COL in the Commonwealth

BANGLADESH | 2015–2021
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2015–2021

COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING
Acknowledgements

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COL in the Commonwealth: 2015–2021 Country Reports summarise COL’s activities over the last six years, detailing what we have achieved in each Member State and across the Commonwealth. The reports describe not only how COL has addressed country needs in education and training but also how its work supports the priorities of its development partners: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the global community to embrace distance and online delivery to keep the doors of learning open. The current crisis has highlighted, yet again, the uneven development of technology across the Commonwealth. COL has been promoting the use of a range of technologies, from print, radio and TV to the Internet, to reach learners in different contexts. As an intergovernmental organisation established by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote distance learning and technologies for human resource development, COL’s role has never been more important.

COL’s Strategic Plan 2015–2021 was based on the conviction that learning leads to sustainable development. COL has continued to use its expertise in distance education and technology-based approaches to promote lifelong learning that leads to sustainable development, which means economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation. This aligns COL’s work with SDG4, which aspires to provide equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning for all.

To accelerate progress towards this goal and enhance impact, COL has been fostering partnerships, building capacity, supporting the development of materials and replicable models, and enabling policy. Focusing on these core strategies, this compendium begins with a Pan-Commonwealth section, which describes COL’s initiatives under Education and Skills, with Gender as a cross-cutting theme. This is followed by a section containing brief regional overviews for Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Americas, Europe and the Pacific. The regional summaries are followed by individual country reports, which highlight some of the results achieved.

You will be pleased to note that COL has exceeded the targets identified for the six-year plan. External evaluators, who conducted a meta-evaluation to assess the impact of the Strategic Plan 2015–2021, concluded that “COL programming over the period assessed... was relevant, effective, and efficient. COL is having an impact in many dimensions and across several initiatives; and in many cases, where government has taken interest and is assuming more leadership, there are good reasons to believe some of the changes at the institutional and government levels are sustainable.”

This success has been possible through the support that COL has received from ministries of education as well as partner organisations and experts. COL in the Commonwealth is also the result of collective effort and collaboration. Partners on the ground have diligently provided COL with updates, while COL staff have tracked and assessed results obtained through meticulous monitoring and evaluation. I am very grateful to everyone involved for their valuable inputs.

Pandemics, natural disasters and widening inequalities will continue to challenge our systems. The lessons learned in the past will help shape a better future. COL will support Member States in their efforts to rebuild robust and resilient systems of education and training by providing bold and imaginative solutions to address future risks and uncertainties. Your continued support will be key to achieving these goals.

Professor Asha S. Kanwar
President and Chief Executive Officer
Commonwealth of Learning
**TARGETS 2021**

- **Improved sustainable livelihoods**
  - 300,000 people

- **Improved organisational capacity to leverage ODL**
  - 470 organisations

- **Increased and equitable access to and use of quality learning opportunities**
  - 1.4 million people

**ACHIEVED by April 2021**

- **Improved sustainable livelihoods**
  - 389,544 people

- **Improved organisational capacity to leverage ODL**
  - 764 organisations

- **Increased and equitable access to and use of quality learning opportunities**
  - 2,059,159 people
Located in British Columbia, Canada, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation that serves the education and training needs of the 54 independent states that comprise the Commonwealth and their combined population of 2.4 billion, of whom more than 60% are under the age of 30. COL was established by the Commonwealth Heads of Government specifically to help ministries, institutions and organisations expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using open, distance and technology-based approaches.

COL participates in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM) and presents its progress report to foreign ministers. During the 25th CHOGM, in London in April 2018, COL highlighted at various forums the paradigm shifts required to secure “our common future.” As well, at the triennial Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) and the meetings of the Commonwealth Education Ministers’ Action Group, COL reports on its progress in promoting learning for sustainable development.

COL leverages its impact through a wide range of partnerships that include institutions, national organisations, international development agencies and non-governmental organisations. Inter-governmental partners include the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Foundation, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UN Women, UNESCO and UNESCO’s Institute for Information Technologies (IITE) and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). COL also works with donor agencies such as the World Bank, regional organisations such as the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation, national and regional distance education associations, industry, and private-sector foundations such as The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

COL assists governmental, non-governmental and community partners in developing policy, building capacity, refining models, creating materials and nurturing collaborative networks.

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Pan-Commonwealth Activity

2nd World OER Congress
COL partnered with UNESCO, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the government of Slovenia to organise the 2nd World OER Congress, in Ljubljana, Slovenia from 18 to 20 September 2017. The ensuing 2017 Ljubljana OER Action Plan provided recommendations to stakeholders in five strategic areas: building the capacity of users to find, reuse, create and share OER; language and cultural issues; ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality OER; developing sustainability models; and developing supportive policy environments.

At the 20th CCEM, in Fiji in 2018, the Commonwealth Education Ministers commended COL “for its emphasis on Lifelong Learning for employment, entrepreneurship and empowerment which supported the ongoing efforts of Member States to achieve[e] SDG4... [and] its global leadership in Open Educational Resources (OER) and innovations in educational technologies.”
COL’s response to COVID-19

COL has been quick to respond to the urgency of the situation and the evolving needs across the Commonwealth by initiating relevant projects and targeted country interventions and joining global coalitions.

COL has joined the UNESCO Global Education Coalition and “Combat COVID-19: Keep Learning”, spearheaded by IITE. COL also initiated the International Partnership of Distance and Online Learning for COVID-19, commonly known as OpenDoor, bringing together over 60 organisations and institutions around the world. COL’s online repository of curated content and tools became a go-to resource for educators across the world. The COL–Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative has provided access to free online courses to almost 150,000 Commonwealth citizens, many of whom have lost their livelihoods due to COVID-19.

In an effort to help young women and girls become successful in their fields of interest and build future generations of leaders, COL has launched CommonwealthWiseWomen. This new mentoring programme offers unique networking opportunities to women and girls from underserved communities across the Commonwealth by pairing them with successful and influential women in leadership roles.

Report to Commonwealth Education Ministers: From Response to Resilience

“What lessons can be drawn from the COVID-19 experience to make education systems more resilient in future? This policy brief provides examples of how governments and institutions made it possible for people to continue their education during the pandemic and identifies factors that contributed to success. The responses required are reviewed from social, pedagogical, technological and psychological perspectives.”
COL’s Programmes

**Education and Skills** are COL’s two programme sectors, with gender as a cross-cutting theme.

**OPEN/INNOVATIVE SCHOOLING (OIS)**

Open/innovative schooling is increasingly recognised as a viable solution to the growing demand for equitable access to secondary education, especially for girls and marginalised groups, and particularly in remote locations. Governments are seeking to redefine the way secondary education addresses societal needs by diversifying the curriculum. This means making technical and vocational programmes available alongside academic offerings — something that open schools are well positioned to do.

**Activities**

OIS currently works in Bangladesh, Belize, Botswana, Eswatini, Guyana, India, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Vanuatu and Zambia. COL also supports the information-sharing activities of the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association.

