



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING



# President's Quarterly Report

April – June 2022

## Board Matters

The sudden passing of our Chair, Professor Narend Bajjnath on 1 May 2022 is a significant loss to the open and distance learning community in the Commonwealth. He represented South Africa on the Board of Governors from 2012 and was appointed as Chair in July 2020. In addition, he served on the Executive Committee and chaired the Audit Committee. He was always there for us with advice and encouragement and will be missed. A memorial service was held in South Africa on 1 July where I sent a video message in recognition of his dedicated service to COL.

We welcome Professor Sudhir Jain, India's representative to the Board and The Hon Dr Alpha T. Wurie from Sierra Leone as the representative for Africa.

Warm congratulations are extended to The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland, QC on her appointment for a further two years as Commonwealth Secretary-General.

Meetings of the Board, Audit and Performance Committees will be held in the first quarter of the next financial year in London during 6-7 July 2022 instead of in Vancouver.

## General

During this quarter, two high-level Commonwealth events were held after a series of postponements.

The 21st Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) was organised in Nairobi, Kenya in hybrid mode on the 27-28 April. Colleagues from the Ministry of Education, Kenya and the Commonwealth Secretariat (COMSEC) must be commended for delivering a successful conference at virtually two months' notice. The COL delegation comprised the Chair Prof Narend Bajjnath, Dr Balaji and me. It was a proud moment, when in his inaugural keynote, HE President Uhuru Kenyatta referred to COL as 'an engine of innovation'! The theme of the Conference was 'Rethinking Education for Innovation, Growth

and Sustainability post Covid-19'. COL's presentation was well received because i) it demonstrated concrete outcomes, ii) was supported by data and research and iii) aligned to the conference theme. In addition, I was invited to conceptualise and facilitate a ministerial Round Table on 'Lessons Learned from Covid-19 mitigation and recovery strategies' chaired by the Minister of Basic Education, South Africa, The Hon Angie Motshekga. One of the recurrent themes of the conference was the need for additional resources for education—a minimal allocation of 15-20% of public spending. As economies have contracted significantly, this is highly unlikely. The message of COL—greater investment in open and distance learning for formal and non-formal education and training—becomes more important than ever before and calls for continued evidence-based advocacy.

The theme of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM 2022) held in Kigali during 20-25 June, was 'Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming'. COL typically presents to foreign ministers and senior officials rather than directly to the Heads, where I made two presentations highlighting how COL was connecting, innovating and transforming to deliver a common future. An Impact Report and a compendium of Country Reports was circulated. In order to optimise the COL presence, I spoke at the Youth and Women's Forums, held in the wings of CHOGM. These presentations helped raise COL's visibility with different constituencies and led to new proposals for collaboration. CHOGM presented two opportunities for meeting several world leaders—the President of Nigeria, the Prime Ministers of Canada, Jamaica, Mauritius, Samoa, Tonga and the UK—at the state banquet hosted by HE President Paul Kagame and the Secretary-General's reception. One of the highlights of this CHOGM was that Gabon and Togo, two West African countries with no previous links to Britain, were admitted to the Commonwealth—with the number of Member States now at 56. The next CHOGM will be held in Samoa in 2024, where the Prime Minister Afioga Fiame Naomi Mataafa, a former COL Board member, will be the host.

COL received good coverage in both the CCEM

and CHOGM Communiques. This recognition of COL's intergovernmental status and its impactful interventions is a critical reminder to those who may not be aware of COL and its work.

Preparations for the Tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open learning (PCF10) are in progress. Over 380 papers and posters from 54 countries have been accepted for presentation. Two pre-conference online forums on 'Building Resilience' and 'Fostering Lifelong Learning' concluded with two more forums scheduled for July. Several Ministers of Education have confirmed their participation which will enrich COL's signature event.

## President's Activities

With travel opening up, this was a very busy time with conferences and events in the field.

The 3rd UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (WHEC) was held in Barcelona in May with the theme 'Reinventing Higher Education for a Sustainable Future'. Instead of the usual keynotes, WHEC organised HED Talks—where my speech on 'Is Distance Education, the ugly duckling, finally a swan?' concluded that distance education had always been a swan—an innovative disruption, an entrepreneurial start-up born in the 18th century and built on the foundations of social justice—but it took a major pandemic for the world to recognise this. I moderated a COL-IITE session on 'The role of Open Universities in Transforming Higher Education' with panellists from China, India, Nigeria, South Africa and Spain. I also spoke at an ICDE panel on 'Quality in online, open and distance Higher Education Across borders: A multi-sectoral, cross country policy dialogue'. This was a hybrid event with 1,800 participants from 130 countries where it was important for COL to participate. While our primary stakeholders are ministers of education in the Commonwealth, it is equally necessary to engage with multilateral organisations. The COL High Level Panel on Climate Change and Education met in person in Seychelles, hosted by the Minister of Education, The Hon Justin Valentin.

