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The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is proud of its strong country focus. While COL works in two programme sectors Education and Livelihoods and Health which cover 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 three years (2009-2012) and captures what we have done in each country.

Following wide consultations with partners, a Country Action Plan was developed at the beginning of the 2009-2012 triennium 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. Earlier versions of these reports were presented to the foreign ministers at the CHOGM 2011 held in Perth in October 2011.

Education 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 2009-2012.

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 2009-2012 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.

Professor Asha S. Kanwar
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 54 Member States, with a particular emphasis on 47 developing countries across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

COL’s Three-Year Plan is 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 goals, within the context of its own mission and mandate.

COL’s vision of “Access to Learning is the Key to Development” informs its work as it helps Member States accelerate progress towards achieving development goals. 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 are presented as Country Reports, which document COL’s work in each country, to the Commonwealth Education Ministers, when they meet at the triennial CCEMs.

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

Open Schooling

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 were officially launched in March 2012 and are 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.

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 Schools Association (COMOSA), which involves partners from every region of the Commonwealth. Twenty-two partners 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.

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.

Forty-one people from 23 COMOSA member countries the COMOSA attended annual general meeting (AGM) in Seychelles in February 2012. Prior to the AGM, an eLearning Maturity Model (eMM) workshop was held for COMOSA members. Participants learned about organisational eLearning capacity and how to use the eMM tool. COL organised an OER and Copyright Policy workshop for Open Schools in Seychelles on 1-2 March 2012. Participants drafted a “COMOSA OER and Copyright Policy” at the workshop. The COMOSA Steering Committee meeting was also held in Seychelles on 1 March 2012 and a launch of the OER for Open School materials was held on 2 March 2012. All member countries have committed to implement the OER policy.

Teacher Education

The UNICEF-COL Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) initiative mainstreamed “child first” concepts, principles and models into the pre-service and in-service teacher education curricula in eight Commonwealth countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka Swaziland and Zambia). COL worked with partner teacher training institutions to develop CFS learning materials and to provide capacity building workshops.

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.

Higher Education

COL provides leadership in quality in ODL. COL’s quality microsite (www.col.org/qualityMS) 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, teacher education and non-formal 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.

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.

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 in Vanuatu and Athabasca University in Canada. Indira Gandhi National Open University, India and the University of Derby, UK have been licensed to offer the programme.

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 VUSSC can be adapted into recognised courses that students can take for credit through educational institutions in small states. The TQF was formally launched in South Africa and 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

Learning for Farmers

COL’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) 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 information and communication technology (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.

**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.

The Flexible Skills Development Online Community Learning Network is a forum for TVET practitioners to discuss the implementation of flexible and blended approaches to TVET delivery. Using social networking software, managers, educators and policy makers can interact and collaborate both regionally and with international experts. Members from Ghana, Kenya, Jamaica, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, St. Vincent & the Grenadines and Zambia are part of the network.

**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 helped community learning programmes adjust and continue to grow.

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

In September 2011, COL hosted a meeting of Healthy Communities partners from 14 Commonwealth countries in Cape Town, South Africa. In addition to sharing best practices and mapping out future plans for COL’s Healthy Communities initiative, the partners made important connections that are already leading to greater “south-south” co-operation. The week-long Cape Town meeting focused on the use of media for non-formal learning about community health and development, particularly in resource-poor settings.

**Intergrating eLearning**

“Taking OER beyond the OER Community: Policy and Capacity” was 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.

COL and UNESCO, with financial support from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, conducted “Fostering Governmental Support for Open Educational Resources Internationally” to raise awareness of OER beyond the communities of practice that had already developed around them. The project involved a survey of governments worldwide and six Regional Policy Forums. This resulted in a 2012 World OER Congress in June 2012 at which the Paris Declaration on OER was adopted by the international community. The Paris Declaration is a commitment to making educational resources developed with public funds freely available for re-use and re-purposing under open licences.

The Commonwealth Computer Navigators Certificate (CCNC) is an 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 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.

COL’s gender microsite (www.col.org/genderMS) provides a single convenient online access point to gender resources in ODL.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

eLearning 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 50 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. COL, the Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria and the National Open University of Nigeria will co-host the Seventh Pan Commonwealth Forum (PCF7) in Abuja, Nigeria in November 2013.

