



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

**COUNTRY REPORT**  
2021-2023 | **ASIA**

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**Sri Lanka**

## Helping Commonwealth Member States and institutions use distance learning and technologies for expanding access to education and training.

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**The Commonwealth of Learning (COL)** is focused on adding value to member states' efforts to reach the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG4. It's supporting the governments and institutions of the Commonwealth in the use of appropriate, affordable technologies to improve and expand learning for sustainable development.

During its current plan (2021-2027), COL will:

- i) build on its expertise in ODL, OER and TEL to play a more influential role in national policy development and implementation;
- ii) invest in innovations and research;
- iii) support the digital transformation of institutions and organisations;
- iv) promote gender equality; and
- v) implement a rigorous monitoring and evaluation plan.

COL's work is organised into two sectors — Education and Skills — with Gender Equality and Technology-Enabled Learning (TEL) as cross-cutting initiatives.

The Education sector supports formal education from secondary to tertiary levels across the Commonwealth, particularly in the small states (Brunei Darussalam and Maldives) and has four initiatives: Open Schooling; Teacher Education; Higher Education and the Virtual University for Small States of The Commonwealth (VUSSC).

The Skills sector supports formal, non-formal and informal education and training to equip learners for livelihoods and has three initiatives: Skills for Work; Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) and GIRLS Inspire.

The work in these sectors complement the three pathways of change COL is focusing on in achieving impact for each member state in the Commonwealth. These are:

1. Building National Resilience
2. Strengthening Institutions
3. Improving Lives and Livelihoods

## INTRODUCTION

An island nation of over 22 million people ([World Bank, 2022](#)), Sri Lanka is located off the southern coast of India and has high literacy rates and a strong network of non-governmental organisations.

COL's work in Sri Lanka is primarily in the areas of girls' and women's education and training, higher education, teacher education, lifelong learning for farmers, and technology-enabled learning and benefits from programmes under the aegis of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA). Learners from Sri Lanka are also participating in COL's free, open online courses and benefitting from other available resources.

## PARTNERS

- Ministry of Education
- Centre for Media and Information Literacy (CMIL)
- National Institute of Education (NIE)
- National Library of Sri Lanka
- Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL)
- Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC)
- Together with Youth
- University Grants Commission
- Women's Development Centre (WDC)
- Wayamba Technical College, Sri Lanka Youth Ltd

## KEY CONTACTS

### BOARD OF GOVERNORS

**Honourable Dr Susil Premajayantha, MP**  
Minister of Education

### FOCAL POINT

**Mrs Hasini Thalagala**  
Director of Education  
(Foreign Agencies and External Affairs)  
Ministry of Education

## REGIONAL CENTRE

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) is located in New Delhi, India and was established to promote cooperation and collaboration in the creation and use of multiple media resources for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and skills development in the Commonwealth countries of Asia. Its activities revolve around COL's Strategic Plan 2021-27, but at the same time, CEMCA retains its regional focus, keeping in view the challenges and requirements of Asian Commonwealth countries.

CEMCA's Advisory Council meets annually and functions as an advisory body on CEMCA's affairs and is responsible for broad policy formulation in the programme areas. The Council meets once a year, and membership is rotated among the members in Commonwealth Asia.

During the 2021-2027 plan, CEMCA will

1. Build the capacity of institutions to transition to online and blended learning;
2. Support gender-responsive skills development for livelihoods; and

3. Develop innovations in a range of technologies, from Community Radio to AI-based solutions for reaching the last mile.

## COL ACTIVITIES BETWEEN JULY 2021 - MAY 2023

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Online workshops were held for the vocational trainers and marginalised youth on employability skills and spoken English.
- Video tutorial in Sinhala developed on 'Sustainable Farming Techniques' for bamboo cultivators.
- A strategy for digitising learning resources, focusing on climate-responsive sustainable livelihoods and food security has been developed.
- Professor Shironica P. Karunanayaka, The Open University of Sri Lanka was appointed [COL Chair](#) for the period 2023 to 2026.
- 2,643 women and girls trained in Sri Lanka

### BUILDING NATIONAL RESILIENCE

**COL is working with governments to use gender-responsive ODL policies and strategies for increasing equitable access to quality learning.**

COL's President met with the Minister of Education, Sri Lanka, the Hon. Dr Susil Premajayantha, in December 2022, who assured continued support to COL.

Sensitisation and training have been provided to 170 policymakers and senior officials in Gender Equality (GE) and prevention of Gender Based Violence (GBV) to increase awareness and promote effective policies and strategies to address these issues.