COL has supported the development of policies and strategies in Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Tanzania; developed and enhanced open schooling models in Belize, Malawi, Mozambique, Trinidad and Tobago, Vanuatu and Zambia; and promoted quality OER, including for persons with disabilities, in Bangladesh, Botswana, Eswatini and Namibia. It also

**Outcomes**

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, the current model for OIS is relatively new and involves developing, piloting, scaling and mainstreaming OER, ODL, eLearning methods and open educational practices in order to have a large-scale systemic impact. Since the implementation of this model started in 2017, educators in six countries have developed curriculum-based OER and have piloted or are close to piloting their use. The pilots in Mozambique and Zambia are currently reaching about 800 formerly out-of-school youths per year, and both countries are now looking towards scaling. In addition, as part of their response
to the pandemic lockdowns, participating countries shared some of the OER they had in development, and these were downloaded more than 26,000 times in 2020. In a similar vein, curriculum-based resources created for use by learners in Kenya were viewed on YouTube more than 20,000 times in the first eight weeks and, it is estimated, were viewed by more than 150,000 learners in Kenya and Tanzania when first broadcast.

TEACHER EDUCATION

Teaching quality is considered to be the most important factor affecting learning in schools in most Commonwealth countries. COL’s focus is on improving teacher quality through school- and technology-based training models, which can cut costs and achieve scale. Working in partnership with government agencies and teacher education institutions, COL supports capacity development in the integration of technology and OER into pre- and in-service training.

Activities

COL is working with ministries of education as well as non-governmental organisations and teacher education institutions in The Gambia, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Uganda to develop capacity and resources for school-based teacher development.

In response to partner needs and emerging pedagogies, the initiative has also developed online courses, including MOOCs and webinars for educators and education leaders.
Uganda and Zambia have partnered with COL in various projects.

COL is collaborating with 12 higher education institutions across the Commonwealth to offer the Commonwealth Executive Master in Business Administration and Commonwealth Executive Master in Public Administration programmes.

Through the Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning project, led by the Association of Commonwealth Universities, COL is supporting the development of quality assurance mechanisms for blended learning courses at 23 higher education institutions located in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

**Outcomes**

The evaluation of Higher Education initiatives in the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021* found that student performance had improved and student satisfaction had increased. There is evidence that systemic investments in technology, staff training, materials development and quality assurance policies have all had a positive impact.

**THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH (VUSSC)**

Strengthening and improving the quality and scope of existing tertiary institutions is a key priority for small states. The VUSSC partnership represents 32 small states of the Commonwealth dedicated to sharing educational resources and expanding access to tertiary education. VUSSC works with ministries of education and their agencies, post-secondary institutions and non-governmental organisations to build capacity in online course development, pedagogy and assessment. It promotes technology-enabled learning through the provision of a learning platform and enables the transfer of credits across small states through the use of the Transnational Qualifications Framework.

**Activities**

VUSSC has been active in small states across three regions — Africa (Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles), the Caribbean (The Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana) and the Pacific (Fiji, Solomon Islands) — promoting eLearning, supporting the development of OER and providing learning opportunities at certificate, diploma and degree levels.

VUSSC has supported the development of a series of blue economy MOOCs in which close to 6,000 learners from across the world have participated.

In response to the increasing need to transition to online delivery, VUSSC has supported institutions in Africa and the Caribbean to manage and use learning management systems to create and offer courses.

As part of a tripartite Commonwealth initiative with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the University of the West Indies Open Campus, VUSSC has repurposed and made available an online undergraduate degree programme in Youth Work Development to universities that are members of the Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work.

**Outcomes**

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, there is strong support from ministers of education in the small states of the Commonwealth, and COL offers a variety of courses responding to the unique needs of small states in areas such as the blue economy, sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism, disaster management and port management. VUSSC has played a major role in the development of OER that have led to educators’ pedagogical development and students’ improved educational performance. The Transnational Qualifications Framework, which allows for the recognition of qualifications earned in one nation by 31 other nations, is a major strength.
The Skills sector addresses the needs of both formal and non-formal learning. The initiatives in this sector are: Technology-Enabled Learning, Lifelong Learning for Farmers, GIRLS Inspire, and Technical and Vocational Skills Development, including Skills Online.

TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED LEARNING (TEL)

This initiative aims to encourage more governments and institutions to integrate TEL and OER policies and practices to improve teaching and learning for skills development. COL believes that for technology to have a transformative effect in teaching and learning, a focus on policy–technology–capacity is needed, and practice must be based on research evidence.

Activities

This initiative is being implemented in Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Belize, Fiji, Grenada, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Saint Lucia, Samoa, South Africa, Sri Lanka, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Since its launch in 2018, COL’s Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) platform has had over 13,500 registered users. Over 24,000 learners have benefited from MOOCs organised in partnership with Athabasca University, Canada. Since 2018, COL’s online course Understanding OER has been used by over 13,000 people worldwide; in 2020, it won a prestigious Brandon Hall Group Silver Award.

Outcomes

According to the Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021, TEL demonstrates the systematic use of technology to offer quality education at scale. The C-DELTA (seven modules) and Online Course on Open Education Resources (LearnOER) platforms are examples. TEL provides peer-reviewed and quality-assured tools and resources to help any educational institution integrate technology in teaching and learning so as to improve the quality of...
student learning and success. The Advanced ICT Skills Development Project has developed 26 OER courses to make the teaching and learning of advanced ICT skills affordable. These courses are developed as OER textbooks that can be adapted by institutions to offer courses. In addition, this initiative works to improve TEL policies.

LIFELONG LEARNING FOR FARMERS (L3F)
This programme empowers vulnerable rural women and their families to gain knowledge, create their own self-directed learning processes, and organise themselves to solve the challenges of lack of access to credit and finance to improve their livelihoods. In this model, COL is a catalyst in bringing together institutions, civil society and the private sector to build the capacity of communities through gender-sensitive learning.

Activities
Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Tonga, Uganda and Zambia are currently implementing the L3F model. Nearly 800,000 farmers, more than half of them women, have participated in L3F learning activities. COL has also trained over 100,000 learners across several countries of the Commonwealth using MOOCs - to scale up L3F through building capacity in agricultural extension. During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, about 42,000 learners were trained using innovative mobiMOOCs. Banks in various countries collaborate with L3F, including NABARD, a large agricultural bank in India, and Andhra Pradesh State Cooperative Bank. COL has been building the capacity of staff at the Bank of Tanzania through a visit to India and subsequent follow-up training workshops.

Outcomes
According to the Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021, since being piloted in 2006, the L3F programme has been demonstrated to enhance crop productivity, household incomes and empowerment, not simply through learning but also by linking small-holder farmers to sources of financing and to other actors in the supply chain. Participants invest their incomes in children’s education, better food and improved housing, as well as increasing their assets and diversifying their income-generating activities, which multiplies the development impact. COL’s ability to broker partnerships is a key strength: the L3F model links participants with microfinance, agricultural extension workers and agricultural supply chains using a social-capital approach.

TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (TVSD)
COL is building the capacity of TVET government agencies and institutions to increase access to quality TVSD through using ODL and learning technologies. COL is supporting selected partners to implement Skills in Demand projects, which blend online learning with learning in the workplace or community. Tapping into the physical and human resources in these contexts helps overcome TVET-specific challenges of how to develop practical skills while still reaching marginalised learners in informal sectors and remote locations.
**Activities**

Since 2015, COL has trained more than 3,000 TVET educators across the Commonwealth in flexible and blended learning. COL is supporting government agency partners in The Gambia, Jamaica, Kenya, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea and Zambia to implement national change strategies for flexible and blended TVET. COL has seven Skills in Demand projects underway in Kenya, Nauru, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Tuvalu and Zambia, and across the Caribbean in partnership with the Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies. Skills being developed are project management, gardening, construction, computer and mobile phone repair, furniture making, and teaching and assessment for TVET teachers and workplace trainers.

**Outcomes**

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, more than 100 partners are implementing flexible and blended (FaB) learning approaches to varying degrees, and there is evidence that organisations are moving toward more flexible TVSD. COL has online OER to build capacity in flexible skills development, allowing countries to cost-effectively scale up institutional capability through training trainers to use COL’s OER. COL’s new Skills in Demand model was found to meet the needs of national TVET agencies and bring government support that allowed work to scale rapidly across institutions and workplaces. TVSD also promoted learning networks: the INVEST Africa Community Learning Network has more than 2,000 members, and the African Foundation for Quality e-Learning for TVET (AFQueT) was founded in 2019 by nine individuals from five African countries who have had their capability in eLearning built through COL.

As well, Skills Online aims to support the efforts of Member States to disseminate skills required for employment and entrepreneurship. Through hybrid models that apply ODL techniques, it helps women, girls, youths, persons with disabilities, entrepreneurs and the unemployed to acquire relevant 21st-century skills and access in-country mentorship support. It enhances the ODL capabilities of both TVET institutions and other non-governmental organisations involved in skills development.

The COL–Coursera partnership has been offered in 50 Commonwealth countries, resulting in over one million course enrolments and over 182,000 certificates. In addition, COL has collaborated with Udemy Inc., facilitating access for vulnerable youths in Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda to 4,000 highly curated online courses that have benefited over 8,100 learners. In India, COL has helped reskill 2,100 auto-technicians, tailors and beauticians to become sanitation hygiene entrepreneurs and train 5,000 women digital entrepreneurs to meet new demands created by COVID-19.

**GENDER**

Gender is a cross-cutting theme that underpins and complements all COL initiatives. COL recognises that the advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment is central to its agenda of learning for sustainable development. COL supports partners in mainstreaming gender and in implementing holistic projects to address specific gender issues. Targeted programmes tackle the distinct challenges faced by
girls/women and boys/men in regions where they are most disadvantaged, while also shifting the social norms that create and perpetuate gender inequalities.

Activities

Projects are being implemented in Botswana, Ghana, Guyana, India, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, and Trinidad and Tobago. Through a variety of skills-building activities in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, COL has been empowering women to achieve sustainable livelihoods. In Sri Lanka and Tanzania, COL has trained girls and young women in ICT, and in the Caribbean, it has helped address issues of boys’ underachievement. In 2020, COL launched a gender-equality capacity-building project with the participation of 11 partners in nine countries of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

As well, a special project, GIRLS Inspire, has aimed to provide schooling and skills development to some of the hardest-to-reach girls in the Commonwealth. COL has worked in Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Tanzania to provide education and training to almost 100,000 girls to equip them for employment and entrepreneurship. This project has been supported by Global Affairs Canada and Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Outcomes

According to the Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021, COL has the ability to influence as well as support partners, and its long history and relationships give it credibility. Three of the gender projects — the Social Safety Net project, Lifelong Learning for Mothers, and the Gender Mainstreaming project — have developed strategies and mechanisms for implementation that can be scaled up. The Gender Mainstreaming model has clear guidelines, and the three phases of the gender mainstreaming strategy are logically connected and relevant. In addition, COL has developed tools, including a Gender Audit Tool and a Gender Road Map template. A social protection mobile application has also been developed for Solomon Islands.

COMMONWEALTH EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CENTRE FOR ASIA (CEMCA)

COL’s regional office in Asia is based in New Delhi, India. CEMCA promotes the meaningful, relevant and appropriate use of media and technology to serve the education and training needs of the Commonwealth Member States of Asia. CEMCA works in education and skills development, with a focus on community media, particularly community radio.

Activities

Through activities with partners in Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, India, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan, Singapore and Sri Lanka, CEMCA has helped institutions improve their capacity to leverage ODL for increased access to education. During the COVID-19 lockdown in the region in 2020, CEMCA offered training to faculty and leaders in ODL institutions to help with the transition to online learning. Recently, virtual labs have been introduced.
Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, CEMCA operates with a small academic staff and well-developed networks. Its advocacy efforts and technical support have led to the successful adoption of institutional OER policies. Similarly, capacity building with institutions has created improvements in knowledge, changes in attitude, and changes in systems and practices, leading to the increased use of OER to create learning materials. In a few cases, partner institutions have shared their experience with other universities, creating a multiplier effect. CEMCA has also been able to obtain additional contributions from other donors or development agencies.

REGIONAL CENTRES

COL supports regional centres in Western and Southern Africa, Europe and the Pacific. These are hosted by ODL institutions (in Botswana, Fiji and Nigeria) or ministries (in Malta). They carry out activities that are aligned to COL’s mandate and programmes.

Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, the regional centres are centres of excellence focused on advocacy and research in ODL. They have generated activities that can be replicated by new partners. In addition, they have well-developed networks of consultants to help them expand activities. The evaluation found that the regional centres are becoming increasingly relevant in their respective regions. The more established ones have developed networks and partnerships, significantly increasing ODL capacity in their regions.

SERVICES

COL’s eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO) is a service initiative that works with international organisations on a fee-for-service basis to develop and deliver professional development courses and projects. Over the past 20 years, eLIO has progressively diversified its services to provide innovative solutions to meet the needs of globally dispersed staff and enable learning for sustainable development.
Affordable and accessible technologies are vital for building resilient education systems. In many parts of Asia, connectivity remains a challenge. While about 50% of the global population has access to the Internet, this indicator is at 40% in Asia. Access to mobile subscriptions is much higher, at 122%, presenting an opportunity to build a cloud-based and mobile-friendly system of teaching and learning (Report to Commonwealth Education Ministers: From Response to Resilience).

There are 21 open universities in Commonwealth Asia. Pakistan’s Allama Iqbal Open University was established in 1974, becoming Asia’s first open university. The Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU), a non-profit organisation of higher learning institutions that are primarily concerned with open and distance education, works to widen educational opportunities and improve the quality of the institutions in terms of their educational management, teaching and research.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, Commonwealth governments in Asia developed remote learning content, broadcast lessons over television and radio, and provided education materials on eLearning platforms. Bangladesh has been offering a digital content platform with interactive multimedia educational content and My School at Home television lessons for students in Grades 6–10. Malaysia launched TV Okey, which provides educational programmes for students; its MOE-DL online learning platform and EduWebTV offer collections of online classes and materials for teachers. Filaa from the Maldives and E-thaksalava from Sri Lanka are other examples of online classes and materials. India’s Swayam Prabha Channel airs courses for school education (Classes 9–12), higher education, out-of-school children, vocational education and teacher training.

