learning for development
Knowledge is like a baobab tree — one person’s arms are not enough to encompass it.

AFRICAN PROVERB
I am pleased to write this preface to introduce the Commonwealth of Learning’s Three-Year Plan for 2006-2009, entitled *Learning for Development*. The previous Three-Year Plan (2003–2006) was entitled *Building Capacity in Open and Distance Learning*, reflecting the focus in the previous triennium. In addressing the needs of Commonwealth governments, we have aligned ourselves with the international development agenda and will build on our experience and expertise in open, distance and technology-enhanced learning to expand the scope and scale of learning for development.

The 2006–2009 Plan further sharpens the focus of COL’s work by using an operational framework defined by sectors and results. It breaks the international development agenda into three broad sectors: Education, Learning for Livelihoods, and Human Environment. In each sector, in light of the needs of individual countries, COL pursues results in the form of policies, systems, and models and materials.

The proposed plan will enable COL to do more to enhance learning for development than could normally be expected in view of its modest resources. This impact will be achieved through the selection of powerful models for scaling up learning. These approaches can be readily transferred from country to country so that governments and their institutions can maximise the contribution of learning to development. We will leverage our resources by forging productive partnerships with ministries, institutions and individuals and by encouraging “south-south” collaboration and exchange.

This plan will serve as a tool to help COL fulfil its mission and mandate over the next three years. I am confident that it will contribute to the efforts of Commonwealth countries to bring development to all their citizens, and I commend it to Commonwealth governments for their support.

*Lewis Perinbam, O.C.*  
*Chair, Board of Governors*  
*Commonwealth of Learning*
The Commonwealth of Learning has conducted the most comprehensive planning exercise in its history in developing this plan for 2006–2009. It consulted extensively with stakeholders across the Commonwealth, commissioned environmental scans from all regions and contracted an external evaluation of its work.

These inputs indicated that COL should now:

• continue to focus on the global development agenda and “south-south” cooperation, taking a long-term view;

• pursue fewer activities but for longer periods and improve the monitoring and evaluation of its work;

• intensify its links with governments and strengthen partnerships with multilateral bodies;

• maintain a balance between policy advice and implementation;

• foster the responsible autonomy of staff but strengthen teamwork; and

• maintain intellectual and technical leadership and sharpen its brand image.

COL’s Board of Governors has responded to these imperatives with this plan. This statement of COL’s strategy will be the basis for discussions with individual Commonwealth governments prior to the 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers to be held in Cape Town, South Africa, 11–14 December 2006. Those discussions will complete this high-level plan with a set of country action proposals linking COL’s overall strategy to each nation’s priorities in an operational manner. At the conference, COL will request pledges of financial support from each government in order to carry out this work over the next three years.

The plan is entitled Learning for Development. COL starts from Amartya Sen’s portrayal of development as freedom, expressed concretely in the widely agreed agenda for bettering the human condition that includes the UN’s Millennium Development Goals, the Goals of Education for All (Dakar) and the Commonwealth objectives of peace, democracy, equality and good ➤
knowledge is the royal road to freedom

governance. Expanding human learning is essential to the achievement of every element in this agenda and knowledge is the royal road to freedom. Conventional teaching methods cannot cope with the scale of the challenge, but technology – old and new – harnessed to aid learning and share knowledge can.

COL achieves impact by promoting powerful models for applying technology to learning for various purposes. It has helped countries create wider access to schooling, improve the health of their citizens, increase farmers’ incomes, and link learning to better livelihoods. Continuing analysis and refinement of these models ensure that they can be transferred intelligently from one country to another.

Although it is a tiny intergovernmental body, not a donor agency, COL has helped Commonwealth countries give millions of people new opportunities to learn over the two decades of its existence. The secret of its success is to empower governments, institutions and individuals to develop learning systems themselves without always relying on donors. This plan extends that process of empowerment.

Sir John Daniel
President and CEO
Commonwealth of Learning
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the strength of a tree lies in its roots...

DUTCH PROVERB
“COL [is]...a very valuable resource...knowledgeable and committed...a consummate networking agency...sensitive to the environments in which it works...an organisation of integrity.”

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT
A COMMUNICATIONS REVOLUTION

“The world is caught in a communications revolution, the effects of which will go beyond those of the industrial revolution of two centuries ago. Then the great advance was the invention of machines to multiply the potency of men’s muscles. Now the great new advance is the invention of machines to multiply the potency of men’s minds. As the steam engine was to the first revolution, so the computer is to the second.”

Lord Geoffrey Crowther at the Inaugural Ceremony of the UK Open University, 1969

Rewind to the 1980s

Several trends converged in the creation of COL. Demand for education at all levels continued to increase through the 1980s. As the mass media penetrated societies ever more widely and the computing revolution gained momentum, Commonwealth governments grew enthusiastic about the benefits of using technology in education and training. In various countries, open universities were already demonstrating that, with economies of scale, wider access to post-secondary education was compatible with higher quality and lower costs.

Commonwealth Heads of Government created COL at their 1987 meeting to foster the application of technology to learning. How was this to be done? Should COL prepare media-based courses and programmes for the Commonwealth or should it help countries to apply educational technology to their own needs? The Planning Committee opted firmly for the second approach.

Four decades ago, this visionary statement marked a seminal event in the application of technology to learning. The remarkable success of the UK Open University, which pioneered the large-scale use of modern communications media for distance education, helped set the stage for the establishment of the Commonwealth of Learning.

To set the context for COL’s 2006–2009 Plan, we look back over two decades and revisit some basic questions. Why did Commonwealth Heads of Government create the Commonwealth of Learning? Are those reasons still valid? Is COL’s mission still important?
The Revolution Continues

Have COL’s aims and methods stood the test of time? Has educational technology fulfilled the expectations of the 1980s? And if it has, can COL claim some credit? Answering these questions is particularly important for developing countries in four areas: higher education; teacher training; schooling; and non-formal learning.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The large-scale application of technology to learning began at the post-secondary level because success there was more likely to stimulate adoption at other levels than the other way round. For a number of Commonwealth countries, launching an open university was their first major foray into educational technology.

Higher distance learning has grown at an accelerating pace in the last two decades. The Commonwealth’s eight mega-universities, with aggregate enrolments now totalling nearly 4 million, are its most striking manifestation. The oldest mega-university is the University of South Africa (UNISA), which began teaching at a distance in 1946 and now has a central role in the development of the new South Africa. COL’s formal recognition of the quality of India’s Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), by designating it as a Centre of Excellence in 1993, helped to establish its credibility and influence in the region. It now has over 1 million students. Such universities are not distinguished by size alone. In national ratings of 100 institutions, the UK Open University ranks first for student satisfaction and fifth for the quality of its teaching. Canada’s Athabasca University topped ratings of student satisfaction in Alberta.

The Commonwealth also has a tradition of dual-mode institutions that combine distance teaching with campus instruction. The University of the West Indies, the University of the South Pacific and various universities in Australia and New Zealand have operated in this way for many years. Today almost all Commonwealth universities are offering some programmes at a distance and many are exploring eLearning. The University of Mauritius is just one Commonwealth university that gives credit to COL for helping it become a dual-mode institution.

These developments have had a huge impact on access. In South Africa, 4 out of every 10 students enrolled in higher education study at a distance. In India, distance learning accounts for 24% of university students and government policy aims to raise this to 40%. Distance education has been particularly helpful for women. In South Africa, they make up 61% of distance students compared with 53% of contact students, and in India women make up 35% of distance students compared with 29% of contact students.

TEACHER TRAINING

Recruiting and training teachers is the major obstacle to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education. Africa alone must recruit and train 4 million new teachers in the next 10 years to reach that goal. What has distance education contributed here?

Teacher education at a distance goes back to the 1960s and 1970s when correspondence programmes started in many developing countries. Most provided initial training to under-qualified and untrained teachers in schools and gave opportunities for school leavers or recent graduates. Industrialised countries used multi-media distance education for teachers to learn new approaches.

In the last 20 years, teacher education at a distance has expanded its purposes and audiences, improved its effectiveness, and harnessed information and
communications technologies (ICTs) in a steadily more sophisticated way.

In the 1980s, countries such as India and Nigeria carried out programme reforms to raise the quality of teaching qualifications obtained through correspondence education. During the 1990s, many initiatives for the continuing education of teachers emerged alongside programmes of initial training, with the open universities playing a major role.

