



COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

President's Quarterly Report

October – December 2021

Board Matters

The Audit Committee met virtually to review and approve the audited consolidated financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2021, where an unmodified report was received, as in all previous years.

Congratulations have been sent to the Hon Siaosi Sovaleni who was sworn in as the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Tonga, where he retains the portfolio for Education and Training.

I extend a warm welcome to Ms Jo Lomas, the Commonwealth Envoy, as the new member representing the UK.

Mr Armoogum Parsuramen completed his term in December as the representative for Africa. We are grateful for his close engagement and support.

Meetings of the Audit and Executive Committees are being planned for the next quarter.

An external Human Resources review was completed. The final report will be discussed at the upcoming Executive Committee and the annual Board meetings.

General

The ongoing pandemic continues to exert tremendous pressure on COL and its partners. However, the targets identified in the Annual Implementation Plan 2021-2022 are being reached, thanks to the resilience of our staff

and the consistent support from the field. As a result, 77 % of the programme budget has either been spent or committed at the end of the second quarter, as compared to 56 % at the same time last year. This projection combined with the strategy for addressing underspends, places COL in a good position to attain a minimum 100% expenditure, as directed by the Board.

One new development which has the potential to achieve scale, sustainability and impact is the partnership with the National Institute of Bank Management (NIBM), India, under which rural banking agents are being trained through mobile learning. These intermediaries located across the country assist banks to market their products and services in rural areas. With COL's help, NIBM, a leading capacity-building institution for nationalised banks, is training these agents in digital literacy and financial inclusion to facilitate access to financial services, especially for rural women.

Seven Pacific countries were reached under the Open, Distance and Flexible Learning project supported by New Zealand. While connectivity and closures continued to be a challenge, all the expected outputs were delivered within specified timelines. The success can be attributed to an increased sense of ownership among the stakeholders because of wide consultations, the strong social capital built over many years and COL resources which were deployed as a matter of priority.

UNESCO-UNEVOC sought a partnership with COL to provide training in digital skills and competencies for

TVET teachers and trainers in low-income countries in Africa and small island states to strengthen remote teaching. This aligns well with COL's core competence in distance and technology-enabled learning.

All capacity building activities during this quarter were conducted online using a range of technologies including community radio and mobile devices. This training was offered either in partnership with institutions/organisations or directly by COL/CEMCA—a strategy that has helped to reach large numbers in diverse contexts.

COLCommons, a new platform that offers micro-courses in professional areas, has already won three Brandon Hall awards in 'best advance in learning management technology' and 'learning evaluation'.

President's Activities

In order to explore the role education can play in addressing the climate crisis, COL has set up a High Level Panel on Climate Change and Education. At our first meeting, education ministers and representatives of the Commonwealth Secretariat and UNESCO shared insights and strategies for harnessing education and technology to support climate action. Some of the key takeaways were: the importance of investing in education for intergenerational, long-term impact; effecting behavioural change; engaging and empowering youth; building the capacity of teachers; collaborating with the private sector. The final report will provide a roadmap for how the Commonwealth can advance a green learning agenda and contribute to global efforts to mitigate the impact of climate change.

Another noteworthy meeting was held with the Hon Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, Vice Prime Minister and

Minister of Education, Mauritius and her senior officials, where the OER policy developed jointly with the Ministry was presented for adoption at the national level.

A report on a new model of schooling in Seychelles was formally presented to the Hon Dr Justin Valentin, Minister of Education with the commitment that COL would support the implementation of the recommendations and build the capacities of teachers.

This was a busy period with many conferences, where I accepted invitations to speak at events organised by institutions in China, India, Norway, South Africa, Switzerland and the USA by providing video recordings. Topics included the importance of open education and blended learning, re-imagining the future of higher education and promoting lifelong learning for all. Presentations are available [here](#).

Travel within Canada has opened up and I was able to call on the High Commissioners of Brunei and Nigeria and met the Commonwealth Director, Global Affairs Canada when I visited Ottawa to attend a board meeting of the Colleges and Institutes of Canada. We welcomed the Cyprus High Commissioner and the Consul General of Malaysia at headquarters. The Consular Corps in British Columbia invited me to showcase COL at one of their monthly luncheons.

In-person meetings were such a refreshing change from on-screen interactions. We know that social interaction is fundamental to learning and innovation. Meeting stakeholders in different cultures and contexts has always been a source of continuous professional development for our staff and I look forward to the time when this can be resumed.

Programme: Progress against Outputs

Activities were undertaken in all regions of the Commonwealth and progress is satisfactory. Outputs regarding 'number of learning resources' and 'community members sensitised' have already been exceeded and will be revised accordingly. A more proactive approach will be required in the development of national policies/strategies. Additional partnerships

with industry and financial institutions will be needed to improve livelihoods opportunities for learners.