Pan-Commonwealth Partnerships

COL’s work is supported by networks of Focal Points, Chairs and 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)
• Blog: timely news and comment from COL (www.col.org/blog)
• Publications: research, books, toolkits and other publications commissioned by COL (www.col.org/publications)
• Country information: This online database provides access to information related to ODL from all Commonwealth countries (www.col.org/CountryInfo)
• Videos: reports from events and insight into COL’s work (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)
ASIA

Bangladesh | Brunei Darussalam | India | Malaysia
Maldives | Pakistan | Singapore | Sri Lanka
REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

BACKGROUND

The Asian Commonwealth comprises of eight countries: three in Southeast Asia and five in South Asia. Three of them (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan) are among the most highly populated countries in the world.

Open and distance learning (ODL) has proliferated in Asia in recent years. Several of COL’s most important partners are located in the region, promoting south-south collaboration and harnessing the potential of information and communication technology (ICT) to expand learning for development.

COMMONWEALTH EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CENTRE FOR ASIA (CEMCA)

CEMCA is COL’s regional agency in Asia. Based in New Delhi, India, CEMCA plans and implements activities in Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Maldives and Sri Lanka. CEMCA is working on strengthening collaboration with partners in Brunei Darussalam, Pakistan and Singapore. CEMCA develops regional expertise in Open and distance learning (ODL) and information and communication technologies (ICT) in the Asian region and organises capacity building to respond to identified needs. It is COL’s only unit outside of its Vancouver, Canada headquarters.

COL’s regional work in Asia includes the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), open schooling, the Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme, capacity building in multimedia content development, support for the expansion of community learning programmes, promotion of open educational resources (OER) and gender equality. Here are some regional activities facilitated by COL and CEMCA in Asia during 2009-2012. Specific activities in each country are outlined in the individual Country Reports that follow.

EDUCATION

Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)

Brunei and Maldives are members of VUSSC, a collaborative network of 32 small states that is working to develop and share learning materials at the post-secondary level.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore co-hosted the 10th VUSSC Team Leaders Meeting from 11-16 November 2011 and the 10th VUSSC International Training and Materials Development Meeting in Master of Education: Educational Leadership at the National Institute of Education (NIE) from 17 November-2 December 2011.

Open Schooling

COL held a workshop on copyright and open educational resources (OER) in Delhi in November, 2009. Representatives from 10 open schools and education agencies in India attended the workshop, along with
participants from more than 20 countries, where they also held the inaugural meeting of the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA).

A Monitoring and Evaluation workshop was held for the Commonwealth Open Schools Association (COMOSA) members in the Asian Region in Nainital in June 2010.

COL organised the Commonwealth Open Schools Association (COMOSA) Annual General Meeting in Seychelles in February 2012. In conjunction with the COMOSA AGM, COL hosted an eLearning Maturity Model (eMM) workshop and an OER and Copyright Policy workshop for Open Schools where a draft “COMOSA OER and Copyright Policy” was prepared. The launch of the “OER for Open Schools” materials was held on 2 March 2012. As a celebration of the achievement of countries, representatives from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka attended the AGM, workshops and launch.

**Higher Education**

COL’s Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA (CEMBA/MPA) programme, which provides professional development for working adults, is offered by several open universities in Asia including:

- Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Pakistan
- Bangladesh Open University (BOU)
- Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL)
- Wawasan Open University (WOU), Malaysia.

COL hosted a case method workshop in Dhaka, Bangladesh in September/October 2009 for selected faculty members of the CEMBA/MPA to refresh and upgrade their knowledge and skills. Twenty-four people participated in the workshop.

The Academic Board and the Executive Governing Board of CEMBA/MPA both met in August 2010 in Penang, Malaysia.

CEMCA supported a session on Digital Library Quality at the 3rd International Conference on Digital Libraries in Delhi, India in February 2010. CEMCA presented a lead paper on quality assurance in multimedia learning materials (QAMLM) guidelines. The session was attended by about 100 participants and copies of QAMLM guidelines were distributed to them. CEMCA sponsored delegates from India and Pakistan to the conference.

CEMCA conducted a multimedia content development workshop for 40 participants at the Bangladesh Open University from February 5-9, 2011. Participants were trained through all technical aspects of content creation from installing the necessary software to adding multi-media supports to content.

COL and WOU hosted the CEMBA/MPA workshop on case-based teaching in Penang from 29 November-1 December 2011.