Diversification continues today to address emerging training needs (such as the use of computers in teaching), environmental issues, special education and counselling/guidance. Important improvements came in the 1980s and 1990s through the development of effective self-instructional materials, combined with learner support systems. More recently there has been a focus on school-based activities and the encouragement of collaborative reflective practice to develop teaching competencies. Pioneering work is being done in Sri Lanka, South Africa and India.

Communications media for teacher education have evolved with the technology. In the 1980s, audio and video material supplemented print. By the 1990s, satellites were in use in the South Pacific, the Caribbean and India, while South Africa began using interactive radio. Today self-learning materials are presented in CD/DVD formats and computer use is growing fast in developing countries, thanks to links between governments and the corporate sector to make hardware more available to teachers.

Teacher education at a distance is now a vibrant activity. The numbers being trained are impressive: hundreds of thousands in Africa and over 1 million in India. COL has contributed substantially to this trend by helping to increase capacity for distance learning in countries as diverse as The Gambia, India, Lesotho, Nigeria and Sri Lanka. Recently it worked with Zambia to formulate a strategy for using open and distance learning (ODL) and ICTs in both pre- and in-service teacher development. Teacher education administrators from all countries of the Commonwealth have received support through an annual COL-sponsored workshop series in Singapore. Some of COL’s most recent work has focused on raising standards by developing Commonwealth quality assurance guidelines with partners in Asia and Africa.

SCHOOLING

Achieving universal primary education is a vital development goal. Can educational technology address this goal directly as well as through its application to teacher education?

There have been government correspondence courses for schoolchildren since the first half of the 20th century in sparsely populated Commonwealth countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Today alternative schooling – the delivery of school-level education through ODL – is growing rapidly in the developing Commonwealth. As countries strive towards achieving universal primary education, many more youngsters are finishing primary school. Sadly, most of them have little chance of getting into secondary school. There are simply not enough secondary schools or the trained teachers to staff them.

Ministries of education are therefore turning to alternative means of secondary schooling.
Open schooling uses high-quality self-instructional materials coupled with networks of local centres staffed with capable facilitators trained to support the learners. Common curricula across school systems make it easier to achieve economies of scale.

Recent successes in Asia and Africa show that open schooling is a feasible alternative to classroom education. It increases access to schooling in a timely, efficient and cost-effective manner and is especially good for reaching girls, women and other disadvantaged groups that have difficulty accessing conventional schooling on a full-time basis. For example, there are now some 1.5 million children enrolled in the open schooling system in school-level and technical/vocational training courses in India alone. COL has worked with India’s National Institute for Open Schooling (NIOS) to update its production processes for quality learning materials and to extend awareness of the potential of open schooling in India. As a result, NIOS is now working with state governments to establish 14 state open schools across India.

Established in the late 1990s, both the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) and the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) are now rapidly adopting ICTs to instruct and support their many thousand students.

More and more countries are exploring open schooling and strengthening existing systems or implementing new systems to deliver schooling in alternative ways. COL stresses “south-south” cooperation in open schooling given the common interests and growing expertise in Africa and South Asia. As a result, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and Kenya have sought the help of COL, NIOS, NAMCOL and BOCODOL in establishing new open schools, whilst Zambia and Bangladesh have requested assistance in improving the quality and scope of their existing alternative schooling offerings.

**NON-FORMAL LEARNING: LEARNING FOR DEVELOPMENT (AGRICULTURE AND HEALTH)**

The earlier examples of higher education, teacher training and schooling involve the application of technology to expand and enhance the reach of the formal education system. However, the basic development agenda of improving health and reducing poverty and hunger calls for learning on a
massive scale, with the focus on improving livelihoods and fostering a healthy population. While the content of learning in these areas is necessarily very locality specific, economies of scale have been achieved by sharing similar models for technology use and learner support.

Improving livelihoods in rural areas is central to world poverty reduction. These livelihoods are mostly farming-dependent, and agricultural extension is still largely based on face-to-face communication and demonstration. However, since the Green Revolution of the 1960s, communications technology has also been applied to agricultural extension.

Radio remains the most important medium for communicating with the rural populations of developing countries. This is particularly true in Africa where there were already 65 million radio receivers a decade ago. More recently video has become an important medium for agricultural education, the basic principle being to empower agricultural extension officers by teaching them camera and video production skills for use at the local level. This supports government policies of crop diversification among small-plot farmers in response to changing patterns of trade.

New tools for poverty reduction are also now available. ICT kiosks are spreading into the villages of India, although evaluation of the early experiences showed that they had been introduced without the adequate involvement of local people. To correct this omission, COL developed its Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3 Farmers) programme. The programme combines four principles: social mobilisation of villagers; use of commercial ICT kiosks; organisation of information providers into consortia; and integration of commercial banks into projects for improving the rural economy. Initial results suggest this could be a self-replicating model that will spread from village to village. Most of the farmers involved are women.

To foster healthy living, COL has worked with World Health Organization (WHO) country offices to identify local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are committed to improving the health of disadvantaged groups. By supplying ODL skills with cost-effective audio and video production technology, COL enables the NGOs to reach all levels of society with culturally and linguistically appropriate health information through radio, television and village cinema events.

COL has worked in this way with NGOs in South Africa, Swaziland, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Sri Lanka.

**Conclusion**

This review of accelerating use of educational technology since the late 1980s suggests that Commonwealth Heads of Government were right to anticipate its importance by establishing COL in 1987. Since then, COL’s contribution to the effective use of distance learning and ICTs at all levels in many Commonwealth countries has been widely acclaimed.

As more governments have realised the importance of distance education, COL’s work has evolved to reflect their changing priorities. Whereas advocacy and policy development for ODL was a demanding task in the early days, COL now helps governments to implement and maintain ODL systems. The earlier preoccupation with formal education has expanded to a broader concern for learning for development that also gives attention to health and livelihoods. With distance learning well established in higher education, COL now focuses particular attention on open schooling at the secondary level.
the apple cannot be stuck back on the Tree of Knowledge; once we begin to see, we are doomed and challenged to seek the strength to see more, not less

ARTHUR MILLER
COL will be under pressure to accelerate its efforts and expand its operations in order to serve the international development agenda effectively.
Moving Forward
How will the world in which COL operates change in the coming years? What is the context in which governments will set priorities and how will the continuing evolution of technology affect its application to learning?

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

From COL’s perspective, the increasing disparities between developing countries are a disturbing geopolitical trend. Fortunately, India (the Commonwealth’s largest country) seems set to continue robust economic growth that will make major inroads in poverty reduction and generate extra resources to expand education and training in the coming years. But it is harder to be optimistic about the future of some of the Commonwealth’s smaller states that are faced with one or more of the challenges of civil strife, fragile democracy, rising sea levels, high HIV infection rates, deteriorating natural environments and the collapse of traditional cash crops.

Nearly all developing countries, however, share the phenomenon of young population profiles with median ages between 20 and 25 years. The pressure for more education, training and jobs for young people can only become more acute. This will intensify governments’ interest in: developing alternative methods of education; making more effective links between schooling, training and livelihoods; encouraging private investment in education; and establishing regulatory frameworks, especially at the tertiary level.

In the international arena there are conflicting signals. Development agencies, preoccupied by the world’s many conflicts, are giving less attention to the largely peaceful Commonwealth, making COL’s philosophy of promoting development without donors timely. Although the spirit of multilateralism may be beginning a comeback, the Doha round of trade talks, which held the promise of new trading opportunities for farmers in poor countries, is currently stalled.

TECHNOLOGY AND LEARNING

Two continuing trends will ensure that information and communications technologies (ICTs) play an expanding role in the life of developing countries. Connectivity will continue to increase as countries adopt more liberal regulatory frameworks and telecom monopolies face more competition.
Meanwhile, the price of electronic hardware continues to fall, one result of which is that 80% of Indian families now have access to television. The overall cost of software may also fall dramatically as the Free/Libre Open Source Software (FLOSS) movement continues to gain ground.

In economic terms, the communications revolution will have its greatest impact in the developing world through the spread of mobile telephony. Cell phones will provide greater benefits to ordinary people than laptop computers will. At the same time, an easing of regulations may give a boost to community mass media (both radio and TV) that will have beneficial effects on development. The growth of “eLearning” will have a transformative effect on open and distance learning that may be primarily semantic and harmful at first, but more profound and positive in the longer term.

