CONNECTIONS

LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Empowering girls at an awareness training session in Bangladesh.

With Her: A Skilled GirlForce

Skilling girls, catalysing communities

October 11 marked the sixth commemoration of the International Day of the Girl Child since its declaration in 2011 and the first celebration in 2012. This day highlights the challenges faced by the girl child and seeks ways to empower girls. This year's theme, "With Her: A Skilled GirlForce," calls on the global community to work with and for girls to expand learning opportunities and equip them with the required skills to successfully transition into the world of work.

During the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, heads of Commonwealth countries noted the ongoing action by Member States and Commonwealth institutions to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage which is one of the barriers to girls' empowerment. They committed to the promotion of gender equality and inclusion, as well as the empowerment of all women and girls in social, economic and political life.

COL has been at the forefront of providing opportunities for girls to attain skills for employability and entrepreneurship. To empower women and girls, COL harnesses the potential of technologies and uses innovative approaches to increase access to education and training. Thanks to grants from the governments of Canada and Australia, COL has trained thousands of marginalised girls in skills for livelihoods in five countries: Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Pakistan and Tanzania. In the last two years, COL trained over 47,000 women and girls, of whom nearly 9,000 have new sources of income.

As COL's President and CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar, said in her video message to commemorate the day, "One of the reasons for the success of COL's GIRLS Inspire project is that it actively involves the girls, their families and communities." COL works with the girls to define their needs and catalyses the linkages between key stakeholders. This is a participatory approach that works with the community to support girls' learning for sustainable livelihoods.

The video message is available at: **https://youtu.be/y23zJQbJq9M**

> "To empower women and girls, COL harnesses the potential of technologies and uses innovative approaches to increase access to education and training."

Jamaica's High Commissioner visits COL

The High Commissioner for Jamaica to Canada, Her Excellency Janice Miller, visited COL headquarters in September 2018 to learn more about COL's work. She commended COL for its vibrant partnership work in her country, which contributed to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and aligned with Jamaica's Vision 2030 National Development Plan. She was interested in knowing how Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) had enhanced the capabilities of Jamaican farmers and the linkages that had been made through this programme.

COL's President and CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar, welcomed the High Commissioner and provided an overview of COL's initiatives and projects, including L3F, the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth and Aptus.

Her Excellency was accompanied by the Honorary Consul for Jamaica in British Columbia, Dr Michael Vaughan.

COL President appointed to UNESCO IITE Governing Board

Professor Asha Kanwar has been appointed to the Governing Board of the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (IITE). Members of this board are selected from across the world for their reputation in effectively utilising ICT for teaching and learning.

Speaking on her appointment, Professor Kanwar said, "I look forward to working with the distinguished group of experts to promote the innovative uses of technology for quality education and lifelong learning. The partnership with IITE will create better synergies between Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth Member States to the mutual advantage of both."

Located in Moscow, Russia, IITE was established by UNESCO's General Conference in November 1997. The institute promotes the innovative use of ICT globally and serves as a facilitator and enabler for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 through ICT-enabled solutions and best practices.

New Zealand's Prime Minister promotes COL USP partnership

The Prime Minister of New Zealand, the Honourable Jacinda Ardern, announced a package of NZ$ 9 million in September 2018 to make it easier for students in the Pacific to access education. She also announced a partnership with the University of the South Pacific (USP) and COL to expand open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) opportunities at the secondary and tertiary levels.

"We are pleased to be able to draw on the considerable expertise of the University of the South Pacific and the Commonwealth of Learning to increase access to high-quality secondary and tertiary education in the Pacific," said Honourable Ardern.

COL and USP have a long history of successful partnership in ODFL in Pacific countries.

Supporting Technology-Enabled Learning in Mauritius

COL's Education Specialist: eLearning, Dr Sanjaya Mishra, met with the Acting President of Mauritius, H.E. Barlen Vyapoory, in October 2018 to brief him about COL's activities supporting the use of technology-enabled learning for expanding access to education and training in the country.

eLearning in Eswatini

COL's Education Specialist: Higher Education, Professor Romeela Mohee, delivered a public lecture on the role of blended learning in transforming higher education practices at the University of Eswatini (UNESWA) in September 2018. Her presentation was part of UNESWA's celebration of 50 years of academic progress. Seventeen faculty who had completed a COL-supported course on developing and teaching online courses received certificates of completion during the ceremony.

Improving quality in African universities

COL supported a regional meeting of the quality assurance (QA) Community of Practice (CoP) in Johannesburg, South Africa in September 2018. During the meeting, participants from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia and Zambia shared their experiences of piloting QA guidelines developed by COL's CoP.

COL President briefs new London-based diplomats

Professor Asha Kanwar briefed new London-based diplomats at the 35th Commonwealth Diplomats Induction Programme (CDIP), held in London, United Kingdom in September 2018. She highlighted COL's work in supporting Commonwealth governments' and institutions' use of technology to improve and expand learning for sustainable development.

Professor Kanwar stressed the impact of open, distance and technology-based learning in providing equitable access to quality lifelong learning for all and encouraged the diplomats to ensure that their countries take advantage of COL's expertise.

