



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING



# COL in the Commonwealth

• **SOUTH AFRICA | 2015–2021**





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# Acknowledgements

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All Education Specialists and their Programme Assistants at the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and colleagues at the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) have contributed to the development of this document.

The following people are thanked especially for their role in the design and publication of *COL in the Commonwealth: 2015–2021 Country Reports*:

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# Foreword

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*COL in the Commonwealth: 2015–2021 Country Reports* summarise COL's activities over the last six years, detailing what we have achieved in each Member State and across the Commonwealth. The reports describe not only how COL has addressed country needs in education and training but also how its work supports the priorities of its development partners: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the global community to embrace distance and online delivery to keep the doors of learning open. The current crisis has highlighted, yet again, the uneven development of technology across the Commonwealth. COL has been promoting the use of a range of technologies, from print, radio and TV to the Internet, to reach learners in different contexts. As an intergovernmental organisation established by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote distance learning and technologies for human resource development, COL's role has never been more important.

COL's Strategic Plan 2015–2021 was based on the conviction that learning leads to sustainable development. COL has continued to use its expertise in distance education and technology-based approaches to promote lifelong learning that leads to sustainable development, which means economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation. This aligns COL's work with SDG4, which aspires to provide equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning for all.

To accelerate progress towards this goal and enhance impact, COL has been fostering partnerships, building capacity, supporting the development of materials and replicable models, and enabling policy. Focusing on these core strategies, this compendium begins with a Pan-Commonwealth section, which describes COL's initiatives under Education and Skills, with Gender as a cross-cutting theme. This is followed by a section containing brief regional overviews for Africa, Asia, the

Caribbean and Americas, Europe and the Pacific. The regional summaries are followed by individual country reports, which highlight some of the results achieved.

You will be pleased to note that COL has exceeded the targets identified for the six-year plan. External evaluators, who conducted a meta-evaluation to assess the impact of the Strategic Plan 2015–2021, concluded that "COL programming over the period assessed... was relevant, effective, and efficient. COL is having an impact in many dimensions and across several initiatives; and in many cases, where government has taken interest and is assuming more leadership, there are good reasons to believe some of the changes at the institutional and government levels are sustainable."

This success has been possible through the support that COL has received from ministries of education as well as partner organisations and experts. *COL in the Commonwealth* is also the result of collective effort and collaboration. Partners on the ground have diligently provided COL with updates, while COL staff have tracked and assessed results obtained through meticulous monitoring and evaluation. I am very grateful to everyone involved for their valuable inputs.

Pandemics, natural disasters and widening inequalities will continue to challenge our systems. The lessons learned in the past will help shape a better future. COL will support Member States in their efforts to rebuild robust and resilient systems of education and training by providing bold and imaginative solutions to address future risks and uncertainties. Your continued support will be key to achieving these goals.



Professor Asha S. Kanwar  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Commonwealth of Learning

## TARGETS 2021

## ACHIEVED by April 2021



Improved sustainable livelihoods  
**300,000 PEOPLE**



**470**  
**ORGANISATIONS**  
Improved organisational  
capacity to leverage ODL



**1.4 million**  
**PEOPLE**  
Increased and equitable  
access to and use of quality  
learning opportunities



# Pan-Commonwealth Activity

Located in British Columbia, Canada, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation that serves the education and training needs of the 54 independent states that comprise the Commonwealth and their combined population of 2.4 billion, of whom more than 60% are under the age of 30. COL was established by the Commonwealth Heads of Government specifically to help ministries, institutions and organisations expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using open, distance and technology-based approaches.

COL participates in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM) and presents its progress report to foreign ministers. During the 25<sup>th</sup> CHOGM, in London in April 2018, COL highlighted at various forums the paradigm shifts required to

secure “our common future.” As well, at the triennial Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) and the meetings of the Commonwealth Education Ministers’ Action Group, COL reports on its progress in promoting learning for sustainable development.

At the 20<sup>th</sup> CCEM, in Fiji in 2018, the Commonwealth Education Ministers commended COL “for its emphasis on Lifelong Learning for employment, entrepreneurship and empowerment which supported the ongoing efforts of Member States to achiev[e] SDG4... [and] its global leadership in Open Educational Resources (OER) and innovations in educational technologies.”

## 2<sup>nd</sup> World OER Congress

COL partnered with UNESCO, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the government of Slovenia to organise the 2<sup>nd</sup> World OER Congress, in Ljubljana, Slovenia from 18 to 20 September 2017. The ensuing 2017 Ljubljana OER Action Plan provided recommendations to stakeholders in five strategic areas: building the capacity of users to find, reuse, create and share OER; language and cultural issues; ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality OER; developing sustainability models; and developing supportive policy environments.



COL leverages its impact through a wide range of partnerships that include institutions, national organisations, international development agencies and non-governmental organisations. Inter-governmental partners include the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Foundation, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UN Women, UNESCO and UNESCO’s Institute for Information Technologies (IITE) and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). COL also works with donor agencies such as the World Bank, regional organisations such as the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation, national and regional distance education associations, industry, and private-sector foundations such as The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

COL assists governmental, non-governmental and community partners in developing policy, building capacity, refining models, creating materials and nurturing collaborative networks.

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## COL's response to COVID-19

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COL has been quick to respond to the urgency of the situation and the evolving needs across the Commonwealth by initiating relevant projects and targeted country interventions and joining global coalitions.

COL has joined the UNESCO Global Education Coalition and “Combat COVID-19: Keep Learning”, spearheaded by IITE. COL also initiated the International Partnership of Distance and Online Learning for COVID-19, commonly known as [OpenDoor](#), bringing together over 60 organisations and institutions around the world. COL's online repository of curated content and tools became a

go-to resource for educators across the world. The COL–Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative has provided access to free online courses to almost 150,000 Commonwealth citizens, many of whom have lost their livelihoods due to COVID-19.

In an effort to help young women and girls become successful in their fields of interest and build future generations of leaders, COL has launched [CommonwealthWiseWomen](#). This new mentoring programme offers unique networking opportunities to women and girls from underserved communities across the Commonwealth by pairing them with successful and influential women in leadership roles.



### Report to Commonwealth Education Ministers: From Response to Resilience

“What lessons can be drawn from the COVID-19 experience to make education systems more resilient in future? This policy brief provides examples of how governments and institutions made it possible for people to continue their education during the pandemic and identifies factors that contributed to success. The responses required are reviewed from social, pedagogical, technological and psychological perspectives.”





## COL's Programmes



**Education and Skills** are COL's two programme sectors, with gender as a cross-cutting theme.

### OPEN/INNOVATIVE SCHOOLING (OIS)

Open/innovative schooling is increasingly recognised as a viable solution to the growing demand for equitable access to secondary education, especially for girls and marginalised groups, and particularly in remote locations. Governments are seeking to redefine the way secondary education addresses societal needs by diversifying the curriculum. This means making technical and vocational programmes available alongside academic offerings — something that open schools are well positioned to do.

#### Activities

OIS currently works in Bangladesh, Belize, Botswana, Eswatini, Guyana, India, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Vanuatu and Zambia. COL also supports the information-sharing activities of the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association.

COL has supported the development of policies and strategies in Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Tanzania; developed and enhanced open schooling models in Belize, Malawi, Mozambique, Trinidad and Tobago, Vanuatu and Zambia; and promoted quality OER, including for persons with disabilities, in Bangladesh, Botswana, Eswatini and Namibia. It also



COL's activities and projects are relevant to achieving SDG4, to the priorities of the Commonwealth countries COL works in, and both relevant and appropriate to achieving the aims of the current Six-Year Plan.

