

EXCERPTS FROM:

# COL in the Commonwealth

## 2006–2009 Country Reports

FOR: MALDIVES



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COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

Learning for Development

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# FOREWORD

*COL in the Commonwealth* is a companion text to *Learning for Development*, the Commonwealth of Learning's Three-Year Plan for 2009-2012. This compendium reviews COL's work over the last three years (2006-2009) country by country. Together these two documents are the springboard for the *Country Action Plans* that will guide COL's future activities in each country over the 2009-2012 triennium and ensure that they are consistent with the national priorities of governments.

Ministers were enthusiastic about the previous issue of *COL in the Commonwealth* that was presented to 16CCEM in Cape Town in 2006. That report covered only developing countries whereas this one, at the request of Ministers, covers all members of the Commonwealth, showing also what COL has done in relation to the international development priorities of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. These country reviews are grouped under four regions: Africa (and the Mediterranean), Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

COL tries to create synergy within regions and across the Commonwealth by bringing countries and institutions together in common endeavours. For this reason each grouping of countries begins with a short account of the regional activities which COL has promoted in 2006-2009.

Member States also greatly value COL's Pan-Commonwealth work, which benefits from the unifying characteristics of the Commonwealth such as a common language, similar constitutional and legal frameworks, and a shared commitment to the values of peace, democracy, equality and good government. Some of the Pan-Commonwealth activities and facilities that underpin COL's work in the regions and countries are listed in the next section.

The production of *COL in the Commonwealth 2006-2009* has been an intense collective effort. COL's advanced knowledge management systems have enabled us to exploit fully the information contained in the numerous event reports prepared by staff as they work and travel. I express particular gratitude to Jasmine Lee, for diligently updating the country profiles that provided the raw material for these reviews, and to Judith Mosley, who brought this volume together in an impressively efficient and expeditious manner.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Daniel', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sir John Daniel  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Commonwealth of Learning

# PAN-COMMONWEALTH INITIATIVES



## BACKGROUND

As a Commonwealth inter-governmental organisation, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) has the mandate to operate in all 53 member states. Its work focuses particularly on 46 developing countries across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific. COL also seeks to align its activities with the education and training priorities and the countries of particular concern for major donor agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID).

COL has developed Action Plans in consultation with Focal Points and country partners in the 46 member states, with activities specific to the individual needs of each country. However, several activities have a regional or pan-Commonwealth nature. This section looks at pan-Commonwealth activities.

## QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION

COL provides material and capacity building support for assuring quality in higher education and teacher education in the Commonwealth. A toolkit called the *Quality Assurance for Teacher Education and Development Toolkit* includes *Quality Indicators for Teacher Education* and *Best Practices in Teacher Education*, was launched in December 2007 to be used by Ministries of Education and teacher education institutions.

COL is also developing a quality assurance toolkit for open schools. As a first step towards this, staff members from 14 countries across all Commonwealth regions have been trained in the Quality Assurance of Open Schools. A Quality Assurance Toolkit for Higher Education is nearing completion.

## OPEN SCHOOLS

COL encourages the application of open and distance learning (ODL) to increase access to primary and secondary schooling. In support of this, two publications, *Perspective Series on Open Schools – Open Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup>*

*Century and Handbook for Managers of Open Schools* have been completed with contributions from chapter authors across the Commonwealth. Both publications will be distributed as a resource to policymakers. Other resources which have been developed include the *Evaluation Study on Open Schools* and the *Cost and Financing of Open Schools* as well as a *Learner Support Guide for Open Schools*.

In addressing the need for quality educational resources, COL has initiated the development of Open Educational Resources for Open Schools (OER4OS) in 20 subjects involving six countries. The open educational resources (OERs) will be available to all Commonwealth countries.

## ELEARNING FOR EDUCATION SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

COL has two major and related pan-Commonwealth initiatives in this area: WikiEducator and Learning4Content (L4C).

COL's WikiEducator ([www.col.org/WikiEducator](http://www.col.org/WikiEducator)) provides an online service to support online educational communities. Use of WikiEducator has grown rapidly during the past year with the number of registered users passing the 9,020 mark and number of hits per day now exceeding 247,653. A wiki is a website on which any user can edit and update pages. The best known is the Wikipedia, the biggest encyclopaedia ever produced. Wikis are a part of the emerging "Web 2.0" environment that includes user-contributed works such as YouTube and MySpace.

