



President's Quarterly Report

April – June 2023

Board Matters

The annual meetings of the Board, as well as of the Audit, Performance and Search Committees are scheduled to take place in Vancouver during 28–29 June 2023. This will be the first meeting in Vancouver after a gap of four years and presents a valuable opportunity for the Board members to interact with COL staff.

The untimely passing of Professor Dan Kgwadi, the representative of the Republic of South Africa on the COL Board since 2020, and a member of the Audit Committee, has been a significant loss. The appointment of his successor is awaited.

General

With an explosion of innovations in generative AI, ChatGPT presents exciting opportunities and unprecedented risks. What are the key issues?

The first relates to the implications of these developments for education. We need to look at generative AI from the perspective of the teacher, the learner and the institution. There is an increasing trend towards developing proprietary technologies—ChatGPT started as a free service but has already released a premium paid tier. This will close rather than open up access to education where the open source movement will need to be

supported for developing open models in AI. COL has to take the lead in developing strategies for harnessing the potential of AI to develop state-of-the-art open content for our remotest stakeholder. This will include empowering teachers to use the technology effectively to reduce workloads, develop adaptive and personalised pedagogic approaches and authentic assessment methods to improve learning outcomes.

The second relates to widening the digital divide and exacerbating inequalities. For example, a 2022 ITU report, indicates that while 60% of the global population uses the Internet, in Africa, the percentage drops to 40%. The same pattern is visible in the ownership of mobile phones. In terms of gender equality, 69% men use the Internet as compared to 63% women—in actual numbers, it means that 259 million more men than women were using the Internet last year. Women are 12% less likely to own a mobile phone than men. With 21 Commonwealth Member States in Sub-Saharan Africa, COL's role will be to find ways of bridging these gaps.

The third is ethics and regulatory concerns. COL will continue to monitor the terrain and provide the necessary policy advice, technical assistance and capacity development to stakeholders, in a timely fashion.

As a learning organisation, COL is building its internal capacity and that of its stakeholders in AI. Several

events including in-house training and webinars were organised to gauge their needs and priorities. One concern expressed was that language could be a barrier for many in the developing Commonwealth. The role of COL is to make sense of emerging developments and provide realistic AI solutions for effective open and distance learning provision.

With its unique mandate for harnessing the ‘potential offered by distance education and by the application of ... technologies to education’, COL has the responsibility to advise its stakeholders from a perspective of equity, inclusion and ethics.

President’s Activities

At the international seminar on ‘Digital Transformation: Reshaping Lifelong Learning for All’, organised by the Shanghai Open University, I delivered a keynote on the theme and moderated a session on OER. This event also advanced a proposal to establish a UNESCO Category I Institute on STEM in Shanghai. This will be in addition to the three Category II Institutes that China already hosts.

Jamaica hosted the 6th International Conference on TVET in the Caribbean, where I contributed a video on ‘Building workforce resilience in disruptive times’ and participated online for the discussion. Another video on ‘Rethinking education for innovation, growth and sustainability post-Covid 19’ was presented at the Commonwealth Education Ministerial Action Group meeting.

COL submits a report to the Commonwealth Secretariat’s annual Board of Governors meeting followed by an online presentation. However, this year the presentation could not be made as the meeting was closed well before the time allocated to COL. This was a lost opportunity to highlight COL’s work to London-based high commissioners, who have responsibility for the Commonwealth and many of them were new.

As Chair of the UNESCO IITE Governing Board, I attended the meeting at the UNESCO headquarters. COL has always had a close relationship with colleagues in Paris and this was an occasion to renew our collaboration and discuss joint activities. One was to finalise an agreement for COL to prepare a Regional Report on Technology and Education in the Pacific as part of the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report. The invitation to lead the development of this global report, funded by UNESCO, recognises COL’s influence in the field of ICT in education and its growing footprint in the Pacific.

During this quarter, my focus has been on mentoring and building the capacity of staff in COL’s core areas of competence—ODL, OER and TEL. In an increasingly competitive environment, COL can only maintain its edge through thought leadership and innovations. COL is a unique organisation that promotes learning for sustainable development—this requires a combination of expertise in education as well as in development. Building that competence and sense of ownership among staff, continues to be an ongoing priority.