The cumulative figures for the first six months are reflected in the graphics to give an overview of current progress towards annual targets. Examples of our work during this quarter follow.

Building National Resilience

Government staff/officials trained/sensitised



621 government staff/officials trained or sensitised in ODL, OER, TEL, GE or COL models.

target: **881**

70%

■ 1st quarter
■ 2nd quarter

Partners in Pakistan and Tanzania engaged 260 government officials in policy dialogues relating to gender equality, women's empowerment and the prevention of gender-based violence. In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, 53 officials from the Ministry of Education and National Reconciliation enrolled in a course on 'Design and Development of Online Assessments' to improve the quality of teaching-learning.

Support for national policies/ strategy development



4 policy/strategy developed

target: **12**

33%

■ 1st quarter
■ 2nd quarter

A strategy for improving school education and teacher training in Seychelles was completed and has been adopted by the Ministry of Education. In Mauritius, a national OER policy developed with COL support, was finalised. Similarly, a national inclusive OER policy has been adopted by the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia. Direct engagement with ministries is part of COL's approach to work more at the national level for scale and sustainability.

Strengthening Institutions

Institutional staff trained

23%
female



31%
male

[46% unreported]

8,017
staff/faculty/trainers trained in ODL, OER, TEL, GE, or COL models

target: **12,395**

65%

■ 1st quarter
■ 2nd quarter

An online course on 'Digital Skills for OER Sharing' enrolled 1,581 teachers, mostly from the Pacific region. A MOOC on 'Advanced Cybersecurity Training for Teachers' was taken up by 885 learners from 58 countries. In Jamaica, the Rural Agricultural Development Authority delivered online/blended training in agricultural business management, financial literacy and enterprise development for 61 staff. Twenty-eight staff members of the University of Namibia participated in a workshop on rapid course development. CEMCA, our regional office in Delhi, trained over 500 teachers in five institutions in India and Bangladesh. These highlights illustrate the range of training conducted for different constituencies.

Institutional policies/strategies developed



39 institutional policies/strategies developed

target: **60**

65%

■ 1st quarter
■ 2nd quarter

A technology-enhanced learning strategy was developed for the College of Open Schooling, Botswana. COL supported the development of an employability framework for the National Open University of Nigeria. CEMCA helped draft an OER policy at Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University, India.

Learning opportunities (courses) developed/improved



193 courses developed or improved with COL support

target: **195**

99% 1st quarter
2nd quarter

Several online courses were offered/developed. These include an introductory MOOC on 'OER for Online Learning' offered by the National Open University of Nigeria and on 'Introduction to Technology-Enabled Learning' with Athabasca University, Canada. CEMCA offered a MOOC on 'Developing Online Courses' for SWAYAM, the Government of India platform for offering MOOCs. Twenty-three course modules were developed with the Namibia College of Open Learning and 26 online courses in teacher education were completed at the Cyril Potter College of Education, Guyana which are available on the COL-supported Moodle platform.

Learning opportunities (resources) developed/improved



1,977 learning resources developed with COL support

target: **1,500**

Exceeded

COL helped the Centre for Girls Education in Nigeria, to create 239 audio resources which are available on COL's Educational Podcasting for Innovative Classrooms portal. In India, a partner created and disseminated resources using COL's mobiMOOC on how farmers could improve access to credit. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, 41 learning resources aligned to the national curriculum were added to the Fiji National OER Collection, supported by COL.

Improving Lives and Livelihoods

Gender-responsive learning opportunities developed and offered through ODL

37%
female



47%
male

[16% unreported]

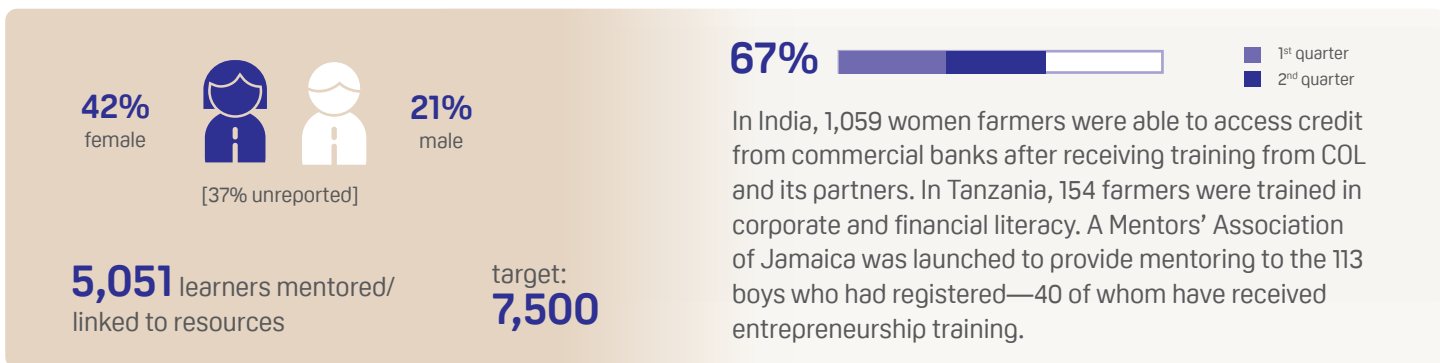
79,521 learners enrolled in COL-run courses