Already the growing use of eLearning as a synonym for “open and distance learning” poses two challenges. First, the international development agencies often combine conservative views on educational methods with scepticism about the value of hi-tech solutions in developing countries. Just when they have realised that mass open and distance learning (ODL) is the only way to scale up access to education beyond the primary level, the renaming of ODL as eLearning is unhelpful because it makes the activity sound more electronic than it really is – even in industrialised countries.

Second, the disappointing track record of “pure” eLearning (i.e., online learning) in the industrialised world risks creating doubts about the effectiveness of ODL generally, just at a time when traditional mass ODL systems are beginning to have a major impact in developing countries. So far, online learning in the richer countries has rarely contributed either to open learning or to distance learning because many online enrolments are simply campus students seeking more flexible study timetables. Far from extending access and reducing costs, pure eLearning may, in such circumstances, actually curtail access for remote students and increase overall costs by adding new options for campus students without compensatory savings.

Nevertheless, COL must engage resolutely with eLearning because in the longer term it holds great promise for developing countries, as well as being a powerful symbol of the bridging of the digital divide. At present, the promise of eLearning lies less in the online delivery of materials than in the possibility of developing those materials through international online collaboration. COL has already done more than any other agency to foster the international sharing of ODL materials, but now – in the spirit of the FLOSS movement – it will be possible to create, distribute and adapt open educational resources much more easily. This will help to make the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth a vibrant reality that could serve as an example for larger states.

WHY COL IS NEEDED

In this era of burgeoning information and communications media, COL is needed more than ever. Its role is to help countries and institutions make sense of the ICT revolution and use technology appropriately in their education and training systems and to expand learning generally.

COL has experience of a wide array of applications of technology to learning for many purposes and in diverse contexts. It has captured this experience in a number of models that help to identify the local factors necessary to ensure the success of any new activity that brings together people, institutions and technology. This allows countries to make judicious choices.
VIEWs FROM THE COMMONWEALTH

The Commonwealth is a very heterogeneous association. Its 53 Member States – even those within the same region – show diversity on many dimensions. COL’s strength – and its challenge – is to develop country action proposals that respond to local needs as expressed by national governments. COL will articulate country action proposals for 2006–2009, in consultation with each government, to complement this plan.

Another of COL’s strengths is to nurture regional networks and partnerships that make its work in each region more than the sum of the country action proposals. Some such work, notably the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, brings together all regions in a common initiative.

To inform its planning, COL commissioned environmental scans from the various regions of the Commonwealth. It is impossible to capture here the richness of this material (which totalled some 70,000 words), but some of the main themes are summarised below.

Pan-Commonwealth

Four major concerns recur across the Commonwealth:

• First, over half the population of the Commonwealth is under the age of 30 years. In many countries, the proportion will hit 60–70% by 2015. Helping hundreds of millions of young people secure sustainable livelihoods is the central challenge of development.

• Second, Commonwealth citizens account for 60% of the 40 million people in the world who live with HIV and all nine of the most seriously affected countries are in the Commonwealth. This is a development disaster with ramifications across all areas of national life.

• Third, the education and training of women is among the top three priority concerns for most member governments. Distance education has proven particularly helpful to girls and women at all levels and contributes substantially to gender equality.

• Fourth, bridging the digital divide emerged as an important aim at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in Malta in 2005. COL is the Commonwealth’s most significant asset in this task.

Caribbean

Levels of economic prosperity vary widely across the Caribbean and the proximity of the North American continent is a major economic and social influence. The educational development of the region is hampered by the migration of teachers both within and out of the Caribbean. The recruitment, training and retraining of teachers is a priority in most states.

Unemployment is a severe problem. Skills training for employment or self-employment is a high priority, as is training for the economic and agricultural diversification required by changing terms of trade. A special challenge in the Caribbean is the underperformance of males in the educational system and the workforce, which calls for special remedial opportunities, some of which open and distance learning (ODL) programmes could provide.

Eastern and Southern Africa

The need for ODL continues to grow because of the increased demand at all levels of education and the desire of governments to improve quality through the professional development of teachers. There is also a growing emphasis
on reaching the unreached: rural people, women and girls, AIDS orphans and other out-of-school youth. As economic growth takes hold, providing flexible opportunities for the professional development of the workforce becomes a higher priority. Improving management skills across the region is the single most important key to change. In all these areas the use of ODL is a key to success.

West Africa

The conflicts in the region in recent years have created flows of refugees that have put extra strains on education and social services. ODL is well suited to meeting the challenges this creates for training more teachers and educating displaced youth (open schooling). There is a new opportunity to work with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Development Bank for employment-related skills and literacy training.

South Asia

The Indian sub-continent is a region of stark contrasts. The Indian economy is booming, yet very large numbers live in poverty and receive little schooling. Illiteracy is high. Although the region includes very large cities, the majority of the population is rural and development must pay attention to improving their livelihoods.

Gender inequity is a daily reality and, in absolute numbers, India has the world’s second largest incidence of HIV/AIDS. Some of the countries in the region are stable democracies, but in general there is room for significant improvements in transparency, bureaucratic effectiveness and good governance. Decentralisation is putting more political and administrative power in the hands of the people, but they need further education and training to use that power effectively.

South Asia is also the site of vibrant developments in information and communications technologies (ICTs) that are being applied to education (e.g., satellites in India). The region has a longstanding commitment to ODL in government policies and institutional structures and there are considerable opportunities for transfer of know-how and technologies among developing countries.
South Pacific

Communication and transport is difficult and expensive in this vast ocean that covers a third of the world’s surface. There are thousands of small islands and atolls, many languages, and relatively few people. The existence of many low-lying coral atolls is threatened by global warming. Some countries have been adversely affected by ethnic and civil strife, corruption, lack of fair trade opportunities and exploitation by large powers competing for influence in the region. Most countries are experiencing the effects of migration, usually to Australia and New Zealand, or to overstretched urban centres such as Nadi, Suva, Port Vila, Funafuti, Port Moresby, Honiara and Tarawa.

For all this, the notable feature of the region is its many strong cultures, usually grounded in family and village values. The ocean that isolates communities is also the source of potential prosperity if harvested sustainably. Pacific people have always been great explorers and navigators, and today provide many seafarers to the world shipping fleet. Locals are beginning to develop ecotourism ventures, which directly benefit their communities as well as protecting the fragile environment. Pacific Island people based overseas are not just sending remittance money home, but transferring skills and ideas.

The Pacific population is a young one: approximately half are under 15 years old in some countries, so there is a strong need to equip the population to earn better livelihoods, either at home or as emigrants. Technical, vocational and maritime training is essential through the support of the local polytechnics and trade-training institutions. Expanding these opportunities to the many remote and small communities is a challenge that must be addressed within this approach.

COMMONWEALTH EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CENTRE FOR ASIA (CEMCA): STRENGTHENING COL’S WORK IN SOUTH ASIA

Based in New Delhi, CEMCA’s function is to provide governments and institutions in South Asia with advice, expertise, know-how and support for the effective use of open and distance learning (ODL), eLearning and technology-mediated education generally.

Specific aims are to:

- provide training in the use and application of ODL methodologies at all levels of education and specifically in the introduction of information and communications technologies (ICTs) into ODL;
- facilitate the exchange of information and knowledge about ODL among educational institutions, government bodies, NGOs, self-help groups, funding agencies, the private sector, experts and researchers;
- promote links among organisations to foster collaboration in ODL and eLearning;
- build capacity for implementing ODL and eLearning within institutions; and
- seek opportunities for CEMCA and COL to give assistance in policy formulation, planning, implementation and problem-solving in relation to ODL and the introduction of educational technology.
EVALUATION

The following is an Executive Summary based on the external evaluation report of COL’s work in 2003–2006, prepared by Dr. Patrick Spaven.

- COL has commissioned a summative evaluation of its performance from July 2003 to March 2006, coinciding with most of its 2003–2006 Plan. This evaluation is largely qualitative, based on key consultations and case studies of 10 of COL’s initiatives, at least one from each of its current eight sub-programmes.

- COL is a small organisation with a small budget. Its sub-programmes – such as its support for ODL in teacher education – cost about CDN$500,000 annually including direct staffing.

- COL aims to be relevant to development priorities in the countries that it serves. It is achieving this aim with its increasing focus on the Millennium Development Goals that is real and not rhetorical.

