



Commonwealth Secretariat Board of Governors

May 2008

Report of the Commonwealth of Learning

Background

1. Created by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1987, COL is the only international, intergovernmental organisation that focuses exclusively on enhancing access to education, training and learning through the use of information and communications technology (ICTs) and open/distance learning.
2. COL works with governments and institutions to expand the scope, scale and quality of learning in support of development. It assists partners in developing policy, strengthening systems, building capacity, refining models, creating materials and nurturing collaborative networks.
3. Starting from Amartya Sen's definition of development as freedom, COL considers that knowledge is the royal road to freedom and that expanding human learning is central to development. However, because conventional teaching methods cannot address the scale and scope of the challenge, it is vital to harness a range of educational technologies to promote learning for development.
4. To guide its work, COL uses a framework for development that blends the Millennium Development Goals, the Dakar Goals of Education for All and the Commonwealth values of peace, democracy, equity and good governance.
5. As a small and specialised intergovernmental agency, COL emphasises partnerships in all its activities, collaborating with multilateral organisations, fostering communities of practice and nurturing regional bodies.

Uganda CHOGM

6. COL marked the 20th anniversary of its creation at the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) in Kampala, Uganda in November 2007.
7. COL's report to CHOGM, *Towards a Commonwealth of Learning: Twenty Years of Progress*, shows how COL has contributed to the achievement of the goals and aspirations expressed by Heads of Government at their biennial meetings held over the last 20 years. The report was presented to CHOGM's Foreign Ministers' Committee by His Excellency, the Hon. Burchell Whiteman, O.J., Acting Chair of COL's Board of

Governors, COL's President Sir John Daniel and Vice-President, Professor Asha Kanwar.

8. CHOGM's Final Communiqué issued after the closing ceremony included one paragraph that dealt directly with COL:

83. Heads of Government expressed satisfaction with the achievements of COL in the 20 years since its creation by the 1987 Vancouver CHOGM. They commended COL's focus on the development agenda in its 2006-2009 Plan, Learning for Development, and progress in implementing the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, in which 29 countries are participating. Heads of Government requested COL to support member countries in enhancing access to quality higher education, encouraging member governments to enhance their contributions, as appropriate, to the budget of COL to enable it to carry out these programmes.

COL's Three-Year Plan, 2006–2009: Learning for Development

9. After consulting extensively with stakeholders across the Commonwealth, COL developed its strategic plan for 2006–2009, *Learning for Development*, and it was endorsed by Ministers of Education at their 16th triennial conference in Cape Town in December (16CCEM). The Plan targets a Cdn\$12 million annual budget by 2008-2009. The 2006–2009 Plan sharpens the focus of COL's work by using an operational framework defined by sectors and results. It breaks the international development agenda into three broad sectors and identifies five initiatives in each sector as follows:

Education Sector

- Quality Assurance;
- Teacher Development;
- Open/Alternative Schooling;
- Higher Education; and
- eLearning for Education Sector Development.

Learning for Livelihoods

- Learning and Skills for Livelihoods;
- Rural and Peri-Urban Community Development;
- National and International Community Development;
- Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth; and
- Transnational Programmes.

Human Environment

- Gender and Development;
- Health, Welfare and Community Development;

- Environmental Education;
 - Good Governance; and
 - Educational Use of Mass Media and ICTs.
10. In each sector, in the light of individual country needs, COL seeks results in the form of policies, systems, and models and materials, defining outputs, outcomes and impacts for its work with appropriate performance indicators. These are summarised in the Corporate Logic Model annexed to this report.
(www.col.org/colweb/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/docs/COL_Logic_Model.pdf)
11. COL achieves impact by promoting powerful models for applying technology to learning. In 2006-2009 it will help countries create wider access to schooling, improve the health of their citizens, increase farmers' incomes, and link learning to better livelihoods. Continuing analysis and refinement of these models ensure that they can be transferred intelligently from one country to another. COL empowers governments, institutions and individuals to develop learning systems themselves without always relying on donors. The new Plan extends that process of empowerment.
12. Work and consultations have begun toward the development of COL's next Three-year Plan, which will be presented to Education Ministers when they meet in Kuala Lumpur in June 2009.

