

Learning

to accelerate in partnership

Commonwealth of Learning
November 2026

Strategic talking points for the
Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
St John's, Antigua and Barbuda

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doi.org/10.56059/11599/6156

Cover image: COL uses only real images of its recent work. Here a COL expert joins women in Machinjiri village, Malawi, in September 2025, with partner Concerned Youth Organisation (CYO), as COL's APTUS frugal off-grid server delivers training to learners' phones for hands-on skills.

CHOGM
ANTIGUA AND
BARBUDA 2026

Actions to accelerate

To support the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in St John's, Antigua and Barbuda (CHOGM 2026) under the theme *Accelerating Partnerships and Investment for a Prosperous Commonwealth,* the Commonwealth of Learning proposes **15 talking points** for consideration, with **12 concrete opportunities to act**.
Building upon the mandate from Heads at CHOGM 2024 and the Gaborone Statement on Open Education from the 11th Pan-Commonwealth Forum (2025), COL continues to act and work with governments to seize these opportunities. As COL completes the Strategy 2021–2027 and readies for 2027+, we continue to listen and act.

PRACTICAL ACTIONS FOR SYSTEMS TO SKILLS

CHANGING LEARNING SYSTEMS

01 21st Century Skills
Learning to livelihoods for a prosperous Commonwealth

02 New Models for School
Reaching beyond the classroom

03 Higher Education
Lifelong, open pathways for a young Commonwealth

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Micro-credentials for quality, digital and lifelong learning

CREATE SKILLS FOR LIVELIHOODS

06 Digital Skills for Youth
From connection to livelihoods

07 Future Green Skills
Climate-smart livelihoods, starting with agriculture

08 Blue Economy Skills
Large ocean states need ocean-ready youth

09 Orange Economy Skills
Turning creativity and culture into livelihoods

TRANSFORM AND CONNECT IN SYNERGY

TRANSFORM WITH TECHNOLOGY

10 Frugal Educational AI
Affordable AI, under local control

11 Sovereign AI
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12 Safe and Human Technology
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CRITICAL CONNECTORS

13 Climate Action
Resilient learning for resilient communities

14 Empowering Women and Girls
From community voice to national change

15 Small State Advantage
Agility matched with urgent need

WORKING IN SYNERGY

The Commonwealth of Learning works in synergy with sister organisations. These talking points align with the **Commonwealth Secretariat** strategic pillars (in blue) and the **Commonwealth Foundation** aligned focus areas (in italics).

Economic *economic inclusion*	01 03 05 06 07 08 09 10 14 15
Democratic *freedom of expression*	02 04 06 09 11 12 14
Climate *climate and environment justice*	07 08 13 15

All talking points presented here are driven by the requirements of Commonwealth Member Nations as expressed by Ministry of Education Focal Points and are aligned with sister intergovernmental and accredited partners.

The Commonwealth of Learning

ACCELERATING COMMONWEALTH LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

Created by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1987, COL is the Commonwealth's intergovernmental organisation for learning innovation and sustainable development.

YEAR 5 OF OUR 2021–2027 STRATEGY RESULTS TO JUNE 2026

121
national policies and strategies, with ministries in 37 Member Nations

11,000+
government officials trained in 42 Member Nations

233
institutional policies, in 170 institutions

59,000+
institutional staff trained

306,000+
enrolments in 'credit-linked' courses

1.4 million
learners trained for sustainable livelihoods

LEARNING IS KEY

At CHOGM 2024 in Samoa, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) asked the Commonwealth Heads of Government to raise the priority of learning innovation, to focus on digitalisation and to speak with a common voice on education (COL, 2024). Today it is important to show how partnership and investment in learning can turn that common voice into delivery.

Learning is the answer to many of the questions we now face in 2026. Investment in education is linked directly to social stability, productivity and peace, yet conventional education systems tend to replicate and reinforce inequalities, particularly in access.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government created COL in 1987, under a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1988, to widen access to opportunities for learning, to lead thinking on open learning and innovation, and to start with disadvantage. COL works with ministries on policy, with institutions on quality and capacity, and directly with learners where it matters most, from its headquarters in Vancouver, Canada, and its centre in New Delhi, India, and through Focal Points nominated by Education Ministers in every Member Nation.