- COL thinks strategically but has not always translated that into robust, practical planning. Its monitoring and evaluation have been weak. COL is aware of this and has been discussing significant improvements for its 2006–2009 Plan.

- COL has a mandate to apply technology to ODL where appropriate, and in general it has not allowed this to lead it into inappropriate initiatives. It should, however, take steps to integrate its technology work with that of other programmes.

- COL’s specialist staff are a very valuable resource. They are knowledgeable and committed. When they join the organisation, they bring valuable experience, expertise and networks from one or more fields of ODL operation. However, COL staff need to work in a more integrated way, within a more proactive performance management framework.

- COL has had difficulties explaining to external stakeholders – and even to itself – the logic of its programmes. What value does it create, and how? COL needs to develop a more accessible and balanced narrative of its worth. This implies, amongst other things, better use of the knowledge management tools it has created.

- Most of COL’s work has been in small interventions rather than large projects. Nevertheless, there has been a trend during the 2003–2006 period to concentrate interventions around themes or institutions. It should continue this trend while retaining a degree of flexibility and agility.

- COL is a consummate networking agency. It has constructed an extensive informal network of networks in ODL, spanning most developing Commonwealth countries and with appropriate links to expertise in the developed world.

- COL is sensitive to the environments in which it works. It draws its staff from many of those environments and they travel to them in listening mode. This is partly through corporate ethos and personal inclination,
and partly out of necessity. **COL does not pay for its place at the table; it has to earn that place by offering appropriate solutions** that are best constructed through a process of iterative dialogue.

› COL engages with ODL at all levels, from national policy down to applications. There is a consensus that it should move steadily upward, engaging more with governments and major agencies over ODL in policies and development strategies. But this is a matter of balance and COL should continue to work on capacity-building for ODL systems and the application of ODL in capacity-building. In the last area, applications, COL must be very clear – through appraisal of its proposed initiatives – that they are either likely to lead directly to good outcomes with wide reach, or to have powerful multiplier or self-replicating effects.

› COL contributes to a wide range of outcomes, although most of them can be classed as increased or enhanced capacity in or through ODL. Among the initiatives studied for this evaluation, the following stand out:

  • continued improvement and extension of the capacity of two very important ODL institutions – the National Teachers Institute (NTI) in Nigeria and the National Institute for Open Schooling (NIOS) in India – and the mobilisation of NIOS as a resource for the development of open schooling systems in other countries;
  
  • the introduction of ODL capacity in institutions previously delivering training and education through conventional modes; two of these institutions – Centre for Environment Education (CEE) in India and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) – offer extensive reach or multiplier potential.
  
  • ODL policy development and implementation in The Gambia and Sierra Leone; and
  
  • a model with potential for adaptive replication, through which sustainable social and economic development appears to be taking place in rural communities through a virtuous cycle of learning and productivity.

› Some interventions have not led to positive outcomes or have not produced sufficient value for the time and other resources invested. Although this is inevitable in development, these examples should not be written off because there is a big opportunity cost for COL and its clients in nugatory work. Lessons should be learnt. The biggest disappointments in this period have been in COL’s work in client-funded projects, suggesting that this is an area that should be approached with caution.

› **Top-of-mind views of COL among informants were more than 90% positive.** Probing and challenging produced qualifications and some negatives, though for most people the latter were minor relative to the positives. COL’s partners expressed a very high level of satisfaction. They regard COL as an organisation of integrity.

› The main groups that COL must work harder to fully convince are some of its own Board members and representatives of bi-lateral and multi-lateral donor agencies.
one generation plants
the trees under which
another takes its ease

CHINESE PROVERB
COL develops and promotes models that are self-replicating and sustainable.
The 2006-2009 Plan
**THE 2006–2009 PLAN**

*Learning for Development* is the theme of the 2006–2009 Plan. Conceiving development as a process of increasing the freedoms that people can enjoy, the plan addresses an agenda that includes the UN’s Millennium Development Goals, the goals of Education for All (Dakar), and the Commonwealth’s objectives of peace, democracy, equality and good governance. Increasing and improving human learning is the key to fulfilling most aspects of this development agenda. Conventional instructional approaches simply cannot expand quickly enough to meet the challenge. COL’s role is to help countries use a range of appropriate and available approaches and technologies to foster learning at scale.

The 2006–2009 Plan groups COL’s work into three sectors of activity: Education, Learning for Livelihoods and Human Environment. The following descriptions of the initiatives and expected impacts of each sector show where COL can best help governments, institutions and potential partners to achieve their own objectives. Dialogue with each Commonwealth government to match national priorities to particular COL initiatives will create a country action plan. The complete set of country action plans will constitute the operational expression of this strategic framework.

**COL’S CORPORATE LOGIC MODEL**

The Corporate Logic Model (page 30) summarises the strategic framework for COL’s work in 2006–2009 and the performance indicators that will be monitored in order to evaluate achievement of the outputs, outcomes and impacts that COL seeks.
This matrix shows COL’s 2006–2009 Plan schematically, listing initiatives by sector of work along with output and outcome expected in terms of policy, systems and models/materials. Knowledge management and gender are cross-cutting themes.

### OUTCOMES (POLICY, SYSTEM, MODELS & MATERIALS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>POLICY FRAMEWORKS and strategies for ODL application</strong></td>
<td>In consultation with COL, stakeholders, governments, institutions, and governments, strategies for policy formulation and framing of the new framework are developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IMPLEMENTATION OF ODL SYSTEMS IN PLACE</strong></td>
<td>Institutions and stakeholders develop and implement ODL systems and tools for effective use of ODL, including capacity-building activities and awareness campaigns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS</strong></td>
<td>Facilities and resources are developed and made accessible to stakeholders, including equipment, materials, and software necessary for effective ODL implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OCCURRING THROUGH PEOPLE-LIVING PEACEFULLY AND EQUITY DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT IN HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS</strong></td>
<td>The outcomes are achieved through effective governance, equitable and democratic decision-making, and healthy environments, leading to sustainable development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### IMPACT

**UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO PRIMARY EDUCATION**

Increased and equitable participation in secondary and higher education with increased access and quality for all.

**SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT**

Increased and effective ODL is achieved by institutions for occupational skills development and improved livelihoods.

**SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY-ECOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT**

Increased and effective ODL is achieved by institutions for occupational skills development and improved livelihoods.

**SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Increased and effective ODL is achieved by institutions for occupational skills development and improved livelihoods.

**SUSTAINABLE HEALTH ENHANCEMENT**

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COL CORPORATE LOGIC MODEL 2006–2009

This document was developed by a team of researchers and educators in order to provide insights into the effectiveness of distance learning and open education in various regions. The key elements of the model include:

### INITIATIVES
- Quality Assurance
- Open Pedagogy
- Gender and Community Development
- Environmental Education
- Good Governance

### OUTPUTS (POLICY, SYSTEM, MODELS & MATERIALS)
- Awareness and development of capacity building: strategies and tools to support quality education and training for all.
- Policy frameworks and strategies for ODL, application in education, health, and community development.
- Improved and more effective ODL as an instrument for occupation skill development.
- Improved and more effective ODL, development and dissemination of strategies accessible to all.
- Improved and more effective ODL, application in education, health, and community development.
- Improved and more effective ODL, development and dissemination of strategies accessible to all.

### OUTCOMES (POLICY, SYSTEM, MODELS & MATERIALS)
- Universal access to primary education and increased and differentiated recognition of education.
- Increased adoption by policy-makers of ODL for occupation skill development.
- Improved livelihoods and increased income generation through the use of ODL.
- Improved livelihoods and increased income generation through the use of ODL.
- Improved livelihoods and increased income generation through the use of ODL.
- Improved livelihoods and increased income generation through the use of ODL.

### IMPACT
- Education for sustainable development.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.

### EDUCATION
- Learning for education development.
- Learning for education development.
- Learning for education development.
- Learning for education development.
- Learning for education development.

### PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
- Educational use of mass media.
- Educational use of mass media.
- Educational use of mass media.
- Educational use of mass media.
- Educational use of mass media.

### HUMAN ENVIRONMENT
- Sustainable development.
- Sustainable development.
- Sustainable development.
- Sustainable development.
- Sustainable development.

