

## Commonwealth Secretariat Board of Governors

April 26, 2023

### Report of the Commonwealth of Learning

#### Context

As countries recover from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is increased attention to distance and online learning. Concurrently, there is a need to address inequalities related to access to technology and learning resources, particularly for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. As an intergovernmental organisation established by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote distance learning and technologies for human resource development, the role of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) has never been more prominent. COL is nearing the completion of the second year of its six-year Strategic Plan 2021-2027 'Learning for Sustainable Development'. This Strategic Plan provides a clear blueprint for COL to support Member States in their efforts to rebuild robust and resilient systems of education and training by providing bold and imaginative solutions to address future risks and uncertainties. As a leading organisation for open and distance learning, COL's expertise, knowledge resources and networks play an important role in guiding Member States and partner institutions to leverage the power of technology to increase access to quality education and training.

#### Background

1. Created by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1987, COL is the world's only intergovernmental organisation with a mandate to promote open, distance and technology-enabled learning in support of sustainable development.
2. COL's mission is to help governments expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using open and distance learning (ODL) and appropriate technologies. It assists governmental, non-governmental and community partners in developing policy, building capacity, refining models, creating materials and nurturing collaborative networks.
3. The Strategic Plan 2021-2027 focuses on 'Learning for Sustainable Development' and has identified three pathways of change to achieve impact: (i) building national resilience, (ii) strengthening institutions, and (iii) improving lives and livelihoods. COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development. Learning must lead to opportunities for economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation.
4. COL's strategic goals are:
  - a. Quality education and lifelong learning for all;
  - b. Skills development for sustainable livelihoods; and
  - c. Gender equality and inclusion.

5. COL's priorities are:
  - a. Development and promotion of open educational resources (OER); and
  - b. Education and training for women and girls.
6. Over the course of six years, COL aims to improve the capacity of 1,800 organisations to leverage technology for education and training, increase quality learning opportunities for two million learners, including those from marginalised communities and strengthen the sustainable livelihoods of 200,000 people. These targets will be achieved through the appropriate use of technologies. As a small and specialist intergovernmental agency, partnerships underpin all of COL's work. COL promotes cooperation and collaboration among Member States, Commonwealth bodies, multilateral organisations, educational institutions, civil society and the private sector.
7. COL has made satisfactory progress towards achieving and exceeding some of the targets identified for the second year of the Plan.

### **Reporting to Governments**

8. In addition to annual reporting to the COL Board of Governors, COL provides an update to the Commonwealth Secretariat Board and presents its Strategic Plan, along with individual country reports, to Commonwealth education ministers when they meet triennially. Last year, the 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) was held on 27-28 April 2022 in Kenya.
9. 'COL in the Commonwealth', a compendium of individual Country Reports, is published at the end of each Strategic Plan period. Country Reports for 2015-2021 were presented at the 21<sup>st</sup> CCEM.
10. COL has a network of Focal Points, nominated by Education Ministers, in each Member State and keeps them apprised of its work on an ongoing basis. Four regional meetings of Focal Points were held between December 2022 to March 2023 in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.
11. COL participates in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM) and presents its progress report to Foreign Ministers. COL participated in the 26<sup>th</sup> CHOGM which took place from 20 - 24 June 2022 in Kigali, Rwanda.

### **Six-Year Plan 2021-2027**

12. The Strategic Plan 2021-2027, approved by the COL Board, is titled 'Learning for Sustainable Development.' COL is committed to realising its vision of achieving development goals through universal access to learning.
13. COL's mission is translated into a comprehensive Logic Model that specifies the outcomes and impact to be achieved through its activities. These activities are divided into two programme sectors – **Education** and **Skills**, with **Gender** and **Technology-Enabled Learning** as cross-cutting themes.

