LEARNING FOR DEVELOPMENT is the theme of the Commonwealth of Learning's Three-Year Plan for 2009-2012. This plan expresses a vision that reaches beyond formal education to embrace areas of learning that are vital for better livelihoods, greater prosperity and a safer environment.

Understanding development as the process of increasing the freedoms that people can enjoy, COL pursues this vision operationally within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the campaign for Education for All and Commonwealth values.

COL's two programme sectors, Education and Livelihoods & Health, embrace eight initiatives that will help governments pursue the twin goals of expanding access to learning and using public funds cost-effectively.

www.col.org/3yp
Recent COL Initiatives/Activities

COL helps developing nations improve access to quality education and training using distance education and appropriate technologies. While significant progress in achieving the MDGs and Education for All has vastly expanded access to education in Africa, major challenges remain. COL is applying its expertise in open and distance learning (ODL) and information and communication technology (ICT) to help address needs in Africa.
EDUCATION

OPEN SCHOOLING: Open/alternative schooling has proven to be a successful and cost-effective means of increasing access to basic and secondary schooling. To meet the growing demand for secondary schooling resulting from the success of the Universal Primary Education campaign, COL supports open schools through activities including:

• Establishing and providing ongoing support for the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA). Ten African open schools are members of this consortium of open schools, which is working to expand access to quality education through open schools. Seychelles hosted the COMOSA annual general meeting in March 2012.

• Increasing access to open educational resources (OER). Open schools in Africa have access to quality learning materials through COL’s OER for Open Schools initiative. Master Teachers in six developing Commonwealth countries, including Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Zambia, developed 20 new secondary-level courses that can be freely downloaded, adapted and re-used as OER.

• Developing multimedia capacity among educators at the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL). The NAMCOL educators are sharing their knowledge and skills with open schools in other African countries. As a result, open schools in Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia have developed strategies for integrating digital content.

• Commissioning a study, “Narrowing the Skills Gap through Vocational and Technical Training” by NAMCOL, which lays the foundation for skills development at the secondary level.

• Supporting improved quality in open schooling through the development of a Quality Assurance Toolkit for Open Schools, a process that involved ten African countries.

• Assisting with planning for new open schools in Cameroon and Ghana; conducting an institutional assessment for the Zambia College of Distance Education.

• Facilitating workshops that develop capacity in learner support, instructional design and course writing specifically for open schools in Africa.

• Training/capacity building in understanding copyright and working with OER, and monitoring and evaluation for open schools.

www.col.org/OpenSchooling
Recent COL Initiatives/Activities

TEACHER EDUCATION: COL promotes the expansion and improvement of teacher training in Africa through:

Supporting Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA), a consortium of 18 organisations that are collaborating to develop extensive OER for teacher training.

Partnering with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and partner institutions and Ministries of Education in ten countries (including Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia) to introduce the Child-Friendly Schools model to teacher training institutions and teacher resource centres.

Publishing Quality Assurance Toolkit for Teacher Education.

Training in distance education tutoring for course facilitators at Nigeria’s National Teachers’ Institute.

Training for course writers to develop ODL materials for the Higher Teacher Certificate for in-service teachers in Sierra Leone.

Hosting workshops for head teachers and principals in West Africa to improve their professional skills and effectiveness, in partnership with Memorial University, Canada.

www.col.org/TeacherEducation

HIGHER EDUCATION: COL is working to improve access to quality higher education in Africa:

- The COL Review and Improvement Model (COL RIM) for effective institutional quality audits has been introduced to educators from 11 African countries. COL RIM has been implemented at the National University of Lesotho, the University of Calabar, Nigeria and the National Institute of Health and Social Sciences in Seychelles.

- Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (Ghana) and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) offer the Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration (CEMBA) and Master of Public
Administration (CEMPA) programme, which offers working professionals the opportunity to study part-time through ODL.

- COL is supporting the development of national ODL policy in Ghana in collaboration with the Centre for National Distance Learning and Open Schooling (CENDLOS).

- NOUN offers COL’s Graduate Diploma in Legislative Drafting, which builds capacity in planning and writing laws and policies.

- COL provided support for universities in Cameroon and Nigeria to go “dual mode” by expanding their offerings to include courses by ODL.

- The Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL), a COL partner in the region, has published the first issue of its research journal. RETRIDOL also develops regional capacity in areas such as research methods in ODL and ODL policy, leadership for women academics, eLearning, effective tutoring and development of course materials.

www.col.org/HigherEducation
VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH: Eight African countries are members of a collaborative network of 32 small states that are part of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). Three African countries – Lesotho, Mauritius and the Seychelles – have hosted VUSSC training workshops, also known as “boot camps”. Numerous African educators have taken part in VUSSC boot camps and online training programmes.