Chaired by Rolph Payet, members finalised a COL report on 'Transforming Education for Climate Action: Report to Commonwealth Education Ministers'. With inputs from nine ministers representing the four regions of the Commonwealth and representatives of COMSEC and UNESCO, this report promises to mainstream issues of climate change into the educational agenda. The High Level Panel called on HE Wavel Ramkalawan, the President of Seychelles, where a discussion on a wide range of topics was held. I also called on the former President, HE Danny Faure, who served on the COL Board when he was Vice President.

I inaugurated two COL Open, Distance and eLearning (ODEL) Centres—one at the Kenya Technical Trainers' College and the second at the Ministry of Education, Seychelles. These centres will serve as nodal agencies to build capacity in open, distance and technology enabled learning in the two countries.

A meeting was held with the Vice Prime Minister (VPM) who is also the Minister of Education, Mauritius, The Hon Leela Devi Dookhun-Luchoomun, to discuss innovative ways of supporting teacher training in the country through the newly established Academy for Professional Development by using MOOCs and mobilising retired teachers to provide mentoring support. While in Mauritius, the VPM and I presented awards to high-achieving learners of the COL-Coursera, COL-Udemy and Grow with Google programmes, which continue to remain popular, especially with the 18–40-year-olds.

As part of the support provided to Higher Education, I initiated the revision of ten courses of the Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme which is offered by institutions in 12 countries. I chaired the meeting of the Academic and Executive Governing Boards comprising vice chancellors and professors from these institutions, where the revisions were finalised. Most of the course revision is being based on existing Open Educational Resources (OER).

Besides these activities, I also participated in the Committee of the Whole meeting and the annual meeting of the COMSEC Board of Governors by contributing two videos. All presentations are on the COL website and I'm told that these are frequently accessed and used by stakeholders across the Commonwealth.

Despite the challenging circumstances, both our partners and staff have contributed to achieving over 100% utilisation of the budget in the programme sectors. As the Covid-19 conditions ease in most countries, activities will be further accelerated in the new financial year and 'underspend' should no longer be a concern.

## Programme: Progress against Outputs

Many partner institutions re-started face-to-face activities during this quarter, leading to enhanced progress in achieving results. All the targets for the year have been achieved or exceeded as reflected in

the graphics below. Based on this experience, activities and targets have been increased appropriately in the Annual Implementation Plan 2022-2023. Some examples of the work undertaken follow:

### Building National Resilience

#### Government staff/officials trained/sensitised



**1,428**

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

target:

**881**

#### Exceeded

With COL support, the University Council of Jamaica facilitated the implementation of distance education standards by training 120 faculty and staff. In Kenya, nine officers from the Technical Vocational Training Authority (TVETA) were mentored to review ODeL standards. COL supported the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, Mauritius, to organise a national consultation on an OER policy where 37 stakeholders contributed to finalising the document. COL trained 342 policymakers and government officials in gender equality and gender-based violence in Bangladesh, Malawi, Namibia, Pakistan and Tanzania.

*Building the capacity of policymakers and officials in the ministries is a key strategy to develop and implement enabling policies for resilient education systems.*

#### Support for national policies/strategy development



**14**

policy/strategy developed

target:

**12**

#### Exceeded

In the Seychelles, COL supported the re-development of the revised Education and Training Policy 2022-2027 for the Ministry of Education. Three policies in recognition of prior learning, recognition of current competencies and credit accumulation and transfer were developed for the Council on Higher Education, Lesotho. TVETA, Kenya developed an accreditation tool for ODeL centres.

*Policy development at a national level is a basic step for systematic and long-term impact of COL support in mainstreaming ODL for development.*

## Strengthening Institutions

### Institutional staff trained

19%  
female



23%  
male

[58% unreported]

**15,260**

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

target:

**12,395**

#### Exceeded

A workshop on rapid development process for online and distance learning was conducted for 20 staff of the Namibian College of Open Learning. Capacity building for Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) was held in nine provinces of Sri Lanka. At the Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, Bangladesh 50 staff and faculty members were trained to develop blended courses. CEMCA, in association with the Andhra Pradesh Information Technology Academy, India supported the training of 437 faculty members from various engineering colleges in the use of advanced technologies and teaching methodologies.

*Training institutional staff is a key pre-requisite for effecting sustainable change and improving the quality of teaching and learning using ICTs.*

### Institutional policies/strategies developed



**67**

institutional policies/  
strategies developed

target:

**60**

#### Exceeded

Sixteen institutional TEL policies for blended and flexible TVET were developed in The Gambia and Zambia. COL supported the development of 13 institutional policies/strategies on employability, authentic assessment and gender-based violence in universities in Africa. An OER policy was developed by Fiji National University. COL's benchmarking toolkit for TEL was implemented in six universities in Malaysia. The Mauritius Institute of Education developed a policy for TEL and the Bangladesh Open University developed a policy on inclusive education.