14. The **Education** sector has four initiatives: Open Schooling, Teacher Education, Higher Education and Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth.
15. The **Skills** sector works in both formal and non-formal learning. The initiatives in this sector are: **Skills for Work, Lifelong Learning for Farmers** and **Girls Inspire**.
16. As cross-cutting initiatives, **Gender Equality** and **Technology-Enabled Learning** support COL's programme sectors.
17. The **Education** sector initiatives are as follows:

**Open Schooling:** Due to progress in achieving universal primary education, secondary schools struggle to absorb the surge of pupils completing primary schooling. Open schooling is a recognised and viable solution to the growing demand for equitable access to secondary education, especially for girls and marginalised groups, particularly in remote locations. In addition, governments are seeking to redefine the way secondary education addresses societal needs by diversifying the curriculum. This means making technical and vocational programmes available alongside academic offerings – something that open schools are well positioned to do (<https://www.col.org/education/open-schooling/>). Open schools are currently being supported in **Bangladesh, Botswana, Cameroon, Eswatini, The Gambia, Guyana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Vanuatu** and **Zambia**.

**Teacher Education:** One of the targets of SDG4 seeks to 'substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states.' One of the priorities for governments is to increase teacher supply and improve teacher quality. This initiative is focused on school-based, in-service training models which can cut costs and achieve scale. The model promotes the use of ODL to increase the number of qualified teachers in the Commonwealth and focuses on the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and OER in teacher training to improve the quality of teaching (<https://www.col.org/education/teacher-education/>). COL is working with institutions in **Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone** and **Zambia**.

**Higher Education:** COL continues to support policymakers, institutions and leaders in higher education to harness the potential of ODL and technology and enable them to cope with the increasing demand for quality higher education within the context of rising costs and diminishing public funding. COL has developed quality assurance frameworks and employability integration approaches for higher education institutions to adopt while offering distance education programmes that are accessible, affordable and can be delivered to learners anywhere, anytime with the use of appropriate technologies, including online learning (<https://www.col.org/education/higher-education/>). COL is working with higher education institutions in **Botswana, Cameroon, Eswatini, The Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania** and **Zambia**.

**The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC):**

Strengthening and improving the quality and scope of existing tertiary institutions is a key priority for small states. The VUSSC network represents **32 small states of the Commonwealth** dedicated to expanding access to tertiary education. VUSSC has connected institutions through online technologies to promote eLearning and the sharing of educational resources using collaborative and multi-institutional partnerships. COL's emphasis is on the delivery of VUSSC courses and programmes and nurturing partnerships to promote blue economy skills for youth and persons with disabilities (PWD) (<https://www.col.org/education/virtual-university-for-small-states-of-the-commonwealth-vussc/>). VUSSC is active in small states in Africa (**Botswana, Eswatini, Mauritius, Seychelles**); the Caribbean (**Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**); and the Pacific (**Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu**).

18. The **Skills** sector initiatives are:

**Skills for Work:** COL has demonstrated that using ODL and learning technologies can provide equitable access to quality technical and vocational skills development. The role of the Skills for Work initiative (<https://www.col.org/skills/skills-for-work>) in creating a skilled workforce of lifelong learners for the formal and informal economies is constantly challenged by urban-rural and gender divides that exclude large numbers of learners from skills training systems. COL is working with institutional partners, industry, and governments in **Antigua & Barbuda, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Dominica, The Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Nauru, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago and Zambia** to create contextualised, high-quality flexible and blended learning approaches to scale up skills development. Under the Skills Online initiative, COL works with partners in **Bangladesh, Barbados, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, India, Kenya, Mauritius, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago**, and online learning providers **Coursera, Grow with Google, and Udemy** to provide job-oriented skills to unemployed youth, combining the power of online with offline mentorship.

**Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F):** COL's L3F follows a holistic approach to capacity building which emphasises continuous learning for farmers using ICTs and linking human capital with social and financial capital. Covid-19 has impacted food security in different regions, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. L3F empowers vulnerable rural women and their families to gain knowledge, create their own self-directed learning process, organise themselves to solve the challenges of food security and improve their living conditions. Under the L3F model, COL serves as a catalyst in bringing together institutions, civil society and the private sector to build the capacity of communities through gender-sensitive learning (<https://www.col.org/skills/lifelong-learning-for-farmers/>). Fifteen countries: **Antigua and Barbuda, Botswana, Cameroon, The Gambia, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia** are implementing the L3F model.

**GIRLS Inspire:** This initiative aims to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment through promoting educational attainment and the economic participation of women and girls. It follows a context-specific and holistic approach, with coordinated interventions operating at the individual, household, community, and societal levels. GIRLS Inspire (<https://www.col.org/skills/girls-inspire/>) aligns its work with local and national development needs for scale and sustainability. It uses community mobilisation to influence change in national policy while providing linkages with employers for internships and employment opportunities that facilitate access to credit for self-employment. This is being implemented with governments and civil society organisations in 11 countries: **Bangladesh, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Solomon Islands, Tanzania** and **Uganda**.

19. The **Cross-Cutting** initiatives are:

**Gender Equality:** COL recognises that the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment is central to its agenda of learning for sustainable development. As a cross-cutting theme, COL's gender equality initiative is shaped by the views, interests and needs of both women and men. Gender mainstreaming is an organisational strategy for COL. While women and girls are deprived of equal access to education compared to men and boys, inequalities and barriers to education are experienced by young men and boys, as well. COL has a Gender Policy, a Gender Action Plan and its website provides links to resources and research on gender and ODL/ICT (<https://www.col.org/cross-cutting-initiatives/gender/>). COL is working with governments in **Belize, Guyana, Jamaica** and **Tonga** to address the issue of boys' academic underperformance and high drop-out rates. Through girls in ICT projects in **Guyana, India, Nigeria, South Africa** and **Uganda**, COL is empowering girls to use ICTs for employment and business opportunities.

**Technology-Enabled Learning (TEL):** As a cross-cutting initiative, TEL supports the development of tested models and scalable platforms. It also encourages more governments and institutions to integrate technology-enabled learning and OER policies and practices to improve teaching and learning for skills development. COL believes that for technology to have a transformative effect in teaching and learning, a focus on policy-technology-capacity is needed, and practice must be based on research evidence (<https://www.col.org/cross-cutting-initiatives/technology-enabled-learning/>). This initiative is working with governments and institutions in **Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Kenya, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sri Lanka** and **Uganda**.

20. Through an agreement signed with the Government of India, COL established its regional office, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) in New Delhi. CEMCA worked in Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka during this year.
21. Recognising that the Commonwealth has diverse and geographically-dispersed populations, COL has established regional centres to support capacity building in the field. COL supports the Research and Training Institute for Distance and Open

Learning (RETRIDOL) hosted by the National Open University of **Nigeria** (NOUN); the Southern African Development Community Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE) located in the **Botswana** Open University (BOU); the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD) at the University of the South Pacific (USP), **Fiji**; and the Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning (CCCL) in **Malta**.

22. To adapt its programme to the unique needs of each country, COL develops individual Country Action Plans after extensive consultations with Focal Points and partner institutions. These are monitored and updated regularly (<https://www.col.org/about/col-focal-points/>).
23. COL adds strength and experience to its professional network by working with a group of eminent education and development professionals from across the Commonwealth. COL Chairs have been appointed to work in specific research areas related to ODL and OER (<https://www.col.org/about/col-chairs/>).
24. COL is results-oriented and strives to achieve ‘value for money’. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation are key components of COL’s Results-Based Management practice. COL’s ‘Theory of Change’ helps to define the roadmap to achieve its goals. A Risk Management Matrix is reviewed regularly by COL’s senior management and by the Executive and Audit Committees, and at the annual meetings of its Board of Governors.