In collaboration with the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) to promote digital education skills among students and teachers, the Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) programme was implemented. This included 45 provincial and school-level coordinating teachers participating in the Training of Trainers' workshops for C-DELTA orientation in March and April 2022. COL's C-DELTA platform received the Brandon Hall Gold Excellence in Learning Award 2021.

### STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS

**COL is supporting partner institutions to strengthen its ODL systems and capacities for providing quality education and training.**

COL's Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) Programme's goal is to deliver high-quality learning and professional development opportunities – with our Commonwealth Partner Institutions – that complement existing MBA/MPA

programmes. The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) is a partner institution. In mid-2022, nine course materials were redeveloped. They include Enterprise Information Systems and Digital Strategy, Management in Organization, People and Talent Management, Operations Management, New Public Management and Governance, Data Analysis for Decision making, Marketing Management, Accounting Issues and Financial Management for Business Decisions, and Disaster Management.

CEMCA collaborated with the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC), the Government of Sri Lanka and Wayamba Technical College to organise two online workshops on Electric Vehicle (EV) and Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning (RAC) for Sri Lankan vocational trainers in September 2021. 448 vocational trainers from various government and private technical colleges attended these workshops.

CEMCA organised a month-long online workshop on 'Design Thinking and Innovation in Teaching and Training' to assist higher education and vocational training institutions in the capacity building of their faculty members/trainers. This workshop was conducted in November 2021. The workshop was attended by 114 participants from five countries (Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Maldives, and Sri Lanka) who were educators from technical and engineering streams, business schools, and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) network.

CEMCA supported Together with Youth, a local NGO in Sri Lanka, to mobilise and enrol 250 youth from marginalised communities (185F/65M) for online training on enhancing employability skills and spoken English linked to the labour market requirements. The Sri Lankan trainers conducted this course via the Zoom platform in batches from November 2021 to January 2022. The course consists of modules on Effective Communication Skills, IT and Computer Literacy, Interview Skills, Resume Drafting, Teamwork and Leadership, Time Management, Personality Development, Professionalism and Work Ethics, Effective Planning and Spoken English.

COL supported the National Institute of Education (NIE) to implement the Gender Policy Framework completed previously by training teachers to update two courses to support gender equality and enrolling students in the updated courses. [Dec2021]

COL's GIRLS Inspire initiative organised a pre-conference workshop at PCF10, which was attended by COL's partners from Sri Lanka. The workshop's objective was to develop a Strategy for Digitization of Learning Resources focusing on Climate and Environmentally Responsive Sustainable Livelihoods and Food Security through a collective discussion on: 1) Improving learning resources using COL's quality standards and aligning it to climate change and environmental protection; 2) Digitisation of the improved learning resources.; 3) Scaling up the use of digitised learning resources for sustainable livelihood and food security. [Sep 2022]

CEMCA collaborated with the International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation (INBAR) and the Industrial Development Board (IDB), Sri Lanka, to organise a virtual training programme on Bamboo Furniture making for 64 artisans, master artisans and potential entrepreneurs from Sri Lanka in May 2022. The workshop emphasised how bamboo and related products can play a major role in achieving sustainable employment opportunities. Video tutorial in Sinhala, developed.

To train teachers in higher education in using virtual labs, CEMCA organised an online workshop in November 2022 in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka. It was facilitated by the Centre for Media and Information Literacy (CMIL) and conducted by a resource person from Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India. 401 participants attended the workshop.

A teacher training workshop on C-DELTA was conducted at the Open University of Sri Lanka, where 45 teachers were trained to become school-level coordinating teachers for conducting C-DELTA training. [Nov2022]

To improve COL's GIRLS Inspire's partners' effectiveness in implementing the initiative, the team held the April Gender Liaisons Session #9 on the theme: Marginalization and inclusion. 12 partners participated. [May2023]

31 female staff members from the Women's Development Centre (WDC) were trained in Value Chain Analysis. In addition, WDC provided advocacy training for 33 (10M/23F) Local level Self Help Groups and Women Entrepreneurs. [May 2023]

## IMPROVING LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS

**COL continues to provide learners, especially from disadvantaged groups, access to learning and resources for improved livelihoods.**

1,141 students at the Open University of Sri Lanka enrolled in the C-DELTA platform. [Nov 2022]

COL's partnerships with Coursera, Udemy and Grow with Google continue to offer nominated learners this vast range of courses – a pathway for lifelong learning and growth and enhancing skills for employment and entrepreneurship. Since July 2021, over 3,630 learners from Sri Lanka have enrolled in 25,053 courses with 5,791 certificates being issued. [Jan 2023]

COL's GIRLS Inspire initiative is working with the Women Development Centre (WDC) to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment through promoting educational attainment and the economic participation of women and girls. To date, a total of 2,643 women and girls have been trained; 208 have accessed financial resources such as loans; and 2,750 Community members have been reached through advocacy events conducted.

