



COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING

President's Quarterly Report

January – March 2022

Board Matters

The Executive Committee met virtually on February 24th where the Human Resources Review report was discussed and the scope and modalities for revising the Governance Manual finalised.

A meeting of the Audit Committee was held on March 1st to monitor progress for the first six months of the financial year, including revenues and expenditures.

The Board will meet in London, UK during July 6-7, 2022 instead of in Vancouver. The venue of the meetings will be Marlborough House, thanks to the Commonwealth Secretariat (COMSEC).

Following the recent elections in Barbados, Senator the Hon Kay McConney has a new portfolio as Minister of Education, Technological and Vocational Training.

General

One of the key issues that emerged during the pandemic was lack of access to ICT infrastructure in the developing Commonwealth—devices and connectivity—causing a great deal of hardship to our stakeholders. An ICT augmentation project was initiated to address this need and will be funded from the existing Contingency Fund over the next three years. As small states and LDC's are the most vulnerable, the focus is on partner institutions identified initially in Antigua & Barbuda, Lesotho, Maldives and Seychelles.

The second meeting of the High Level Panel on Climate Change and Education was held, where an outline of a Report to Commonwealth Education Ministers was

finalised. The increasing frequency of climate-related disasters in small states, such as the recent tsunami in Tonga, reinforces the requirement for urgent and concrete action. The panel emphasised the importance of a holistic approach to influencing behavioural change and to engaging communities through lifelong learning. Members stressed the need for harnessing traditional knowledge and promoting applied research to support climate action.

As COL prepares for PCF10 in partnership with Athabasca University, the response to the call for proposals has exceeded expectations. This demonstrates the success of the PCF brand itself and the prominent role of distance and online learning due to the pandemic. Letters of invitation have been sent to ministers of education in the Commonwealth to join us in Calgary to share their experiences and contribute to discussions of 'innovations for educational resilience'.

The recent renewal of the three-year funding agreements with major donors, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, is a welcome development which strengthens COL's ability to deliver on the commitments of the Strategic Plan 2021-2027.

Mr Maninder Sidhu, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Canada visited COL headquarters, met with staff and expressed appreciation for COL's contributions to educating and training girls in the most remote regions of the Commonwealth. The visit was timely, coming as it did before the Rwanda CHOGM, when COL will present to Ministers of Foreign Affairs in June.

President's Activities

As the UK opened its borders, it was possible to organise the annual Commonwealth Diplomats' Induction Programme as a hybrid event at Marlborough House. Organised jointly by COMSEC, Commonwealth Foundation and COL, this event is a fine example of how the three sister organisations collaborate and complement each other's work to serve the Commonwealth. The programme reflected the priorities of a post-pandemic Commonwealth, which included the imperatives of sustainable development, the urgency of the climate crisis and the role of technologies where I made five related presentations which are available [here](#).

A very impressive service, befitting the occasion of the platinum jubilee of Her Majesty The Queen, was held in Westminster Abbey on Commonwealth Day. The multi-faith service concluded with the Commonwealth Secretary General's moving words—'We affirm our belief in the Commonwealth as a powerful influence for good in the world, and pledge ourselves to its service, now and for the future'—serving as a reminder of what it means to be a member of the Commonwealth family and upholding its values. This was followed by a reception hosted by COMSEC where I met The Prince of Wales, Hon Lord Ahmad, the UK Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth, and several dignitaries.

During this trip, I met the UK Commonwealth Envoy and our board member Jo Lomas for the first time. I called on the Commonwealth Secretary-General, and met with the High Commissioners of Australia, The Bahamas, Canada, Mauritius, New Zealand, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea.

The 'Open Distance and Flexible Learning in the Pacific' project supported by New Zealand made good progress despite continued lockdowns. It was encouraging to note that hundreds of teachers and TVET trainers participated in the online courses and webinars even though connectivity was often a challenge. Teachers are central to any recovery or resilience and will be the foundation of a sustainable educational ecosystem in the Pacific.

During this quarter, a virtual meeting was held with the Minister of Education and Youth, Jamaica Hon Fayval Williams, to discuss the establishment of an open school. A joint task force of ministry officials and COL staff will take this project forward. The Minister of Technical and Higher Education, Sierra Leone, Hon Dr Alpha Wurie and I had an online discussion to identify specific activities for strengthening tertiary education in the country.

I was invited to deliver speeches at the ICDE Leadership Summit in South Korea; on quality assurance for the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities, Philippines; on girls' education for the National Institute of Open Schooling, India and the UFN-UNESCO conference on the future of higher education in South Africa, where our board Chair Prof Narend Bajinath was also a speaker. COL organised a Women's Leadership training programme for mid-career women academics from 18 countries in collaboration with Wawasan Open University, Malaysia. My presentation at this event and the video message for International Women's Day are available [here](#) with all other speeches.

This standard practice of placing speeches on COL's website enables partners and education stakeholders to reuse and repurpose the presentations as required.