### LEARNING FOR LIVELIHOODS
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.

### SUSTAINABLY DEVELOPED COMMUNITIES:
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.

### GOVERNANCE
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.

### SUSTAINABLE FOOD SECURITY
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.

### SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTS
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.

### SUSTAINABLE FOOD SECURITY
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.

### SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTS
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.
- Improved livelihoods for all.

### SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTS
- Improved livelihoods for all.
COL helps countries increase access to education of quality at all levels by focusing on quality assurance, teacher development, alternative forms of schooling, new approaches to higher education, and the creation of expertise in eLearning.

**Initiatives**

1. **QUALITY ASSURANCE**
   - Developing quality assurance systems and related professional development of personnel at all educational levels, with special emphasis on ODL and technology-mediated approaches.
   - Offering advice on implementation of relevant guidelines.

2. **TEACHER DEVELOPMENT**
   - Expanding teacher education through combinations of ODL and classroom-focused training.
   - Increasing opportunities and capacity for developing and delivering quality professional development of teachers and other education sector personnel.

3. **OPEN/ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLING**
   - Application of ODL and flexible learning to increase access to basic and secondary schooling, particularly for the marginalised and those whose access to education is restricted.

4. **HIGHER EDUCATION**
   - Developing/strengthening systems, models and materials for higher education through open universities and dual-mode operations.

5. **eLEARNING FOR EDUCATION SECTOR DEVELOPMENT**
   - Increasing awareness, building capacity and developing content for eLearning in the education sector.
   - Facilitating the use of open educational resources.

---

**COL HELPS UNIVERSITIES BUILD CAPACITY IN ODL**

“The university must become a primary tool for Africa’s development in the new century. Universities can help develop African expertise; they can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights, and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars.”

*Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General, 2000*
Impacts

POLICY: All governments are now emphasising quality as they strive to broaden access. COL helps them formulate policies for quality assurance, notably in the areas of teacher education, alternative schooling and higher education (with a special focus on eLearning). COL’s participation in the evaluation of the NEPAD eSchools Pilot Project will yield policy recommendations for the use of ICTs in schools in Africa that will address concerns about the digital divide. Policies for adding distance education programmes to conventional teacher education establishments are a vital response to the chronic shortage of teachers.

SYSTEMS: There is a major need for training to help institutions convert to dual-mode operations and address the skills deficit amongst the staff of open schools and the NGOs that work with them to bring education to marginalised groups. COL will place special emphasis on integrating vocational skills training into alternative schooling. COL is also building capacity to meet the high demand for training in eLearning, notably in support of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, which will be an important bridge over the digital divide. In empowering educators with ICT skills COL will help them use technologies for online collaboration to share open educational learning content and resources.

MODELS AND MATERIALS: The successful model of the open university has already been widely replicated. The model of the dual-mode institution, which teaches both face-to-face and at a distance, is less straightforward to apply and COL is working with institutions around the Commonwealth to share good practice. COL is now helping to refine the model for open schools, because such schools are a vital response to the rapidly increasing demand for secondary education. An important new model, which holds enormous promise for developing countries, is the collaborative production of open educational resources for eLearning. COL will remain in the forefront of these developments.

COL is successfully sharing learning materials. For example, quality assurance materials for teacher education jointly developed for Asia and Africa will be introduced around the Commonwealth.

PARTNERSHIPS: COL’s education sector partners are numerous. Its collaboration with UNESCO supports COL’s work on teacher training in Africa. The two organisations are also working together on quality assurance systems for eLearning, cross-border education and higher education generally. In Africa, COL provides some funding to two regional centres: the SADC Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE) based in Botswana and the Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDOL) serving West Africa from the National Open University of Nigeria. COL is also developing stronger relationships in education with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Association of Commonwealth Universities. In developing eLearning, COL is working with The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and building a link with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) on copyright matters.

COL HELPS COUNTRIES TRAIN MORE TEACHERS

“The acute shortage of qualified teachers has been identified as one of the biggest challenges to Education for All; some four million more teachers are needed in sub-Saharan Africa to meet the goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015.”

UNESCO, 2006
LEARNING FOR LIVELIHOODS SECTOR

COL helps countries to identify where livelihoods can be improved, and to create matching learning opportunities. Successful approaches to improving rural and peri-urban economies draw on COL’s close relationship with international agricultural bodies. The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth is a collaborative network for creating open educational resources for work-related learning.

In this sector of activity, COL brokers proven distance learning programmes already offered around the Commonwealth. COL’s International Organisations Programme develops and delivers eLearning courses to staff in agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank, and transforms technical guides developed by these organisations into effective learning materials.

Initiatives

6. LEARNING AND SKILLS FOR LIVELIHOODS
   - Identifying where livelihoods can be improved or expanded and creating learning opportunities to exploit them.
   - Increasing access to basic literacy and occupational training for young people and illiterate and neo-literate adults.
   - Developing technical and vocational education and training using ODL methods for low technology environments.

7. RURAL AND PERI-URBAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
   - Developing ODL and ICT-based teaching/learning models for sustained improvement of livelihoods in rural and peri-urban communities, depending on the food and environment sectors.

8. NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
   - Building ODL capacity among strategic national and international agricultural education, extension, research and policy-making bodies with mandates and resources for education, training and research in the food, agriculture and vocational sectors.
9. VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY
FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH

• Developing a collaborative network of 25 small states aimed at creating and sharing materials for livelihood-related post-secondary programmes.

10. TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAMMES

• Developing and managing learning programmes for international organisations and sharing ODL programmes of proven effectiveness with institutions globally.

Impacts

POLICY: COL encourages government policies that enhance rural connectivity and communications to facilitate the deployment of village ICT kiosks and the spread of community radio. Too often outdated regulations impoverish the village communications environment. To encourage the creation of jobs and self-employment, COL works with governments to create better connections between education for literacy and training for livelihoods. It helps agricultural universities and extension services to develop policies for conducting distance education at scale.

SYSTEMS: COL emphasises the importance of multi-directional communication between all those involved in its programmes. Enhancing the effectiveness of farmers’ associations as local actors is one example of capacity enhancement at the grassroots level. The appetite for training in how to conduct distance learning is particularly high in organisations that bring together literacy and livelihoods.

MODELS AND MATERIALS: COL has found a self-replicating model in its Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme. This continues to spread in India and is now being tested in Africa. Closely linked is COL’s Media Empowerment model, through which agricultural extension units enable many more farmers to learn to diversify their crops. COL facilitates the preparation, in local languages, of very basic materials related to livelihoods. A diploma course for technical and vocational teachers developed through COL’s assistance in the Caribbean is being adopted in Ghana and Pakistan. The COL-brokered Commonwealth Executive MBA and MPA programme, produced through regional cooperation in South Asia, will now be offered in Nigeria, Malaysia and other regions. The collaborative development of materials for small states in eLearning format will be a key activity in 2006–2009 under the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth. Countries will reap the benefit of COL’s investment in the technology and know-how of learning object repositories in facilitating the transfer and adaptation of materials.

PARTNERSHIPS: To improve livelihoods in rural communities, COL has a close relationship with some of the institutions that form the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), as well as with various agricultural universities. As COL extends this work in Africa, it will benefit from the developing relationship with the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA). COL’s work on literacy and livelihoods has led to a Memorandum of Understanding with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its Caribbean equivalent, CARICOM. In the private sector, a relationship is developing with India’s National Institute for Information Technology (NIIT) for skills training. The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth involves partnerships between 25 Commonwealth states.
HUMAN ENVIRONMENT SECTOR

Sustainable development occurs when people can live peaceably and equitably under democratic government in healthy environments. COL helps countries use learning technologies to make a difference in the areas of gender, health, environment and governance and can advise on the educational use of media and ICTs.

Initiatives

11. GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT
   • Using ODL and other technologies to foster the full participation of women and to address unequal gender relations that prevent equitable development.
   • Developing ODL materials and training that address issues of gender in development.

12. HEALTH, WELFARE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
   • Equipping and training government agencies, NGOs and community groups to use video and audio technology for local production of educational materials related to health, welfare and community development.

13. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
   • Expanding environmental education at all levels.
   • Adapting and using existing ODL programmes.
   • Developing learning materials for sharing across the Commonwealth.

14. GOOD GOVERNANCE
   • Developing and adapting ODL materials and training to strengthen democracy and good governance through the public sector, the educational system and NGOs.

