COL in the Commonwealth

2018–2020 HIGHLIGHTS

BANGLADESH
Improved sustainable livelihoods
300,000 people

Increased and equitable access to, and use of, quality learning opportunities
1.4 million people

Improved organisational capacity to leverage ODL
470 organisations

TARGETS 2021

ACHIEVED BY 2020

257,484 people

654 organisations

Target EXCEEDED

880,039 people
**Introduction**

Since its creation some 30 years ago, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) has become a true catalyst for positive change for a third of the world’s population. Our vision of “learning for sustainable development” means that learning must lead to social inclusion, economic growth and environmental conservation. This aligns COL’s work with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote learning opportunities for all.”

COL harnesses the potential of open, distance and technology-enabled learning to help Member States accelerate progress towards achieving development outcomes.

To achieve outcomes and impact, COL has led six paradigm shifts:

- If the child cannot go to school, the school comes to the child.
- Technology-enabled learning can break open the ivory towers of tertiary education.
- Open educational resources (OER) are the answer to closed and costly textbooks.
- The digital divide can be transformed into a digital dividend.
- Literacy is not always a precondition for learning.
- The social capital of the mother is the most important determinant in bringing girls to school.

What are COL’s key success factors? COL aligns its work with global priorities and ensures that it stays relevant to Member States’ needs and priorities. COL is relevant, responsive and results oriented. The 2018–2020 Country Highlights summarise COL’s progress towards achieving SDG4.

Professor Asha S. Kanwar  
*President and Chief Executive Officer*  
*Commonwealth of Learning*
Highlights

Working in two sectors, Education and Skills, with Gender as a crosscutting theme, COL uses pioneering models and approaches to achieve impact.

- COL has developed an innovative employability framework to strengthen and evaluate the impact of higher education institutions on graduates’ employability, with a focus on industry and labour-market engagement.

- GIRLS Inspire has reached close to 81,000 girls and young women in remote and unreached communities, providing schooling and skilling them for livelihoods.

- The Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) model is being upscaled in partnership with national banks, moving from the meso to the macro level.

- The Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) programme is now being implemented across the Commonwealth.

- Ambitious projects to improve gender equality in two Commonwealth regions have been launched. These holistic models are based on community mobilisation and address areas such as capacity building in education, gender-based violence, health, empowerment, economic opportunities, and policy.

- Blockchain technology, built according to open standards, was used to issue certificates for massive open online courses (MOOCs) in different disciplines.

- COL has developed a comprehensive solution for data resilience in education for small states facing climate-related disasters.

- The ninth Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF9), held in Edinburgh, brought together close to 550 thought leaders, policy makers and practitioners to share best practices and harness innovation for change, with a view to providing employability skills to young people, offering a quality education to all regardless of circumstances, and identifying practical ways for technology to speed up our progress.
COL works with partners in Bangladesh to expand access to quality education and lifelong learning for all. Professor Datuk Dr Asma Ismail, President, Academy of Sciences, Malaysia, and Chairperson, Malaysian Qualifications Agency, represents Asia on COL’s Board of Governors, and Mr Syed Ali Reja, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Education, is COL’s Focal Point for Bangladesh.

COL’s current work in Bangladesh is primarily in the areas of girls’ and women’s education and training, higher education, open and innovative schooling, technology-enabled learning, and technical and vocational skills development. Bangladesh benefits from programmes under the aegis of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, and learners have also benefited from open online courses and other COL resources.

The following are the highlights from 2018 to 2020.

**Programmes**

**HIGHER EDUCATION**

The Higher Education initiative works with ministries and higher education institutions to increase equitable access to tertiary education, and to address the needs of industry and national development through the use of policies, systems, models and gender-responsive learning resources.

Since 2002, Bangladesh Open University (BOU) has been offering COL’s Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) programmes, and it is a member of the CEMBA/CEMPA consortium. The 29th Academic Board meeting and 13th Executive Governing Board meeting of the CEMBA/CEMPA programmes were held in Penang, Malaysia in May 2018. The meetings were hosted by Wawasan Open University and attended by board members from Bangladesh.

A high-level roundtable for vice chancellors (VCs) and heads of ODL was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in May 2018. Thirty-one VCs and representatives from 19 countries participated, including Bangladesh. The meeting was co-hosted by Asia eUniversity.
VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH (VUSSC)

Initiated by ministers of education of developing small states of the Commonwealth, VUSSC supports the collaborative development and sharing of OER to promote learning for sustainable development.