COL's WikiEducator creates online communities whose members participate from remote locations to create educational content collaboratively and to plan conferences and other events. It is one of the tools used by the Virtual University of Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). WikiEducator is reaching 79 % of countries around the world and COL is now supporting the installation of a French language version.

The L4C initiative aims to build capacity among educators in using WikiEducator to develop free content for education. Training is free and educators "pay" for their training by donating time to develop one free content lesson of their choice. L4C workshops have already been held in 28 Commonwealth countries and at least one face-to-face workshop will be held in each member state. In addition, 26 online workshops have been held and others are scheduled. Commonwealth teachers and educators are thus becoming WikiEducators themselves, developing and donating one free content resource back to the WikiEducator community.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation approved a grant of USD 100,000 to COL over one year as core support for this initiative.

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

VUSSC is a collaborative network of small states that create and share materials for livelihood-related post-secondary programmes. Activities during this planning period have included capacity building and the creation, customisation and reuse of OERs. Quality assurance and cross-accreditation of learning programmes has also been an area of focus.

The VUSSC is a creation of the participating countries and their existing tertiary institutions. It is a collective mechanism for people to develop expertise in online collaboration, eLearning and information and communication technologies (ICTs). It also provides an opportunity for them to produce, adapt and deploy courses and learning materials on selected subjects identified by country Interlocutors and stakeholders.

The model that has emerged is a three-week training and course development workshop at which subject specialists from a subset of the participating states strengthen their information technology (IT) skills and begin to develop course material collaboratively online. Six workshops were held during this planning period:

1. Entrepreneurship and Tourism, hosted in Mauritius in August 2006.
2. Professional Development of Educators, in Singapore in March 2007.
3. Life Skills, hosted in Trinidad & Tobago in June 2007.
4. Disaster Management, in November 2007 in Samoa.
5. The Fishing Industry, in Seychelles in March 2008.
6. The Construction Industry, in The Bahamas in November 2008.

Orientations for the selected team leaders in preparation for the workshops took place in Vancouver six weeks before each workshop.

Senior officials from VUSSC countries met in Singapore in February 2008 to consider, refine and agree mechanisms of a transnational qualifications framework (TQF), the first of its kind. This will allow the 30 participating small states to transfer course materials, qualifications and qualified learners between countries. The South African Qualifications Authority, an organisation of the South African Government with more than twelve years experience in establishing frameworks in South and Southern Africa, helped to prepare a concept document and facilitate the proceedings.

The Ministry Interlocutors for VUSSC met in London in July 2008 to discuss the implementation of the TQF, the establishment of a management committee, the logo and branding of VUSSC, monitoring and evaluation, and copyright issues.

## TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAMMES

COL designs, develops and delivers distance and technology mediated learning programmes for international organisations with a global workforce. During this planning period, COL has developed and delivered a number of new programmes including: Writing Effectively for the International Labour Organization (ILO); World Bank Writing E-mails, Memos and Letters and World Bank Report Writing; and an Operational Data Management Learning Programme for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). These eLearning courses are designed to enhance the skill of staff working in field offices and in headquarters.

## GOOD GOVERNANCE

COL promotes gender equality in all its programmes. Specific gender-related issues are identified during the work-planning process with country stakeholders and addressed through appropriate research, training and materials development.

COL and the Commonwealth Secretariat (ComSec) are working together to develop ODL training materials aimed at promoting good governance and gender equality in the public sector. The work is based on two workshops hosted by ComSec which concluded that there was limited capacity among the majority of policy makers, senior managers and professionals to mainstream gender equality in their daily work. A critical decision was to explore the role of ICTs and ODL in delivering training on a larger scale and to support research on flexible learning opportunities. A status report on what learning materials for gender mainstreaming are currently available to the public service concluded that while there are some materials available online, the current model for accessing the materials is not adequate.

A two-day meeting was convened in July 2008 to deliberate how best COL and ComSec could develop the required content using ODL tools. Invited participants included members of administrative staff colleges and other institutions involved in training public servants such as National Women's Machineries, Commonwealth partner agencies and resource people. The focus for piloting this initiative is Africa in the first instance.