**LIVELIHOODS AND HEALTH**

**Healthy Communities**

COL and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) conducted a workshop for community radio and education and development organisations on the sidelines of the AMARC Asia-Pacific Conference in Bangalore, India in February 2010. Participants shared, discussed and applied innovative approaches to developing educational content and programmes. They were made aware of community radio in the Asia Pacific and its potential contributions to local development, education, governance, knowledge and skills. There were discussions and sharing of best practice on using community
media as part of disaster management, climate change mitigation, food security, and advocacy for gender equity. The Bangalore Declaration was passed by the AMARC Asia Pacific general assembly. It is a collective statement of participants’ beliefs and commitments including the use of community radio as a tool for non-formal education and food security.

COL hosted a Healthy Community partners workshop in Cape Town, South Africa in September 2011. The workshop brought together 14 partners from around the Commonwealth, including Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, to further develop the models and approaches that guide COL’s work with non-formal learning using media/mobiles, share experiences of community learning and train each other in the use of useful tools and approaches, and refine strategies and plans for Healthy Communities initiatives in the next Three-Year Plan.

In December 2011, Maraa (a media and arts collective based in Bangalore, India) and the Regional Media Centre of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community worked together with AMARC to plan and run a three-day residential workshop on developing participatory learning programmes for 14 community broadcasting trainers and managers from Asia Pacific at a regional training forum held in Bangkok, Thailand.

**Integrating eLearning**

In association with the Asian Media Information and Communication (AMIC) Centre Singapore, CEMCA supported the participation of experts from Commonwealth Asian countries in July 2010 at New Delhi.

CEMCA organised the post-conference workshop on Community Media and Convergent Media in association with AMIC Singapore and Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) Malaysia in New Delhi in February 2010. Representatives from Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka were sponsored by CEMCA.

COL and UNESCO, with financial support from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, conducted a project “Fostering Governmental Support for Open Educational Resources Internationally” to raise awareness of OER beyond the communities of practice that had already developed around them. The Regional Policy Forum for Asia/Pacific OER and Government Policy was held in Bangkok, Thailand in April 2012. This resulted in a 2012 World OER Congress at which the Paris Declaration on OER was adopted by the international community.

**GENDER**

Gender equality is a cross-cutting corporate goal for COL. The advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment are central to COL’s agenda of Learning for Development. COL is working to ensure it is a model organisation that mainstreams gender in all its processes and at all levels. COL’s Gender micro-site provides Commonwealth countries with a one-stop, comprehensive platform to access print and electronic resources on gender and ODL and ICT.

COL led development of the Gender-Class Empowerment Index, which is based on political, economic, psychological and entrepreneurial characteristics. A study has been conducted in India based on this Index. COL also commissioned a longitudinal assessment of gender in its Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme in Tamil Nadu, India.

**REGIONAL PRESENCE**

COL maintains strong relationships with many stakeholders in Asia, including member governments, partner institutions, donors and individuals. COL’s Honorary Advisors, a network of eminent ODL professionals, includes two representatives from Asia. The region is also represented by a COL Chair,
Professor Chandra Gunawardene of the Open University of Sri Lanka, and a network of individuals, selected by the eight member Governments, who liaise directly with COL as Focal Points. COL creates specific country action plans and country reports to ensure the region’s needs are addressed.

REGIONAL FOCAL POINTS MEETING

The COL Regional Focal Points Meeting (Asia) took place in Penang, Malaysia in September 2011. The meeting is held once every three years. Focal Points share information about the status of ODL in their countries, receive the mid-term report of what COL has done in each country, and identify education and training priorities that COL can support in the next Three-Year Plan, 2012-2015. The key issues identified at the Asia Focal Points Meeting were:

- Lifelong learning,
- Skills development,
- Teacher training in eLearning,
- Open schooling,
- Dual mode provision for universities,
- Mutual recognition of qualifications/credit transfers, and
- Community health and hygiene.

REGIONAL BROCHURES

COL has regional brochures that 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.
BANGLADESH

COL Focal Point: Mr. Md. Nazrul Islam, Office of the Prime Minister

BACKGROUND

Bangladesh has a largely rural population of about 162 million. COL has worked with Bangladesh over the years on numerous projects aimed at advancing open and distance learning in the country. The Bangladesh Government has declared “Digital Bangladesh by 2021”, which includes all secondary education institutions being online by 2013 and primary education by 2015. Bangladesh is a regular contributor to COL’s budget and participates in regional activities, many of them led by COL’s regional agency, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA).

SUMMARY

Professor Dr. R.I.M. Aminur Rashid, Vice Chancellor of the Bangladesh Open University, is a member of the CEMCA Advisory Council.

