participants from the first pilot batch. Their enthusiasm for the course was palpable. They said that its innovative approach had been challenging and sometimes controversial in their schools. But their students had responded very well and were far more engaged than with most other parts of the school curriculum. Other teacher colleagues had been drawn into the process and were using the materials. They gave examples of impact such as families recycling their waste for the first time, and one school yearbook entirely devoted to green issues. How sustainable these impacts will prove to be is of course not yet known.

30. The piloting process seems to have run without any major hitches. It has been monitored and evaluated formatively and lessons fed in.

31. The course material at present is entirely print-based, in English. Most teaching, in Indian state schools as least, is in local languages, and as the Green Teacher handbooks are made to be used directly as source materials, this limits their potential. Adaptation would be difficult and expensive. With an international audience in mind, the fact that the case studies and other contextual material are largely from

India is an inhibiting factor, and even within India, there is a need for more local content contextualisation.

32. The solution would seem to lie in conversion to on-line delivery. This would not just facilitate access and adaptation; it would also offer potential for discussion groups, feedback loops and other interaction which can be important parts of the learning process and particularly relevant to teachers. Many teachers and their schools do not have internet access, but this is growing fast in India at least, and should not be a barrier to adaptation.

33. CEE does not yet have a marketing strategy for the course, but for the next year this is probably not a problem as the expansion plans are modest and word of mouth seems already to have generated sufficient interest. A greater challenge will probably be in dealing effectively with the demand. CEE will need to give a lot of attention to logistical and student support mechanisms. COL is organizing another consultancy that will help them to plan for this. It will require adequate resourcing by CEE.

34. The Director of CEE no longer sees the partnership as centred only on the Green Teacher project. He sees it as a process of 'institution-level cooperation'. There seems to be a mutual intention to work together long-term. CEE foresees a big role for ODL in education for sustainable development (ESD) for a variety of target groups and is keen that CEE becomes a dual mode institution in the coming 3-5 years.

35. COL has begun to widen its involvement with CEE. It brought a key staff member to the IISc in Bangalore for a partnership meeting in environment education and to the NAAC-partnered workshop on quality in teacher training (Case Study 7).

36. Another layer to the relationship was created during the International Conference on Education for a Sustainable Future jointly organized by UNESCO and CEE in Ahmedabad in January 2005. COL organized a workshop on ODL for ESD which led to the formation of an Indian consortium on ODL and ICT in teacher ESD. Other members include the IISc. A collaboration that has been agreed as a result is the sharing of environmental education materials between CEE and IISc.

37. COL is already trying to extend the reach of the Green Teacher initiative. The National Institute of Open Schooling has shown interest, as has at least one State open university. A senior representative of the National Teachers Institute in Nigeria visited CEE in February 2006, at COL's initiative, to consider its adoption.

38. In the CEE/IISc collaborations COL is forging internal (intra-COL) horizontal linkages - an encouraging development.

39. The Green Teacher course seems to be a high quality environmental education instrument that has the potential change attitudes. In India the Supreme Court decision presents it with a large market amounting to millions of schoolchildren, teachers and their families. It has the potential to be adapted relatively cheaply for other countries.

40. Satisfying the demand and the developmental need for this education will require a massive effort in India. But the Green Teacher course has the potential to make

considerable inroads, partly because it uses the economies of scale of ODL and also because its quality will attract and retain participants who are prepared to pay.

41. Reaching these wide markets requires considerable organization, marketing and the course to be put on-line. CEE will need considerable support from COL or another partner to take this forward. Other partners will be needed. COL should build on these promising beginnings. This would be the way fully to leverage value from the investment. But it should also carefully research existing provision in other parts of the world, and avoid duplication and the stifling of good local initiatives. It should also be aware of the different conditions in other parts of the world, where for example, teachers may not be able to afford to subscribe to the course. Different business models may be needed.

42. The materials emerging from the IISc collaboration also appear to be high quality educational products, developed on the basis of needs assessment and in consultation with local teachers, university faculty and the education department. Whether they achieve their full potential will depend on the future organization and commitment of COL and the partner institutions.

43. The impression is that, like CEE, IISc now sees its involvement with COL as a long-term partnership with COL's support directed as much at helping it to become a dual mode organization as at mobilising the specific products. IISc is very pleased with the COL partnership and has moved from being apprehenive of adopting dual mode to being confident and enthusiastic. The commitment seems to be strong and the forward planning ambitious. The horizontal linkages with CEE, for example, should help to maintain the momentum.

CASE STUDY 10
CAPACITY BUILDING FOR DELIVERING HEALTH INFORMATION

Background

1. One of COL's most consistent activities has been its capacity-building work in mass media for information, training and education. In the 1990s this was brought together in an initiative known as Commonwealth of Learning Media Empowerment (COLME). COLME is no longer used as a title by COL, but its basic components and approach still characterize COL's mass media work and is the responsibility of the specialist who launched the COLME initiative.