Funding

13. COL's core budget comes from voluntary contributions of Commonwealth member states. The six largest donors are Canada, India, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa and the United Kingdom but COL much appreciates the financial support that it receives from all contributing Commonwealth countries. Last year, in part due to increased efforts directed at Governments that had not contributed recently, 38 countries made voluntary contributions for the year ending 30 June 2007, up from 27 during the previous year (2005/2006). So far this fiscal year (2006/2007), we have received contributions from 33 countries.
14. So far COL is on target to achieve the Cdn\$12 million budget approved by 16CCEM by the end of the triennium. COL is also attracting increased partnership funding from external sources, most recently the Hewlett Foundation and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, but core funding from Commonwealth governments is still vital. Education Ministers (16CCEM) have urged all Commonwealth member governments to renew or increase their financial support to enable COL to continue its strong contributions towards *Learning for Development*, and Heads of Government (Uganda CHOGM) are "encouraging member governments to enhance their contributions, as appropriate, to the budget of COL to enable it to carry out these programmes."

Examples of COL's work

15. COL's purpose is to help Commonwealth governments and institutions use a variety of technologies to improve and expand education, training and learning in support of development. COL has a particular focus on open and distance learning (ODL) because it has proven its cost-effectiveness in many countries through economies of scale, country-wide geographical reach and flexibility.
16. The following examples of COL's work are arranged by Commonwealth region although many of them are carried out in countries in several or all regions.

Asia

17. COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3 Farmers) programme (www.col.org/L3Farmers) takes aim at the fundamental Millennium Development Goal of poverty reduction. The programme began in India (Tamil Nadu) and is now being transferred to Jamaica, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka. The simple but effective L3 Farmers model starts at the grassroots by getting the farmers to define their vision of a better future and the questions it raises. Local information providers then work together to answer those questions using commercial village ICT kiosks as a communications channel. The prospect of a more prosperous village encourages banks and businesses to get involved. In one Tamil Nadu village, for example, the farmers, 60% of whom are women, are visibly more prosperous and more empowered. The best success indicator is that the model is now spreading spontaneously from village to village without COL's involvement.
18. Underpinning the MDGs and other development targets is the strengthening of democracy through good governance. A relatively new area for COL, the objective is to use open and distance learning methods to add value to international efforts to achieve good governance. COL is working with Action Aid and with Rupantar (a local NGO) in Bangladesh on two separate governance initiatives in rural areas focussing on increasing the role of civil society.
19. The collaborative Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programmes have attracted a cumulative enrolment of over 800 students studying through one or more of the founding partners: Allama Iqbal Open University (Pakistan), Bangladesh Open University, Indira Gandhi National Open University (India) and the Open University of Sri Lanka. The new Wawasan Open University in Malaysia joined the consortium in 2006 followed by universities in the Caribbean, the Pacific and West Africa in 2007.
20. COL's regional agency, the Commonwealth Education Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), helps to implement COL's mandate in the eight countries of Commonwealth Asia.

Africa

21. COL's Media Empowerment programme addresses the three Millennium Development Goals related to health. It began and continues in Africa (The Gambia, Malawi, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland and Tanzania, but has now been adopted in Asia (India, Sri Lanka), the Pacific (Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands) and the Caribbean (Barbados, Guyana) as well. The model is to equip local NGOs, usually identified as effective by the World Health Organization, with video production and editing equipment and to provide them with intensive training. They then shoot and edit videos on health matters (HIV/AIDS education and stigma, malaria, diabetes), which communicate very effectively because they are made by the people for the people. To reach the audience, the NGOs use mass media where available but have also use travelling "village cinemas". In The Gambia, for example, an estimated 60% of the total population have seen these videos and the Government believes they have had a substantial impact on reducing HIV transmission and increasing the numbers using insecticide-treated bed nets. It is effective and inexpensive.
22. Open/alternative schooling has proven to be a successful and cost-effective means of increasing access to basic and secondary schooling. COL has helped to establish a Consortium of Open Schools in Southern Africa (Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Tanzania, and Zambia) and has sponsored an Institute on the planning and development of open schooling attended by educators/officials from SSA and Asia (The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone). A thorough evaluative review of open schooling in India and Namibia and a needs assessment and draft action plan for the establishment of an open school in Nigeria have been completed.
23. COL is helping to build ODL capacity among strategic national and international agricultural education, extension, research, training and policy-making bodies with mandates and resources for education, training and research in the food, agriculture and vocational sectors. COL joined the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) and the American Distance Education Council (ADEC) in arranging a consultation meeting with Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa with the goal of finding appropriate institutional partnerships and mechanisms to strengthen Africa's ability to build capacity in agriculture and natural resources. A number of significant action items were identified and follow-up is taking place.
24. COL facilitated the establishment of a Centre of Expertise in ODL for West Africa, the Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDAL), at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and, in Southern Africa, the Southern African Development Community – Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE), in partnership with the Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL) and the Botswana Ministry of Education. Both of these regional agencies are building up a resources inventory and network of expertise and conducting regional ODL training workshops.

