GIRLS Inspire: Reaching Hard-to-Reach Women and Girls

The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved unless we provide girls and women with equal opportunities to benefit from learning and education.

To this end, GIRLS Inspire is a new initiative by COL, launched on 8 March 2016 to coincide with International Women’s Day. The initiative encompasses two projects supported by the governments of Canada and Australia to reach the unreached women of the Commonwealth, with a view to ending the cycle of child early and forced marriage.

According to UNESCO, almost one-quarter of all young women (aged 15–24) in developing countries have never completed primary school. Through the GIRLS Inspire initiative, COL is partnering with community organisations in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mozambique and Tanzania, leveraging their collective expertise in open and distance learning to provide schooling and skills development to some of the world’s most vulnerable and hard-to-reach girls. COL recognises that advancing the goals of both women’s empowerment and gender equality are central to “learning for sustainable development.”

“Providing learning opportunities for vulnerable, hard-to-reach women and girls is one of the best investments we can make in working towards sustainable development,” says Professor Asha Kanwar, President and CEO of COL. “Empowering women and girls to shape their own future has an incredible multiplier effect on economic growth that leads to increased prosperity not just for individuals, but for entire families.” In this regard, open and distance learning can be especially helpful in enabling women and girls to access educational opportunities whilst they fulfil their other responsibilities.

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L3F Women Start Own Company

A community of women goat herders in Theni District, southeast India, have inaugurated their own company after receiving training in goat farming and business management through COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) programme.

In 2000, the women had no experience or skills in using mobile phones or running their own business enterprise. Using mobile phones, community members received voice-mail messages with information to help them achieve higher productivity in goat rearing through better breed selection, feed, health management and animal care. The women proudly call themselves voicemail farmers.

In 2013, the women began contemplating forming their own company to eliminate the need for a middleman and enable them to retain more of the profits of their work in their own community. With the support of Vidiyal, a non-governmental organisation, and India’s National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, the Theni District Goat Farmers Producer Company Limited was registered under the Companies Registration Act in January 2016.

The company is operated by a board of eight women and two men, who run it with funds raised from members’ shares (each member has bought 100 shares). Profits will be shared as dividends, and the excess will be kept as a reserve.

www.col.org/l3f
https://www.nabard.org/english/Home.aspx

The women proudly call themselves voicemail farmers.

TVET Ministries in Africa Lead the Way

More than 6,500 new learners have been reached through flexible and blended approaches amongst technical and vocational education and training (TVET) partners in Africa. Now, government ministries responsible for TVET have made major commitments to scaling up this model in Zambia, Nigeria and Kenya. INVEST Africa has increased to 90 the number of institutions starting or strengthening this approach. This includes the development of policy guidelines and strategic plans to ensure that a flexible TVET model is integrated through public institutions. At the introductory workshop in Kenya, Mr Mursal Bashir, Director of TVET in Kenya, said, “We know that flexible and blended TVET is the way to go if we want to equip trainees with the skills that employers want. Government is expanding the number of institutions, and we need to use these approaches to reach more people with skills training for both formal employment and the informal sector.”

Nigeria’s National Board for Technical Education is spearheading the approach with 13 polytechnics across the country that have a strong focus on integrating non-formal courses for livelihoods training. In Zambia, both the National Training Agency and the Ministry of Higher Education are developing a range of policy and strategy documents, with an emphasis on print-based distance education for increasing access to skills training in 25 TVET institutions.
Transforming Teacher Education at Kenyatta University

Training teacher-trainers to integrate ICT in teaching and learning is a strategy for ensuring Kenyatta University produces teachers who will be prepared for the future.

“Kenyatta University has about 6,000 students taking different education courses. Meeting the needs of all these student-teachers and preparing them to be effective teachers who can successfully integrate ICT in classrooms is a challenge,” says Dr Fatuma Chege, Dean of the School of Education. As a way forward, Kenyatta University is transforming its education course materials from simple print-based modules to vibrant, multimedia e-content, in response to market demands that require innovative educational methods.

The university hopes to increase: confidence amongst staff in the innovative use of ICT in pedagogical practices; interaction between lecturers and students using the Moodle platform; and, ultimately, the overall number of students enrolled on the eLearning platform. Twenty-one teacher-educators have been trained in a wide array of topics, including open educational resources, social media, models of technology integration, and planning for technology integration.

Vanuatu Focuses on OER

The Vanuatu TVET Sector Strengthening Program is an Australian government-funded initiative working to strengthen national and provincial structures within the TVET sector. It also concentrates on building capacities amongst local training providers to deliver courses focused on employment and income-generation outcomes within a nationally recognised framework.