### **Examples of COL’s work**

Some examples of COL’s work at the Pan-Commonwealth level and in the four regions over the past year are presented as follows:

#### **Pan-Commonwealth**

25. COLcommons (<https://colcommons.org/>), the short course platform of COL launched in July 2021, has attracted over 11,000 participants during this year. The Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) platform (<https://cdelta.col.org/>) supporting teachers and students to develop digital education competencies has registered over 5,200 active users. Four new courses were added to the COLcommons platform: Foundations of Assessing Online Learners, Learning Designs for Emerging Learning Environments, Motivating and Supporting Online Learners and Quality Assurance of Blended and Online Learning. The platform now has 31,934 enrolments.
26. COL has offered over 20 massive open online courses (MOOCs) during the period in partnership with leading experts and organisations, reaching more than 41,000 learners. All content of COL MOOCs is offered as OER and can be adopted/adapted/repurposed by any institution globally.



27. In collaboration with the Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation, **Malaysia**, 13 courses were developed in manufacturing, building and civil engineering as OER.
28. Partner institutions in **Guyana, India, Kenya, Maldives, Mauritius, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Seychelles, Tanzania and Zambia** received support for blended course development, effective use of the Moodle learning management system and for facilitating online courses.
29. COL partnered with the **UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)** to offer a course on implementing ODL for youth and adult literacy. In addition, COL supported UIL to offer an online course on family and intergenerational literacy.
30. Over 12,600 Commonwealth citizens were trained in skills for employability under the COL-Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative, with Coursera course enrolments reaching 29,310. The COL-Udemy programme, aimed at building skills for employment and entrepreneurship, reached 77,467 enrolments from **Bangladesh, Barbados, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, India, Kenya, Mauritius, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Tonga and Trinidad and Tobago**. The 'Grow with Google' programme registered 31,456 enrolments for skills development in job-oriented advanced ICT skills.
31. COL initiated the CommonwealthWiseWomen (CWW) project to empower women and girls to achieve their leadership potential and to influence the next generation of leaders (<https://www.commonwealthwisewomen.org/>). One cohort of 16 mentors and 29 mentees from across the Commonwealth participated.
32. The GIRLS Inspire initiative is now being offered in **Kenya** in addition to **Bangladesh, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Solomon Islands, Tanzania and Uganda**. To date, 13,497 women and girls and 2,656 men and boys have been trained.
33. A strategy for the digitization of learning resources, focusing on climate-responsive sustainable livelihoods and food security was developed for **Bangladesh, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Uganda**.
34. COL organised the Fourth Pan-Commonwealth Training Programme on Women and Leadership with Wawasan Open University, in **Malaysia**. The two-and-a-half day meeting titled 'Women Leaders: Shaping the future for a sustainable world' aimed to enhance participants' knowledge of transformational leadership, technology and climate change and provide networking and mentoring opportunities; 26 mid-career academics from 16 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific participated.
35. Over 800 government officials and policymakers participated in an eight-week course on 'Capacity Building for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment'.

36. 162 trainers and staff from **The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago** and **Zambia**, participated in a workshop on ‘Skills for Work’. Additionally, six institutions – Technical and Vocational Teachers' College, **Zambia**, Ramogi Institute of Advanced Technology, Sigalagala National Polytechnic, **Kenya**, Yaba College of Technology, **Nigeria**, Sir Arthur Lewis Community College and the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme, **Saint Lucia** –developed strategies to integrate TEL in technical and vocational education and training.
37. Nine courses of the Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) Programmes were revised.
38. Competency-based webinars on pedagogy for TVET instructors were conducted for participants in the Commonwealth and beyond.