target: **150,000**

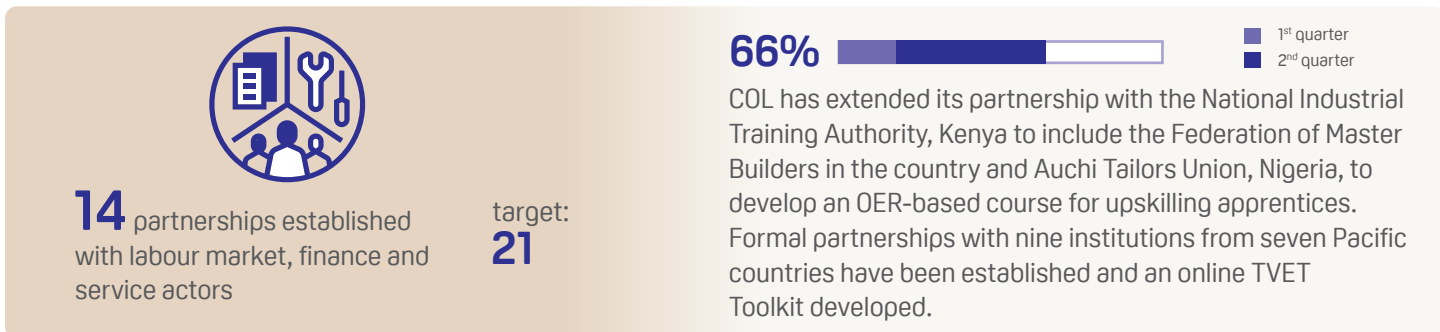
53% 1st quarter
2nd quarter

Online courses, especially MOOCs, continued to serve as the main channel for keeping learning opportunities open. In South Africa, 2,353 learners including 1,230 teachers participated in the Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA). A total of 1,379 new users registered in COLCommons for just-in-time professional development. MOOCs covered a wide range of topics, such as digital teaching and learning and veterinary science. In the Pacific, two MOOCs for teachers attracted a total of 1,914 enrolments while an online course on an 'Introduction to assistive technologies and disability needs assessment' enrolled 35 participants from four countries in the SADC sub-region. The COL-Coursera, Google and Udemy projects continue to be popular with 6,444 new enrolments in various professional development courses.

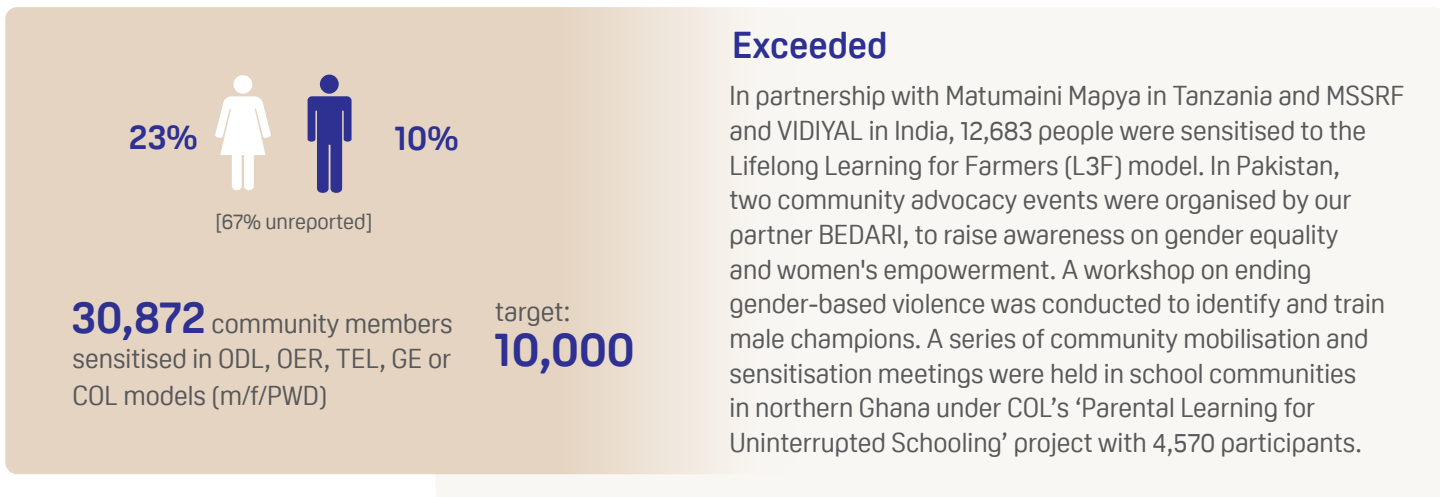
Learners mentored and linked to services and financial resources