*Developing policies in partner institutions is based on an assessment of local requirements and lead to long-term impact.*

### Learning opportunities (courses) developed/improved



**583**

courses developed or improved  
with COL support

target:

**195**

#### Exceeded

The Nakuru Training Institute, Kenya developed 21 vocational courses to be offered in blended mode. Similarly, the Model Institute of Education and Research, India developed 20 courses for teacher training. Daffodil International University, Bangladesh developed and offered four skills courses on agriculture, health, social media and cybersecurity. A new micro-course, 'Introduction to Open Schooling' was developed for COLcommons. The MobiMOOC, 'Promotion of Livestock Farmers Activities as Profitable Self-Employment' was revised with COL support.

*Sharing courses developed by partner institutions contributes to Commonwealth cooperation, and increases learning opportunities by making quality OER available.*

## Learning opportunities (resources) developed/improved



**4,077**  
learning resources developed with  
COL support  
target:  
**1,500**

### Exceeded

In Jamaica, an e-book 'Teaching boys effectively' was developed for mentors. In India, CEMCA supported the Power Sector Skill Council in developing video content. And the L3F partners, VIDYAL and M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, developed 426 audio messages for farmers producer organizations on topics in agricultural and animal production.

*Using a range of technologies for reaching the unreached is a key to success in the implementation of COL's interventions in the field.*

## Improving Lives and Livelihoods

### Gender-responsive learning opportunities developed and offered through ODL

**9%**  
female



**9%**  
male

[82% unreported]

**264,013**  
learners enrolled in COL-run  
courses

target:  
**150,000**

### Exceeded

COL supported the National Teaching Council, Ghana to train over 15,000 teachers. A MOOC on 'Teaching Mathematics with Technology' offered by COL attracted 1,236 participants from 44 countries. In Botswana and Eswatini, 1,630 nurses enrolled in professional learning modules. The MOOCs on 'OER for Online Learning' and 'Learning for a Digital World' registered 1,590 participants from 104 countries. A total of 13,432 farmers received training in Ghana, India and Kenya with an emphasis on food security and gender equality. In collaboration with Coursera, Udemy and Grow with Google, 7,514 learners enrolled for various ICT and business courses. The C-DELTA and COLcommons platforms have attracted over 4,200 participants.

*COL's delivery of online courses will continue to play a key role in building capacities at scale in Commonwealth countries.*

## Learners mentored and linked to services and financial resources

**29%**  
female



**17%**  
male

[54% unreported]

**46,619**  
learners mentored/linked to  
resources

target:  
**7,500**

### Exceeded

Through the GIRLSInspire project, 3,227 women and girls received apprenticeship opportunities. Moreover, 531 women, girls and boys were integrated back into school in Bangladesh, Malawi, Pakistan and Tanzania. In Ghana, 15,440 farmers were linked to financial institutions to access savings and credit services. GIRLSInspire partners in Bangladesh, Malawi, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania and Uganda facilitated access to financial resources for 1,744 women and girls. In Uganda, 73 youth received employment opportunities, linked to internships and started their own enterprises in graphics and web design through COL support.

*It is not enough to provide training—participants must also be provided with opportunities for accessing livelihoods.*

## Partnerships with labour market, finance and service industry established



21

partnerships established with labour market, finance and service actors

target:

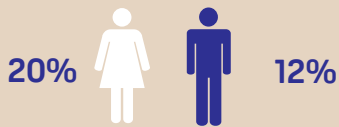
21

### Achieved

With COL support, Siaya Seed Sacco, Kenya established a partnership with the German Agency for International Cooperation and Micro Enterprises Support Programme Trust to support farmers.

*Developing partnerships with labour market and financial institutions play an important role in improving the livelihoods of stakeholders.*

## Community members sensitised



[68% unreported]

97,590

community members sensitised in ODL, OER, TEL, GE or COL models (m/f/PWD)

target:

10,000

### Exceeded

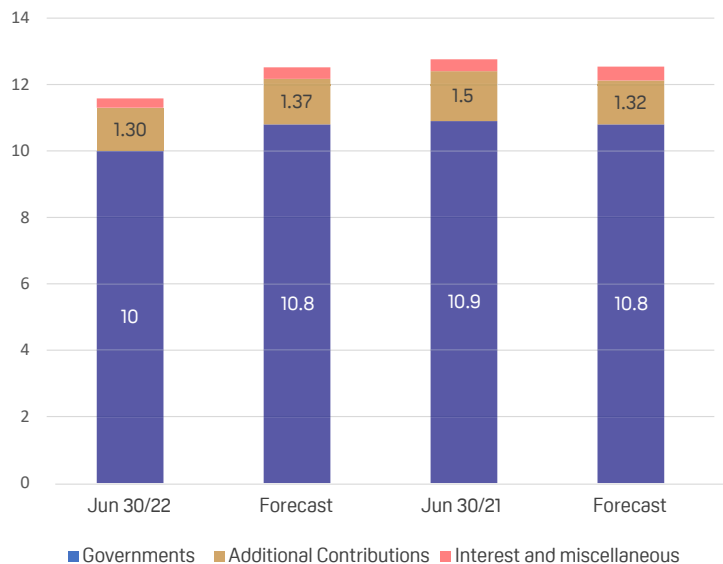
COL conducted awareness-raising events and sensitised 19,664 community members on gender equality in Bangladesh, Malawi, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Uganda. Similarly, 230 small and marginal farmers from India and Tanzania were sensitised on water harvesting structures, irrigation methods, agriculture and animal production.

*Empowering communities and building social capital are important strategies for achieving scale and sustainability.*

## Revenues and Expenditures

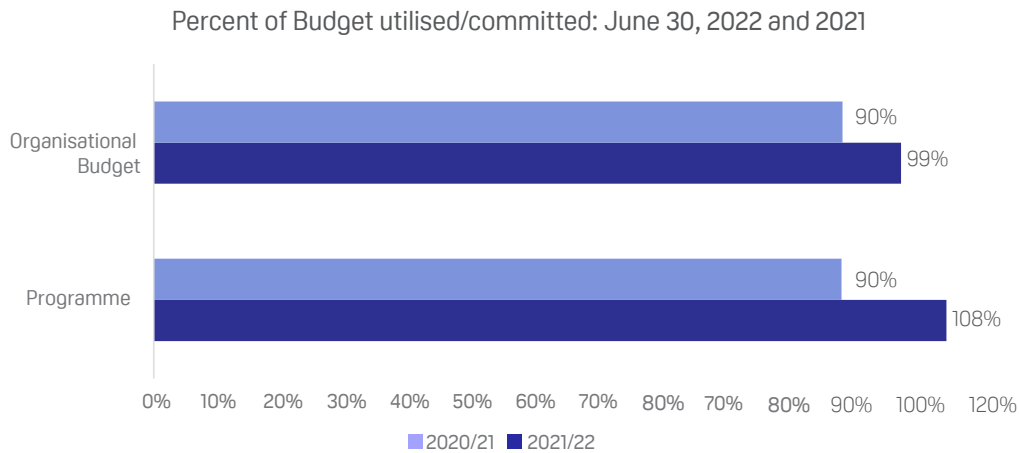
Forty-five countries have contributed \$10 million for the year ended 30 June 2022 (the same number as for the previous year with \$10.9 million received). The reason for this difference in amounts is mainly due to the fact that six major donors have contributed this year as compared to seven for the same period a year ago. Of the \$1.4 million forecast for additional contributions from grants and service fees, approximately \$1.3 million has been recognised.

Revenues to Forecast: Year ended June 30, 2022 and 2021



At the organisational level, an estimated 99% of the total annual budget of \$12.2 million has been spent and/or committed at June 30 (as compared to 90% at June 30, 2021). For the programme component of the overall budget, 108% has been spent and/or committed, an

increase of 18% from a year ago. An additional amount of \$205,000 has been spent and/or committed for the ICT augmentation project which is being met from the Contingency Fund.



## Outreach, engagement and communications

Progress is continuing along all three dimensions of COL’s Communications Strategy—to inform, engage and inspire action.

On the COL website, unique page views reached 78,623 which was higher than the previous quarter (68,223). COL’s activities and success stories were published in 32 news items. On social media, the number of profile visits to COL’s Twitter site stood at about 14,000 in this quarter which is a decrease by about 2,700 from the previous quarter. Similarly, on Facebook, the quarterly reach of content stood at 1,170,681 which was a decrease of about 68% from the previous quarter. Targeted campaigns for PCF10, organised earlier, had led to a high number of visits. In the absence of this campaign, numbers have dropped to previous levels. The number of video views on COL’s YouTube channel increased by 17%. News media in 20 countries covered COL activities in 56 releases.

To increase stakeholder engagement using social media, specific pages for regions are being set up. The Facebook page for the Pacific Partnership project reached an additional 3,370 viewers in nine small island member countries.

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

- *Connections* (vol. 27, no. 1) - issued in an accessible version as well
- *Learning for Sustainable Development: COL’s Impact 2015–2021*
- *COL: Delivering a Common Future*
- *Out-of-school Children in Commonwealth Africa*
- *Country Reports: Highlights (July 2018 — March 2022)*

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 5 July 2022