COL focuses on adding value to countries’ efforts towards reaching the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG4. It supports the Commonwealth governments and institutions in Asia in the use of appropriate, affordable and accessible technologies to improve and expand learning for sustainable development. Its initiatives in formal education...
include an emphasis on achieving inclusive, quality secondary and higher education and strengthening teacher development programmes. In the area of skills, COL supports technology-enabled learning (TEL), expanding access to technical and vocational education, and linking credit and finance to informal learning in agriculture. These initiatives have been designed to achieve socially inclusive and gender-sensitive human resource development at low economic and environmental costs.

COL’s regional office in New Delhi, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), promotes the meaningful, relevant and appropriate use of media and technology to serve the education and training needs of the Commonwealth Member States of Asia. CEMCA works in education and skills development, with a focus on community media, particularly community radio. Through activities with partners in eight countries, CEMCA has helped institutions leverage open and distance learning (ODL) for increased access to education and building capacity for accreditation. CEMCA has been closely associated with all aspects of developing community radio in the region and has responded to COVID-19 challenges by offering training on creating of online courses and using virtual labs. In the current reporting period, CEMCA activities took place in all Member States except Singapore.

The Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021 concluded that COL’s activities improve education access and quality and are focused on capacity building, policy development and institutional technology support for education, TVET, agriculture, and women’s and girls’ empowerment. The focus is relevant to both COL objectives and national priorities.

COL’s major initiatives in the Asian Commonwealth countries between 2015 and 2021 are outlined below.

- Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan, Bangladesh Open University, the Open University of Sri Lanka and Wawasan Open University, Malaysia have benefited from the high-quality learning and professional development opportunities offered by COL’s Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) programmes.

Graduates of the CEMBA/CEMPA programme at Allama Iqbal Open University (Pakistan) have experienced, on average:

- an increase of 37.6% in monthly earnings;
- an increase of 31.6% in annual income;
- an increase of 28.5 percentage points in the probability of being employed as a manager; and
- an increase of 36.8% in wages (earnings per hour).

— Evaluation of CEMBA/CEMPA at Allama Iqbal Open University (2018)

- High-level roundtables for vice chancellors (VCs) and heads of ODL were held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in March 2016 and May 2018, with the participation of VCs and representatives from 19 countries. In April 2019, in partnership with CEMCA, IGNOU and India’s Ministry of Human Resource Development (now the Ministry of Education), COL organised a roundtable for VCs of African and Asian open universities in New Delhi to discuss models for the 21st century.
• A paper stemming from COL’s OER-based eLearning professional development online course at the Open University of Sri Lanka received an ICDE Prize for Innovation and Best Practice – 2015 at the 26th ICDE World Conference, held in Sun City, South Africa in October 2015.

• CEMCA supported four Indian universities under its higher education integrated model to provide access to education through various needs-based courses. A total of 38,514 learners were enrolled and successfully completed the courses.

• As well, jointly with UNESCO’s office in New Delhi, CEMCA published Best Practices of Community Radio and Sustainable Development Goals: A Handbook, with 56 stories from Bangladesh, India and Nepal, covering 15 Sustainable Development Goals.

• As part of the Advanced ICT Skills Development project, four universities in Asia (Allama Iqbal Open University, IGNOU, Open University Malaysia, and the Open University of Sri Lanka) have worked to develop two programmes: Web Application Development and Mobile Application Development.

• COL supported four universities — Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, Bangladesh, Rajiv Gandhi University of Knowledge Technologies, India, SNDT Women’s University, India, and Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) — to systematically implement TEL by developing policy, building capacities to develop blended courses, and evaluating the impact of TEL for improving student learning.

• COL’s interventions have contributed to improved integration of information and communication technologies in teaching and learning at University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) in comparison to the baseline study conducted in 2018. The overall score of 3.85 on a scale of 5 shows that TEL at UMS is now growing towards robustness. UMS has demonstrated systematic implementation of TEL and has enhanced the quality of the teaching and learning environment by integrating ICT.

“Report of the Benchmarking of Technology-Enabled Learning at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (2020)”

• COL’s Introduction to Technology-Enabled Learning and Blended Learning Practice MOOCs, offered in collaboration with Canada’s Athabasca University, have attracted large numbers of participants from Asia.

• In India and Sri Lanka, COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) initiative has improved the livelihood security of marginalised farming households, particularly those headed by women, by linking them to social and financial capital through the use of ODL and flexible and blended learning. The innovative L3F model for the economic empowerment of rural women through ODL, using basic mobile phones as access devices, has now been adapted by a regional rural bank in India for scaling up. In addition, AgMOOCs offered in partnership with the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur have reached over 120,000 students and faculty in agricultural universities.

• GIRLS Inspire has provided over 92,000 vulnerable women and girls in hard-to-reach areas...
of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka with opportunities to receive skills training that will enable them to have sustainable livelihoods.

- Supported by COL, the Open University of Malaysia has been working with five other open universities in Africa and Asia to develop courses related to web applications and mobile application development.

- Facilitated by COL, the south-south collaboration between Bangladesh Open University (BOU) and the National Institute for Open Schooling (NIOS), India led to improved quality assurance approaches in both institutions, as well as the ongoing development of an inclusive education policy, implementation and review process for the Open School at BOU, to give greater access to children with disabilities.

- In a similar vein, a COL-supported engagement between NIOS and the National Institute for Education (NIE) in Sri Lanka led to the development of a Gender Policy Framework for NIE, which is now in the process of implementation and review.

- The school-based teacher development model Teacher Futures is being implemented in Sri Lanka. The programme supports collaborative learning among teachers and teacher educators through communities of practice as well as school-based training.

- In partnership with Malaysia’s Wawasan Open University, COL’s Gender initiative in 2018–2019 organised two workshops in the framework of the Pan-Commonwealth Training Programme on Women and Leadership in ODL to build the leadership capacity of mid-career women in ODL institutions.

- COL and Singapore’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a workshop to build the capacity of teacher educators and education practitioners in the use of ICT to improve teaching and learning. This annual initiative, under the Singapore

The L3F programme has enabled the women to take up various farm- and non-farm-based entrepreneurial activities. After L3F training, around 56% of women have taken up new entrepreneurial business activities. This shows the L3F programme has positively contributed to employment generation and livelihood creation for women in the villages.

--Impact Study of Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) Project by Mann Deshi Foundation and Mann Deshi Cooperative Bank (2018)
Cooperation Programme, was held in Singapore in August 2017 and hosted 18 participants from ten Commonwealth countries.

- The Asia Regional OER Consultation, which provided opportunities for Asian delegates to learn more about OER and contribute to the 2nd World OER Congress, was held in December 2016 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

- The 8th Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF8) on Open Learning was organised with the Open University Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur in November 2016.

