



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

Learning for Sustainable Development

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

President's Quarterly Progress Report:
April – June 2019

The Board of Governors of the Commonwealth of Learning met on June 27, 2019 in Canada. In lieu of a Quarterly Progress Report from the President for April – June 2019, the President's Report was provided to Board members for this meeting.

President's Report

At their Conference held in Fiji last year, the Commonwealth Education Ministers commended the Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

'...for its emphasis on Lifelong Learning for employment, entrepreneurship and empowerment which supported the efforts of Member States to achieving SDG 4.... its global leadership in Open Educational Resources (OER) and innovations in educational technologies.'

(Nadi Declaration, 20 CCEM, 2018)

This vote of confidence in COL's ability to deliver and respond to the needs of Member States, places a greater responsibility on us to be even more results-oriented. In the Nadi Declaration, Ministers of Education identified several priorities and COL, as the only Commonwealth intergovernmental organisation with the mandate to promote education and training through the use of technologies, has responded with concrete action.

First, Ministers stressed 'the need for quality education regardless of circumstances.' In Mozambique, COL has worked with 15 schools in remote regions to develop quality content in Portuguese—staff have been trained in technology enabled learning and the course materials are already being used by teachers and learners in secondary schools. With 16 million lower secondary youth out of school in the Commonwealth, COL's open schooling model, opens up access to affordable quality education for the last person in the queue.

Second, the Nadi Declaration identifies 'high quality teaching' as an urgent need, with 19 million additional teachers required by 2030. During this year, COL has supported school-based teacher development in The Gambia, Kiribati, Sierra Leone and South Africa. Integrating technology into teaching is often a challenge for teachers in both developed and developing countries. In partnership with Athabasca University, Canada, COL recently offered a MOOC on 'Technology Enabled Learning,' and teachers from 73 countries around the world participated, including from 43 Commonwealth Member States. Interestingly, there was a large participation from the Caribbean.

Third, the Declaration calls on the educational community to 'enable success, future education and employment'. COL's Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme is offered by universities in 11 countries and over 14000 have graduated. In Pakistan, graduates saw an increase of 38% in monthly income and every dollar invested led to a direct return of \$3.40. In Uganda, 95 boys and girls received advanced ICT skills training for six months—of these 74 are already employed or self-employed. COL has worked with universities in Mauritius and Namibia to integrate an employability framework into their operations to make graduates work-ready.

Fourth, Ministers drew attention to the 'need for climate change awareness'. Sixty per cent of the small states are affected by climate change. In order to build the resilience of

educational institutions, COL has developed a solution for backing up data on the cloud so that records are not lost when disaster strikes. This is being implemented in Dominica where resilience is being strengthened through public education using local media.

Fifth, tackling 'gender disparities in education, whether that be boys or girls' was identified as a key priority in the Commonwealth. With support from the governments of Canada and Australia, COL's GIRLS Inspire project has empowered women and girls for livelihoods in Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Pakistan, and Tanzania. After receiving skills training, many girls have returned to school to complete their education. COL has also launched a project in the Caribbean, 'From Zero to Hero' in partnership with the University of the West Indies (UWI) Open Campus. A competency-based curriculum on digital entrepreneurship has been developed for out-of-school youth.

Finally, Ministers stressed the need for strengthening educational partnerships. COL, Commonwealth Secretariat (COMSEC) and the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) signed an agreement for a Commonwealth Education Partnership. COMSEC, COL and UWI have developed a joint qualification on youth development for 15 partner institutions in 13 Commonwealth countries. COL is working with ACU on a higher education project where it provides quality assurance expertise to 24 universities in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. COL's triennial Pan-Commonwealth Forum in partnership with the Open University, UK has attracted 15 additional partners, including several universities and development organisations. During this year, COL has strengthened its partnerships within the Commonwealth and expanded its circle internationally.

If we are to contribute to ministerial priorities and the aspirations of SDG4 to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and... lifelong learning for all', we need to move beyond the 'business as usual' approach and the 'brick and mortar' mindset which assumes that learning is only possible within the walls of a classroom. Alternative and innovative approaches must be adopted to address the magnitude of the challenge. Last mile innovations will help us reach the most marginalised stakeholders including persons with disabilities. Open and distance learning is widely preferred by persons with disabilities who are hugely underrepresented in both formal and non-formal learning. With its expertise in educational technologies and OER, COL is ideally placed to accelerate global efforts to ensure that no one is left behind.

Asha Kanwar
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