

Open Educational Resources for Network Enabled Education



India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, 20 – 21 August 2009

INITIATIVES FROM COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING

Dr. R. Sreedher, Director, Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, New Delhi

Introduction

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Governments to encourage the development and sharing of open learning/distance education knowledge, resources and technologies. COL is helping developing nations improve access to quality education and training.

The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of more than 50 independent sovereign states, which provide support to each other, and work together toward international goals. The Commonwealth is described as a "family" of nations, originally linked together in the British Empire, and now building on their common heritage in language, culture and education, which enables them to work together in an atmosphere of greater trust and understanding than generally prevails among nations. Bringing together some 1.7 billion people of many faiths, races, languages, traditions and levels of economic development, the Commonwealth represents almost one-third of the world's population.

COL's Three-year Plan for 2009-2012 is entitled Learning for Development, continuing with the theme of the previous triennium. The broad term "learning" – which subsumes formal education and training – not only captures the variety of demands that development makes on people but also evokes the vision implicit in COL's name: Learning is our Common Wealth. Learning for Development expresses a vision that reaches beyond formal education to embrace areas of learning that are vital for better livelihoods, greater prosperity and a safer environment. Understanding development as the process of increasing the freedoms that people can enjoy, COL pursues this vision operationally within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the campaign for Education for All (EFA) and Commonwealth values. While building on the extensive pan-Commonwealth consultation conducted for the previous triennium, COL has refreshed its understanding of current development priorities through regional meetings with the country Focal Points appointed by Ministers of Education. A rigorous external evaluation of its work in 2006–2009 has enabled COL to play to its strengths in responding to these priorities.

Programme Activity

In the 2009–2012 triennium, COL will pursue eight initiatives in two sectors:

Education

- Open schooling
- Teacher education
- Higher education
- Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

Livelihoods & Health

- Skills development
- Learning for farmers
- Healthy communities
- eLearning

The cross-cutting themes of gender equality, quality and appropriate technologies are pervasive throughout the programme.

COL pursues its aims through five core strategies:

- Partnerships: Fostering sustainable partnerships and networks in support of these aims.
- Models: Refining and sharing models for applying teaching and learning technologies to development challenges
- Policies: Assisting countries and organisations to develop and implement policies that support technology-mediated learning
- Capacity: Facilitating training and organisational development to increase the overall ability of partners to deploy learning systems and technologies effectively
- Materials: Working with partners to co-create learning materials and make them widely available

These strategies focus on co-creating value with COL's extensive network of partners and stimulating new developments.

To be better present at the regional level, COL has its own unit in India, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA). In West Africa it works with RETRIDOL (Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning) and in Southern Africa with SADC-CDE (Southern African Development Community Centre for Distance Education).

To adapt its programme to fit the unique needs of each country, COL develops individual Country Action Plans after extensive consultations with Ministers, Focal Points and partner institutions. These are monitored and updated regularly. COL in the Commonwealth, a compendium of individual Country Reports, is published at the end of each triennium.

COL practises results-based management. This is summarised through a logic model (link on the right) that lays out the expected long- and intermediate-term results (impacts and outcomes) over the three-year period. Outputs and activities, and the inputs needed to achieve them, are set out annually in log frames that are integrated with the logic model and are specific to each initiative. The log frames are regularly updated and include detailed performance indicators. To build on its core strengths and operate effectively in a fast-changing world, COL has identified six critical success factors to help it manage risk: financial stability, partnerships, visibility, leadership, managing expectations and emerging issues.

Partnerships

COL exists through its partnerships and maintains relationships with many stakeholders, including member governments, institutions, donors and individuals. It seeks to create mutually beneficial linkages, especially of a "south-south" character, between Commonwealth countries. Key partners are the organisations linked to the United Nations (e.g., UNESCO, WHO and the World Intellectual Property Organization) and the Commonwealth, as are regional governmental organisations such as the Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Southern African Development Community (SADC). COL has had a long-standing Memorandum of Agreement with UNESCO and in July 2007 the two organisations updated their Workplan Agreement. COL also has strong networks of partners in its various areas of activity. In education, these include the Commonwealth's distance-teaching universities, open schools, SchoolNets, and regional centres for distance education such as the Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDOL) and SADC Distance Education Centre (SADC-CDE). For its work on rural livelihoods, COL has productive links with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and its associated bodies. It sustains links with NGOs in many countries and has an important relationship with the Hewlett Foundation for developing the use of open educational resources.