“Col helps people teach people about health
“If money spent on treatment went instead to effective prevention, between three and seventy-five new HIV infections could be averted for every extra year of life given to an AIDS patient. Spending AIDS money on treatment rather than prevention makes the AIDS crisis worse, not better.”

15. EDUCATIONAL USE OF MASS MEDIA AND ICTS

- Using policy, strategy, capacity-building and models to promote the educational use of mass media and ICTs through broadcast, cable and satellite channels, community radio, village cinema, telecentres, community media centres, ICT kiosks and the Internet.

Impacts

POLICY: COL promotes policies that support its successful model of health education through media empowerment. This means policies for collaboration with NGOs for peer health education and access to mass media for health messages. In the area of gender equity, COL’s work with the Commonwealth Secretariat on boys’ underachievement will produce policy recommendations. Policy for greater use of distance learning for the professional development of the public sector workforce will help the drive to better governance. Policies for environmental education in schools will ensure optimal use of the excellent learning materials that are being developed.

SYSTEMS: Various types of capacity enhancement are occurring. The expansion of the Media Empowerment programme means training for newly involved NGOs and refresher courses for those in the established programmes. ODL is a force for gender equity because ODL institutions attract higher proportions of women as both students and staff. COL places special emphasis on training women in the management of ODL. System capacity enhancement is the focus of COL’s extrabudgetary programme that teaches effective communications skills to hundreds of staff members of international agencies.

MODELS AND MATERIALS: The Media Empowerment model creates health messages that have an impact on behaviour. Conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organization and various NGOs, the model will be extended to more countries.

These activities create and use a variety of materials, including videos on healthy living, training materials for caregivers to vulnerable children, materials for governments and institutions on gender mainstreaming, and a course on legislative drafting. The Gender Toolkits that COL developed with the Commonwealth Secretariat will be used by more countries during 2006–2009. In the 1990s, COL and UNESCO invested US$1 million in materials for environmental education. They are enjoying a renaissance as derivative learning products are used for distance learning at secondary and tertiary levels in response to government policies for strengthening environmental education. An example is the Green Teacher initiative in India.

PARTNERSHIPS: COL works with the World Health Organization to identify NGO partners for its Media Empowerment activity and maintains close links with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation on matters of gender and governance.

“Providing food and an education is the single most important thing we can do for the development of the individual and his or her nation.”

James T. Morris, Executive Director, UN World Food Programme, 2005
CROSS-CUTTING THEMES: GENDER AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Gender equality and knowledge management are integral to COL's work in all three sectors. Because technology-mediated learning is particularly helpful for women and girls, COL uses it to help promote gender equality. And because access to knowledge is central to development, COL is committed to deploying the most modern methods of knowledge management.

ASSESSING ACTIVITIES

In preparing and updating country action plans, COL will apply a “6R” filter to assess activities proposed:

RELEVANCE
How does the activity contribute to: the needs of Member States, COL’s mission and mandate, Commonwealth priorities and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All goals? Does the activity fit COL’s Corporate Logic Model? Is the activity appropriate, significant and of high quality? Does it enhance indigenous capacity? Does it duplicate, complement or supplement the work of other agencies, or does it break new ground?

RESULTS
What will be the outputs, outcomes and impact? Have performance indicators been identified? What will be the monitoring and evaluation strategies? How will the activity be sustained after COL exits? Does COL have an exit strategy?

REACH
Which organisations, institutions or individuals will be the direct or indirect beneficiaries of this activity? What percentage of the beneficiaries will be
women and girls? Does the activity reach out to special constituencies such as HIV/AIDS orphans, people in post-conflict societies, nomads and others? What strategies will be employed to reach the beneficiaries?

REGIONS
Which region or regions will the activity cover? How does it fit within the overall pan-Commonwealth initiatives undertaken by COL? To what extent are the poorest regions being targeted? Are regional priorities addressed?

RESOURCES
What investment of human, financial and temporal resources will the activity require? Will there be partners? If so, what resources will they contribute? What level of in-kind contributions are expected and from whom? Is extra-budgetary funding envisaged? What will be the strategies for leveraging available resources?

RELATIONSHIPS
Who are COL’s partners? Is COL promoting south-south collaborations? How do these partnerships promote the achievement of COL’s mission and mandate?

COL WORKS WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES
“We have not invested enough in education and especially in technical education. Technical education would give citizens knowledge, skills and experience, which would make them competent, confident and competitive ... Without skills, people will always find themselves locked out of productive, rewarding economic activities that would give them a better share of their national wealth. They find themselves unemployed or underemployed and they are certainly underpaid.”

Wangari Maathai, Founder of the Green Belt Movement and the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, 2005
SUCCESS FACTORS AND RISK MANAGEMENT

As an agency that fosters new approaches to learning and teaching, COL is inherently a risk-taking organisation. The success of its initiatives will depend on managing risk on the following dimensions:

RELATIONS WITH MEMBER STATES: COL must retain the confidence of Commonwealth member governments through the strength and effectiveness of its programmes. Maintaining close and cordial relationships with all governments will be critical to the success of the 2006–2009 Plan.

Risk: Sudden changes of (and within) governments may require relationships to be rebuilt from scratch.

Mitigation strategy: Build relationships with multiple stakeholders.

FINANCIAL STABILITY: COL must ensure delivery of pledged funds and maintenance of the agreed minimal funding levels. Given the modest funding at its disposal, COL has to reach out to a variety of sources for additional support to its programmes, including multi-national organisations, large corporate bodies, public/private charities and other donor agencies. However, COL will seek funding for its own programmes rather than tendering for contracts from development banks.
**Risk:** Without a critical mass of funding, COL’s programme will lack impact.

**Mitigation strategy:** Build the resource base by tapping traditional and non-traditional sources of funding.

**PARTNERSHIPS:** COL must work with major international and intergovernmental organisations and agencies engaged in its programme areas in order to leverage its professional and technical capacity and credibility and so achieve greater impact on international development.

**Risk:** Partners’ inability to implement at the same pace and level of quality may compromise COL’s standards and credibility. Mismatch in size and budget cycles can create barriers to equal partnerships and timely outcomes.

**Mitigation strategy:** Advance planning and clarity of goals.

**LEADERSHIP:** The Board of Governors supports COL’s drive to position itself as a global player that promotes learning as the most critical input to development. Continued Board leadership will be critical in sustaining momentum. COL must also nurture a cadre of leaders in the field to give voice and visibility to its programmes.

**Risk:** The leaders identified in the field may shift allegiance to other organisations or institutions.

**Mitigation strategy:** Identify and nurture multiple “champions” to be in each country and region.

**IN-HOUSE EXPERTISE:** By attracting some of the Commonwealth’s brightest talent, COL has become a credible and effective instrument in the pan-Commonwealth drive to promote learning through applications of relevant technologies. As it moves into new areas of learning, such as health and governance, COL will need to broaden its staff competence. COL will foster the responsible autonomy of its professional staff while strengthening teamwork and shared values.

**Risk:** Eminent specialists may not be available to join the COL team.

**Mitigation strategy:** Offer a competitive compensation package with periodic reviews.

**ABILITY TO LEARN:** Close monitoring of initiatives and collective introspection and appraisals have become part of COL’s organisational culture. It must develop this asset further, not just as a routine exercise, but as a purposeful tool for continuously reviewing and refining the approaches, attitudes and activities that make COL truly self-reflexive and responsive to emergent developments.

**Risk:** Lack of adequate resources may compromise optimal use of monitoring and evaluation efforts.

**Mitigation strategy:** Promote continuous professional development and training in monitoring and evaluation for COL staff.

**INNOVATIVE USES OF TECHNOLOGY:** Working with people in rural and remote areas, and helping them to learn in their environments, calls for new approaches. Fostering communities of practice in farming and health and empowering them as agents of social change will enable COL to assume a leadership role in the emerging field of “people’s technologies.”

**Risk:** Use of inappropriate “high-end” technologies may further widen the digital divide.

**Mitigation strategy:** Work with partners in the field to identify local needs and priorities.
“My own sense is that education is on the brink. In all of the countries, teachers were dead, teachers were dying, teachers were ill and away from school, children, especially girls, were being taken out of school to tend to sick and dying parents, children who had lost their parents to AIDS weren’t in school because they couldn’t afford the school fees. It felt, in every instance, as though the education sector was under siege. In Zambia, they lost 1,967 teachers in 2001, over two thousand teachers in 2002; the Teacher’s Colleges are graduating fewer than one thousand a year. In parts of Malawi, HIV-positive teachers are estimated at over thirty percent. How can education be sustained?”

