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# CONNECTIONS



LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Her Excellency Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta opened the first-ever CHOGM Women's Forum

Photo credit: CHOGM Malta 2015 photo

## COL takes learning for sustainable development message to CHOGM

COL representatives worked hard to ensure that education and learning for sustainable development was on the agenda at the 2015 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM 2015) 27-29 November in Malta.

"Ending extreme poverty by 2030 has to be more than just a goal, it has to be a reality," said COL President & CEO Professor Asha Kanwar, referring to the United Nations' new global Sustainable Development Goals. "Our task is to ask, 'How can we use distance learning and technology to provide not just formal education, but all forms of learning to achieve all 17 sustainable development goals?'"

The theme for CHOGM 2015 was Adding Global Value. COL representatives used CHOGM meetings and sessions to promote a new COL initiative that will support secondary schooling, training and skills development for hard-to-reach girls and women using open and distance learning. COL also used CHOGM as an opportunity to share details of its 2015-2021 Strategic Plan, *Learning for Sustainable Development*, and highlight the many ways in which COL's work achieves global value and impact.

COL representatives presented at seven different sessions throughout the week-long agenda leading up to CHOGM that included a Youth Forum, Business Forum, People's Forum, and for the first time ever, a Women's Forum. COL's presentations focused on education and learning for girls and women, women leaders in sustainable development, human resource development for the blue economy and adding global value.

“Our task is to ask, ‘How can we use distance learning and technology to provide not just formal education, but all forms of learning to achieve all 17 sustainable development goals?’”



COL President & CEO Professor Asha Kanwar and Joseph Caruana, Permanent Secretary, MEDE sign a new partnership to support digital education while COL Chair Dr Linda Sissons, Hon Evarist Bartolo, Minister for Education and Employment, Malta and George Borg, Director General, MEDE look on.

## Malta MEDE and COL to collaborate on digital education

COL and the Malta Ministry of Education and Employment have signed an MOU to collaborate on digital education and foster an exchange of ideas between key institutions in the European Union (EU) and the Commonwealth on issues related to education and learning for sustainable development.

The partners will convene a think-tank of global leaders in digital education and develop a robust, sustainable framework for good practice in digital pedagogy. This framework will include pilot systems for the recognition and accreditation of online qualifications with due consideration for quality assurance.

The agreement provides for the establishment of a Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning based in Malta, and managed as a joint COL/MEDE venture. The Centre will operate as an international hub for action research on digital education, including content, curricula, assessments, new forms of teaching and learning practices and changes to leadership and values.

“We hope this new centre will serve not only Malta, but the Europe-Africa region of the Commonwealth.”

“This partnership recognises Malta’s unique position in both the EU’s educational framework and as a small Commonwealth state with an advanced system of education and training,” said COL President & CEO Professor Asha Kanwar. “We hope this new centre will serve not only Malta, but the Europe-Africa region of the Commonwealth.”

## STAFF

### Announcements



COL welcomes Dr K Balasubramanian (Bala) as Vice President. Dr Bala, who assumed the Vice President role on 16 October 2015, came to COL as Education Specialist for Agriculture and Livelihoods in 2009, bringing with him vast experience in senior roles in international development as well as in the university, government and non-governmental sectors.



COL wishes to acknowledge former Vice President, Mr Vis Naidoo for his contributions to COL and the development of its 2015-2021 Strategic Plan. Mr Naidoo served as Vice President from 2012-2015 and previously served for five years as Education Specialist for Educational Technology Policy and Planning.



COL also welcomes Mr Roy Thorpe-Dorward as Communications Manager. Mr Thorpe-Dorward joins COL from his previous post as Director, Public Affairs at Fraser Health Authority, British Columbia with over 20 years of experience in media relations and corporate communications.



Seated from left to right: Ferida Ramkissoon, MIC; Lyndon Wilson, Tobago House of Assembly; Anil Ramnarine, MIC; and Reynold John, MIC  
 Back row from left to right: Betty Joseph, MIC; Marcia Roper, MIC; Lystra Sampson Ovid, COL; Ian McIntosh, MIC; and Jean Nichols, MIC

## MIC launches open school at Tobago Technology Centre

A new open school in Tobago will support local students in developing skills that will help them to get jobs and also qualify for higher level technical and vocational courses offered at the MIC Institute of Technology (MIC).

The open school, which will offer Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) courses in Mathematics, Integrated Science and English, was launched by MIC and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) 13 October 2015.

The open school initiative will play a pivotal role in the transformation of the lives of students who want to develop their skills and enhance their employability. After learning these literacy and numerical skills and competencies, students can matriculate into higher level technical vocational courses offered at MIC.

The open school joins other initiatives of MIC in its mandate to develop Trinidad and Tobago's workforce. The plan is for the open school concept to be expanded to other MIC centres throughout the country.



## University Grants Commission of Bangladesh visit

Forging stronger ties and sharing experiences from the world of higher education and open and distance learning was the agenda for the day as COL hosted a delegation of 11 representatives from the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh in August.

The delegates, led by Professor Dr Mohammad Mohabbat Khan, highlighted the sharp increase in demand for higher education across Bangladesh and the pressing need to advance a comprehensive framework for teachers, students and communities alike.

“Our focus is to create an enabling environment for open and distance learning. Today we can begin a process of building a coalition,” said Dr Godson Gatsha, COL's Education Specialist for Higher Education.

