LEARNING FOR DEVELOPMENT is the theme of the Commonwealth of Learning’s Three-Year Plan for 2012-2015. Through this plan, COL is committed to realising its vision – namely, that of seeing the achievement of human development goals through universal access to learning.

COL helps governments expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using appropriate technologies, particularly those that support open and distance learning. It assists governmental, non-governmental and community partners in developing policy, building capacity, refining models, creating materials and nurturing collaborative networks.
As a small and specialised intergovernmental agency, COL emphasises partnerships in all its activities, collaborating with other Commonwealth bodies and multilateral organisations and NGOs, as well as Commonwealth Governments, fostering communities of practice and nurturing regional bodies.

COL’s two programme sectors, *Education* and *Livelihoods & Health*, embrace seven initiatives that will help governments pursue the twin goals of expanding access to learning and using public funds cost-effectively. *eLearning* and *Gender* are COL’s two cross-cutting themes that underpin and complement all seven initiatives. COL’s programme is also supported by knowledge management and communications services.

While significant progress in achieving the MDGs and Education for All has vastly expanded access to education in Africa, major challenges remain. Through partnerships with institutions in the region, COL is applying its expertise in open and distance learning (ODL) and information and communication technology (ICT) to help address needs in Africa.

[www.col.org/3yp](http://www.col.org/3yp)
EDUCATION

OPEN SCHOOLING: Secondary school places are grossly insufficient to absorb the surge of pupils now completing primary schooling, thanks to progress made in achieving universal primary education. Open schooling is increasingly recognised as a viable solution to the growing demand for equitable access to secondary education, especially for girls and marginalised groups, particularly in remote locations. Governments are seeking to redefine the way that secondary education addresses societal needs, by diversifying the curriculum. This means making available technical and vocational programmes alongside academic offerings – something that open schools are well placed to do.

Throughout the Commonwealth, COL is working with 26 countries to expand open schooling and thereby increase learning opportunities for secondary education, particularly for girls, out-of-school youth and people in remote regions. The initiative has also provided training and produced several studies, action plans and resources, including a Quality Assurance Toolkit for Open Schools and case studies, entitled Open Schooling with Open Educational Resources: Opening doors, creating opportunities, for administrators and policy makers. Recently, open schools in five African countries – Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia – have used the Toolkit to develop institutional quality assurance policies which will lead to greater efficiency and sustainability in open schooling.

COL is strongly advocating the adoption of open schooling systems. It has helped to establish the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA) which includes a consortium of open schools in Africa (Botswana, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia).

African partners are actively involved with COL’s Open Educational Resources for Open Schools (OER4OS) initiative, largely funded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. New OER for 20 secondary courses have been created and are now freely available online. The self-instructional learning materials were developed by educators from Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia. The 100 Master Teachers involved in this training are now providing training to colleagues in their countries.

COL is also helping to develop multimedia capacity among educators at the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) who are sharing their knowledge and skills with open schools in other African countries. As a result, open schools in Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia have developed strategies for integrating digital content.

www.col.org/OpenSchooling
TEACHER EDUCATION: Achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015 requires well-trained teachers of good quality. Governments want to increase teacher supply and improve teacher quality; and COL has a good record of helping them do this. COL’s Teacher Education initiative is focusing on school-based, in-service training models during this three-year period.

COL’s Quality Assurance Toolkit for Teacher Education is freely available on COL’s website – and COL continues to support institutions wishing to adapt this toolkit for use in their institutions.

COL is working with various teacher training institutions in Africa, as well as with the Teacher Education in sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) consortium and with the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, to promote integration of OER in ODL materials and programmes so as to improve the quality of teaching and learning. COL has developed OER for English Language Teaching to support school-based training for teachers working in the higher grades of basic education. This has been implemented in various African countries. The material is also freely available on COL’s website.

Alongside promotion of OER, COL is also supporting institutions in integrating ICTs in the training of teachers, running training workshops in different institutions. COL is also developing modules on ICTs for Teacher Education (ICT4TE) that will be available as OER for use across Africa.