- COL is accepted and seen as a leader in ODL. It has the mandate, over 30 years of experience, a large repository of OER materials, tools and highly skilled international experts on staff and at the governance level.
- COL's innovative approaches to teacher development, blended learning, and institutional capacity building in ODL, OER and TEL are at the cutting edge.
- COL is committed to learning from doing and adapts its work based on the evidence coming from M&E and internal studies.

Key Evaluation Findings. *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*

has been building capacity in course development, delivery and assessment in Guyana and Papua New Guinea.

#### Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, the current model for OIS is relatively new and involves developing, piloting, scaling and mainstreaming OER, ODL, eLearning methods and open educational practices in order to have a large-scale systemic impact. Since the implementation of this model started in 2017, educators in six countries have developed curriculum-based OER and have piloted or are close to piloting their use. The pilots in Mozambique and Zambia are currently reaching about 800 formerly out-of-school youths per year, and both countries are now looking towards scaling. In addition, as part of their response

to the pandemic lockdowns, participating countries shared some of the OER they had in development, and these were downloaded more than 26,000 times in 2020. In a similar vein, curriculum-based resources created for use by learners in Kenya were viewed on YouTube more than 20,000 times in the first eight weeks and, it is estimated, were viewed by more than 150,000 learners in Kenya and Tanzania when first broadcast.

## TEACHER EDUCATION



Teaching quality is considered to be the most important factor affecting learning in schools in most Commonwealth countries. COL's focus is on improving teacher quality through school- and technology-based training models, which can cut costs and achieve scale. Working in partnership with government agencies and teacher education institutions, COL supports capacity development in the integration of technology and OER into pre- and in-service training.

### Activities

COL is working with ministries of education as well as non-governmental organisations and teacher education institutions in The Gambia, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Uganda to develop capacity and resources for school-based teacher development.

In response to partner needs and emerging pedagogies, the initiative has also developed online courses, including MOOCs and webinars for educators and education leaders.

COL's Educational Podcasting for Innovative Classrooms is a response to the increased need for practices, processes and systems for effective last-mile teaching and teacher professional development in partner countries.

### Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, the model has been replicated in ten countries. The findings from the evaluations and interviews with key actors at institutional and government levels suggest that the model is succeeding in West Africa, particularly The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, and it shows potential for scale, with the strategic selection of institutions by governments.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

COL continues to support policy makers, institutions and leaders in higher education to harness the potential of ODL and technology and enable them to cope with the increasing demand for quality higher education in the face of rising costs and diminishing public funding. COL has developed action plans aligned to the priorities of specific countries to increase access to quality higher education, while also forging partnerships with international and regional organisations to leverage its impact.

### Activities

Institutions in Bangladesh, Botswana, Cameroon, Eswatini, Ghana, Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, Sri Lanka,



Uganda and Zambia have partnered with COL in various projects.

COL is collaborating with 12 higher education institutions across the Commonwealth to offer the Commonwealth Executive Master in Business Administration and Commonwealth Executive Master in Public Administration programmes.

Through the Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning project, led by the Association of Commonwealth Universities, COL is supporting the development of quality assurance mechanisms for blended learning courses at 23 higher education institutions located in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

### **Outcomes**

The evaluation of Higher Education initiatives in the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021* found that student performance had improved and student satisfaction had increased. There is evidence that systemic investments in technology, staff training, materials development and quality assurance policies have all had a positive impact.

## **THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH (VUSSC)**

Strengthening and improving the quality and scope of existing tertiary institutions is a key priority for small states. The VUSSC partnership represents 32 small states of the Commonwealth dedicated to sharing educational resources and expanding access to tertiary education. VUSSC works with ministries of education and their agencies, post-secondary institutions and non-governmental organisations to build capacity in online course development, pedagogy and assessment. It promotes technology-enabled learning through the provision of a learning platform and enables the transfer of credits across small states through the use of the Transnational Qualifications Framework.

### **Activities**

VUSSC has been active in small states across three regions — Africa (Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles), the Caribbean (The Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana) and the Pacific (Fiji,



Solomon Islands) — promoting eLearning, supporting the development of OER and providing learning opportunities at certificate, diploma and degree levels.

VUSSC has supported the development of a series of blue economy MOOCs in which close to 6,000 learners from across the world have participated.

In response to the increasing need to transition to online delivery, VUSSC has supported institutions in Africa and the Caribbean to manage and use learning management systems to create and offer courses.

As part of a tripartite Commonwealth initiative with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the University of the West Indies Open Campus, VUSSC has repurposed and made available an online undergraduate degree programme in Youth Work Development to universities that are members of the Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work.

### **Outcomes**

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, there is strong support from ministers of education in the small states of the Commonwealth, and COL offers a variety of courses responding to the unique needs of small states in areas such as the blue economy, sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism, disaster management and port management. VUSSC has played a major role in the development of OER that have led to educators' pedagogical development and students' improved educational performance. The Transnational Qualifications Framework, which allows for the recognition of qualifications earned in one nation by 31 other nations, is a major strength.



**The Skills sector** addresses the needs of both formal and non-formal learning. The initiatives in this sector are: Technology-Enabled Learning, Lifelong Learning for Farmers, GIRLS Inspire, and Technical and Vocational Skills Development, including Skills Online.



### TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED LEARNING (TEL)

This initiative aims to encourage more governments and institutions to integrate TEL and OER policies and practices to improve teaching and learning for skills development. COL believes that for technology to have a transformative effect in teaching and learning, a focus on policy–technology–capacity is needed, and practice must be based on research evidence.



#### Activities

This initiative is being implemented in Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Belize, Fiji, Grenada, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Saint Lucia, Samoa, South Africa, Sri Lanka, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Since its launch in 2018, COL's Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training

in Action (C-DELTA) platform has had over 13,500 registered users. Over 24,000 learners have benefited from MOOCs organised in partnership with Athabasca University, Canada. Since 2018, COL's online course *Understanding OER* has been used by over 13,000 people worldwide; in 2020, it won a prestigious Brandon Hall Group Silver Award.



#### Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, TEL demonstrates the systematic use of technology to offer quality education at scale. The C-DELTA (seven modules) and Online Course on Open Education Resources (LearnOER) platforms are examples. TEL provides peer-reviewed and quality-assured tools and resources to help any educational institution integrate technology in teaching and learning so as to improve the quality of



#### PCF8

PCF8 was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 27 to 30 November 2016. More than 500 participants from 59 countries joined COL and host partner Open University Malaysia for four days of speeches, presentations and discussions on the theme Open, Online and Flexible Learning: The Key to Sustainable Development. In the framework of the forum, education ministers from five countries held a Ministerial Roundtable, where they discussed learning and sustainable development, including issues of access and capacity. Forum delegates adopted the Kuala Lumpur Declaration with a set of ten recommendations for governments, institutions, the private sector and civil society, on topics that included lifelong learning, ODL, access and equity, teacher education, OER, education of women and girls, research and innovation.

student learning and success. The Advanced ICT Skills Development Project has developed 26 OER courses to make the teaching and learning of advanced ICT skills affordable. These courses are developed as OER textbooks that can be adapted by institutions to offer courses. In addition, this initiative works to improve TEL policies.