The day included presentations from COL's education specialists, identifying opportunities and laying the foundations for future collaboration between COL and UGC Bangladesh.

The workshop served as an important learning experience for both COL and UGC Bangladesh, with Professor Dr Khan concluding: “small steps will lead to bigger things.”



## COL President delivers keynote at DEASA annual conference

COL President Professor Asha Kanwar delivered the keynote address at the annual Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA) conference hosted by the University of Swaziland on 18 September 2015. Her keynote, *Widening Access to Education in the Commonwealth: What Have We Learned?* highlighted DEASA's role in the evolution of open and distance learning and offered four lessons learned: Strengthen systems, conduct robust research, embrace openness and promote ODL for development.



## Online Course on Open Educational Resources

COL released a two-hour course *Understanding Open Educational Resources* to address the problem of inadequate understanding of OER and open licenses. This online course is also available in CD format for learners who do not have Internet access. At the end of the course, participants can print a certificate of completion. The course can be accessed at COL's Technology-Enabled Learning Lounge: <http://tell.colvee.org>

## NAMCOL scoops World Summit Award 2015



The Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) was awarded a 2015 World Summit

Award for digital creativity and innovation that has social impact for its *Notesmaster Namibia: Open Education Resources*. The NAMCOL Notesmaster initiative brings new technologies that foster a collaborative approach to digital content development, allowing teachers in Namibia to access relevant, good-quality digital resources and integrate them into classrooms.

### IN BRIEF



The L3F table banking groups near Tamale, Ghana have experienced some challenges working with formal financial institutions.

“The SACCO manager reported that the performance of the table banking groups has been exceptional.”

## Table banking picking up in Tanzania and Ghana

COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) initiative introduces financial literacy to farm families and communities and encourages them to integrate table banking into their activities. Table banking is a group funding strategy where members of a particular group meet regularly, place their savings, loan repayments and other contributions on the table, and then borrow long- or short-term loans as needed.

In the Global Affairs Canada supported L3F projects in Tanzania and Ghana, table banking activities and learning have become core activities. L3F partners from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana and Mauritius visited one such group as well as a Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO) in Turiani, Tanzania. The SACCO manager reported that the performance of the table banking groups has been exceptional. They borrow mostly for productive purposes in agriculture and livestock and the repayment rates to the SACCO from the groups are very high.

In Ghana, a COL education specialist met three groups started by the General Agricultural Workers' Union of Trade Union Congress (GAWU), Ghana near Tamale. These groups have inspired the formation of even more village groups. During the group meetings, members go through a learning process and then the financial transactions start. Each member is expected to contribute a minimum amount and is also expected to contribute to a social welfare fund that goes to village development.

The education specialist learned that the groups are facing challenges in depositing and transacting with formal financial institutions. The contributions are therefore kept in a steel box with three keys kept by three of the women members of the group. All three women have to come together to open the cash box. Based on the capital accumulated, a certain portion is loaned to members for agriculture, livestock, and education and health purposes. GAWU and COL are working with the groups to improve the relationship with financial institutions.

## Belize COMOSA Conference



The first Regional Conference on Open Schooling held 10- 12 August in Belize was testament to what a small group of dedicated people can create with the right motivation, said COL Education Specialist Frances Ferreira. The conference, facilitated by the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA) Canada-Caribbean Chapter, attracted a wide range of excellent keynote speakers and presenters who provided a range of interesting perspectives on the conference theme: Innovative schooling; transforming pedagogy, increasing access, to ensure learning.

“Having such high-profile speakers made a tremendous difference,” said Ferreira. “They went out of their way to share their passion for innovation in education with an audience that was hungry to hear what they had to say.”

Students had an opportunity to share their stories and Ferreira said it was clear that those from the open school faced significant personal challenges, including teenage pregnancy, being victims of violence, poverty and disabilities.

“For those students it was not just technology that was responsible for their success, it was their personal ambition, the supportive environment and teachers who believed in them,” Ferreira said.



Professor Asha Kanwar, with Professor Alan Tait at the 26<sup>th</sup> ICDE World Conference Panel

## COL addresses sustainable e-learning at 26<sup>th</sup> ICDE World Conference

The 26<sup>th</sup> International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) World Conference (14-16 October 2015) brought together experts, academics and practitioners from around the globe to address the theme of “growing capacities for sustainable distance e-learning provision.”

Asked to offer views on the current distance education landscape, panelists, including COL President & CEO Professor Asha Kanwar, Professor Tolly Mbwette of the Open University of Tanzania and Professor Alan Tait of Open University, UK, identified key trends and opportunities that can be leveraged by higher education institutions. Professor Kanwar gave examples of COL’s work on MOOCs for Development, which harness appropriate technologies and use blended approaches to meet the needs of learners in the developing world context.

The conference was followed by a High-Level Policy Forum organised by ICDE, UNESCO, COL and the Open Education Consortium (OEC). The forum asked global leaders and decision makers to identify concrete actions and strategies for achieving affordable, quality and equitable higher education for all by 2030. Common themes that emerged from discussions included the need for stronger funding, better frameworks for accreditation and qualifications, improvements to infrastructure, capacity and quality, more collaboration and resource sharing, as well as the need for stronger advocacy around open and distance learning (ODL) and open educational resources (OER).

Building on the work of previous summits, the forum resulted in the establishment of preliminary action plans for each region of the world aimed at leveraging higher education to help achieve sustainable development worldwide.

