

46th National Student Commonwealth Forum 2018

Video Message

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Greetings from the Commonwealth of Learning. Did you know that long before you were born, the Commonwealth Heads of Government met for CHOGM in Vancouver and decided to establish the Commonwealth of Learning? And we have been in beautiful British Columbia for the last thirty years.

As you know the Commonwealth is a very diverse group of 53 Member States spread across the globe—from the Pacific to Asia, Africa, Europe and the Caribbean. Some of these are large states like India with a population of 1.3 billion and small ones such as Nauru with just 11,000 people. What is really interesting is that 60% of the Commonwealth is under 30—so it's a young Commonwealth and you young people are our future.

The Commonwealth promotes peace, democracy, good governance and rule of law. These values are enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter. Each member, however large or small has an equal voice and the Commonwealth works by consensus. Collectively the 53 states have 'soft power' in global affairs. Most of the members, were former British colonies, and share a common language, English, and similar legal and educational systems. Because of these commonalities, studies suggest that it costs about 20% less to trade with fellow members than with non-Commonwealth countries. Another benefit of being in the Commonwealth is that you can win medals in the Commonwealth Games—Canada did very well with 82 medals in the Commonwealth Games held in the Gold Coast earlier this month!

Just last week 46 Heads of Commonwealth countries met in London for CHOGM 2018 to discuss the way forward towards our common future. They adopted the Blue Charter to call for coordinated global action to protect our oceans. They called for 12 years of education for all girls and boys. While we take this for granted in Canada, sadly there are 35 million children not in school across the Commonwealth. Heads also highlighted to role of youth in building peace and countering violent extremism.

The Commonwealth has three intergovernmental organisations to address these challenges: two, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation, are based in London. The third and the youngest is the Commonwealth of Learning. COL's mission is to harness the potential of technologies for expanding access to education and training. COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development. This means that learning must lead to: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation. Let me demonstrate this with examples of our work.

First, how does COL support economic growth? COL's Commonwealth Executive MBA programme offered in 11 countries is a high quality and cost-effective distance learning programme. Raymond Loh from Malaysia completed this programme in his early fifties and started a relocation service with a presence in 40 countries. COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers' project has lifted thousands of farmers out of poverty in 11 countries. Women in India learnt agriculture and enterprise development skills using basic mobile phones. Every dollar invested has generated assets worth \$9.

Second, what is COL's contribution to social inclusion?

COL developed Aptus a low-cost offline virtual classroom that provides learners in remote locations with access to digital resources. As you know in Tonga, Cyclone Gita destroyed the schools so COL sent Aptus devices loaded with thousands of quality resources to the island nation for restoring classes.

Even today we find a wide prevalence of early child and forced marriage across the Commonwealth. Thanks to the government of Canada, COL is training girls in five countries for employment and entrepreneurship. In the last two years, more than 35,000 girls have been trained, nearly 7000 have new sources of income and over 400 child marriages have been averted.

Third, environmental sustainability is a central concern for the Commonwealth, particularly the small states. COL is supporting the development of courses on the Blue Economy and the Green Teacher to address this issue. Did you know that the carbon footprint of a distance learning student is only one third compared to that of their campus-based counterparts?

These are some examples of how we promote learning for sustainable development. When you go in for your model CHOGM, can you think of how we can reach the unreached; how we can prevent our small island states from sinking into oblivion; what innovations can we propose for helping our people and planet?

How can each one of us contribute to a better Commonwealth? Good luck with your deliberations.