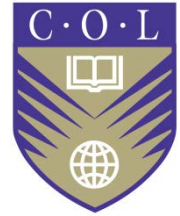


# *COL in the Commonwealth: Promoting Learning for Sustainable Development*



*Presentation Transcript*

*Senior Officials Meeting*

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*Presented by  
Professor Asha Kanwar, President & CEO*

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Chair, Colleagues,

It is a privilege to present the Commonwealth of Learning or COL to you.

It is a pleasure honour to be here with the Chair of the COL Board of Governors, Dr Linda Sissons CNZM. This is an important meeting for COL for two reasons: i) to present to you the work that COL does and ii) to seek ratification for our new Strategic Plan.

As you know, the Commonwealth of Learning was established nearly three decades ago by Commonwealth Heads of Government, to help Member States and institutions use various technologies to improve and expand access to education and training.

We have given you Aptus or the Classroom Without Walls, with support from the Hewlett Foundation, which has the potential to reach the unreached with last mile connectivity. It carries a wealth of key educational resources. We have also loaded two important documents for you on this device.

The first is COL in the Commonwealth: Country Reports 2012-15. The complete compendium of what COL has done in each Member State over its last three year plan, is a substantial document and for that reason we have only given you printed reports relating to your country. The compendium includes summaries of pan-Commonwealth and regional work. I hope you are pleased with what has been accomplished in your country.

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COL also commissioned an external evaluation of its work over the past three years, which concludes that ‘All the initiatives moved successfully forward, on time and within budget. The large majority of the agreed Performance Indicators were met....the relative cost-effectiveness of COL has been commented on favourably....’

COL commissioned an external evaluation, supported by DFID, of its impact over the past nine years. The reports states that ‘COL has had a major impact on individuals...a significant impact on institutions and organisations (but we need to do more to influence policy at the national level)... is a highly respected and well regarded, flexible and nimble organisation which leverages partnerships...to achieve outcomes’

Based on the recommendations of these two evaluations and the consultations with our Focal Points in all four regions, of the Commonwealth, we have developed a Strategic Plan.

This is the second document that we have given you titled ‘Learning for Sustainable Development 2015-21 which has been approved by our Board of Governors. We shall request the Hon Ministers to ratify this plan on Friday.

COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development. What do we mean? Learning must lead to opportunities for economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation.

This aligns closely with the growing consensus around Goal 4 of the 17 SDGs identified. The standalone goal on education focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030.

The goal has several targets: one, quality education must lead to effective learning outcomes, two, we must focus on developing skills for employment, entrepreneurship and global citizenship, and three, the need for having qualified teachers in place to achieve these targets.

All these challenges can be addressed by harnessing the potential of existing and new technologies. These include print, community media, radio and TV, as well as mobile and online learning systems.

Let me demonstrate this with our proposed strategic plan which is organised in two sectors: education and skills.

The Centrefold of the Plan gives you a summary of the outcomes and impact COL aims to achieve over the next six years within a results based management framework.

The Education sector focuses on formal education which has four initiatives.

The first is open schooling. As countries seek to achieve universal secondary education, open schools can provide flexible learning opportunities through the use of a range of technologies from print to the internet.

Open schooling costs well below formal secondary schools. A COL study shows that the National Institute of Open Schooling, India costs one tenth and the Namibian College of Open Learning costs one

fifth of what it costs to put a student through government schools. COL is working in 22 countries to promote this.

Well-trained teachers are critical to improving the quality of education. Conventional teacher education methods cannot cope with the demand

COL developed free content on English Language Teaching which has been used to train teachers in Kenya. Teachers have indicated that students are already demonstrating better learning outcomes. The teachers and the students in the classes are the same—but what is new are the teaching resources which are making the difference.

Improving access to quality Higher Education continues to remain a priority for you. Studies show that open universities cost about one third of what it takes to put a learner through a campus institution and that there is no significant difference between the outcomes achieved in either. COL continues to support new open universities in Botswana and PNG.

In April we conducted a leadership training programme for VCs from 15 universities in Pakistan—supported by the British Council and HEC.

Commonwealth Ministers of Education directed COL to establish a Virtual University for the small states. All 31 small states are on board, as is Sierra Leone and have collaboratively developed several skills-based elearning courses which are freely available as Open Education Resources or OER.

This initiative has not only strengthened Commonwealth wide cooperation but trained over 50,000 persons across the small states and helped staff members to develop online course content—all of which is available free for use and reuse.

COL has also supported the development of a Transnational Qualifications Framework to assure the quality of courses and facilitate the mobility of students across institutions.

The second sector of COL's work, Skills, makes an equally important contribution to learning for sustainable development.

As you try to tackle the issue of youth unemployment, COL helps ministries and institutions to use technologies to increase access to skills development. Face to face TVET can cost up to 14 times more than academic courses.

Working with the Ministry of Education, Nauru, COL supported a training programme on working with concrete where 167 young people qualified using blended approaches.

Millions of farm families do not have access to learning in developing countries. COL offers a new approach called the Lifelong Learning for Farmers, or L3F. COL catalyses the links between the civil society, experts and financial institutions to develop multi-media based learning.

Farmers in Uganda and Kenya learn from experts in the local languages using basic mobile phones. Research shows that this has led to improved food security and the generation of assets among communities.

We get many requests for help in introducing technology enabled learning. We promote the use of technologies that are available, affordable and accessible.

COL offers MOOCs for Development with its partners around the Commonwealth. This means offering MOOCs in low-bandwidth situations in developing countries. COL recently offered a MOOC with the African Virtual University for the professional development of teachers. COL offered a MOOC for skilling gardeners in India that was delivered through basic mobile phones and taught in Hindi. You will be pleased to note that the MOOC on mobiles-for-development, that COL offered in partnership with IIT-Kanpur, won an international award in February this year.

COL recognises that the achievement of gender equality is central to its agenda of learning for sustainable development. COL will continue to harness technologies as it works with you to expand access to learning opportunities for girls/women and boys/men, where they are most disadvantaged.

COL has developed a gender microsite and several training resources for gender mainstreaming. That, in brief, Colleagues is COL's programme.

COL is your organisation and it works for you. It is small and flexible and can respond readily to your needs. COL is a source of world class expertise in open distance and technology based approaches and in these times of economic difficulty, these approaches will become more important than ever before. Your continued support will be critical in making this happen.

More than three fourths of Commonwealth countries make voluntary contributions to COL's budget. We consider this an important indicator of your confidence in us. Thank you for your contributions, both financial and intellectual, and for your kind attention.