Partnerships with labour market, finance and service industry established

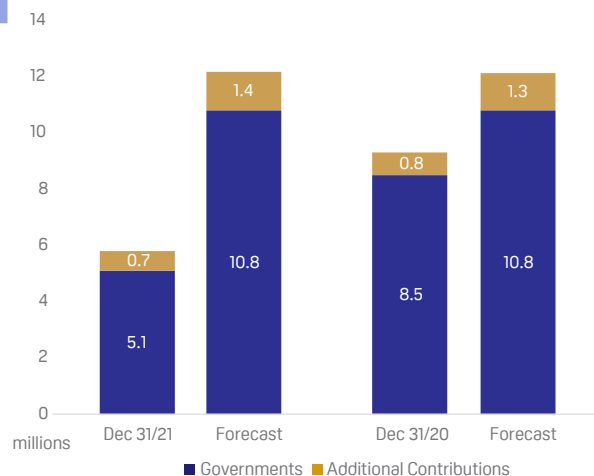


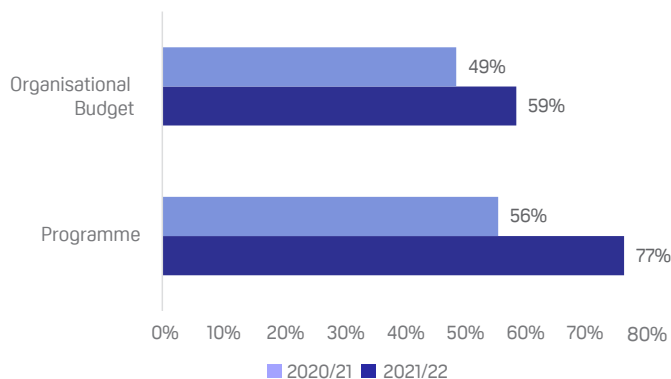
Community members sensitised



Revenues and Expenditures

To date, 29 countries have contributed to COL's budget for a total of \$5.1 million (as compared to 32 countries totalling \$8.5 million for the six-month period ended December 31, 2020). Contributions include three major donors as compared to six for the same period a year ago. COL is forecasting additional contributions of \$1.4 million from grants and service fees. Deferred revenue of \$1.1 million was on hand at the beginning of the financial year which will be recognised as revenue during the year as activities related to these funds are completed. Approximately \$700,000 from these sources has been recognised to date.





At the organisational level, an estimated 59% of the total annual budget of \$12.2 million has been spent and/or committed at the end of the second quarter (as compared to 49% for the period ended December 31, 2020).

Communications

The Communications Strategy 2021-2027 has three goals—to inform, engage and inspire action. COL has made progress along all three dimensions and is more visible around the Commonwealth and beyond. International and national organisations continue to seek partnerships with COL. The number of invitations to conferences and forums indicate the high regard for COL’s thought leadership. More national news media are featuring COL’s work in their countries/regions. However, more needs to be done to enhance COL’s visibility, especially through social media.

COL launched its new website (www.col.org) reflecting the strategic directions for 2021-2027 and featuring assistive technology for key disability profiles. There were 60,198 unique page visits, averaging 654 per day. During this quarter, 26 news items highlighting COL’s activities and success stories were published on the website.

Enhanced social-media activity resulted in a growth of COL mentions on Twitter from 50 in October to 120 in December; the quarterly reach of content on the corporate Facebook page increased from 951,633 to 1,029,137 users; the view hours on YouTube have increased from 1,300 to 1,600 hours. COL received 22 mentions in the news media of 13 countries.

Demand for COL’s services and resources has grown, with over 39,000 new users of COL’s online repository,

OAsis. COL’s online contact form is being utilised and 65 requests were received regarding resources, services and employment opportunities.

Recent publications and resources (available on [OAsis](#)), include:

- *Connections* (vol. 26, no. 3)
- *Journal of Learning for Development* (vol. 8, no. 3)
- Guidelines on Open and Distance Learning for Youth and Adult Literacy
- Policy Brief: Leveraging MOOCs for Teacher Development in Low-Income Countries and Disadvantaged Regions
- Practical Guide for WITED Chapters and Individual Champions for Increasing Girls and Women’s Participation in STEM-TVET
- Towards a New Model of Schooling in Seychelles
- Social Return on Investment Analysis of Support from the Commonwealth of Learning for the Open and Innovative Schooling Model

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 January 14, 2022