### **Africa**

39. COL supported national ODL policy in **Mozambique, Lesotho** and **Sierra Leone**. Three policies in recognition of prior learning, recognition of current competencies and credit accumulation and transfer were developed for the Council on Higher Education, **Lesotho**.
40. A national policy on ICT in Education that also includes OER was developed with the Ministry of Education, **Malawi**.
41. COL supported the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, **Mauritius** to organise a national consultation on an OER policy where 37 stakeholders contributed to finalising the document. The policy was adopted by the Cabinet in December 2022.
42. In the **Seychelles**, COL supported the re-development of the revised Education and Training Policy 2022-2027 for the Ministry of Education. The policy was approved by the Government of Seychelles in October 2022.
43. COL supported the development of a detailed project plan to establish a virtual open school and two national policies on sheep and poultry farming in **The Gambia**.
44. COL supported the National Teaching Council, **Ghana** to train over 15,000 teachers.
45. COL supported the development of 21 institutional policies/strategies on TEL, OER, employability and authentic assessment in universities in Africa. In **Nigeria**, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology revised 11 courses to integrate authentic assessments. Ahmadu Bello University revised seven existing courses to integrate authentic assessment.
46. Under the COL-ACU Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning, 12 higher education institutions in **Ghana** and **Nigeria** participated in a quality assurance project.



47. In **Botswana, Eswatini** and **Seychelles**, over 5,000 nurses and midwives enrolled in online professional learning modules.
48. The **Namibian** College of Open Learning revised 14 courses as per the national curriculum.
49. The Academy for Design and Innovation, **Mauritius** developed eight blended courses with COL support.
50. COL supported the training of staff in digital learning in 16 Nigerian universities.
51. COL supported the **Kenya** Institute of Special Education to train teachers in online course facilitation for students with special needs.
52. Teachers at **Seychelles** Institute of Distance and Open Learning received training on developing blended courses.
53. COL supported Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology in **Kenya** to adopt COL's benchmarking toolkit and develop a three-year action plan for mainstreaming TEL.
54. In **Nigeria** COL partner 'Researchers on ICTs in Education in Africa' developed audio and text-based resources as OER in business, science, health and social studies for primary and junior secondary learners.
55. Alupe University and Nakuru Training Institute in **Kenya** trained faculty resulting in the development of 41 blended online courses.
56. 489 policymakers and government officials were trained in gender equality, gender-based violence and grass-root advocacy in **Namibia, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania** and **Uganda** through local partner organisations. In **Malawi** and **Tanzania**, workshops were organised to build the capacity of policymakers, parliamentarians and law enforcement officials to change discriminatory social norms.
57. In **Kenya**, nine officers from the Technical Vocational Training Authority were mentored to review ODeL Standards and develop an Accreditation Tool for ODeL centres.
58. A total of 13,432 farmers received training in **Ghana** and **Kenya** with an emphasis on food security and gender equality. In **Ghana**, 15,440 farmers were linked to financial institutions to access savings and credit services. With COL support, Siaya Seed Sacco, **Kenya** established a partnership with the German Agency for International Cooperation and Micro Enterprises Support Programme Trust to support farmers.
59. Through the GIRLS Inspire project, 1,652 women and girls accessed apprenticeship opportunities. In addition, 712 women, girls and boys were re-integrated back into school in **Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania** and **Uganda**. GIRLS Inspire partners in **Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia** and **Uganda** facilitated access to financial resources

for 3,469 women and girls. COL conducted awareness-raising events and sensitised 17,381 community members on gender equality in **Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania** and **Uganda**.

60. In **Uganda**, 73 youth received employment opportunities, linked to internships and started their own enterprises in graphics and web design through COL support.
61. 29 teachers from **Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda** and **Zambia**, were trained in the use of virtual labs in collaboration with the Kenya Technical Trainers College.
62. COL partner, the Centre for Research and Development Initiative, **Malawi** developed and disseminated 30 radio programmes and 60 short messages for mobile devices to develop vocational skills among girls.
63. Matumaini Mapya, a COL partner in **Tanzania**, worked with five local government authorities to facilitate the establishment of a Learning Innovation Development Platform (LINDEP). The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture organised a workshop on e-content for participants from 17 countries in Africa. With COL support, the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Makerere University, **Uganda** designed content on post-harvest technologies, water management and agronomic practices for potato cultivation for delivery using mobile phones. Partners in **Uganda** provided training in honey production and skills for livelihoods.
64. Institutional partners in **Kenya, Namibia** and **Nigeria** received training in blended TVET and ODL course development.
65. COL organised a regional workshop on the use of virtual labs in TVET for practitioners from **Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda** and **Zambia**.

