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LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Delegates at the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (Credit: Department of Information, Government of Fiji).

2018 Nadi Declaration

Ministers recognise COL's work over 30 years

Delegates from 34 Commonwealth Member States gathered in Nadi, Fiji for the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (20CCEM), from 19 to 23 February 2018. The theme of 20CCEM was "Sustainability and Resilience: Can Education Deliver?"

The Nadi Declaration was adopted on 23 February 2018 at the final session of 20CCEM. The Declaration outlined the priorities and agenda for education across the Commonwealth for the next three years (2018–2021).

Building on the outcomes of 19CCEM, ministers reaffirmed that education is a fundamental human right and is indispensable for achieving sustainable development. They expressed a commitment to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and to promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Ministers recognised the valuable service provided by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) over the last 30 years. They

appreciated COL's focus on promoting learning for sustainable development through the use of technologies as well as its emphasis on lifelong learning for employment, entrepreneurship and empowerment, all of which support the ongoing efforts of Member States to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4.

COL was also commended for the growing impact of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth in strengthening tertiary education in small states, and for its global leadership in open educational resources and innovation in educational technologies.

COL President and CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar, said, "COL will work in partnership with sister organisations and stakeholders in the field to ensure that development outcomes are not just achieved but exceeded."

The 2018 Nadi Declaration can be found at www.col.org/NadiDeclaration



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CEMCA Advisory Council meets in Sri Lanka

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) Advisory Council held its 17th annual meeting at the Open University of Sri Lanka, Colombo in December 2017 in partnership with the Ministry of Education. Representatives from Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka participated.

The meeting was chaired by COL President and CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar, who highlighted the priorities of COL and CEMCA and stressed the need to continuously create learning opportunities for citizens of the Commonwealth. "CEMCA should develop and nurture a network of leaders in open and distance learning across Asia, who can be called upon to provide technical advice," Professor Kanwar said.

CEMCA's Director, Dr Shahid Rasool, presented the annual report and update on programme activities. The members of the Advisory Council appreciated CEMCA's work within the region in promoting cooperation and collaboration in the use of electronic media resources for distance education.

Ghana's High Commissioner to Canada visits COL



Ghana's High Commissioner to Canada, H.E. Joseph Ayikoi Otoo, and his delegation visited COL headquarters in November 2017. Professor Asha Kanwar briefed the High Commissioner on COL's work in Member States, particularly Ghana. COL's Vice President and colleagues highlighted key activities taking place in some of the institutions in Ghana, including universities, technical institutes and civil society organisations.

The High Commissioner commended COL's efforts and stated that COL's work was important in helping Member States to improve their educational capacity. He expressed his country's desire to partner with COL in supporting farmers in Ghana and equipping its graduates with modern entrepreneurial skills.



Canadian Deputy Minister visits GIRLS Inspire project in Mozambique

Canada's Deputy Minister of International Development, Ms Diane Jacovella, appreciated the positive impact that COL's GIRLS Inspire project is having on the women and girls being trained in Nacala Porto, Nampula Province, Mozambique. The deputy minister visited the province recently to see first-hand the barriers these learners experience, and how child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) can be prevented.

During a tour of project partners, the deputy minister had the opportunity to meet with women and girls undergoing training



in a variety of vocational courses and attended a presentation on the plight of the girl child and the root causes of CEFM. Ms Jacovella noted that the interventions by the GIRLS Inspire project had contributed to changing the lives of these women and girls and had empowered them to have voices within their communities.

India's High Commissioner to Canada visits COL

H.E. Mr Vikas Swarup, India's High Commissioner to Canada, visited COL in January 2018 to familiarise himself with COL's work. During his visit, he said that "COL meets a very important lacuna in India, and its work impacts people on the ground." Professor Asha Kanwar briefed the High Commissioner on COL's work in Member States, particularly India. Mr Swarup was accompanied by the Consul-General of India in Vancouver, Ms Abhilasha Joshi.



COL President meets Sri Lanka's Minister of Education

Professor Asha Kanwar recently met with Sri Lanka's Minister of Education, the Honourable Akila Viraj Kariyawasam, and the Secretary, Ministry of Education, Mr Sunil Hettiarachchi, to provide an update on COL's work in Sri Lanka. The minister appreciated COL's work and requested further technical support for the implementation of capacity-development programmes for teachers and educational personnel.



Higher education pilot launches in Zambia

COL and the University of Zambia (UNZA) are collaborating on a pilot of COL's higher education integrated model. The aim of this pilot is to harness the potential of open and distance learning to increase access and improve the quality of courses in dual-mode universities. The pilot was launched at a project design workshop held at UNZA in November 2017. The workshop focused on delivering high-quality distance education and eLearning programmes.



Fiji welcomed as member of COL



At a meeting held during the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (20CCEM), COL President and CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar, and the Attorney-General and Minister of Education, Arts and Heritage of Fiji, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, explored a range of initiatives that COL could undertake in partnership with the government of Fiji to strengthen learning for sustainable development.

