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The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is proud of its strong country focus. While COL strives to achieve synergy in its programme across the whole Commonwealth, it also considers itself accountable for its work in each Member State. COL in the Commonwealth reviews COL’s work over the last two years (2009-2011) country by country.

At the beginning of the 2009-2012 triennium a Country Action Plan was developed to guide COL’s activities in each country and ensure that they were consistent with the national priorities of the government. These reports describe the implementation of these plans. Final versions of these reports will be presented to the 18th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (18CCEM) at the end of the triennium in 2012.

Ministers were enthusiastic about the previous issue of COL in the Commonwealth that was submitted to 17CCEM in Kuala Lumpur in 2009. At the request of Ministers these reports cover all Member States of the Commonwealth, showing not only what COL has done in the developing countries but also how its work relates to the international development priorities of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The reviews are grouped under four regions: Africa (and the Mediterranean), Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific. The reports for each group of countries begin with a short account of the regional activities which COL has promoted in 2009-2011.

Member States also 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 2009-2011 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 Karen Speirs, who brought this volume together in an impressively efficient and expeditious manner.

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) operates in all 54 member states, with a particular emphasis on 47 developing countries across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

COL’s Three-Year Plan was developed after consulting widely in the Commonwealth. It focuses specifically on the expressed needs of Member States and the imperative of progressing the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All, within the context of its own mission and mandate.

COL’s vision of “Access to Learning is the Key to Development” encapsulates both strategy and outcome. For example, COL harnesses the potential of open and distance learning (ODL) to bring lifelong learning for farmers (L3F) in an effort to mitigate the challenge of poverty and food security (MDG 1). As more countries achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE), they seek to provide access to secondary education. Since existing institutions are unable to cater to this massive surge, COL initiated the Open Educational Resources for Open Schools project as a response (MDG 2). COL uses community media to promote mother and child health goals (MDGs 4 and 5) in countries such as India, Kenya and Malawi.

COL also focuses on four Education for All goals – access to primary education, gender equality, quality education, and learning and life skills for young people and adults – through teacher training, gender mainstreaming, quality assurance and skills development respectively.

The approach has been to work within the framework of the COL Logic Model 2009-12 but to also be flexible and responsive enough to cater to new and specific needs as they occur.

COL develops Country Action Plans for Member States based on discussions with country Focal Points and partners. These dynamic documents are updated regularly and incorporate requests from countries over the course of the triennium. They will be presented as Country Reports, which document COL’s work in each country, to the Commonwealth Education Ministers, when they meet in Mauritius in 2012.

A number of COL activities span the Commonwealth. This section outlines these pan-Commonwealth initiatives.

EDUCATION

“OER FOR OPEN SCHOOLS”

COL’s “OER for Open Schools” initiative involved working with partners at open schools in six countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Seychelles, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia) to create open educational resources (OER) for 20 secondary level courses. The OER will be freely available for download, adaptation
and use, resulting in a substantial contribution to open schooling globally. COL provided extensive training to “Master Teachers” in each country, helping them build their skills in developing OER in both print and eLearning versions. “OER for Open Schools” was funded in part by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

COMMONWEALTH OPEN SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

COL supports the expansion of ODL to meet the growing need for primary and secondary education, as well as lifelong learning. As part of COL’s initiative to establish and strengthen open schools, COL assisted in the establishment of the Commonwealth Open School Association (COMOSA), which involves partners from every region of the Commonwealth who have signed the COMOSA constitution.

The COMOSA website was launched at the first Annual General Meeting in Delhi in November 2010, and COMOSA’s activities for the next three years were identified as Research, Gender and Vocational and Technical Education. A COMOSA workshop on “Research in Open Schooling” was held in Delhi, India in November 2010, and a Research Agenda with ten areas was adopted.

OPEN SCHOOLING

Representatives from more than 20 countries took part in a COL workshop on copyright and open educational resources (OER) in Delhi in November 2009.

