

Connecting the Commonwealth through Online Learning



Presentation Transcript

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In the next five minutes, I'll explain how we connect the Commonwealth through online learning. But first a word about the Commonwealth of Learning or COL which is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government at the CHOGM held in Vancouver in 1987.

Our mission is to help Commonwealth member states and institutions to use existing and new technologies for expanding access to education and training.

COL believes that learning must lead to sustainable development and this is the thrust of our Strategic Plan 2015-21.

Governments are looking for ways in which the young Commonwealth can be skilled for employment and entrepreneurship. In fact the Indian Prime Minister Mr Modi has called for skills to be developed at speed and at scale—we can capture this as the 3 S's: skills, speed, scale.

In which ways can the phenomenal growth in technology help? Let me share four examples.

The first: Commonwealth Ministers of Education directed COL to establish a Virtual University for Small States (VUSSC). Over 53,000 persons have been trained under this initiative in 31 small states. The small states have developed collaborative courses in business entrepreneurship which are available free to all the members of the consortium.

The participating institutions in the eight countries offer the qualifications which are transferable because of the Transnational Qualifications Framework developed by the group. Here is a nice example of Commonwealth cooperation.

My second example is COL's Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme, which has been developed by experts from around the Commonwealth and is offered in 11 Commonwealth countries and

the over 27000 students who have enrolled now have improved access to livelihoods opportunities at one third the cost of a similar campus-based programme.

Third, COL in partnership with IIT-Kanpur offered a MOOC on mobiles-for-development, covering technology as well as agriculture, mobile learning, inclusive finance and banking. This interdisciplinary online course attracted registrants from 116 countries. COL also offered a MOOC for Gardeners using basic mobile phones under which over a thousand gardeners improved their skills.

Finally, COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme reaches over 200,000 farmers using mobile phones and radios in seven countries. Because of the shared learning within and across cultures, the practice of table banking has spread from Asia to Africa.

Over 3000 women started agri-enterprises in Tanzania over the last one year.

What has COL learned from these experiences?

One, it is not enough to provide skills alone. The youth need not just the skills but also the opportunities to translate their skills into livelihoods. Governments have a major role in developing not just sound educational policies but also enabling policies relating to trade industry and agriculture.

Two, while technology can help connect us with our diverse and dispersed stakeholders across the Commonwealth, it can never be a silver bullet for learning. It is our responsibility to help stakeholders to domesticate and appropriate technologies, rather than be further marginalized by them.

Three, if we wish to improve learning outcomes, we need to bring together online and face to face learning—a blended learning approach has had a positive impact on learning outcomes.

Finally, the connections cannot be sustained on the basis of good intentions alone but must be based on a win-win framework for all.

Thank you.