The aim of the CDIP is to introduce diplomats to the intergovernmental and civil society organisations that link governments and the 2.4 billion people of the Commonwealth. For the first time, COL joined the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation as a joint organiser of the programme.

Innovative agMOOC for farmers

COL partnered with the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IITK) and the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS), Raichur to launch a massive open online course (MOOC) for rice and cotton farmers in Karnataka, India. Over 4,000 farmers enrolled in this course, which started in August 2018.

The course is free of charge and accessible through basic mobile phones. The learning materials are in the Kannada language and are available in an audio format. The technology behind this audio-only agMOOC was developed by Professor T. V. Prabhakar and his team at IITK and tested extensively in multiple trials involving hundreds of learners. Professor A. Prabhuraj of UAS serves as the course designer and manager.

COL facilitates this MOOC through its Knowledge Management and Technology services programme. COL's Director: Technology and Knowledge Management, Dr V. Balaji, observes that "this technology can make an important contribution to increased access to learning by farmers."

Learners signing up for the agMOOC at a contact centre.

Supporting COL's newest member, The Gambia

Ahead of the launch of COL's school-based teacher development programme in The Gambia, COL's Adviser: Teacher Education, Dr Betty Ogange, briefed the permanent secretaries of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MHERST) and the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) on COL's Teacher Futures programme in September 2018.

Dr Ogange also visited The Gambia College and met the principal and staff. She noted during the briefings that "an important component of the Teacher Futures programme is to support partner institutions in developing a cost-effective technology-based teacher professional development programme and strengthen the capacity for monitoring and evaluation in The Gambia."

The Permanent Secretary of MHERST, Mr Yaya Sireh Jallow, expressed optimism about a strong partnership with COL after the country rejoined the Commonwealth. "We are pleased to collaborate with COL to improve teacher quality. The support for capacity building in teacher professional development in partnership with COL is timely indeed," he noted.

"The MoBSE hopes to work closely with The Gambia College in quality assurance as well as monitoring and evaluation of the proposed programme," said the Permanent Secretary of MoBSE, Mr Mohammed S. Jallow.

Digital Education Leadership in Sri Lanka

With support from COL, the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) has initiated a research project on the implementation of the Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) programme in Sri Lankan schools.

As part of the activities to launch the project, OUSL organised three days of training on C-DELTA in July 2018. It was inaugurated by OUSL's Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor K. B. Gunaherath, and attended by 41 teachers from 39 schools across the country. The objective of this activity was to improve the teachers' digital education skills and prepare them to become champions of C-DELTA in their schools. These teachers will support other teachers and students in learning digital education skills via the C-DELTA platform.

"The implementation of the C-DELTA programme in these schools will help empower both teachers and students to become lifelong learners and effectively utilise digital tools for learning. This implementation is unique as the OUSL team has developed a research plan to evaluate the impact of the modules on students and teachers," said COL's Education Specialist: eLearning, Dr Sanjaya Mishra.

RETRIDOL workshop in Ghana

COL collaborated with the Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDOL) to organise a workshop entitled "Overview of Open and Distance Learning (ODL)" at the University of Ghana in June 2018. The workshop, aimed at supporting institutions to embrace distance education practices, was attended by 22 senior administrators and faculty from ten Ghanaian educational institutions.

COL's Adviser: Education, Dr Kirk Perris, noted that the workshop built on a larger initiative to expand the use of ODL in West Africa to augment enrolment in post-secondary education. As such, participating institutions from Ghana were tasked with drafting policies that will support their transition to becoming dual-mode institutions.

Professor Goski Alabi, a member of the Board of Governors of Laweh Open University College, said, "The GER in Ghana is only 16%, so Ghana needs to look in the area of open and distance education. We cannot achieve SDG4, which emphasises inclusive, equitable and quality access [to education] and to promote lifelong learning, without adopting ODL."

Dr Ojo Olugbenda and Dr Clifford Amini, both faculty of the National Open University of Nigeria, where RETRIDOL is hosted, facilitated the workshop.

Tonga adopts L3F

The Tonga Business Enterprise Centre (TBEC) shared financial literacy courses with a cohort of 300 learners, mainly from the fishing industry, in August 2018. The courses, which were packaged in print and audio formats, were disseminated through mobile-based learning and face-to-face interactions. This is part of COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) strategy to improve the financial inclusion of marginalised communities, particularly women, in the country.

This L3F project in Tonga has caught the attention of the Food and Agriculture Organization, which now uses L3F's financial literacy resources developed by TBEC to address the learning needs of participants in its relief and rehabilitation programme. The initiative is being implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Forest and Fisheries and the Ministry of Internal Affairs as well as civil society organisations.

Free online course on OER

COL has updated its course on "Understanding Open Educational Resources (OER)" to improve the adoption of OER by teachers, educational institutions and policy makers. The course was first introduced in 2015 to address the inadequate understanding of OER and open licences. Over 18,000 learners from 160 countries accessed the two-hour course.