Caribbean

25. COL supported the creation of a new National Open School in Trinidad & Tobago, launched in June 2007. COL has also been working with the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) to assist it in expanding its capacity to manage the development and maintenance of ODL materials that support their curricula.
26. COL has a long-time relationship with the University of Technology, Jamaica (UTech). The Technical Teacher Training Programme developed by COL through regional collaboration was piloted as a Special Diploma by UTech to students in The Bahamas and St. Kitts & Nevis. The materials produced through the initiative are available free-of-charge to publicly funded institutions in the region and have now been adapted for use in Africa.
27. COL is working with institutions in the Caribbean on teacher development programmes. Learner support personnel in Trinidad & Tobago are being trained.

Pacific

28. COL has facilitated the creation of the Pacific Association for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (PATVET) and the creation of some basic skills courses which are being passed from island to island with whatever translation and versioning is required. Courses in “Working with Timber,” “Working with Concrete,” and “Working with Small Engines (Outboards)” are already in use in a number of countries. These courses are in simple formats but they have had a very positive impact. More courses are in development and a new initiative has been started to upgrade learners’ competency in English. COL and PATVET are also planning to convert the Basic Trade Skills courses into online programmes using open educational resources.
29. COL is helping to build ODL capacity among strategic national and international agricultural education, extension, research, training and policy-making bodies with mandates and resources for education, training and research in the food, agriculture and vocational sectors. In June 2007, COL sponsored a regional workshop on “Delivering Distance Learning Programmes for Agriculture and Rural Development.” Through initiatives such as this workshop COL has a catalytic role in the South Pacific, promoting capacity-building and information dissemination to enable regional institutions and leaders to apply distance learning strategies to shared development goals.
30. In collaboration with international organisations such as the World Health Organization, COL is equipping and training government agencies, NGOs and community groups to use video and audio technology for local production of educational materials related to health, welfare and community development. COL implemented an activity focussed on reduction of HIV/AIDS with Anglicare STOPAIDS, an NGO based in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. Videos are being produced that address both stigma and prevention of HIV. A series of village cinema events has been undertaken in the remote areas of the country for target groups to view

the materials and the productions have been aired on local television. In the Solomon Islands, the Solomon Islands Development Trust has developed various video productions to address health, governance and, recently, tsunami relief.

Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

31. On behalf of Commonwealth Ministers of Education, COL is coordinating the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). Ministers conceived this idea at 14CCEM and endorsed a proposal for it at 15CCEM. Thirty countries from all Commonwealth regions are now actively engaged in making the VUSSC a reality.
32. VUSSC countries have chosen to focus on creating postsecondary, skills-related courses in areas such as tourism, entrepreneurship, professional development, disaster management and a range of technical and vocational subjects. These non-proprietary, electronically-held course materials, which can readily be adapted to the specific context of each country, are used in the offering of credit-bearing qualifications in the countries' postsecondary institutions, strengthening their educational capacity and outreach. Small states thus become active contributors to global development and leaders in educational reform through the innovative use of information and communications technologies (ICTs). The VUSSC is throwing a wide bridge across the digital divide.
33. The first VUSSC course materials have been developed at a series of pan-Commonwealth workshops facilitated by COL. Over the past two years, the Governments of Mauritius, Samoa, Seychelles, Singapore and Trinidad & Tobago have hosted VUSSC workshops to train educators in information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Participants at the workshops began to create course materials, continuing their collaboration after returning home.
34. Newly developed VUSSC course materials are available through COL's website, which provides free access to these university-level courses, along with many other courses. More recently a Transnational Qualifications Framework for the VUSSC has been developed with the help of the South African Qualifications Authority. This will facilitate the transfer of courses and credits between countries and give students confidence in the legitimacy of these eLearning programmes.