The Quality Assurance Toolkit for Open Schools was launched during the Sixth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF6) in Kochi, India in November 2010. The Toolkit will be used in all the countries affiliated with COMOSA to develop their institutional Quality Assurance frameworks. Copies of the Toolkits were made available to the delegates at PCF6.

CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

The UNICEF-COL Child-Friendly Schools initiative is mainstreaming “child first” concepts, principles and models into the pre-service and in-service teacher education curricula in eight Commonwealth countries. COL is working with partner teacher training institutions to develop Child-Friendly Schools learning materials and to provide capacity building workshops.

BUILDING CAPACITY IN MULTIGRADE TEACHING

A Consultative Meeting, the first phase of the Capacity Building Programme on Multigrade Teaching for Teachers in Selected Commonwealth Countries (Belize, Maldives, Namibia, Samoa and Solomon Islands), was held in Honiara, Solomon Islands in June 2010. The capacity building initiative aims to strengthen the current work of the Commonwealth Secretariat and COL on multigrade teaching through the design and implementation of a programme to support teachers, using ODL strategies.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

COL provides leadership in quality in ODL. COL’s quality microsite (www.col.org/quality) provides a single convenient online access point to quality assurance resources in ODL. This includes access to COL’s Quality Assurance Toolkits for open schools, higher education and teacher education.

The COL Review and Improvement Model (COL RIM) provides higher education institutions with a “do-it-yourself” approach to institutional quality audits. COL developed COL RIM as a cost-effective approach that focuses on self-assessment and helps institutions improve internal quality assurance, planning and systematic institutional improvement. The COL RIM package, consisting of a conceptual framework and handbook, is freely available from COL.
COMMONWEALTH EXECUTIVE MBA/MPA

COL’s Commonwealth Executive Master of Business Administration and Master of Public Administration programme is designed for part-time study by busy working professionals, in response to the growing demands for post-graduate level education in business and public administration. The CEMBA/MPA programme is offered at partner institutions in Bangladesh, Ghana, Guyana, Jamaica, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka.

LEGISLATIVE DRAFTING PROGRAMME

COL’s Graduate Diploma in Legislative Drafting builds professional skills through ODL. The programme is currently offered by three partner institutions: the National Open University of Nigeria, the University of the South Pacific and Athabasca University in Canada.

VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY FOR SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH (VUSSC)

VUSSC is a network of 32 small states of the Commonwealth dedicated to expanding access to tertiary education. VUSSC hosted international training and materials development workshops that develop capacity and initiate the development of new courses that are available as OER. Educators and learners can freely access, adapt and re-use VUSSC learning materials.

Originally led by COL, VUSSC is now governed by a Management Committee with representation from all regions of the Commonwealth.

VUSSC members collaborated to develop the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF), a system of accreditation for VUSSC courses that facilitates the movement of courses and learners among states. Through the TQF, VUSSC aims to ensure all open educational resources (OER) created for VUSSSC can be adapted into recognised courses that students can take for credit through educational institutions in small states. The TQF was formally launched in Namibia in May 2010.

VUSSC’s learning portal, launched in 2011, includes an online Learning Management System for learners and educators to access and contribute to VUSSC courses, as well as free online materials and tips for learning online.

LIVELIHOODS AND HEALTH

LIFELONG LEARNING FOR FARMERS

COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme helps rural communities engage in appropriate technology-based open and distance education to improve their livelihoods. While governments face challenges in funding adequate agricultural extension, globalisation is creating increasing competition for poor rural farmers.

Lifelong Learning for Farmers addresses these issues by enabling vulnerable rural women and their families to embrace learning. The programme brings together four key partners: farmers, learning institutions, mobile phone and ICT companies and banks. As farmers gain relevant knowledge from learning institutions via mobile phones and ICT kiosks, banks provide loans to them with greater assurance.