Due to its popularity, COL revised the course after the 2nd World OER Congress, making it a stand-alone platform. The course is short and succinct, providing distilled information and links to additional resources to enable the learner to pursue deeper interests in specific aspects of OER. It is available at **https://learnoer.col.org/**

Credit: ACHEA

Higher education in an age of disruption

Artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain are two technological trends transforming teaching and learning. Professor Asha Kanwar spoke about these emerging trends in July 2018 at the 17th Annual Association of Caribbean Higher Education Administrators (ACHEA) Conference in Trinidad and Tobago, in her address on creativity and innovation.

Professor Kanwar noted that the adoption of such technology will result in blended and collaborative learning. She stressed that the rapid rise of messaging has strong implications for learning, particularly via WhatsApp and Messenger, which both have billions of users. "Because messaging is widely used, messaging-based learning management platforms will have a faster uptake in the developing world, thereby reducing costs," she said.

The presentation, titled "Innovations in Higher Education: Re-imagining Learning," suggested that learners will move back and forth between academia and employment to skill and reskill themselves. Faculty will also have to become lifelong learners to keep pace with these changes, and the focus will be on acquiring knowledge and skills in new modes of delivery and pedagogy.

Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning

The Ninth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF9) will be held at BT Murrayfield, Edinburgh, Scotland from **9 to 12 September 2019**. Organised by COL in partnership with The Open University, United Kingdom, PCF9 brings together the best minds in open and distance learning to discuss issues of common interest, exchange ideas and explore best practices.

PCF9's theme is "Innovations for Quality Education and Lifelong Learning" with four sub-themes:

1. Employability
2. Equity and Inclusion
3. Opening Up Education
4. Technology

SPECIAL FOCUS:

1. Education for Girls
2. Empowering Youth

Visit **www.pcf9.org** for more details.

Skills for girls in Sri Lanka

COL and the Women's Development Centre, Sri Lanka, organised a five-day workshop in August 2018 for trainers, to train marginalised and underprivileged girls on mobile application development. This is the first phase of a national project to prepare 5,000 girls to start their own mobile application development businesses, use ICT to enter higher education and engage in lifelong learning.

During the workshop, 25 girls between the ages of 17 and 27 learned Android mobile application development using the "MIT App Inventor" platform. The workshop was conducted in both Sinhala and English, with the aid of the *Educational App Development Toolkit for Teachers and Learners* published by COL. The toolkit has been translated into the Sinhala language to help the participants learn better.

COL's Adviser: OER, Dr Ishan Abeywardena, the author of the toolkit, says: "Upskilling girls in ICT is a national priority for Sri Lanka to compete in the global economy. With the wider penetration of mobile devices and broadband, training underprivileged and marginalised girls in app development is a worthy investment for the country to achieve the SDGs."

Open Schooling for SADC-CDE

The Southern African Development Community Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE) and COL held a workshop on Technology-Enabled Learning (TEL) for Open Schooling at the Botswana Open University (BOU), Gaborone, in August 2018.

The workshop, hosted by BOU, presented opportunities to augment the volume, quality and delivery of content through the adoption of TEL and Aptus. Participants, consisting of 24 research officers, directors and other staff from the university, worked in small teams to select and critique open educational resources and to develop mini courses using MOODLE.

TEL serves to facilitate a more learner-centred pedagogy and reduce the costs of printing materials, while also heightening interactivity and learning outcomes.

Call for applications: COL Chairs Programme

COL invites applications from Commonwealth citizens to serve a three-year tenure as COL Chairs.

The COL Chairs are **thought leaders or scholars** who undertake research and innovation in open and distance learning (ODL), open educational resources (OER), technology-enabled learning (TEL) and learning for sustainable development.

The strategic objectives of the COL Chairs Programme are to:

- Promote **thought leadership** in COL's areas of competence;
- Apply research and innovation to support the achievement of **Sustainable Development Goal 4**; and
- Support learning for sustainable development within the framework of **COL's Strategic Plan** (2015–2021).

Submitted applications will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Applications and instructions for submission can be found on the COL Chairs webpage: **https://www.col.org/about/col-chairs**

Promoting boys' education in the Caribbean

The University of Guyana in partnership with COL, Guyana's Ministry of Education, UNICEF and the Caribbean Community, organised a two-day symposium on "Bridging the Gender Divide: Stemming the Tide of Male Underachievement in the Education System" in June 2018. This was followed by a project action planning workshop organised for education officers and representatives from government and non-governmental agencies to address issues affecting boys.

According to COL's Education Specialist: Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, Dr Mairette Newman, "This symposium

provides an opportunity to bring together thought leaders, practitioners, academicians and researchers from diverse disciplines across the Caribbean to share ideas, innovations and practices that would improve the learning outcomes and life challenges for boys."

Data in Guyana reveals that at birth and early education, the ratio of boys to girls is one to one. By the end of the secondary school level, this ratio stands at two to one in favour of girls. To address this, the country's Ministry of Education is reforming the schools' curriculum to keep more boys in school and improve their performance.

Tanzanian women turn entrepreneurs

One of COL's GIRLS Inspire project partners, the Institute of Adult Education (IAE), recently introduced the Msanzi CEFM Women's Group in Tanzania to microfinancing opportunities to help them become entrepreneurs. Following this, the Rukwa Regional Manager of the Small Industries Development Organisation, Mr Emmanuel Makere, presented a soft loan to the group in September 2018. This loan will enable the women to launch small businesses in areas such as soap and batik fabric production.

