

# Promoting Learning for Sustainable Development



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Secretary General, Excellencies, Colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity to brief you about the Commonwealth of Learning. We've given you a detailed report so I'll share just a few examples of our recent work in your countries.

As you know, COL is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government at the 1987 CHOGM. Canada offered to host the organisation and we've been in beautiful British Columbia since.

What do we do? Our mission is to help Commonwealth Member States and institutions to use technologies for expanding access to quality education and training.

After wide consultations around the Commonwealth, we developed a Strategic Plan 2015-21 entitled 'learning for sustainable development'.

How do we propose to achieve scale and sustainability? By harnessing the potential of existing and new technologies.

You'll be pleased to note that for 2015-16, we received an A++ rating from DFID which means we've substantially exceeded expectations in outputs and outcomes. The results achieved for this year are: over 370000 learners, have been reached, with more than 50% being women. 102 institutions around the Commonwealth have adopted COL models and materials and we supported the development of 635 curricula and learning resources. How were we able to do this? By working with 280 partners in 42 countries.

Where is the evidence? We have developed e-logframes for our staff to monitor outputs on a quarterly basis. The results framework links the outputs to the outcomes and the long term corporate goals.

COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development. Learning must lead to three things: economic growth; social inclusion and environmental conservation.

First, how has COL supported economic growth? Let me share three examples

These women in India are part of COL's L3F project, under which they have learnt agriculture and enterprise development skills using basic mobile phones. They have established companies in agriculture and livestock in which they are shareholders and have generated enough assets within a space of three years to pay back their loans and support themselves and their families.

In Kenya, COL supported women to start agri-enterprises and a recent study concludes that learning leads to empowerment and for every 1% increase in empowerment, there is a 2.3% increase in profits.

COL's Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme is offered in 11 countries. Raymond Loh, an alumnus of Wawasan Open University, Malaysia completed this programme in his early fifties and started a moving and relocation service which now has a presence in 40 countries.

Two, how does COL's work to support social inclusion? Even today we find a wide prevalence of early child and forced marriage across the Commonwealth. Thanks to grants from Australia and Canada, COL is training 45,000 girls and women over three years in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mozambique and Tanzania. In the first eighteen months itself, over 29000 girls have been trained in various skills for livelihoods and 5260 girls have found new sources of income generation.

The first cohort of out of school youth in a remote fishing village in Trinidad & Tobago graduated through a COL-supported open school. The entire curriculum was structured around fisheries which addressed the livelihoods needs of the young people.

COL worked with a partner in a rural community in Samoa to train people and a study shows that this has not only enhanced their knowledge and skills but also led to increased income and food security.

Third, what is COL's contribution to environmental conservation?

Ministers of Education directed COL to establish a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). All 30 small states of the Commonwealth are active members of this consortium. Environmental sustainability is a central concern for all the small states. VUSSC is offering online courses in eco-tourism, sustainable fisheries and sustainable agriculture. A recent study conducted in Botswana showed that the carbon footprint of a VUSSC distance learning student was only one tenth of that of a campus-based student, without a negative impact on learning outcomes.

Working with the Blue Economy Institute in Seychelles, COL has developed a course on this emerging field and this is being offered as a free MOOC by the University of Seychelles.

COL is working with the National Teachers Institute, Nigeria, which has an annual enrolment of 50,000 trainee teachers, to develop a Green Teacher course which will ensure that teachers inculcate environmental concerns amongst school children from an early stage.

Let me also share three significant events that mark this year.

COL triennial Pan Commonwealth Forum was organized in partnership with the Open University of Malaysia, and attracted over 500 participants from 60 countries, including seven ministers of education. This resulted in the 2016 KL Declaration which provides a clear roadmap of how distance and technology-based learning can lead to sustainable development

Gender underpins all our work at COL and we signed an MOU with the Executive Director of UN Women to collaborate on gender equality in education and skills development for women and girls.

COL is an acknowledged world leader in open educational resources and organized six regional consultations on OER in collaboration with UNESCO, the government of Slovenia and Hewlett Foundation. 85 governments including non-Commonwealth countries have responded and the report will feed into the 2nd World OER Congress in Slovenia to be held in September this year.

These, in short, are a few examples of our work. COL is your organisation and it works for you. It is small and flexible and can respond readily to your needs. COL is a source of world class expertise in open

distance and technology based approaches, develops innovative models and quality resources and supports capacity building. I invite each member state to make full use of these.

With that let me thank you for your contributions.