“Meeting the sustainable development goals requires real investment and innovation in higher education; business as usual will not produce the breakthroughs in social and economic development the world needs,” said Gard Titlestad, Secretary General of ICDE.

In her presentation, Professor Kanwar said that open and distance learning will be a key driver in this kind of innovation. “Open and distance learning can make a real difference to the wellbeing and livelihoods of citizens and contribute significantly to meeting the development goals of nations as demonstrated in work throughout the Commonwealth,” she said.



Full panel discussion available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arSCgsYh5cM>

# TOP 5 TIPS FOR TEACHING THE PRACTICE OF ‘OPEN’

The notion of ‘openness’ in education continues to evolve as new opportunities and frameworks for open sharing and collaboration gain traction among education institutions. Open access, open educational resources (OER), and massive open online courses (MOOC) all represent an ongoing shift away from historical approaches to teaching and learning that opens doors to rethinking education in more equitable, accessible terms. As discussions continue, practitioners are evolving new methods of ‘doing’ openness in the classroom. Speaking at an International Open Access Week panel discussion in Vancouver, BC hosted by SFU and UBC, Dr Juan Pablo Alperin shared his five tips for ‘teaching the practice of open.’

## 1

### Make all readings open access

Practice what you preach by making use of available open access publications as course readings wherever possible.

## 2

### Have students annotate them openly

Encourage students to use public forums and open annotation tools such as Hypothes.is to respond to published material.

## 3

### Have students publish all their work

Encourage students to publish and share their own work openly using freely available blogging and website publishing tools such as Wordpress.

## 4

### Give students feedback through annotations

Respond and share feedback on student work openly via comments and open annotations.

## 5

### Have students openly review each other

Encourage students to share feedback with each other via comments and open annotations.

Source: *Openness in Higher Education*, by Juan Pablo Alperin (@juancommander on Twitter) View the complete presentation at <https://speakerdeck.com/jalperin>



Catherine Dunlop,  
eLIO e-coach

## At the heart of it: Supporting distance learners in emergency and conflict zones

The sound of gunfire, shells exploding nearby in the night, an urgent change of location, armoured vehicles and flak jackets, blackout curtains and no power: these are all part of the reality faced by distance learners working in emergency and conflict zones. Their work brings them to the heart of human struggles and hardship. COL's work supporting them as distance learners brings "heart" to the role of e-coaching.

COL helps to support distance learners in emergency and conflict zones through eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO). The programme specializes in providing the "human touch" in its course offerings and has a cadre of more than 50 e-coaches who have worked with over 8,500 learners in 160 countries to offer individualised and customised support.

A recent example is a nine-month online program management course delivered for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), which culminated in a five-day face-to-face workshop. Catherine Dunlop, an eLIO e-coach, had the opportunity to attend the workshop, meet the learners and hear their stories. Over and over, they emphasised that the support and encouragement of their e-coach was instrumental in motivating them to keep going and make the most of the course.

Three key themes emerged when supporting distance learners in emergency and conflict zones:

1. E-coaching is more than sending reminders and doing marking; it is about connecting with individual learners and understanding their unique context.
2. Deadlines sometimes need to be "lifelines"; a flexible approach will help learners to pull through a difficult patch when a rigid approach would leave the learner behind.
3. E-coaching with heart includes empathy; it helps to "be there" with the learner, no matter how far away they are, to celebrate and commiserate while they work at the heart of difficult struggles.

"Millions of lives are touched by the work of these distance learners in emergency and conflict zones. As e-coaches with eLIO, we are committed to the human-to-human connection with learners so that many more people can benefit from their important work," said Dunlop.

## Upcoming Events

### PCF8 theme & sub-themes announced

COL and the Open University Malaysia are pleased to announce the theme and sub-themes of the upcoming 8<sup>th</sup> Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF8). PCF8 takes place 27 November 2016 – 1 December 2016 at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, Malaysia.



**Theme:** Open, Online and Flexible Learning:  
The Key to Sustainable Development

**Sub-themes:**

1. Quality and Equity in Learning (Quality Assurance Frameworks, Accreditation, Certification, Benchmarking, Ranking)
2. Access and Inclusiveness (e-Learning, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), Public-Private

Partnership, Equitable Educational Opportunities, Policies)

3. Efficiency and Effectiveness (Business Models, Comparative Studies)
4. Technology and Innovation (Teaching and Learning, Mobile Learning, Collaborative Working, MOOC, Open Educational Resources)

Full details <http://pcf8.oum.edu.my/>

## Fiji looks to Aptus as a robust, flexible learning solution

Despite the proliferation of online educational resources and networks, persistent barriers to Internet access can render these resources inaccessible. Fiji knows this well. As an archipelago of over 300 remote Pacific islands, developing and maintaining effective Internet service is complex and costly. While access to online resources isn't essential, it is discouraging for both teachers and learners to miss out on opportunities to access quality materials both for professional development and classroom use.

Education Specialist Mr Matai Tagicaki with Fiji's Higher Education Commission has been working with teachers and learners across Fiji to find innovative ways to share knowledge and resources through open source platforms such as Moodle; however, connectivity remains a challenge. Tagicaki believes Aptus is the game-changer.

Aptus is a low-cost, offline 'virtual classroom' developed by COL. Since learning about Aptus, Tagicaki has demonstrated it as an effective solution across a range of learning environments in Fiji, including early childhood, secondary and higher education scenarios.