Programme: Progress against Outputs

Progress towards achieving the targets in the annual implementation plan is monitored at the senior management meetings held each month. Over 100% of the programme budget was spent/committed, 37 Commonwealth countries were covered and stakeholder engagement was strengthened by holding four regional meetings of Focal Points. The priorities identified have

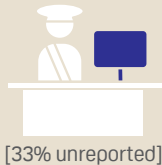
been captured in the Annual Implementation Plan 2023–2024.

The results for 2022-2023 are satisfactory with seven of the ten targets exceeded, one on track to be achieved and two will be carried over to next year. Cumulative figures are provided to 15 June, while some of the activities described below took place during this quarter.

Building National Resilience

Government staff/officials trained/sensitised

33%
female



34%
male

2,486 government staff/officials trained or sensitised in ODL, OER, TEL, GE or COL models

target: **1,060**

Exceeded

COL supported the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, The Gambia to organise a workshop on ODL for in-service teacher training on using Moodle to create OER-based curriculum content. In Mauritius, COL supported the implementation of the national OER policy by facilitating capacity building of trainers and IT specialists to manage OER repositories. With COL support, National Universities Commission, Nigeria and the Teaching Council of Zambia hosted workshops on the development of ODL courses, OER and learning management systems. University Council of Jamaica facilitated a series of workshops across Jamaica to pilot the training materials for Distance Education Standards developed with COL support. In the Pacific, COL organised training for ministry officials from Kiribati and Samoa on customising open courses. In collaboration with the Caribbean Association of National Training Authorities, COL conducted a workshop in St. Kitts and Nevis to identify and develop occupational standards in the digital, green, blue and orange economies and reviewed existing regional occupational standards.

Policymakers play a key role in developing relevant strategies and plans at the national level for increasing access to quality education and skills development. COL's effort has been to work with ministry officials to help them understand the benefits of ODL/TEL as a viable and cost-effective approach.

Support for national policies/ strategy development

74%



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



28 policy/strategy developed

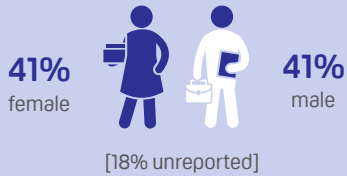
target: **38**

The National Council for Higher Education, Malawi developed national guidelines on the delivery of ODL programmes with COL support. A Technology Enabled Learning Competence Framework was developed for the Teaching Council of Zambia. With COL support, national technical vocational authorities in Malawi and Zambia developed national strategies and guidelines for implementing open distance and flexible learning programmes. Quality Assurance Criteria and Guidelines were developed for Caribbean Vocational Qualifications in collaboration with the 12 Commonwealth Caribbean countries. In Papua New Guinea, the Department of Education developed a flexible open learning policy for vocational education and training.

Policies help provide the enabling environment to promote ODL/OER in country specific contexts. However, effective implementation is required for achieving the expected outcomes.

Strengthening Institutions

Institutional staff trained



7,565
staff/faculty/trainers
trained in ODL, OER, TEL,
GE, or COL models

target:
7,428

Exceeded

To strengthen the capacity of partner institutions to leverage the use of OER, TEL and ODL, several workshops were held in Antigua and Barbuda, Botswana, Ghana, The Gambia, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Maldives, Mauritius, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa and Trinidad and Tobago, where 1,559 teachers and staff received training. Staff in TVET institutions in Barbados, Jamaica, Kenya and Nigeria received training in ODL, the design and development of OER, quality assurance and managing online provision.

Capacity building of teachers and institutional staff is needed to strengthen institutions and to create the environment for the adoption of innovative ways of teaching and learning.

Institutional policies/strategies developed



47 institutional
policies/strategies
developed

target:
43

Exceeded

With the support of COL, three universities in Kenya developed TEL/ODL policies. Six universities in Nigeria developed institutional OER policies, while two developed authentic assessment frameworks. The Gambia College and Njala University, Sierra Leone developed ODL policies with COL support. The National Institute of Education in Maldives received support to develop an institutional policy for technology-enabled learning. Gender responsive strategies for ODL in TVET were developed and implemented in five institutions in Ghana, Kenya and Zambia.

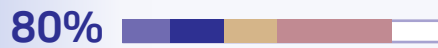
Policy development at the institutional level helps partner institutions to mainstream TEL/OER/ODL and complements COL's work at the national level. This also supports building effective strategies for leveraging the use of technology to leave no one behind.

