

# President's message for International Women's Day 2022



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Professor Asha Kanwar  
President & CEO, Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

Today, as we observe the International Women's Day (IWD) under the theme Gender Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow, it gives me great pleasure to share that COL promotes women's empowerment as one of its main strategies for achieving learning for sustainable development.

Two years of the Covid-19 pandemic have widened gender gaps and social inequities.

This year's theme acknowledges that gender equality and sustainability are inextricably linked. Just as Covid-19 rolled back gender equality, climate change has a greater negative impact on women and girls.

In many Commonwealth countries, women depend on the natural environment for income generation and subsistence to support their families. They possess a wealth of information and experience that can contribute to protecting the environment. While women have an important role in their families and can be powerful leaders for climate adaptation and mitigation, they often do not have the power to inform decision making and influence policies at local or national levels.

COL launched the Commonwealth Wise Women mentorship project as a strategy to build a foundation for female leadership. Through this project, COL is engaging eminent women as role models, who mentor women at the early stages of their career, and girls at the grassroots level in under-served communities, to become successful in their field of interest and influence the next generation of leaders.

Let us celebrate a few of those women who have made a difference.

COL has been supporting the Servants of St Joseph in Papua New Guinea to upskill vulnerable women, girls, and young men for better livelihoods.

With COL support, a pilot training on the island of New Britain, has equipped women with the skills necessary for organic gardening. The number of those who have taken up food production and processing has increased, and participants are now exploring the possibility of growing plants for medicinal purposes.

As Sister Aurora Yolanda Pugal says: 'In this COL partnership, we are constantly challenged to be innovative in our strategies and approaches.'

As a widow with seven children, Millicent Achieng Onyango relies heavily on her farm for sustenance and income generation. Through training facilitated by COL's partner, the Siaya Seed Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO), Millicent gained knowledge in horticulture and poultry management and was then able to raise capital to buy chickens and seeds. In just a year, Millicent has doubled the number of

birds and is selling vegetables to buy chicken feed. Millicent has become a role model for her community and regularly shares her knowledge with peers.

In Nigeria, Ubaida Shehu Faruk is passionate about environmental education. She participated in Green Teacher Nigeria (GTN), an environmental education programme offered by the National Teachers' Institute in Kaduna, Nigeria, with support from COL. As a Principal Education Officer at her institution, Ubaida has been instrumental in imparting pedagogical and problem-solving skills and environmental awareness among learners. She is particularly proud of the support she has received from the parents, the local authority and the State Ministry of the Environment to start a tree-planting campaign. "The school children and their parents donated more than 200 trees, which we planted along the road to the school." As a champion of environmental education, she believes that teachers have a key role to play in building climate resilience and inculcating sustainable behaviours.

As we celebrate the work of these inspiring women, we hope many more will join them in pursuit of a sustainable tomorrow. Each one of us can contribute in concrete ways to empower women and girls to be equal players in decision-making and catalysing social change. Gender equality today will lead to a sustainable tomorrow for our people and our planet.

Let me wish you a safe and productive International Women's Day.