

# *Pacific Regional ODL Centre Planning Meeting*

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## *Video Presentation*

*Pacific Regional ODL Centre Planning Meeting,  
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## **Transcript**

I start my brief address with an apology – due to prior commitments that could not be changed, neither the Commonwealth of Learning’s President Professor Asha Kanwar nor I are able to be physically present at this important regional meeting. We opted to use technology to send you this message and I hope this illustrates COL’s commitment to the development of the regional centre and our support for your centre.

The Commonwealth Pacific made up of nine Island nations plus Australia and New Zealand and is an important region to COL. There is a long tradition of open and distance education in the region but it has yet to reach some sectors of society. The proposed new centre for ODL will be an important development for the region and will enable COL to focus its work in the region.

The Pacific island nations, like most countries in the world, have social, economic and environmental challenges that need to be addressed. These challenges, if not solved, could result in severe social and economic problems. The Island nations are also small and have various kinds of resource constraints in terms of people, finances and natural resources.

In recognising the enormity of the challenges and the constraints that exist, the Pacific Island nations have embarked on crafting partnership between the island nations and with other countries and regional bodies. This ability to partner and lever of respective strengths to ensure the region develops is an important strategy that has been employed to good effect. COL is privileged to have been part of some of these regional partnership developments.

This issue of partnerships was also noted in the report of the United Nations High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. This report, entitled ‘A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development’ focuses on partnerships as one of the 5 big transformative shifts that the High Level Panel believe is critical if the world is to get rid of poverty by 2030. The other transformative shifts include:

1. leave no one behind (including all people, especially from marginalised communities),

2. put sustainable development at the core,
3. transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth,
4. build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all, and
5. forge a new global partnership.

This model of partnership needs to focus on solidarity, cooperation and mutual accountability. The Report notes that such partnerships need to involve governments at the national and local levels, civil society organisations, women, traditionally marginalised groups, multilateral institutions, the business community, academia and private philanthropy groups.

The report goes further to emphasise that any actions to address the priorities and goals of a country should go beyond the aid agenda. It also calls for the various partners to work to remove corruption from aid funds, ensure complete transparency and to be fully accountable for the decisions taken and implemented.

As we meet over the next three days, we need to ask if the proposed regional centre will be functioning in a ‘business as usual’ way or will be focus on doing business in ways that meet real needs, that ensures people from all backgrounds are included, the work that is being planned focuses on sustainability and starts to transforms economies and develop societies.

This fits with COL’s approach. Our vision is to be the foremost global agency that promotes learning for development. To achieve our vision, we have identified five strategies, which are partnerships, building capacity, materials development, models of development and policies. Our support for the Pacific Regional Centre is an expression of these strategies.

We believe the partnership we are in will enable us to leverage the respective strengths of the partners who are present and others that could not be with us today. COL’s focus on building capacity, developing materials and enabling policy is important for the construction of the formal and non-formal education and training system in your respective countries and organisations. COL’s support for the Pacific Regional Centre is also part of the models that we have to enable regional support for local development.

We have already embarked on supporting regional centres in West Africa and in Southern Africa. Further, COL has also set up a regional office for South Asia in Delhi, India. So we have various models for supporting regional centres. This approach is underpinned by the belief that with the appropriate support, regional institutions and organisations can make best use of open, distance, blended and technology mediated learning. This supports people centred and planet sensitive economic and social development.

The learners who benefit from the formal and non-formal education and training will be central for sustainable development. If the Pacific Regional Centre can focus on strategies and projects that can support learners to improve their ability to work and contribute to society, then we would have done our jobs. If we can support learners to make a difference to their country and planet, then we have done our jobs extremely well.

Therefore the kinds of programmes and projects that are established through the Pacific Regional Centre will also be important to drive the people centred and planet sensitive development agenda. Your role in this becomes a very important one. How you determine the programmes and projects, what constitutes the content of such programmes and projects and how this is taught to the learners become important issues to address as you embark on your planning process.

This is the challenge that we all face, in all parts of the developing and developed world.

My best wishes to you in your deliberations over the next three days. I look forward to reviewing the plans that you construct and more importantly, the steps that you take to make this a reality. The Pacific Regional Centre is the first step to supporting constructive and accountable partnerships, one that makes a real difference to the lives of people in our respective countries.

It is an important step to take.

Thank you.