Initiated by COL and now led by an independent Management Committee, VUSSC is creating OER for post-secondary, skills-related courses in areas such as disaster management, entrepreneurship, sustainable agriculture and tourism. These non-proprietary, electronically-held course materials are freely available for download, use and adaptation, strengthening the educational capacity and outreach of tertiary education institutions in small states.

The VUSSC Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) was officially launched in Cape Town, South Africa in April 2010. The TQF is a system of accreditation for VUSSC courses that facilitates the movements of courses and learners among states.

www.col.org/VUSSC
www.vussc.org

LIVELIHOODS AND HEALTH

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: COL’s Flexible Skills Development initiative is supporting the expansion of access to technical and vocational skills development in partnership with the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa (CAPA). The activity focuses on opening up skills training to previously disadvantaged groups, especially women and workers in the
informal economy. Eleven TVET institutions in six African countries identified as “key institutions” are building capacity in flexible learning approaches to TVET. COL is providing training and assisting with the management of ICT infrastructure and the establishment of organisational structures; in return, the key institutions will help other TVET institutions in their country to expand the reach of their programmes through these flexible and blended approaches.

COL and CAPA are building capacity for flexible and blended approaches through online training, face-to-face workshops and an online learning and collaborative space. Ongoing support and collaboration takes place through an online Community Learning Network.

COL’s Flexible Skills Development initiative involves policy makers, industry associations, curriculum developers and government officials in establishing government strategies to expand access to quality skills training through flexible and blended approaches.

[www.col.org/SkillsDevelopment]

**LEARNING FOR FARMING:** COL helps countries harness the potential of ICT to build capacity in the agricultural sector. COL’s successful Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3 Farmers) programme, launched in India in 2003, is now established in Jamaica, Kenya, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea and Uganda. This powerful partnership of farmers, educational institutions, banks and ICT providers promotes learning for sustained improvement of livelihoods.

In Kenya, COL is working with partners in the country’s Central Province to help farmers gain knowledge and access financing in support of poultry keeping enterprises. Some students at Queens University, Canada and the Kenya AIDS
Intervention Prevention Project Group (KAIPPG) have developed a backyard poultry business and credit management plan for L3F participants in Western Kenya, an interesting example of north-south collaboration.

In Uganda, COL is working in partnership with Makerere University Agriculture Research Institute Kabanyolo to improve the livelihoods of 500 people involved in potato, sorghum and honey-bee farming in the country’s southwest. The farmers are learning about subjects such as pest control, product pricing, market development, loan management and farming practices through radio programmes, mobile phones and a website.

COL supported a workshop for African partners on integrating linkages between community banks and commercial banks in L3 Farmers in India in June 2010. Participants saw examples of community banking and identified strategies for similar linkages in their own countries.

COL has supported the creation of a collection of Farming OER that is now freely available through both the COL and OER Africa websites.

www.col.org/L3Farmers

**HEALTHY COMMUNITIES:** Working collaboratively with community networks, media and technology groups, health and development experts, and public authorities, COL helps build knowledge and skills to use non-formal ODL to address health issues at the community level. Citizens provide their experience with relevant issues, experts provide knowledge; media provide scale and engagement; and community networks provide learner support. COL’s community learning programme approach is low-cost and participatory, and prioritises local ownership and story-based learning.

- COL supported the development of a community learning programme about maternal and child health in Malawi, working with the MaiMwana Trust. A weekly radio programme targets an audience of 80,000 women; a network of 200 community groups facilitates learning through discussion and collective action among more than 3,000 women.
- COL has also supported community learning initiatives in Cameroon, Kenya, Sierra Leone, 
South Africa and Tanzania, bringing together community radio groups with community networks, district health authorities, schools and non-governmental organisations to develop low-cost learning programmes about community health issues such as HIV/AIDS, maternal and child health, water and sanitation-related illnesses.

- COL has supported capacity building for community media and their development partners in Lesotho and Namibia (both in partnership with UNESCO) as well as in Nigeria.

- COL partnered with Farm Radio International to create and run online radio scriptwriting and programme development courses in conjunction with competitions on smallholder innovation and promoting healthy communities for radio broadcasters in Africa.