As part of a tripartite Commonwealth initiative with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the University of the West Indies Open Campus, VUSSC has repurposed and made available online certificate, diploma and undergraduate degree programmes in Youth Work Development to universities that are members of the Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work. BOU is a member of the consortium. COL’s Education Specialist: VUSSC facilitated sessions on institutional readiness and the Transnational Qualifications Framework at a technical workshop hosted by the partners in London, UK in June 2018.

In November 2019, BOU hosted a technical workshop for the Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work. It was part of a series designed to prepare partner institutions to develop and deliver the BA in Youth Work in blended and online environments. Workshop participants included BOU faculty, representatives from Bangladeshi youth training centres and NGOs, students from the BOU Diploma in Youth Development Work, as well as delegates and youth work experts from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, India and the UK.

GIRLS INSPIRE

GIRLS Inspire is a COL initiative funded by the Government of Canada through the Global Affairs Canada office and Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with the aims of ending the cycle of child, early and forced marriage and addressing the barriers that prevent women’s and girls’ economic participation.

In Bangladesh, COL has been working with the Centre for Mass Education in Science (CMES) and Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha (SSS). CMES focuses on 16 districts with a high prevalence of early marriage, working with adolescents and youths to empower them economically and socially through skills development. CMES has trained over 8,000 women and girls in life skills and various vocational skills, including fashion garments, computers, vermicomposting, mobile phone servicing, and solar and LED lighting; more than 100 women and girls started their own online businesses after completing training. Through various awareness-raising events, CMES has reached close to 100,000 community members. In addition, activities have been undertaken to build the capacity of more than 5,500 boys and men in gender equality.
SSS brings learning to the doorsteps of families, girls and women living in communities affected by flooding in Northwestern Bangladesh. SSS boats have reached over 15,000 girls and women, providing training in various vocational skills, such as garment manufacturing and farming. The boats have also trained girls and women in computer skills, as well as solar lantern manufacturing and repair. A number of girls and women who benefited from the training have started working as skills instructors, sharing their knowledge with over 1,620 trainees. The boats also reached over 4,500 boys and men.

Through GIRLS Inspire, over 2,800 trained girls and women were able to obtain micro-loans, close to 10,000 benefited from internship opportunities, and over 6,600 became self-employed.

**OPEN AND INNOVATIVE SCHOOLING (OIS)**

OIS increases access to secondary education, especially for out-of-school youths. COL’s approach focuses on training teachers in eLearning and using OER, improving the management of open schools, and supporting the use of appropriate technologies in teaching and learning.

Peer-to-peer (P2P) quality review between regional open schools is an important part of COL’s open schooling mandate. COL initiated P2P activities to support the development of common criteria for reviewing quality at the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) in India and BOU’s Open School. The two institutions agreed to conduct quality assurance audits based on an inter-institutional audit framework. The NIOS team visited BOU in August 2018 and reviewed the quality assurance process of the BOU Open School using the common criteria developed jointly with the BOU team. Reciprocally, the BOU team visited NIOS in February–March 2019, reviewed the quality of NIOS’s open schooling process, and validated the self-assessment report prepared by the NIOS team through presenting an exit report.

As well, with support from COL, a workshop was organised in May 2018 on *Gender Mainstreaming and Development of Gender Policy*. The objective of the workshop was to develop a comprehensive gender policy for BOU’s Open School. NIOS provided three facilitators.

**GENDER**

COL’s Gender initiative supports partners in mainstreaming gender and in implementing holistic projects to address specific gender issues. It aims to tackle the distinct challenges faced by girls/women and boys/men in regions where they are most disadvantaged, while also shifting the social norms that create and perpetuate gender inequalities.
In Bangladesh, the Dhaka Ahsania Mission has used COL’s Gender Scorecard to develop a Gender Roadmap 2017–2025.

As well, COL has provided assistance with upskilling girls in ICT through mobile app development. In collaboration with CMES, COL organised a train-the-trainers workshop in September 2018. A total of 25 participants were trained to conduct training programmes on mobile app development for underprivileged girls in Bangladesh.

In the framework of this initiative, COL has hosted the Pan-Commonwealth Training Programme on Women and Leadership in ODL in Malaysia. Ms Nazneen Akhter, BOU, participated in the 2019 session.

TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED LEARNING (TEL)

This initiative aims to encourage more institutions to integrate TEL and OER policies and practices to improve teaching and learning for skills development. TEL activities focus on the individual, institutional and country levels.

In Bangladesh, COL has supported the development of a national OER policy. In June 2019, BOU held a national consultation to review the draft. The consultation was organised jointly with the Ministry of Education and the Access to Information programme of the Government of Bangladesh.

As well, COL has been supporting BOU to develop blended online courses for the Master of Public Health programme. A workshop on developing online courses was organised at BOU in March 2019. Another workshop was hosted in June 2019 to finalise the blended course designs. In December 2019, COL’s Education Specialist: eLearning shared a course design template and assisted BOU with enhancing the Moodle learning management system with interactive video and synchronous conferencing facilities.

COL’s Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) programme has been implemented in 15 schools across Bangladesh, in partnership with the Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM). A workshop for training teachers to use the C-DELTA platform was organised by DAM in January 2019. A recent train-the-trainers workshop in January 2020 built the digital skills of 30 teachers from both government and non-government colleges and teacher training centres to use the C-DELTA platform.

As well, COL co-organised a workshop in June 2019 to develop an OER policy to be implemented across 13 educational institutions supported by DAM. As part of this policy, an OER repository has been developed to improve the management and sharing of the large number of educational resources developed by participating institutions.
COL is supporting Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology (AUST) in implementing the Digital Bangladesh 2021 Vision through TEL. A workshop on developing a draft policy for implementing TEL was held in April 2019. Another workshop, in June 2019, focused on blended course design using Moodle. In December 2019, a capacity-building workshop was organised for teachers on developing blended courses using Moodle.

Dr Kazi A. Kalpoma, AUST, participated in the Technology-Enabled Learning Community of Practice meeting, while Mr Abu Nasar Md Tofail Hossain, BOU, and Mr G.F. Hamim, DAM, attended the C-DELTA Training of Trainers workshop, both held in New Delhi, India in December 2018.

Under the aegis of TEL, COL has been offering a MOOC on *Introduction to Technology-Enabled Learning*, in partnership with Athabasca University, Canada. In 2018–2019, 593 learners from Bangladesh benefited from the third and fourth course offerings.

**TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (TVSD)**

COL’s TVSD supports partners with using ODL to increase access to demand-driven, competency-based skills training. TVSD is increasingly focused on innovative models that harness ODL for theory, with practical skills development organised in workplaces and communities.

In Bangladesh, TVSD has worked with DAM to develop and pilot an online gender staff training course. This followed their completion of a gender audit and development of a Gender Action Plan in 2018. In September 2018, COL supported two workshops with DAM staff to develop the materials for the course, plan a delivery strategy, and provide training in the development of OER. Following the training, DAM piloted the course.

As well, TVSD funded a situational analysis of the training needs within Bangladesh’s ready-made garment (RMG) industry and the perceived appropriateness of using eLearning for training. The analysis identified managerial training as the major gap and confirmed the need for a blended learning model to help fill this gap. In September 2019, COL’s Education Specialist: TVSD visited two factories to meet potential learners and industry partners. COL and DAM have now agreed to work with several RMG companies to pilot a model that combines workplace and online learning to train sewing machine operators for line chief and floor supervisor roles. The project aims to increase the number of Bangladeshi managers, reduce gender inequity in management, and safeguard more women against predicted job losses from automation of the industry.
COL’s Skills Online initiative has partnered with Better Future For Women (BfW), an organisation working to improve the conditions of women and to identify and recruit the most marginalised men, women, boys and girls in certain poverty-stricken locations in Bangladesh, including refugee camps for Rohingya people who have migrated from Myanmar. The goal is to ensure that by mid-2020, at least 1,000 people from marginalised communities, of whom some 40% are women, will have accessed at least two short-term courses aligned to their employability prospects. As a result of this initiative, many of them will be able to establish their own social enterprises, while the rest, it is envisaged, will have found suitable jobs in a variety of sectors. Through BfW, COL has been able to work with: a local partner, the Rural Reconstruction Foundation, among the local poor population in the Jessore district; Young Power in Social Action and Sheba Manabik Unnayan Kendra among the Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar; and eTryBiz Pvt. Ltd. among local youths seeking jobs in the IT and IT-enabled services sector.