Six Open Universities to Develop ICT Skills Courses

Experts from the Allama Iqbal Open University, Indira Gandhi National Open University, National Open University of Nigeria, Open University Malaysia, Open University of Tanzania and Open University of Sri Lanka participated in a two-day strategy meeting in Mauritius from 25–26 January 2016 to discuss the development of ICT skills courses.

Towards an OER Policy: OUT

A two-day workshop on developing open educational resources (OER) policy frameworks was held with the support of COL at the Open University of Tanzania from 28–29 January 2016. The meeting was facilitated by Dr Sanjaya Mishra of COL and Dr Tony Mays of OER Africa; the latter organisation is also working to develop OER policy in Africa, with the support of The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Hewlett Supports Monitoring and Evaluation

With its Strategic Plan 2015–2021, COL has committed to focusing on outcomes and impact rather than on outputs alone. Explaining what we do and produce (outputs) remains important, but even more significant is showing the impact of our work and demonstrating measurable outcomes that contribute to sustainable development in the Commonwealth countries we serve.

To support this work, COL has received a grant from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation to develop a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system that will enable COL to capture, collect and analyse data, with a view to assessing progress made on its Strategic Plan 2015–2021.

Tristan Measures, an experienced M&E practitioner, is assisting COL staff to develop a robust M&E plan that provides a practical methodology for analysing the relationships between the costs, outputs, intended outcomes and impacts of COL’s initiatives.

IN BRIEF

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Tristan Measures, an experienced M&E practitioner, is assisting COL staff to develop a robust M&E plan that provides a practical methodology for analysing the relationships between the costs, outputs, intended outcomes and impacts of COL’s initiatives.
COL President and CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar, delivered a keynote speech on “The New Paradigm for Open Universities” at the annual conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities, hosted by Open University Malaysia, in Kuala Lumpur, from 30 November to 2 December 2015. This focused on how open universities must transform themselves to keep abreast of technological developments and meet the needs of the 21st-century learner.

COL Presents at EMAG

COL President and CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar, made a presentation via Skype to the Education Ministers Action Group (EMAG) meeting held at the Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House, London, on 22 January 2016. Chaired by the Honourable Jerome K Fitzgerald, Minister of Education, Science and Technology, The Bahamas, the purpose of EMAG is to drive policy action in Member States to achieve Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Professor Kanwar explained how COL’s Strategic Plan, “Learning for Sustainable Development,” is closely aligned with the aspirations of Goal 4, which are “to ensure equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning for all.” She also demonstrated how COL is harnessing the potential of various technologies to promote quality education, skills development and gender equality around the Commonwealth. COL’s country reports were presented to the ministers and representatives of the participating countries.

Improving Access to Higher Education in Cameroon and Zambia

The University of Buea, Cameroon, and the University of Zambia recently requested COL’s technical assistance in the formulation of open and distance learning (ODL) policies to improve access to higher education. These universities are two of the many that were originally established as traditional face-to-face higher education institutions in the region. Their adoption of ODL policy frameworks is expected to result in increased access to higher education in the two countries. Professor Olufemi Peters, from the National Open University of Nigeria, and Professor Mpine Makoe, from the University of South Africa, facilitated the policy formulation process in Cameroon and Zambia, respectively. Capacity building in ODL was followed by policy development. The policy frameworks include leadership, governance, staff professional development, ODL foundations and ODL systems. The workshops were also attended by senior university management, including the vice chancellors. In both institutions, the output of the technical assistance included draft ODL policy documents and overwhelming acceptance of ODL by faculty and senior management.

New Online Diploma in TVET Teaching, Sri Lanka

The need for TVET teachers to integrate technology into skills training is now an imperative in all vocational areas in the Commonwealth. Not only is information and communications technology a vocational subject in itself, but it is also becoming the medium by which employability skills are integrated into TVET programmes. The University of Vocational Technology (UNIVOTEC) has been developing online content for a new National Diploma in TVET Teacher Education and has successfully launched the diploma programme, with 240 trainees throughout Sri Lanka. This programme is offered in a blended format, with 50 per cent of the materials available online. COL continues to work closely with UNIVOTEC to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the National Diploma in TVET Teacher Education online programme.
USING OER LIKE A PRO

Open educational resources (OER) are rapidly becoming a major part of the education landscape, especially with the new thrust towards “openness.” Conceptually, OER are a sensible and cost-effective way of incorporating quality materials, including multimedia items, into a particular teaching and learning scenario. Realistically, however, this is easier said than done. To fully harness the potential of OER, you need to understand some of the guiding limitations of the philosophy. The following five tips will get you started:

1. Make the effort to change your mindset.
   “Open” doesn’t come naturally to many of us. The first step is to convince yourself that being open will only enhance your academic prowess.