Stephen Lewis, UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, 2003

**STRATEGIC PLANNING:** As a matter of strategy, COL will select activities in each country and region, based on the most pressing local development concerns, and plan them in the medium to long term so that a measurable outcome is achieved for each activity.

*Risk:* A three-year planning cycle does not encourage long-term commitment or allow for long-term impact.

*Mitigation strategy:* Plan for long and medium terms.

**PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES:** Local ownership is critical to the success of any activity. COL’s approach has been to facilitate “development with a human face” and this can be further strengthened to inspire confidence and empathy among developing countries.

*Risk:* This approach may not be suitable to every context and occasion.

*Mitigation strategy:* Assess and analyse specific environments to identify the appropriate approach to use.

**VISIBILITY:** For governments and international agencies to continue to fund COL on a voluntary basis, it is important that they be aware of its work and impact.

*Risk:* It is not always possible for COL, as a small agency dedicated to ODL, to achieve the centrality that bigger agencies have. COL must sharpen its brand image with a well-conceived communications strategy. However, a higher profile can also attract criticism more easily.

*Mitigation strategy:* Create awareness of COL’s work and impact among targeted stakeholders by using COL’s vast and extensive networks.
MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The external evaluation of COL's work in 2003–2006 recommended improvements in monitoring and evaluation, noting that although monitoring and evaluation was integral to the results-based management system, it had not been fully implemented. Because COL did not consistently generate data about its performance, it had become too reliant on external evaluations.

To effect the recommended improvements, monitoring and evaluation received special attention in the preparation of the 2006–2009 Plan. All senior staff, education specialists, and programme assistants took part in a four-day workshop to develop the monitoring and evaluation framework presented in the plan. The new framework articulated more transparent outcomes and outputs and more measurable indicators, as well as augmenting COL's capacity to capture and analyse data as evidence.

COL's Logic Model incorporates the results of this work. Although the outcomes, outputs, and indicators are broken down by sector, they have been developed in a holistic way to ensure coherence across the programme. Sector teams have strategies to capture data for each indicator, identifying in advance where external evaluations will be sought. These may include a simple and rapid external audit of annual results.

A similar system for monitoring and evaluation has been developed for the cross-cutting programme theme of Knowledge Management.

Taking advantage of its advanced expertise in knowledge management, COL is developing more effective means of data storage and retrieval and better processes for analysing, sharing, and reporting information.

Given the nature of the organisation's mission, COL's work does not readily lend itself to quantitative monitoring and analysis. Nevertheless, qualitative monitoring is just as challenging because of the large amount of narrative available. However, the framework in this plan provides greater transparency and offers stakeholders a better understanding of COL's contribution.

“The society as a whole should promote a significant cohort of university-trained graduates. These teachers, medical officers, agricultural extension officers, and engineers will be needed to harness technologies for local use.”

Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the UN Millennium Project and Special Advisor to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the Millennium Development Goals, 2005
a good tree brings forth good fruit

Matt. 12:33
Having a suitably qualified and motivated staff under an appropriate human resource management system is the key requirement for delivering.
Governance, Organisation and Resources
GOVERNANCE

Following a decision of Commonwealth Heads of Government at their meeting in Vancouver in 1987, COL was formally established in 1988 through a Memorandum of Understanding signed by Commonwealth Governments. COL makes reports to the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings and to the triennial Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers.

With a Headquarters Agreement with the Government of Canada, COL is an International Organisation under the laws of Canada. This means it has immunities and privileges for itself and its staff as set out in the Convention on Privileges and Immunities of the UN (1946) and accepted by Canada. Member countries of the Commonwealth (through their governments) are participants.

The Memorandum of Understanding gives the Board of Governors of COL the general responsibility for determining the principles, policies and priorities that will guide it in its activities. The Board, which currently has 14 members and one advisor (see Appendix 2), usually meets once a year in Vancouver. It operates with an Executive Committee, an Audit Committee and a Performance Committee.

COL fosters diversity and enables knowledge and skills to return to home countries.
Governance Organisation Resources

President & CEO

- FUNCTION
  - KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT, INFORMATION SYSTEMS & COMMUNICATIONS
    - DIRECTOR
      - IT MANAGER
      - IRC MANAGER
      - COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER
  - FUNCTION
    - STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT
      - VICE PRESIDENT
      - EDUCATION SPECIALISTS & TEAM LEADERS
      - DIRECTOR CEMCA
      - LEARNING MANAGER INT’L ORGANISATIONS
      - BOARD SECRETARY & GENDER OFFICER
  - FUNCTION
    - PROGRAMME
  - FUNCTION
    - FINANCES, ADMINISTRATION & HUMAN RESOURCES
      - DIRECTOR
      - ACCOUNTANT
      - HUMAN RESOURCES & CONTRACTS MANAGER

SUPPORTED BY TECHNICAL, PROGRAMME AND GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF
ORGANISATION

COL organises its staff within the four key reporting functions shown in the chart on page 48.

The evaluation of the 2003–2006 Plan found that COL’s main organisational challenge in its Programmes function is to achieve the optimal balance between individual professional autonomy and teamwork. The organisational structure for 2006–2009 places greater emphasis on a team-focused approach, with core teams established in each of the three sectors of the programme. The Knowledge Management, Information Systems and Communications function will continue to have an administrative aspect (accountability for COL’s information systems) as well as a programme aspect through the Knowledge Management role – notably the development of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth.

HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY

Having a suitably qualified and motivated staff is a key requirement for delivering the plan. COL’s small complement of 40 people puts a high premium on their effective deployment. Since 2004, the implementation of a modern Human Resources Framework and Compensation Plan has substantially improved COL’s capacity to manage its human resources. The regular movement of senior, internationally recruited staff between Commonwealth countries and COL strengthens relationships with Governments, fosters diversity and enables knowledge and skills to return to home countries.
COL maintains an active virtual library of about one million documents related to learning and development.

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

As a small intergovernmental agency that depends on voluntary contributions and grants in support of its programme, it is essential for COL to maintain effective relationships with multiple stakeholders. COL's communication strategy must:

- sustain dialogue with each Commonwealth government,
- maintain relationships with country partners and institutions,
- nurture relationships with foundations and donors,
- foster regional and pan-Commonwealth networks and coalitions,
- retain intellectual leadership in learning technologies,
- sustain a reputation as a reliable source of information,
- advocate open, distance and technology-mediated learning,
- equip Board members to be effective advocates, and
- portray COL as an effective partner and an exciting place to work.
KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

As a leader in this fast-evolving field, COL continues to develop its internal knowledge management systems to capture information from its own work and support partners. Current systems capture information as it is submitted by staff and consultants so that it can be disaggregated and reformatted as needed.

COL captures information from online sources to maintain an active virtual library of about one million documents on topics related to learning and development. This supports COL’s work by maintaining resource collections that can be accessed through the Internet in any Commonwealth country. COL also maintains a physical resource centre in Vancouver and publishes ODL resources on its website.

COL expects that the open educational resources movement will generate content, software and tools that will strengthen education in developing countries. Educational content developed by the member countries of the Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth is licensed as share-and-share-alike with attribution, using the CreativeCommons model. Ongoing collaboration will help develop access to comprehensive collections of open educational resources. COL provides governments with guidance on copyright in education to help them limit costs and loss of foreign exchange through modern copyright legislation.

Knowledge management is a cross-cutting theme in COL’s programme. The programme outputs, outcomes, impact and performance indicators of the Knowledge Management function have been specified in a similar style to those for the three sectors so that they can be monitored and evaluated in the same way.

INFRASTRUCTURE

COL is headquartered in Vancouver, Canada, at a convenient location in the downtown core. The premises, under lease to 2015, are well equipped to meet COL’s operational needs for a secure and work-conducive environment. A long-range plan for the maintenance and replacement of assets is in place where resources are allocated annually for this purpose.

The recommendations of a 2004–2005 external review of COL’s information systems have been implemented, including assigning dedicated personnel to this function and ensuring closer management of outsourced functions. COL is well placed to operate effectively at the frontier between closed source and open source software and to serve both its internal administrative needs and its external programme commitments.