The need is clearer every day.

A more complex world calls for a quality leap in open, digital and distance learning, with blended and online provision, AI literacy, digital skills and flexible, recognised credentials, and for closing the long-standing gaps in access to technology and learning resources for the most disadvantaged.

Working in partnership with Commonwealth intergovernmental institutions, accredited organisations and sister international agencies, COL aims to respond with agility to strategic needs and to work directly to the strategy of Member Nations expressed through Ministry partnerships and guided by Country Focal Points.

COL leverages the expertise and experience of every Commonwealth partner to solve each single challenge to the benefit of all 56 Member Nations.



Across the Commonwealth: open schooling in Eswatini; young creatives in Vanuatu; AI leaders in New Delhi, India; and Caribbean Focal Points in Kingston, Jamaica.

doi.org/10.56059/11599/6156

Evidence to impact

From Apia, Samoa to St John's, Antigua and Barbuda, via Gaborone, Botswana



President Advocate Duma Gideon Boko opens PCF11, Gaborone, Botswana, September 2025.



The President, Cabinet Members, eight Commonwealth ministers of education join the Commonwealth of Learning at the opening of PCF11, 2025.

> *Launching the open learning forum, His Excellency President Advocate Duma Gideon Boko stressed the importance of creativity and innovation in building a knowledge-based economy.*
>
> (COL, 2025a)

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EVIDENCE MATTERS

Hosted by Botswana in Gaborone in September 2025, with the Ministry of Higher Education and Botswana Open University, the 11th Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF11) brought together more than 400 participants from 48 countries, with ministers and senior government officials in a dedicated Ministerial Track for Member Nation feedback and engagement (COL, 2025b). COL's scholarly strength leverages evidence to act with clarity.

The Gaborone Statement on Open Education, building on the CHOGM 2024 Samoa Communiqué, sets seven collective actions for governments, institutions and partners. These ongoing actions are now carried through the 15 talking points presented here for CHOGM 2026.

THE GABORONE STATEMENT

	PCF11 collective actions (2025)	One year on: one piece of evidence to highlight progress
1	**Equity with quality at scale** for girls and women, persons with disabilities, disengaged youth and marginalised communities	EWG results in five countries; an open schooling proposition for the Caribbean.
2	**Skills for productive and resilient lives** flexible, work-relevant learning, micro-credentials, TVET, and green and blue skills	a ten-year Pacific partnership; research on Caribbean young men's success; a business case for AI-assisted open resources in TVET.
3	**Ethical leverage of the digital dividend** — open learning as digital public goods, with ethical, inclusive AI guardrails	the Gaborone to New Delhi Compact and reference architecture; guidance on conversational agents in tertiary education.
4	**Teachers as skilled agents of change** technology-enabled pathways into teaching and scalable professional development	a co-creative mentoring model (Ghana); an ODL framework and Beyond Numbers (Africa); 1,500+ quality-assured, teacher-created resources through Teacher-in-the-Loop AI.
5	**Reimagine assessment** authentic, competency-based assessment with robust QA	Authentic Assessment in a Changing World (2026).
6	**Positive disruption in post-secondary education** technology-enabled TVET and higher education, open resources and trusted credentials.	a micro-credential implementation and quality assurance guide; guides to localising open resources, including with AI (a, b, c).
7	**Crosscutting commitments** small states, climate, ocean, gender equality & youth	Youth Robotics for Blue-Green Resilience; an inclusive teacher competency framework steered by the Maldives.

21st Century Skills

Learning to livelihoods for a prosperous Commonwealth

TALKING POINT 01
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A YOUNG COMMONWEALTH

*More than 60% of the Commonwealth's 2.7 billion people are under 30.**
Whether that becomes a dividend depends on the skills young people can gain, prove and use.

* Source: Commonwealth Secretariat (2026).

WHY SKILLS MATTER

A changing world demands new skills. Young people need learning that prepares them for employment, entrepreneurship and participation in their communities, with flexible routes through education, chances to return to learning, and qualifications that recognise what people can actually do.

The pressure is immediate. Employers expect 39% of core skills to change by 2030, and 59 in every 100 workers will need training (WEF, 2025). Yet one in five young people worldwide, more than 257 million, are not in employment, education or training (ILO, 2026). Conventional systems cannot be built fast enough, or cheaply enough, to close that gap on their own.

