

# Graduation Ceremony

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*Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning  
(BOCODOL)  
Gaborone, Botswana*

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*Prepared by  
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The Honorable Minister of Education & Skills, P Venson Moitoi, Executive Director of BOCODOL, Dr DR Tau; Vice Chancellor of Zimbabwe Open University, Dr Primrose Kurasha; Members of the Syndicate and Academic Council, Graduates, Colleagues, Eminent Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both an honour and a privilege to speak at the Graduation Ceremony of the Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL). A Graduation ceremony is a very important milestone in the journey of those of you who have now completed a critical stage of your lives, and are stepping onto the next stage of further education, or the world of work. To the institution, it marks an occasion to see many of its students whose talents it has nurtured, and whose faculties it has helped develop, move on successfully to the next stage of their lives. I am delighted to be a part of this happy occasion, and I thank the Executive Director, Dr Daniel Tau for giving me this opportunity to be with you today. The tenth anniversary of BOCODOL makes this event even more special and I bring to you felicitations from the Commonwealth of Learning especially our President Sir John Daniel and all colleagues!

What is the significance of BOCODOL? Botswana has a young population with 37 % of its people below the age of 15 with a need for education and training. During the last twelve years, BOCODOL has helped tens of thousands of out-of-school youth and adults to return to learning, offered them the environment and the opportunities to break all barriers to personal development through flexible learning, and enabled them to learn what is relevant to their needs and at a time and place convenient to them. Open schooling, vocational training and tertiary programmes are offered through this institution. At a time when most developing countries are still struggling with the question of achieving the MDGs and the EFA goals, BOCODOL has certainly shown the way, and you stand out as an example that many other African countries can emulate.

When the developed nations turned to mass higher education, most of the developing countries were still struggling with their efforts to universalise primary education. These countries had to face not just the shortage of physical resources, but more importantly, shortages of trained and qualified teachers. Many

countries that had established primary education facilities saw very poor transition rates to secondary education. The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010 states:

*Open Schools are urgently needed to provide access to education for millions of children who currently have no access to any formal schooling. While the world average for secondary school enrolment is 66%, the Gross Enrolment Rate in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is 34%.*

Lack of access to secondary education has resulted in massive unemployment among the youth, compounded by the fact that they found no opportunities for any training. In the early days skills development initiatives were met with complete lack of enthusiasm and vocational education was looked down upon. Not too long ago, vocational education was derisively described as the ‘diploma disease’. , and institutions that promoted vocational education were called ‘diploma mills’! But not anymore! Today, these institutions perform a vital social function. They equip the youth with employable skills.

How did this change come about? The last three decades witnessed two significant developments that changed the world forever. The first of these was the emergence of new technologies that changed the way we lived, worked and communicated with one another. To begin with, they seemed to be out of reach for most; but it became clear that the more we use technology, the less costly it becomes. There is no better example to prove this point than the unprecedented penetration of mobile phones! Technology today has become both affordable and accessible and the ‘digital divide’ is slowly and surely being closed!

Developments in technology have led to the changing nature of the workplace. As agriculture gave way to manufacturing as the major economic activity, the notion of the blue-collar jobs emerged. Those working on the shop floors had greasy hands and soiled collars. These were quite different from the white collar workers, who had a higher social esteem; and were perceived as better educated. It did not matter even if they were the most unproductive segment of the working force. On the other hand, the shop floor workers who dirtied their hands did not enjoy the same esteem in society even if they were the most productive and the real wealth creators! It was this notion that was reflected in the earlier negative attitude to vocational education

Machines took over many of the functions of the blue collar workers. The production line in most industries is automated; computers perform most tasks, and people manage machines and their processes. These tasks require new skills; technical skills, communication skills, the coordination and management of processes and problem-solving. The new paradigm is about equipping people with these skills. The programs that provide the opportunities to acquire the skills and competence required to perform a variety of functions at the workplace are as valuable and necessary as any other academic program.

In the last forty years, education has opened up to constituencies that it never served before. This is the second significant development. Those who went to schools and universities were the ones considered properly educated. All learning outside the classroom was considered inadequate and inferior. This attitude clouded our approach to self-learning and correspondence education. The adoption of new information and communication technologies exploded this myth and gave new acceptability to open and distance education.