Pan-Commonwealth

35. COL's Pan-Commonwealth initiatives facilitate the development of an important programme by local institutions and then encourage its adoption elsewhere.
36. Sharing know-how is equally important. Here COL is helping to promote two developments that are vital for advancing the educational agenda defined by the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All framework. To improve teacher education (both at a distance and face-to-face) it has developed Pan-Commonwealth Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Teacher Education drawing on the expertise of specialists from across the Commonwealth. Given the rapidly growing

demand for secondary education, COL has documented the experience of open schooling to help countries and development agencies assess its potential for responding to this need (www.col.org/consultancies).

37. A collection of quality assurance best practices across the Commonwealth, based on quality indicators for teacher education (QUITE), has been completed. QUITE, along with a module on Introduction to Quality Assurance and a package of Best Practice Cases, is being published as a "toolkit" on Quality Assurance in Teacher Education and Development (QUATED) which will be used jointly with UNESCO for capacity building of policy makers and administrators in the school education sector. COL also maintains a Quality Assurance Micro-Site on its website.
38. UN and international agencies such as the UNHCR, UNAIDS, WHO, ILO, the World Bank and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are using COL's eLearning for International Organisations programme (www.col.org/COLeIO) to provide customised communications and data management skills training for their headquarters staff and field-based workers located throughout the world. This involves many hundreds of staff annually.
39. COL is recognised as a foremost source of knowledge on open, distance and technology-mediated learning. As a leader in the fast-evolving field of knowledge management, COL also continues to develop its internal systems to organise information from its own work and support partners. COL also maintains an information resource centre and publishes ODL resources through a variety of media.
40. COL works with international experts and agencies to provide suggestions and information on copyright so that Commonwealth Governments may take action to implement education-friendly legislation that makes access to learning content affordable for more people. It is also supporting the use of free and open source software (FOSS) and is a leader in advocating CC-BY-SA (share and share alike, with attribution) content licenses.
41. COL's WikiEducator website (www.wikieducator.org) was launched in 2007 and its use continues to grow rapidly. WikiEducator creates online communities whose members participate from remote locations to create educational content collaboratively (e.g., the VUSSC and other free educational content), and to plan conferences and other events. The site provides an online transnational workspace for a variety of educational purposes and is free for anyone to use. All materials submitted to WikiEducator are licensed under the Creative Commons CC-BY-SA 3.0 copyright license which permits copying, editing and free reuse of the materials, with attribution. WikiEducator averages over 3500 unique visits per day.
42. COL's Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning is held biennially. It is co-hosted with different partners in different regions of the Commonwealth each time. The five-day programme is designed to address open and distance learning through widening educational access, bridging the digital divide and by advancing the social and economic development of communities and nations at large. The Forum's focus is on

topics relating to, and participation by, societies in developing countries. COL's Excellence in Distance Education Awards are also presented at the Forum. The Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF5) (www.col.org/pcf5) will take place in London, from 13-17 July 2008, hosted in collaboration with the University of London. The theme is "Access to Learning for Development."

Conclusion

43. Although it is a tiny intergovernmental body, not a donor agency, COL has helped Commonwealth countries give millions of people new opportunities to learn over the two decades of its existence. The secret of its success is to empower governments, institutions and individuals to develop learning systems themselves without having to rely on donors.
44. Finally, COL's records, with deep regret the death of our Chair, Lewis Perinbam, on 12 December 2007. As Special Advisor to COL's first two presidents, Dr. James Maraj and Tan Sri Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, from 1991, and as Chair of the Board of Governors since 2003, Lewis served COL with commitment, devotion and distinction for most of its existence. The large number of letters and messages of condolence to the family and to COL received expressed deep admiration and appreciation for Lewis' contributions to public service and to international development as well as for his work at COL. The process of selecting a new Chair is under way. Prior to leaving office, Secretary-General McKinnon wrote to Heads of Government and Board members inviting them to propose names of suitable candidates.

Further information:

www.col.org
www.col.org/3yp0609
www.col.org/reporting

Attachment: COL Corporate Logic Model

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