In partnership with IAE, the GIRLS Inspire project reintegrates women and girls into education through open, distance and technology-based education to prevent child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) in the country. Over 2,700 women and girls have registered for schooling and skills training with IAE. "The GIRLS Inspire project not only trains women in financial literacy, life skills and vocational training, but provides them with opportunities to apply their skills in improving their livelihoods," says COL's Senior Adviser: Women and Girls, Ms Frances Ferreira.

Open/ Innovative Schooling model takes off in Mozambique

COL, in collaboration with the National Institute of Distance Education (INED), launched Phase 2 of COL's Open/Innovative Schooling model in Mozambique during a workshop organised in August 2018. Technology-enabled learning will be implemented in 15 pilot schools.

Speaking about the model, COL's Senior Adviser: Open Schooling, Dr Johan Hendrikz, said, "In preparation for this launch, over 1,600 eLearning resources developed by Mozambique's Ministry of Education and Human Development were loaded on 15 Aptus devices and handed to staff of the pilot schools, who were trained to use the Aptus."

The Honourable Minister of Education and Human Development, Ms Conceita Sortane, handed the Aptus devices and laptops to representatives of the pilot schools. She was accompanied by the Director General of INED, Mr Pedro Baptista, and the Director of the Institute of Distance Education, Mr M. Simbine. The workshop was conducted by Ms Rosário Passos.

The workshop was attended by two staff members from each of the selected schools, geographically spread throughout Mozambique. It focused on the pedagogy of teaching in an eLearning mode using the Aptus device.

FOCAL POINTS ME THE CARIBBEAN,

COL organised two meetings for Focal Points from the Caribbean, Africa and Europe to strengthen the effectiveness of its strategic plan and programme activities. The meetings provided an opportunity to refine COL's approach to meet the education and training priorities of the three regions.

The Caribbean Focal Points meeting was held in Kingston, Jamaica in August 2018 and was attended by Focal Points from Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Focal Points from Africa and Europe met in Gaborone, Botswana in September 2018. Participants from 12 African countries attended — Botswana, The Gambia, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Eswatini, Tanzania and Zambia — as well as from Cyprus and Malta representing Europe.

Focal Points identified country/regional priorities that COL could address, particularly in the areas of capacity building in open, distance and eLearning, as well as secondary and higher education, quality assurance and learner support. They demanded more support in curriculum reform and entrepreneurship training for women, in addition to the development of skills for nation building.

> "COL holds Focal Points meetings around the Commonwealth once every three years to obtain first-hand information about country priorities."

The Caribbean

Jamaica's Minister of Education, Youth and Information, Senator the Honourable Ruel Reid, stressed the need for a holistic, agile and flexible education system to prepare youths for the challenges emerging in the fourth Industrial Revolution. He complimented COL for enhancing flexible learning opportunities and for the Focal Points meeting, which will help countries share their experiences and strengthen the Caribbean partnership.

Professor Asha Kanwar welcomed Minister Reid and the Focal Points and explained how COL promotes learning for sustainable development using technologies. She referred to the targeted approach that has helped deepen COL's work in each country and expressed confidence that this meeting would identify further opportunities for sustained engagement.

ETINGS IN
AFRICA AND EUROPE

Africa & Europe

Botswana's Minister of Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology, the Honourable Ngaka Ngaka, inaugurated the Africa and Europe meeting, during which he expressed appreciation to COL for supporting the education sector in Botswana and in Africa more generally.

At this meeting, Professor Kanwar stressed the important role that Focal Points play as advocates for open and distance learning (ODL) and in sharing information about COL in their respective countries. "If we need to increase the number of qualified teachers, have more children complete 12 years of schooling and increase the gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education, we need innovative approaches, and that is where COL has a role," she said.

Credit: BOU

Credit: BOU

COL, BOU sign MOA

On the sidelines of the Africa and Europe Focal Points meeting, COL and Botswana Open University (BOU) signed a Memorandum of Agreement to support the Southern African Development Community – Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE) as a regional centre of expertise in ODL. SADC-CDE was previously managed by the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology and will now be overseen by BOU. Before the signing ceremony, BOU's Vice Chancellor, Dr Daniel Tau, assured COL of BOU's support for the new partnership.

Focal Points appointed in 2018

BANGLADESH
Mr Syed Ali Reja
Deputy Secretary
Secondary & Higher Education Division
Ministry of Education

ESWATINI
Ms Fikile Mdluli
Chief Inspector of Tertiary Education
Ministry of Education & Training

FIJI
Ms Alison Burchell
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Education, Heritage & Arts

THE GAMBIA
Mr Anthony Mendy
Director of Tertiary & Higher Education
Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science & Technology

GUYANA
Ms Patrice La Fleur
Secretary General
Guyana National Commission for UNESCO

KIRIBATI
Ms Bwakura Metutera Timeon
Secretary
Ministry of Education

LESOTHO
Mr Monaheng Mohale
Director
Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre

MAURITIUS
Mr Megavarnen Varaden
Deputy Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Education & Human Resources, Tertiary Education & Scientific Research

PAPUA NEW GUINEA
Ms Leah Margis
Executive Manager
Innovation & Digital Education
Department of Higher Education, Research, Science & Technology