Professor Kanwar said, "I can't think of a better occasion to welcome Fiji to the Commonwealth of Learning than 20CCEM. We are very happy that COL will now be able to work much more closely with institutions and the Ministry of Education to promote the Fijian government's development agenda."

The Attorney-General stated, "Our membership in COL will give us new opportunities to deliver the right tools and technologies into the hands of Fijian students and create classroom environments at every level of the Fijian education system that best prepare students for the demands of the modern workplace."

Teacher Futures programme commences in Kiribati

COL and Kiribati Teachers College (KTC) in Tarawa are collaborating on COL's Teacher Futures programme to improve senior secondary teacher quality through ICT-supported and innovative school-based teacher development. The programme was officially initiated in November 2017 by the Permanent Secretary of Kiribati's Ministry of Education, Ms Kaaro Neeti, and the Principal, KTC, Mr Aberaam Tebitaki.

The official launch of the programme was followed by a capacity-building workshop to sensitise KTC staff on the tenets of the Teacher Futures programme and prepare teacher educators for participation in a global teacher community of practice. The workshop was facilitated by Ms Anouk Janssens-Bevernage.



BOCODOL is now Botswana Open University

COL's President sent a congratulatory message to the Botswana Open University (BOU) on transitioning from the Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL) into an open university, effective 1 December 2017.

COL assisted BOCODOL during the transition process by providing technical advice and reviewing the institution's systems, and by supporting capacity building in open educational resources, information and communication technologies (ICT) and open and distance learning (ODL).

BOCODOL was a committed member of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth and housed the Southern African Development Community's Centre for Distance Education. The new university's mandate is to make education accessible to all in Botswana, especially out-of-school youths and adults, through the use of ODL.

Left to right: BOU's first Vice Chancellor, Dr Daniel Tau; COL Senior Adviser: Open Schooling, Dr Johan Hendrikz; and COL's Focal Point in Botswana, Ms Fancy Amey.



Women farmers in India.

L3F women borrowers in India set new record

More than 30,000 women in Tamil Nadu, India who were supported by COL to build capacity in their farming practices and business skills borrowed a total of USD 12 million from commercial banks over the past two years. During this period, the women farmers also repaid 98 per cent of these loans.

Through COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) partner VIDYAL, these women were mobilised into groups and taken through structured learning, focused on sustainable farming practices, financial literacy, corporate literacy and enterprise development. They were able to establish farmer-producer companies under India's Companies Act and become major shareholders in these companies.

Speaking on L3F's work in Tamil Nadu, Professor Asha Kanwar said, "COL catalyses the partnerships between communities, experts, financial institutions, ICT providers and the market to create a win-win situation for all. COL utilises open and distance learning strategies, as well as ICT resources such as mobile phones and community radios, to facilitate a continuous learning process for these women in their own languages. These efforts not only benefit the women but bring about positive change in their families and communities."



JL4D seeks contributors

Contributors are invited for the *Journal of Learning for Development*, which focuses on innovation in learning – in particular, but not exclusively, open and distance learning and its role in development. Your contributions can take the form of research articles, case studies, commentaries and reports from the field. Please visit the journal's website for more details and to submit your work: <http://www.jl4d.org>

COL supports OER mainstreaming in Tonga

COL is collaborating with Tonga's Ministry of Education and Training to mainstream open educational resources (OER) at the Tonga Institute of Education (TIOE) and Tonga Institute of Higher Education (TIHE). The first phase of the mainstreaming process commenced with 34 teachers, including senior management of TIOE and TIHE, being trained in the use of OER in course development and instructional video production.

In phase two, 20 teachers from both institutes were trained in developing and delivering OER-based online courses using Moodle. In the process, four life-skills



courses were developed – Thinking and Learning Skills, Working and Social Skills, Information Technology, and Restorative Practices in Education – which are now being delivered to Tongan youths as online courses.

“This project approached the mainstreaming of OER in a systematic manner that included advocacy, capacity building, course development, policy development, and technology-enhanced learning. The project is now in its third phase, where we will evaluate the impact of OER in terms of learning outcomes,” said COL Adviser: OER, Dr Ishan Abeywardena.

COL celebrates International Women's Day 2018



COL celebrated International Women's Day on 8 March by highlighting this year's theme, “Press for Progress.” In a video message, Professor Asha Kanwar noted that “a top priority for COL is to close the gender gap by promoting women's economic empowerment through access to learning.”

“Each contribution we make towards women's equality and empowerment is a building block towards establishing a society where women and girls will have equal rights and opportunities,” said COL's Senior Adviser: Women and Girls, Frances Ferreira.

TOP 5 WAYS FOR OPEN UNIVERSITIES TO REDUCE THEIR CARBON FOOTPRINT

1

Encourage digital publications

Open universities are largely dependent on providing learning materials in printed form. Switching to the digital production and distribution of educational materials will reduce the dependency on printed learning materials. On average, one digital publication will save 60 trees. Students may also be given incentives (e.g., a 20 per cent reduction in fees) to opt for digital materials.

