



COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

Learning for Development

Commonwealth Secretariat Board of Governors

May 2009

Report of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

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 (ODL).
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 other Commonwealth bodies and multilateral organisations, fostering communities of practice and nurturing regional bodies.
6. ODL is a cost-effective approach to expanding education. Its use has grown rapidly over the 20 years since Commonwealth Heads of Government established COL. Today, thanks to expanding connectivity and new developments in ICTs such as social software and open educational resources, ODL applications continue to accelerate. The interactive Web is a rich environment for learning and a powerful vehicle for expanding awareness about the possible futures of humankind.

New Three-Year Plan, 2009–2012

7. COL's Chair (HE, the Hon. Burchell Whiteman) and President (Sir John Daniel) will present a new Three-Year Plan for 2009–2012 to Commonwealth Ministers of

Education for their endorsement at their 17th triennial Conference (CCEM) to be held in Kuala Lumpur in June 2009.

8. The theme of this plan, *Learning for Development*, which is the same theme as for 2006-12, expresses a vision that reaches beyond formal education to embrace areas of learning that are vital for better health, greater prosperity and a safer environment. Understanding development as the process of increasing the freedoms that people can enjoy, COL pursues this vision operationally within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the campaign for Education for All (EFA) and Commonwealth values.
9. While building on the extensive pan-Commonwealth consultation conducted for the previous triennium, COL has refreshed its understanding of current development priorities through various formal and informal channels including regional meetings with the country Focal Points appointed by Ministers of Education and COL's Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (London, July 2008). A rigorous external evaluation of its work in 2006-2009 (see below) has enabled COL to play to its strengths in responding to these priorities.
10. Its first response is to tighten the focus. COL's two programme sectors, *Education* and *Livelihoods & Health*, embrace just eight initiatives that will help governments pursue the twin goals of expanding access to learning and using public funds cost-effectively.
11. The second response is to scale up its impact. Working with its country partners COL has developed powerful models for applying technology to learning for development. These models must now be applied at scale and extended to new countries.
12. The context of COL's work has evolved in three years. Its plan for the new triennium also addresses the three imperatives in the contemporary agenda for *development*:
 - A global economic slowdown requires billions of people to learn their way to new livelihoods and demands cost-effectiveness in educational spending;
 - Universal Primary Education is finally on the horizon and a surge towards secondary schooling must now be satisfied; and
 - Healthy communities, in which free individuals treat each other with respect and understanding, are best equipped to face contemporary challenges.
13. The plan also adapts to three trends in the technologies available for *learning*:
 - Continuing expansion of connectivity is enabling much greater access to technology-mediated learning;
 - New social software is transforming the Web into a vast space for online collaboration; and

- Open educational resources herald the emergence of a global intellectual commons.

14. The programme initiatives are:

EDUCATION

Open Schooling: Growing success in achieving universal primary education is creating a surge of demand for secondary schooling that many governments have not the resources to satisfy by building more schools. Open Schooling can deliver quality education cost-effectively at scale.

Teacher Education: Achieving the MDGs and EFA will require millions of new teachers and training for millions more unqualified teachers already in post. Teacher education institutions will not be able meet these demands without adopting the methods of ODL and COL will help them.

Higher Education: Many universities face burgeoning demand after a period of neglect and some countries are creating open universities. COL will facilitate the expansion of quality higher education and share programmes among institutions, including imaginative courseware to promote the Commonwealth agenda of Respect and Understanding.

Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth: Hundreds of teachers and officials have acquired advanced ICT skills through this network. It produces and shares eCourses in skills-related areas within a new Transnational Qualifications Framework and links them together in a common portal.

LIVELIHOODS & HEALTH

Skills Development: COL assists with the development of policy for the use of ODL in skills development and works with partners to design and deliver quality courses that are increasingly rich in ICTs. Partnerships among institutions at different stages of development operate in a spirit of south-south cooperation.

Learning for Farming: Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) is a successful grassroots model for increasing rural prosperity that uses ICTs to link banks and universities to village communities to exploit new economic opportunities. It is now being implemented at scale by extending the use of knowledge info-mediaries.

Healthy Communities: COL's Media Empowerment model has proven its effectiveness for bringing health messages to communities. It will now be scaled up by training health groups and communities to create and share learning materials and make effective use of community media.

Integrating eLearning: Countries are eager to raise levels of digital literacy and deploy eLearning in their education systems. To build capacity COL is training educators to develop eLearning materials, to conduct eTutoring, and to share materials as open educational resources through communities of practice.

15. The cross-cutting themes of gender, quality and appropriate technology are pervasive throughout the programme.
16. Each sector pursues its aims through five core strategies: partnerships, models, policies, capacity and materials. These strategies focus on co-creating value with COL's extensive network of partners and stimulating new developments.
17. In order to be more present at the regional level COL has its own unit in India, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA). In Africa it works with RETRIDOL (Research and Training Institute for Distance and Open Learning) in West Africa and SADC-CDE (Southern African Development Community Centre for Distance Education).
18. To adapt its programme to fit the unique needs of each country COL develops individual Country Action Plans after extensive consultations with Ministers, Focal Points and partner institutions. These are monitored and updated regularly. *COL in the Commonwealth*, a compendium of individual Country Reports, is published at the end of each triennium.
19. COL practices Results-Based Management. This is summarised through a logic model that lays out the expected long- and intermediate-term results (impacts and outcomes) over the three-year period. Outputs and activities, and the inputs needed to achieve them, are set out annually in log frames that are integrated with the logic model and are specific to each initiative. The log frames are regularly updated and have more detailed performance indicators.