2. The core component is training in the use and application of audio and visual equipment and techniques. The equipment is for audio and visual recording and editing, or radio broad- or narrow-casting. It is often supplied by COL along with the training.

3. In its mass media activity, COL targets communities in less developed countries which are in need of information and knowledge for development: for poverty alleviation, better health, gender equity, vocational and teacher education. It identifies key agencies, such as agricultural extension, vocational training and health promotion services, and offers them capacity building in the application of these tools. COLME's aim was to provide "sustainable models that local stakeholder(s) in-country can build upon and replicate". This is also broadly the aim of its successor activity.

4. In the 2003-06 plan, COL began to focus mainly on the health sector, putting most of its work in the other sectors on a maintenance basis – top-up training and technology updates. Three of the MDGs are health-centred: reduction of infant mortality, improvement of maternal health, and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

5. Its first significant interventions in health in the 2000-03 plan period were in Gambia and South Africa. In both cases COL provided technology and training to an NGO to enable it create audio-visual materials for health education. In both cases, the NGOs acquired the capacity to create good quality videos which have been seen by a high proportion of their target groups.

6. Encouraged by these good results, COL has stepped up its work in health with NGOs in the 2003-06, judging them to be the most appropriate partners for delivering health information and learning to vulnerable groups. The NGO field is a crowded and complex one, and as health content is sensitive, COL first sought the advice of WHO in Geneva, and then in its country offices, on appropriate partners.

7. During the 2003-06 period, COL has enabled NGOs in Sri Lanka, Swaziland and Solomon Islands to establish Health Media Units. This has meant the provision of digital audio and video production equipment accompanied by training in the use of the equipment and wider aspects of media production. It has helped organizations in

6 other locations to develop their audio-visual capacity in other ways. Two more are at the planning stage.

COL's work with Sarvodaya

8. This case study looks at the health intervention in this field that COL regards as its most significant - in terms of potential - in the 2003-06 period, and thus a benchmark of sorts.

9. The work in Sri Lanka was the result of consultations with WHO's Sri Lanka representative in October 2003. The NGO identified as a potential partner was the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement. Sarvodaya is Sri Lanka's largest NGO. It was established 49 years ago, has 34 district offices and works in around a third of Sri Lanka's villages, in both Tamil and Sinhalese areas. Its core work is community development, but it also works on the political plane, promoting participatory democracy and good governance through political and legal empowerment. Some of this work is directed towards the Sri Lankan peace processes.

10. Sarvodaya has been in the forefront of providing humanitarian assistance in the Tsunami affected areas in the country. It was the first NGO to begin relief work. It is still involved in relief work such as the management of welfare camps - including the provision of medical care – set up for those who lost their dwellings.

11. Sarvodaya has used both formal and informal media for many years in its development work. It is very open to ICT and is currently implementing an IDRC supported rural tele-centre project. In the 1980s it began pioneering work in video documentary on development issues. Over 100 were produced. The Development Communication Unit still exists but its equipment is obsolete and its in-house productions have virtually ceased. Occasional media work is outsourced at considerable expense.

12. In 2003, Japan donated a mobile ICT unit to Sarvodaya, consisting of computerised multi-media equipment, audio-visual equipment, a giant screen, and a PA system. Its annual report for 2003-04 reported that it had been effective in reaching thousands of people in, for example, Sarvodaya youth camps.

13. Prior to COL's approach to Sarvodaya, it had asked WHO for help with capacity-building in community radio for health. However, it discovered that it would face licensing problems and decided to create the health media production unit that COL with which COL was offering help. Sarvodaya submitted a proposal to WHO and COL at the beginning of 2004, describing its priorities. It spoke of taking a new initiative in the use of electronic media - in health, governance and non-formal education. It proposed using its own funds to convert two rooms in one of its Colombo buildings into a media studio. COL offered to provide the digital audio and video production equipment and training. WHO was prepared to advise on health priorities and media content.

14. The COL specialist visited Sarvodaya in February 2004, brought the equipment and provided some basic training. A plan was developed for use of the unit. The original camera was faulty and could not be repaired in Sri Lanka. It was replaced after a short delay.

15. The Unit began operating in June 2004. By December it had begun work on four out of the five videos Sarvodaya had planned to produce by then. None was complete, but either shooting or scripts were finished for three of them. The Unit had also been used to begin work on several documentaries on peace and good governance topics that had not been part of the original plan.

16. The COL specialist returned in December 2004 to evaluate what had been done, provide further training, technology updates, and help Sarvodaya design a pilot for more strategic use of the Media Unit. COL also provided seed-corn funding. The pilot was to be health-focused in selected villages in the north of the country. It would laed to a series of videos produced and delivered on priority topics, and impacts measured. The pilot was due to run through the first six months of 2005. It would have WHO advisory support and was seen to be in line with its new 5-year, MDG-oriented, Country Cooperation Strategy with the Sri Lanka government.