### LIFELONG LEARNING FOR FARMERS (L3F)

This programme empowers vulnerable rural women and their families to gain knowledge, create their own self-directed learning processes, and organise themselves to solve the challenges of lack of access



to credit and finance to improve their livelihoods. In this model, COL is a catalyst in bringing together institutions, civil society and the private sector to build the capacity of communities through gender-sensitive learning.

### Activities

Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Tonga, Uganda and Zambia are currently implementing the L3F model. Nearly 800,000 farmers, more than half of them women, have participated in L3F learning activities. COL has also trained over 100,000 learners across several countries of the Commonwealth using MOOCs - to scale up L3F through building capacity in agricultural extension. During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, about 42,000 learners were trained using innovative mobiMOOCs. Banks in various countries collaborate with L3F, including NABARD, a large agricultural bank in India, and Andhra Pradesh State Cooperative Bank. COL has been building the capacity

of staff at the Bank of Tanzania through a visit to India and subsequent follow-up training workshops.

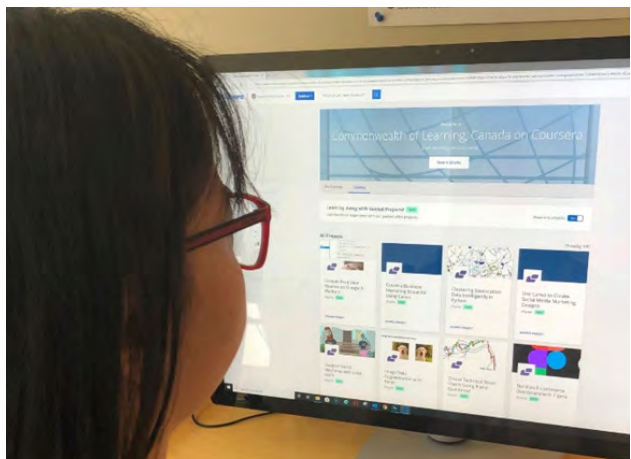
### Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, since being piloted in 2006, the L3F programme has been demonstrated to enhance crop productivity, household incomes and empowerment, not simply through learning but also by linking small-holder farmers to sources of financing and to other actors in the supply chain. Participants invest their incomes in children’s education, better food and improved housing, as well as increasing their assets and diversifying their income-generating activities, which multiplies the development impact. COL’s ability to broker partnerships is a key strength: the L3F model links participants with microfinance, agricultural extension workers and agricultural supply chains using a social-capital approach.

### TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (TVSD)

COL is building the capacity of TVET government agencies and institutions to increase access to quality TVSD through using ODL and learning technologies. COL is supporting selected partners to implement Skills in Demand projects, which blend online learning with learning in the workplace or community. Tapping into the physical and human resources in these contexts helps overcome TVET-specific challenges of how to develop practical skills while still reaching marginalised learners in informal sectors and remote locations.





### **Activities**

Since 2015, COL has trained more than 3,000 TVET educators across the Commonwealth in flexible and blended learning. COL is supporting government agency partners in The Gambia, Jamaica, Kenya, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea and Zambia to implement national change strategies for flexible and blended TVET. COL has seven Skills in Demand projects underway in Kenya, Nauru, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Tuvalu and Zambia, and across the Caribbean in partnership with the Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies. Skills being developed are project management, gardening, construction, computer and mobile phone repair, furniture making, and teaching and assessment for TVET teachers and workplace trainers.

### **Outcomes**

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, more than 100 partners are implementing flexible and blended (FaB) learning approaches to varying degrees, and there is evidence that organisations are moving toward more flexible TVSD. COL has online OER to build capacity in flexible skills development, allowing countries to cost-effectively scale up institutional capability through training trainers to use COL’s OER. COL’s new Skills in Demand model was found to meet the needs of national TVET agencies and bring government support that allowed work to scale rapidly across institutions and workplaces. TVSD also promoted learning networks: the INVEST Africa Community Learning Network has more than 2,000 members, and the African Foundation for Quality e-Learning for TVET (AFQueT) was founded in 2019 by nine individuals

from five African countries who have had their capability in eLearning built through COL.

As well, Skills Online aims to support the efforts of Member States to disseminate skills required for employment and entrepreneurship. Through hybrid models that apply ODL techniques, it helps women, girls, youths, persons with disabilities, entrepreneurs and the unemployed to acquire relevant 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills and access in-country mentorship support. It enhances the ODL capabilities of both TVET institutions and other non-governmental organisations involved in skills development.

The COL–Coursera partnership has been offered in 50 Commonwealth countries, resulting in over one million course enrolments and over 182,000 certificates. In addition, COL has collaborated with Udeemy Inc., facilitating access for vulnerable youths in Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda to 4,000 highly curated online courses that have benefited over 8,100 learners. In India, COL has helped reskill 2,100 auto-technicians, tailors and beauticians to become sanitation hygiene entrepreneurs and train 5,000 women digital entrepreneurs to meet new demands created by COVID-19.

### **GENDER**

Gender is a cross-cutting theme that underpins and complements all COL initiatives. COL recognises that the advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment is central to its agenda of learning for sustainable development. COL supports partners in mainstreaming gender and in implementing holistic projects to address specific gender issues. Targeted programmes tackle the distinct challenges faced by



girls/women and boys/men in regions where they are most disadvantaged, while also shifting the social norms that create and perpetuate gender inequalities.

### **Activities**

Projects are being implemented in Botswana, Ghana, Guyana, India, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, and Trinidad and Tobago. Through a variety of skills-building activities in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, COL has been empowering women to achieve sustainable livelihoods. In Sri Lanka and Tanzania, COL has trained girls and young women in ICT, and in the Caribbean, it has helped address issues of boys' underachievement. In 2020, COL launched a gender-equality capacity-building project with the participation of 11 partners in nine countries of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.



As well, a special project, GIRLS Inspire, has aimed to provide schooling and skills development to some of the hardest-to-reach girls in the Commonwealth. COL has worked in Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Tanzania to provide education and training to almost 100,000 girls to equip them for employment and entrepreneurship. This project has been supported by Global Affairs Canada and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

### **Outcomes**

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, COL has the ability to influence as well as support partners, and its long

history and relationships give it credibility. Three of the gender projects — the Social Safety Net project, Lifelong Learning for Mothers, and the Gender Mainstreaming project — have developed strategies and mechanisms for implementation that can be scaled up. The Gender Mainstreaming model has clear guidelines, and the three phases of the gender mainstreaming strategy are logically connected and relevant. In addition, COL has developed tools, including a Gender Audit Tool and a Gender Road Map template. A social protection mobile application has also been developed for Solomon Islands.

### **COMMONWEALTH EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CENTRE FOR ASIA (CEMCA)**

COL's regional office in Asia is based in New Delhi, India. CEMCA promotes the meaningful, relevant and appropriate use of media and technology to serve the education and training needs of the Commonwealth Member States of Asia. CEMCA works in education and skills development, with a focus on community media, particularly community radio.

### **Activities**

Through activities with partners in Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, India, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan, Singapore and Sri Lanka, CEMCA has helped institutions improve their capacity to leverage ODL for increased access to education. During the COVID-19 lockdown in the region in 2020, CEMCA offered training to faculty and leaders in ODL institutions to help with the transition to online learning. Recently, virtual labs have been introduced.



## Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, CEMCA operates with a small academic staff and well-developed networks. Its advocacy efforts and technical support have led to the successful adoption of institutional OER policies. Similarly, capacity building with institutions has created improvements in knowledge, changes in attitude, and changes in systems and practices, leading to the increased use of OER to create learning materials. In a few cases, partner institutions have shared their experience with other universities, creating a multiplier effect. CEMCA has also been able to obtain additional contributions from other donors or development agencies.