21st-century skills combine foundational and technical learning with critical thinking, creativity, entrepreneurship, and digital and AI literacy, applied in the green, blue and orange economies where Commonwealth futures will be made.

Open, flexible and technology-enabled learning is how these skills reach people at scale.

No single Member Nation or institution can deliver this alone. The Commonwealth's advantage is its ability to work as one family, in synergy.

CASE STUDY – TRANSFORMING LEARNING FUTURES

On 21 May 2026, COL, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation brought together seven Ministers of Education, COL's Board of Governors and Commonwealth Accredited Organisations at Marlborough House in London. The Roundtable, 'Transforming Learning Futures: Skills, Inclusion and Gender Equity Across the Commonwealth', asked a practical question: how can the Commonwealth family move education and skills from intention to delivery, together?

Participants agreed that the Commonwealth's institutional ecosystem is strong, but that its collective value depends on coordination and shared outcomes. They saw COL's distinctive contribution at the meeting point of open learning, skills development, educational technology and teacher support: an asset for countries moving from policy ambition to implementation (COL, 2026).

Three further messages stood out: gender equality, disability inclusion, rural access, youth disengagement and teacher capacity; they are not side issues, they decide whether reforms succeed. The roundtable agreed that skills must be tied to economic relevance, with stronger links to industry, entrepreneurship and local labour markets, especially for young people already outside formal pathways. And new technologies, including AI, must be combined with local knowledge and context.

Commonwealth Accredited Organisations brought their own diverse perspectives, underlining the critical value of synergy: the Association of Commonwealth Universities asked how universities can work more deliberately with COL on skills, innovation and teacher development; the



Participants gather outside Marlborough House for Transforming Learning Futures, London, 21 May 2026.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Members can accelerate in partnership

Make 21st-century skills the Commonwealth's shared investment aspiration, with the Commonwealth delivering as one.

MILESTONES

1 **AT CHOGM26**
Commit
Endorse learning-to-livelihoods as a Commonwealth priority.

2 **BY MID-2027**
Invest
Mobilise sovereign, private and partner co-financing behind proven models: open schooling, micro-credentials, community skills hubs and Frugal AI.

3 **BY CHOGM28**
Scale and report
Report results to Heads by gender, disability, location and small-state status.

4 **BY 2030**
Embed
Make flexible, recognised learning pathways a permanent, budgeted part of every national education and skills system.

WE CONTINUE TO ACT

COL will bring networks, open educational resources and technical expertise to every milestone, and publish the evidence of what works.

TRANSFORMING LEARNING FUTURES (continued)

Commonwealth Education Trust stressed affordable digital training and peer learning for teachers in low-resource settings; the Commonwealth Health Professions and Partners Alliance linked open and blended learning to health workforce training; and the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations called for joint proposals rather than parallel effort.

In her statement to the Roundtable, the Secretary-General framed the opportunity: where the mandates of the Commonwealth institutions meet, the space between them becomes a space for action.

> *"There can be no prosperous Commonwealth without a skilled Commonwealth. No resilient Commonwealth without educated citizens. No innovative Commonwealth without learners who are confident, connected and equipped for the present and future world of work."*
>
> The Hon. Shirley Botchwey, Commonwealth Secretary-General, statement to the COL Board–Ministerial Roundtable, May 2026

COL brings proven reach to that space: open schooling partnerships in more than 20 countries; 94,804 learners in online skills scholarships; 38,348 women and girls completing life-skills and vocational training through GIRLS Inspire; and more than 7,200 Pacific educators in professional development.

Moving now from the eight key talking points debated by the Roundtable and developing the strategic agenda for St John's, we reflect on the opportunity to consult further on these issues and then influence the new strategy for the Commonwealth of Learning for 2027 onward. The talking points cover school, higher education and teachers; digital, green, blue and orange skills; transformative technology; and, as concepts that connect the set, climate action, women and girls, and small states.

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CHOGM ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA 2026

New Models for School

Reaching beyond the classroom

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SCHOOLING MUST CHANGE

*In 2024, 273 million children and young people were out of school: one in six of school age. In low-income countries, the number has risen by 29% since 2015.**

* Source: UN DESA (2026).