## COL-PROTEIN PROGRAMME

The COL Poverty Reduction Outcomes through Education Innovations and Networks (COL-PROTEIN) programme supports innovative uses of ODL to alleviate poverty in rural areas. In particular, COL-PROTEIN supports initiatives that adapt ODL, ICTs and media to build capacities for community development, for example, in areas such as food security, environmental protection, women's empowerment, micro-enterprise and good governance. Several projects across the regions have already been recipients of a COL-PROTEIN Award.

## PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUMS

More than 500 people from 64 countries and various international organisations gathered in Ocho Rios, Jamaica for COL's Fourth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF4) from 30 October to 3 November 2006. In his closing remarks, Sir John Daniel pointed to three key areas of progress since the Third Pan-Commonwealth Forum in Dunedin, New Zealand in 2004:

1. Better research
2. More participation from developing countries
3. Integration of technology.

COL was grateful to the local hosts of the Forum for ensuring the success of the event, in particular the University of the West Indies' Distance Education Centre, in co-operation with the Caribbean Association for Distance and Open Learning, the Jamaican Association for Distance and Open Learning, the Trinidad & Tobago Distance Learning Association and the Office of Continuing Education and Distance Learning at the University of Technology, Jamaica.

The Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF5) took place in London, UK, in July 2008, with the theme "Access to Learning for Development". It was hosted by COL in collaboration with the University of London, as part of the University's celebration to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of its External Degrees Programme. PCF5 brought together practitioners, researchers, planners and policy makers in the fields of ODL and development to explore the contribution of ODL to international development goals. Over 700 participants from over 70 countries, the majority from the developing Commonwealth, took advantage of opportunities to share experience and expertise, and to contribute to future policy and provision.

## COL NEWS SERVICE & NEWSLETTER

COL customises services provided by Google and Yahoo to provide a news service on ODL and specialised topics. The general news service is available from COL's homepage while the specialised services are available on the appropriate topic pages on the website. The news service is updated approximately every hour.

COL publishes a newsletter, *Connections*, and a companion publication, *EdTech News*, three times per year, designed to provide regular news and information to COL's stakeholders. The publications are distributed in print and electronically directly to 10,000 government officials, ODL and educational technology leaders and practitioners throughout the Commonwealth and beyond. The newsletter offers updates on COL and partner activities; ODL developments, resources and events; and educational technology reviews – all with a “development” focus. It also features an “In Focus” section which highlights a different COL programme in each issue, and periodic editorials as well as “Fair Comment” columns from external sources. It can be found on COL's website at [www.col.org/connections](http://www.col.org/connections).

## COPYRIGHT FOR EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS

COL has worked extensively in the area of copyright in education. The focus of COL's attention is on providing information on how learning resources may be made available at low or no cost by applying the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights Agreement (TRIPS). In early 2009 COL published a book on copyright for educators and administrators titled *Introducing Copyright* which is available on the COL website at no cost.



# Asia

**Bangladesh | Brunei Darussalam | India | Malaysia | Maldives |  
Pakistan | Singapore | Sri Lanka**



# REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

## BACKGROUND

The Asia region comprises eight countries, three in South-East Asia and five in South Asia. Three of them are E-9 countries, that are the most populated in the world: Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

Asia has experienced a phenomenal increase in distance education over the last three decades. India alone has 14 open universities and 14 open schools in addition to over 140 dual-mode institutions serving nearly seven million distance learners. This region has become a natural ally of COL in promoting South-South collaborations, sharing best practice and harnessing low-cost technologies to reach the unreached.

## EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CENTRE FOR ASIA

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), based in India, plans and implements activities in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Maldives, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam and acts as COL's regional office in India. CEMCA is COL's only unit outside of its Vancouver headquarters.

Its basic aim is to develop regional expertise in open and distance learning (ODL) and information and communication technologies (ICTs) as well as organising capacity building in response to identified needs, including providing support to new and emerging institutions in the region. CEMCA has initiated several activities related to the quality assurance of education, teacher education and multimedia materials, working with countries throughout the region. CEMCA is also facilitating regional activities in teacher development, open schools and higher education.

## QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

COL and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), India, co-organised a regional forum on quality assurance in teacher education for policy makers and senior administrators from Ministries of Education responsible for quality in teacher education. Held in Bangalore, India in December 2007, the forum was designed to expose participants to the various quality assurance practices and to the modalities of addressing challenges related to policies and practices for quality assurance in the professional development of teachers.

## ICTs FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

CEMCA hosted a regional expert roundtable on Improving Existing Understanding of Contexts and Conditions in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for Women's Empowerment. The meeting was

held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in collaboration with the Centre for Women's Research in December 2006. The publication produced by the meeting is available.

## SUPPORTING GENDER FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

COL is working with partners to develop a toolkit for Gender Friendly Schools, which includes indicators and guidance on how to develop them for primary and secondary schools. The initial focus of the activity is South Asia. In March 2008, COL, along with the Commonwealth Secretariat (ComSec) and the Commonwealth Foundation convened a roundtable in Bangalore, India with several institutions and participants from across South Asia. The result of the workshop was a set of draft indicators for school management committees, parents, schools and students. These indicators were then field tested with groups in both Bangladesh and India. A second workshop was held in November, 2008.

## REGIONAL FOCAL POINTS MEETING

The first Regional Focal Points Meeting for the Asia and Pacific regions was co-organised by COL and the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, and was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in October 2008. These meetings are planned to take place every three years. At the 2008 meeting, each participant reviewed, on behalf of their country, the progress that had been made so far in COL's current Three-Year Plan 2006-2009, provided feedback on COL's planning processes and gave concrete inputs for developing the next Three-Year Plan 2009-2012. The meeting also provided a valuable opportunity for networking, facilitating future inter-country collaboration. As part of the event, the group visited the Open University Malaysia and Universiti Tun Abdul Razak.

## REGIONAL PUBLICATIONS

CEMCA regularly highlights best practices and innovative developments in technology for development and ODL in their quarterly publication, *EduComm Asia*.

COL also has regional brochures which summarise its activities in each of the four regions of the Commonwealth. These can be found on COL's website at: [www.col.org/regional](http://www.col.org/regional).



# MALDIVES

**COL Focal Points:** **Mr. Hamid Sodique (2006-2007)**  
**Mrs. Khadeeja Adam (2006-2007)**  
**Dr. Ali Fawaz Shareef, Centre for Open Learning (current)**  
**Mr. Ahmed Yasir, Ministry of Education (current)**

## BACKGROUND

Maldives is an archipelago with a small population dispersed across far-flung islands and atolls. As a result, the country faces particular development challenges and is benefiting immensely from the further expansion of distance learning. While adult literacy is high and the education system is well-developed and effective, there is an urgent need to develop an innovative student support system which will reach out to learners located in remote areas. Maldives is a contributor to COL's budget.

## SUMMARY

The quality of school education was of primary importance to the then Minister of Education, the Honourable Mrs. Zahiya Zareer, and has continued as a priority during this triennium. The Minister was nominated as the Asian representative on COL's Board of Governors and is also a member of the Advisory Council of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA). Maldives is an active player in the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). This is developing the capacity of individuals as well as supporting the strengthening of the Centre for Open Learning at the Maldives College of Higher Education.

CEMCA has trained Maldives professionals in the development of multimedia content and is working on an internet radio option for reaching the unreached islands. Under the COL Media Empowerment (COLME) project, a multimedia unit was set up at the Ministry of Education and COL supported capacity-building in all aspects of open and distance learning (ODL) and eLearning in support of this facility.

## EDUCATION

### Quality assurance

The first COL-NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council, India) Joint Forum on Quality Assurance in Teacher Education for Policy makers and senior administrators from Commonwealth Asia held in Bangalore, India, in December 2007 was attended by a representative from the College of Higher Education, Maldives.

### Higher education

CEMCA facilitated the participation of a senior educational administrator from Maldives, the Director General, Ministry of Higher Education, Employment and Social Security at a Conference on Higher Education in India in September 2006. Such support enables ODL practitioners and professionals in higher education from the Maldives to attend professional development programmes in the region.