2. If you take, remember to give back.
   OER are not just about taking free stuff and using it in your own work. You must remember to share back your own work under a free licence.

3. Know your licences.
   What you can and cannot do with an OER depends on the licence under which it was released. Visit creativecommons.org/licenses/ to learn more about the various licences available.

4. Plan ahead.
   Before starting, be certain about the licence and format under which you will release your work. Once you are certain, it becomes much easier to search and locate resources that match your requirements.

5. Practice first, and policy will follow.
   Usually, policy follows practice in OER. Your pioneering work in OER will encourage your institution to implement the necessary policy frameworks to assist you.

OER Workshop at the Open University of Sri Lanka

A two-day workshop on open educational resources (OER) was conducted at the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) on 15–16 February 2016. The objective of the workshop was to build capacities amongst academic staff in using/reusing OER in online and distance learning course development. The facilitator of the workshop was Professor Mostafa Azad Kamal, Director of the eLearning Centre of the Bangladesh Open University. The workshop was attended by a good mix of junior to senior academics from various departments of OUSL, with approximately 50 per cent female participation. The feedback gathered by OUSL from the participants indicated that the most important takeaway from the workshop was a new appreciation and understanding of the various types of licensing they should be aware of when developing OER material. The key outcome of the workshop was that each participant would strive to develop at least one open and distance learning course by using and/or reusing OER, in alignment with OUSL’s OER policy framework.

CEMCA Advisory Council

The annual meeting of the CEMCA Advisory Council was held in New Delhi on 4 December 2015. The meeting was chaired by COL President and CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar, and attended by COL’s Vice President and members from Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Maldives and Sri Lanka. The purpose of these meetings is to provide strategic direction to CEMCA and to review its annual progress.
Open Textbook Forum Held in Antigua and Barbuda

COL organised a series of workshops in Antigua and Barbuda, focusing on officials from the Ministry of Education and teachers from six eastern Caribbean Commonwealth countries, to formulate strategies to develop open educational resources (OER) and related policies in the region. The workshops, held from 26–28 October 2015, were supported by a grant from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (www.hewlett.org) to promote OER policy development and strengthen open textbook initiatives in the eastern Caribbean countries.

With the inclusion of information and communications technology (ICT) in the education policy for open licensing in Antigua and Barbuda, the other five countries in the region (Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines) have shown a growing interest in following a similar route. In this light, workshop participants analysed issues related to developing appropriate ICT in education policies, worked on the Understanding OER course, and initiated the development of OER projects in their countries. COL will continue to support this initiative.

Upcoming Events

Open Education Global Conference 2016
12–14 April 2016, Kraków, Poland. Theme: Convergence Through Collaboration. Organisers: Open Education Consortium and AGH University of Science and Technology


International Council on Education for Teaching 60th World Assembly

http://www.mona.uwi.edu/icetjamaica2016

Australia Doubles Contribution to COL

Australia will increase its contribution to the Commonwealth of Learning to AUD $1 million in 2015–2016 to support a range of projects aimed at improving education in Commonwealth countries through open and distance learning.

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull made the announcement at a press conference in Malta on 28 November 2015. Prime Minister Turnbull was in Malta to attend the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

“The Commonwealth of Learning is a great Commonwealth initiative which aims to improve access to education – especially for girls – through distance and open learning,” Turnbull said whilst announcing that Australia will double its annual contribution to COL from last year’s AUD $500,000.

“We are grateful for Australia’s generous contribution,” said COL President and CEO Professor Asha Kanwar. “Australia has made gender equality and investments in education a strategic priority. COL’s work in this area will support Australia in achieving its aid goals and help to improve the lives of thousands of vulnerable girls and women.”
The COL Excellence in Distance Education Awards (EDEA) acknowledge that excellence in educational processes is being achieved at many points in the learning process: at the institutional level, in the development of learning materials, in student attainment and in terms of individual educators. The EDEA Awards have become a highly prized and sought after recognition of achievement by institutions/organisations and individuals around the Commonwealth.

The 2014–2016 awards will next be presented at PCF8, which will take place at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre from 27–30 November 2016. Colleagues in open, distance and technology-enabled learning are encouraged to submit nominations for the awards and attend the forum.