Open schooling pioneers at Emlalatini Development Centre, Eswatini, plan the move from print-based to digital and blended open schooling, 2023.

BASIC SCHOOLING MATTERS

School learning is pivotal to a resilient society, since investment in schooling leads directly to social stability and national productivity. But for much of the world, classrooms could never be built fast enough and qualified teachers are missing to close the gap in need. In sub-Saharan Africa, only 68% of children complete primary school, 47% lower secondary and 28% upper secondary (UN DESA, 2026).

Nor is simply being in school the same as learning.

Across 57 countries, the share of students reaching minimum proficiency in reading fell from 59% to 47% between 2012 and 2022. By 2030, the social cost of children leaving school without basic skills is estimated at US$10 trillion a year (UNESCO et al., 2024).

Even with unlimited budgets, conventional schooling would still fail learners who cannot reach a classroom, cannot stay, or need more flexible learning options to succeed. Rather than think of young people 'dropping out', we must admit that our systems are pushing them out, through economic marginalisation, social pressures and rigidity in our processes. The cost is human and financial, and we can change it.

Open schooling narrows the gap: flexible, blended, technology-supported provision that offers a quality alternative and a second chance, while strengthening the conventional system it sits beside.

CASE STUDY – ESWATINI

When COL first engaged with Eswatini's Emlalatini Development Centre (EDC) in 2019, its open schooling model was struggling. Today open schooling is a key pillar of the Ministry's forward-looking national strategy and attracts significant government investment (Maseko, as cited in Mays & Siafu, 2025).

COL's support followed a deliberate path: policy and strategy first, then tutor and teacher capacity, then the move from print to digital and blended learning. Open schooling now improves alignment across the system, and the same resources strengthen conventional schools, especially during pandemics and natural disasters, and in districts where examination results have been poor.

Eswatini also shows the Commonwealth advantage at work! In the early stages, teachers and learners used open resources created in Malawi. Meanwhile, Botswana Open University alerted classroom teachers to the open schooling Open Educational Resources it had developed, and its College of Open Schooling has since adopted a new strategic plan and business model with COL. What one Member Nation builds, others can adapt.

High-impact open schooling is a multi-year, multi-phase process of developing, piloting, scaling and then mainstreaming, until open schooling becomes a line item in a ministry's own budget. Because every context is different, there is no cookie-cutter model. COL's support is tailored: advisory in Nigeria, exploratory with new ministry partners such as Cameroon, Jamaica and Togo, and hands-on with Africa partners and Papua New Guinea.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Members can accelerate in partnership

Recognise open schooling as a mainstream, funded route to 12 years of quality education for every young person.

MILESTONES

1. **AT CHOGM26**
   Commit
   Recognise open schooling as a mainstream, equitable pathway, not a last resort, in national education sector plans.

2. **BY MID-2027**
   Map the need
   Identify out-of-school and disengaged learners by district, gender and disability, and where open schooling can reach them.

3. **BY END 2027**
   Pilot
   Launch blended open schooling with shared open resources, trained tutors and, where relevant, dual academic and skills certification.

4. **BY CHOGM28**
   Budget and scale
   Scale successful pilots and make open schooling a line item in the Ministry's own budget.

5. **BY 2030**
   Mainstream
   Open and conventional schools share resources, teachers and credit as one coherent, resilient system.

WE CONTINUE TO ACT

COL will provide policy advice, open curriculum resources, tutor training and evidence. We connect countries so that what one builds, others can adapt.

ESWATINI (continued)

Lesotho's Distance Teaching Centre is becoming a College of Open and Distance Learning.

COL's open schooling work aims for 12 years of quality schooling for every girl in the Commonwealth, with a special focus on sub-Saharan Africa. In Mozambique, open and innovative schooling has been implemented in 15 secondary schools (Cossa et al., 2021), showing how the model can strengthen, not replace, the conventional school.

Across COL's open schooling partnerships in more than 20 countries, new enrolments in courses developed with COL support have reached 44,863 against a target of 15,000, for a very modest investment.