## **Asia**

66. COL's regional office in New Delhi, CEMCA, partnered with the Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education and Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation to organise faculty development programmes on integrating 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in teaching and learning and digital marketing.
67. CEMCA, in partnership with the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, **India**, organised a discussion with policymakers and academics for developing blended learning policy.
68. Capacity building for Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) was held in nine provinces of **Sri Lanka**.
69. COL's benchmarking toolkit for TEL was implemented in six universities in **Malaysia**.
70. The Model Institute of Education and Research, **India** developed 20 courses for teacher training.

71. Daffodil International University, **Bangladesh** developed and offered four skills courses on agriculture, health, social media and cybersecurity.
72. Teachers at the Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, **Bangladesh** received training on developing blended courses.
73. Teachers and teacher educators in **India** were trained on a Virtual Reality platform developed by CEMCA. CEMCA organised workshops on Virtual Labs, OER, teacher training and skills development in **India** and **Sri Lanka**.
74. CEMCA supported Vidyasagar University, **India**, to develop an institutional OER policy. CEMCA, in association with the Andhra Pradesh Information Technology Academy, supported the training of 437 faculty members from various engineering colleges in the use of advanced technologies and teaching methodologies in **India**.
75. COL's civil society partners in **Bangladesh, Pakistan** and **Sri Lanka** trained and sensitised 555 policymakers and government officials in gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence. In **Pakistan**, a workshop was organised to build the capacity of policymakers, parliamentarians and law enforcement officials to change discriminatory social norms.
76. Through the GIRLS Inspire project, 5,502 women and girls were linked to resources and community services by COL's partners in **Bangladesh, Pakistan** and **Sri Lanka**. As a result, 3,787 women and girls received apprenticeship opportunities. Partners also facilitated access to financial resources for 1,435 women and girls. Moreover, 378 women, girls and boys were integrated back into school. Partners also signed MoUs and entered in partnership with 94 local enterprises to enhance the employment and income opportunities of COL trainees, mostly women and girls. COL's partners in **Bangladesh, Pakistan** and **Sri Lanka** conducted awareness-raising events and public advocacy campaigns and sensitised over 30,000 community members, including traditional leaders, on gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence.
77. In **India**, CEMCA supported the Indian Plumbing Skills Council and the Power Sector Skill Council to develop video content for training at scale. CEMCA supported the International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation to develop two audio-visual modules on furniture-making for artisans and entrepreneurs in **Bangladesh** and **Sri Lanka** and to develop video content for entrepreneurs in **Brunei** and **Malaysia**.
78. In **India**, a total of 4,277 farmers received training with an emphasis on food security and gender equality. Similarly, a MobiMOOC on 'Promotion of Livestock Farmers Activities as Profitable Self-employment' attracted 1,507 farmers. L3F partners, VIDYAL and M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, in **India** developed 426 audio messages for farmers' producer organizations on topics in agriculture and animal production.
79. The Mann Deshi Foundation, **India** used the Digital Borrowing System to provide access to financial support to aspiring women entrepreneurs; 5,363 women were

supported through a revolving grant initiative. Similarly, 339 women farmers working with VIDYAL received credit support from banks for mobile-based learning.