### PCF9

Close to 550 policy makers, practitioners and thought leaders from across the Commonwealth and beyond gathered at the historic Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh, Scotland for PCF9, themed Innovations for Quality Education and Lifelong Learning. It was organised from 9 to 12 September 2019 in partnership with The Open University, UK. The four days of insightful keynote addresses, engaging plenary panels, informative parallel sessions, and other programme highlights provided a unique opportunity to bridge traditional divides between borders and sectors. Discussions centred around four key sub-themes — Opening Up Education, Equity and Inclusion, Technology, and Employability — and delegates appreciated the focus on new forum features: artificial intelligence, youth and girls' education, and learners with special abilities. Under the auspices of PCF9, COL hosted a ministerial roundtable with participation from six education ministers.

## REGIONAL CENTRES



COL supports regional centres in Western and Southern Africa, Europe and the Pacific. These are hosted by ODL institutions (in Botswana, Fiji and Nigeria) or ministries (in Malta). They carry out activities that are aligned to COL's mandate and programmes.

## Outcomes

According to the *Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021*, the regional centres are centres of excellence focused on advocacy and research in ODL. They have generated activities that can be replicated by new partners. In addition, they have well-developed networks of consultants to help them expand activities. The evaluation found that the regional centres are becoming increasingly relevant in their respective regions. The more established ones have developed networks and partnerships, significantly increasing ODL capacity in their regions.

## SERVICES

COL's eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO) is a service initiative that works with international organisations on a fee-for-service basis to develop and deliver professional development courses and projects. Over the past 20 years, eLIO has progressively diversified its services to provide innovative solutions to meet the needs of globally dispersed staff and enable learning for sustainable development.





## COL IN AFRICA

By 2030, young Africans aged 15–24 are expected to make up 42% of the world's youth and will account for 75% of those under age 35 in Africa, presenting a huge opportunity to change this demographic fact into a demographic dividend. Education has a key role to play in reducing inequality, improving health, boosting employability and spurring social empowerment, and it is pivotal for meeting the global sustainable development agenda. Distance and online learning provide additional opportunities, but many parts of the region still experience significant challenges with connectivity and electricity, access to platforms, content, and teacher capacity.

In Africa, mobile-cellular subscriptions per 100 inhabitants are at 76.57% (2018), and 17.37% of households have Internet (2018).

There are five public open universities in Commonwealth Africa, and the University of South Africa was the first distance teaching university in the world. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, governments provided remote learning to out-of-school students using a variety of approaches, such as radio, television programmes, eLearning platforms, and social media.



COL focuses on adding value to the countries' efforts to reach the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG4. It supports the Commonwealth governments and institutions of Africa in the use of appropriate, affordable technologies to improve and expand learning for sustainable development. Its initiatives in formal education include emphasising quality and inclusive secondary and higher education and strengthening teacher development programmes. In the area of skills, COL supports the expansion of access to technical and vocational education, the linking of informal learning to credit in agriculture, and the use of technology-enabled learning (TEL). These initiatives have been designed to achieve



socially inclusive and gender-sensitive human resource development at low economic and environmental costs.

Two regional centres help promote the development of leadership and expertise in the fields of open distance learning (ODL) and TEL within Africa. The Southern African Development Community Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE) is supported by the Botswana Ministry of Education and hosted by Botswana Open University. SADC-CDE operates to increase the provision of quality distance education in the region, support research activities, and undertake and promote training and development in ODL. The Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL) is hosted by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). This regional centre promotes capacity-building and research activities in ODL while also serving as a centre of expertise for Nigeria and West Africa.

*The Meta-Evaluation Report Stage 2: Strategic Plan 2015–2021* concluded that COL's activities improve education access and quality and are focused on capacity building, policy development and institutional technology support for education, TVET, agriculture, and women's and girls' empowerment. The focus is relevant to both COL objectives and national priorities.

COL's major regional initiatives in the African Commonwealth countries between 2015 and 2021 are outlined below.

- COL assisted the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning with transitioning into Botswana Open University (BOU, effective 1 December 2017) by providing technical advice, reviewing the institution's systems and supporting capacity building.
- BOU, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana, the Open University of Mauritius, NOUN and the University of Seychelles have benefited from the high-quality learning and professional development opportunities offered by COL's Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Administration programmes.
- BOU and the University of Mauritius offer the Virtual University for Small States of the

Commonwealth (VUSSC) Master of Educational Leadership programme. BOU also offers VUSSC degree and diploma programmes in Business and Entrepreneurship.

The collaboration between Botswana Open University and COL through the VUSSC was beneficial to the small states of the Commonwealth, and the introduction of open educational resources reduced the cost of study materials by more than 50%.

*– An Evaluation of the Bachelor of Business Entrepreneurship Programme by Open and Distance Learning: The Case for Botswana Open University (2020)*

- Through the Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning (PEBL) project, COL works to enhance teaching quality, student outcomes, employability and research output by addressing the critical academic staff shortages faced in many East African universities. Nine PEBL institutions have utilised COL's quality assurance (QA) rubrics for the review of blended courses, and 15 institutions have drafted their institutional QA review reports. Between October 2019 and September 2020, 10,083 students took quality-assured, credit-bearing blended learning courses developed by PEBL.



- In partnership with RETRIDOL and hosted by NOUN, COL has supported the development of dual-mode universities in Nigeria. Two universities have acquired the permit to operate as dual-mode universities. The ODL policies for nine universities have been approved by their institutional senates, positioning them to acquire dual-mode

accreditation from Nigeria's National Universities Commission.

- In January 2021, a Memorandum of Agreement was signed between COL and NOUN to continue supporting RETRIDOL as a centre of expertise in ODL for West Africa.
- SADC-CDE has engaged in capacity building in open schooling, non-formal education, and gender. Through these efforts, it has supported all 11 Commonwealth Member States of the SADC region, as well as three additional countries in the East African Community: Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.
- SADC-CDE also supports the capacity building of officers in ministries across the region in the area of distance education. It is currently sponsoring 33 learners from Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and Seychelles.
- COL launched a new regional community of practice for QA in blended and online courses, involving higher education institutions and national QA agencies from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia and Zambia.
- An institutional trial audit of the University of South Africa (Unisa) conducted by COL marked a critical milestone in a year-long collaborative project. Initiated to prepare Unisa for its institutional review by South Africa's Council of Higher Education, the trial audit supported South Africa's largest university in reviewing its policies and practices, with a focus on teaching, learning and student success.
- The school-based teacher development model Teacher Futures is underway in The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Uganda. The programme supports collaborative learning among teachers and teacher educators through communities of practice and school-based training. A total of 4,174 teachers and teacher educators have been reached.
- Working in collaboration with various institutions and experts from the region, COL has offered tailored training through a series of MOOCs to improve teacher capacity in responding to new demands for distance and online learning during COVID-19. The courses include



The students in the treatment schools — i.e., those who benefited from COL's intervention — have higher scores than their counterparts in the control schools. The combined mean score of the students from the treatment schools is higher than their counterparts' from the control schools.