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia COL's regional agency, the Commonwealth Education Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), implements COL's mandate in the eight countries of Commonwealth Asia. In the Education Sector, working with partnering institutions, CEMCA conducts capacity building and training workshops on development of educational multimedia materials, instructional design and eLearning for teachers and professionals in the open school and open university systems. CEMCA has recently developed "Easy Now", an innovative open-source based platform that allows teacher-developers to create multiple ODL deliverables from a single electronic source. This is already being implemented in India, Malaysia, Maldives and Sri Lanka. It is also facilitating the development of "Quality Assurance for Multimedia Learning Materials (QAMLM)" programme with partners in India and Malaysia.

CEMCA is also very actively and effectively engaged in the use of mass media for development, particularly community radio. Working with the Government of India, CEMCA is facilitating the development of community radio stations on campus and in the community, with civil society organisations, for use by disadvantaged and marginalised groups, particularly women. CEMCA publishes a quarterly EduComm Asia, and produces knowledge resources on various applications of ICTs in education. Partnering with several regional and international donor agencies, CEMCA has produced various multimedia training packages including Community Based Rehabilitation for Children with Special Learning Needs; Gender and Rural Development, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO Bangkok); Tsunami Teacher with UNESCO, Paris; and an Education For All resource kit for use by media professionals, with UNESCO and the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD). CEMCA also serves as a regional networking and collaborating centre for open and distance learning and technology enabled learning services. www.cemca.org

A Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

On behalf of Commonwealth Ministers of Education, COL is coordinating the development of a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). Thirty countries are now actively engaged in making the VUSSC a reality. VUSSC countries have chosen to focus on creating postsecondary, skills-related courses in areas such as tourism, entrepreneurship, professional development, disaster management and a range of technical and vocational subjects. These non-proprietary, electronically-held course materials, which can readily be adapted to the specific context of each country, are used in the offering of credit-bearing qualifications in the countries' post-secondary institutions, strengthening their educational capacity and outreach. Small states thus become active contributors to global development and leaders in educational reform through the innovative use of information and communications technologies (ICTs). The VUSSC is throwing a wide bridge across the digital divide.

VUSSC Background

Commonwealth Education Ministers conceived the idea of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth at their meeting in Halifax, Canada, in 2000. Following the Halifax meeting, COL chaired a technical advisory committee and helped draft a proposal for the VUSSC. A small group of Ministers, meeting in the Seychelles in March 2003, reviewed the proposal and recommended it to the Edinburgh Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CEM) in October 2003.

Learning4Content

COL's Learning4Content programme has trained 3,000 people in wiki skills for content editing over an 18-month period. More than 85 online and face-to-face workshops have been held around the world since January 2008, drawing participants from 110 countries.

“We are delighted to have been the catalyst to build this global collaborative education community,” said Dr. Wayne Mackintosh, who launched and oversaw the growth of Learning4Content as COL's Education

Specialist, eLearning and ICT Policy. “This is a fantastic example of what can happen when people have the opportunity to share knowledge freely.”

The Learning4Content workshops are offered at no cost. Participants learn how to use WikiEducator and other wiki technologies to create and publish open educational resources (OERs). In return, they are asked to contribute one open content learning resource for use in secondary schools, vocational education and post-secondary institutions.

We’ve had tremendous support from governments and educational institutions who have contributed meeting space and computers, and from numerous people who have volunteered their time as facilitators. Most importantly, we have a large and growing group of about 9,000 educators who are now able to create, use, share and adapt learning content. This will make a huge, long-term contribution to education worldwide.