2

Use recycled paper

Whenever paper is necessary, recycled is recommended. The use of paper that meets environmental and social quality standards – such as those set by the Forest Stewardship Council – helps reduce an institution's carbon footprint. Even using paper with low grammage (i.e., lighter weight) reduces paper consumption.

3

Promote recycling of printed learning materials

Students can be encouraged to recycle books and reading materials by returning them to the university for use by other learners once they complete a course. Such recycling will further reduce paper consumption.

4

Create centralised facilities to recycle e-waste

Responsible management of electronic waste materials, including alkaline and lithium ion batteries, is an important aspect of reducing an institution's carbon footprint. Creating a centralised facility to collect and recycle electronic scrap materials not only helps develop awareness but also leads to better management of resources.

5

Use online facilities to reduce face-to-face counselling

Travelling to study centres to attend face-to-face counselling sessions accounts for the greatest proportion of open universities' carbon footprint. Replacing these with online, two-way videoconferencing sessions to provide learner support will further reduce the institution's carbon footprint.



In order to transform society, ODL must first transform itself

“Can open and distance learning (ODL) contribute to development and transform societies? How can we extend our reach to cover more people and places by adopting effective methods and ideas?” These were the questions that Professor Asha Kanwar posed to participants in her keynote address at the International Conference on Development Interventions and Open Learning for Empowering and Transforming Society, held at Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Guwahati, India in December 2017.

“At COL, we have found that if we want to reach unreached people, we must adopt a targeted approach,” said Professor Kanwar. Emphasising that ODL has reached people in previously unreached places with methods and innovative ideas that have made educational success possible, Professor Kanwar mentioned examples of communities from around the Commonwealth that have been positively impacted by COL’s work. She pointed out that learners must be at the centre of every activity and be encouraged to become active producers of open educational resources.

First cohort completes CVQ Assessor training in the Caribbean

The first cohort of 26 learners recently completed the first offering of the COL-supported online Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) Assessor course. Aimed at preparing learners to become certified assessors, the course was offered by the National Training Agency in Trinidad and Tobago and attracted participants from Barbados, Grenada and the host country.

One of the learners is visually impaired. She currently serves as an information technology instructor at the National Centre for Persons with Disabilities, in San Fernando, Trinidad and Tobago and was able to complete the online CVQ course using on-screen and audio readers. Speaking on how the course has impacted her career, she said, “The completion of this programme has both added to my stability as relates



to my employment and put me at the same level [as] or may have given me an edge [over] my non-disabled counterparts.”

Upcoming Events



Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)

The 2018 CHOGM will be held in London, United Kingdom during the week of 16 April 2018. The theme is “Towards a Common Future,” with a further focus on a prosperous, secure, sustainable and fair future for all Commonwealth citizens.

<https://www.chogm2018.org.uk>

Participants at the Blended Course Development workshop.

India's RGUKT adopts TEL

With support from COL, Rajiv Gandhi University of Knowledge Technologies (RGUKT) developed a technology-enabled learning (TEL) policy to integrate technology in teaching, learning and assessment and is now systematically implementing the policy through the development of courses.

COL's engagement at RGUKT is transforming teaching and learning processes to match the learning preferences of students. At a jointly organised Blended Course Development workshop, held in November 2017, courses in language, mathematics and engineering were developed to be offered to students in the semester starting February 2018.



Inaugurating the workshop, the Vice Chancellor of RGUKT, Professor V. Ramachandra Raju, said: "RGUKT has been taking important steps to make technology-enabled learning part of its DNA. Thanks to COL for guiding the university and its faculty to implement TEL systematically."

RGUKT's Director of the Centre for Educational Technology and Learning Sciences, Professor V. Venkaiah, coordinated the event and emphasised that "the workshop supported by COL is helping develop internal capacity and trainers who can assist other teachers in RGUKT to implement blended course development."

Pacific Focal Points meet in Fiji



The Pacific regional meeting of COL Focal Points took place on 16 and 17 February 2018 in Fiji. Its aim was to strengthen the effectiveness of COL's work by addressing key priorities for education and training in the region and to share information about developments related to learning for sustainable development. COL co-hosted the meeting with the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development, hosted by the University of the South Pacific.

COL holds Focal Point meetings around the Commonwealth once every three years to obtain first-hand information about country priorities. This is the first meeting in the series planned for 2018. Nine Focal Points or their representatives from the 11 Pacific Member States attended the meeting. COL had prepared Country Reports of its work in each country over the last three years, which were presented to the Focal Points.



Course in business for sustainable development with OUM

Recognising the importance of global goals for sustainable development, and in an effort to assist business leaders with adopting sustainable practices, COL has partnered with the Open University of Mauritius (OUM) to develop a course on business for sustainable development, which will become part of the Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration programme.

A two-day workshop for course writers was facilitated by COL's Education Specialist: eLearning, Dr Sanjaya Mishra, at OUM in November 2017 to develop a blueprint for the course and integrate open educational resources.