17. The day after the COL specialist left Sri Lanka, the tsunami struck. Much of Sarvodaya – including the Health Media Unit – became focused on the relief effort. By mid-February the Unit had produced and began screening two videos containing essential health messages on, for example, water sanitation and communicable diseases - mainly for people in the camps. The videos were used intensively in the relief camps for about 6 weeks. Several other pieces of tsunami-related material, largely with the same footage, were produced for a simple advocacy video and web shots.

18. Because of the overarching priority of tsunami relief, the pilot project and the completion of the earlier work were put on hold. The local WHO representative has moved on and there has been no involvement by his successor in the initiative. However Sarvodaya say that they plan to reactivate part of the pilot soon and have identified a source of funding for the Unit's activities. They are considering ways to integrate the work of the Health Media Unit into the IDRC-supported youth training project in the North West.

19. The COL specialist has not visited Sarvodaya since the tsunami, but has supported it with technology updates and training DVDs. He also sent a large screen so that material could be presented to large numbers at the village level. He is planning to visit in March.

20. COL's programme expenditure on the Sarvodaya initiative was about $30,000 over two years. The annual programme expenditure for COLME and post-COLME work is about $250,000.

CONCLUSIONS

21. It is difficult to deduce from the Sarvodaya activity the potential value of this type of intervention because it took an unforeseen path. It is also difficult to assess its full impact because no monitoring or evaluation has been done since December 2004. Nevertheless it is possible to draw some conclusions from the experience.

22. Sarvodaya in its report on the Health Media Unit activity to December, was disappointed with its progress. The reasons it gave were:

- Delays in securing external resource persons for script writing, direction etc.
- Diversion of the necessary Sarvodaya staff into peace/governance work.
- Heavy rain, delaying shooting work.
- A technical problem with the camera.

23. Two longer-term problems were also mentioned in the report or during the evaluation interviews:
    - Funding of production work – payments to outside production personnel, and running costs such as transport.
    - Limitations of the equipment supplied by COL. Most videos are produced in the vernacular, but the equipment is unable to support the required fonts for titling. This work has to be outsourced. The equipment cannot be serviced in Sri Lanka, and this has already led to minor problems and will probably limit its useful life.

24. The funding problem has definitely inhibited the Unit's work. The volume of output has not been impressive either before or after the tsunami. This means that for the time being, the original priority health issues, such as Sri Lanka's high female suicide rate and the growing HIV infection rate, are not being addressed systematically through the Unit.

25. Sarvodaya has now identified a source of funding for the Health Media Unit and has begun to work up ideas for extending its use. Sarvodaya acknowledge that these ideas lack a strategic framework. This is understandable given the special circumstances of the last 14 months.

26. The equipment issue has so far been less of an obstacle. Ways round most of the limitations have been found. Longer-term, the equipment will need to be replaced with more appropriate and sustainable kit. But this equipment has given the Unit staff important hands-on experience which has helped them to embed the training and further develop their competence in media production. It will not have been wasted even if the equipment were to collapse tomorrow. Sarvodaya now has 2-3 people with much greater competence in mass media production than before. It is pleased with this outcome. The Unit is seen as important enough to have its reporting line direct to Sarvodaya's CEO.

27. As suggested above it is difficult to value the output so far from the Unit. The most used - and probably most useful - output has been the health videos for the tsunami relief camps. These were shot in the camps, contain simple health messages, and appear to be relevant to their audiences. The video showings have been attended by several thousand people and could have saved or improved many lives, but with no monitoring and evaluation, there is no way of knowing their impact.

28. One important issue is that the use of the output so far has been entirely dependent on the availability of the Unit staff. No multiplier mechanism is yet in place. This will need addressing strategically through for example the purchase, deployment and staffing of additional projection equipment. The Unit will need help to broaden its use. The videos produced so far are simple in format and that has been appropriate in their current context. In the future, Sarvodaya may need to produce videos with a more sophisticated learning format and for this they may need to acquire competence in instructional design.

29. Overall conclusions about the COLME and post-COLME interventions cannot be drawn from the Sarvodaya case study. But the core components and approach are similar to many of the other media capacity-building interventions; and with a scan of COL's other work in this area in mind, some inferences can be made. On the plus side
    - COL's interventions are widely appreciated by the partner organizations. COL provides them with opportunities they would not have, easily or at all.
    - The training and other support, when available, is context-sensitive and effective as long as the trained staff remain in place and resources are provided for its mobilization.
    - The outputs can reach large numbers of people as the Gambia example shows.