Learning opportunities (courses) developed/improved



220 courses developed or improved with COL support

target: **275**



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

COL supported Freetown Polytechnic, Sierra Leone to develop 25 ODL courses. The Teaching Council of Zambia developed three ODL courses for the continuous professional development for teachers. Vidyasagar University, India developed four OER modules on botany, English, nutritional management and political science with CEMCA support. St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College developed six courses for online delivery in partnership with COL. The University of the South Pacific, Fiji adapted and offered two COL courses on 'Assessment Skills for ODFL' and 'Learner Support for ODFL'. The Pacific Polytech used the COL Online TVET Toolkit as a guide to develop course materials. As a result, trainers developed descriptors for 13 TVET micro-courses.

COL is committed to helping institutions develop courses as OER to encourage the sharing of resources without duplicating efforts.

Learning opportunities (resources) developed/improved



1,461 learning resources developed with COL support

target: **73**

Exceeded

CEMCA developed course modules on aquaculture and organic farming with Joygopalpur Gram Vikash Kendra, India. In Pakistan, COL collaborated with a civil society partner SPARC to develop learning resources on e-commerce, life skills and kitchen gardening. COL's L3F partners in India, Kenya and Uganda developed a range of learning resources, including video clips, voice messages and audio scripts to train farmers in entrepreneurship and post-harvest management and storage. Youth Challenge Guyana partnered with COL to create the Community Dialogue Manual for training out-of-school boys on the prevention of gender-based violence.

Developing short courses is useful for providing just-in-time learning that is lifelong and lifewide.

Improving Lives and Livelihoods

Gender-responsive learning opportunities developed and offered through ODL

10%
female



11%
male

[79% unreported]

227,881 learners enrolled in COL-run courses

target: **209,958**

Exceeded

To promote research in ODL, a new programme on 'Practitioner Research Training and Mentorship' was launched with 30 participants from across the Commonwealth supported by 14 experts as mentors. Ten COLCommons courses attracted 2,653 participants and 227 enrolled on the C-DELTA platform. A new MOOC on 'Teaching for Climate Action' attracted 1,335 registered participants. Coursera, Grow with Google and Udemy courses continued to be popular—86,466 learners enrolled during this period with nearly 60% in Udemy. This demonstrates the high demand for self-paced technical skills.

In addition to offering courses with partners, COL offered several online courses directly to support skills development and employability. This strategy enables COL to reach larger numbers in shorter timespans.

Learners mentored and linked to services and financial resources

48%
female



16%
male

[36% unreported]

38,987 learners
mentored/linked to
resources

target:
3,060

Exceeded

COL's partners in Namibia and Pakistan linked learners to agricultural inputs and technologies for production processing and marketing. More than 1,600 women and girls were linked to internship opportunities and financial institutions in Bangladesh, Malawi and Pakistan. SchoolNet, a partner in South Africa provided mentorship and support to over 900 learners to encourage them to complete the training, ensure active engagement in the course and to find further studying opportunities.

COL has a holistic approach which includes training, mentoring and linking learners to financial institutions and resources to enhance opportunities for livelihoods.

Partnerships with labour market, finance and service industry established

52%



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



240 partnerships
established with labour
market, finance and
service actors

target:
465

In Bangladesh, Better Future for Women established partnerships with Kopotaksha Munda Dalit Women's Cooperative Society Ltd., Sundarban Adibasi Munda Sangstha and Rural Reconstruction Foundation to digitise TVET courses. To increase women and girls' access to credit and financial resources, GIRLS Inspire partners in Bangladesh and Pakistan collaborated with nine financial institutions. In Kenya, Siaya Seed SACCO entered into three new partnerships with civil society organisations to provide agricultural inputs to farmers.

Working with civil society partners enables COL to reach the most marginalised communities and provide the support needed for enhanced livelihoods. This approach leads to sustainable development and the results can be traced in shorter timeframes.

