



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

Learning for Sustainable Development

**BOARD OF GOVERNORS
President's Quarterly Progress Report:
April – June 2016**

The Board of Governors of the Commonwealth of Learning met on 10 June 2016 in Canada. In lieu of a Quarterly Progress Report from the President for April – June 2016, the President's Report and the Programme Reports that were provided to Board members for this meeting.



President's Report

COL completes the first year of its six-year strategic plan 'Learning for Sustainable Development'. It has been a period of continuity and change. Continuity, as COL takes forward seven of the eight initiatives from its previous Three-Year Plan. The health initiative was sunsetted as there are other organisations that are working with greater expertise and impact in this area. It was also necessary to focus on COL's key strengths and the needs of Member States in education and skills development. It has been a period of change as COL aligns itself with the Sustainable Development Goal on education (SDG 4), developments in technology and achieving outcomes and impact.

One important aspect of demonstrating outcomes and impact will be gathering data and concrete evidence to measure results. Thanks to a grant from Hewlett Foundation, COL commissioned a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) expert to provide individual coaching to COL staff to develop performance frameworks for capturing results. There will be a greater focus on statistically verifiable results rather than only on case studies and anecdotal evidence. In the L3F initiative, COL has made a beginning by moving beyond measures of economic growth to developing a framework for measuring social empowerment. This is a concrete contribution to development discourse. COL has also measured the Social Return on Investment (SROI) in open schooling and the results in an open school in Belize indicate that for every dollar spent, the SROI is \$8.59. The findings from this study strengthen COL's advocacy efforts for open schooling. Initiative managers are encouraged to track and document results with similar levels of rigour so that the organisation can raise its game in M&E and increase its impact in Member States.

The additional contributions from Global Affairs Canada and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia enable COL to address the issue of child, early and forced marriage in five countries. Partners in Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Pakistan and Tanzania have been identified and baseline studies conducted. Such activities will further serve to deepen our work in these countries.

A grant from Hewlett supports COL's efforts to strengthen its work in Open Educational Resources (OER) to address the issue of making quality educational content available to the remotest and most marginalized communities. Eastern Caribbean countries are developing Open Textbooks under this project. COL's offline off-grid Classroom Without Walls, Aptus, has been deployed in Fiji, Kiribati and Samoa. Qatar Foundation provided the support to implement the Aptus project in the remote mountainous district of Swat, Pakistan. A study shows that both the students and the teachers benefited – the academic performance of the students improved and the teachers' attitude towards their teaching practice changed. There will be greater emphasis on implementing substantive activities in each Member State, especially in the Pacific.

COL presents its work to Foreign Ministers at CHOGMs and this time we had the opportunity to present our new Strategic Plan as well as how COL 'adds global value', the theme of CHOGM 2015, Malta. On both occasions, COL received the warm support of over a dozen Member States. We also ensured that we had the opportunity to present at the Women's, Business and Youth Forums, resulting in more visibility and new partnerships.

Another outcome of the Malta CHOGM was the announcement of a Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning (CCCL) by the Minister of Education & Employment, the Honourable Evarist Bartolo. This has since been established as a Foundation after the formal approval of the Cabinet. The objective of CCCL is to provide an interface between the European Union and the Commonwealth and foster collaboration, research and capacity building in the areas of elearning, OER, MOOCs, teacher education and the Transnational Qualifications Framework.

Given the importance of education in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, COL has offered to facilitate an Education Forum in the wings of future CHOGMs. As the Communiqué states 'Heads requested COL and other related intergovernmental organisations, as well as Commonwealth Associated Organisations to study the possibility of organising education fora at future CHOGMs'. COL has commissioned a feasibility study which will be discussed with key stakeholders in London in September. UNESCO, Paris has confirmed its support to the proposed Forum.

Meanwhile, preparations are under way for the Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF8) which will be held in collaboration with the Open University Malaysia during 27-30 November 2016 in Kuala Lumpur. The theme is 'Open Online and Flexible Learning: the key to Sustainable Development'. The keynote speeches for the four sub-themes will be delivered by world authorities: Martin Bean (President, RMIT, Australia), David Wiley (Chief Academic Officer, Lumen Learning, USA), Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (Executive Director, UN Women) and Tan Sri Anuwar Ali (former President, Open University Malaysia). Four online forums are being organised to draw a wider global audience into the discussions. The first of these on 'Efficiency and Effectiveness' attracted over 216 participants. The results of these discussions will be shared with the participants of PCF8. A highlight of the PCFs is the Asa Briggs Lecture, which becomes even more significant as we pay tribute to the late Lord Briggs, and will be delivered by Sir John Daniel, who knew him personally.

CEMCA has a new director and the staff complement is now complete. Community Radio, an area of traditional strength for CEMCA, has received a fresh boost with funding from the Government of India. The organisation is also trying to promote skills development through blended approaches and is working with the private sector to scale up its impact.

Achieving impact will not be enough – COL will also need to show the impact achieved through various channels to a diversity of stakeholders. This will raise COL's profile as a thought leader in promoting learning for sustainable development. COL and CEMCA have a rich repository of human interest stories and lessons to share with the wider education and

development communities. Both COL and CEMCA will renew their efforts to implement a systematic and effective communications plan.

COL will continue to strengthen its position as a values-based organisation that is committed to serving the last person in the queue. At the same time, it will evolve and change to respond to national needs and priorities. This balance between continuity and change gives COL its relevance and its special character.

Professor Asha S. Kanwar
June 2016