In trials at local institutions, Aptus has proven to be a robust solution that is easily customisable to diverse needs. It is currently being

explored as a platform for open educational resources (OER) in Fiji's secondary schools, and as a 'library-on-the-go' to serve rural students enrolled in distance learning programmes at Fiji National University.

Tagicaki and his colleagues in Fiji continue to explore how Aptus can be used to address the unique challenges faced by local education institutions and practitioners working in an environment with limited or no Internet access. The feedback and demand for Aptus from school administrators and educators has been overwhelming, Tagicaki reports.



Aptus is helping teachers in Fiji to engage students.

"One school teacher from an outer island school had tears in her eyes while expressing how much the video content on Aptus will help her with otherwise difficult-to-teach lessons," he said.



Seated from left to right: Dr Daniel Tau, Professor Asha Kanwar and Dr Unity Dow, Minister of Education and Skills Development.

Back row from left: Professor William Otoo Ellis, Professor Roshun Dhurbarylall, Professor Anbahan Ariadurai, Professor Roy Bodden and Professor Dato' Dr. Ho Sinn Chye

## Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA meetings in Botswana

The 26<sup>th</sup> Academic Board and 11<sup>th</sup> Executive Governing Board meetings of the Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) Programme were held in Gaborone, Botswana on 19 and 20 October 2015.

Representatives of all participating institutions from 11 countries (Bangladesh, Botswana, Cayman Islands, Guyana, Ghana, Jamaica, Malaysia, Mauritius, Nigeria, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) were present at the meetings, which were held to strengthen linkages among consortium members and to improve the academic quality of CEMBA/CEMPA.

The meetings were opened by Dr Unity Dow, Minister of Education and Skills Development, Botswana, who

welcomed delegates and thanked the consortium for accepting Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) as a member. She further commended COL for its unwavering support for the development of open and distance learning (ODL) in Botswana.

COL President & CEO Professor Asha Kwar thanked the Minister for officiating and expressed her appreciation of Botswana's collaboration with COL over the years. The Minister said she was impressed by what open universities across the Commonwealth were offering, and that she was pleased that BOCODOL had joined a consortium critical to its transformation into an open university.



# FOCUS

# TABLETS FOR L WHAT'S THE

## Reviews show that tablets can be effective learning tools when used with a student-centered approach

Tablet computers are being introduced to support learning in classrooms around the world, but are they effective? Supported by COL, Dr Tamim from Zayed University, and Dr Borokhovski and Dr Bernard from

Concordia University conducted two systematic reviews to identify prominent tablet initiatives and investigate the impact of using tablets for teaching and learning as reflected by empirical research.

The first review<sup>1</sup> examined government-supported large-scale tablet initiatives in order to understand their origins, underlying principles, financial and organisational

models and expected outcomes. Major findings reflected the increasing penetration of information and communications technologies (ICT) globally. The literature search, which led to 142 documents, showed that governments have made large financial investments in tablets to reform educational systems, make K-12 classrooms more engaging, and reach children in isolated rural areas.

The review identified 11 countries that have launched such large-scale projects. Documents showed that the majority of the initiatives were launched in a hasty and uncalculated manner, similar to the uncritical enthusiasm that previously surrounded the one-laptop-per-child

initiatives. More interestingly, countries with more developed and established educational systems focused on creating policies, procedures, and infrastructure for enhancing the educational process for students while not limiting technology use to a particular device or product.

The second review<sup>2</sup> went beyond the general hype around tablets and mobile devices to investigate evidence supporting their effectiveness as educational tools. Researchers completed a systematic review of quantitative and qualitative research studies published since 2010 and 27 quantitative studies were subjected to a full-scale meta-analytic procedure. Although not tested statistically, the findings indicate that tablets are more effective as learning tools when used with a student-centered approach, rather than within teacher-controlled environments.

In addition, 41 qualitative research studies were examined for substantive study characteristics. Findings indicated that tablets and mobile devices are garnering positive perceptions within educational contexts with stronger support for their effectiveness when used within more student-active educational contexts. Beyond students' performance, some of the most common advantages of using tablets cited by students included: a) improved organisational and note-taking skills; b) enhanced ability to express themselves; c) support for their independence and communication skills; d) increased accessibility to resources while supporting complex visualisations of concepts; and e) improved literacy and math skills.

The qualitative literature review also provided insight into some of the challenges faced by students when tablets and mobile devices are used for teaching and learning. The most prominent challenges included: a) technical issues and needed expertise; b) the distracting nature of the device and plethora of apps making it difficult to navigate and choose; and c) the need for professional

“The findings indicate that tablets are more effective as learning tools when the devices are used with a student-centered approach, rather than within teacher-controlled environments.”



Photo credit: ITU/R.Farrell/Stand With Malala @ ICT Discovery, CC BY 2.0, [www.flickr.com/photos/itupictures/8166927384](http://www.flickr.com/photos/itupictures/8166927384)

# EARNING: EVIDENCE?

development to enable teachers to properly use devices to enhance teaching and learning.

The reviews reflected the common skepticism that is usually prominent with large-scale initiatives, in addition to the concerns about quality assurance and compliance issues. Both qualitative and quantitative reviews, summarizing messages found in primary studies, identified and reflected the most common themes emerging in the research literature on tablet use in education, more specifically those that emphasise the importance of pedagogy and how the devices are used, and the need for extensive professional development and teacher training.