SRI LANKA
Dr Madura M.Wehella
Additional Secretary, Planning & Performance Review
Ministry of Education

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
Ms Amia Conrad Christopher
Head of Teaching & Teacher Development Division
Ministry of Education

VANUATU
Mr Reginal Garoleo
PEO Teacher Education & Development Officer
Teacher Education Directorate
Ministry of Education & Training

OUR COMMONWEALTH

The founding of Botswana Open University

Contributed by Dr Daniel Rakgomo Tau,
Vice Chancellor of BOU

Botswana recently launched its open university, the Botswana Open University (BOU), following the passing of the Botswana Open University bill of July 2017. This bill saw the former Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) transition into a full-fledged university. The advent of this university marks a significant milestone in the development of education in the country as well as in the Commonwealth.

> "...charting a successful path for BOU over the next few years will require the dedicated efforts of all the institution's stakeholders, from the Council to the Vice Chancellor, the Senate and all members of staff."

The university inaugurated its founding Chancellor, former Vice President of Botswana, Dr Ponatshego Honorius Kefaeng Kedikilwe, and founding Vice Chancellor, Dr Daniel Rakgomo Tau, in ceremonies that marked a change in the educational landscape of Botswana. Both events were held in Gaborone, Botswana. The inauguration of the Chancellor in March 2018 was witnessed by all four chancellors of the country's public universities. While addressing the congregation, the Minister of Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology, the Honourable Dr Alfred Madigele, expressed confidence in the new Chancellor. Dr Madigele stressed that the Chancellor's experience, intellect and wisdom would enable him to provide sage counsel and guidance to the institution.

In his acceptance speech, the Chancellor observed that we live in a particularly challenging time for universities. During the past 30 years, universities have been subject to sweeping changes — in the way they are funded and managed, in the social demands and expectations for their performance, in the regulatory environment to which they are subjected, and in the international competitive arena in which they participate. This means that charting a successful path for BOU over the next few years will require the dedicated efforts of all the institution's stakeholders, from the Council to the Vice Chancellor, the Senate and all members of staff.

Delivering his inaugural speech as the Vice Chancellor in September 2018, Dr Tau noted the importance of open and distance learning (ODL), stressing that ODL had effectively changed the lives of over 70,000 Botswana citizens since 2000. BOU will make education accessible to all people irrespective of their socio-economic circumstances, as the operations of the university will be aligned with the country's *National Education Strategy, Education Policies* and *Pillars of National Vision 2036*. The institution has leveraged on the national ICT infrastructure to facilitate online services that include virtual teaching and learning, enabling learners to access BOU's services from anywhere.

The Vice Chancellor was instrumental in establishing BOCODOL's collaboration with COL. COL supported its transition into an open university by providing technical advice and developing the institution's ICT Policy and Strategy, among other assistance. COL continues to deliver support through the Southern African Development Community Centre for Distance Education, which is hosted by BOU. As a result of this partnership, BOU has co-hosted some of COL's activities in the country, including the recent meeting of COL Focal Points, in Gaborone. The collaboration stands to benefit not only the people of Botswana but all citizens of the Commonwealth.

BOCODOL received a Commonwealth of Learning Award of Excellence in Distance Education in 2006, and COL presented Dr Tau with the Commonwealth of Learning Fellowship Award in 2013.

Nigeria launches Green Teacher programme

COL, in collaboration with the National Teachers' Institute (NTI) Kaduna, officially launched the Advanced Diploma in Environmental Education Programme, also known as the Green Teacher Nigeria Programme, in September 2018. This 12-month blended online programme targets primary and secondary school teachers, as well as staff of environmental protection agencies and other stakeholders in the country.

During the inauguration, the Executive Secretary, National Board for Technical Education, Dr Mansur Mas'udu Kazaure, read a message from Nigeria's Honourable Minister of Education, Mallam Adamu Adamu, which stated: "I applaud the institute for taking advantage of the opportunities provided by new technology to deliver the new diploma programme."

NTI's Director General and Chief Executive, Professor Garba Dahuwa Azare, stressed the institute's commitment to improving the quality of teachers at all levels of the nation's education system through its various training programmes. "COL's partnership with NTI marks an important milestone in teacher and learner empowerment in the conservation and improvement of the environment," said COL's Adviser: Teacher Education, Dr Betty Ogange.

Digital learning for teachers in South Africa

COL and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa organised a four-day planning forum for professional development in digital learning in September 2018 at the University of Fort Hare.

The Acting Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Fort Hare, Professor Mzuyanda Percival Mavuso, welcomed participants to the forum, which was attended by 39 delegates, including academic staff from the Faculty of Education and the university's Teaching and Learning Centre. Representatives from the national, provincial and district departments of education as well as the Nelson Mandela Institute of Education and Rural Development also attended.

In her opening address, the DBE's Director for Learning and Teaching Support Materials, Policy Development and Innovation, Ms Kulula Manona, stated that the DBE looked forward to the partnership with COL to ensure innovative digital teaching and learning in secondary schools in the Eastern Cape.