## **Caribbean**

80. With COL's support, the University Council of **Jamaica** facilitated the implementation of distance education standards by training 120 faculty and staff. COL partner the **Jamaica** Teaching Council (JTC), distributed 26,147 Boys' Journals in 76 schools in seven regions—this life-planning guide helps to set life goals and follow them through. JTC mentored boys from different schools as part of the 'Boys' Education Empowerment Project'. An e-book 'Teaching boys effectively' was developed for mentors.
81. COL supported **Antigua** State College to develop blended courses and train teachers on facilitating blended and online learning courses.
82. A workshop on Moodle for teachers at the Adult Education Association, **Guyana** was conducted. COL supported the National Centre for Education Resource Development, **Guyana** to develop 15 teacher training courses. Youth Challenge **Guyana** promoted capacity-building for men and boys on the prevention of gender-based violence and engaged 25 companies to provide internships and jobs to them in hospitality services. Moreover, a mentoring network for parents was established to support young men and boys to return to school and seek employment.
83. The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Transport, **Belize** facilitated apprenticeships for skills training in graphic design and customer service for boys.
84. In **Grenada**, officials reviewed the Guidelines and Criteria for the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications for national adoption in order to strengthen and promote the mobility of the workforce.
85. Eight institutional strategies on ODL for technical and vocational education were developed in **Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Jamaica and Saint Kitts and Nevis**.

## **Pacific**

86. A special parallel session titled 'Strategies and Solutions for ODFL in the Pacific Region' was held during the Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF10) which brought together over 40 key policymakers and experts from the Pacific. The parallel session was co-chaired by the Prime Minister of **Samoa**.
87. Under the Partnership for Open Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL) in the Pacific Project (<https://pacificpartnership.col.org>) supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand, COL, together with PACFOLD, offers capacity-building support for teachers and TVET educators in **Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu**. In addition, 61 officials from these countries participated in a workshop on policy and planning for

ODFL. A course on ‘Learner Skills for ODFL’ was offered to 372 participants and a course on ‘Quality Assurance for ODFL’ attracted 655 teachers from ten countries in the Pacific. COL supported the professional development of TVET practitioners using the Online TVET Toolkit (<https://pacifictoolkit.col.org>) in nine institutions from **Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.**

88. With COL support, the Ministry of Education, **Vanuatu** has re-started the Open Schooling model in 15 schools.
89. An OER policy was developed by **Fiji** National University with COL support. The Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises and Development, **Fiji** (FRIEND Fiji) developed five courses for livelihoods. FRIEND Fiji developed a module on organic farm management, oil infusion making, soap making, nursery training and business management with COL support. 391 youths received employment-oriented training in Fiji.
90. A course, ‘Empowered Digital Teacher for Online Learning’ attracted 24 master teachers from the Pacific.
91. The University of the South Pacific adapted and offered a COL course on ‘Digital Skills for OER Sharing’, ‘Communications Skills for ODFL’ and ‘Assessment Skills for ODFL’ reaching 1,145 enrolments from the Pacific.
92. A research study was conducted on ICT use and access and the digital gender gap in the small island developing member states in the Pacific to improve education outcomes.
93. 21 policymakers were trained in gender-sensitive practices and the prevention of gender-based violence in the **Solomon Islands.**
94. The Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Course Catalogue for the Pacific (<https://www.odlcatalogue4pacific.org>) was developed and launched which offers a wide range of training courses for teachers on various aspects of ODL.
95. An in-depth needs assessment was conducted with the Ministry of Education in **Tuvalu** and **Vanuatu** to build data resilience in education in response to a natural disaster.

### **Technology and Communications**

96. The Tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF10) organised by COL, in partnership with Athabasca University in Calgary, Canada, had the theme ‘Innovations for Resilience’ and brought together about 500 participants from 53 countries (42 Commonwealth countries) in a hybrid mode, culminating in the Calgary Communique that provided a roadmap for education in the post-Covid-19 world. The Prime Minister of Canada sent a welcome message while the Prime Minister of Samoa personally attended the forum, with another ten ministers of education joining from different Commonwealth countries. All the 378 papers presented are available for public access in COL’s institutional repository online.