30. There are some less positive inferences:
    - There are few – if any – examples of the original COL capacity-building being cascaded.
    - Continuity of the capacity depends either on the training being transferred when staff are replaced, or on repeat training by COL which is expensive and often difficult to achieve.
    - Full use of the capacity also depends on local financial resources being available and maintained. COL's contribution is quite rightly restricted to start-up costs. Local resources are not always forthcoming.
    - Equipment is not always appropriate. Radios require licences which are not always forthcoming; and as we have seen in Sri Lanka, it is not always possible to maintain equipment locally.
    - Occasionally, such as the support to the National Teachers Institute in Nigeria, the media interventions are part of a broader COL programme. Mostly they are not and this may reduce their chances of being used strategically.

31. There has not been a recent evaluation of COL's mass media work. There has also been no systematic documented monitoring of results. This evaluation has come across anecdotal evidence of COLME interventions that have led to sustained output, such as in Jamaica's Rural Agricultural Development Authority[17], and some that have not. Without a fuller evaluation, it is not possible to know where the balance lies.

32. The overall conclusion is that there is a role for COL support for mass media. It would probably best be focused on wider capacity-building programmes where it can be integrated strategically with other interventions and stand more chance of leading to sustainable outcomes. COL could consider outsourcing the field work to consultants, but it should have among its core staff at least one person who understands the strategic use of mass media.

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[17] The Jamaica Ministry of Agriculture's 2005-06 budgetary presentation to parliament included the following: "with the kind assistance of the Commonwealth of Learning, the Rural Agricultural Development Authority is now equipped ….to expand its coverage and visibility and to improve its effectiveness in transmitting technology packages and other messages to farmer groups and other mass audiences."

**ANNEX C
TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**The External Evaluation of the 2003-2006
Commonwealth of Learning Strategic Plan**

The Project and what it has set out to achieve.

1 The Commonwealth of Learning commenced its current 3 year plan, *'Building Capacity in Open and Distance Learning'*, in July 2003. It will be completed on 30th June 2006.

2 The plan, set within a Results Based Management framework, aims to achieve developmental impact through open and distance learning methodologies. Overall corporate objective, short and medium term outputs and outcomes and a long term impact statement were set. This is replicated at programme level, of which there are 3, and the 7 sub-programmes which fall within them. The sub-programmes are made up of initiatives of which there are 33. In July 2004, Performance Indicators were framed and set at the sub-programme level.

The reasons for the evaluation and the key questions that the Consultant should answer

3 It is now necessary, in the final year of the plan, to evaluate COL's work against the objectives set at the start of the plan and provide a report to the Board of Governors. The overall purpose of the evaluation is to ascertain what difference COL has made over the past 2 years, moving into the 3rd and final consolidation year. The evaluation should consider both the strategy and the programmes at the initiative level. An 'evidenced-based' assessment of short/medium term outcomes is needed with both quantitative and qualitative data. Longer term impacts may be more difficult to ascertain for initiatives of less than 5 years duration, but should be done where possible, and an impact assessment plan written with a timetable for evaluations where it is not possible to assess impact at this stage.

4 The evaluation should be guided by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee's international criteria of

Relevance; Effectiveness; Efficiency; Impact; and Sustainability

5 The 3 key questions that the evaluation should answer are:

• To what extent has the Commonwealth of Learning made a difference in the life of its current 3 year plan?

• What lessons can COL, its Board of Governors and partners, take from the operation of the plan into future planning periods?

• How appropriate are the current sub-programmes in realizing the aims of the 3

strategic programmes, ODL Policy, ODL Systems and ODL Applications.

Who the main client and interested stakeholders are.

6 The main client for the evaluation is COL and its Board of Governors. Interested stakeholders are the 53 Commonwealth countries and those with whom COL works. It would be necessary to consult with Board members and the DFID Evaluation department to ascertain their views on the evaluation.

The context in which the evaluation is taking place.

7 The over- arching context is the progress that the international development community is making towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. COL works with Commonwealth government to help them achieve their MDG goals. COL also considers Commonwealth priorities when committing resources. These are the goals of partner governments which may lie outside the scope of the MDGs, although essentially most development effort can be read through the MDGs. COL's particular context is that Commonwealth governments may use the evaluation report to decide if and at what level they will fund COL in its new plan. DFID and CIDA, its two main donors, have indicated thus.

A rough guide to the tasks to be completed and the schedule.

8 The evaluation should consider both the strategy and the programmes at the initiative level. In preparation for this latter examination, an initiative self-evaluation form has been completed by education specialists for each of the 33 initiatives which contains basic data on it status and an achievement assessment (aims fully achieved to not achieved). It is envisaged that the evaluation strategy will consider all COL's work over the life of the plan, at the initiative level and sample around 8 initiatives, one from each of the 7 sub-programmes and Knowledge Management, chosen in consultation with Education Specialists. The remaining initiatives should be assessed through the initiative evaluation form which will be submitted to the Consultant for verification.

9 A comparative analysis should be employed which would consider a country(ies) within which COL has worked as opposed to a country(ies) that it has not to ascertain what difference ODL has made. The comparator should also be at the level of the institution within countries that COL has worked comparing institution(s) that have employed ODL and institution(s) that have not.