Award Categories

1. Award of Excellence for Institutional Achievement

Submissions are judged on the following criteria:

- significant institutional achievement, quality of courses and programmes offered;
- effectiveness of course materials and learner support system;
- effective use of appropriate technology;
- outreach to remote, rural and marginalised communities; and
- relevance of programmes to international sustainable development goals, equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all and Commonwealth values of peace, democracy, equality and good governance.

2. Award of Excellence for Open and Distance Education Materials

Category A: print, electronically delivered materials or other low-cost media materials, such as audio, video or a combination of these.

Category B: open educational resources (OER) –use, reuse and innovation. Materials for this category should be any innovative combination of print, digital, audio, video and be used and reused as OER.

In order to qualify, materials must be developed and produced by publicly funded, not-for-profit educational institutions, non-governmental organisations and private sector entities in Commonwealth countries. The materials may be in any language used in the Commonwealth; however, an English version of the material must be available for evaluation.

3. Award Recognising Distance Learning Experience

Category A: Award for Distance Learning Experience in a Degree-Granting Programme

This award provides a forum for the expression of student experience in learning through distance education. Submissions are invited that describe a notable distance education learning experience. Eligibility is limited to citizens of Commonwealth countries and may be given to an individual or institution. Submissions can be made by:

- educational institutions that deliver programmes directly to students;
- a programme administrator/tutor; or
- students.

Category B: Award for an eLearning Experience in Difficult Circumstances

Submissions must describe how undertaking the eLearning course has enabled the learner to overcome training constraints when working in an area of conflict, natural disaster, pandemic or other challenging situation, or when belonging to an especially mobile workforce. Eligibility is limited to learners who have completed one of the Writing Effectively, Operational Data Management or Advanced Programme Management courses that COL has delivered for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), Council of Europe, United Nations Development Fund for Children (UNICEF) and the World Bank. Eligible learners must have participated in a training session conducted between 1 January 2014 and 30 June 2016 and must have completed the course.

In recognition of the winning submission, the learner(s) will be provided with:

- a return air-ticket (most economical fare) to PCF8 in Kuala Lumpur; and
- the PCF8 registration fee, accommodation and meals.

4. Honorary Fellows

The designation of COL Honorary Fellow recognises outstanding individual contributions to distance education in areas such as: leadership and service, published works, including coursework, lectures and presentations, and mentorship. Consideration is typically limited to citizens of Commonwealth countries, and designations are for life. COL names Honorary Fellows during the PCF8 but does not seek nominations for this award.

Important Dates

- Notification of Full Paper Acceptance: 30 June 2016
- Full Paper Submission: 29 July 2016
- Notification of Full Paper Acceptance: 30 August 2016
- Early-bird Registration: 27 September 2016
- PCF8: 27–30 November 2016
The idea of the “blue economy” was conceived at the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012. This conference addressed two key themes: the further development and refinement of the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development and the advancement of the “green economy” concept. The outcome of the meeting reaffirmed poverty eradication as its key challenge and focused on the green economy as a tool to achieve both poverty eradication and sustainable development.

The blue economy concept has been subsequently presented in many fora and is viewed as an alternative economic model for sustainable development that puts the oceans at the centre of this approach.

During the Rio+20 preparatory process, countries with coastlines were concerned about the focus of the green economy and its applicability to them. Robust statements were presented in support of a “blue economy” concept to address these nations’ situations more appropriately. The blue economy concept has wide relevance, as the oceans, including humankind’s common heritage of the high seas, represent in many respects the final frontier for humanity and its quest for sustainable development. Institutional efforts were made to expand the blue aspect of the green economy, and these were embodied in the Green Economy in a Blue World report, but international momentum has since moved on.

The oceans cover a large proportion of the earth’s surface and make up more than 95 per cent of the biosphere. They provide much of the world’s population with food and livelihoods and are a significant means of transport in global trade. The marine and coastal environments also constitute key resources for the important global tourism industry, supporting all aspects of the tourism development cycle, from infrastructure and the familiar “sun, sand and sea” formula to the diverse and expanding domain of eco-tourism.

