

Commonwealth of Learning: Delivering a Common Future



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Chair, Hon Ministers, it is an honour to present my organisation, the Commonwealth of Learning as it completes 35 years of service to the Commonwealth.

As you know, COL was established by Commonwealth Heads of Government when they met in Vancouver for CHOGM 1987. Ever since, we have been in beautiful British Columbia, which makes us the only Commonwealth intergovernmental organisation not in London. We also have a regional office for Asia in New Delhi.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Heads in September 1988, to establish COL and to specify its role.

Our mission is to help Commonwealth member states and institutions to use technologies for expanding access to education and training.

COL has a Headquarters Agreement with Canada and enjoys the immunities and privileges extended to foreign missions and international organisations.

Member States provide voluntary contributions to COL and the major donors — Canada, India, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Nigeria and South Africa — have a seat on our Board of Governors.

The MOU requires COL to report to Ministers of Education and Heads of Government. As part of our accountability, we also report to our own board and that of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

We have prepared a compendium of our work in each Member state and a report on 'Delivering A Common Future', which have already been circulated.

What does COL offer? COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development. Learning must lead to opportunities for economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation.

We organise our work in two sectors, Education and Skills, with Gender as a crosscutting theme.

Our strategy is to harness the potential of existing and new technologies to achieve development outcomes.

The theme of CHOGM this year is 'Delivering a Common Future: connecting, innovating and transforming'. As the only Commonwealth intergovernmental organisation dedicated entirely to education and training, let me share examples of how COL is connecting, innovating and transforming.

First, connecting. COL leverages its modest resources by nurturing and catalysing a network of partners in the Commonwealth and beyond.

COL has connected all thirty-two small states in a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, under which several needs-based courses have been jointly developed and delivered.

COL developed a partnership of over 60 IGO's, universities and associations during the pandemic. As a result of this, over 200 online courses were shared by partners to keep the doors of learning open.

COL initiated Commonwealthwisewomen.org, which connects eminent women with girls in grassroots communities for mentorship and networking opportunities.

Second, innovations. For COL, innovations are not just about technologies but also about models, methods and processes which can be scaled.

COL developed AptusPi a low-cost offline virtual classroom that provides learners in remote locations with access to digital resources. It's a server that works with a solar charger and a wireless router and costs approximately \$ 150. This has been successfully deployed in 13 countries.

COL's MobiMOOC is an innovation that allows farmers to access lifelong learning using basic mobile phones.

During the pandemic, COL helped develop virtual labs so that university students could still conduct science experiments in institutions in Kenya and India.

Third transforming. Today, it is not enough to provide access to education and training — we must also create opportunities for livelihoods that can transform individuals and societies.

During the pandemic, the COL-COURSERA workforce recovery project offered free skilling and reskilling opportunities from some of the top universities in the world to over 150000 Commonwealth citizens. Even though connectivity was often a challenge, learners used mobile devices or library facilities in what has been a life-changing experience for thousands.

COL's Girls Inspire initiative has trained over 106,000 women and girls for livelihoods in remote regions in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mozambique, Sri Lanka and Tanzania. This is also being implemented in Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Uganda.

Technologies have an important role to play in transformation. To address the issue of lack of access to ICT, COL recently developed an ICT augmentation project for small states and LDC's to provide specific equipment, solar panels, connectivity and capacity building. This is being implemented in partner institutions in Antigua & Barbuda, eSwatini, Lesotho and Seychelles.

These are a few examples of how COL is connecting, innovating and transforming. In order to deliver a common future, COL promotes learning for sustainable development, supports innovations for affordable and accessible technologies and serves the last person in the queue.

COL is organizing its triennial conference, the tenth Pan Commonwealth Forum in partnership with Athabasca University in Calgary during 14-16 September. Several education ministers from around the Commonwealth will join us to enrich discussions on the theme of Innovations in Educational Resilience.

With that let me thank you for your kind attention and your valuable contributions, both financial and intellectual.