10 An exercise, '*The Long Look Back and the Long Look Forward'* is currently underway that is assessing the state of play of ODL prior to COL's existence and look ahead to the future of ODL. This work will inform part of the evaluation and will be supplied by COL to the Consultant.

11 There has been constant monitoring over the life of the plan, reported in two Board papers (June 2004 and June 2005) and through ¼ reports supplied by the President. There is a wealth of data contained in these reports on how the plan is progressing. Data, in the form of evaluations, is also contained in approximately 20 evaluation reports already completed on particular projects within the plan and 10 or so more are planned throughout the programme. This data in the main, however, has not been assessed against the discipline of the RBM objectives, outputs and outcomes.

12 It is envisaged that the methodology would employ a desk study of the data produced by the programmes; interviews with the key stakeholders and COL staff and visits to the field to consult with a sample of activities within programmes.

What the outputs from the evaluation may be and when they are due with specific dates if the report is required for a particular meeting.

13 A report to the Board will need to leave COL by 31st March 2006 for the Spring Board meeting in Vancouver. A draft interim report should be made available by 31st December 2005 in order that it may be used when drafting the new strategic plan, 2006-2009. Work on the evaluation should continue in the New Year until the final report is completed. There will be monthly progress reports submitted in writing to COL and supplemented by either face to face meetings or telecoms from the end of August until 31st March 2006.

Details of the evaluation team

14 The evaluation team should consist of at least one senior experienced evaluator with knowledge and experience of evaluations in the development field. There should be at least one junior evaluator to conduct the desk studies. COL can provide the assistance of the monitoring and evaluation advisor to the programmes, Dr Cathie Dunlop, Simon Fraser University. The services of Koyali Burman, a PhD student from the University of British Columbia who has worked on aspect of monitoring and evaluation over the past 6 months could also be made available. Both of these resources would be made available at no additional cost to the Consultant, within limits to be established.

Information about the size and format of the report

15 The report should be no more than 20 pages in length. It should contain both quantitative and qualitative evidence of short/medium and long term outputs/outcomes/impact in an easily read and digestible form. The findings could be presented as a table, thus:

Programme	Initiative	Short Term Output/Outcomes	Medium Term Output/Outcomes	Long Term Impact

The structure of the report should be:

Title Page
Preface
Map (possibly)
Contents page
Acronyms and abbreviations
Acknowledgements
Executive summary

The main report
- Introduction
- Methodology
- Findings

- Conclusions
- Lessons
- Recommendations

Appendices/Annexes

Name and contact details of the Evaluation manager and reporting requirements during the evaluation and whom the report should be sent to.

16 The Programme Director is Rod Tyrer, Commonwealth of Learning, 1200-1055 West Hastings Street, Vancouver BC V6E 2E9 Canada: Rtyrer@col.org is the main contact.

17 There will be monthly progress reports, starting end August 2005 through to end April 2006. These will be in the form of a written report, to be agreed between the Director and the Consultant, a teleconference or face to face meeting.

18 The final report should be sent to Sir John Daniel, President and CEO, Commonwealth of Learning.

ANNEX D
PEOPLE CONSULTED

NAME ("Key informants" in bold)	INSTITUTIONAL ROLE (AT TIME OF INTERVIEW)
COL STAFF	
Alluri, Dr Krishna	Specialist, Food Security and Environment
Carigi, Claire	Course Coordinator *Writing Effectively Series*
Daniel, Sir John	President and CEO
Fehr, Helen	Governance and Programmes Officer
Gao, Nick	Coordinator Information Resource Centre
Kanwar, Prof Asha	Specialist, Higher Education and Policy Development
Kwan, Angela	Development Manager
Lee, Ray	Accountant
Lentell, Helen	Specialist, Training and Materials Development
Long, Brian	Vice President
Mackintosh, Wayne	Specialist, Education Technology (designate)
Mallet, Josh	Specialist, Learning and Livelihoods
McEachern, Doris	Finance and Administration Manager
Menon, Dr Mohan	Specialist, School Development
Phillips, Susan	Specialist, Basic Education
Reddi, Dr Usha	Director CEMCA
Schlicht, Patricia	Programme Assistant
Tyrer, Rod	Programme Director
Walker, David	Specialist, Education Technology
Walker, Carol	Programme Assistant
West, Paul	Knowledge Manager
Wilson, Dave	Communications Manager
COL BOARD OF GOVERNORS	
Bermingham, Desmond	UK Representative, London
Butterfield, Shona	New Zealand Representative, Wellington
Chong, Denise	Canada Representative, Ottawa
Cox, Winston	Deputy Secretary-General, Commonwealth, London, England
De Mel, Dr Tara	Asia Representative, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Glennie, Jennifer	South Africa Representative, Johannesburg.
Mackinnon, H E, The Rt Hon Donald	Secretary-General, Commonwealth, London, England
Omolewa, H E Prof Michael	Nigeria Representative, UNESCO, Paris, France
Onorio, The Hon Teima	Pacific Representative, Tarawa, Kiribati
Perinbam, Lewis	Chairman, Vancouver, Canada
Whiteman, Senator, The Hon Burchell	Caribbean Representative, Kingston, Jamaica
OTHER INFORMANTS	
Aboderin, Shola	Regional Coordinator, ODL and ICT for Learning, Africa,