The seabed is a major source of hydrocarbons, and exploration in this area is expanding. New technologies are advancing the frontiers of marine resource development, including bio-prospecting and the mining of seabed mineral resources. The sea also offers vast potential for renewable “blue energy” production from wind, wave, tidal, thermal and biomass sources. The potential of the oceans to meet sustainable development needs is
enormous, but only if the oceans can be maintained in and/or restored to a healthy and productive state. The developing world has been the driving force behind the blue economy, pioneered by small island developing states (SIDS), but the blue economy is also relevant to other coastal states and to countries with an interest in waters beyond their national jurisdiction. Indeed, although SIDS have always been highly dependent upon the seas for their livelihoods and well-being, the blue economy goes beyond just the concept of ocean-based economies; it also identifies the oceans as development spaces where spatial planning integrates conservation, sustainable use, oil and mineral extraction, bio-prospecting, sustainable energy production and marine transport. The blue economy has brought to the fore that the oceans are not simply places for the extraction of free resources and the dumping of waste products. It gathers together ocean values and services into economic modelling and decision-making processes. The blue economy paradigm constitutes a sustainable development framework for developing countries that will help to address issues such as equity in the access to, development of and sharing of benefits from marine resources, offering scope for reinvestment in human development and the alleviation of crippling national debt.

The blue economy embraces the same desired outcomes as the Rio+20 green economy initiative: “[achieving] improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities” (UNEP, 2013). It also endorses the same principles of low carbon use, resource efficiency and social inclusion, but it is grounded in a developing world context and is designed to reflect the circumstances and needs of countries whose futures depend on marine resources. Fundamental to this concept is the principle of equity, ensuring that developing countries: optimise the benefits received from the development of their marine environments (e.g., fishery agreements, bio-prospecting, oil and mineral extraction); promote national equity, including gender equality and in particular the generation of inclusive growth and decent jobs for all; and have their concerns and interests properly reflected in the development of seas beyond national jurisdictions, including the refinement of international governance mechanisms and their concerns for states proximate to seabed development.

It is increasingly recognised that the future of many SIDS depends on the sustainable development and protection of the ocean and ocean resources.
One of the oldest open and distance learning institutions in the world, the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year.

Owned by the New Zealand government, Open Polytechnic was originally established to provide correspondence trades training for servicemen and servicewomen returning after World War II.

One of the factors that makes Open Polytechnic unique in its field is that it now offers technical and vocational training programmes across a much broader range of qualifications than most other open and distance learning institutions globally. Their certificate, diploma and degree programmes range from trades training to business, applied management, psychology, communication, information technology, information and library studies, legal executive, environment, social work, engineering technology, early childhood education and the arts.

Open Polytechnic is the largest specialist provider of distance education in New Zealand, with one in every five polytechnic students enrolling there. During their studies, students receive: course resources designed by instructional design experts; lecturer support online and by free phone; and online access to library resources.

A pioneer in online learning delivery, in 2015 Open Polytechnic moved to the next stage of its digital transformation, creating its own digital learning platform, iQualify.

The platform has been built to deliver media-rich online courses and teaching across multiple devices, including computers, tablets and smartphones. “When we designed iQualify, we wanted to ensure we delivered a motivating and engaging experience for our mainly adult students who are studying in their own time and place,” says Open Polytechnic Chief Executive Dr Caroline Seelig.

iQualify allows learners to create searchable study notes next to their online course materials, and the platform supports media-rich content such as videos and interactive quizzes.

iQualify is also driven by powerful learning analytics, so Open Polytechnic teaching staff can see how students are engaging in the learning materials and track their progress. “This allows us to make improvements based on how we’re seeing students use the platform,” confirms Dr Seelig.

The new digital learning platform has also been designed to provide affordable access to high-quality online learning for other education providers and organisations.

“Open Polytechnic has always been a leader in the delivery of online and distance learning in New Zealand,” says Open Polytechnic Council Chair Murray Bain. “eLearning using iQualify has tremendous potential to enhance the quality and accessibility of education on a very cost-effective basis both for the Open Polytechnic and more broadly across New Zealand’s wider education and training sector, as well as for our international partners.”

Designed as a white-label online platform, iQualify allows partners to use their own branding. As Dr Seelig explains, “That means organisations can deliver online education under their own brand name in a cost-effective way without having ongoing technology development, risk or maintenance costs.”

“Open Polytechnic has come a long way in its 70-year history,” says Dr Seelig, “but the one thing that hasn’t changed is its focus on remaining one of the highest performing open and distance learning organisations in the world.”

www.openpolytechnic.ac.nz
Training in online course development is in high demand amongst technical and vocational education and training teachers in Kenya. More than 50 teachers from Thika Technical Training Institute and Coast Institute of Technology have recently started developing online courses as a result of COL workshops, joining the 100 already trained, with a strong focus on quality improvement. The Principal of Thika Technical Training Institute, Jefferson Kariuki, recently reported that the ODL Department had the second highest pass rates at his institution in the December 2015 National Examinations in Kenya. He attributed this to the effectiveness of the distance learning programmes that are being offered.