**COMMONWEALTH EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CENTRE FOR ASIA (CEMCA)**

Established by COL in 1994 with the goal of effectively utilising educational resources for distance education, CEMCA is headquartered in New Delhi, India and works in seven Commonwealth countries of Asia: Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore and Sri Lanka. CEMCA works in two sectors — Education and Skills — with Gender as a cross-cutting theme.

In Bangladesh, in collaboration with BOU, CEMCA has been implementing a comprehensive project called Impacting Education and Open Schooling through OER—Making a Difference Among the Learners. In the framework of this initiative, vocational education and training (VET) integrated high schooling was developed, along with e-Bachelor in Education / e-Master in Education curricula for five courses. A total of 33 faculty members from BOU’s Open School and School of Education were trained, and their capacities in VET content development were enhanced. Apart from theory, hands-on experience with ICT-based open and distance education systems was provided, with a view to implementing an OER-based blended vocational education programme. An OER repository using DSpace was developed for BOU.

*Integrating Community Radio with Skills to ensure TL2L (Transformation of Listener to Learner)* is another project implemented by CEMCA in Bangladesh. In 2018–2019, CEMCA engaged five community radio stations and one web radio station in Bangladesh to increase awareness amongst youths about avenues for developing skills and thereby
finding a sustainable livelihood. Community radio stations have been trained to conduct field activities, such as career counselling, job melas and skill camps.

As well, in the framework of the Integrated Higher Education Model, a Quality Assurance Toolkit for ODL institutions was finalised at a workshop in February 2019. Hosted by the e-Learning Centre, University of Hyderabad, it brought together 24 participants from 12 higher education institutions in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. Two representatives from BOU participated in the workshop.

In January 2020, CEMCA organised a two-day workshop in collaboration with BOU on *Impacting Education and Open Schooling through OER* for 31 tutors and faculty members who are engaged in providing tutorials for learners in the Higher Secondary Certificate and Education programmes (BEd/MEd). Following the workshop, the university agreed on policy recommendations for BOU, such as exchanging VET materials among regional open universities to achieve cost-effectiveness for the planned VET programme.

**Events and Special Activities**

**BANGLADESH NGO AFFAIRS BUREAU DIRECTOR VISITS GIRLS INSPIRE PROJECT SITE**

The Director of the NGO Affairs Bureau in Bangladesh, Mr Helal Uddin, visited Amtoli in November 2018 to witness first-hand COL’s GIRLS Inspire project activities. He observed activities such as skills training, awareness sessions and a performance by a girls travelling troupe. Hosted by CMES, the Director also joined in a meeting with women and girls, project staff and local support group members.

**REGIONAL MEETING OF COL FOCAL POINTS**

The Asia regional meeting of COL’s Focal Points took place on 10–11 December 2018 in New Delhi, India to strengthen the effectiveness of COL’s work in addressing key priorities for education and training in the region, and to share information about developments related to learning for sustainable development. Mr Syed Ali Reja, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Education, represented Bangladesh at the meeting.
GIRLS INSPIRE STAKEHOLDER MEETING

In February 2019, COL, in collaboration with Tanzania’s Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, co-hosted the GIRLS Inspire end-of-project meeting for preventing child, early and forced marriage. It was attended by members of parliament and their representatives from nine countries, including Bangladesh. The outcomes of the project and lessons learned were shared, along with a roadmap for how to engage policy makers and partners to integrate this initiative into national programmes for preparing women and girls for employment and entrepreneurship.

MOOC ON INTRODUCTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN BUSINESS

The two offerings of COL’s MOOC on *Introduction to Sustainable Development in Business*, organised in collaboration with the Open University of Mauritius in May–June 2019 and November–December 2019, attracted 80 participants from Bangladesh.

PCF9

Close to 550 policy makers, practitioners and thought leaders from across the Commonwealth and beyond gathered at the historic Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh, Scotland for the ninth Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF9), themed *Innovations for Quality Education and Lifelong Learning*. It was organised from 9 to 12 September 2019 in partnership with The Open University, UK.

The four days of insightful keynote addresses, engaging plenary panels, informative parallel sessions, and other programme highlights provided a unique opportunity to bridge traditional divides between borders and sectors. Discussions centred around four key sub-themes: *Opening Up Education*, *Equity and Inclusion*, *Technology* and *Employability*, and delegates appreciated the focus on new forum features — artificial intelligence, youth and girls’ education, and learners with special abilities. Under the auspices of PCF9, COL hosted a ministerial roundtable with participation from six education ministers.