To strengthen the National Youth Service Council of Sri Lanka, CEMCA has partnered with Together with Youth (TWY) to enhance Soft Skills and Spoken English among Sri Lankan youth to increase their employability. A baseline survey was conducted among 150 youth to identify the key areas to develop a course. TWY has designed a draft course content outline covering multimedia training materials. (June 2023)

The Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) of Sri Lanka partnered with CEMCA to develop a course for Elderly Caregivers based on the National Competency Standard and Competency Based Training Curriculum for Caregivers (ELDER). In this process, 7H Studio created 180 minutes of multimedia content covering eight Modules. Module 1 - What is Elder Care?, Module 2 - Attend domestic affairs of the Elder, Module 3 - Prepare Living Area of the Elder, Module 4 -

Maintain Personal Hygiene and Appearance of the Elder, Module 5 - Maintain Nutrition of the Elderly, Module 6 - Administering the Medicine to the Elders, Module 7 - Check and Record Vital Signs and Module 8 - Care of an Elderly Person. (June 2023)

## SPECIAL EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Professor P.M.C. Thilakarathne, Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), participated in COL's fourth edition of the **Vice-Chancellor's Roundtable**, which focused on "Quality Higher Education for Sustainable Development in July 2022. This two-day event held in Malaysia provided an opportunity to share and learn from peers and develop collaborative action plans.

Chathurika Karunanayake from OUSL was invited to participate in the **Fourth Pan-Commonwealth Training Programme on Women and Leadership in ODL** in August 2022, in Penang, Malaysia, including an online workshop earlier in the year. The workshop theme was 'Women Leaders: Shaping the future for a sustainable world' with three sub-themes-Leadership, ICTs and Climate Change.

COL's Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning is held triennially and is co-hosted with different partners in different regions of the Commonwealth. Five delegates from Sri Lanka registered for the **Tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF10)**, the first-ever hybrid Forum held in Calgary, Canada, from 14-16 September 2022. Four were sponsored by COL, where several were also invited to participate in COL pre-conference meetings. Participants included: Thimibipalage Fernando, OUSL; Sujata Gamage, LIRNEAsia; Buddhini Jayatilleke, OUSL; Prasad Senadheera, OUSL; Sashi Stephen, Women's Development Centre.

CEMCA held their **22<sup>nd</sup> Advisory Council Meeting** in New Delhi on 26 December 2022, with members from Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Maldives and Sri Lanka in attendance. A major concern expressed was that even though distance learning had been embraced globally during the pandemic, the negative perceptions relating to the quality of this mode of delivery continue to persist. CEMCA Director mentioned that despite the challenges confronted during the pandemic, CEMCA reached out to a significant number of learners. Ongoing activities included supporting higher education institutions to implement Open Educational Resources (OER) policies and help enhance pedagogical skills among teachers/trainers of Technical and Vocational Education institutions in Commonwealth Asia. Council members noted CEMCA's contribution to ODL in the region and outlined the priorities for the future. Ms Hasini Thalagala, Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, applauded the contributions of CEMCA while highlighting the need for establishing virtual labs for vocational skill development.

The **Regional Focal Points Meeting for Asia** was held in New Delhi, India, on 27-28 December 2022. COL Focal Point Ms Hasini Thalagala from the Ministry of Education participated in the two-day meeting.

## PUBLICATIONS OF RELEVANCE

Reaching the Unreached: Scale-Up Empowerment Study <http://hdl.handle.net/11599/4006>

Commonwealth Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) Annual Report: 2021-2022  
<http://hdl.handle.net/11599/5301>

Blended Learning Policy: Templates for Higher Education Institutions in Commonwealth Asia (CEMCA) <http://hdl.handle.net/11599/5319>

Handbook on Online Education in Commonwealth Asia (CEMCA) <http://hdl.handle.net/11599/5259>

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) Achievement Report: July - November 2022 <http://hdl.handle.net/11599/5345>

Report on the Regional Focal Points Meeting – Asia <http://hdl.handle.net/11599/5228>





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