Speaking on the significance of the course, COL's Education Specialist: Higher Education, Professor Romeela Mohee, said: "The course is being developed to address the growing needs of stakeholders to respond to the sustainability challenges of the world and in particular SDG12 on sustainable production and consumption. The learners in this course will not only understand the inter-linkages of the sustainable development goals, but will also develop competencies to apply sustainable practices in different sectors of business and industry."



20TH CONFERENCE EDUCATION MINIS

Delegations from 34 Commonwealth Member States attended 20CEM under the theme: “Sustainability and Resilience: Can Education Deliver?” COL participated in several sessions of the conference, including the Integrated Partners’ Forum and the Ministerial Roundtable on Skills for Development, both organised by COL.



Opening ceremony

Former Prime Minister of New Zealand and former Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, Helen Clarke, addressing delegates with Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Rt Honourable Patricia Scotland QC and the Honourable Prime Minister of Fiji, His Excellency Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama.

Integrated Partners’ Forum

COL President and CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar, with the Attorney-General and Minister of Education, Arts and Heritage of Fiji, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum at the inauguration of the Integrated Partners’ Forum.



OF COMMONWEALTH TERS



Progress report

Professor Asha Kanwar presented COL's progress report to education ministers at 20CCEM. Professor Kanwar highlighted COL's activities undertaken during the first three years of its Strategic Plan 2015–2021.



Ministerial Roundtable

COL organised a Skills for Development roundtable on 22 February. Right to left: Mr Foong Tze Foon, CEO, Nanyang Polytechnic International, Singapore; Honourable Dr Unity Dow, Minister of Basic Education, Botswana; Honourable Joel Morgan, Minister of Education and Human Resource Development, Seychelles; Dr Linda Sissons, Chair, COL Board of Governors; Honourable Jean Ernest Massena Ngalle Bibehe, Minister of Secondary Education, Cameroon; and Dr K. Balasubramanian, COL Vice President.



Credit: Association of Commonwealth Universities

Pledge to deliver SDGs through education

COL has pledged with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through education. This pledge was signed by Commonwealth Secretary-General the Rt Honourable Patricia Scotland, ACU Chief Executive and Secretary General Dr Joanna Newman, and COL President and CEO Professor Asha Kanwar at 20CCEM, in the presence of ministers and other education stakeholders. The Commonwealth Education Partnership for Sustainable Development will see the three organisations working together to support Member States to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Through this partnership, the three organisations will develop joint programmes and support policy development across the Commonwealth, in response to the evolving needs of Member States.



Expanding open textbooks in the Commonwealth

COL Director: Knowledge Management, Dr V. Balaji, spoke during a session at 20CCEM on the topic of "OER and Open Textbooks for Quality Education in the Commonwealth." He highlighted some of the advantages of open textbooks that are based on open educational resources (OER), including accessibility, cost-effectiveness and portability.

OUR COMMONWEALTH



Former President of Nigeria, His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo (middle), receiving his PhD from NOUN's vice chancellor (first left).

NOUN enhances social equity through ODL

Contributed by Professor Abdalla Uba Adamu, Vice Chancellor of NOUN

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is the largest single-mode open and distance learning (ODL) institution in the West African sub-region. With over 420,000 enrolled students and 103,071 in flexible registration, it remains by population the largest university south of the Sahara. The flexibility of the university means that although students can enrol (and thus are reflected in the population pattern of the university), they may defer registration until such time as their economic circumstances allow. This is why the university chose “Work and Learn” as its motto. This adaptable approach enables everyone, including nursing mothers, to combine work, domestic duties and learning.

“ODL can deliver — from the shackles of age, power, imprisonment, poverty and uncertainty.”

While the major development focus of NOUN centres around the internal control of data management and flow to enable more effective and accurate decision making, the university also is honouring its role as a social enabler and game changer by introducing a series of innovations targeted at enhancing social equity. The most successful is the Inmate Scholarship Scheme, through which NOUN provides scholarships to 486 prisoners across eight Nigerian Prisons Special Study Centres across the country. The condition for the scholarship is that candidates must have achieved a minimum of five credits in their O level exams, as required for entry into conventional Nigerian universities, including credit passes in English and mathematics. The scholarship has no vertical limits, enabling a student to achieve up to the doctoral level. A study of the inmate-students revealed interesting instances of prisoners not desiring early release as they did not wish to forego their chance of free education while in prison.

For younger prisoners, mainly juveniles, NOUN is collaborating with the Kaduna State Ministry of Justice to provide

skills acquisition training in economically viable projects, such as basic information and communication technology, hairdressing, tailoring and others, for 60 inmates. The project is assisted with equipment from the World Bank and provides participants with vital skills to properly re-orient themselves as responsible youths in society after their incarceration.

