

# *Teacher Development: Working Together to Achieve Quality Education*

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## *Video Presentation*

*Regional Workshop on Teacher Education in the Pacific Samoa, 20-22 May 2013*

*Teacher Development: Working Together to Achieve Quality Education*

*By Mr. Vis Naidoo  
Commonwealth of Learning*

## **Transcript**

Senior Officials from Ministries of Education of Pacific Island nations,

Leaders from teacher development institutions

Leaders from development partners

Senior Officials from our hosts institute – National University of Samoa

Greetings from the Commonwealth of Learning in Vancouver, Canada.

I start my brief address with an apology – due to prior commitments that could not be changed, neither the Commonwealth of Learning’s President Professor Asha Kanwar nor I are able to be physically present at this important regional Forum. We opted to use technology to send you this message and I hope this illustrates COL’s commitment to the Pacific Teacher Development Forum.

The Pacific island nations, like most countries in the world, have social, economic and environmental challenges that need to be addressed. These challenges, if not solved, could result in severe social and economic problems. The critical platform that is necessary to address these challenges is to have a well-functioning education system, one that enables learners to achieve their full potential and make a contribution to addressing these challenges.

We all know that education and training is the critical platform for any social and economic development. Many Pacific Islands have made excellent progress with respect to increasing access to basic education. The UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report for 2012 records that

regionally, over the last decade, the fastest growth in gross enrolment rates for primary education were seen in the Pacific and East Asia. Of course this puts increasing pressure on secondary and post-secondary education and training systems.

At COL, we believe that countries will not be able to meet this increased demand through ‘bricks and mortar’ approaches and new models of technology-enhanced education and training are needed. Our focus on open learning, distance education and technology is designed to identify strategies that can address the needs of our education and training systems, both at the formal and non-formal levels.

In any school education, the teachers are a critical component of such a system. Current statistics from UNESCO’s Institute for Statistics for 2012 and their projections to 2015 note that the East Asia and Pacific require almost 9 million teachers. Of this, just over a million are required immediately. Understandably, most of these teachers will be needed by the larger countries of the East Asia and less by the Pacific Island nations.

If I take a few Pacific countries data, the numbers become clearer. For example, in Samoa, the UNESCO data for teachers needed by 2015 is 875. In Vanuatu, the country’s education system requires 1 904 teachers by 2015. In both of these examples, there is almost a zero growth rate in terms of teachers needed.

Noting that the demand for trained teachers is stable, a further important requirement is the quality of teachers that support the education system. We recognize this is an immense challenge - to find teachers that have the necessary pedagogical skills and subject matter knowledge. This challenge is further exacerbated in the important subjects like mathematics, technology, sciences and languages. In addition, teachers also require administrative skills and increasingly technology skills that can be used in the classroom.

Small states face challenges with respect to human resource development. How does a small island nation address the many challenges facing it? How does one set up the education and training system so that it provides the critical platform for social and economic development? How can this be done in a context of reduced funding from the state, shortage of human resources and increasing areas of need?

One option is for small island nations to build regional co-operation in the area of teacher development. The Pacific Islands have a rich history of regional collaboration and this is something that COL has worked with in the technical vocational area, open schooling and for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). Teacher development institutions in the Pacific can collaborate to jointly develop materials and courses, build the capacity to both develop materials/courses and to customize these for the local context and requirements. This sharing of capacity and resources will, in part, address funding issues as the materials development process will be done at vastly reduced costs. It also reduces the time spent on course development – another saving that can benefit teacher training institutions.

We are fortunate that in many Pacific Island nations that are part of the Commonwealth, the context we refer to has more similarities than differences. The values of the Commonwealth, viz peace, democracy, equality and the rule of law is the glue that binds all Commonwealth states. Such similarities and

commonalities offer all Pacific Island nations the platform to collaborate in the area of teacher development.

I want to commend the countries that are participating in this Forum for taking the step to using technology, distance and flexible learning methodologies and collaborating – this Forum is the first step. I look forward to the Forum identifying the specific needs with respect to teacher training, quality and determining how these needs can be addressed. In doing this, it will be important to also identify how countries can collaborate, how countries can use open educational resources (available at COL and from other institutions) to speed up course development and reduce the costs associated with it.

In many ways, the key to the success of this Forum will be determined by what takes place afterwards.

- What do we do when we return back to our countries and institutions?
- How do we take the various strategies forward?
- How do we ensure that we put in place programs that make a difference to the teachers in our countries and through the teachers, to the students as we prepare them to take their rightful place in society?

I leave you with this challenge.

Best wishes with your deliberations over the next few days.

Be assured of COL's support as we strive to build a more prosperous country and region for all.

Thank You.