Bangladesh continues to be centrally involved in many COL initiatives and activities, including Open Schooling and Higher Education, Skills Development and Healthy Communities, with Bangladesh Open University (BOU) and Rupantar, a development communication organisation working with traditional cultural media, in important partnership roles.

EDUCATION

Open Schooling

As part of COL’s initiative to establish and strengthen open schools, COL assisted in the establishment of the Commonwealth Open Schools Association (COMOSA). The inaugural meeting of COMOSA was held in Delhi in November 2009, and the COMOSA Constitution was signed by 22 partners. Professor Dr. Qazi Mohd. Galib Ahsan of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) was invited to the inaugural meeting.

COMOSA held its first Annual General Meeting in Delhi in November 2010. The COMOSA website at http://comosa.org/wordpress/ was launched. COMOSA’s activities for the next three years would include Research, Gender and Vocational and Technical Education. Professor Dr. R.I.M. Aminur Rashid of BOU attended the AGM.

A COMOSA workshop on “Research in Open Schooling” was held in Delhi, India in November 2010. A Research Agenda with 10 areas was adopted and four areas (Curriculum and Course Development, Integration of the Vocational Education with the academic/general education, Gender and Online Learning) were prioritised for the next two years. Prof. R.I.M. Aminur Rashid of BOU attended the workshop.
COL organised the COMOSA Annual General Meeting in Seychelles in February 2012. Forty-one people from 23 COMOSA member countries attended the meeting. The eLearning Maturity Model (eMM) workshop for the COMOSA members was held on 29 February 2012.

COL organised an OER and Copyright Policy workshop for Open Schools in Seychelles on 1-2 March 2012. The face-to-face workshop was preceded by two online workshops. A draft “COMOSA OER and Copyright Policy” was prepared at the end of the workshop.

The launch of the “OER for Open Schools” materials was held on 2 March 2012. As a celebration of the achievement of countries, representatives gave a presentation on a specific topic at the launch.

Dr. R.I.M. Aminur of BOU attended the three events above, namely the COMOSA AGM, eMM workshop, OER and Copyright Policy workshop and the launch.

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 to COMOSA to develop their institutional Quality Assurance frameworks.

BOU participated in three open schooling research studies:
- Online Learning Success Variations/Factors
- Integrating Vocational and Academic Education
- Gender Audit on Open Schooling.

COL sponsored a Gender-Sensitive Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Strategy for Open Schooling Workshop in Maputo, Mozambique in July 2011. One of the purposes of the workshop was to promote understanding and discussion around the role of gender and ICT in Open Schools. Meherun Nesa of BOU attended the workshop.

A Monitoring and Evaluation workshop was held for COMOSA members in the Asian Region in Nainital, India in June 2010. Professor Dr. Md. S. Alam and Professor Dr. R.I.M. Aminur Rashid of BOU attended the workshop.

Md. Anwarul Islam of Bangladesh attended a workshop on Integrating, Vocational and General or Academic Education in Botswana in July 2011.

COL is now working with the Bangladesh Open University’s Open School to help it expand its reach to women and girls.

Higher Education

An international roundtable to showcase COL’s Quality Assurance toolkits was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka in August 2010. About 30 representatives from Australia, Bangladesh, Mauritius, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and several non-Commonwealth countries attended the roundtable, including Professor Dr. Md. S. Alam of BOU.


CEMCA conducted a multi-media content development workshop for 33 participants from Bangladesh and eight from other South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries at Bangladesh Open University in February 2011.
COL sponsored Mohammed Rezwan of Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha to the Cambridge International Conference on Open, Distance and e-Learning in September 2011.

The Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme (CEMBA/MPA) is offered by the Bangladesh Open University. A case method workshop was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh in September-October 2009 for selected faculty members of the CEMBA/MPA to refresh and upgrade their knowledge and skills. Twenty-four participants attended, including representatives of BOU, the University of Dhaka, the University of Chittagong, and the Islamic University.

The Academic Board (AB) and the Executive Governing Board (EGB) of CEMBA/MPA both met in August 2010 in Penang, Malaysia. Professor Dr. A.T.M. Tofazzel Hossain and Professor R.I.M. Aminur Rashid of BOU attended the AB and EGB meetings respectively. Professor Hossain is a member of the Academic Board and Professor Dr. Rashid is a member of the Executive Governing Board.