The next step is regional. In the Caribbean, where the disengagement among boys and young men is an enduring concern, COL proposes an open school offering dual certification, academic and vocational learning together, with built-in mentoring (Jha, 2025), and country case studies in Jamaica and St Kitts and Nevis have gauged the response. At the Caribbean Examinations Council conference in Jamaica in March 2026, Dominica's Minister of Education, the Hon. Octavia Alfred, joined COL's session, where participants backed an Innovative Open School for the region, to be piloted before it scales. New research on Caribbean young men who succeeded against the odds is helping to shape what that support should look like.

COMMONWEALTH OPEN SCHOOLING AT A GLANCE

20+
countries in COL's open schooling partnerships

44,863
new enrolments, against a target of 15,000

15
secondary schools running open and innovative schooling in Mozambique

12 years
of quality schooling: the aim for every girl in the Commonwealth

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Higher Education

Lifelong, open pathways for a young Commonwealth

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DEMAND OUTPACES CAMPUSES

*Higher education enrolment grew from about 100 million students in 2000 to 269 million in 2024. Yet the gross enrolment ratio is about 80% in Western Europe and North America, and just 9% in sub-Saharan Africa.**

* Source: UNESCO IESALC (2026).



Working with the Open University of Kenya on policy development, Machakos, Kenya, February 2026.

HIGHER LEARNING IS TRANSFORMATIVE FOR ECONOMIES AND PEOPLE

Demand for higher education is outpacing campuses, budgets, facilities and staff. In a Commonwealth where more than 60% of people are under 30 (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2026), the scale and cost of building upon a conventional campus model no longer makes sense alone.

The challenge is not only about places in classrooms. Learners need qualifications that lead to work, entrepreneurship and further study. Employers need graduates who can solve problems, communicate, adapt and use digital tools, including AI, responsibly. Countries also need sovereign research and innovation capacity to work on home-grown solutions to national challenges and opportunities. Yet tertiary change remains slow, and often starts from an elite model poorly suited to a world of technology-empowered learners.

Innovation in higher education allows us to reimagine a flexible, quality-assured open ecosystem rather than a single pathway through one institution: online and blended provision as a new normal, open educational resources, open science and scholarship, recognition of prior learning, micro-credentials, and authentic assessment that shows what learners can do when technology and AI are in the room (Prinsloo et al., 2026).

Once the territory of open universities, digital is becoming the mainstream response to equity, affordability and relevance. For conventional universities, the opportunity is not to replace degrees, but to open them: stackable, gender-responsive and accessible to learners whose lives do not fit traditional structures.

CASE STUDY – OPEN UNIVERSITY OF KENYA

The Open University of Kenya (OUK) illustrates the Commonwealth opportunity: a national open university that widens access while encouraging the whole system to modernise. COL supported policy development and implementation, learner support, course design, the practical systems needed for quality open education and the effective use of micro-credentials. For Kenya, this extends beyond one institution. Open universities can drive change across a country and region and act as innovation hubs for the sector, while conventional universities move to dual-mode delivery by drawing on shared open resources, authentic assessment and flexible learner support.

OUK is part of a wider pattern. Under COL's 2021–2027 strategy, partners have developed 29 regional or national and 68 institutional policies and strategies for open learning, quality assurance and assessment. Recent support has reached national bodies in Eswatini, The Gambia, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius and Sierra Leone, and institutions from Nigeria and Jamaica to Tonga, on open resources, learner support, AI policy, business models and online course design. Tonga National University adopted an institutional ODFL policy in July 2025, and the Open University of Ghana's business model was approved in June 2026. In St Vincent and the Grenadines, the Community College adopted an online teaching and learning policy and developed 27 online courses with COL, with more than 80 educators trained in online assessment and learner support.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Members can accelerate in partnership

Open up higher education through shared, quality-assured Commonwealth Open Degrees and pathways that learners can enter, leave and return to.

MILESTONES

1. **AT CHOGM26**
   Back the idea
   Support a Commonwealth Open Degrees initiative and invite universities and quality agencies to co-design it.

2. **BY MID-2027**
   Agree on the design
   Set common standards: stackable, micro-credential-ready modules, open resources, authentic assessment and recognition of prior learning. Identify the test cases.