Introduced in southern India in 2004, Lifelong Learning for Farmers has been adapted and introduced in Jamaica, Kenya, Mauritius, Sri Lanka and Uganda.
FLEXIBLE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

COL is helping technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions in Africa expand flexible and blended delivery approaches. By increasing access to quality skills development for young people and adults, COL’s Flexible Skills Development (FSD) programme aims to alleviate poverty. This programme actively targets course development for people working in the informal economy. Through online training, workshops and an online Community Learning Network, COL is helping 11 key TVET institutions in six countries in strengthening capacity to develop new curriculum content to realise the benefits of educational media and technology.

COL is also working with TVET training institutions in the Pacific to develop training courses in basic trades to help meet the skills needs of small island states. COL has worked with partners in the region to develop courses in Small Business, Small Engine Maintenance, Tourism as a Business, Working with Timber and Working with Concrete, as well as Literacy for Basic Trades, which assists students with varying levels of literacy.

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

COL’s Healthy Communities initiative brings together groups working at the local level – media, health agencies, NGOs and community groups – to address health and development challenges through participatory learning programmes. While programmes vary according to local needs, COL’s approach remains consistent:

- Bring together local partners: most often community groups identify health information needs, health agencies provide content and community radio stations broadcast the learning programmes.
- Build capacity: this usually involves radio production skills, which expands the pool of community members who are actively engaged in the programme.
- Provide ongoing support: as programmes mature and partners change, COL will help community learning programmes adjust and continue to grow.

Recent initiatives span the Commonwealth, responding to local health needs.

“TAKING OER BEYOND THE OER COMMUNITY”

“Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity” is a COL/UNESCO joint initiative that promoted the wider use of OER by expanding understanding of OER by educational decision makers and quality assurance experts. The programme involved capacity building workshops in all regions of the Commonwealth, online discussion forums and new OER publications.

COMMONWEALTH COMPUTER NAVIGATORS CERTIFICATE

The Commonwealth Computer Navigators Certificate (CCNC) is an information and communication technology (ICT) literacy course based on the International Computer Driver’s Licence (ICDL) using Open Office on either a Linux or Windows Platform. The high quality training materials are available from COL free of cost.

GENDER

Gender equality is a cross-cutting theme that underpins in all COL’s initiatives. The advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment are central to COL’s agenda of learning for development.
COL looks beyond the arithmetical target of gender parity (equal numbers of males and females in school) to the more challenging goal of gender equality (equality of outcomes). COL’s gender work includes providing gender resources, capacity building in ICT for women and gender research.

E-LEARNING FOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

COL customises eLearning solutions to meet the capacity enhancement needs of international organisations around the world. COL develops and delivers effective training solutions in partnership with the UN and other international agencies. This contract work is performed on a fee-for-service basis with full cost recovery. Course subject matter ranges from effective communication and report writing to operational data management and debt management.

PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING

COL’s biennial Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF) is one of the world’s leading conferences on learning and global development. It brings together people representing educational institutions, governments and development agencies to explore issues related to ODL and development. More than 600 delegates from 70 countries attended PCF6 in Kerala, India in 2010. COL’s Excellence in Distance Education Awards, honouring individual and institutions contributions to ODL, are presented at PCF.

PAN-COMMONWEALTH PARTNERHIPS

COL’s work is supported by networks of advisors across the Commonwealth:

- Focal Points: individuals nominated by the Minister of Education in each country to act as COL’s primary contact.
- Honorary Advisors: eminent ODL professionals from across the Commonwealth are a valuable resource for consultations about COL’s future plans and for Member States seeking advice on ODL.
- UNESCO-COL Chairs: distinguished serving academics who serve in an honorary capacity, complementing the political and administrative role of the Focal Points and Honorary Advisors.