- The Asia regional meeting of COL's Focal Points took place on 10–11 December 2018 in New Delhi, India to strengthen the effectiveness of COL’s work in addressing key priorities for education and training in the region and to share information related to learning for sustainable development. On 1 June 2020, COL held online consultations with Focal Points from the region as part of the development of its new strategic plan (2021–2027).

- Learners from seven Commonwealth countries in Asia were among close to 6,000 participants in the four blue economy MOOCs offered by COL in 2020–2021.

- Working in collaboration with various institutions and experts from the region, COL has offered tailored training through a series of MOOCs to improve teachers’ capacity to respond to new demands for distance and online learning during COVID-19. The courses include Cybersecurity Training for Teachers, Mobile Learning with Multimedia (focusing on educational podcasting), OER for Online Learning and Teaching Mathematics with Technology, among others. These have

Each year, millions of girls worldwide are forced into early marriage for a variety of economic and cultural reasons. With COL’s support, 1,181 child marriages have been prevented, including 642 in Bangladesh.

– Preventing Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) through Open, Distance and Technology-Based Education (2019)
attracted over 2,795 participants from seven Commonwealth countries in Asia.

• Allama Iqbal Open University (Pakistan), Asia e University (Malaysia), Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (India), Bangladesh Open University, Fatima Jinnah Women University (Pakistan), Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (India), Netaji Subhas Open University (India), Odisha State Open University (India), the Open University of Sri Lanka, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Uttarakhand Open University (India), Wawasan Open University (Malaysia) and Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (India) are all members of the COL-led International Partnership of Distance and Online Learning for COVID-19.

• Dr Lily Chan, Professor Datuk Dr Asma Ismail, Professor Abtar Kaur and Professor Dr Zoraini Wati Abas (Malaysia), as well as Professor Vasudha Kamat and Ms Chetna Vijay Sinha (India), are mentors in COL’s CommonwealthWiseWomen programme, aimed at developing the leadership potential of women and girls in the Commonwealth.

• Over 36,800 learners from Asia joined the COL–Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative, gaining free and unlimited access to 4,000 online courses taught by highly reputed professors and mentors from top universities and companies around the world. They invested over 750,000 learning hours and earned close to 52,000 certificates of course completion, boosting their employability in the face of COVID-19.
Introduction

Bangladesh (population: 163,046,161 in 2019) has a primary net enrolment rate of 90.5% (2010) and a secondary school completion rate of 66.6% (2018). The Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB) is a state regulatory board responsible for monitoring and developing technical and vocational education and training at the secondary level throughout the country. The main public universities are the University of Dhaka, which offers teacher training, the University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh Agricultural University, the University of Chittagong and the University of Jahangirnagar. The Bangladesh Open University (BOU) provides distance learning for a wide range of students at the secondary and tertiary levels.

Internet connectivity is available to 18% (2016) of the population, and mobile-cellular subscriptions are at 102 (2019) per 100 people. Infrastructure is available for distance and technology-enabled learning and for expanding access to education and training in Bangladesh. The Ministry of Education’s Master Plan for ICT in Education in Bangladesh (2012–2021): Progressive Review Report 2019 continues to focus on modernising and revolutionising Bangladesh’s education system through the use of ICT and promoting technology-based teaching and learning. By leveraging ICT in different fields of education, government stakeholders and educators aim to enhance traditional teaching methods through technology-based teaching, learning tools and facilities.

BUILDING EDUCATION RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis has had an unprecedented impact on education. Shortly after the pandemic struck, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Primary and Mass Education adopted the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan and developed remote learning content, providing lessons through television, mobile phones, radio and the Internet.

COL BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Professor Datuk Dr Asma Ismail, President, Academy of Sciences, Malaysia, and Chairperson, Malaysian Qualifications Agency, represents Asia on COL’s Board of Governors.

COL FOCAL POINT

Mr Syed Ali Reja, Deputy Joint Secretary, Ministry of Education, Secondary & Higher Education Division, is COL’s Focal Point for Bangladesh.

NOTABLE MENTIONS

Professor M. Aminul Islam is a COL Honorary Fellow.

Professor Dr Abdul Mannan is a former Honorary COL Adviser.

The Honourable Nurul Islam Nahid, MP, is a former member of COL’s Board of Governors.
COL’s current work in Bangladesh is primarily in the areas of girls’ and women’s education and training, higher education, open and innovative schooling, OER policy development, technology-enabled learning, and technical and vocational skills development.

Bangladesh benefits from programmes under the aegis of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), and learners have also benefited from COL’s open online courses and other resources.

Education Sector Overview

OPEN/INNOVATIVE SCHOOLING (OIS)

Peer-to-peer (P2P) quality review between regional open schools is an important part of COL’s OIS mandate. COL initiated P2P activities to support the development of common criteria for reviewing quality at the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) in India and BOU’s Open School. The two institutions agreed to conduct quality assurance audits based on an inter-institutional audit framework. The NIOS team visited BOU in August 2018 and reviewed the quality assurance process of the BOU Open School using the common criteria developed jointly with the BOU team. Reciprocally, the BOU team visited NIOS in February–March 2019, reviewed the quality of NIOS’s open schooling processes, and validated the self-assessment report prepared by the NIOS team through presenting an exit report.

As well, with support from COL, a workshop was organised in May 2018 titled Gender Mainstreaming and Development of Gender Policy. The objective of the workshop was to develop a comprehensive gender policy for BOU’s Open School. NIOS provided three facilitators.

A total of 41 learners from Bangladesh participated in the OER for Online Learning (OER4OL) MOOC organised by COL in 2020.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Eleven representatives from the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh visited COL in August 2015 to discuss ways of forging stronger ties and sharing experiences in the areas of higher education and open and distance learning. The delegates, led by Professor Dr Mohammad Mohabbat Khan, highlighted the sharp increase in demand for higher education across Bangladesh and the pressing need to advance a comprehensive framework for teachers, students and communities alike.

In March 2016, a workshop titled Training of Trainers for Tutor Training was held at BOU. Thirty-five staff from seven schools were trained, and a Tutor Manual was developed. In April, a workshop titled Local Training Co-ordinators was completed successfully, with 34 participants from the Student Support Service Division and 12 BOU regional centres.

BOU was one of COL’s first partner institutions to offer the Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) programmes. Between 2015 and 2018, 538 persons enrolled in the programmes and 223 graduated.

CEMBA/CEMPA benefits from the oversight and direction of two governing bodies: an Executive Governing Board (EGB) and an Academic Board (AB). The EGB is the policy formulation body, which governs the programmes and has general control over its administration and performance, while the role of the AB is to plan, develop and review the courses and programmes and advise the EGB. BOU’s Vice Chancellor is invited to serve on the EGB, and Professor Dr M.A. Mannan, served as its member.

Mr Mostafa Azad Kamal, Associate Professor, School of Business, is a member of the AB.

Between 2015 and 2021, the AB met in Gaborone, Botswana in October 2015 and in Penang, Malaysia, in
May 2018; six meetings were organised via teleconference (in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2021). The EGB in-person meetings took place in Gaborone in October 2015 and in Penang in May 2018; the EGB hosted a virtual meeting in August 2016.