**– The Evaluation of the Integrated INSET School-Based Teacher Development Programme (INSET SBTD) Sierra Leone (2019)**

*Cybersecurity Training for Teachers, Mobile Learning with Multimedia (focusing on educational podcasting), OER for Online Learning and Teaching Mathematics with Technology, among others. These have attracted 2,974 participants from 19 Commonwealth countries in Africa.*

- COL's OER for Online Learning MOOC, offered in 2020, attracted a total of 390 participants from 28 countries in Africa.
- With COL's support, the ministries of education in Eswatini, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria and Zambia have been integrating open/innovative schooling (OIS) in their education systems. The OIS initiative has also been working with partners to follow up on the outcomes of COL-supported programmes through research studies, and to promote peer auditing for QA. Another important activity is the strengthening of the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association through increased member engagement and social media presence.
- COL helped to develop institutional ODL policies in Cameroon, Uganda and Zambia. Baseline studies on the status of ODL in Cameroon and



## Advanced ICT Skills Development Project

The Advanced ICT Training Employability project of Kampabits, Uganda has been highly effective and created social value for each of its stakeholder groups. The estimated social return on investment is UGX 1:UGX 3.481. This social value is linked to the contribution toward employability, reduction in the risk of STD, provision of access to ICT equipment and training, and ensuring of matches between Kampabits participants and employers.

– *Evaluation of Technology-Enabled Learning Initiative (2019)*

Rwanda indicated that the current demand for higher education in Cameroon will double by 2030 and that there is an urgent need for stronger capacity building in Rwanda. Quality Assurance Certificates of Recognition for successfully implementing the COL Review and Improvement Model were issued to two institutions in Lesotho and Seychelles.

- In collaboration with the University of Cape Town, South Africa, COL has developed the conceptual framework and seven modules for the Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) programme to build the capacities of teachers and learners to use digital skills for lifelong learning throughout the Commonwealth.
- COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers initiative has contributed to the improved livelihoods of more than 500,000 people in Africa. In Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, partners are moving towards macro-level expansion through partnerships with governments and national banks. In Tanzania, COL has been working with the Ministry of Agriculture to



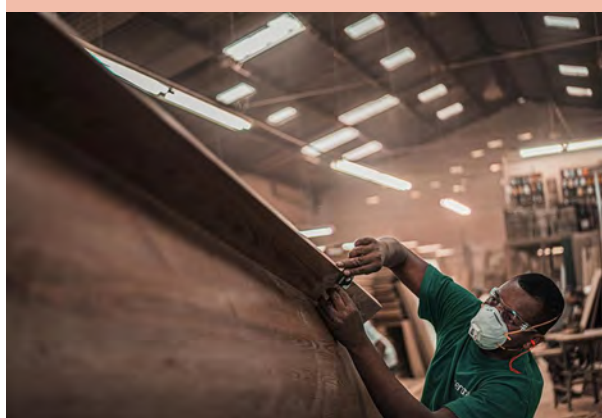
integrate L3F and table banking in co-operative law and legislation. The innovative mobiMOOC approach has increased access to learning using basic mobile phones. Subregional organisations, such as the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS), the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), and the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), have partnered with COL to use AgMOOCs for building agricultural capacity in Sub-Saharan Africa.



- Through the Government of Canada's funding for the GIRLS Inspire project, COL has provided relevant skills that lead to livelihoods for more than 7,500 unreached and marginalised girls in remote and rural areas in Mozambique and Tanzania and has prevented child marriages.
- The Skills in Demand model, which links educational institutions and industry partners, was introduced in Africa. COL supported three partners in Kenya, Nigeria and Zambia to work with informal industry associations to increase

As a result of COL's interventions, the Kenya Technical Teachers Training College revised its strategy to include technology-enabled teaching and learning, leading to the establishment of the ICT and ODeL departments, and the allocation of budgets to support ICT integration in teaching and learning. The institution also established departmental performance contracts aligned to the college's strategic priorities and operational procedures to guide the FaB approach led by the ODeL Department.

– **Commonwealth of Learning: TVSD Initiative INVEST Africa Summative Evaluation (2019)**



access to formal TVET through blending online and workplace learning.

- COL has launched a project in Mauritius with the Global Rainbow Foundation (GRF) to build the capacity of service workers, teachers and volunteers who work with people with disabilities. With COL's support, GRF has developed short, interactive, online courses for these practitioners.
- In partnership with the University of Seychelles, COL organised a series of MOOCs on the blue



economy and blue growth, which attracted close to 6,000 participants worldwide.

- In partnership with the Open University of Mauritius, COL offered its *Introduction to Sustainable Development in Business* MOOC in June 2019, November 2019 and June 2020. The MOOC attracted close to 5,000 participants from the Commonwealth countries in Africa.
- The Africa OER Regional Consultation, which provided opportunities for African delegates to learn more about OER and contribute to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World OER Congress, was held in March 2017 in Port Louis, Mauritius. Representatives of 16 Commonwealth countries from Africa were in attendance.
- The Africa and Mediterranean regional meeting of COL's Focal Points took place on 24–25 September 2018 in Gaborone, Botswana to strengthen the effectiveness of COL's work in addressing key priorities for education and training in the region and to share information related to learning for sustainable development. In April 2020, COL held online consultations with Focal Points from the region as part of

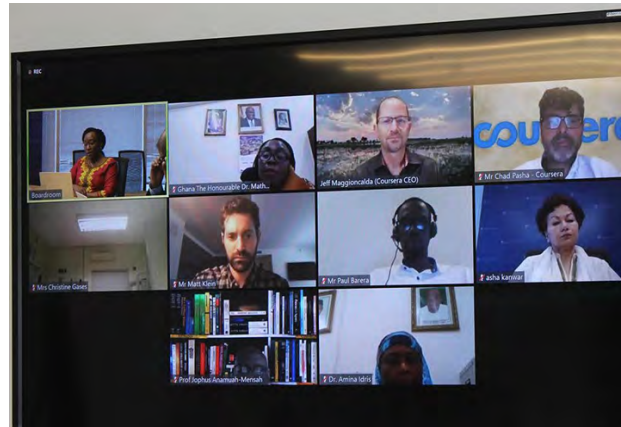


the development of its new strategic plan (2021–2027).

- African Virtual University, Botswana Open University, Busitema University (Uganda), Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology (Kenya), Moi University (Kenya), Mzuzu University (Malawi), Namibian College of Open Learning, National Open University of Nigeria, National Teachers' Institute – Kaduna (Nigeria), Open University of Mauritius, Uganda Management Institute, Thika Technical Training Institute (Kenya), University of Namibia, University of Rwanda, University of Seychelles and University of South Africa are all members of the COL-led International Partnership of Distance and Online Learning for COVID-19.
- Ms Kgomotso Motlotle (Botswana), Ms Margaret Mensah-Williams (Namibia), Professor Romeela Mohee (Mauritius) and Professor Mpine Makoe (South Africa) are mentors in COL's CommonwealthWiseWomen programme, aimed at developing the leadership potential of women and girls in the Commonwealth.
- Through the Ghana Library Authority, Rwanda Telecentre Network and Kenya's Programme for

Capacity Development in Africa, there were over 15,700 enrolments in Udemy courses, aimed at upskilling young people for better livelihoods.

- More than 44,500 learners from Africa joined the COL–Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative,



gaining free and unlimited access to 4,000 online courses taught by highly reputed professors and mentors from top universities and companies around the world. Learners earned over 44,800 certificates of course completion, boosting their employability in the face of COVID-19.