NOUN spectacularly proved its lifelong learning potential with the graduation of Nigeria's former president, His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo, who recently received his PhD at the January 2018 graduation ceremony. Although he was the second Nigerian leader to graduate with a PhD after serving in office (the other being Rtd General Yakubu Gowon, Warwick University, 1984), Dr Olusegun Obasanjo's doctoral efforts send three clear signals that encapsulate the spirit behind ODL education. First, one is never too powerful to learn (he ruled the country twice, as both a military and a civilian head of state); second, one is never too old to learn (he was 80 at graduation); and third, one can never have too much knowledge, for learning is a continuous process.

Other milestones that demonstrate NOUN is a game changer amidst the vicissitudes of life was the operation of its campuses in insurgency areas of North East Nigeria. At one of the internally displaced persons camps in a community in Yola, Adamawa State, our best graduating student was Mrs Amina Abdullahi, who obtained a first-class degree in Islamic studies despite living in extremely difficult circumstances. The indomitable spirit displayed in her determination to succeed was only able to shine through an ODL opportunity.

So ODL can deliver — from the shackles of age, power, imprisonment, poverty and uncertainty. The flexibility of ODL, such as NOUN offers, can ultimately become a catalyst for the use of education in national development.

Professor Muhammad Ibn Junaid (third left) with staff at King Fahad Junior Secondary School in Freetown, who participated in a COL-supported baseline survey.

Teachers trained in Sierra Leone

A baseline survey conducted by COL in collaboration with Freetown Teachers College (FTC) has revealed that teachers in Sierra Leone are receptive to technology-supported teacher professional development, despite infrastructural and Internet connectivity challenges in their schools.

The study indicated that mobile technology is used by 55 per cent of teachers and 70 per cent of teacher educators in the institutions sampled, and that over 90 per cent of these teachers and teacher educators prefer to use their mobile devices not only to access microlearning and eLearning resources, but to participate in online and messaging-based communities of practice. The survey was part



of the preparatory activities for COL's Teacher Futures programme in Sierra Leone, which aims to improve teacher quality through school-based, technology-supported professional development. This programme helps equip teacher education institutions to deliver effective learning opportunities for sustainable development.

The survey team was led by Professor Muhammad Ibn Junaid and comprised five FTC staff members, who interviewed teachers and head teachers in 13 secondary schools as well as staff at FTC.

agMOOCs receive Skoch Gold award

agMOOCs, a project conceptualised by COL, received a Skoch Gold award in the "Technologies for Growth" category at the recent 50th Skoch Summit in New Delhi. This award recognises innovative efforts in technology, business and social development, with an emphasis on start-ups.

agMOOCs was designed to help learners acquire and enhance their knowledge and skills in agriculture. COL's partner institution, the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur (IITK), serves as the anchor institution and manages the project using the mooKIT platform, which contains a number of innovations that enable access even in conditions of very limited bandwidth. To date, over a dozen agMOOCs have been offered, attracting more than 13,000 learners from 90 countries.

Professor T. V. Prabhakar (left) of IITK received the award on behalf of the agMOOC consortium.



L3F model adopted by regional government in Tanzania

Tanzania's Kagera region recently adopted COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) model. In implementing this model, the regional government will be utilising open and distance learning, including mobile learning and traditional face-to-face approaches, to train farmers in the region.

The regional government acknowledged the efforts of COL's partner Matumaini Mapya in supporting agricultural extension services through a mobile learning system, which has increased farmers' awareness, simplified their means of communication and linked them with financial institutions. With the L3F model, more farmers will have access to extension services and information and communication technologies to improve their farming practices.



ODL for persons with disabilities?

COL President and CEO, Professor Asha Kanwar stressed the need for more institutions to make special efforts to design open and distance learning (ODL) offerings for persons with disabilities (PWDs), in her keynote address at the 6th International Conference on Information and Communication Technology and Accessibility, in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, in December 2017. Much more needs to be done, and ODL institutions can take the lead in this regard.

“Research shows that more and more people with disabilities are joining ODL institutions,” said Professor Kanwar. She pointed out four reasons why ODL presents better opportunities: “First, ODL is convenient for PWDs as they can study at their own pace, place and time. They don’t need to travel to campus or seek accommodation near the institution. Second, ODL is more flexible and offers content in various formats so learners can read, listen to or watch lectures. Third, ODL is more affordable as it costs significantly less than campus-based instruction. Finally, ODL also provides a degree of anonymity – where students with disabilities can interact with professors and peers without feeling discriminated against.”

CEMCA to offer Life Skills for Engineers MOOC

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) recently announced the offering of a massive open online course (MOOC) titled Life Skills for Engineers, starting in May 2018. In preparation, COL and CEMCA held a workshop at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur (IITK) to finalise content design, orientate faculty and create the course calendar for this MOOC. The mookIT platform, which was developed by IITK with COL’s input, will be used.

The interactive workshop was facilitated by Dr V. Balaji of COL and Professor T. V. Prabhakar of IITK and coordinated by Dr Manas Panigrahi of CEMCA. Participants included senior faculty from a variety of institutions who will conduct the MOOC. Professor H. C. Verma, a well-known writer of physics textbooks whose own MOOC had about 57,000 learners, and Professor B. Jirli explained the usefulness of the dynamic analytic data captured by mookIT for making mid-course alterations.