A tracer study on CEMBA/CEMPA graduates was completed in January 2021. Details from the qualitative portions of the study provided guidance on 2021 learning features that students are seeking from the programme.

Two high-level roundtables for vice chancellors and heads of ODL institutions were held in Malaysia — in March 2016 and May 2018. Representatives from 19 countries participated, including Bangladesh. Meetings were co-hosted by Asia e University.

As well, COL has supported BOU to develop an employability strategy for the School of Business, a marketing plan to encourage girls to enrol in BOU business programmes, and a competency-based curriculum for the Bachelor of Business Administration.

As part of a tripartite Commonwealth initiative with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the University of the West Indies Open Campus, the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) has repurposed and made available online certificate, diploma and undergraduate degree programmes in Youth Work Development to universities that are members of the Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work. BOU is a member of the consortium. COL’s Education Specialist: VUSSC facilitated sessions on institutional readiness and the Transnational Qualifications Framework at a technical workshop hosted by the partners in London, UK in June 2018.

In November 2019, BOU hosted a technical workshop for the Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work. It was part of a series designed to prepare partner institutions to develop and deliver the BA in Youth Work in blended and online environments. Workshop participants included BOU faculty, representatives from Bangladeshi Youth Training Centres and NGOs, students from the BOU Diploma in Youth Development Work, as well as delegates and youth work experts from India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and the UK. COL’s Education Specialist: VUSSC facilitated a session virtually.

The three offerings of COL’s Introduction to Sustainable Development in Business MOOC, organised in collaboration with the Open University of Mauritius in 2019–2020, attracted 110 participants from Bangladesh.
Skills Sector Overview

TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (TVSD)

COL has been working with Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) to offer vocational training on vermicomposting, poultry rearing, nurseries, batik printing and flower gardening to women from rural communities. A total of 12,000 women had participated in the training by 2020, enhancing their vocational skills and gaining opportunities to improve the quality of their lives.

TVSD has also worked with DAM to develop and pilot an online gender staff training course. This followed their completion of a gender audit and development of a Gender Action Plan in 2018. In September 2018, COL supported two workshops with DAM staff to develop the materials for the course, plan a delivery strategy, and provide training in the development of OER. Following the training, DAM piloted the course in its head office and seven regional offices.

As well, TVSD supported a situational analysis of the training needs within Bangladesh’s ready-made garment (RMG) industry and the perceived appropriateness of using eLearning for training. The analysis identified managerial training as the major gap and confirmed the need for a blended learning model to help fill this gap. In September 2019, COL’s Education Specialist: TVSD visited two factories to meet potential learners and industry partners. COL and DAM have now agreed to work with several RMG companies to pilot a model that combines workplace and online learning to train sewing machine operators for line chief and floor supervisor roles. The project aims to increase the number of Bangladeshi managers, reduce gender inequity in management, and safeguard more women against predicted job losses from automation of the industry.

Participants from Bangladesh have also benefited from the TVSD courses offered to global audiences, including the Facilitating Online course.

COL’s Skills Online initiative partnered with Better Future for Women (BFW) to promote skills among youths, especially women/girls and people with disabilities, including in Rohingya refugee camps. This unique partnership brought a range of over 4,000 curated courses on Udemy, an online platform, directly to target groups in Bangladesh. Over 1,700 young people have been chosen to access online courses aligned to employability and are further being offered mentorship and counselling support to gain employment and establish digital businesses in key sectors in Bangladesh. There have been over 3,000 certifications.

Helping a new mother from Bangladesh regain professional confidence

Nahid Sultana from Dhaka, Bangladesh had to leave her software development job at a private company to care for her newborn baby two years ago. As a new mother, she had to spend most of her time at home, taking care of her child, and feared that she might never be able to restart her career, which had been her only source of income. With support from COL and BFW, Nahid obtained an eLearning scholarship opportunity and learned new skills to stay relevant in the changing software development market.

“I have received certificates and now look forward to reaching out to my old employer and also to applying for new job opportunities,” she said. “I have regained my lost confidence to resume my career afresh.”
In February 2020, Skills Online released *Skills Development for Sustainable Livelihoods: An Overview of Four Case Studies*. The publication consolidates the findings from an overview of the skills demand, supply and gaps in four case study countries, including Bangladesh.

A total of 13,832 learners from Bangladesh have benefited from online courses in the framework of the COL–Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative, boosting their employability skills in the face of economic disruptions caused by COVID-19. The initiative has been implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Commerce, BOU and COL’s lead partner, BFW. On 27 April 2021, learners from the region who had earned certificates through the COL–Coursera programme were celebrated at a virtual convocation, where H.E. Tipu Munshi, MP, the Honourable Commerce Minister, made special remarks.

**TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED LEARNING (TEL)**

In Bangladesh, COL has supported the development of a draft national OER policy. In June 2019, BOU held a national consultation to review the draft. The consultation was organised jointly with the Ministry of Education and the Access to Information Programme of the Government of Bangladesh.

COL has also supported BOU to develop blended online courses for the Master of Public Health programme. A workshop on developing online courses was organised at BOU in March 2019. Another workshop was hosted in June 2019 to finalise the blended course designs. In December 2019, COL’s Education Specialist: eLearning shared a course design template and assisted BOU with enhancing the Moodle learning management system with interactive video and synchronous conferencing facilities.

COL’s Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) has been implemented in 15 schools across Bangladesh, in partnership with DAM. A workshop for training teachers to use the C-DELTA platform was organised by DAM in January 2019. A train-the-trainers workshop in January 2020 built the digital capacities of 30 teachers from both government and non-government colleges and teacher training centres to use the C-DELTA platform.

Dr Kazi A. Kalpoma, Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology (AUST), participated in the Technology-Enabled Learning Community of Practice meeting, while Mr Abu Nasar Md Tofail Hossain, BOU, and Mr G. F. Hamim, DAM, attended the C-DELTA Training of Trainers workshop, both held in New Delhi, India in December 2018. Since its launch in May 2018, the C-DELTA platform has had over 13,500 registered users, including from Bangladesh.

COL co-organised a workshop in June 2019 to develop an OER policy to be implemented across 13 educational institutions supported by DAM. As part of this policy, an OER repository has been developed to improve the management and sharing of the large number of educational resources developed by participating institutions. The OER policy has been implemented across the network of DAM institutions.

COL is supporting AUST in implementing the Digital Bangladesh 2021 Vision through TEL. A workshop on developing a draft policy for implementing TEL was held in April 2019. Another workshop, in June 2019, focused on blended course design using Moodle. In December 2019, a capacity-building workshop was organised for teachers on developing blended courses using Moodle.
In partnership with Athabasca University, Canada, COL has been offering two MOOCs — *Introduction to Technology-Enabled Learning (TEL)* and *Blended Learning Practice* — for teachers in secondary, post-secondary and vocational education across the Commonwealth and beyond. Learners from Bangladesh were among the 24,000 participants in these courses.