Building Capacity in Blended Online Teaching, Kenya

The ninth cohort of students following the Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration programme at the Open University of Sri Lanka recently completed their Corporate Social Responsibility programme.

After a needs assessment, the Corporate Social Responsibility programme focused on building a library for the remote Udagama Primary School, which is located 33 km east of Colombo in the Avissawella Electorate. One of the key factors in focusing on this particular school is its student composition, which mostly comprises estate children from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. To build the library, the students raised LKR 1.5 million. Based on feedback from the students of Udagama Primary School, the Corporate Social Responsibility programme can be deemed a successful case study from an MBA perspective, as well as from a humanitarian perspective.
New Open School Launched in Trinidad

The Catholic Education Board of Management, the Caribbean Fisheries Training and Development Institute (CFTDI) and COL have jointly launched an open school that will focus on practical skills training for students in Matelot, Trinidad. The Matelot Innovative Community Open School, which officially opened 13 November 2015, targets young school dropouts for training and certification in boat engine repairs, fish handling/processing and net mending.

According to COL education consultant Lystra Sampson-Ovid, the courses and training were developed following consultations with Matelot residents who showed an interest in fields related to the fishing industry. In this regard, students will follow the CFTDI curriculum tailored to meet their specific learning needs. The open school also has the support of the local community, with local fishermen acting as student mentors with the support of CFTDI instructors. The Trinidad and Tobago government has identified the growth of fisheries as a great way to help diversify the local economy.

JL4D Seeks Contributors

Contributions are invited for the Journal of Learning for Development (ISSN: 2311-1550), which focuses on innovation in learning – in particular, but not exclusively, open and distance learning and its role in development. We are as much interested in presenting the implications of new avenues – such as open educational resources, massive open online courses, and mobile technologies for learning – as in covering issues and interventions that change social and/or economic relations, especially in terms of improving equity. Your contributions can take the form of research articles, case studies, commentaries, and reports from the field.

Please visit the journal site and register to submit your work. The journal is indexed in the Bielefeld Academic Search Engine (BASE) and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), as well as being archived at COL’s institutional repository, OAsis.col.org

www.jl4d.org

STAFF

Announcements

Dr Johan Hendrikz
COL welcomes Dr Johan Hendrikz, Senior Adviser on Open Schooling, who joined COL on 1 February 2016. Having grown up in Namibia and later moving to South Africa, Johan brings a wealth of experience from his professional career in education management at the University of Pretoria, which complements his long-standing relationship with COL as a consultant. Profile: www.col.org/content/dr-johan-hendrikz

Dr Ishan Abeywardena
Dr Ishan Abeywardena joined COL as the Adviser on Open Educational Resources on 1 January 2016. A computer scientist by training, Ishan comes to COL from the Open University of Sri Lanka, where he was Director of International Academic Relations and Acting Director, National Online Distance Education Service. Profile: www.col.org/content/dr-ishan-abeywardena

Ms Carol Walker
Congratulations to Ms Carol Walker, Programme Assistant, who completed 25 years of service at COL in January 2016. Her commitment and dedication to the work of COL is much appreciated.
The five pioneer sets of MOOCs in agriculture, which were launched by the COL-founded AgMOOCs Consortium in January 2016, concluded in the first week of March 2016 after a nine-week run. These MOOCs were managed by IIT-Kanpur, which acted as the anchor of the consortium. The number of expected signups, 12,000, was exceeded, with 84 per cent active participation in the courses. Consequently, they meet the needs of a broad range of learners and people of all ages who want to acquire new skills and knowledge to improve their livelihoods.

COL has supported the establishment of open schools in more than a dozen developing Commonwealth countries. “We know that open schools work, because we hear individual success stories of graduates who complete programmes and go on to get better paying jobs,” said COL President and CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar. However, until now, these investments haven’t been systematically evaluated to determine whether open schools are good value for money.

Between 2012 and 2015, COL supported the establishment of open schools in Vanuatu and Belize. The programme in Vanuatu is an initiative of the country’s Ministry of Education and Training and aims to address the needs of adolescents who either drop out or are pushed out of conventional schools before completing Year 10. In Belize, the open school programme is offered by Gwen Lizarraga High School, supported by Vanuatu’s now Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. For many years, Gwen Lizarraga High School offered face-to-face classes for out-of-school youths. Beginning in 2012, with support from COL, staff began developing online study materials for students to use as an alternative to attending daily classes.