## Introduction

South Africa (population: 58,558,270 in 2019) has a primary net enrolment rate of 87.0% (2017) and a secondary school completion rate of 71.9% (2017). In March 2000, the [Services Sector Education and Training Authority](#) (Services SETA) was established and registered in terms of the Skills Development Act of 1998. The [South African Council for Educators \(SACE\)](#) is the professional council for educators, which aims to enhance the status of the teaching profession through appropriate registration and management of professional development. The [University of South Africa \(UNISA\)](#) is the largest open distance learning institution in Africa.

Internet connectivity is available to 56% (2017) of the population, and mobile-cellular subscriptions are at 166 (2019) per 100 people. Infrastructure is available for distance and technology-enabled learning and for expanding access to education and training in South Africa. In its *Action Plan to 2019 Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030*, the government recognises that the most crucial enabler of ICT in schools is high-speed broadband.

### **BUILDING EDUCATION RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF COVID-19**

The COVID-19 crisis has had an unprecedented impact on education. Shortly after the pandemic struck, several online courses and reading materials were made available on the site of the [Ministry of Education](#) for different grade levels to facilitate learning from home during school closures. The [eLearning portal](#) of the Western Cape Government contains different types of resources available in English and Afrikaans for use by students and teachers.

### **BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

Professor Narend Bajinath, former Chief Executive Officer, South Africa Council on Higher Education, is the Chair of COL's Board of Governors.

Mr Armoogum Parsuramen, Founder-President, Global Rainbow Foundation, Mauritius, represents Africa on COL's Board of Governors.

Professor Daniel Kgwadi, Vice Chancellor and Principal of the North-West University, represents the government of South Africa on COL's Board of Governors.

### **FOCAL POINT**

Ms Trudi van Wyk, Chief Director: Social Inclusion, Equity, Access and Quality, Department of Higher Education and Training, is COL's Focal Point for South Africa.

### **COL CHAIR**

Professor Mpine Makoe, Institute for Open and Distance Learning, University of South Africa, serves as a COL Chair.

### **NOTABLE MENTIONS**

Ms Jenny Glennie is a COL Honorary Fellow and a former member of COL's Board of Governors.

Professor Mandla Makhanya is a COL Honorary Fellow.

Professor Veronica McKay is a former Honorary COL Adviser.

The Honourable Naledi Pandor is a COL Honorary Fellow.

Professor N. Barney Pityana is a COL Honorary Fellow.

Dr Ihron L. Rensburg is a former member of COL's Board of Governors.

Mr John Samuel is a former member of COL's Board of Governors.



# COL's Work in South Africa: Six-Year Review 2015–2021

COL's current work in South Africa is primarily in the areas of higher education, teacher education, and technology-enabled learning. Learners from South

Africa have also benefited from COL's open online courses and other resources.



## Education Sector Overview

### OPEN/INNOVATIVE SCHOOLING (OIS)

In January 2017, COL sponsored a workshop on the topic of mobile technology-enabled learning for the African chapter of the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association. The workshop was held in Johannesburg and focused on the use of mobile phones in the development of learning content. Attendees came from eight Commonwealth African countries, including South Africa.

In 2020, COL commissioned the South African Institute for Distance Education to support the open school at Botswana Open University (BOU) with online training in Moodle to develop new content for business studies.

### TEACHER EDUCATION

The Ministry of Education in South Africa has identified the University of Fort Hare and ten schools in Eastern Cape as institutional partners to implement COL's school-based teacher development programme.

COL supported teacher educators from South Africa's North-West University at a five-day training workshop on information and communication technologies (ICT) in teaching and learning, at the Singapore National Institute of Education in May 2016. The training workshop built the capacity of teacher educators in integrating ICT into their programmes as a key strategy to improve quality in education.

In collaboration with South Africa's Department of Basic Education, COL organised a four-day planning forum for professional development in digital learning in September 2018 at the Alice Campus of the



University of Fort Hare (UFH) to develop a strategy and action plan for Teacher Futures – South Africa, with a focus on digital education in the country. The forum was facilitated by SchoolNet South Africa.

A series of professional development workshops on *Digital Literacy for Teachers* and *Initiation of Communities of Practice* followed in February 2019 at three separate school venues in the Amathole District of the Eastern Cape, along with a learning design workshop in Hogsback. Subsequently, participants from UFH and the Eastern Cape Department of Education enrolled in the Commonwealth Certificate of Teacher ICT Integration.





Thirty-seven stakeholders from various universities and teacher education institutions in seven African countries, including South Africa, came together for the *Train-the-Trainers Workshop on Quality Assurance for Teacher Training and Professional Development*, organised by the African Council for Distance Education at the Open University of Tanzania in March 2019 with COL's support. The workshop focused on the need for schools of education within universities and other institutions to develop resilient mechanisms to improve teacher development.

As well, 28 school management team members and district education leaders in Eastern Cape Province completed a four-month *Change Leadership for Digital Learning* course. A total of 60 teachers from ten schools in Amathole District, Eastern Cape Province completed a course titled *Using Digital Learning Resources in the Classroom*, designed to guide them in effectively integrating curriculum-aligned digital content into their lessons. With support from COL, on-site training has been conducted at Nzululwazi High School and Sakhululeka High School, Eastern Cape.

Learners from South Africa participated in the *OER for Online Learning (OER4OL)* MOOC offered in 2020 as well as in the October–December 2020 offerings of the *Mobile Learning with Multimedia* MOOC. There were a total of 26 participants from South Africa in the *Cybersecurity Training for Teachers* MOOC, also offered twice in October–December 2020. Learners from South Africa joined the *Teaching Mathematics with Technology* MOOC, organised in November–December 2020.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

A video titled *How Technology Developments Are Driving Change in Higher Education* was produced for presentation at the Southern African Regional Universities Association Vice Chancellors' Leadership Dialogue, in Cape Town in September 2015.

In October 2015, COL's President and CEO Professor Asha Kanwar spoke on the topic of "Growing Capacities for Sustainable Distance eLearning Provision" at the first plenary panel of the 26<sup>th</sup> International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) World Conference, hosted by UNISA in Sun City. COL provided support to the conference. Professor Kanwar

also spoke at the High-Level Policy Forum, organised by ICDE in partnership with UNESCO, COL and the Open Education Consortium.

As part of COL's efforts to increase access to higher education in dual-mode institutions in Africa's Commonwealth Member States, COL in September 2016 brought together representatives from 13 universities for a workshop in Pretoria to strengthen learner support. The workshop focused on introducing ODL and learner support to faculty members who were new to ODL. It also covered the implementation of an appropriate learner support system at their respective institutions.

A high-level roundtable for vice chancellors and heads of ODL was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in May 2018. Thirty-one vice chancellors and their representatives from 19 countries were in attendance, including one representative from UNISA. The meeting was co-hosted by Asia e University.

As well, South Africa hosted a meeting in April 2018 to launch a new regional community of practice for quality assurance in ODL, involving higher education institutions and national quality assurance agencies from seven southern African countries. A task force was formed to draft and pilot quality assurance guidelines. Subsequently, pilot studies of quality guidelines at seven institutions (BOU, National University of Lesotho, Open University of Mauritius, University of Namibia, University of Eswatini, University of Malawi and University of Zambia) were completed. A follow-up workshop was conducted in Johannesburg in December 2019 for representatives from the national qualification authorities of Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia and Zambia.





In December 2019, in partnership with UNISA's Department of Institutional Research and its Business Intelligence Unit, COL organised a workshop in Pretoria to share an employability readiness model, which had been developed by COL with the Department of Planning and Quality Assurance and the various UNISA colleges.