The MOOC will be offered in two phases, with Professor R. Ivaturi of the University of Hyderabad, India as the course director.

PEOPLE



STAFF
ANNOUNCEMENTS



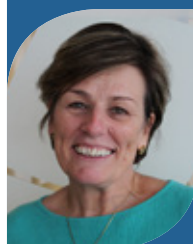
JOHN LESPERANCE

COL wishes to acknowledge former Education Specialist: VUSSC, John Lesperance, for his contribution to COL. Mr Lesperance joined COL in January 2009 from Seychelles, where he was Director of Further Education Development in the Ministry of Education. John has completed his tenure at COL and returned to Seychelles.



SPARROW MCGOWAN

Farewell to Sparrow McGowan, who joined COL as Communications Manager in 2016. We are thankful for her contribution to COL and wish her all the best in future endeavours.



DR MAIRETTE NEWMAN

COL welcomes Dr Mairette Newman, who joined COL as Education Specialist: VUSSC in February 2018. Prior to joining COL, she was Coordinator of the Graduate Studies Unit in the School of Education at the University of the West Indies, Jamaica. She has worked extensively in the area of tertiary education in the Caribbean, especially in designing, facilitating and evaluating a range of learning experiences.



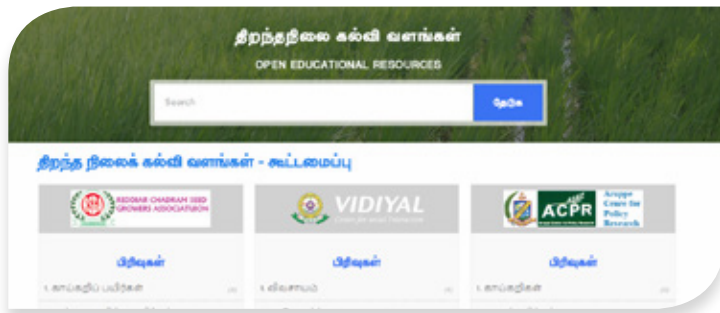
DR OBINNA OKWELUME

Dr Obinna Okwelum joined COL as Communications Manager in November 2017 from Nigeria, where he had served at the National Universities Commission as Head of the Public Relations Division.



DR KIRK PERRIS

Dr Kirk Perris joined COL as Adviser: Education in January 2018. He has held a variety of positions, including as Assistant Professor at Beijing Normal University and Research Associate at the Open University of Hong Kong. He has a wide range of experience both nationally and internationally in open and distance learning, higher education and development.



OER for non-formal education in Tamil

COL, in collaboration with Arul Anandar College (AAC), Reddiarchatram Seed Growers' Association (RSGA) and VIDYAL, will launch the Tamil Nadu Lifelong Learning for Farmers OER Federation in India in March 2018. This open educational resources (OER) repository, named L3fpedia, was created by farmers for farmers in Tamil Nadu in their native Tamil language. L3fpedia, which contains OER provided by multiple institutions and organisations, offers an easy-to-use single interface for users seeking farming-related OER.

Speaking on the objective of this project, COL Adviser: OER, Dr Ishan Abeywardena, said, "The novelty of this new OER federation is its ability to support the livelihoods of farmers through non-formal education delivered in their native language. Further, this project addresses the recommendations in the Ljubljana OER Action Plan 2017 under 'language and cultural issues' through the use of user-friendly technology."

COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers initiative empowers farming communities using open, distance and flexible learning. With COL's support, the partners have developed 150 quality-assured OER courses to be shared through L3fpedia, based on an extensive needs analysis.

New agMOOCs launched



agMOOCs, a consortium supported by COL, launched two new MOOCs in February 2018, with over 6,400 learners signing up for both courses: (1) Fundamentals of Agricultural Extension and (2) Integrated Disease Management. An innovation in these MOOCs is the deployment of messaging apps, which enable learners to participate in real-time discussion spaces.

These MOOCs also allow learners to download course videos directly to their devices so they can view course materials frequently and on demand. As repeated access to online video materials can be expensive for many learners, direct downloading lowers costs and improves access to learning.

Within a week of the launch, 40 per cent of participants had used the messaging app to access the courses, indicating that learners are receptive to the agMOOCs approach of deploying messaging systems in online learning platforms.



MOOC on technology-enabled learning reaches 94 countries

A massive open online course (MOOC) titled Introduction to Technology-Enabled Learning (TEL), offered jointly by COL and Athabasca University, Canada attracted 3,926 participants from 94 countries. Of these participants, about 40 per cent were female teachers, and the highest numbers of registrants were from Bangladesh, Barbados, Canada, India, Mauritius, Rwanda and South Africa.

The MOOC covered issues related to integrating technology in teaching and learning in secondary, post-secondary and vocational education. This five-week course required approximately three to five hours per week from the participants and offered flexible options for learning the content to accommodate busy schedules. The course equipped learners with the knowledge to use appropriate technologies and online resources, including open educational resources, to improve student learning.

