

# *Promoting Open Education Resources (OER)*

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## *Video Presentation*

*Commonwealth Symposium on Education,  
Nairobi, Kenya, 6 June 2013, Promoting Open  
Education Resources (OER)*

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## Transcript

Greetings to everyone at the Commonwealth Symposium on Education from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in Vancouver. It is an honour to be virtually present to give you COL's perspective on Open Education Resources or OER.

As you know, COL believes that knowledge is the common wealth of human kind and that all educational content developed with public funds must be made available under open licenses, so that more people are able to benefit from the initial investment.

As such, COL has taken several concrete steps to promote OER. In fact COL was promoting the development of OER in the nineties with its STAMP 2000+ teacher training materials well before the term OER, was first coined at a UNESCO workshop in 2002. More recently, COL became one of the first intergovernmental organisations to declare its commitment to OER through the development of an OER policy.

Why is COL interested in promoting OER? The purpose of COL, as stated in its MOU, is 'to widen access to opportunities for learning' and to assist "the acquisition and delivery of teaching materials and more generally facilitate[ing] access to them; and commission[ing] and promote[ing] the adaptation and development of teaching materials". This was a visionary idea at the time and is now beginning to bear fruit as OER.

COL is leading several initiatives to promote the development and use of OER. Thirty-two Member States of the Commonwealth are actively engaged in developing OER under COL's Virtual University of the Small States of the Commonwealth initiative. Need-based courses on "Disaster Management", "Tourism" 'Entrepreneurship' 'Fisheries' etc have been completed and are available on COL's website. COL is supporting the Teacher Education in Sub Saharan Africa or TESSA consortium, another partnership of 13 African countries, for developing and deploying teacher training materials. However, COL recognises that OER need to be promoted for schools as well. Through a six-country partnership,

COL has developed 20 sets of course materials in print and online formats, based on the secondary curricula of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia. This has established communities of practice and helped teachers and institutions save time and money by collaborating on the content development across different countries and cultures. This long engagement with OER gives COL a perspective about the inherent challenges and the emerging opportunities.

We believe that the OER movement is a people's movement, founded on the principles of openness, sharing and collaboration. This is very much in keeping with the spirit of the 2012 Paris OER Declaration, that was adopted by the global community at the World OER Congress organized jointly by UNESCO Paris and COL with support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

The Paris Declaration makes 10 recommendations. Let me just refer to three key recommendations

- Reinforce the development of strategies and policies on OER
- Encourage the development and adaptation of OER in a variety of languages and cultural contexts
- Encourage the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds

This Declaration is an important development as governments tend to take such internationally-agreed documents seriously.

OER also featured in the Communique issued by the Commonwealth Education Ministers when they met for their triennial conference in Mauritius in August 2012. Ministers recommend that *'a common platform for OER materials be set up for ease of access'* and that *'the development and use of OER in providing quality teaching and learning for all' be promoted*. This again is an influential document that gets the attention of policy makers across the 54 Commonwealth Member States.

What will COL do to take these recommendations forward? COL will continue its partnership with UNESCO and other like-minded organisations to focus on four areas: one, advocacy and awareness generation regarding the benefits and availability of OER; two, policy development on OER at the national and institutional levels; three, capacity building so that more governments, institutions and individuals are able to effectively harness the potential of OER and four, promote research through its publications on OER and its Chairs programme. COL's website has one of the most comprehensive repositories of materials and resources on OER and I invite you to visit us at [www.col.org](http://www.col.org).

In conclusion, let me say that the OER movement has the potential to enhance access to quality education at low costs. Let us build our capacities so that we can take full advantage of this opportunity.

Let me wish you all a very memorable symposium.