Participants from the Maldives were among 20 from five South Asian countries who received training at a workshop organised by CEMCA on “ODL for differently abled teachers” at Indira Gandhi National Open University in December 2007.

### eLearning for education sector development

Maldives was represented at the regional expert roundtable organised by CEMCA in collaboration with the Centre for Women’s Research in December 2006 in Sri Lanka, to develop knowledge resources focussing on the contexts and conditions of the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for women in the Asian region.

COL organised a one-day workshop on Video Production and e-Content in May 2007, which enabled participants from new ODL institutions to have hands-on training in the production of video programmes and their subsequent modification into eLearning material. Four participants from the Educational Development Centre, Maldives, attended the workshop at the Educational Multi-media Research Centre Indian Institute of Technology (EMMRC IIT) campus Roorkee, India.

Maldives is one of the countries included in the South Asia node of the Global Distance Education Network (GDENet). CEMCA continues to highlight ODL best practice in Maldives through its quarterly publication *EduComm Asia*. The article *Making Waves in Telecommunications - Maldives* was published in the March issue.

## LEARNING FOR LIVELIHOODS

### Learning and skills for livelihoods

Participants from five countries including one from the Educational Development Centre, Maldives attended a review workshop on the Livelihoods Skills Activities of COL in South Asia, held in Chennai in February 2007.

CEMCA organised a workshop in June 2008 on EasyNow software for faculty members, electronic media personnel and computer literate people in Maldives, with a view to trialing a distance education course in Tourism using the software.

## **Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)**

Maldives is an active member of VUSSC. During 2006-2009, activities have included capacity building and the creation, customisation and reuse of open educational resources (OERs). Quality assurance and cross-accreditation of learning programmes have also been a focus area during this period. Participants from the Centre for Open Learning, the Maldives College of Higher Education and Iskandar School attended five of the six training and course development workshops that took place.

A delegate from the Ministry of Higher Education participated in the officials meeting in Singapore regarding the development of a transnational qualifications framework (TQF).

Maldives is also an active partner in the management of the VUSSC. The Interlocutor for Maldives, from the Centre for Open Learning is a member of the VUSSC Management Committee. A member of the TQF Management Committee is also from Maldives.

## **Transnational programmes**

Five staff members of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies based in Maldives were trained in Writing Effectively through a tutor-mediated eLearning COL course.

## **Educational use of mass media and ICTs**

COL, through COL Media Empowerment (COLME) programme, worked with the Educational Technology Unit (ETU) in the Ministry of Education to increase the Unit's multimedia capacity to deliver quality learning to all education sectors of the country. COL upgraded the digital video editing technology and capacity at ETU in December 2006 and provided an audio library to enhance productions. COL has made an assessment of the activity to date with the Unit.

## **OTHER ACTIVITIES**

### **Pan-Commonwealth Forum**

COL's Fourth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning, held in Ocho Rios, Jamaica from 30 October to 3 November 2006 was attended by one of the COL Focal Points for Maldives and a representative of the Ministry of Higher Education.

### **Regional Focal Points meeting**

The Regional Focal Points meeting for the Asia and Pacific regions held in Kuala Lumpur in October 2008 was attended by one of the COL Focal Points for Maldives, from the Ministry of Education.

### **Appointments**

The Honourable Mrs. Zahiya Zareer, the then Minister of Education was appointed Regional Representative for Asia on COL's Board of Governors in July 2008 and has also accepted COL's invitation to be a member of the CEMCA Advisory Council. Mr. Ahmed Ali Didi, the Deputy Minister of Education, represented The Honourable Zahiya Zareer, at the 7<sup>th</sup> CEMCA Advisory Council Meeting in New Delhi in December 2007. Mr. Ahmed Shafeeu,

Director-General, Ministry of Education represented the Honourable Minister of Education at the 8<sup>th</sup> CEMCA Advisory Council Meeting in New Delhi in December 2008.

## LOOKING FORWARD

In the next triennium, Maldives is set to continue its full participation in COL's initiatives in the country as well as expanding its role in the region and beyond through membership of the Board of Governors. The Maldives already takes an active role in VUSSC activities and management which will help the VUSSC achieve its goals during this period. COL will work with partners in the Maldives to further extend ODL and learner support throughout the country.