	World Bank
Alagesan, Prof V	Director for ODL, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore, India
Ariyaratne, Dr Vinya	Executive Director, Sarvodaya, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Bakwena, Festina	Permanent Secretary for Education, Gaborone, Botswana
Balaji, Venkataraman	Head Knowledge Management and Sharing, ICRISAT Hyderabad, India
Balakrishnan, Prof V	Dept Animal Nutrition, Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Chennai, India.
Balasubramanian, Dr Konhandaraman	Development Consultant and Catalyst, Chennai, India
Bateman, Peter	Manager, Open, Distance and eLearning Initiative, Africa Virtual University, Nairobi, Kenya
Beniest, Jan	Principal Training Scientist, World Agroforestry Centre, Nairobi, Kenya
Benoit, Robert	Senior Program Manager, CIDA, Ottawa, Canada
Binns, Dr Felicity	Executive Director, IEC, Cambridge, UK
Butcher, Neil	Technology-Enhanced Learning Specialist, SAIDE, Johannesburg, South Africa
Chand, Farhana	Script writer, OLSET, Johannesburg, South Africa
Chandersekaran, Prof K R	Director Academic, NIOS, Delhi, India
Chandiram, Jai	Executive Director Fortune Institute of Communication and Television, Delhi, India
Chandradasa, Lalith	Director, Community Health, Sarvodaya, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Coomaraswamy, Prof Uma	Vice Chancellor, Open University of Sri Lanka, Colombo, Sri Lanka
D'Antoni, Dr Susan	Head, Virtual Institute, International Institute for Education Planning UNESCO
Dhanarajan, Dato' Prof Gajaraj	Director, Wawasan Educational Foundation, Penang, Malaysia. (Ex President and CEO COL)
Dunlop, Dr Cathie	Head Evaluation Centre, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada
Elfick, Chris	Consultant, Johannesburg, South Africa
Farrell, Dr Glen	Consultant, Vancouver, Canada.
Forrester, David	Consultant, London, UK
Francis, Dr Henry	Assistant General Manager Rural Development, State Bank of India, Chennai, India
Fryatt, Dr Bob	Dept of Country Focus. Sustainable Development and Health Environments. WHO, Geneva, Switzerland
Garg, Prof S C	Pro-Vice Chancellor IGNOU, Delhi, India
George, Dr Nancy	Associate Vice President, Academic Management, University of Technology, Jamaica
Isaacs, Shafika	Director SchoolNet Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa
Jain, Shivani	Programme Coordinator, CEE, Ahmedabad, India
Jayasena, Aruna	Cameraman and Producer, Health Media Unit, Sarvodaya, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Kakonge, Dr Esther	Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, Nairobi, Kenya
Kamaraj, K	Founder, Vidiyal (NGO), Rasingapuram, Theni, India