COL sponsored 13 delegates from Bangladesh to attend the forum. As well, four Bangladeshi participants joined the TEL Partners meeting, three attended the *Open and Innovative Schooling* workshop, one delegate participated in the Higher Education meeting, and there was one participant at the TVSD workshop; all these workshops were hosted by COL in Edinburgh in the framework of PCF9.
PCF9 Edinburgh Statement

Forum partners from over 60 countries believe that it is possible to significantly accelerate progress towards the aim and targets of SDG4 by prioritising the following collective actions now:

1. **Accomplishment at scale**
   Mobilise an emergency response to ensure that all children in the Commonwealth, including girls, learners with different abilities, and learners from vulnerable and marginalised communities, experience a quality education focused on accomplishment, knowledge exchange and the continued ability to learn.

2. **Skills for productive lives**
   Urgently create learning opportunities for marginalised, excluded, vulnerable and out-of-school young people to build skills for leading a productive life, embracing technology to enhance employability, entrepreneurship and confidence, and bridging accessible formal, non-formal and informal education.

3. **Creating new digital dividends**
   Develop new, innovative, flexible modes of education to foster creativity, imagination and peer knowledge exchange, increase reach and ensure no one is left behind, through the use of appropriate media and delivery, including blended approaches to digital learning.
4. Teachers as skilled agents of change
Teachers and teacher educators are the main agents of change for quality education and can be supported to catalyse action in their schools, communities and colleges as respected professionals who model lifelong learning. To do this we propose:

Creating alternative, flexible and technology enabled pathways into teaching to resolve the shortage of skilled and motivated teachers;

Expanding low-cost, highly effective ways to support school-based teacher professional development to build change capacity and capability within regional and national educational systems.

5. Positively disrupt higher education
Support innovation for quality higher education; strengthen the technology-enabled learning ecosystem throughout the Commonwealth, including the scope to develop professional skills, recognition, validation and verification of experiential and prior learning through micro-credentialing and blockchain technology; expand the reach of open education for dispersed audiences; and improve barrier-free access to tertiary education.

6. Challenging assessment
Radically relook at assessment models: build a culture of assessment to support employability and micro-entrepreneurship.

Our ambition is to achieve this through:

Bold inclusive collaboration;

Bringing together the diverse groups of critical thinkers, innovators and practitioners who can collaboratively make change happen by delivering quality education and lifelong learning for all;

Making greater use of data, evidence and storytelling to galvanise political will for enabling policies and well-resourced implementation plans;

Sustaining the momentum;

Building an active network of learning, support and action starting now.

Sustaining and building our momentum for change, we aim to bring our key commitments to the fore of the policy agenda through the Conference of Commonwealth
New Publications and Resources

In 2018–2020, COL produced a number of publications and resources, including:

**Knowledge Series: Designing and Implementing Micro-Credentials: A Guide for Practitioners**

As online learning and MOOCs become mainstream, it is important to explore new forms of credentialing. This publication offers a step-by-step guide to plan, design and implement micro-credentials and badges in diverse contexts and provides greater flexibility in the journey of the new learner-earner through a skills and capability framework.

**A Blueprint and Toolkit for School-Based Teacher Development: SECONDARY**

This toolkit is for implementing school-based teacher development as a way to improve the performance of schools and raise the achievement of children. This valuable resource includes a detailed framework, which can be adapted to the context of a particular country, region, district or school, and offers practical daily activities for teachers.

**Guidelines on the Development of Open Educational Resources Policies**

This new publication provides specific tools to analyse current contexts and policy environments, understand issues related to copyright and licensing, and align policy in support of Sustainable Development Goal 4. The guidelines present a systematic process for designing and implementing OER policies and measuring their impact.

**A Guide to Integrating Employability in Higher Education Institutions: The Commonwealth of Learning’s Employability Model**

This publication provides clear guidelines on how to integrate employability pathways into instructional systems. From career counselling to career support, the guide demonstrates how institutions can prepare graduates for employment or entrepreneurship.

**Gender Scorecard 2.0: Instructions and Templates**

This is a tool to audit the capacity of institutions to mainstream gender. It helps with analysing existing policies and practices and developing clear steps for the effective promotion of gender equity.

All COL publications can be found on its open-access repository at [oasis.col.org](http://oasis.col.org).