An online workshop on OER for Revision was conducted for CEMBA/MPA partners in April 2012. Mostafa Azad Kamal, Mohammad Zahir Raihan, Dr. Md. Serazul Islam and Md. Asaf-Ud-Doula of BOU were nominated for the programme.

LIVELIHOODS & HEALTH

Skills Development

A four-day workshop was held in Khulna, Bangladesh in December 2009 in partnership with Rupantar. Swapan Guha, co-CEO Rupantar; Rafiqul Islam Khokan, co-CEO Rupantar; Liaqat Ali, Editor and Publisher of Pubanchal newspaper; Pallabi Dey, CCD Rajshahi; Saifuddin Sobuj, Rupantar; Sabrina Sharmin, RDRS, Rangpur and 16 participants from civil society organisations who have been granted an initial letter of intent for grant of community radio attended the workshop. The objective of the workshop was to develop Rupantar as a key facilitator for community radio stations in Bangladesh and to encourage potential community radios to develop a content bank in preparation for launching their stations.

CEMCA co-sponsored a four-day workshop in September 2010 at the Jadavpur University Community Radio Station (JUCR), Kolkata, India for 14 participants from Bangladesh. They included partners from NGOs and civil society organisations who are in the process of setting up community radio stations. The workshop gave firsthand exposure to practical aspects like studio design, location and orientation of antennae.

CEMCA facilitated a workshop on Community Radio Station Management and Sustainability Measures for Functional Stations at Radio Mahananda 98.8 FM, Chapai-Nawabgonj, Bangladesh from 28-30 March 2012. Twenty-one participants from nine community radio stations attended the workshop, which was jointly organised by Rupantar and Radio Mahananda 98.8 FM.

In collaboration with Dhaka Ahsania Mission, COL is developing 5 new skills training courses for non-formal skills development. A needs analysis was carried out to identify the most appropriate subjects. The course materials are in print and video and will be broadcast on television. The courses will be offered through different NGOs in the country.

Healthy Communities

Rupantar is a key partner in developing capacity in 15 agencies that are establishing community radio stations and services. COL and Rupantar signed a memorandum of understanding in July 2010 to establish a formal basis of cooperation to promote culturally appropriate development communication and open and distance learning with a focus on community-based non-formal education and learning for healthy communities and sustainable livelihoods.
COL and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) conducted a workshop for community radio and education and development organisations on the side lines of the AMARC Asia-Pacific Conference (20-23 February 2010, Bangalore, India). Participants shared, discussed and applied innovative approaches to developing educational content and programmes. They also learned new awareness of community radio in Asia-Pacific and its potential contributions to local development, education, governance, knowledge and skills in using community media as part of disaster management, climate change mitigation, food security and advocacy for gender equity. COL sponsored Mr. Rafiqul Islam Khokan of Rupantar to the workshop and conference.

A training course on Theatre for Community Development was conducted in March 2011 at Rupantar Conference Hall, Khulna. Fourteen executive directors, directors and other decision makers attended on the first day. Twenty-nine participants from 15 organisations participated in the second phase over seven days.

COL facilitated a five-day workshop in programme development skills in December 2010. The workshop was divided in two parts:

1) Training of trainers from Rupantar
2) Training of multi-sectoral groups from four communities in community learning programme development skills, led by the Rupantar facilitators. The participants included representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, non-governmental organisations, Rupantar and community media. A guidebook based on the workshop process was produced and distributed to the participants after the workshop.

Following the workshop, 32 people (eight from each of the four participating organisations) developed community learning programmes on health from four districts: Kurigram, Barguna, Chapai Nawabganj and Bagerhat under the theme of Maternal Healthcare. One of the organisations, Agriculture Information Service of the Ministry of Agriculture, is developing a community learning programme on boro paddy about rice farming in saline areas in Bangladesh.

Rupantar participated in the Healthy Community partners’ workshop to review and plan COL’s programming, held immediately prior to the Sixth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Opening Learning (PCF6) in Kochi in November 2011, and also participated in the COL-UNESCO Seminar, Learning from Community Media, as well as PCF6’s Community Development theme. Mr. Rafiqul Islam Khokan and Dr. Rezaul Haque of Rupantar attended.