The COL study set out to determine whether these investments achieved value for money in relation to the financial support and other inputs provided. The evaluation showed that open schools were both more efficient and more economical than traditional schools at producing qualified graduates with good prospects for improved livelihoods. To date, approximately 320 out-of-school youths and adults have successfully obtained secondary education qualifications through the two programmes. More than 60 per cent of “graduates” in Belize were female. The study shows that the open school programme will generate over USD 21 million for stakeholders over a 10-year period, achieving a return-on-investment ratio of almost 8.6 to one. Professor Asha Kanwar commented: “This study looks at the bigger picture and shows that open schools can deliver a powerful return on investment.”

A recent study commissioned by COL showed that every US dollar invested in an open-schooling programme in Belize yielded a return of more than eight dollars to the local economy.

Open schools are recognised as a solution to the growing demand for secondary education in developing countries because they are more flexible than traditional schools with regards to student ages and enrolment requirements. Consequently, they meet the needs of a broad range of learners and people of all ages who want to acquire new skills and knowledge to improve their livelihoods.

AgMOOCs

The five pioneer sets of MOOCs in agriculture, which were launched by the COL-founded AgMOOCs Consortium in January 2016, concluded in the first week of March 2016 after a nine-week run. These MOOCs were managed by IIT-Kanpur, which acted as the anchor of the consortium. The number of expected signups, 12,000, was exceeded, with 84 per cent active participation in the courses. There were learners from 56 countries, with India, Nigeria and Kenya leading the list. It is expected that the proportion of learners qualifying for certificates will be about 23 per cent. An informal survey at an earlier stage showed that the learners came from highly varied backgrounds, such as managers in fertiliser companies, professional scientists, college students and practising farmers.

Four MOOCs were offered in English at the undergraduate level without any prerequisites. One was offered in Hindi at the secondary/high school level. The latter MOOC, which attracted the largest number of participants, could be followed using a basic mobile phone or the Web. For faculty, this was the first experience of offering an open, online course. They were active in the course space as mentors and provided a number of supplementary resources as the demand arose. These MOOCs were offered using the mooKIT platform. The entire technology suite for voice was also built with mooKIT.

Open Schools Offer Good Return on Investment

This study looks at the bigger picture and shows that open schools can deliver a powerful return on investment.”

PROFESSOR ASHA KANWAR
We launched the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development in 2005, when I was Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO. What did it mean? At that time, “sustainable development” was more exclusively linked to environmental issues than it is today, but we wanted it to be more than a decade for environmental education. The longer we grappled with the term “sustainable development,” the simpler our interpretation became. It means development – in all the rich sense of that term – which is sustainable. We must not eliminate opportunities for future generations in order to pander to ourselves.

My main task at UNESCO was to co-ordinate the efforts of intergovernmental organisations (UNESCO, the World Bank, UNICEF, etc.) and national development agencies to advance the global campaign for education for all (EFA). Although the objective of securing education for everyone goes back to the end of WWII and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a concerted focus on it really began with the Jomtien Conference in 1990. However, the 1990s were a turbulent decade during which the campaign actually went backwards: there were 100 million children not in school in 1990, and by 2000 this had grown to 125 million. So in 2000, the drive to EFA was given greater impetus, not only through a second conference at Dakar and the proclamation of the Millennium Development Goals but, very importantly, by putting in place systematic follow-up mechanisms.

These included a Fast-Track Initiative to direct significant funds to developing countries that had already nearly achieved universal primary education, and the publication of an annual global monitoring report on progress towards the EFA goals. As a result, our understanding of the links between education and development became both more holistic and more evidence based. For example, the strong link between secondary education for girls and sustainable development became very clear. Women with secondary education have, on average, 1.5 fewer children than those with only primary schooling. Limiting population growth is the most promising way of limiting climate change, and even a one-child difference per woman represents three billion more or fewer people on the planet by the middle of the century.