Dr Tamim, Dr Borokhovski and Dr Bernard's complete reviews can be found on OASIS, COL's open access institutional repository at <http://oasis.col.org>

<sup>1</sup> Tamim, R.M., Borokhovski, E., Pickup, D. and Bernard, R.M. (2015). Large-Scale, Government-Supported Educational Tablet Initiatives. Commonwealth of Learning: Burnaby.

<sup>2</sup> Tamim, R.M., Borokhovski, E., Pickup, D., Bernard, R.M. and El Saadi, L. (2015). Tablets for Teaching and Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. Commonwealth of Learning: Burnaby.

## Advantages and challenges cited by students when tablets and smart mobile devices are used for teaching and learning:

### Advantages



- Improved organisational and note-taking skills
- Enhanced ability to express themselves
- Support for independence and communication skills
- Increased accessibility to resources
- Improved literacy and math skills

### Challenges



- Technical issues
- Distracting nature of the device and plethora of apps
- Need for professional development to enable teachers to properly integrate devices in class



## Remembering Flora Isabel MacDonald

Flora MacDonald during one of her visits to COL

The sad news of the passing of the Honourable Flora MacDonald in July brought back memories of COL in the early 1990s when a host of interesting personalities visited the organisation as it formulated a plan for distance learning activities across the Commonwealth. It was easy to focus on the technology "miracle" that seemed to predominate with the rapid proliferation of the Internet during that period. However, it was Flora, in her role as Special Advisor to COL, whose experience as a former Secretary of State for External Affairs—the first female foreign minister in Canada—and her humanitarian work in many trouble areas of the world, specifically Afghanistan, who strongly influenced COL's thinking and planning and helped to ensure that we focused on more than just technology.

Flora understood that development activities involve uplifting all aspects of the community and integral to that is the education of women and girls. Her legacy is reflected today by the recent Canadian Government commitment of \$2.3 million for COL to expand access and improve learning outcomes for girls and women. Flora was an important figure in Canadian government and her later work as a



humanitarian has been an example to many young Canadians, including those of us who were lucky enough to have spent time learning and working with her. We were fortunate in those early days to have had her presence at COL.

- David Walker, COL Education Specialist, 1991-2007

# OUR COMMONWEALTH



## How ICT is changing the lives of students with disabilities at Open University of Tanzania

Professor Elifas Bisanda, Vice Chancellor, Open University of Tanzania

The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) is an open and distance learning institution with a mission to provide affordable quality education for all. The university has established a special unit headed by Dr Cosmas Mnyanyi called “Assistive Special Technology” to support students with disabilities and has implemented a number of education services for people with special needs and disabilities. The use of information and communications technologies (ICT), including audio materials and Braille prints, has been key to OUT’s success.

Since 2004, OUT has been integrating ICT in teaching by converting all learning resources to digital formats to support online and offline delivery. The question has been how best to support students with visual impairment in digital learning. At a time when no other institutions in Tanzania were providing training in assistive technology, OUT had over 50 visually impaired students. Through collaboration with non-governmental organizations like Sightsavers Tanzania, Tanzania Education Authority (TEA), Tanzania League of the Blind (TLB) and the Ministry of Education, the first ICT for persons with disabilities training was conducted at OUT in 2011, with 15 participants attending.

“Open university changed my life,” said OUT graduate Clement Ndahani. “I was a chemical engineer for years, but I became blind at 50 and lost hope. Through OUT I got training

in ICT and joined other OUT and international course programmes.”

Ndahani studied using ICT for his postgraduate diploma in Social Work and is now doing his masters degree in Social Work.


OUT is now a leading university providing education to people with visual and hearing disabilities. The university has enrolled over 200 students with disabilities with more than half of them graduating in different degree and non-degree programmes. After introducing ICT support services, people with disabilities are completing their studies in the same period as able students.


In 2015, OUT successfully introduced ICT support in education for the deaf and has introduced an entry examination that will allow deaf students without the requisite qualifications to join the foundation course. This exam will pave way for more disabled students to join OUT bachelor degree programmes.

Most disabled students face challenges in paying course and registration fees. To help with this, the university is looking for more partners to support it in advancing education and knowledge transfer to people with various disabilities.



 **1992**  
FOUNDED

 **22,280+**  
GRADUATES  
SINCE '99

 **TOP PROGRAMMES:**  
BACHELOR OF ARTS  
(IN EDUCATION)  
BACHELOR OF EDUCATION  
BACHELOR OF LAW

**200+**  
ENROLLED  
STUDENTS WITH  
VISUAL OR HEARING  
DISABILITIES

Dr Samuel Okae-Adjei, Director, IODL, was awarded a plaque of recognition and a certificate on behalf of the Koforidua Polytechnic.

## Koforidua Polytechnic wins 'most promising TVET' award

Ghana's Koforidua Polytechnic (KP), which is a partner in COL's Technical Vocational and Skills Development (TVSD) initiative, has been recognised by the African Union (AU) as having one of the 10 most promising technical/vocational education and training (TVET) models for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The competition, *TVET for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Africa*, was organised in collaboration with non-profit human development organisation FHI 360, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). A panel of judges considered over 50 final entries from across Africa. The aim was to highlight examples of best practice in TVET in Africa, in order to provide learning models for enhancing TVET development as a major means of promoting entrepreneurship, youth employment and innovation for generating wealth and development.