Karunanayake, Dr Shironika	Programme Coordinator MATE, Open University of Sri Lanka Colombo, Sri Lanka
Khare, Dr Pankaj	Deputy Director International Division, IGNOU, Delhi, India (former staff member CEMCA)
Kinyanjui, Lucy	CEO, Schoolnet Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya
Kinyanjui, Prof Peter	Programme Coordinator Human Development, NEPAD, Pretoria, South Africa
Koul, Prof B N	Consultant, Haryana, India
Lekamge, Dr G Dayalatha	Dean Faculty of Education, OUSL, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Marquard, Stephen	Coordinator Learning Technologies, Centre for Educational Technology, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Mataafa, Fiame	Consultant, Apia, Samoa (former Minister for Education, Samoa and Pacific Representative COL Board).
Matangala, Anisio	Advisor to the Minister of Education, Maputo, Mozambique
Mathur, A S	Director, Vocational Education, NIOS, Delhi, India
Matubber, Dr Md Arshed Ali	Dean, Open School, Bangladesh Open University, Dacca
Mendis, U A	Deputy Executive Director, Technological Programme, Sarvodaya, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Mertens, Angela	Head, Department of Distance Education, Maputo, Mozambique
Mitchell, William	Head of Distance Education, British Council, London, UK
Mitra, Dr Sushmita	Director, Student Support Services, NIOS, Delhi, India
Moreno, Juan	Senior Education Specialist, Human Development Network The World Bank, Washington DC, USA
Mukharjee, Sonjib	Director, Metalearn Services Pvt Ltd, Bangalore, India.
Munguambe, Machatine	Reitor, Academia de Ciencias Policias, Maputo, Mozambique
Murthy, Dr Rajasekara	Senior Scientist, Environment Canada, Toronto, Canada
Murugan, Prof K	Director Student Support Services, Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai, India
Mwangi, Dr Waweru	Director ICSIT, JKUAT, Nairobi, Kenya
Nagarajamurthy, L	Director, Vocational Education, Govt of Karnataka, Bangalore, India
Naidoo, Gordon	Director, OLSET, Johannesburg, South Africa
Naidu, Prof Som	Dept Research and Evaluation, University of Melbourne, Australia
Naidoo, Vis	CEO Mindset, Johannesburg, South Africa (former COL specialist)
Nhavoto, Arnaldo	Director, CIINED, Maputo, Mozambique
Odumbe, Dr Jeckoniah	Director, Centre for ODL, University of Nairobi, Kenya
Pant, M C	Chairman, NIOS, Delhi, India
Passos, Rosario	Instructional design consultant, SEDE Project, Maputo, Mozambique.
Payne, Barbara	Senior Education Adviser, DFID, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
Ponnapa, P G	CEO, n-Logue Communications Pvt Ltd, Chennai, India
Prasad, Prof V S	Director NAAC, Bangalore, India
Preethiraj, Nishantha	Coordinator, Health Media Unit, Sarvodaya, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Pushparaj, Rev Dr G	Principal Arul Anandar College, Karumathur, Madurai, India
Rahman, Md Mizanoor	Coordinator, Junior Secondary Education Project, Open School, Bangladesh Open University, Dhaka
Ramachandra, Dr T V	Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, India
Rawnsley, Sally	Manager, Design and Development Centre, The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, Lower Hutt.
Sampson-Ovid, Lystra	Project Manager, Distance Education Unit, Ministry of Education, Port-of-Spain,Trinidad & Tobago
Sarabhai, Dr Kartikeya	Director CEE, Ahmedabad, India
Senthilkumaran, S	Associate Director M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai, India
Sharp, Helena	British Council Head of Commonwealth Partnerships
Siaciwena, Prof Richard	Director of Distance Education, University of Zambia
Stillwell, Dr Barbara	Department of Human Resources for Health, WHO, Geneva, Switzerland
Takwale, Prof Ram	Professor Emeritus, Pune University, India.
Tau, Dr Daniel	Principal BOCODOL, Gaborone, Botswana
Theobald, David	Consultant, Distance Education Capacity Building Project Management Group, Maputo, Mozambique
Thomson, Janet	CEO SchoolNet South Africa, Johannesburg
Thutoetsile, Thulaganyo	Director SARDEC
Umar, Dr Abdurrahman	Director Academic Services, National Teachers Institute, Kaduna, Nigeria.
Uvalic-Trumbic, Stamenka	Head of Reform, Innovation and Quality, HE Division, UNESCO, Paris, France
Van Wyk, Trudi	Director, Curriculum Innovation, Department of Education, Pretoria, South Africa
Wanniarachchi, Dr Nanda	Director, Dept of Open School, National Institute of Education, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Ward, Michael	Senior Education Adviser, DFID, Delhi, India.
Williams, Jenny	COL Pacific Project Manager, Wellington, New Zealand
Williams, V J	Director, Evaluation, NIOS, Delhi, India
Wynd, Dr Shona	Evaluation Dept, DFID, East Kilbride, UK
Zafar Iqbal, Prof M	Adviser, Secondary Teacher Education Dept. Allama Iqbal University, Islamabad, Pakistan
Zebroff, Tanya	Education Adviser, World Bank, Kaduna, Nigeria.
Group discussions	
9 COL specialist staff (3 separate discussions)	COL, Vancouver, Canada
10 staff members	NIOS, Delhi, India
4 staff members	Academia de Ciencias Policias, Maputo, Mozambique
4 staff and 5 Green Teachers course participants	CEE, Ahmedabad, India
6 State Bank of India managers, (2 separate discussions)	Theni and Thirapattur Districts, Tamil Nadu, India.

About 150 farmers, internet kiosk operator and other community members (4 separate discussions)	Uppukottai, Thirukalakudi, Kaalapur and Govindanagram villages, Tamil Nadu, India

ANNEX E
MAIN MATERIALS USED IN THE EVALUATION

COL plans and strategic reports

A World of Knowledge, Summary Report 2000-03, COL

COL Mid-Term Evaluation. Report of the External Panel, COL 2002

COL Results-Based-Management plans, reports and self-assessments

COL Three Year Plans 2000-03 and 2003-6

Learning and Living with Technology: The commonwealth of Learning and the Millennium Development Goals. COL 2006

Learning for Development. COL Draft Three-year Plan 2006-09

Looking Backwards and Looking Forwards: Context for Planning. COL 2005
Memorandum of Understanding on the Commonwealth of Learning. COL 1988 and 1995.

