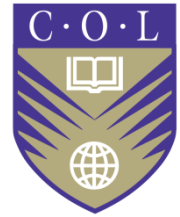


Learning for Development



*Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Perth,
Australia, Pre-CHOGM Foreign Ministers' Meeting, 26
October 2011*

Learning for Development

*Presentation by Sir John Daniel, President & C.E.O.,
Commonwealth of Learning,*

*Introduced by the Honourable Burchell Whiteman, O.J.
Chair, COL Board of Governors*

Introduction of COL Report

by The Honourable Burchell Whiteman, O.J.:

Honourable Chair; Honourable Ministers; Our distinguished Secretary-General;

Fellow Delegates of Intergovernmental and other Commonwealth Organisations:

It is a distinct honour for me to introduce the general report and the individual country reports from the Commonwealth of Learning, now in its 24th year, and to commend them to you for your most earnest examination.

On behalf of the Board of Governors, whose membership of 14 is drawn from 10 countries and from all regions and continents, I wish to assure you that we are very grateful for the support which you and your governments have provided to COL over the past biennium and which has made it possible for the organisation to continue to make a difference in your various countries.

In a very few minutes COL's President, Sir John Daniel, will highlight the critically important aspects of the present and future direction of the work and show why so small an organisation has been able to make such a significant developmental impact across the Commonwealth. Allow me however to point out that the President – who is now in the final year of his service to COL – has, with a most dynamic Vice President and a competent, professional and dedicated cosmopolitan staff, earned the respect of education, technology, health and development professionals not only in the Commonwealth but in the international community as well. COL has provided world class performance while delivering services at every level of our communities – from the policy makers to the grassroots practitioners.

I make one further observation. At a time when following on the decisions of the 2009 CHOGM in the Caribbean, the Commonwealth has been reflecting on how to improve its work after six decades of

existence and in response to the many and complex challenges in global developments and the rapid changes taking place around us, it remains my view as Chair of COL that we have in this organisation a tried and tested vehicle which has proven its capacity to **accelerate** development by harnessing human creativity with innovations in technology and sharing good practices as well as a wide range of resources in response to national and regional needs.

*The story of COL is a story of **relevance, responsiveness and results**.* It is a story in which 44 of the 54 member countries of the Commonwealth have participated through their financial contributions and in which all 54 have been actors either as beneficiaries, human resource providers or through contributions in kind. *Learning for Development* is a simple but totally accurate description of what COL is about and I believe that its agility, its resources and its reach will continue, with your support, to **accelerate** the social and economic progress for which we all yearn (in both the developed and the developing countries of the Commonwealth.)

Whatever the decisions may be in relation to the changing profile of the Commonwealth, COL can be depended upon to play its part in equipping the people of the Commonwealth, in particular the young and the workers, active or potential – be they in farm, factory or financial institution – our people who will always be the organisation’s focus and who are best seen as the facilitators of their own development.

Our President & CEO Sir John Daniel will now add the substance to these bare bones.

COL report

by Sir John Daniel:

Chair, Secretary-General, Honourable Ministers and delegates.

Introduction

I am most grateful to our distinguished Board Chair, the Honourable Burchell Whiteman, for his generous introduction to this short summary of the work of the Commonwealth of Learning.

COL is extremely fortunate to have Burchell Whiteman as its Board Chair because COL’s work is a blend of educational development and international relations. Burchell Whiteman served for many years as Minister of Education in Jamaica and later as its High Commissioner in London. He is, therefore, thoroughly familiar with both learning imperatives and Commonwealth diplomacy.

Heads of Government created the Commonwealth of Learning 12 CHOGMs ago when they met in Vancouver in 1987. They did so from the belief that countries could use help in using information and communications technologies to advance education, training and learning at all levels and in diverse circumstances. That is COL’s mission.

COL's Plan for 2009-2012

Our slogan, and the title of our current work programme for 2009-2012, is *Learning for Development*. The general report that we have submitted to you details the ways in which COL is contributing to the achievement of each of the Millennium Development Goals. I shall come to the specific country-by-country reports in a moment.

One facet of our activity helps countries expand and improve their formal education systems.