KP was invited to feature in an exhibition at the UA's Specialized Technical Committee meeting on Education, Culture and



Human Resources in October in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which was attended by Ministers of Education, Science and Technology and senior government representatives, AU staff, officials from TVET and civil society, and other international agencies.

KP showcased its strong partnership with industries, small-scale business empowerment through its distance education programme for informal students, and strong engineering, among other inventions. Its award-winning distance education programme for informal sector workers was started in KP's new Institute of Open and Distance Learning (IODL) created through the INVEST Africa partnership.

Dr Samuel Okae-Adjei, Director, IODL, was awarded a plaque of recognition and a certificate on behalf of the Koforidua Polytechnic.



Photo (from L to R): Professor Asha Kanwar, Professor Shironica Karunanayaka, Dr. Som Naidu, Professor Anbahan Ariadurai, VC, OUSL

## CEMCA supported work receives ICDE Prize for Innovation and Best Practice

A paper based on the adoption and implementation of the OER-Based e-Learning professional development online course of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) at the Open University of Sri Lanka received the ICDE Prize for Innovation and Best Practice in Open, Distance, Flexible, Online Education and E-learning at the 26<sup>th</sup> ICDE World Conference in Sun City, South Africa, 14-16 October 2015.

The paper, entitled "From OER to OEP: Shifting Practitioner Perspectives and Practices with Innovative Learning Experience

Design," was presented by Professor Shironica Karunanayaka, Faculty of Education, Open University of Sri Lanka and Dr Som Naidu, Monash University, Australia, who authored the paper with Professor J.C.N. Rajendra and Dr Uditha Ratnayake.

The paper was adjudicated one of the five best papers in the Innovation and Best Practice category by the editorial board of *Open Praxis*, a scholarly journal published by ICDE, and the conference's scientific committee, and will be published in a future issue of *Open Praxis*.



## USP collaborates with COL on climate change MOOC

More than 1,500 learners signed up for

a MOOC on Climate Change in the Pacific offered by COL and the University of the South Pacific (USP) August – October 2015, showing that if a topic is relevant, it will attract a lot of regional interest. More than 70 per cent of participants were from countries in the Pacific, with strong representation from Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu.

A total of 420 participants are eligible to receive certificates for completing the course. Among them, 247 completed a pictorial assignment for presentation at the 2015 United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP21) 30 November - 11 December in Paris.

The rate of completion was high for a first-ever offering, and learner engagement was significantly higher than a typical face-to-face class, said Deepak Bhartu, the USP course coordinator.

Bhartu said this was partly due to a unique functionality in the MOOC platform that allowed learners to use their social media accounts to track and post to discussions. Learners did not have to visit the course space to learn of new developments because they were alerted via social media.

COL provided a hosting facility for the MOOC through its MOOCs for Development (MOOC4DEV) portal ([www.mooc4dev.org](http://www.mooc4dev.org)). The platform used is designed by COL partner the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, which provided technical advice and support. In addition to COL, UNESCO and the Japanese Funds-in-Trust were also partners in the MOOC.

“The response has been tremendous and shows that we can do complex things successfully in close collaboration with our partners,” said Professor Rajesh Chandra, Vice Chancellor and President, USP.

## India AgMOOCs consortium launches five new MOOCs

Food and agriculture is a critical sector in achieving sustainable development; however, there are few online courses or MOOCs in this area. To help address this, COL facilitated the formation of a consortium of well-known institutions to offer MOOCs in agriculture.

A total of 2,000 learners participated in a MOOC on information and communications technologies (ICT) basics offered in March-April 2015 and, building on this success, the consortium decided to offer MOOCs on a wider range of topics.

Consortium leaders and prospective faculty attended a capacity-strengthening workshop hosted by COL and the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IITK). A total of 30 experts in the field of agriculture were joined by a small group of faculty members from institutions of engineering and technology. The workshop was led by Professor T. V. Prabhakar, IITK and Dr Venkataraman Balaji, Director, Technology & Knowledge Management, COL.

In six sessions offered over three days, participants learned about MOOCs and connected learning and produced prototype course videos, which were reviewed for quality and gaps. Sessions also focused on techniques and practices for effective online mentoring with case studies presented by those who have offered or managed MOOCs.

The consortium decided that two groups of MOOCs will be offered starting in January 2016. Each course will have two faculty members supported by a team at IITK that will manage

the backend using the mooKIT platform. About 12,000 learners are expected to participate in these

MOOCs, which will be supported by the National Project for Tech-Enhanced Learning (NPTEL), a program of the Ministry of Human Resources Development, India.

### Upcoming Courses

#### January-March 2016

- ICT in Agriculture (advanced)
- Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
- Weather Forecasting and Agro-advisories
- Essentials of Nutrition for Health
- GIS (geographic information system) Applications
- Implications of Climate Change in Food Production

#### July 2016

- Trends in Organic Agriculture
- Entrepreneurship Development in Agriculture
- Protected Cultivation of Vegetables
- Sensors in Agro-ecosystem Management



Mr Ricky Cheng talks with teachers from SWAT, Pakistan during a training course in Doha.

## ROTA and COL extend mobile learning solutions to remote classrooms in Swat, Pakistan

Reach out to Asia (ROTA), a member of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, partnered with COL to launch new mobile learning services in the Swat district, KPK province, Pakistan following a training course 6-9 September 2015 at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Doha, Qatar, which brought together project staff and six teachers from participating schools in Swat. The goal of the training was to build capacity for integrating mobile learning into classrooms and learn about Aptus, an innovative, offline device developed by COL as a platform for mobile learning.

