The Commonwealth of Learning’s support to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in Africa

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is the only international intergovernmental agency that focuses exclusively on using technology to expand the scope and scale of human learning. It operates on the premise that knowledge is the key to individual freedom and to cultural, social and economic development.

COL helps Governments to develop policies that make innovation sustainable and to build systems or applications that expand learning. It works in partnership with other international and bilateral organisations working on the MDGs. These include: the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the U.K.’s Department for International Development (DFID), New Zealand’s Agency for International Development (NZAID), the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), the African Virtual University (AVU), the regional Development Banks and The World Bank.

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Africa faces enormous challenges – war, extreme poverty, an epidemic of HIV/AIDS, malnutrition and illiteracy. Of all the areas of the world, this continent of more than 620 million people will benefit most from progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

There is a tsunami every month in Africa. But its deadly tide of disease and hunger steals silently and secretly across the continent. It is not dramatic, and it rarely makes the television news. Its victims die quietly, out of sight, hidden in their pitiful homes. But they perish in the same numbers.

The U.K. has taken a leadership position in addressing the African problem with its Commission for Africa’s thoughtful recommendations, the focus on HIV/AIDS during its European Union Presidency and the priority put on improving education in the developing world outlined in the recent “Putting the World into World-Class Education” strategy from the Department for Education and Skills.

When the African Ministers of Education met in Dar es Salaam in December 2002, they deliberated on the education challenges facing Africa and noted that Open and Distance Learning should be considered an important strategy in addressing these challenges.

COL’s CONTRIBUTION to the MDGs in Africa

1. **ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER**
   - Literacy project in Zambia
   - Kitchen gardens and nutrition initiative in Kenya
   - Solar cooking project in Nigeria
   - Agricultural research and rural radio in Cameroon, Ghana and Uganda
   - Community radio in several countries
   - Expanding COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme to Southern Africa
   - Supporting NGOs engaged in community education

2. **ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION**
   - Support for Schools without teacher training
   - Open school for primary students in Mozambique
   - Teacher training in Nigeria, Sub-Saharan Africa
   - Southern Africa Teacher Training (STAMP 2000+)
   - African schoolnets
   - Out-of-school rural youth programme in Mozambique
   - Distance delivery enhancement in Namibia
   - Educational radio for primary students in South Africa

3. ** PROMOTE GENDER, EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN**
   - Media development for women in agro-food processing in Ghana

4. **HEALTH GOALS**
   - Use of community videos to address HIV/AIDS stigma and prevention issues in The Gambia, Swaziland, Sierra Leone and South Africa.
   - Use of solar-powered community radio to address health issues in Northern Uganda
   - Creation of health promotion radio programmes to be available as open source content for radio stations

5. **ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**
   - Library of resources and documents on the environment
   - Creation of health promotion radio programmes to be available as open source content for radio stations

6. **DEVELOP A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT**
   - Creating partnerships with governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other development agencies
   - Creation of health promotion radio programmes to be available as open source content for radio stations
   - COL’s Commonwealth Executive Masters Programmes in Public Administration and Business Administration
   - Educate public servants in Africa

7. **WHAT is ODL?**
   - Open learning describes policies and practices that permit entry to learning with as few barriers as possible.
   - Distance learning is the delivery of learning or training to people who are separated, mostly by time and space, from those who are teaching and training.
   - Both are encompassed in the term open and distance learning (ODL).

Some of the advantages of ODL include:
- **FLEXIBILITY.** ODL can be integrated with traditional approaches to education to create flexible learning. It can also operate independently.
- **ADAPTABLE.** ODL employs a range of media and technologies, including radio, teleconferencing, video, audio and computers.
- **REACH.** ODL can reach marginalized and under-represented groups, whether their barriers to education are social, political or geographical.
- **CONSISTENCY.** ODL can be uniformly conducted at scale.

ODL can widen access to education and raise the quality of education at the same time. This explains the powerful potential of ODL for achievement of the MDGs.

COL IS HELPING COUNTRIES INTRODUCE NEW APPROACHES AND TECHNOLOGIES IN SUCH A WAY AS TO MAKE THEM SELF-REPLICATING

Learning and Development

There is a strong link between learning and development. By and large, the more that citizens of a country have learned, the more developed that country is. People need to learn across a broad front and that includes learning to be, learning to know, learning to do and learning to live together. While the correlation between learning and development is far from perfect, we do know that more educated populations have greater life expectancy and better health than do people in less educated countries.