**GENDER**

The *Gender Profile 2017: Bangladesh* report is a compilation of current sex-disaggregated data for socioeconomic indicators, namely in the areas of health, education, economic participation, and decision making.

DAM used COL’s Gender Scorecard to develop its Gender Roadmap 2017–2025.


COL has been collaborating with the Centre for Mass Education and Science (CMES) to train vulnerable women and girls in hard-to-reach areas for better livelihoods. In the framework of this partnership, COL provided assistance with training girls in ICT through mobile app development. In collaboration with CMES, COL organised a train-the-trainers workshop in September 2018. A total of 25 participants were trained to conduct training programmes on mobile app development for underprivileged girls in Bangladesh. Most recently, COL trained 74 girls from nine rural villages in mobile app development using the MIT AI2 Companion, in collaboration with CMES.

**GIRLS INSPIRE**

GIRLS Inspire was initiated in July 2015 with generous support from Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Global Affairs Canada (GAC) to mobilise the power of ODL to provide secondary schooling and skills development training to women and girls who are prevented from attending schools by barriers such as early marriage, cultural norms and distance from schools.

Funding from GAC supported the implementation of the project Preventing Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) through Open, Distance and Technology-Based Education. It addressed the needs of girls, as they are disproportionately impacted due to discriminatory social norms, and it specifically focused on preventing child marriages.

> “By directly working with disadvantaged women and girls, we’ve learned that the main barrier in their disadvantaged situation is the social context of our country, and we need to focus on improving their social condition by engaging them with [wage-earning] activities and empowering them physically and mentally.”

— Ayesha Akter Jamy, Former Project Manager, CMES

COL’s local implementation partners were Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha (SSS) and CMES. Their community awareness-raising events reached over 200,000 community members in 90 communities on topics such as human rights, repression, reproductive health and the impact of CEFM. Initially, men and boys were reluctant to see the benefits of skills training for girls, but with more community sessions, they were able to acknowledge the value of education for women and girls. A total of 16,636 women and girls completed life-skills training and locally relevant vocational training and attended job fairs to learn about markets and employment. A total of 314 Memoranda of Understanding were signed with prospective employers; 5,688 participants applied for employment, and 5,505 were successful, while 1,846 girls opened bank accounts, and 2,902 girls obtained microloans.
The Director of the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) in Bangladesh, Mr Helal Uddin, visited Amtoli in November 2018 to witness first-hand COL’s GIRLS Inspire project. He observed activities such as skills training, awareness sessions and a performance by a girl’s travelling troupe. Hosted by CMES, the director also joined in a meeting with the women and girls, project staff and local support group members.

As a result of co-operation with COL, SSS developed an “equality, diversity and inclusion” policy, and CMES developed a gender policy. CMES also held two exchanges with advocates for GIRLS Inspire at regional and national forums attended by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and at gender forums attended by other local and international NGOs.

In February 2019, COL, in collaboration with Tanzania’s Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, co-hosted the GIRLS Inspire CEFM end-of-project meeting. It was attended by members of parliament and their representatives from nine countries, including Bangladesh. The outcomes of the project and lessons learned were shared, along with a roadmap for how to engage policy makers and partners to integrate this initiative into national programmes for preparing women and girls for employment and entrepreneurship. In Bangladesh, 642 child marriages were prevented, in part because of GIRLS Inspire, as shown in the final report prepared for GAC.

The project Reaching the Unreached (RtU) through ODL in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, which was funded by DFAT, provided secondary schooling and skills development training to women and girls who are prevented from attending school. The initiative mobilised the power of ODL to overcome barriers to education and economic participation and create enabling conditions for sustainable livelihoods.

In the framework of the RtU initiative, SSS used solar-powered boat schools and floating libraries, equipped with Internet-linked laptops, multimedia projectors and educational materials, docking at villages to provide on-board training. By March 2017, 13,578 girls from Bangladesh were trained in life and vocational skills. SSS also helped 1,602 girls to access microloans and 4,389 girls and women to gain income-generating opportunities. Without these boat
schools, these girls had no chance of an education or employment opportunities. SSS held evening shows on their education boats, reaching over 10,764 community members and addressing topics such as gender equality, the prevention of early marriage, the elimination of domestic violence and exploitation, and productive employment opportunities for women. The RtU Through ODL in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan project concluded in March 2017 and had reached over 54,000 girls and women in these countries, as shown in the final report prepared for DFAT.

Building on the success of this RtU model, the RtU Scaling Up Project: Training and Technology for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls in poor rural communities in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka was launched in July 2018 with further funding provided by DFAT. In the framework of this initiative, over 17,000 women and girls have been trained in Bangladesh, and close to 90,000 community members were reached through awareness-raising activities. Close to 8,500 women and girls gained employment, and over 7,000 benefited from internship opportunities. Close to 9,000 men and boys were trained in gender equality.

As well, partners in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka participated in three webinars using social media, creating databases and providing support during COVID-19.

**COMMONWEALTH EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CENTRE FOR ASIA (CEMCA)**

Established by COL in 1994 with the goal of effectively utilising educational resources for distance education, CEMCA is headquartered in New Delhi, India and works in eight Commonwealth countries of Asia: Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, India, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan, Singapore and Sri Lanka.

Mr Syed Ali Reja, Joint Secretary, Secondary and Higher Education Division, Ministry of Education, and Professor (Dr) M. A. Mannan, former Vice Chancellor, BOU, are members of the CEMCA Advisory Council.

CEMCA assisted BOU in developing and implementing a comprehensive OER policy to mainstream the use of OER in teaching and learning. Thirty-five academic leaders and 90 ODL professionals from BOU were trained during August and September 2015 to use and create OER materials.

CEMCA, in partnership with Rupantar, has supported the launching of web radio programmes in five community radio stations to strengthen skills development in rural communities.

In collaboration with BOU, CEMCA has been implementing the comprehensive project Impacting Education and Open Schooling through OER — Making a Difference among Learners. In the framework of this initiative, vocational education training (VET) integrated high schooling was developed, along with e-Bachelor in Education / e-Master in Education curricula for five courses. A total of 33 faculty members from BOU’s Open School and School of Education were trained, and their capacities in VET content development were enhanced. Apart from theory, hands-on experience with ICT-based and open and distance education systems was provided, with a view to implementing an OER-based blended vocational education programme. An OER repository was developed for BOU using DSpace. In January 2020, CEMCA organised a two-day workshop
in collaboration with BOU titled *Impacting Education and Open Schooling through OER* for 31 tutors and faculty members who are engaged in providing tutorials for learners in the Higher Secondary Certificate and Education programmes (BEd/MEd). Following the workshop, the university agreed on policy recommendations for BOU, such as exchanging VET materials among regional open universities to achieve cost-effectiveness for the planned VET programme. In August 2020, CEMCA and BOU jointly organised a virtual workshop to facilitate video content development.