COL continues to address needs of marginalised groups and has worked to support nomadic teachers in Africa, including the development of online and print-based materials for the professional development of multi-grade teachers.

www.col.org/TeacherEducation

HIGHER EDUCATION: COL continues to support policy makers, institutions and leaders in higher education to harness the potential of ODL and technology and so enable them to cope with the combination of increasing demand for higher education, rising costs, diminishing public funding and the need to maintain high quality levels.

The collaborative Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programmes have attracted a cumulative enrolment of over 24,000 students studying through one or more of the participating institutions in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. BOCODOL/Open University of Botswana; Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana; the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN); and the Open University of Mauritius are members. Designed for senior and middle managers working in developing Commonwealth countries, the newly revised courses help developing nations meet the need for professionals who can contribute to economic growth and good governance. The programmes have over 10,000 graduates.

NOUN also offers COL’s Graduate Diploma in Legislative Drafting, which builds capacity in planning and writing laws and policies.

The COL Review and Improvement Model (COL RIM) for effective institutional quality audits is freely available to all institutions and provides a cost-effective approach to quality assurance.

www.col.org/HigherEducation
VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH: Eight African countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Swaziland and Tanzania) are members of a collaborative network of over 30 small states that are part of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). VUSSC was initiated by COL and is now led by an independent Management Committee, with support from COL. Hundreds of educators from Africa have taken part in VUSSC boot camps and online courses. Three of these countries are offering VUSSC developed certificate and degree programmes.

Fourteen courses and programmes are now being delivered by nine institutions in eight Commonwealth small states. In 2013, the first group of VUSSC students graduated with a Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture from the National University of Samoa.

Primarily through online collaboration, VUSSC countries have chosen to focus on creating postsecondary, skills-related courses in areas such as tourism, entrepreneurship, professional development, disaster management, the fisheries industry, port management, construction safety and agriculture. These non-proprietary, digital course materials (OER), which can readily be adapted to the specific context of each country, are used in offering credit-bearing qualifications in post-secondary institutions, strengthening their capacity and outreach. The programmes developed under VUSSC include a Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture for Small States, a Bachelor’s Degree in Business and Entrepreneurship and a Master’s in Educational Leadership.

VUSSC has also developed a Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) to show how qualifications from one region translate to those in another and it has now been mapped against national and regional frameworks including those in use in Africa and the Mediterranean.

www.vussc.info
LIVELIHOODS AND HEALTH

**TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT:**
COL has demonstrated that using ODL and learning technologies can increase access to quality technical and vocational skills development equitably. The role of TVSD in creating a skilled workforce of lifelong learners for the informal and formal economies is constantly challenged by urban-rural and gender divides that exclude large numbers of learners from skills training systems.

COL is working with institutional partners and governments to create contextualised, high-quality models for using educational media and technology in TVSD.

COL is working closely with members of the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa to introduce flexible skills training, challenging TVET teachers, managers and policy makers to change the way they think about how to provide technical and vocational skills training. Thirteen institutions in seven countries are actively involved. Flexible approaches to TVET aim to improve access and quality but also aim to provide young adults – especially women – who left school with a poor secondary education, to provide them with a chance to gain livelihood skills. New courses aimed at providing relevant, flexible skills training for people working in the informal sector have been developed by INVEST Africa partners.

COL is providing training and assisting with the management of ICT infrastructure and the establishment of organisational structures and online communities of practice; in return, the key institutions will help other TVET institutions in their country to expand the reach of their programmes through these flexible and blended approaches.

[www.col.org/TVSD](http://www.col.org/TVSD)

**LEARNING FOR FARMING:** The L3F approach strengthens livelihoods and empowers the poorer sections of rural societies by linking social capital and financial capital with human capital. So far, COL has promoted networking and capacity development in livestock, horticulture and agriculture, leading to higher incomes. It continues to facilitate self-replication and scaling-up so that L3F can reach marginalised communities in many more countries. Under the L3F model, COL is a catalyst in bringing together governments, institutions, civil society, financial institutions and the private sector to build the capacity of the communities through gender-sensitive ODL.