Reflections on Ten Years of the Commonwealth of Learning. Raj Dhanarajan, COL 2001

Reports to COL Board of Governors on Programmes by Regions and Countries for 2003-04 and 2004-05

Other COL publications and unpublished papers and reports

A Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth. Report, Glen Farrell, COL 2003

African Schoolnet Tookit. COL/SNA 2005

An International Scan of the Use of ICT in Education. N. Butcher, COL 2004

COL staff trip reports

COL/African Virtual University E-learning Workshop, August 2004, Nairobi. Report Catherine C. Dunlop, COL 2004

Connections and EdTech News Vols. 5-10.

Distance education and open learning in Sub-Saharan Africa – A literature survey on policy and practice. SAIDE/COL 2002

Forum on Open Schooling for Secondary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Report, Alicia Fentiman, COL 2004.

ICT and Literacy: Who benefits? - Experience from Zambia and India. Report on the COL Literacy Project (COLLIT),Glen Farrell COL 2004

Innovations in Teacher Education International Practices of Quality Assurance. NAAC/COL 2004.

Lifelong Learning for Farmers - Report and Recommendations. Colin Latchem et al, COL 2004

Literacy & Livelihoods: learning for life in a changing world. Papers from the International Experts Meeting November, 2004. COL 2005

Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for NEPAD e-Schools Demonstration Project. COL 2005.

Other COL event evaluations

Output to Purpose Review of the SEDE Project, Mozambique. Richard Siaciwena, DFID/COL 2005

Regional Scan Reports. COL 2004-05

The Activities of Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia. Evaluation, Badri N. Koul, COL 2004

Third Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, Dunedin. Report, Catherine C. Dunlop, COL 2003

Training and Capacity Building in Distance Education in Mozambique. Evaluation, FM Litto, COL/SAIDE 2004

Training Impact Study. Fred Lockwood and Colin Latchem, COL 2002.

Other publications

"Against All Odds", Reflections on SchoolNet Africa's Challenges, Paper for presentation at WSIS, Tunis, Shafika Isaacs 2005

Basic Education at a Distance. J. Bradley and C. Yates, eds. Routledge/Falmer Press/COL 2000.

CIDA Evaluation Guide 2004.

Education For All Global Monitoring Reports 2005, 2006. UNESCO

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ANNEX F
ABBREVIATIONS

ACIPOL	The Police Academy in Mozambique
AfDB	African Development Bank
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
AVU	African Virtual University
BOCODOL	Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning
CAEM	Conference of African Education Ministers
CARADOL	Caribbean Regional Association for Distance and Open Learning
CCEM	Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers
CEE	Centre for Environment Education
CEMBA/MPA	Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration/ Master of Public Administration
CEMCA	Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
COLLIT	COL Literacy Project
CIINED	Mozambique Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology & DE Task Force
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
COLME	Commonwealth of Learning Media Empowerment
ComSec	Commonwealth Secretariat
DE	Distance Education
DEASA	Distance Education Association of Southern Africa
DFID	Department for International Development
EFA	Education for All
ESD	Education for sustainable development
ICRISAT	International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics
ICT	Information and Communications Technologies
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IEC	International Extension College
IGNOU	Indira Gandhi National Open University
IISc	Indian Institute of Science
IRC	Information Resource Centre
JKUAT	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology
L3F(armers)	Lifelong Learning for Farmers
LMS	Learning Management System
LOR	Learning object repository
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MATE	Master of Arts in Teacher Education
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSSRF	MS Swaminathan Research Foundation
NAAC	National Assessment and Accreditation Council
NAMCOL	Namibian College of Open Learning
NCCE	National Commission for Colleges of Education

NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-government organization
NIOS	National Institute for Open Schooling
NOUN	National Open University of Nigeria
NTI	National Teachers Institute
ODL	Open and distance Learning
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OER	Open educational resources
OLSET	Open Learning Systems Educational Trust
OUSL	Open University of Sri Lanka
PATVET	Pacific Association forTechnical and Vocational Education and Training
PCF	Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning
PREST	Practitioner Research and Evaluation Skills Training in ODL
QA	Quality assurance
QI	Quality indicators
RBM	Results Based Management
RETRIDAL	Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning
RGF	Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAIDE	South African Institute for Distance Education
SARDEC	Southern African Regional Distance Education Centre
SEDE	Secondary Education by Distance Education Project
SHG	Self help group
SNA	Schoolnet Africa
STAMP	Science, Technology and Mathematics Programme
TANUVAS	Tamil Nadu University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences
TNAU	Tamil Nadu Agricultural University
TNOU	Tamil Nadu Open University
TORS	Terms of reference
TOPNZ	The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand
TVET	Technical/Vocation Education and Training
UWI	University of the West Indies
UGC	University Grants Commission
UKOU	Open University, U.K.
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPE	Universal Primary Education
VUSSC	The Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth
WADEA	West African Distance Education Association
WHO	World Health Organization
WSIS	World Summit on the Information Society