Blended online course development in Uganda

COL supported a five-day workshop on developing blended courses at the Uganda Management Institute (UMI) in September 2018. The workshop was aimed at assisting teachers to develop blended courses for UMI's MBA programme, using a learning management system (LMS). In 2017, COL supported the development of a technology-enabled learning policy and trained teachers to use the LMS.

Inaugurating the workshop, UMI's Director of Programmes and Student Affairs, Dr S. Kasozi Mulidwa, said that "COL's support is timely and will help UMI faculty to gain new technology-enabled pedagogical practices as well as reduce their workload." He asked participants to deliver the developed programme to students in the upcoming semester, in early 2019.

The workshop was facilitated by Mr Andrew Moore from South Africa and attended by 20 teachers who are developing modules and courses for UMI's MBA programme.

COL's Adviser: Teacher Education, Dr Betty Ogange, said that "COL recognises the need to work with in-country partners to develop a professional development programme that will upscale digital knowledge and skills among teachers towards better educational achievement in the Eastern Cape initially, and in other parts of South Africa subsequently."

Inclusive education in Kenya

COL, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Kenya, organised a three-day stakeholder forum on inclusive education in secondary schools in August 2018 at the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE), Nairobi.

The Director of KISE, Mr Wambua T. Mutiso, said that the forum was an eye-opener for the secondary school heads and teachers — many of whom had not received any training on inclusive teaching practices and yet were constantly faced with the challenge of helping students with disabilities and special needs. "We look forward to the partnership with COL to ensure successful inclusive education in the secondary school sector in our country," he added.

Participants represented the Ministry of Education, the Teachers Service Commission, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, KISE, as well as selected special, integrated and mainstream secondary schools.

Athabasca University & COL launch MOOC

The third edition of COL's Introduction to Technology-Enabled Learning (TEL) course started in October 2018. This massive open online course (MOOC) is designed for teachers in secondary, post-secondary and vocational education to develop their knowledge and practice in teaching and learning with technology.

The TEL-MOOC has become a popular course in fulfilling a specific need of teachers in the Commonwealth. In its first offer, TEL-MOOC attracted over 1,100 participants, and in its second offer, the enrolment increased by about 300 per cent with 18 per cent earning a certificate and over 67 per cent active learners.

This course offering is led by Dr M. Cleveland-Innes and Dr N. Ostashewski, both from Athabasca University, Canada.

PEOPLE

MICHAEL GORT

Mr Michael Gort in his capacity as the Director General, International Organization at Global Affairs Canada was appointed to the Board in July 2018 as Canada's representative. He takes over from Ms Janet L. Ecker, the former representative on the Board since 2010.

AMINA MOHAMED

Ambassador Dr Amina Mohamed was appointed to COL's Board of Governors as the regional representative for Africa. She is currently the Cabinet Secretary (Minister) for Ministry of Education in Kenya. The Honourable Dr Unity Dow, currently Botswana's Minister of International Affairs and Cooperation and former Minister of Education and Skills Development in the country, had served on the Board since 2017.

LOUISE ELLIS

Ms Louise Ellis MBE was appointed to COL's Board of Governors as the representative for the United Kingdom. Ms Ellis is the Head of the Commonwealth Unit at the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The former member, Mr Steven Hillier, was from the Department for International Development, UK.

ALISON MEAD RICHARDSON

COL acknowledges the former Education Specialist: TVSD, Dr Alison Mead Richardson, for her contribution to COL. Dr Mead Richardson joined COL in September 2009 from Namibia, where she had been an international consultant in distance education working in Africa. She completed her tenure at COL in September 2018.

TERRY NEAL

Ms Terry Neal joined COL as Education Specialist: TVSD in October 2018. She has a diverse range of experience managing and implementing programme initiatives related to skills development for livelihoods and has worked with governments and institutions to harness the potential of open, distance and technology-based learning.

Teacher professional development in Botswana

COL organised a sensitisation meeting on teacher professional development at the Tlokweng College of Education in Botswana in September 2018.

COL's Adviser: Teacher Education, Dr Betty Ogange, said that COL has developed a blueprint and toolkit for school-based teacher development (SBTD) for countries and regions wishing to implement SBTD to improve schools' performance and pupils' achievement.

The principal of the college, Mr Bushy Setabo, lauded COL's efforts in strengthening the capacity of teacher education institutions and providing mentorship for SBTD, saying, "We welcome this initiative and hope that the ministry can guide us further to be able to engage with COL in this initiative."

Learning Pathway programmes launch in Solomon Islands

Two thousand school dropouts in the Solomon Islands are expected to complete their education through the Learning Pathways – Second Chance Education programme between 2019 and 2021. With COL's support, the programme was developed by Solomon Islands National University's Distance and Flexible Learning Centre to offer two major learning pathways for learners wishing to return to school.

The Preparatory and Community Studies Certificate (PCSC) is designed for students who wish to complete their studies to Form 5, and the Tertiary Community Studies Certificate (TCSC) for those learners who dropped out at Forms 6 or 7 and wish to improve their grades to continue to further education. The Learning Pathways structure also offers primary school leavers an opportunity to pursue the Life Skills Pathway, designed to provide learners with a "hands on, look and learn" experience. Both programmes were launched in September 2018.