Launched in India in 2003, L3F is established in Kenya, Mauritius and Uganda, as well as in other
countries in Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific. This year, the L3F model has expanded further into three additional countries in Africa (Seychelles and, with the help of additional financial partnership from DFATD, Ghana and Tanzania).

In Kenya, COL is working with partners in the country’s western region to help farmers gain knowledge and access financing in support of poultry keeping enterprises.

In Uganda, COL is working in partnership with Makerere University Agriculture Research Institute Kabanyolo to improve the livelihoods of 6,000 people involved in potato, sorghum and honey-bee farming in the country’s southwest. The farmers are learning about subjects such as pest control, product pricing, market development, loan management and farming practices through radio programmes, mobile phones and a website.

In Mauritius, the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare is using the L3F model to empower women.

Seychelles has adopted L3F as a major strategy for its agricultural extension programme.

Recent studies conducted in Asia and Africa have confirmed the effectiveness of COL’s L3F initiative and the impressive social and financial rates of return for both participants and partners such as financial institutions.

www.col.org/L3Farmers

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES: Communities across the Africa have urgent needs in community health and development, which conventional top-down approaches to education generally fail to meet. COL’s Healthy Communities initiative addresses the gap. By emphasising collaboration, participation and blended and multichannel approaches, the community learning programme model enables better individual and collective responses to local issues – from maternal & child healthcare and HIV/AIDS to teenage depression & suicide, water and sanitation to substance abuse. Healthy Communities pays special attention to issues faced by women and youth in resource-poor areas.
COL's Healthy Communities initiative is working with individuals and groups in thirteen countries in Africa (Cameroon, Lesotho, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia). The initiative works with national and regional partner agencies to build capacities among local communication and development groups using both face-to-face and distance training and mentoring methods. COL builds local capabilities to plan, design and deliver community-based learning and social behaviour change programmes using a participatory and collaborative approach. Community partners assist with research and facilitate active participation by target audiences in design and delivery. Local experts provide subject information and lend credibility. Community leaders and policymakers link local programmes to national priorities, in terms of both inputs and feedback. Media technologies help enable scale, creative approaches and dialogue, e.g. through the use of radio, mobiles, and social media.

New community learning programmes (CLP) in Africa, including operational programmes in Cameroon (breastfeeding), Malawi (maternal & child health), Sierra Leone (water & sanitation) and South Africa (HIV/AIDS, teenage depression & suicide, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse) have been designed through a blended training and mentoring process jointly developed and offered by the East African Community Media Network, the Institute for Media and Society (Nigeria) and the Media & Training Centre for Health (South Africa) and COL in association with Healthy Communities partners around the Commonwealth. Communication for Development (C4D): Why. How. Now. and Research for Planning, the first two courses in the CLP Developer’s Certificate, inaugurated the certificate in 2013-2014.

COL also provides technical advice to Commonwealth governments, institutions and organisation concerning the use of information and communication media to support learning for development.

www.col.org/HealthyCommunities

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

GENDER: COL recognises that the advancement of the goals of gender equality and women’s empowerment is central to its agenda of learning for development. As a cross-cutting corporate goal, gender equality requires that both women’s and men’s views, interests and needs shape its programmes. ODL can be especially helpful in enabling women and girls to access educational opportunities while also fulfilling other responsibilities. COL has a Gender Policy and a Gender Action Plan – and a Gender Microsite provides links to resources and research on gender and ODL and ICT.

www.col.org/Gender
www.col.org/GenderMS
eLEARNING: COL continues to raise levels of digital literacy and expertise in partner organisations, as well as the ICT competencies of teachers, and facilitates the creation of high-quality learning materials made available as open educational resources (OER). COL is also continuing its partnership with UNESCO for the global advocacy of OER and the open licensing of educational materials produced with public funds.

In Ghana and Seychelles, COL is helping to develop a national ICT/OER policy.

COL’s Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration (CCTI) uses ODL to train teachers in how to integrate ICT into school management, teaching and learning. An Instructional Design tool developed by COL is being used in developing countries to create quality courses and learning materials that use best practices in eLearning.

www.col.org/eLearning

REGIONAL PRESENCE

COL maintains strong relationships with many stakeholders in Africa, including member governments, partner institutions, donors and individuals. Six of COL’s Honorary Advisors and Honorary Chairs are from Africa.