COL KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES

COL’s extensive resources, freely available through its website, include:

- *Connections* newsletter: providing news, commentary and insight about COL’s work and the broader field of ODL and development ([www.col.org/connections](http://www.col.org/connections))
- Blog: timely news and comment from COL ([www.col.org/blog](http://www.col.org/blog))
- Publications: research, books, toolkits and other publications commissioned by COL ([www.col.org/publications](http://www.col.org/publications))
- Knowledge Finder: an index of documents about ODL and international development from quality-assessed external sources ([www.col.org/kf](http://www.col.org/kf))
- Country information: This online database provides access to information related to ODL from all Commonwealth countries ([www.col.org/CountryInfo](http://www.col.org/CountryInfo))
- Videos: reports from events and insight into COL’s work ([www.col.org/videos](http://www.col.org/videos))
• Course materials, gender microsite, quality assurance microsite, speeches and other resources (www.col.org/resources)

• Governance and financial information: including Board minutes, financial statements and the President’s quarterly reports to the Board (www.col.org/GovInfo)
PARTNER COUNTRIES

Australia | Canada | New Zealand | United Kingdom
BACKGROUND

COL has been based in Vancouver, Canada since it was established in 1987 and the Canadian government offered to host it in British Columbia. Of 36 COL staff, 27 are Canadians or Permanent Residents of Canada. COL President and CEO Sir John Daniel is a former President of Laurentian University in Ontario, Canada.

Canada is a major contributor to COL’s budget and a strong supporter of COL’s activities. As a major donor, COL has a seat on COL’s Board of Governors.

Canada is a host that is rich in resources for COL. Canadian institutions often co-operate with COL to host visitors from the developing world and share experiences and expertise.

Canada delivers support to countries and regions around the world through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). COL is included in CIDA’s Multilateral Programmes Branch, United Nations and Commonwealth Programmes Division.

SUMMARY

COL’s work in 2009-2012 is aligned with CIDA’s goals in many of its countries of focus. COL’s work in both sectors, Education and Livelihoods & Health, supports CIDA’s priorities.

COL enjoys close relationships with several Canadian educational institutions. In this triennium, COL has embarked on a partnership with the University of British Columbia to develop and launch an innovative learning management system for use in developing Commonwealth countries.

Dr. Rory McGreal of Athabasca University, Canada has been appointed as a UNESCO-COL Chair for Open Educational Resources (OER).

CIDA MANDATE AND PRIORITIES

CIDA is Canada’s lead agency for development assistance. CIDA’s aim is to:

- Manage Canada’s support and resources effectively and accountably to achieve meaningful, sustainable results, and
- Engage in policy development in Canada and internationally, enabling Canada’s effort to realise its development objectives.
CIDA’s work is guided by three priority themes:

- Increasing food security,
- Securing the future of children and youth, and
- Stimulating sustainable economic growth.

COL supports CIDA’s work to support access to quality education through its initiatives in open schooling, teacher education, Child-Friendly Schools and the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). CIDA’s focus on child survival, including maternal health, is supported by COL’s Healthy Communities activities in a number of Commonwealth countries. Canada’s efforts to address the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are reinforced by COL’s work in almost all of its programme areas.

COUNTRIES AND REGIONS OF FOCUS

The Government of Canada’s approach is to focus 80 per cent of bilateral resources in 20 countries of focus. These 20 countries were chosen based on their real needs, their capacity to benefit from aid, and their alignment with Canadian foreign policy priorities. The goal is to make Canada’s international assistance more focused, more effective and more accountable.

In Africa, CIDA is working to help the African Union achieve its vision of regional integration and socio-economic growth. CIDA’s work involves food security; specifically, increasing agricultural productivity. CIDA focuses on strengthening the enabling environment and coordinating mechanisms needed for regional integration. CIDA’s countries of focus in Africa include Ghana, Mozambique and Tanzania – all countries where COL has a presence.