ICT integrated courses in Kenya

COL supported a workshop on developing policy for the implementation of technology-enabled learning (TEL) at the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology (JOOUST) in Bondo, Kenya in September 2018. The workshop was conducted based on the findings of a baseline study by the university, which examined the utilisation of ICT in teaching and learning.

Inaugurating the workshop, the Vice Chancellor of JOOUST, Professor Stephen G. Agong, said, "We are already on the path to embrace technology-enabled learning — thanks to COL's support, the university can now adopt TEL systematically." He called on the

deans of the university to leverage this opportunity to develop an inclusive and realistic TEL policy that can be implemented.

COL's Education Specialist: eLearning, Dr Sanjaya Mishra, noted that "JOOUST is a fertile ground for success in TEL implementation as the university already has a learning management system and an institutional repository in place. The baseline study also reported that faculty members and students are looking forward to the integration of TEL, and the university's strategic plan aims at integrating ICT in 50 per cent of courses by 2021."

Quality higher education in Uganda

COL is working with Busitema University (BU) in Uganda to implement open and distance learning (ODL) and transition to being

a dual-mode university. In June 2018, COL supported a workshop on online course development for 27 BU faculty. With campuses in rural areas of the country, BU looks to ODL as a means of increasing access, improving programme flexibility for students, and boosting the overall quality of programmes through effective instructional design and learner support.

"By providing quality distance and online learning opportunities, we anticipate that BU will be able to increase access and positively impact the lives of learners in Uganda," said COL's Education Specialist: Higher Education, Professor Romeela Mohee.

Dr Alex Grech, Executive Director, Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning, Malta. He is coordinator of the first nation-state pilot of blockchain credentials (in Malta) and a member of the European Union Blockchain Observatory and Forum.

Blockchain's early promise: self-sovereignty for holders of verified credentials

This is a time to feel whimsical about old, enthusiastic mantras concerning the Internet and social media, such as Stewart Brand's 1984 statement that "information wants to be free," when the future of everything appeared to be in the wisdom of the crowd and open-source software. Fast forward to 1 October 2018, when *Smart Mobs* author Howard Rheingold announced that he was deleting his Facebook account: "I just don't want to be part of the continuing rolling disastrous damage to the public sphere and individual privacy."

If the Cambridge Analytica scandal shredded any remaining trust in the goodwill of Silicon Valley platforms towards the data sovereignty of online crowds, it also left early enthusiasts of the liberating affordances of technology wondering whether they had been duped. Certainly, the early promise and affordances of the blockchain as a *disruptive technology with no central authority* should be couched with caution.

> **"** ...the early promise and affordances of the blockchain as a *disruptive technology with no central authority* should be couched with caution. **"**

The blockchain holds the same socially empowering promise of the early Internet. Our misplaced trust in centralised platforms, databases and protocols could perhaps be addressed by a technology that is *trustless by design* yet allows varying degrees of trust to be built into the infrastructure's transaction and communication levels.

Self-sovereignty is a core principle for the social value proposition of the blockchain, particularly in educational technology. Self-sovereignty is frequently associated with individuals' right to own and control their own identity online and be the final arbiters of who can access and use their data and personal information. Applying these principles to the credentials learners secure over a lifetime brings a number of issues and opportunities into focus.

To issue, manage, verify and share credentials with third parties, institutions administer central databases that store information about the recipients of credentials. In a truly self-sovereign ecosystem, recipients should be able to control every aspect of their credentials: where they are stored, with whom they are shared and how recipients are identified as individuals in the credential.

The *notarisation of credentials on the blockchain* is tantamount to digital self-sovereignty. No personally identifiable information gets stored on the chain: what is stored is a *hash* on the distributed ledger — the hash being the equivalent of a "digital fingerprint." The credential recipient can download a digital version of the credential that has been notarised on the blockchain and may in turn be verified by third parties.

The debate on the potential advantages of blockchain credentials over current practices is only just starting. Some tangible advantages, based on use case studies, are: co-ownership of records by issuers and recipients; vendor-independent verification, whereby issuers may own and keep all the records they issue, even if they switch vendors later on; the ability to issue to multiple blockchains; portability; privacy; interoperability; ease of use; and scalability.

Blockchain appears to have all the prerequisites to support new and emerging trends in the digitisation of macro- and micro-credentials. Nevertheless, the blockchain is not a cure-all for the challenges faced by credential issuers and recipients. While blockchain will make it easier to share credentials, the "garbage in, garbage out" rule prevails: questions remain about quality assurance and about who creates and grants certifications. Employers and educational institutions will need to decide what knowledge and skills are important and how these may be developed and assessed.

The outlook on the affordances of blockchain technology remains overwhelmingly positive. Blockchain is a solution with decentralisation, immutability, self-sovereignty, consensus and trust built in as code, and we are only at the initial stages of understanding how it will help bring sustainable change to the education sector. Digital credentials and self-sovereignty are early pointers to that potential.