COL, together with an international panel of quality assurance experts, has guided UNISA in extensive self-review activities. These activities were initiated to prepare UNISA for its institutional review by South Africa's Council on Higher Education in 2020. Various preparatory workshops were conducted by COL in 2019, and a panel meeting was held in London, UK in July to develop the audit framework and guidelines for the self-review process. A communication strategy for the audit was developed, in consultation with staff, during a workshop held in October 2019. The institutional trial audit of UNISA, conducted by COL in December 2019, marked a critical milestone in this collaborative project between the two institutions. In January 2020, the *Trial Quality Audit Report on Doctoral Degrees at UNISA* was produced and shared with the university. In March 2020, the audit final report was shared with UNISA's team. Based on the recommendations in this final report, UNISA developed an improvement plan, on which the panel members provided feedback in May 2020.

The three offerings of COL's *Introduction to Sustainable Development in Business* MOOC, organised in collaboration with the Open University of Mauritius in 2019–2020, attracted 62 participants from South Africa.

COL Chair Professor Mpine Makoe has undertaken a regional scan on the uptake of OER in Sub-Saharan Africa. In response to COVID-19, she has participated in drafting the *Policy Brief SADC-ODEL Response to COVID-19*, in partnership with Dr Godson Gatsha, BOU.

Professor Makoe is also working on a project to rapidly upskill teachers to teach online and has offered training to 544 educators.





## Skills Sector Overview

### TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

A total of 60 learners from South Africa have benefited from online courses in the framework of the COL–Coursera Workforce Recovery Initiative, boosting their employability skills in the face of economic disruptions caused by COVID-19, with support from the African Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.

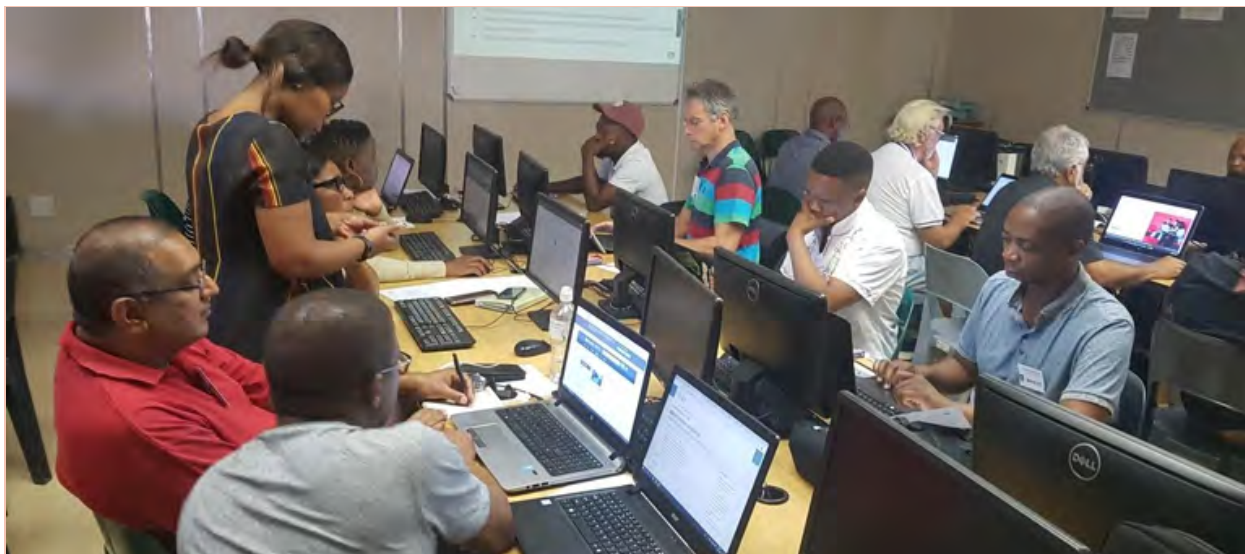
### TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED LEARNING (TEL)

In collaboration with the University of Cape Town, COL developed the curriculum and course materials for the Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) programme, which is being used in over 50 countries.

In March 2017, COL Education Specialist: eLearning participated in the OE Global Conference hosted by the University of Cape Town. He also joined a workshop on the Cape Town Open Education Declaration, organised by the Open Education Consortium.



In collaboration with COL, SchoolNet South Africa conducted a three-day workshop in January 2019 to build teacher capacity to develop digital education skills using the C-DELTA platform. Hosted at the University of Johannesburg, the workshop was attended by 35 public and private school teachers, as well as members of education faculties from across South Africa.



#### Digital Education Leadership Training for teachers in South Africa

“The course is well designed. It addresses the problems facing us now. It helps us be aware [that] we can protect ourselves in the digital world. It creates awareness of the world at large,” said one of the participants in the C-DELTA course in January 2019.

Representatives from South Africa participated in two meetings with a TEL focus hosted by COL in New Delhi, India in December 2018. Mr Andrew Moore from Neil Butcher & Associates, South Africa participated in the Technology-Enabled Learning Community of Practice Meeting, while Ms Omashani Naidoo from SchoolNet South Africa and Ms Catherine Thabisa Mayisela from the University of Cape Town attended the *C-DELTA Training of Trainers Workshop*.

A workshop on C-DELTA was organised by SchoolNet South Africa and the Department of Education in January 2019 with Phendukani Full Service High School, where 20 teachers and 43 learners participated. In February 2020, 63 participants attended another C-DELTA workshop, organised by SchoolNet South Africa and the Department of Education in KwaZulu Natal Province.

Since its launch in May 2018, the C-DELTA platform has had over 13,500 registered users, including over 1,800 in South Africa.

Most recently, C-DELTA received accreditation from the South African Council of Educators, making it equivalent to 35 continuous personal and professional teacher development points.

In partnership with Athabasca University, Canada, COL has been offering two MOOCs – *Introduction to Technology-Enabled Learning (TEL)* since 2017 and *Blended Learning Practice* since March 2020 – for teachers in secondary, post-secondary and vocational education across the Commonwealth and beyond. Learners from South Africa were among the 24,000 participants in these courses.

## GENDER

The *Gender Profile 2017: South Africa* report is a compilation of current sex-disaggregated data for socioeconomic indicators, namely in the areas of health, education, economic participation, and decision making.

In 2020, COL launched the CommonwealthWise-Women (CWW) mentoring project to promote change by empowering girls and women to become leaders and influence the next generation of leaders. [Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka](#), United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, and [Professor Mpine Makoe](#), UNISA, are CWW mentors.

## REGIONAL CENTRE

### THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY CENTRE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION (SADC-CDE)

South Africa benefits from the activities of SADC-CDE, COL's regional centre in Southern Africa, hosted by BOU.

In January 2019, SADC-CDE held a workshop in Botswana on non-formal education, with participants from eight countries in the region, including two from UNISA. The goal was to sensitise them to ODL and ICT in non-formal education programmes. Participants developed draft institutional action plans for non-formal ODL programmes.

In February 2019, SADC-CDE and the NGO Gender Links organised a gender sensitisation workshop in Johannesburg, South Africa. Participants included academics and administrators of ten institutions from Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles and South Africa. Two participants were from UNISA.