That brings me to the role of the Commonwealth of Learning, the organisation that I have the privilege to represent. When Heads of Government of all the Commonwealth countries decided to set up the Commonwealth of Learning in 1987, they saw this as an imaginative response to strengthening higher education in the developing world by making use of the potential of open, distance and technology enhanced education. They foresaw that traditional teaching methods simply could not cope with the scale and diversity of learning needs of the emerging knowledge society that was changing the nature of the world of work. Our motto ‘learning for development’ underscores a vision that moves us beyond formal face-to-face education into non-formal modes of learning and has given a new meaning to Open and Distance Learning (ODL). COL has not only expanded the definition of what we mean by ODL but has also convinced many Commonwealth Member States to see the value of harnessing ODL methodologies for achieving development goals.

COL has enjoyed the support of the government of Botswana over two decades and we are grateful to you for your contributions, both financial and intellectual. We are a small organisation with limited resources, and our strength in the field is our partners. BOCODOL has been a very significant partner. It is for this reason that when the then Minister of Education, Botswana asked COL to set up an entity for capacity development in ODL for the sub-region, BOCODOL was a natural choice for establishing the SADC-CDE.

COL is helping Southern African countries plan and implement open schools to expand access to secondary education. It is doing so in various ways—one of them being a multi-country partnership to develop 20 sets of course materials in print and online formats, based on the secondary curricula of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles and Zambia. Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean is also a partner in this initiative. The materials are being developed as Open Education Resources (OER), so that without duplicating effort, participating countries can have access to quality materials that they could adopt and adapt as necessary. Botswana is also an active member of the Virtual University of the Small States of the Commonwealth.

COL has worked closely with BOCODOL and congratulates it on its rigorous adherence to quality standards. It does this through staff development, performance management and decentralised and inclusive democratic processes. BOCODOL is also investing in innovative delivery systems and at the recent Pan Commonwealth Forum 6 in India, presented a paper on the effective use of SMS in the teaching-learning process. Even Bill Gates points out that computing cannot benefit 2 billion of the world’s poorest people. On the other hand, the world has 2.7 billion mobile users. Mobile penetration is especially high in Botswana with 77 mobile subscribers per 100 people. So the study has implications for a large number of learners.

Let me now share with you two secrets of success as you embark on the next phase of your lives. When our generation graduated many years ago, we were sure that we would never have to study again. Today the world has changed and knowledge is multiplying at a rapid pace. What we learnt two or three decades ago is just not enough even for survival, let alone for success in a highly competitive global market. So even if you enter the world of work, you will still need to continue to learn, unlearn and re-learn many different things during the course of your life. In short you will need to be lifelong learners if you wish to succeed. You are young and may face multiple career choices in the ever-changing global economy.

The second secret is hard work. Usually people say that talent determines success in life. While talent may contribute to success, it is actually hard work that makes the difference between success and failure. You all know that the Beatles are legends whose music will stand the test of time. Were they successful because of their great talent? Very few know that in 1960 when they were still struggling, they were invited to play in Hamburg, Germany. They had to play seven days a week, eight hours a day at a club. And it was here that they got better and gained more confidence in their craft. When they experienced their first success in 1964, they had already performed 1200 times! This is what set them apart and on the road to success.

Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Outliers* gives an interesting recipe for how to become a world class expert in any field of activity—it is the 10,000 hour practice rule. He looks at a study done by Berlin's Academy of Music. They divided the violinists into 3 groups—the first group was the stars, the second group was good while the third were amateurs who would never play professionally. All three groups were asked how many hours they practised the violin. In the beginning, at about the age of 5 everyone practised for about 2-3 hours a week. But after the age of 8, those who practised more than others were the best in their classes. They were practising 8 hours a week by the age of 12, 16 hours by 14 and by the time they reached age 20, they were practising 30 hours a week. In short the star performers had practised for 10,000 hours already. Those who were good students, had practised for about 8000 hours. The difference between being good and excellent is 2000 hours of practice or hard work. So the moral of this story is that if you want to excel and reach the top, you have to work not just hard but much harder than everyone else. Bill Gates got the opportunity to do computer programming when still in Grade 8. He spent about 20-30 hours on the computer every week during the night and on weekends and he was way past the 10,000 hour mark in about seven years. As Henry Ford put it 'Genius is seldom recognized for what it is: a great capacity for hard work.'

I extend my warm greetings and congratulations to all of you who graduate today. As you set out on the next steps of your journey, and as you cross many more milestones that mark your achievements, I am sure you will proudly recall the value of the opportunities that BOCODOL gave you, and how it empowered you for success. More importantly, as you look back many years hence, I am sure you will appreciate and acknowledge the enormous contribution of distance education in making a difference to the lives of people, communities and nations.

May this Christmas and New Year bring you peace, prosperity and progress. Thank you for your attention.