NEW RESOURCES

Preventing Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) Through Open, Distance and Technology-Based Education: Progress Report #4

This report captures the progress of the Child, Early and Forced Marriage project over the past two years. It provides an evidence-based narrative assessment of the progress made towards the achievement of the expected outcomes and outputs. It also provides actual data on activities undertaken, results, lessons learned, best practices, challenges and limitations, as well as mitigation strategies where relevant.

http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/3082

Journal of Learning for Development (JL4D)

The July issue, Volume 5, No. 2 (2018) contains two special features, on "Learning for Development in the Context of South Africa: Considerations for Open Education Resources in Improving Higher Education Outcomes" and "Education for Development: From Distance to Open Education," as well as research articles on an array of topics, a book review and an editorial.

Contributors are invited to submit research articles, case studies, commentaries and reports from the field for the next issue. Please visit the journal's website for more details and submit your work at:
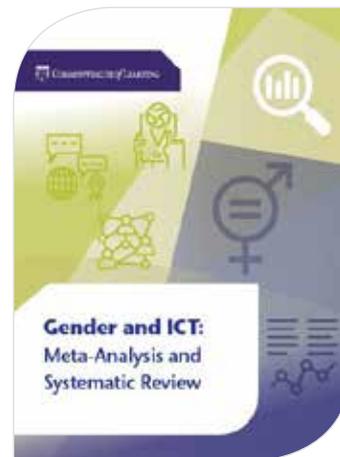
www.jl4d.org

Gender and ICT: Meta-Analysis and Systematic Review

This publication addresses the intersection of gender and ICT in the Commonwealth, the USA and Scandinavian countries. It summarises a meta-analysis of empirical research on gender-based differences in perception and actual use of ICT in education, and it presents a systematic review of policy documents that address issues and solutions related to gender and ICT.
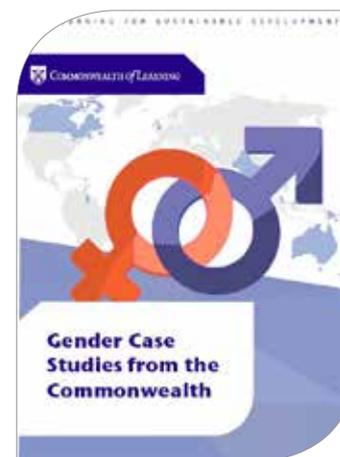
http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/3089

Gender Case Studies from the Commonwealth

This compilation of gender case studies and corresponding teaching notes was created for the Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration (CEMBA) and Public Administration (CEMPA) programmes. The studies feature cases from across the Commonwealth and were written by faculty from institutions that offer the programmes.

http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/3086

Mid-term Outcome Evaluation of Technology-Enabled Learning Initiative

This report comprises the interim evaluation of four TEL projects, critically analysing the progress made in each project with respect to stated outputs and outcomes against the indicators. The report suggests that a community of practice approach be adopted and that TEL strategies be integrated at individual, institutional and national levels.

http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/3060

#TECHTRENDS

Cloud can power Augmented Reality developments

Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) will be major growth areas for the next ten years, with their market size expected to reach about USD 212 billion during that time. Within the next two years, both will be quite different, with wholly new sets of apps and devices.

With AR, an individual's experience of the real world is enhanced by overlaying information from reality with information from a computer, whereas the VR user experience takes place entirely in a synthetic environment. A newer term is *mixed reality*, which merges aspects of AR and VR.

Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, promotes AR as the most important application for the present because it is socially less isolating. The ubiquity of the smartphone and the amount of computing power inside a reasonably priced smartphone have given AR a boost.

A major functionality in a smartphone is the camera. According to *Business Insider* magazine, about 1,300 billion digital photos were snapped in 2017, more than 90 per cent with a smartphone. Almost all smartphones today can perform a visual search. A user can take a photo with a smartphone and immediately compare it with a similar photo on the Internet, thereby gathering more details about the scene or object. When the phone has an AR app, captured images can be used to gain information. For example, one can photograph an office chair and use an AR app to get its price at a retail outlet. As of mid-2018, an estimated 1,000 AR apps were available in the App Store.

To date, a significant number of experiments around the world have deployed AR in education and training. Almost all used AR with desktop computers, since smartphone AR is a recent development. A 2016 overview of the results showed that learning outcomes were better when AR was used. However, the technologies had many glitches, and teachers needed more exposure to the technologies and to AR in general.

Major changes are about to take place in the way AR products are made. An important development is the availability of Sumerian, a platform from Amazon's cloud services arm. Sumerian enables the development of AR products even if the content developer does not have advanced knowledge of programming languages. Since the service can be accessed from a browser on a computer, this approach has excellent potential to build a large following for AR development.

This is the right time for developing countries to launch well-structured experiments deploying AR in education and training. Access to smartphones is increasing rapidly, presenting an opportunity to boost learning outcomes using AR. Constraints remain: access to powerful smartphones is limited to small numbers of teachers and students; most teachers have no exposure to AR; and bandwidth is often inadequate to run AR apps effectively.

Within these constraints, it should still be possible to carry out strategic trials. Cloud services can be used where bandwidth is available. Aptus, COL's open-source hardware innovation, can be used to store AR content for local access by appropriate smartphones and tablets. It is important to build the leadership necessary to harness smartphone-based AR, as this will remain the preferred device among youths for the coming decade.

> "To date, a significant number of experiments around the world have deployed AR in education and training."