Despite good progress, the battle for EFA is by no means won. The Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 include education goals articulated in last year’s Incheon Declaration. From my perspective, however, there are two major gaps in the Incheon Declaration. First, and almost unbelievably in the second decade of the 21st century, it makes no reference to the potential of technology to drive education forward. Second, these development agencies still retain their coyness about acknowledging the large role of small, private schools in bringing quality education to the poorest communities. But I suppose the important step is to have the world sign up to the SDGs and acknowledge the importance of EFA. As COL has shown brilliantly, technology has its own dynamic once it is unleashed, and governments will, sooner or later, realise that they need help from all sectors if they are to achieve the Incheon education goals.
NEW RESOURCES

Educational App Development Toolkit for Teachers and Learners

Created by Dr. Ishan Abeywardena, this toolkit provides a step-by-step guide to developing educational apps, offering hands-on activities and tutorials in using the Designer and Blocks Editor components of App Inventor to create apps that can be readily downloaded and used on any Android smartphone or tablet. Several examples include text-to-speech, accelerometer, speech recognition, drawing, video, games and music playback features. For teachers, a training plan is included which can be used to provide training to students in an instructor-led environment.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/1729

The Impact of ICT on the Costs and Economics of Distance Education: A Review of the Literature

The review looks at relevant literature on costing since 2000 as well as on costing open educational resources and massive open online courses, mobile learning and distance education in developing countries. Given the limited space, the review is selective, with the impact of information and communication technologies on the direct teaching costs of distance education being used as the guide for selection. The review finds that the real difference between pre-2000 distance education and distance education today is due to the impact of ICT.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/2047

Open Educational Resources (OER) Guide for Students in Post-Secondary and Higher Education

This guide provides an introduction to OER for students in post-secondary and higher education. It is aimed at helping students to explore the value of good quality OER, and it provides an introduction on how to find and use OER. It intends to serve primarily as a source of reference for students in the Small States of the Commonwealth, but it will be useful to students from any country.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/2093

Adding Global Value

This booklet highlights how COL adds value, not just to the Commonwealth but also to the wider global community.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/1742

Open and Distance Learning Quality Assurance in Commonwealth Universities

This report offers some key insights and findings on how quality assurance (QA) is currently being practised in open universities in the Commonwealth, from the perspectives of policy makers, leaders and practitioners in open and distance education institutions. The lessons show that whilst all accept the importance of QA as a strategic value, the standards of practice, criteria and measures differ considerably. There is also a growing concern over QA in new forms of teaching and learning, including eLearning, open educational resources and massive open online courses.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/2046

The State of Open Universities in the Commonwealth: A Perspective on Performance, Competition and Innovation

This report critically examines specialist open and distance learning universities. Institutions such as The Open University, UK, Indira Gandhi National Open University, India, and the University of South Africa have pioneered radically innovative instructional and support methods, opening pathways for vast numbers of non-traditional students.

http://hdl.handle.net/11599/2048
The most popular content management systems (CMS) today are WordPress and Drupal. Both are open source applications. WordPress is the market leader, with about 30 per cent of the share, whereas Drupal has just under 10 per cent of the market. Both are extensively used in formal higher education. With tens of thousands of plug-ins and themes available, a CMS with the right plug-ins and themes can give traditional learning management systems a run for their money.

CMS today have applications in non-formal and informal learning as well. An important application is the design of systems that allow audio messages to be created on the Web and delivered via basic mobile phones. A CMS like Drupal can be used to create an interface which allows the expert to generate an audio message for specific groups of learners. For example, messages about fodder management can be linked to groups of shepherds. The CMS can then work with open source telephony software, such as Asterisk or FreeSwitch, to deliver the audio message to the mobile phones of individuals in the groups. Responses from the individuals can be recorded using the keypad in the phone and sent back to the CMS using the same route, allowing an expert to interact with a group of learners and track their progress. This is the essential arrangement in the LIVES+ software, which has been successfully deployed in COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers activities in a number of countries.

Another major advancement in recent times is the use of Drupal to build a comprehensive suite of web-to-voice mobile technologies for delivery and exchange on a large scale. Here’s how it works. An expert can create an audio message on the Drupal interface and target a group of learners. They will receive a “missed call,” which indicates that a message is waiting for them. At their own convenience, learners can call up the originating number to listen to the audio message. Instead of using the keypad, they can record their yes/no responses or numerals in voice. The CMS uses these inputs to match the responses with the correct profiles/answers and assign scores.

This arrangement has been used in the AgMOOCs to support thousands of learners in a single offering. It has been particularly helpful in overcoming literacy barriers as well as technological challenges caused when displaying non-Roman characters on mobile phone screens.

A closely related innovation in informal learning is Aptus, COL’s open source hardware platform. WordPress is used in Aptus to build libraries of content and software. The ability of WordPress to work with the computing power available in Aptus enables it to serve thousands of videos and documents to scores of connected learners. It has proven to be stable under these conditions of loading on a fairly basic server. Our trials show that WordPress can also be used to deliver open source apps in addition to documents and videos.