CEMCA is working with the Development Research Network (D.Net) in Bangladesh to help local organisations use open and distance learning (ODL) technologies for health. A four-day introductory workshop on Learning4Content-WikiEducator and CEMCA’s EasyNow platform, organised by DNet with technical and financial support from CEMCA, was held in Dhaka in December 2009. Fourteen participants were trained in the use of WikiEducator and EasyNow to create content on local health practices and indigenous knowledge. (www.wikieducator.org/L4C_Dhaka)

CEMCA conducted a follow-up multimedia content development workshop on health-related issues using indigenous knowledge and practices using Easy Now in December 2010 in Dhaka. Participants created a digital resource on medicinal herbs. http://www.ik.org.bd/?page_id=42

A workshop on Using Internet to Deliver Audio Content was held in June 2011 at Caritas Development Institute, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Representatives from the government, community groups and media attended the workshop.

Sumon Frances Gomes of Rupantar attended COL’s Healthy Communities partners’ workshop in Cape Town, in September 2011. The workshop brought together 14 partners from around the Commonwealth to further develop the models and approaches that guide COL’s work with non-formal learning using media/mobiles, share experiences of community learning and train each other in the use of useful tools and
approaches, and refine strategies and plans for Healthy Communities initiatives in the next Three-Year Plan.

CEMCA facilitated a workshop on Developing e-content at Rupantar Training Centre from 31 March-2 April 2012. The workshop introduced participants to the Easy Now Package and Wikipedia where they were introduced to creating content in multiple media. Twenty participants from Amader Gram, Khulnanews.com, UNICEF-Khula, Agriculture Information Service, Bangladesh TV, Radio Chilmori and Rupantar attended the workshop.

**Integrating eLearning**

COL and UNESCO hosted two open educational resources (OER) capacity building workshops. These workshops form part of a series organised within a COL-UNESCO initiative, “Taking OER beyond the OER community: Policy and Capacity”. The first workshop was for Heads of Commonwealth Universities on 28 April 2010 in Cape Town, South Africa. The intent of the workshop was to alert university leaders to the potential of OER to facilitate the expansion of quality higher education and to receive feedback from them on policy issues relating to the use of OER in universities. Professor Dr. R.I.M. Aminur Rashid of BOU attended the workshop.

CEMCA, in collaboration with Wawasan Open University, conducted a four-day “Train the Trainers” workshop on Advanced EasyNow in Penang, Malaysia in June 2010. Farha Sharmin and Naimul Haque Joarder of D.Net attended the workshop.

**OTHER ACTIVITIES**

The Sixth Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF6), jointly organised by IGNOU, India and the Commonwealth of Learning, was held in Kochi, India from 24-28 November 2010. The theme of the Forum was “Access and Success in Learning: Global Development Perspectives” with four sub-themes, namely: Social Justice, Community Development, Skills Development and Formal Education. COL organised 18 pre-conference meetings and workshops.

Over 600 delegates from more than 50 countries attended PCF6. COL sponsored over 250 delegates to the Forum including Dr. Zobaido Akhter, Md. Anwarul Islam, Sharker Md. Numan, Professor Dr. R.I.M. Aminur Rashid and Sabina Yeasmin of BOU; Abu Nasar Md. A. Rahman of Bangabanndhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University; and Dr. Rezaul Haque and Rafiqul Islam Khokan of Rupantar.

Professor Aminul Islam of Bangladesh was made an Honorary Fellow of the Commonwealth of Learning at PCF6 in Kochi, India.

**eLearning for International Organisations**

COL customises eLearning solutions to meet the capacity enhancement needs of international organisations around the world. Learners from Bangladesh were involved as follows:

- Two learners took the UNHCR Writing Effective course in 2009,
- One learner took the World Bank Effective Writing course in 2009,
- Three learners took the World Bank Organization Effective Writing course in 2010,
- Seven learners took the International Labour Organization Effective Writing course in 2010,
- Two learners took the UNHCR Writing Effective course in 2010,
- One learner took the World Bank Writing Effective course in 2010,
- Two learners took the World Bank Writing Effective course in 2011,
- One learner took the UNHCR Writing Effective course 2011, and
- Three learners took the UNHCR Operational Data Management course in 2011.
LOOKING FORWARD

COL develops Action Plans for each country, based on national priorities and its own mission and mandate. This is done through a consultative process. One such opportunity is the triennial Focal Points meeting at which the COL Focal Point is requested to consult with in-country partners and identify the key priorities that COL can support over a three-year period. The areas identified by Bangladesh for 2012-2015 are:

- Developing teachers’ capacity to create subject-based content for use in a multimedia classroom,
- Bringing general education under the ODL umbrella,
- Content development under PPP model,
- Awareness campaign of ICT in education, and
- Centralised multimedia content development and online broadcasting.
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).