In addition to membership on COL’s Board of Governors, the African region is also represented by a network of individuals, selected by member Governments, who liaise directly with COL as Focal Points. In-depth meetings of Focal Points take place once every three years in all four regions of the Commonwealth. These meetings provide an opportunity for Focal Points to share information about the status of ODL in their countries, receive a report on what COL has done in their country and identify education and training priorities COL can support in COL’s next Three-Year Plan. COL creates specific country action plans and country reports to ensure the region’s needs are addressed.

COL also facilitated the establishment of, and continues to support, two regional centres of expertise in ODL:

• The Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDOL), serving West Africa, in partnership with the National Open University of Nigeria, and

• The Southern African Development Community – Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE), in
partnership with the Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL) and the Botswana Ministry of Education.

These regional agencies are developing an inventory of resources and network of expertise, and conducting regional ODL training workshops.

**eLEARNING FOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

UN and international agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF, ILO, the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth Secretariat, The World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank are using COL’s eLearning for International Organisations programme to provide customised communications, programme and data management skills training for their headquarters staff and field-based workers located throughout the world.

[www.col.org/COLeLIO](http://www.col.org/COLeLIO)

**PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING**

COL’s Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning is co-hosted with partners in different regions of the Commonwealth every three years. The programme is designed to explore applications of open and distance learning in widening educational access, bridging the digital and information divide and advancing the social and economic development of communities and nations at large. The Forum’s focus is on topics relating to developing countries and participation of practitioners from these countries.

Officials from nearly all of the Commonwealth countries and others, including many subsidised delegates, explore how open and distance learning can help achieve international development goals and education for all. COL’s Seventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF7) was held in Abuja, Nigeria in December 2013, co-hosted by the Federal Ministry of Education. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was the lead partner institution. The Forum addressed “Open Learning for Development: Towards Empowerment and Transformation” through five themes: “Girls’ and Women’s Education”, “Skills Development”, “Promoting Open Educational Resources”, “Innovation and Technology” and “Institutional Development”.

COL’s Excellence in Distance Education Awards are also presented at the Forum. Several people and institutions from Africa are among the
past award winners. In 2013, in Abuja, COL awarded eight distinguished individuals with the designation, Honorary Fellow of COL. Three of the eight are from African countries. An African institution, the University of South Africa (UNISA), also won an award for distance education materials and an African was recognised for her eLearning experience in difficult circumstances.

www.col.org/pcf
www.col.org/edea

TECHNOLOGY, KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES AND COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA

As a leader in the fast-evolving field of knowledge management, COL continues to develop its internal systems to organise information from its own work and to support partners. COL also maintains an Information Resource Centre and collects ODL news, policies, resources and statistics from large variety of sources. It is also developing directories of open educational resources (DOER), researching the use of OER and mobile devices in education and conducting MOOCs (massive open online courses). In 2013, COL partnered with the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT Kanpur) offering a six-week MOOC on Mobiles for Development. The course attracted 2,255 registrants from 115 countries.

www.col.org/KnowledgeServices

Aptus is COL’s prototype “Classroom Without Walls” system that it is currently testing with a number of partners. Combining low-cost technology and OER, the system facilitates content sharing and learning interaction through WiFi, without requiring internet connections.

www.col.org/Aptus
COL is a firm advocate of creative commons (CC) content licenses through OER and OpenAccess. OER repositories and directory services that COL offers to partners and the public are being enhanced to take advantage of the latest technologies and tagging methods.

www.col.org/oer  http://doer.col.org

COL employs a variety of media to communicate with and provide resources for stakeholders and the wider public. COL’s website, newsletters (Connections/EdTech News and EduComm Asia), journal (Journal of Learning for Development), blog and electronic resources are among the world’s foremost sources of knowledge on ODL. Most of COL’s recent publications are available on CD-ROM; all are available on the COL website.

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