CEMBA/CEMPA programme offers good economic return for graduates

A recent study commissioned by COL has shown that the Commonwealth Executive Master's in Business Administration and Public Administration (CEMBA/CEMPA) programme yielded an increase of more than CAD 200 in graduates' monthly earnings/income.

The study, conducted at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU), Pakistan, revealed that for every dollar a student invested in CEMBA/CEMPA, an average return of CAD 3.39 was received. There was also an increase of 28.5 percentage points in the probability of gaining a managerial position, which corresponded to more than twice that probability in 2012 for the treatment group.

COL is collaborating with 11 higher education institutions across the Commonwealth to offer the CEMBA/CEMPA programme, which is designed for part-time study by busy working professionals, in response to growing demands for post-graduate education in business and public administration.

Associate Professor Salman Qureshi (middle) of AIU, conducting interviews during the study.



FAIR COMMENT



Andy Lane, Professor of Environmental Systems, UK Open University

There are tensions in making our models of education sustainable

Sustainable Development Goal 4 sets out several ambitions. One is to extend learning opportunities to everyone at all levels of education. Another is to ensure that all learners have the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development itself, including sustainable lifestyles.

While these are laudable ambitions, sustainable development is a contested concept in principle and practice, as it relies on trade-offs between different needs and wants. For example, building a new school or university campus uses up natural resources and may impinge on land good for wildlife but at the same time add to the local economy and improve the area's social capital. However, if the school or campus is designed to take students from afar, that can greatly increase the carbon emissions arising from travel.

Open, distance and eLearning generally do not require much travel, the maintenance of large lecture theatres and classrooms, or dedicated housing for students. Studies undertaken by myself and colleagues at the UK Open University (<http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/susteach/>) have shown that both print-based and online modes of distance education, with or without some face-to-face tutorials, generate around one-tenth the carbon emissions of traditional, campus-based programmes. We have also produced a free course titled *The Environmental Impact of Teaching and Learning* as an open educational resource (<http://ow.ly/U1Ib30iuOQH>) for anyone to assess and identify ways to reduce these impacts.

The challenge of educating everyone appropriately at all levels is massive. Sir John Daniel, former President and CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning, calculated that to bring all countries up to the higher-education participation levels of the best-performing countries would require opening a new university campus every day for the foreseeable future. The economic, social and environmental impacts of doing that appear enormous. A considerable expansion of open, distance and eLearning provision seems an obvious way to limit the economic and environmental impacts, but the social impacts depend on how inclusive and accessible the educational opportunities are.

Unfortunately, openness and digitalisation do not, in themselves, make it easier to access, afford or find the educational opportunities that open, distance and eLearning can offer; these aspects all depend on who is deciding what is open, when and for whom, and how digital technologies and infrastructure are implemented and managed. Several issues can arise for potential learners: local bandwidth may mean the resources are difficult to study; the costs of using Internet or mobile data networks may be prohibitive; the materials may not be formatted for the learner's digital device; or the resources may be in a learner's second or third language, to name but a few challenges. The social impact of education is driven more by societal and political structures than by particular technologies or forms of education, so reducing or eliminating inequalities in access to education requires systemic changes in how education is organised at all levels more than systematic changes in the way we currently do things.

I have proposed that making the significant changes implied in SDG4 requires adopting a wide-ranging theory of change that brings together power relationships, systems thinking and open education. This theory of change covers the whole spectrum of lifelong learning. Based on this, I suggest that the following be addressed:

- student- and teacher-led open educational practices;
- leadership in higher education institutions based on open education policies and practices;
- access to digital infrastructure and development for open education; and
- influence over education-sector regulations and policies on frameworks, quality assurance, funding and accountability.

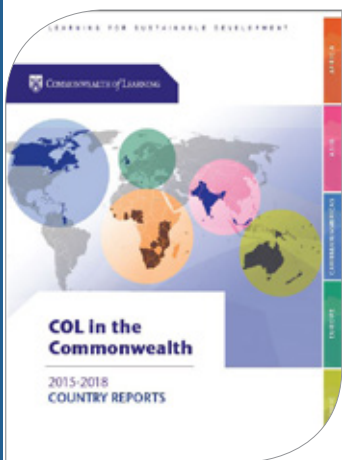
Using such a theory of change won't avoid tension and difficult choices, but it can help us address those difficult choices by attending to the underlying power relations within all parts and levels of our education systems.