97. COL's website ([www.col.org](http://www.col.org)), enabled with disability-friendly functionalities, receives about 30,000 new visitors every month.
98. As a key player in the fast-evolving field of knowledge management, COL continues to develop its internal systems to organise information about its own work and to support partners. COL has an advanced intranet service that facilitates collaboration between internal teams and partners while enabling access to a large repository of professional reports and publications. COL's institutional repository (<https://oasis.col.org>) includes 5,000 documents since 1999 and attracts about 100,000 visits monthly, while publications indexed in the Google Scholar service have received more than 21,000 citations.
99. *The Journal of Learning for Development* (JL4D) is an open online scholarly journal which provides a forum for practitioners and academics working in education and international development to share knowledge and experience (<https://jl4d.org/index.php/ejl4d>) and is indexed in prestigious services such as Scopus. Scholars and practitioners from **Cameroon, Canada, India, Malaysia, Rwanda, Mozambique, Namibia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Tanzania** and the **United Kingdom** have published papers in JL4D this year.
100. Based on a communications strategy of informing, engaging and inspiring action, COL is present in many online social media services. COL's formal communications media such as its website and newsletter, *Connections*, are supported by other electronic communications such as broadcast messaging, Facebook, Twitter, online videos and blogs. COL's Facebook impressions exceeded three million during PCF10.
101. COL has also pioneered the practice of offering pre-configured learning management platforms on-demand to existing partners particularly in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, and was successful in migrating one installation to a partner's own institution in **Guyana**, while an innovative AI-powered and human-mediated helpdesk for learner support in Moodle-based courses has been launched.
102. AptusPi is a low-cost device designed by COL to support educators and learners to connect to digital learning platforms and content without the need for grid electricity or Internet access. About 80 teachers nominated by the **Maldives** Ministry of Education were trained in using AptusPi in the classroom while devices were made available in limited numbers to ministries and partner institutions in **Belize, Fiji** and **Guyana**.

## **Funding**

103. COL's core budget comes from voluntary contributions of Commonwealth Member States.
104. COL's financial strategy is based on mobilising resources from two sources of revenue. Voluntary contributions from approximately 45 Commonwealth Member States provide the resources for about 85% of the annual budget. While the seven largest major donors are **Canada, India, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Nigeria, Australia**, and **South Africa** COL appreciates the financial support that it receives



from all contributing Commonwealth countries. Additional contributions from grants, services and other sources accounts for approximately 15% of total revenue. On the expenditure side, a minimum of 85% of the budget is directed to the programme and the balance to organisational management and governance.

105. To date, 37 countries have contributed during this financial year which ends on June 30, 2023. In the previous fiscal year, COL received financial contributions from 45 countries. Togo has joined COL as a contributing member.

## **Conclusion**

106. COL will continue to support Member States to adopt flexible and blended learning approaches for developing resilient systems that open up access to quality education and skills training. Progress towards achieving the targets of SDG 4 by 2030 is set back because of the pandemic and innovative approaches and models will be required to make up for the learning loss suffered in all Member States.
107. Going forward, COL will continue to:
- i) build on its expertise in ODL, OER and TEL to play a more influential role in national policy development and implementation;
  - ii) invest in innovations for scale, and in sharing best practices across the Commonwealth;
  - iii) support the digital transformation of institutions and organisations;
  - iv) develop skills for employment and entrepreneurship; and
  - v) promote gender equality.

## **Further Information**

Web: <https://www.col.org/>

Twitter: @COL4D

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/COL4D/>

Videos: <https://www.youtube.com/user/comlearn>

Six-Year Plan 2021-2027: <http://hdl.handle.net/11599/3871> .

Board of Governors: <https://www.col.org/about/current-members-cols-board-governors/>

Staff: <https://www.col.org/about/col-staff/>

Publications: <https://www.col.org/resources/>

Speeches and presentations: <https://www.col.org/news/speeches-and-presentations/>

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