



### Khadija's story

*"My name is Khadija. We are four sisters and one brother. I was living in a village and I went to a village school. My father did not want me to study because he does not believe that girls should study. My father wants girls to get married as early as possible. He believes that only the boys should have an education, not the girls. So my father wants me to get married, but I did not want to destroy my life by getting married at an early age. I want to continue my study to become independent. Right now I am continuing my studies at the Open School in Dhaka because I firmly believe that education can change my social position."*

- Khadija Khatun  
Grade 10 student in Bangladesh, 22 years old

*"Educating girls and giving them the tools to shape their own future has an incredible multiplier effect on economic growth. It leads to increased prosperity not just for individuals but for their communities and their societies. It provides returns for decades."*

- Ban Ki-moon  
Secretary-General of the United Nations



Learning for empowerment.

### For more information:

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### Learning for Sustainable Development

COL is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.

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### Ending child, early and forced marriage (CEFM)

Canada has made ending child, early and forced marriage a foreign policy and development priority. COL's work builds on Canada's international advocacy efforts in this area by working in Commonwealth countries to promote secondary schooling for girls and women and provide them with skills development training to improve their livelihoods.

### Gender equality and empowering women and girls

Universal education is a strategic priority for Australia's aid investments in education, with a particular focus on girls and children with disabilities. Australia supports initiatives that improve access and participation in education and training at all levels recognising that improving learning outcomes for girls means addressing a range of interlinked challenges including safety, quality learning, adequate facilities, transitions from primary to secondary school and local leadership.



Government of Canada  
Gouvernement du Canada



Australian Government  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



## The challenge

An estimated **31 million** girls of primary school age and **32 million** girls of lower secondary school age are not enrolled in school (UNESCO, 2014)<sup>1</sup>. In developing countries, **116 million** young women, almost one-quarter of all women of this age group (aged 15-24), have never completed primary school (UNESCO, 2013)<sup>2</sup>. Education and skills development empowers citizens to take greater responsibility for their own well-being, as well as that of their communities and the environment. Investing in girls and women yields high returns in achieving development outcomes.

## The barriers

Addressing this challenge requires an understanding of the barriers that girls and young women face in attending and completing school.

**Early & forced marriages** - Millions of girls are forced into early marriage for a variety of economic and cultural reasons. Girls and women who marry young tend to have lower levels of education and are much more likely to have multiple children to care for while still young.

**Distance to school and safety concerns** - Distance from school is a safety issue for girls and women in many regions of the world. The issue is not only safety, but cultural and social values. In many cultures, it is not common or desirable for girls to travel unaccompanied for long distances. The further away a girl lives from school, the less likely she is to attend.

**Cost of schooling** - The cost of schooling is a significant barrier for many resource-poor families. If they are to invest in education, boys receive priority. If education is affordable and flexible, girls also have the opportunity to participate without disrupting their family responsibilities.

## The solution: Open schooling

Open schooling, which uses innovative teaching practices and information and communications technologies (ICTs) to bridge the physical distance between learners and teachers, is a powerful way to address issues of social justice and equality. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) promotes open schooling as a gender-sensitive model across the Commonwealth. Through open schooling, girls and women can participate in education and skills training, no matter their age or social status. COL uses ICTs in innovative ways so girls and women can learn at their own pace, place and convenience, and prepare to enter the world of work while also attending to day-to-day activities and family responsibilities.



*Community oriented open schooling for girls and women will contribute to reducing Child, Early and Forced Marriage.*

## What will we do?

Thanks to the generous support of the governments of Canada and Australia, COL will support secondary schooling, training and skills development for girls and women using open and distance learning.

This work will be completed under two separate projects:

- **Ending the Cycle of Child, Early and Forced Marriage**, supported by Global Affairs Canada, will focus on Bangladesh, Mozambique, Tanzania and Pakistan.
- **Reaching the Unreached**, supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, will focus on Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

COL will work with its partners to augment work already taking place to address development challenges and gender equality.

**Our strategy** is to use education and learning within the whole community, with its traditions and practices, to support girls' education and learning through schooling and skills training. Recognising that ownership and collaboration are important in achieving sustainable results, the community's participation in baseline data collection and monitoring of the activities will be important to inform the development of relevant gender-sensitive learning resources as well as to measure progress.

Through this initiative, COL will use ICTs and distance learning to reach some of the world's most vulnerable girls and young women to ensure they have access to educational opportunities and skills development training. One of the new technologies to be used is Aptus. Aptus is an innovative, low-cost device developed by COL that allows learners in regions with poor or limited broadband connectivity to benefit from digital resources and learning networks by way of an off-grid, offline virtual classroom.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics (2014) *Gender and Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/gender-education.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report: Girls' Education – the Facts*, UNESCO, New York, 2014.