External Evaluation of 2006-2009 Three-Year Plan

20. COL commissioned an external evaluation of its work in 2006-2009. The evaluation found that COL inspires great trust among its stakeholders. By working with ODL across a range of development fields COL creates synergies and has created a paradigm shift in using ODL outside formal education. COL was especially commended for its impact in small states through the VUSSC; for the sustained improvements to the livelihoods of rural people occasioned by the Lifelong Learning for Farmers initiative; and for the use of its quality toolkit for teacher education.
21. The main challenge facing COL is to scale up its impact, for example by ensuring the replication of its initiatives in rural livelihoods and media empowerment. It should select its partners carefully, analyse the feasibility of new projects thoroughly before undertaking them, base its reports on evidence, and develop better strategies for dissemination and advocacy.
22. A key finding, which is reflected in this plan, was that COL should improve its focus still further by working in fewer sectors with fewer projects. The eight initiatives chosen for 2009-2012 are areas of special importance for development in which COL has already demonstrated its strength. COL will develop strategies for

scaling up its outcomes and ensuring the sustainability of its interventions in these areas with an emphasis on innovation.

Funding

23. COL's core budget comes from voluntary contributions of Commonwealth member states.
24. COL's financial strategy is based on three sources of revenue. Voluntary contributions from over forty Commonwealth member states provide approximately 80% of the annual budget. 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. Additional contributions (from grants and fee-for-service work) and miscellaneous revenue account for the remainder. On the expenditure side a minimum of 80% of the budget is directed to the programme and not more than 20% to organisational management and governance.
25. Thirty-one countries have contributed to-date during this fiscal year (ending 30 June) including, for the first time, Nauru, the Commonwealth's smallest country. COL is still expecting contributions from 11 additional governments and is hopeful that a good portion of this amount will be received before June 30. Efforts have been redoubled to secure contributions from these governments.

Examples of COL's work

26. 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.
27. 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

28. COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3 Farmers) programme 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.

www.col.org/L3Farmers

29. 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.
30. The collaborative Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programmes have attracted a cumulative enrolment of over 1000 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.
31. 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

32. 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 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.
33. 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 and several open schooling resources have been published to help administrators and policy makers.

34. 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 FARA 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.
35. 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

36. 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.
37. 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.
38. COL is working with institutions in the Caribbean on teacher development programmes. Learner support personnel in Trinidad & Tobago are being trained.

Pacific

39. 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 such as “Working with Timber,” “Working with Concrete,” and “Working with Small Engines (Outboards)” are now 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 converting the Basic Trade Skills courses into online programmes using open educational resources.

40. 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.
41. 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.
42. COL supports its activities in the Pacific with a COL Representative, based in Vanuatu, who facilitates COL programmes and Pacific Education Ministers’ resolutions, including promoting regional co-operation, facilitating capacity building and creating appropriate regional resources.

Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

43. 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.

44. VUSSC countries have chosen to focus on creating postsecondary, skills-related courses in areas such as tourism, entrepreneurship, professional development, disaster management, the fisheries industry 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.
45. The first VUSSC course materials have been developed at a series of pan-Commonwealth workshops facilitated by COL. Over the past three years, the Governments of The Bahamas, Maldives, 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.
46. 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

47. COL's Pan-Commonwealth initiatives facilitate the development of an important programme by local institutions and then encourage its adoption elsewhere.
48. 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
49. UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund) is collaborating with COL to help promote its Child-Friendly Schools programme. Child-Friendly Schools models are now the major means through which UNICEF advocates for and promotes quality in education. Child-Friendly Schools go beyond good teaching methods and learning outcomes to also consider issues such as: health and nutrition status of

- learners; adequacy of available facilities, services and supplies; and safety and protection afforded by the learning environment.
50. UN and international agencies such as the UNHCR, UNAIDS, WHO, ILO, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the World Bank and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are using COL's eLearning for International Organisations programme 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.
www.col.org/COLeIO
 51. 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.
 52. 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.
 53. COL's WikiEducator website 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 now has over 6,000 registered users and averages over 3,500 unique visits per day.
www.wikieducator.org
 54. COL's Learning4Content programme likely the world's largest effort to develop wiki skills for education. This ambitious and empowering project aims to reach at least 52 Commonwealth Countries, conduct 160 workshops, train 2500 teachers/educators and develop 2500 lessons of free content. Learning4Content is supported by a grant from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.
 55. 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 explore applications of open and distance learning in widening educational access, bridging the digital divide and advancing the social and economic development of communities and nations at large. The

Forum's focus is on topics relating to developing countries and participation of practitioners from these countries. COL's Excellence in Distance Education Awards are also presented at the Forum. The Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF5) was held in London, from 13-17 July 2008, hosted in collaboration with the University of London. Over 700 educators from more than 70 countries explored how open and distance learning can help achieve international development goals and education for all. The Sixth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF6) will take place in late November 2010, in Kochi (Cochin, Kerala), India, in partnership with India's Indira Gandhi National Open University. www.col.org/pcf

Conclusion

56. 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.

Further information:

www.col.org

www.col.org/3yp

www.col.org/reporting

www.col.org/regional (COL's work by Commonwealth region)

www.col.org/GovInfo (Financial Statements and the President's Quarterly Reports to the Board)

Handout:

2009 – 2012 Logic Model (from COL's Three-Year Plan, 2009 – 2012)

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