First, we support the expansion of open schooling. This helps countries provide education to the 400 million teenagers who are not in secondary school. Our host, Australia, pioneered the open schooling movement with the creation of the School of the Air sixty years ago. Today the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association, which was launched in New Delhi two years ago, symbolises the vital importance of open schooling for Commonwealth countries.

Second, COL helps to train more teachers, a critical contribution in a world that needs many millions of new teachers over the next decade – the majority of them in the Commonwealth. We are also working with UNESCO to help teachers in the Caribbean use ICT effectively in their classrooms.

Third, we assist universities in improving quality as they struggle to meet burgeoning student demand by making more use of distance learning and ICT.

Fourth, the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, an idea that was launched by your Education Ministers back in 2000, is now a reality that involves all the small states. It has a pan-Commonwealth management committee, chaired by Samoa, and COL provides back-up as requested.

COL also promotes informal learning focused on Livelihoods and Health. Our Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme is visibly improving rural prosperity in the countries where it operates. Mobile phones are now revolutionising this model, which is part of our wider programme of skills development for the informal sector of the economy, always with a focus on improving livelihoods and work.

Finally our programme on healthy communities aims to put the 'community' back into community radio and empower communities to use this powerful local medium for health education.

That, Honourable Ministers, is COL's overall programme, as laid out in the 3-year plan that Education Ministers approved in Kuala Lumpur two years ago.

COL's focuses on country priorities

But COL's overriding aim is to assist individual countries. Our country focus is resolute. At your places you will find a report that details what COL has done in your country in the first two years of the current plan.

You will see that COL has attuned its work carefully to your own national priorities.

This year, in preparation for COL's 2012-2015 plan, we are holding consultations in each Commonwealth region. Those for the Caribbean, Africa and Asia have already taken place and our Pacific partner countries will meet in New Zealand next week.

CHOGM's Priorities

COL also addresses the key themes that emerge from these Heads of Government meetings, so I conclude with a few comments on those.

The Malta CHOGM stressed the importance of bridging the digital divide. Here are four examples of how COL is doing that.

First, mobile phones are revolutionising COL's programme for farmers. COL is working with the University of British Columbia to use mobile phones at scale in rural development in India and Africa and the Caribbean. Voicemail-based learning materials now reach thousands of farmers in their local language or dialect. It has been enthusiastically adopted by the IKSL-Airtel group in India and we are now extending it to East Africa and Jamaica.

Second, COL's unit in New Delhi, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia has developed a \$75 laptop for use in schools. We tested it in Maldives and have made the plans freely available for manufacturers to develop further.

Third, because COL believes that knowledge should be the common wealth of humankind, we are promoting and facilitating the development of Open Educational Resources: a term for quality educational content that anyone can use and adapt. For example, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia have jointly created learning materials for a complete senior secondary curriculum and have made them freely available to the world as Open Educational Resources.

Fourth, and in the same spirit, COL has played the central role in developing the educational content for the Commonwealth Connects portal that will be launched here in Perth.

The Kampala CHOGM received the report *Civil Paths to Peace* and made the cultivation of respect and understanding a priority. The Secretary-General asked COL to use the media to advance this agenda, so our unit in Delhi has recorded a series of video interviews with Commonwealth figures who have real experience of creating civil paths to peace.

The Port of Spain CHOGM focussed strongly on employment and the economy. COL is helping open schools across the Commonwealth to scale up vitally needed vocational education, whilst our Livelihoods programme has been demonstrably successful in improving rural prosperity.

Several of the priorities identified by Head of Government in Port of Spain are integral to the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, which is an excellent mechanism for these countries to work together on common challenges. They have developed a programme on Sustainable Agriculture for Small States to address food security. Learning materials on Disaster Management help them to cope with climate change. These and all other VUSSC courses are available as Open Educational Resources for use worldwide.

Conclusion

Honourable Ministers, I have explained that the Commonwealth of Learning focuses its work tightly on your national agendas within the wider framework of Commonwealth priorities. I end by thanking you for the voluntary financial contributions that 44 countries made to COL last year, for the great work of our national focal points that your governments have appointed, and for the tremendous support we get from the hundreds of institutions and thousands of individuals in your countries that we count as our partners.

Thank you, Chair.