Community members sensitised

24%
female



20%
male

[56% unreported]

96,555
community members
sensitised in ODL,
OER, TEL, GE or COL
models (m/f/PWD)

target:
22,492

Exceeded

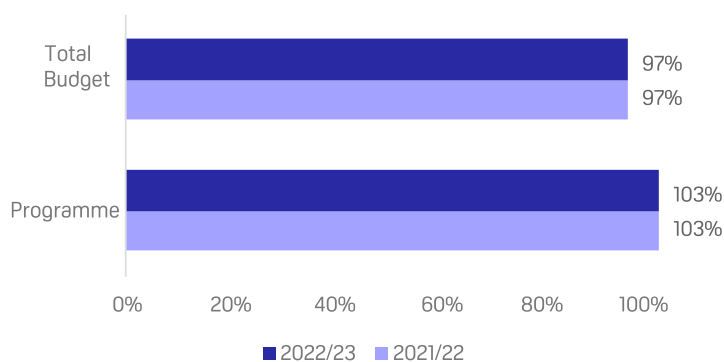
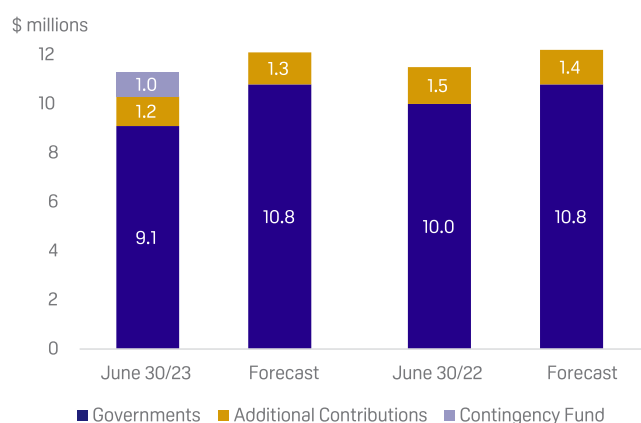
In Bangladesh, Malawi, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Uganda 12,736 community members were sensitised on the importance of girls' education, ending gender-based violence and women's empowerment. COL participated in the UNESCO-UNEVOC's virtual learning forum where experiences and lessons learned of the project on building the resilience of TVET institutions, were shared. Three webinars related to ChatGPT were organised to sensitise stakeholders on the implications of generative AI.

Engaging with community leaders ensures support for COL's work and builds trust leading to benefits for men and boys, and women and girls. In the post pandemic world, webinars and technologies are being used to sensitise and connect communities.

Revenue and Expenditure

Forty-three countries have contributed \$9.1 million for the year ended 30 June 2023 (as compared to 45 countries at 30 June 2022 with \$10 million received). The difference in amounts is mainly due to the reduction in funding by two major donors, Australia and United Kingdom, during the year. Of the \$1.3 million forecast for additional contributions from grants and service fees, approximately \$1.2 million has been recognised.

In addition, \$1 million is being transferred from the Contingency Fund to the operating account to meet programme expenditures and address budgetary shortfalls.



At the organisational level, including the programme, an estimated 97% of the total annual budget of \$12.7 million has been spent and/or committed at 30 June (the same level as at the previous year end). Of the programme component of \$7 million, 103% has been spent and/or committed, also at the same level as a year ago.

Total expenditure represented 108% of revenue received, after the transfer from the Contingency Fund.

All currencies expressed in CAD.

Outreach, engagement and communications

There were approximately 212,000 new users on OAsis this quarter, with the 'Guide to Blended Learning' emerging as the most popular resource, with around 1,500 downloads. The COL website attracted some 28,000 visitors, a slight decrease from the previous quarter. Our disability-friendly functionalities have been well-received and are being used by over ten percent of the visitors. There were 20 news items and seven blogs published, while COL's work featured in 34 news pieces across 11 countries.

A significant development was the increased reach of COL on Facebook in the Pacific region, which grew to 176,641 from 13,491 in the previous quarter. This can be attributed to a series of COL events in the region that garnered widespread attention. The Instagram presence has been revitalised. While the engagement on Twitter remained steady, the baseline will not be met. The imminent changes to Google analytics are likely to affect future website measurements and baselines will need to be adjusted accordingly.

Recent publications and resources (available on OAsis):

Reports:

- Regional Focal Points Meetings: Africa and Europe, the Caribbean and the Pacific
- MOOC on Blended Learning Practice
- Technology-Enabled Learning at the Four Public Higher Education Institutions of Mauritius
- Blended Learning Experiences at Nakuru Training Institute, Kenya
- MOOC on Designing for Communities of Inquiry in Online Courses

Course materials:

- Becoming a Climate Champion: A Climate Emergency Course for Young People
- Machine Learning for Everyone

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June 24, 2023