COL’s management practices provide reasonable assurance that reliable, relevant and timely information is available; that assets are safeguarded and controlled; and that resources are managed economically and efficiently. In 2006–2009, COL will pursue strategies for reducing paper waste and promoting recycling and energy efficiency within its internal operations.
COL obtains resources for its work in two ways. Its core financing comes in the form of voluntary contributions from Commonwealth governments. Through its communications strategy, COL does everything possible to persuade governments to make pledges of financial support and to honour them. One of COL’s strengths, in the world of international agencies, is that developing countries account for three of its six major donors (India, Nigeria and South Africa) and for nearly 30 other contributing states.

However, the sum of the voluntary contributions from governments has never reached the notional level of CDN$9 million endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government in Durban in 1999. For this reason, COL augments its budget from other sources. One such source is revenue earned from the development and delivery of eLearning courses, mainly in communications skills and report writing, to staff in international agencies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Bank. This also includes transforming technical guides developed by these organisations into effective learning materials.

To obtain a second revenue stream, COL used to tender for contracts from the development banks, but in 2005 the Board concluded that such work had a high opportunity cost and could lead to mission drift. Instead, COL now
actively seeks grants in direct support of components of its programme. An example is an award of US$750,000 received from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation in support of five areas of COL’s work, including the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth.

In preparing the 2006–2009 Plan, COL faced the dilemma of whether to base its budget on the total needs of its stakeholders in accordance with its mandate or, in view of the record of core funding shortfalls from the levels endorsed, to construct a plan that might realistically be funded based on current projections. COL has therefore made strategic choices about adequately financing the programme activities it expects to be funded and scaling back or eliminating other activities for lack of funds. At the same time, however, COL remains optimistic that increases may be forthcoming, that success will be found in sourcing other forms of revenue to fund more of the core programme, and that slow but steady expansion must be envisaged over the period of the plan.

The graph on page 52 depicts the levels and sources of funding targeted in support of the 2006–2009 Plan.

Since 1995, COL has realised gradual growth in its revenue streams mainly as a result of the pursuit of other revenue sources. This has been followed by a matching expenditure pattern as the graph above demonstrates. The 2006–2009 Plan is based on the critical assumption that this growth will be sustained and that the funding targets set above will be achievable.

Appendix 1 presents the funding contributions of COL member governments, for 2004–2006.
### APPENDIX 1:
**MEMBER GOVERNMENTS CONTRIBUTIONS**

For the Years Ended 2004–2006 (June 30)

(CDN$)

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<th>Country</th>
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<th>2006</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<td>$</td>
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* COUNTRIES WITH MEMBERSHIP ON THE BOARD AS MAJOR DONORS. SEE APPENDIX 2 FOR THEIR BOARD REPRESENTATIVES.
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$6,738,453 $8,315,524 $6,614,351 $21,668,328
APPENDIX 2: BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Commonwealth of Learning
(1 September 2006)

CHAIR
MR. LEWIS PERINBAM, O.C.

MEMBERS

COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY-GENERAL:
His Excellency, the Rt. Hon. Donald C. McKinnon

APPOINTMENTS BY MAJOR DONORS:

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA: Ms. Denise Chong, Writer and Author
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA: Mr. Sudeep K. Banerjee, Secretary, Secondary and Higher Education, Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development
GOVERNMENT OF NEW ZEALAND: Ms. Shona Butterfield, CNZM, former Commissioner, Tertiary Education Commission and former Chief Executive, Open Polytechnic of New Zealand
GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA: His Excellency Professor Michael Omolewa, Ambassador/Permanent Delegate, The Permanent Delegation of Nigeria to UNESCO
GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA: Ms. Jenny Glennie, Director, South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE)
GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM: Dr. David Levesque, Senior Education Adviser Education and Skills, Policy Division, Department for International Development

REGIONAL APPOINTMENTS ON THE ADVICE OF COMMONWEALTH MINISTERS OF EDUCATION:

AFRICA: Professor Penina Mlama, Executive Director, Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)
ASIA: Dr. Tara de Mel, Chairperson, Worldview, Sri Lanka
CARIBBEAN: The Honourable Burchell Whiteman, O.J., Retired Senator and former Minister of Information and former Minister of Education and Culture, Jamaica
PACIFIC: The Honourable Teima Onorio, Vice-President and Minister for Education, Youth and Sports, Kiribati

APPOINTMENT BY THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY-GENERAL: vacant

PRESIDENT (EX-OFFICIO):
Sir John Daniel, President and CEO, Commonwealth of Learning

ADVISER:
Dr. John Rowett, Secretary General, Association of Commonwealth Universities
Glossary of Acronyms

BOCODOL  BOTSWANA COLLEGE OF DISTANCE AND OPEN LEARNING
CARICOM  CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY SECRETARIAT
CEE  CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENT EDUCATION
CEMCA  COMMONWEALTH EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CENTRE FOR ASIA
CGIAR  CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
COL  COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING
ECOWAS  ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES
FARA  FORUM FOR AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH IN AFRICA
FLOSS  FREE/LIBRE OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE
HIV/AIDS  HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS/ACQUIRED IMMUNодеFICIENCY SYNDROME
ICRISAT  INTERNATIONAL CROPS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR THE SEMI-ARID TROPICS
ICTS  INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES
IGNOU  INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY, INDIA
L3 FARMERS  LIFELONG LEARNING FOR FARMERS
NAMCOL  NAMIBIAN COLLEGE OF OPEN LEARNING
NEPAD  NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR AFRICA’S DEVELOPMENT
NGOS  NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS
NIIT  NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
NIOS  NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR OPEN SCHOOLING, INDIA
NTI  NATIONAL TEACHERS INSTITUTE, NIGERIA
ODL  OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING
RETRIDAL  REGIONAL TRAINING AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING
SADC  SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
SADC-CDE  SADC DISTANCE EDUCATION CENTRE
TVET  TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING
UN  UNITED NATIONS
UNESCO  UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION
UNHCR  UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES
WHO  WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
WIPO  WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION
WHAT IS THE COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING?

VISION  Access to learning is the key to development. MISSION  The Commonwealth of Learning helps governments and institutions to expand the scope, scale and quality of learning by using new approaches. COL promotes policies and systems to make innovation sustainable and works with international partners to build models, create materials, enhance organisational capacity and nurture networks that facilitate learning in support of development goals. WHAT COL DOES  COL helps developing Commonwealth countries to increase access to learning using distance education and appropriate technologies. STAKEHOLDERS  Governments, institutions and citizens of the 53 Commonwealth member countries benefit from COL’s work. FINANCES  Core funding from voluntary contributions by Commonwealth member governments is supplemented by a variety of extra-budgetary resources in support of the programme. STAFF  COL has some 40 employees distributed between its headquarters in Vancouver, Canada, and the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia in New Delhi, India. Its people reflect the cultural diversity of the Commonwealth, and senior staff members, who serve on rotation, are recruited from around the Commonwealth. PROGRAMME SECTORS  The programme of work addresses some of the key learning challenges associated with the UN’s eight Millennium Development Goals, the six goals of Education for All (Dakar) and the Commonwealth objectives of peace, democracy, equality and good governance. These are grouped in three sectors of activity: • Education • Learning for Livelihoods • Human Environment. Gender is a cross-cutting theme as is “knowledge management technology,” which has close links to the development of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, a network requested by Ministers of Education. PROGRAMME RESULTS  Each initiative seeks outputs and outcomes in one or more of three categories: • Policies • Systems • Models and Materials. The greatest impact COL has is in giving citizens of the Commonwealth better access to education and training through open, distance and eLearning, thereby enabling them to gain the freedoms of improved livelihoods and gender equality that promote economic, social and cultural development. MODE OF OPERATION  COL is an agency in the service of all Commonwealth governments. It is not a funding body. It works with institutional and individual partners to give policy advice and to implement programme activities in consultation with governments. DEPLOYMENT OF RESOURCES  Having a small and effective core staff allows COL to target resources directly to countries with activities that emphasise regional cooperation and south-south exchanges through collaborative networks. CONTACT

COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING, 1055 WEST HASTINGS STREET, SUITE 1200, VANCOUVER, BC  V6E 2E9, CANADA
PH: + 1-604-775-8200 | FAX: + 1-604 -775-8210 | EMAIL: INFO@COL.ORG | WEB: WWW.COL.ORG