Integrating Community Radio with Skills to ensure TL2L (Transformation of Listener to Learner) is another project implemented by CEMCA in Bangladesh. In 2018–2019, CEMCA engaged five community radio stations and one web radio station in Bangladesh to increase awareness amongst youths about avenues for developing skills and thereby finding sustainable livelihoods. Community radio stations have been trained to conduct field activities, such as career counselling, job melas and skills camps.

As well, in the framework of the Integrated Higher Education Model, a Quality Assurance Toolkit for ODL Institutions was finalised at a workshop in February 2019. Hosted by the e-Learning Centre, University of Hyderabad, it brought together 24 participants from 12 higher education institutions in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. Two representatives from BOU participated in the workshop.

BOU also requested CEMCA’s support with an online capacity-building programme for their faculty: Development of Outcome-Based Self-Learning Materials. The programme was conducted in October 2020. Over 80 faculty members from various BOU schools actively participated in the four-day programme.

Most recently, CEMCA organised a *Development of Outcome-Based Self-Learning Materials* workshop for more than 80 BOU faculty members.
PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING (PCF)

PCF8 was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in November 2016. COL sponsored ten participants from Bangladesh to attend the forum, including Dr Zobaida Akhtar of BOU, Hassan Banu of CMES, Professor Dr Md. Kabirul Islam of Daffodil International University, Hurain Jannat of CMES, Professor Mostafa Azad Kamal of BOU, Mr Shahnewaz Khan of DAM, Professor Dr Mohammad A. Mannan of BOU, Mr Suprakash Paul of SSS, Mr Mohammad Rezwan, also of SSS, and Mr Abdus Sattar of BOU.

COL also sponsored 13 delegates from Bangladesh to attend PCF9 in Edinburgh, UK in September 2019. As well, four Bangladeshi participants joined the TEL Partners meeting, three attended the Open and Innovative Schooling workshop, one delegate participated in the Higher Education meeting, and there was one participant at the TVSD workshop; all these gatherings were hosted by COL in Edinburgh in the framework of PCF9.

REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS ON OER

COL organised six Regional Consultations on OER leading up to the 2nd World Open Educational Resources Congress, hosted by the Government of Slovenia in Ljubljana in partnership with UNESCO and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The Asian Regional Consultation was held in Kuala Lumpur in December 2016. Ms Shahnaz Samad, the COL Focal Point for Bangladesh, and Professor Mustafa Kamal Azad, BOU, were in attendance.

REGIONAL MEETINGS OF COL FOCAL POINTS

Between 2018 and 2020, COL’s Focal Points from Asia met twice for regional consultations. The first meeting took place in December 2018 in New Delhi, India, and the second meeting was held virtually in May 2020. Mr Syed Ali Reja, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Education, represented Bangladesh at both meetings.
COL’S INTERNATIONAL MOOCs


In 2020–2021, COL’s VUSSC initiative offered four MOOCs on the blue economy in partnership with the University of Seychelles. Learners from Bangladesh were among the nearly 6,000 participants in these courses.

A total of 118 learners from Bangladesh have enrolled in the AgMOOC courses offered since 2015.

The Digital Literacy Lab for Educators MOOC, offered by COL in September 2020, had 1,685 enrolments, including from Bangladesh.

Partnerships

Partnerships are fundamental to COL’s work. Strategic partnerships allow COL to broaden its reach and engage at global, regional and national levels, while implementation partners support COL’s work in communities and institutions across Commonwealth Member States. Partners include multilateral organisations, regional bodies, national governments, government agencies, foundations, civil society organisations, public and private (not-for-profit) institutions and the private sector. COL partnerships assist in improving and extending teaching and learning services to people in the developing Commonwealth.

COL’s partners in Bangladesh include:

• Ministry of Education
• Access to Information (a2i) Programme
• Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology
• Bangladesh Open University
• Better Future for Women
• Centre for Mass Education in Science
• Dhaka Ahsania Mission
• Rupantar
• Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha

Looking Ahead: 2027

Most Member States will accelerate efforts to address the learning deficit that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused. They will also need innovative solutions to achieve the targets of SDG4 by 2030. COL’s experience shows that ODL, OER and TEL can be leveraged to increase access to quality education, skills development and lifelong learning at lower costs. COL will provide support to ministries and institutions to develop enabling policies, build resilient systems and enhance human resource capacity for formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Going forward, COL will:

i) build on its expertise in ODL, OER and TEL to play a more influential role in national policy development and implementation;
ii) invest in innovations and research;
iii) support the digital transformation of institutions and organisations;
iv) develop skills for employment and entrepreneurship; and
v) promote gender equality.
Forum partners from over 60 countries believe that it is possible to significantly accelerate progress towards the aim and targets of SDG4 by prioritising the following collective actions now:

1. **Accomplishment at scale**
   Mobilise an emergency response to ensure that all children in the Commonwealth, including girls, learners with different abilities, and learners from vulnerable and marginalised communities, experience a quality education focused on accomplishment, knowledge exchange and the continued ability to learn;

2. **Skills for productive lives**
   Urgently create learning opportunities for marginalised, excluded, vulnerable and out-of-school young people to build skills for leading a productive life, embracing technology to enhance employability, entrepreneurship and confidence, and bridging accessible formal, non-formal and informal education;

3. **Creating new digital dividends**
   Develop new, innovative, flexible modes of education to foster creativity, imagination and peer knowledge exchange, increase reach and ensure no one is left behind, through the use of appropriate media and delivery, including blended approaches to digital learning;

4. **Teachers as skilled agents of change**
   Teachers and teacher educators are the main agents of change for quality education and can be supported to catalyse action in their schools, communities and colleges as respected professionals who model lifelong learning.

To do this we propose:

Creating **alternative, flexible and technology-enabled pathways into teaching** to resolve the shortage of skilled and motivated teachers;

Expanding low-cost, highly effective ways to **support school-based teacher professional development** to build change capacity and capability within regional and national educational systems.

5. **Positively disrupt higher education**
   Support innovation for quality higher education; **strengthen the technology-enabled learning ecosystem** throughout the Commonwealth, including the scope to develop professional skills, recognition, validation and verification of experiential and prior learning through micro-credentialing and blockchain technology; expand the reach of open education for dispersed audiences; and improve barrier-free access to tertiary education.

6. **Challenging assessment**
   Radically relook at assessment models: build a culture of assessment to support employability and micro-entrepreneurship.

Our ambition is to achieve this through:

- **Bold, inclusive collaboration**;
- **Bringing together the diverse groups of critical thinkers, innovators and practitioners who can collaboratively make change happen by delivering quality education and lifelong learning for all**;
- **Making greater use of data, evidence and storytelling to galvanise political will for enabling policies and well-resourced implementation plans**;
- **Sustaining the momentum**;
- **Building an active network of learning, support and action, starting now**;
- **Sustaining and building our momentum for change, we aim to bring our key commitments to the fore of the policy agenda through the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and PCF10**.

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**PCF9 Edinburgh Statement**

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**COL IN THE COMMONWEALTH: 2015–2021**

28
LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

COL is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.

VISION: To be the foremost global agency that promotes learning for sustainable development

MISSION: To help governments and institutions to expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using open, distance and technology-based approaches

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