Dr Mohamed Ally, Senior Researcher at Athabasca University, and Mr Ricky Cheng, Knowledge Services Manager at COL and lead Aptus developer, shared their expertise in mobile learning and offered advanced technical instruction on the use of Aptus. Teachers said they were grateful to learn about solutions to address the unique challenges they face in Swat, a remote, hilly region without reliable Internet service where teachers and learners are unable to access the same high-quality materials that those in connected areas are able to. Because Aptus does not require Internet connectivity or grid power, these materials, along with extensive collections of digital resources and interactive tools, can be accessed by teachers and learners in Swat even when connecting online is not possible.

Access to the digital resources available through Aptus is useful, especially for difficult-to-teach subjects like science that are best demonstrated visually, and allows teachers to engage students with more varied learning styles, whether auditory, visual or experiential learners.

The opportunity for customised, self-paced learning presented by Aptus also allows students who may miss classes to catch up more easily by accessing materials and following lessons digitally via their own mobile devices. This is especially relevant for girls in the region who may have limited access to schooling.

Teachers said they left the training excited to bring Aptus to their classrooms. As they integrate Aptus into teaching, they will gather and share data on Aptus usage with Dr Ally, who is leading a research study that will measure the impact of Aptus as a mobile learning tool and help to identify opportunities for further development.

“Teachers said they left the training excited to bring Aptus to their classrooms.”

A teacher has a closer look at Aptus, an innovative device for mobile learning developed by COL.



# FAIR COMMENT



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## The role of technologies in achieving 'Inclusive and equitable access to quality lifelong learning for all by 2030'

In 2015, world leaders committed to 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and fix climate change. Goal #4 is “to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

### What role can technology play in helping to achieve this goal?

We need to learn from the past to avoid repeating the same mistakes. Technology has been touted for more than 80 years as the solution to a lack of quality education in developing countries. Past technology projects include:

- Radio schools in Latin America and radio animation groups in Senegal and Niger (1950-1980s)
- Educational television projects in Brazil, Côte d’Ivoire, Mexico and El Salvador (1970-1990s)
- Satellite TV in the Philippines and India (1975-1990s)
- One Laptop Per Child programme (2000-2014)
- Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) (2014- ).

Each of these programs has had varying degrees of local success, but none has proved to be the silver bullet that would radically transform education in developing countries.

“Learning materials delivered via technology must be adapted to local conditions, reflecting local language, culture and geography.”

### Success factors

We know then from past experience what the success factors are for using technology to reduce inequity and raise the quality of education for all:

#### Universally available technology

A universally accessible and consistent electrical power supply is critical, but reliable electricity is still lacking in many countries. Equally, Internet access remains a major challenge, even in newly emerging countries with dynamic economies, such as Brazil, Mexico, and India, where less than 30 per cent of the population have Internet access at home.

Even in economically advanced countries like Canada, lack of wideband access is problematic for reaching disadvantaged groups such as remote aboriginal communities. The rapid development of open educational resources is enabling high-quality learning materials to be available for free. Nevertheless, non-Internet based technologies such as radio, broadcast television and stand-alone computers will continue to be valuable technologies for reaching the poor and disadvantaged well into the 2020s.

### Local content

Learning materials delivered via technology must be adapted to local conditions, reflecting local language, culture and geography. This requires a relatively small but highly skilled local workforce capable of creating and adapting multimedia learning materials for local use.

### Learner support

Rather than replacing teachers, technology-based learning requires teachers to provide support for learners. Technology works best as an enabler rather than as a replacement for teachers. However, teachers need to be properly trained to work with technology-enabled learning. The main value then of technology-enabled learning is to improve quality rather than to save costs.

### Sustainable local funding

Too often, technology projects have been funded by external donors, and when the funding ends, the projects collapse. Local governments need to support technology-enabled learning by creating a long-term strategy for the operation and funding of technology-enabled learning.

### Conclusion

Technology will be one element in achieving inclusive and equitable high-quality learning, but it needs to be combined with other initiatives such as teacher training, universal schooling and economic development. Technology is an enhancement rather than a replacement for these other strategies. There is no silver bullet – not even or especially MOOCs. Achieving SDG #4 will require hard work and boots on the ground at a local level, as well as advanced technology, for success.

# NEW RESOURCES



## Knowledge Series: Gender Mainstreaming in Learning for Sustainable Development

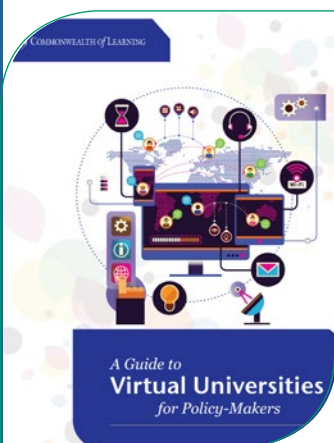
Learning is a key tool in achieving sustainable development, which has three key facets: equity, economic empowerment and environmental protection.

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy and process for ensuring that both men and women participate equally in decision-making and

access resources, opportunities and benefits of social and economic development. From a learning perspective, this is achievable through various means, including the use of technologies and open and distance learning (ODL). ODL provides marginalised populations with an “equalising opportunity” to tap into formal and informal learning as opposed to formal education.

