

Inaugural Address



Formal Inauguration of CEMBA/MPA, Open University of Mauritius, Port Louis, Mauritius, 27 September 2013

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Transcript

Hon Minister Rajeshwar Jeetah, Distinguished Members of the Executive Governing Board and the Academic Boards, CEMBA/MPA, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed an honour and a privilege to be present on this special occasion to formally launch the Commonwealth Executive Masters in Business Administration and Masters in Public Administration Programmes at the Open University of Mauritius, the youngest in the family of Commonwealth open universities. Let me also thank my hosts, especially the Director General Dr Kaviraj Sukon under whose leadership the MOU has joined the Pan Commonwealth consortium to offer this international professional development programme.

Created by Commonwealth Heads of Government in twenty five years ago, the Commonwealth of Learning or COL is the only intergovernmental organisation that focuses exclusively on enhancing access to education and training through open, distance and technology-enhanced learning.

COL has had a long association with Mauritius, which has been a pioneer in opening up educational opportunities for its citizens through alternative approaches. When the University of London introduced the notion of higher education without boundaries in 1858—its first external exams were held in Mauritius. Over a century later in 1989, COL commissioned a report to advise the government on how it might use distance education for human resource development in Mauritius. So this has been a long and productive partnership and COL is very grateful to the government of Mauritius for its continued financial and intellectual support. Mauritius hosted the triennial Focal Points meeting for Africa and the Mediterranean regions in 2011 and this is but instance of their support.

Mauritius has been a key player in the development of distance education. It started out with the Mauritius College of the Air, followed by the Centre for Professional Development and Lifelong Learning and more recently, the Virtual Centre for Innovation and Learning Technologies of the University of Mauritius, which received the COL award for excellence in distance and online learning in 2010. We can see that Mauritius has taken a gradual and evolutionary approach to the development of open and distance learning and the University of Mauritius model that has emerged is specific and relevant to its needs. Mauritius is also an active member of the COL-led Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth and the Lifelong Learning Programme for entrepreneurship development for women. COL will be ready to further strengthen such collaborations.

The Open University of Mauritius is now a member of a Pan Commonwealth consortium with partners from the Caribbean, Asia and Africa. We are fortunate to have the Vice Chancellors and academics from the partner institutions present at this launch. What's more we also have our Vice President and Education Specialist responsible for the CEMBA/MPA programme here today.

Through collaboration among institutions with shared missions and respect for each other, we can offer students in our countries access to programmes that we would have difficulty mounting as sole institutions. It then becomes critical to seek out skills and competencies that complement each other among partners to achieve greater synergy and success. Partnership is about giving and sharing as well as receiving benefits.

I recall my excitement over the initial launch of the Programme in South Asia a decade ago. Recognising the need for a quality management and public administration programme at affordable costs to learners in the developing world, COL facilitated the establishment of a consortium of four institutions in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Initially five courses were generously contributed by IGNOU, which runs one of the largest and most popular management programmes in India. The whole complement of 22 courses was developed by curriculum designers and writers from Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, India, Canada and Hong Kong SAR. These courses have been recently reviewed and revised to ensure currency and quality and shared with all partners. With the emergence of Open Education Resources, we hope that existing materials will be further supplemented and strengthened by the partners using the rich resources available on the web. The Hon Minister is a believer in OER and during the 18th Commonwealth Conference for Education Ministers held in Mauritius last August ensured that there was a clear direction in the Communique for *'for the development and use of OER in providing quality teaching and learning for all'*.

The CEMBA/MPA Programme is both flexible and modular, and was developed to ensure convenient entry and exit points. Another advantage of this international programme is that students can transfer credits earned in one institution to another participating institution.

The CEMBA / MPA Programme is one answer to the daunting challenge of an affordable and quality management education programme. A top-quality MBA Programme in Canada or the US would be way beyond the reach of our students in the developing Commonwealth. The CEMBA Programmes are made available to our partners in the spirit, and with the proviso that they are priced reasonably for the local market.

COL's priorities are access, quality and affordability.. We have developed guidelines to ensure that all our partners offer the required learner support services to enable students access to success. We know that MOU takes pride in giving its students the knowledge essentials; creating an interactive, responsive and flexible learning environment, and developing a strategic orientation to real world problems and solutions. What is required in the global knowledge economy is a cadre of professionals that is both creative and innovative. We hope that this programme will contribute substantially to this goal.

We are all vital stakeholder in the success of this endeavour. Together we will overcome the challenges and optimize the opportunities to strengthen and accelerate human resource development in Mauritius and the wider Commonwealth.