## Special Events and Activities

### **PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING (PCF)**

Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women and former Vice President of South Africa, gave a keynote speech at PCF8, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in November 2016. Participants from South Africa sponsored by COL included Professor Paul Prinsloo, UNISA, Dr Cheryl Lee Brown, University of Cape Town, Ms Shafika Isaacs, independent, Ms Happiness Mzikazi Ntuli, ADPP Mozambique, and Mr Hendrik Kruger, University of Pretoria.

COL sponsored seven delegates from South Africa to attend PCF9 in Edinburgh, UK in September 2019. They included Dr Winston Hendricks, University of Fort Hare, Professor Mpine Makoe, UNISA, Ms Brenda Mallinson, OER Africa, Ms Thabisa Mayisela, University of Cape Town, Mrs Hlengiwe Mfeka, SchoolNet SA, Dr Ephraim Mhlanga, Saide, and Ms Omashani Naidoo, SchoolNet SA. In addition, several were invited to participate in various pre-forum COL meetings held in Edinburgh: Dr Mhlanga attended a higher education workshop, Dr Hendricks and Mrs Mfeka participated in the teacher education workshop, and Ms Naidoo participated in the TEL Partners meeting.

A major highlight of PCF9 was the conferment of the title of COL Honorary Fellow on eight eminent individuals, including Professor Mandla Makhanya, UNISA's Principal and Vice Chancellor, in recognition of his contribution to lifelong learning in the Commonwealth.



### **REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS ON OER**

COL organised six Regional Consultations on OER leading up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Open Educational Resources Congress, hosted by the Government of Slovenia in Ljubljana in partnership with UNESCO and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The African Regional Consultation was held in Port Louis, Mauritius in March 2017. Ms Jenny Glennie (Saide), Dr Cheryl Hodgkinson-Williams (University of Cape Town) and Dr Mark Horner (Siyavula Foundation) attended.

### **REGIONAL MEETINGS OF COL FOCAL POINTS**

Between 2018 and 2020, COL's Focal Points from Africa and Europe met twice for regional consultations. The first meeting took place in September 2018 in Gaborone, Botswana and was organised by COL in partnership with the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology and BOU. The second meeting was held virtually in May 2020. Ms. Trudi Van Wyk, Chief Director: Social Inclusion, Equity, Access and Quality, Department of Higher Education and Training, participated in the 2020 online meeting.

### **COMMONWEALTH CONSORTIUM ON YOUTH WORK QUALIFICATIONS**

In March 2016, through COL's Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) initiative, COL, the Youth Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Open Campus of the University of the West Indies convened a meeting at UNISA in Pretoria on advancing youth work education and training. The meeting, which included representatives from a number of South African universities and organisations, involved discussions on a proposal to create a Commonwealth Consortium on Youth Work Qualifications and was held to coincide with the Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work. VUSSC has repurposed and made available online certificate, diploma and undergraduate degree programmes in Youth Work Development to universities that are

members of the Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work. The University of Venda is a member of the consortium. COL's Education Specialist: VUSSC facilitated sessions on institutional readiness and the Transnational Qualifications Framework at the technical workshop hosted by the partners in London, UK in June 2018.

### COL'S INTERNATIONAL MOOCS

The *Blockchain in Education* webinar series conducted in July 2020 with 91 unique participants involved nominated individuals from partner institutions in five countries, including South Africa.

Recognising the need to improve numeracy skills among youths in the South Pacific region, the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development created a MOOC entitled *Functional Numeracy*. The two course offerings (February and June 2020) saw enrolments from around the Commonwealth, including one from South Africa.

The *Digital Literacy Lab for Educators* MOOC, offered in September 2020, attracted 28 learners from South Africa.

Participants from South Africa benefited from the four blue economy MOOCs offered by COL in 2020–2021 to nearly 6,000 learners across the world.



## Partnerships

Partnerships are fundamental to COL's work. Strategic partnerships allow COL to broaden its reach and engage at global, regional and national levels, while implementation partners support COL's work in communities and institutions across Commonwealth Member States. Partners include multilateral organisations, regional bodies, national governments, government agencies, foundations, civil society organisations, public and private (not-for-profit) institutions and the private sector. COL partnerships assist

in improving and extending teaching and learning services to people in the developing Commonwealth.

COL's partners in South Africa include:

- Department of Higher Education and Training
- SchoolNet South Africa
- University of Cape Town
- University of Fort Hare
- University of Pretoria
- University of South Africa



## Looking Ahead: 2027

Most Member States will accelerate efforts to address the learning deficit that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused. They will also need innovative solutions to achieve the targets of SDG4 by 2030. COL's experience shows that ODL, OER and TEL can be leveraged to increase access to quality education, skills development and lifelong learning at lower costs. COL will provide support to ministries and institutions to develop enabling policies, build resilient systems and enhance human resource capacity for formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Going forward, COL will:

- i) build on its expertise in ODL, OER and TEL to play a more influential role in national policy development and implementation;
- ii) invest in innovations and research;
- iii) support the digital transformation of institutions and organisations;
- iv) develop skills for employment and entrepreneurship; and
- v) promote gender equality.

## PCF9 Edinburgh Statement

Forum partners from over 60 countries believe that it is possible to significantly accelerate progress towards the aim and targets of SDG4 by prioritising the following collective actions now:

### 1. **Accomplishment at scale**

Mobilise an emergency response to ensure that all children in the Commonwealth, including girls, learners with different abilities, and learners from vulnerable and marginalised communities, experience a quality education focused on accomplishment, knowledge exchange and the continued ability to learn;

### 2. **Skills for productive lives**

Urgently create learning opportunities for marginalised, excluded, vulnerable and out-of-school young people to build skills for leading a productive life, embracing technology to enhance employability, entrepreneurship and confidence, and bridging accessible formal, non-formal and informal education;

### 3. **Creating new digital dividends**

Develop new, innovative, flexible modes of education to foster creativity, imagination and peer knowledge exchange, increase reach and ensure no one is left behind, through the use of appropriate media and delivery, including blended approaches to digital learning;

### • **Teachers as skilled agents of change**

Teachers and teacher educators are the main agents of change for quality education and can be supported to catalyse action in their schools, communities and colleges as respected professionals who model lifelong learning.



To do this we propose:

Creating **alternative, flexible and technology-enabled pathways into teaching** to resolve the shortage of skilled and motivated teachers;

Expanding low-cost, highly effective ways to **support school-based teacher professional development** to build change capacity and capability within regional and national educational systems.

### 4. **Positively disrupt higher education**

Support innovation for quality higher education; **strengthen the technology-enabled learning ecosystem** throughout the Commonwealth, including the scope to develop professional skills, recognition, validation and verification of experiential and prior learning through micro-credentialing and blockchain technology; expand the reach of open education for dispersed audiences; and improve barrier-free access to tertiary education.

### 5. **Challenging assessment**

Radically relook at assessment models: build a culture of assessment to support employability and micro-entrepreneurship.

### Our ambition is to achieve this through:

- *Bold, inclusive collaboration;*
- *Bringing together the diverse groups of critical thinkers, innovators and practitioners who can collaboratively make change happen by delivering quality education and lifelong learning for all;*
- *Making greater use of data, evidence and storytelling to galvanise political will for enabling policies and well-resourced implementation plans;*
- *Sustaining the momentum;*
- *Building an active network of learning, support and action, starting now.*
- *Sustaining and building our momentum for change, we aim to bring our key commitments to the fore of the policy agenda through the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and PCF10.*

## LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

COL is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.

VISION: To be the foremost global agency that promotes learning for sustainable development

MISSION: To help governments and institutions to expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using open, distance and technology-based approaches



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May 2021