As part of the *Knowledge Series*, this is a start-up guide that provides ODL practitioners and institutions with the information needed to initiate gender mainstreaming processes that will, in turn, facilitate equitable access to, participation in and benefits from learning opportunities for both men and women.

<http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/1390>



## A Guide to Virtual Universities for Policy-Makers

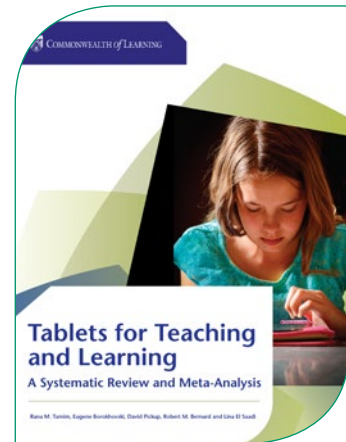
*A Guide to Virtual Universities for Policy-Makers* by Griff Richards aims to clarify the virtual university concept and provides a conceptual framework to establish a virtual university. The guide will help policy-makers to look critically at the evolution of virtual universities and assist in planning a virtual university.

<http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/1723>

## Tablets for Teaching and Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

*Tablets for Teaching and Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis* by Rana M. Tamim, Eugene Borokhovski, David Pickup, Robert M. Bernard, and Lina El Saadi explores the world of tablets from teaching and learning perspectives to help readers go beyond the general hype around tablets and smart mobile devices to investigate the evidence supporting their use in educational contexts. Reporting on the review of 27 quantitative studies and 41 qualitative research studies, the report reveals that devices are more effective when used with a student-centered approach rather than within teacher-led environments.

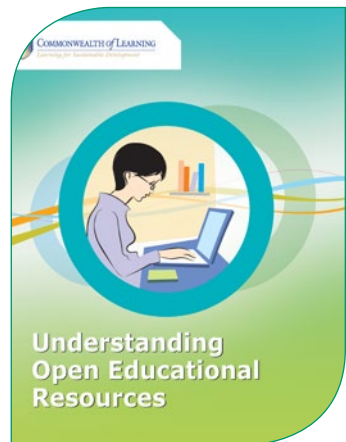
<http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/1012>



## Understanding Open Educational Resources

*Understanding Open Educational Resources* by Neil Butcher and Andrew Moore is a short three-lesson course on OER, which is also available online and in CD format. It explores the challenges OER helps to address, including the limited availability of good-quality educational materials due to prohibitive cost.

<http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/1013>



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# #TECH TRENDS



## Improved tablets and memory cards a boon to educators

“Aptus, COL’s low-cost, tablet-based offline virtual classroom, was made possible by recent advances and improvements in tablets and memory cards.”

Tablet computers have been around in various forms for the past two decades, but before the iPad was launched in 2010, they were considered auxiliary devices for desktop and laptop computers. Today, tablets are built on powerful processors that can handle more functions, resulting in a significant increase in use. International Data Corporation, a reputed market intelligence company, estimates that about 790 million tablets were sold globally from 2013-15, outselling laptops (550 million) and desktop computers (400 million). Top sellers are globally recognised brands like Apple and Samsung, but there is also a large number of tablets on the market from “white label” manufacturers, mostly based in China, whose brand names are not nearly as recognisable.

Tablet computing power, capacity and performance have increased considerably in recent years. In 2012, a typical tablet was built on a low-power processor with 512 MB RAM, a low-quality 7” display, 4 GB storage, a low-capacity battery and cost about USD 60-75. It used Android 4.0 as the operating system with relatively limited functionalities. Today’s tablet can have a powerful processor (such as Intel’s Atom) with 2 GB RAM, a high-resolution 8-9” display, 32 GB of storage, improved battery capacity and costs about USD 80-85. It can run Android 5.0 and Windows 8/10 with all the related functionality.

The availability of Android as a free operating system has also done much to make tablets more affordable, and with the recent decision by Microsoft to make Windows available for free for tablets up to 8”, affordable tablets will be able to manage more complex, office-type jobs, making them even more useful.

Previously, a number of public agencies interested in large scale deployment of tablets in education placed their tablet procurement projects on hold because hardware and software

specifications were in flux. This is no longer the case. Configurations will continue to evolve, but it is now easier to procure tablets on a large scale because like laptops, core specifications are stable within a range. Industry analysts predict that a proliferation of reasonably powerful and affordable computers in small forms (6” to 11”) is highly likely to occur over the next two years.

This is good news for the education sector. Not only are prices favourable, it is easier to incorporate tablets into more advanced teaching practices because functionality is also better. Also, configuration, testing, and delivery of hundreds of thousands of tablets is considerably easier than it would be for laptops. With tablets, a memory card can be used to deliver content and software updates. Delivering memory cards by the thousands to schools and colleges is easier than dispatching hundreds of technicians to carry out software updates, which are essential for maintenance of laptops. With these advancements, at least some of the practical problems that affected some large-scale tablet projects can now be overcome.

Another important development is the rapid advancement in memory card technology. Today, micro SD cards of 64 GB are available, off the shelf, at an affordable price, and much bigger cards with 256 GB are also readily available. It is possible to load an entire operating system on to a micro SD card.

In COL’s Aptus, a low-cost, offline virtual classroom, the Linux operating system, several thousand videos, hundreds of thousands of Wikipedia entries, as well as Moodle and a number of other open source software systems are loaded on to a 64 GB card. When a partner requires some customisation, it is easy to make adjustments and send them an SD card.

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