CIDA’s Asia programme concentrates on governance, private sector development and health. CIDA places a special emphasis on health and education in South Asia. Promoting gender equality is a cross-cutting theme for all sectors. CIDA’s countries of focus in Asia where COL is engaged in activities in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

CIDA’s Caribbean programme serves 14 countries, including the 12 Commonwealth nations where COL is also active. CIDA focuses on promoting sustainable economic growth in the region through initiatives such as increasing access to employment skills for youth, capacity building in small- and medium-sized businesses and strengthening the management of public financial resources.

EVENTS

Canada participated in COL’s Sixth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in 2010 in a number of ways. Approximately 30 delegates from Canada took part in PCF6, in addition to COL staff. Individuals from Canada presented papers and participated in pre-Forum workshops organised by COL. COL regularly hosts meetings at its headquarters in Vancouver, Canada for team leaders for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) as well as numerous staff members from developing world institutions for training programmes, meetings and consultations.
Open Schooling

As part of COL’s initiative to establish and strengthen open schools, COL assisted in the establishment of the Commonwealth Open School Association (COMOSA). The inaugural meeting of COMOSA was held in Delhi in November 2009. Cindy Gauthier of the Vancouver Learning Network, Canada was one of 30 partners who signed the COMOSA Constitution.

The COL workshop on Copyright and OER was held in Delhi in November, 2009. Cindy Gauthier of the Vancouver Learning Network and open and distance learning (ODL) practitioners from more than 20 countries attended the workshop.

Higher Education

COL’s Graduate Programme in Legislative Drafting was launched at Athabasca University in November 2009. The Programme is attracting students from around the globe who will graduate with the expertise to undertake diverse and challenging drafting responsibilities with proficiency and confidence.

Learning for Farming

In collaboration with the University of British Columbia, Canada, COL has developed a Learning Management System called LIVES (Learning through Interactive Voice Educational Systems). The goal is to provide communities with a learning tool based on voice mails using mobile phones. COL will be able to scale up its interventions because more than a thousand learners can be reached through this system, which can provide automated feedback and can be used to transmit voicemails in any language or dialect. LIVES is being tested with farmers in India and Jamaica.

Healthy Communities

In this triennium, COL has partnered with Ottawa-based Farm Radio International to host scriptwriting contests for educators and media organisations in Africa. Focusing on smallholder farmer innovation and healthy communities, the initiative also provided free eLearning courses on radio scriptwriting. The winning scripts were distributed to several hundred radio organisations in Africa to encourage further use. COL Education Specialist, Community Media, Ian Pringle, sits on the Board of the Community Radio Fund of Canada.

Integrated eLearning

Dr. Roger Powley has developed an Instructional Design Template and conducted two workshops on Instructional Design in Guyana with the University of Guyana and Cyril Potter College of Education, Guyana and with eight TVET institutions in Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia.

Athabasca University’s Dr. Rory McGreal presented at a COL OER workshop in May 2011.

COL GOVERNANCE

As a major donor, Canada has a permanent seat on COL’s Board of Governors. Since 2010, that position has been filled by Janet Ecker, an accomplished business person and former Minister of Finance in Ontario.
ASSISTANCE AND EXPERTISE

Since 2009, COL has hired 104 Canadian consultants to provide expertise and resources to projects across the Commonwealth.

COL works with a range of Canadian partners including universities, organisations and private companies. COL’s partners in Canada include Athabasca University, BCcampus, the Canadian Council on Learning, CIDA, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Royal Roads University, Simon Fraser University, the University of British Columbia, York University, private providers and individual consultants.

LOOKING FORWARD

COL looks forward to continuing its close and fruitful partnership with Canada in 2012-2015. Canada will continue to be a valued sponsor of COL’s activities while also continuing to provide valuable expertise through consultants, the Board of Governors and staff members.
Learning for 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:
Access to learning is the key to development

Mission:
To help governments and institutions expand the scope, scale and quality of learning by using new approaches and technologies, especially those subsumed under the general term of open and distance learning (ODL).