Programme: Progress against Outputs

Most of the targets identified in the Annual Implementation Plan are being tracked in these reports and have already been achieved or exceeded. These will need to be rationalised in developing the Implementation Plan for the next financial year 2022-2023.

The cumulative figures for the first nine months are reflected in the graphics to give an overview of progress thus far. Some examples of the work undertaken follow:

Building National Resilience

Government staff/officials trained/sensitised



720 government staff/officials trained or sensitised in ODL, OER, TEL, GE or COL models

target: **881**



The Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, Belize organised a 3-week online course in digital education for teachers from 21 schools. COL collaborated with the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia to organise similar online training for trainers from 22 universities. COL's civil society partners in Tanzania and Malawi trained 53 government officials in gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence.

The marked shift during this Strategic Plan is an increased focus on reaching policy makers and working with ministries for scale and sustainability.

Support for national policies/strategy development



7 policies/strategies developed

target: **12**

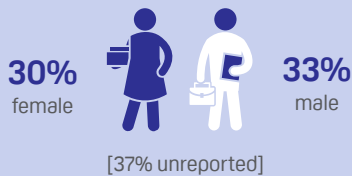


With COL's support the Department of Higher Education & Training, South Africa developed the Social Inclusion Review and Improvement Model for promoting equity in the post-school sector. The Higher Education Commission, Mauritius worked with COL to develop a regulatory framework for the establishment and accreditation of higher educational institutions. In collaboration with the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, Zambia, COL prepared the Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) extension policy to strengthen the livestock sector.

Not only does COL support the development of policies and strategies, but it also continues to partner with institutions/organisations for the longer term to assist with the implementation.

Strengthening Institutions

Institutional staff trained



11,528 staff/faculty/trainers trained in ODL, OER, TEL, GE, or COL models

target: **12,395**



COL organised a training programme on Women and Leadership to promote gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment where mid-career academics from all regions of the Commonwealth participated. School for Life, a COL partner in Ghana trained 80 teachers in innovative pedagogy and parental involvement. The National Centre for Educational Resource Development, Guyana trained 20 officers in online teacher professional development with COL support. CEMCA trained 712 teachers in three institutions in India to develop open educational resources for blended learning.

Investing in the professional development of staff in various aspects of quality provides an enabling environment for implementing policies/strategies.

Institutional policies/strategies developed



25 institutional policies/
strategies developed

target:
60



A technology-enabled learning policy was developed at the Nakuru Training Institute, Kenya and 20 instructors trained to develop skills courses for blended learning.

Since TEL was embraced overnight during the pandemic, it is important for COL to be more proactive in this field and help institutions make the transition from an ad hoc approach to a more systematic integration.

Learning opportunities (courses) developed/improved



495 courses developed or
improved with COL support

target:
195

Exceeded

In India, a MobiMOOC on 'Livestock Management in Winter' was developed and COL supported its civil society partner in Ghana to develop three courses for farmers. The University of Eswatini worked with COL to develop and offer a 4-week online certificate course in Online Teaching. CEMCA, in partnership with the Domestic Worker Sector Skill Council, India developed a course for Infant Care Givers consisting of 22 videos. In partnership with UNESCO-UNEVOC, COL developed a course on Assistive Technologies for TVET.

Such examples demonstrate COL's ability to use its expertise in distance and online learning to help partners develop courses according to their specific needs.

Learning opportunities (resources) developed/improved



3,094 learning resources
developed with COL support

target:
1,500



Exceeded

Ten videos highlighting the achievements and successes of women leaders were developed for CommonwealthWiseWomen.org. In India, COL's partner VIDYAL, developed and disseminated 378 voice messages based on farmers' needs. Emlaladini Development Centre, Eswatini prepared 88 online lessons as OER in nine secondary school subjects with COL support.

COL uses a range of appropriate technologies relevant for different contexts so that no one is left behind.

Improving Lives and Livelihoods

Gender-responsive learning opportunities developed and offered through ODL



9% female
9% male
[82% unreported]

183,570 learners enrolled in COL-run courses

target: **150,000**

Exceeded

The COL-Coursera, Google and Udemy projects continue to be popular with 45,996 new enrolments in various professional development courses. COL's own online courses offered directly through MOOC4DEV, COLcommons and C-DELTA platforms are also attracting large numbers. The MOOC on 'Blockchain for Developers' offered by CEMCA attracted over 6,000 participants from 44 countries. The COL course on 'Designing and Developing Online Assessments' was offered to 35 teachers from the Cyril Porter College of Education, Guyana.

Skilling and reskilling the work force through online delivery is a successful method of achieving both speed and scale.

Learners mentored and linked to services and financial resources



25% female
15% male
[60% unreported]

11,074 learners mentored/linked to resources


target: **7,500**

Exceeded

In Tanzania, six table banking groups with 723 farmers joined the Tanzania Producers Microfinance Public Limited Company as direct shareholders. Through two partners in India, COL linked 3,814 farmers to banks which provided credit that was needed for their crops.