For further details, see:



<http://jl4d.org/index.php/ej14d/article/view/266/256>

NEW RESOURCES



COL in the Commonwealth: 2015–2018 Country Reports

COL in the Commonwealth: 2015–2018 Country Reports summarises COL's activities over the last three years (2015–2018), succinctly detailing what COL has achieved in each

Member State and across the Commonwealth. The reports describe not only COL's recent activities in developing countries, but also how its work supports the international development priorities of its partner countries: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.



hdl.handle.net/11599/2866



Advanced ICT Skills Courses

COL has released 17 courses related to three programmes: (i) Certificate in Web Application Development, (ii) Diploma in Mobile Application Development and (iii) Diploma in Multimedia and Animation. The programmes are offered in partnership with open universities in Africa and Asia. These courses are available as open educational resources for adaptation by any institution to

improve the skills and employment of youths.



hdl.handle.net/11599/2925

Baseline–Endline Report: Reaching the Unreached (RtU) through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan

This report documents the baseline–endline study conducted by the GIRLS Inspire team's Reaching the Unreached project to examine the implications of skills training and education for women's and girls' empowerment and sustainable livelihoods. It is based on data collected from quarterly reports, mirrored against the project outcomes, meeting reports and surveys from March 2016 to March 2017. The quarterly and meeting reports documented the activities undertaken. While the actual training was offered exclusively to women and girls, the reports and surveys also captured the input of men and boys in terms of their participation in various community events.



hdl.handle.net/11599/2848



Kavya Inspirado por histórias, Histórias para inspirar

This is a Portuguese translation of the original *Kavya* book, which contains stories collected by the Mann Deshi Foundation in India, one of COL's partner organisations. The stories give us a look into the lives of girls, parents and community members who are responding to age-old traditions and cultures that preclude girls from having the right to make decisions about their own lives.



hdl.handle.net/11599/2451



#TECH TRENDS

Blockchain in education: irrational exuberance or mature technology?

If one lives in a developing country, it is not uncommon to see social media posts about missing documents, especially transcripts and degree certificates. Replacing a lost credential document can take a considerable amount of time and effort. Ideally, learners should be able to access their records anytime, without the need for an intermediary. Employers and academic entities

should be satisfied that the records thus furnished are authentic, intact and free from tampering.

In principle, this is something blockchain technology can offer. Like other kinds of certificates, digital ones require authentication. Blockchain technology does not require third-party services for this authentication, thereby enabling entities to establish trust digitally, even if the entities are unrelated and do not know each other.

Unlike a paper ledger, a blockchain does not exist as a single copy. Rather, it is a distributed and decentralised ledger that can exist as several identical copies in the custody of several different entities. A change in one copy appears in all of them, allowing for multiple entities to enter transactions on the same blockchain. Importantly, entries can only be added to this super-ledger; no deletion is possible.

In terms of student qualifications records, blockchain allows entities that administer courses (e.g., universities, colleges and training agencies) to create and update a lasting record of a student's transactions in online courses that is available to the student as well as to the administering entity. The entity and the student can have encrypted keys to the record and use these to make portions of it available to authentic interested parties, such as employers.

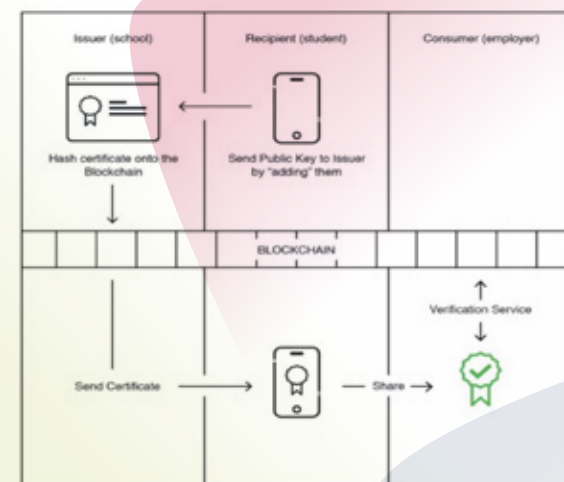


Diagram source: Blockcerts, 2016, licensed for sharing with attribution

One area where this can have an impact is in non-formal learning. In many countries, the formal higher education sector and the less-formal skills development sector have not been able to work in synergy, partly due to challenges in credentialing and recognition. With the deployment of blockchain technology, this gap can be bridged.

The deployment of blockchain technology is a major topic of discussion in many sectors of business and industry. In late 2016, there were about 130 implementations of blockchain in different business areas. Gartner, an IT analysis firm, positions blockchain technology in the "irrational exuberance" phase of its technology hype cycle. But it is maturing rapidly and is ready for more mainstream applications. To date, though, the education sector has not taken to blockchain in a significant way.

Malta, a COL member country, has the most advanced government-run project for implementing blockchain in education. COL and the Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning (CCCL), a joint venture between COL and Malta's Ministry for Education and Employment, are organising a two-day workshop for 17–18 May 2018 on using blockchain in open and connected learning. It will bring together experts in blockchain technology with experts in learning technology from around the Commonwealth to explore collaborative trials.

Resources: The UK government has published the very useful report *Distributed Ledger Technology: Beyond Blockchain* (see <http://bit.ly/1WreVPL>). CCCL's Executive Director, Alex Grech, has co-authored a 2017 European Commission report titled *Blockchain in Education*, one of the first such reports (<http://bit.ly/2hr1FSb>).