- A Healthy Communities Partners workshop was hosted by COL and the Media and Training Centre for Health in Cape Town, South Africa in September 2011. Twelve national and regional partner groups from across the Commonwealth participated.

www.col.org/HealthyCommunities

INTEGRATING eLEARNING: COL helps countries and institutions to understand and implement eLearning. Activities in Africa include international workshops held in Namibia and South Africa to promote OER among educational decision makers, an information session about copyright and OER for African Vice Chancellors and a meeting of Deans of Education from ten higher education institutions to develop institutional visions for ICT integration in teacher education institutions.

www.col.org/eLearning

OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES (OER): Increasingly, COL’s work involves the development and promotion of OER – learning resources that can be freely downloaded, adapted and reused.

- Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity is a COL/UNESCO joint initiative that promoted wider use of OER by expanding understanding among educational decision makers and quality assurance experts. The programme involved capacity building workshops in all regions of the Commonwealth, online discussion forums and new OER publications.
• Fostering Governmental Support for Open Educational Resources Worldwide is an extension of the COL-UNESCO joint initiative. COL is currently leading this effort to encourage governments worldwide to recognise officially the importance of sharing OER. The objective is to have a statement supporting the principle of open access to educational materials developed with public funds adopted at the UNESCO World OER Conference in June 2012.

• WikiEducator is an online community dedicated to the development of free educational content. Originally launched as a COL programme and still supported, in part, by COL, WikiEducator has provided free training in “wiki” skills for thousands of people in more than 100 countries through its Learning4Content initiative.

• OER University (OERu) is a network that aims to provide more affordable access to post-secondary education for the estimated 100 million learners in the world who are qualified but unable to gain access to tertiary education. COL is a supporter of OERu.

**eLEARNING FOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS:** COL’s custom ODL programmes help to build skills and knowledge among staff at international agencies such as the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Labour Organization, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Bank and World Health Organization. Headquarters staff and field-based workers located throughout the world can access COL’s eLearning for International Organisations programmes in areas such as communications, data management and debt management. COL uses an open source learning management system (www.col-vle.org) for most of its eLearning for International Organisations course delivery. The web-based platform enhances communication, sharing, learning and reporting amongst learners, tutors and administrators. www.col.org/COLeLIO

**REGIONAL PRESENCE**

In Africa, COL has facilitated the establishment of:

• The Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDOL), a centre of expertise in ODL for West Africa, at the National Open University of Nigeria, and

• The Southern African Development Community – Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE), in
partnership with the Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL) and the Botswana Ministry of Education.

These regional agencies are developing an inventory of resources and network of expertise, and conducting regional ODL training workshops.

COL maintains strong relationships with many stakeholders in Africa, including member governments, partner institutions, donors and individuals. Two of COL’s Honorary Advisors, a network of eminent ODL professionals, are from Africa. The region is also represented by two COL Chairs and a network of individuals, selected by member Governments, who liaise directly with COL as Focal Points. COL hosted a Regional Focal Points Meeting (Africa and the Mediterranean) in Mauritius in May 2011. Held every three years in all four regions of the Commonwealth, these meetings provide an opportunity for Focal Points to share information about the status of ODL in their countries, receive a report on what COL has done in their country and identify education and training priorities COL can support in the next Three-Year Plan, 2012-2015. COL creates specific country action plans and country reports to ensure the region’s needs are addressed.

**PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING:**
COL’s Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF) has become one of the world’s top international conferences on learning and global development. Each biennial conference is co-hosted with a partner in a different region of the Commonwealth. PCF7 will be held in Abuja, Nigeria in November 2013, co-hosted by the Federal Ministry of Education. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is the lead partner institution. Previous conferences include PCF6 in India, 2010 and PCF5 in London, 2008.

The five-day programme is designed to address ODL’s role in widening educational access,
bridging the digital divide and advancing the social and economic development of communities and nations at large. Thanks to an active sponsorship programme and low registration fees, most participants come from developing countries, including many from Africa. COL presents its Excellence in Distance Education Awards and confers Honorary Fellowships at each Forum. A number of Africans are among the past award winners and COL Fellows.

www.col.org/pcf

KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES AND COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA:
COL employs a variety of media to communicate with and provide resources for stakeholders and the wider public. COL’s website, newsletters (Connections/EdTech News and EduComm Asia), blog and electronic resources are among the world’s foremost sources of knowledge on ODL. Most of COL’s recent publications are available on CD-ROM; all are available on the COL website.

COL’s Information Resource Centre maintains an extensive online library of documents about ODL and international development from quality-assessed external sources. More than one million documents are freely available through COL’s Knowledge Finder search facilities.

www.col.org
www.col.org/connections
www.col.org/kf
www.col.org/blog