

Skilling our Youth: Role of Partnerships



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Chair, Secretary General, Hon Ministers, thank you for the opportunity to present some examples of how the Commonwealth of Learning is skilling our youth to face the future. As you know, COL was established by Commonwealth Heads of Government when they met in Vancouver for CHOGM 1987. Our headquarters are in Metro Vancouver with a regional office in New Delhi.

COL's mission is to help Commonwealth member states and institutions to use distance learning and technologies for expanding access to education and training.

COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development. Learning must lead to opportunities for economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation. We work in two sectors: Education and Skills, with Gender as a crosscutting theme. COL achieves impact by harnessing the potential of existing and new technologies.

Technology is growing faster than anyone can keep pace with — presenting exciting opportunities and unprecedented risks. The jobs that exist today were unheard of ten years ago and the jobs of the future will need to be aligned to the green and blue economies. We have a young Commonwealth and a higher rate of youth unemployment as compared to the global average.

The COL experience shows that partnerships and collaboration are the most powerful means of addressing this major challenge. One example of a fruitful collaboration on youth development is the consortium led by the Commonwealth Secretariat, COL and The University of the West Indies, where each partner shares their particular expertise and resources. Today 17 universities from 15 Commonwealth countries are active members of this consortium.

One partner, the Namibian College of Open Learning is offering the Bachelor's programme in youth and community development online — which helps scale up access and reduce costs for aspiring and practising youth workers.

COL's Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth connects institutions in the 33 small states by promoting cooperation in the development and sharing of tertiary level courses.

The Blue Economy offers significant career opportunities for youth in areas such as, marine biotechnology, ocean engineering, fisheries and sustainable tourism. By offering short, competency-

based courses that combine soft skills and vocational training, learners will be prepared for jobs in low carbon Blue Economy growth industries

In partnership with ministries of education, COL reaches out of school youth through its open schools. Learners can study at their own pace place and time and have access to both academic and vocational courses. In the last two years over 30,000 learners were enrolled in open schooling courses with COL partners in Botswana, Nigeria, Malawi and Tanzania.

The first cohort of out of school youth in a remote fishing village in Trinidad & Tobago graduated through a COL-supported open school. The entire curriculum was structured around fisheries which was both interesting and relevant to the needs of the youth.

The COL-COURSERA workforce recovery project and partnerships with Google and Udemy, have offered free skilling and reskilling opportunities to over 350000 youth in the Commonwealth. Even though connectivity was often a challenge, learners used mobile devices or library facilities. COL supported the establishment of Help Desks in the Ministries to provide learner support, leading to high completion rates.

Sakhawat Hussein from rural Bangladesh is now an advanced programmer. He gained the necessary professional skills from a COL programme with Udemy, which led to this employment opportunity.

COL's Girls Inspire has trained over 127000 young women in vocational skills for employment or entrepreneurship in ten countries. This holistic approach provides training in technical skills, life skills, and financial literacy. Participants are linked to employers and financial institutions for livelihoods opportunities. Because of the huge impact of this project, the government of Canada has provided additional funding support for the next three years.

Martine Benemariya, a mother two from Rwanda was struggling to keep her digital and online business afloat. As a result of this project, her customer base and revenues have increased and she is now able to help train others including persons with disabilities.

With support from MFAT, New Zealand, COL is working with civil society organisations to provide skills training for youth in Fiji, PNG and Vanuatu, where 93% of the youth trained have reported improved employability skills.

A TVET Professional Development Toolkit is now available to build the capacity of trainers and provide quality courses and support services for youth in the Pacific.

Similarly in the Caribbean, COL has partnered with the Caribbean Association of National Training Authorities to build the capacity of TVET providers and strengthen the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications framework to promote the recognition of qualifications and the mobility of qualified youth across the region.

COL responds to some of the most pressing challenges by providing learning opportunities that lead to livelihoods. It leverages its impact through partnerships with intergovernmental

organisations, regional bodies, ministries, the corporate sector and civil society. The biggest area of explosive growth is AI with a major impact on future jobs.

Even with advances in AI, three kinds of jobs will still be in high demand: blue collar jobs, jobs that need empathy and jobs where creativity and innovation are the key requirement.

Whatever field they decide to pursue, our youth will need three literacies, as proposed by Aoun. First, human literacy, prepares students to perform jobs that only human beings can do and help them to make ethical choices. Second, data literacy is essential where learners must be able to find meaning and separate the true from the fake. Third, technological literacy is essential for learners to deploy software and hardware for creativity and excellence. How can we ensure this? Through collaborations between ministries of youth, education and technology.

Excellencies, COL is your organization and it works for you. Please make full use of our resources and expertise. Thank you for your kind attention.