COL believes that providing training is not enough and stakeholders must also be provided the opportunities that can lead to livelihoods—hence the holistic approach.

Partnerships with labour market, finance and service industry established



18 partnerships established with labour market, finance and service actors

target: **21**

86% 

1st quarter 2nd quarter 3rd quarter 4th quarter

In India, CEMCA supported the CSC e-Governance Services India Limited to conduct a free online Optical Fibre Slicer course for 2,500 Persons with Disabilities (PWD). COL's partner the Livestock Development Trust, collaborated with the African Women in Animal Resources Livestock Farming and Agribusiness Network Project in Zambia to increase women's capacity to acquire and own livestock.

Equity and inclusion are central to COL's vision for promoting learning for sustainable development. A targeted approach is being adopted to reach women and PWD.

Community members sensitised



20% female
12% male
[68% unreported]

73,419 community members sensitised in ODL, OER, TEL, GE or COL models

target: **10,000**

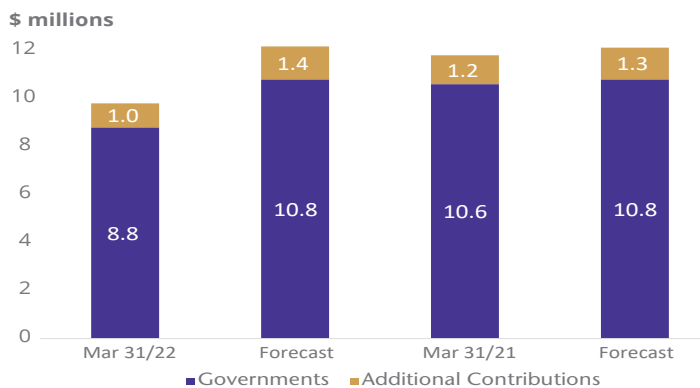
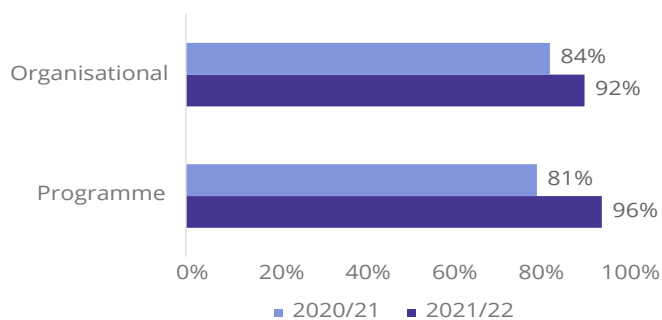
Exceeded

In Malawi, the Concerned Youth Organisation held awareness meetings to bring girls back to school by reaching 1,384 community members. In Ghana, 40 community volunteers were trained in mobilizing parental learning by fostering collaborations between communities, parents and teachers.

COL experience shows that empowering communities and parents is the biggest determinant in bringing girls back to school.

Revenues and Expenditures

To date, 38 countries have contributed to COL's budget for a total of \$8.8 million (as compared to 39 countries totalling \$10.6 million for the nine-month period ended March 31, 2021). The reason for this difference in amounts is due to the fact that five major donors have contributed as compared to seven for the same period a year ago. Of the \$1.4 million forecast for additional contributions from grants and service fees, approximately \$1.0 million has been recognised to date.



At the organisational level, an estimated 92% of the total annual budget of \$12.2 million has been spent and/or committed at the end of the third quarter (as compared to 84% for the period ended March 31, 2021). For the core programme component of the overall budget, 96% or \$5.1 million has been spent and/or committed at March 31, 2022. This is an increase of 15% from a year ago. An additional amount of \$235,000 has been committed for the ICT augmentation project to be met from the Contingency Fund.

Communications

Progress is continuing along all three dimensions of COL's Communications Strategy—to inform, engage and inspire action. Accessibility functionalities on the COL website have been further enhanced and unique page views increased to 68,223 (compared to 60,198 in the previous quarter). COL's activities and success stories were published in 26 news items.

On social media, the number of profile visits to COL's Twitter site increased by over 2,700. On Facebook, the quarterly reach of content more than tripled to 3,691,620. The number of video views on COL's YouTube channel increased by 25%. News media in 12 countries covered COL activities in 25 releases.

COL is exploring ways to increase stakeholder engagement through the use of social media. Staff are being encouraged to use their professional networks to enhance COL's visibility by sharing human interest stories and the difference COL is making.

Recent publications and resources (available on [OAsis](#)), include:

- *Connections* (vol. 26, no. 3) - also in an accessible version
- *Journal of Learning for Development* (vol. 9, no. 1)
- *Integrating OER in Teaching: A Guide for Teachers in the Pacific*
- *Making Digital Assessment Count: Designing for Engagement, Integrity and Authenticity*
- *Open Educational Resources in the Commonwealth 2021*
- *Reaching the Unreached: Scale-Up Empowerment Study*
- *Reversioning OER: A Guide for Teachers in the Pacific*

Professor Asha S. Kanwar
 President & Chief Executive Officer
 April 14, 2022