3. **BY END 2027**
   Launch
   Open the first transdisciplinary programmes, each awarded by partner institutions under their own business models.

4. **BY CHOGM28**
   Recognise
   National quality agencies recognise shared modules, and conventional universities add dual-mode capacity.

5. **BY 2030**
   Lifelong by default
   Every learner can progress through portable, recognised pathways across Commonwealth institutions.

WE CONTINUE TO ACT

COL will convene partners, support policy and quality assurance, share open resources and track learner outcomes.

OPEN UNIVERSITY OF KENYA (continued)

Over five years, more than 51,000 learners have enrolled in open and distance courses, and more than 6,800 staff have received capacity building.

Mauritius shows the system view. COL is supporting the National Higher Education Strategy 2025–2035, whose priorities include teaching and learning, digital transformation, research excellence, internationalisation and industry engagement, and has worked with the Higher Education Commission on national guidelines for the use of AI in higher education. Universities are also asking how to stay resilient: a survey of 60 Commonwealth universities on economic resilience, by the Association of Commonwealth Universities and COL, was debated at the Palace of Westminster, UK, in May 2026.

Being open is not enough: partnership needs to be bigger, and change must include pathways. Building on its multi-country Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA (at the University of Guyana alone, more than 150 students have enrolled and 89 have graduated), COL proposes transdisciplinary Commonwealth Open Degrees, co-designed by partners and awarded by each under its own business model, starting with sustainable entrepreneurship, climate and the green and blue economy, and primary health care.

Each degree would share a common, micro-credential-ready and competence-aligned design (COL, 2025), so learners can move between partners, stack credit, and step on and off as their lives require.

HIGHER EDUCATION IMPACT, 2021–2026

29
regional or national HE policies and strategies

68
institutional HE policies and strategies

51,000+
learners enrolled in open and distance courses over five years

6,800+
HE staff supported through capacity building

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CHOGM ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA 2026

C21 Teaching

Empowering teachers for digital-age learning

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EXTENDING TEACHER CAPACITY

*Universal primary and secondary education by 2030 needs 44 million additional teachers, 15 million of them in sub-Saharan Africa, and about US$120 billion a year to pay for the new posts.**

* Source: UNESCO & International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (2024).



A practical session on the use of generative AI in classroom teaching, Accra, Ghana, February 2026. Credit: CENDLOS.

PEDAGOGY MATTERS

Teachers are the lifeblood of education. Their commitment shapes the human capital on which every country's future depends. Yet around one in five teachers worldwide lacks the minimum required qualifications, rising to 30–40% in sub-Saharan Africa (UN DESA, 2026). Shortages are most acute in rural areas, refugee settings and disadvantaged communities, and in secondary STEM subjects.

We also need to rethink what teaching means in the 21st century. Learners need teachers who can design for digital, blended and AI-supported learning, who can model critical thinking and creativity, who can adapt when disruption happens, and who can help young people use powerful new tools safely and well.

Traditional face-to-face training cannot reach these numbers in time, and the countries that need it most do not have the budgets to build it. Governments need collaborative, technology-enabled approaches: open and distance learning, open educational resources and digital pedagogies that combine pre-service and in-service development, communities of practice and recognised micro-credentials, at a fraction of the cost and at national scale, building teacher digital skills at the same time.

Teachers also need time and recognition. Professional development that counts towards registration and promotion is far more likely to be taken up, completed and sustained.

CASE STUDY – GHANA AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

In Ghana, COL worked with the Centre for National Distance Learning and Open Schooling (CENDLOS) and Wesley College of Education to develop a co-creative mentoring model for pre-service teachers. Introduced at a national AI workshop, it blends traditional and reverse mentoring with peer collaboration, gender-responsive pedagogy and the guided use of generative AI to co-create inclusive, curriculum-aligned resources (Adu-Manu et al., 2026).

The model moves through four stages (preparation, co-creation, implementation, and reflection and sustainability), so that colleges can adopt and scale it themselves. Trainee teachers learn digital pedagogy by doing it, with mentors who learn alongside them.

Across the region, COL's Beyond Numbers partnership with the Africa Federation of Teaching Regulatory Authorities has worked with teacher regulators in Botswana, Nigeria, Seychelles and South Africa on a shared open and distance learning framework for teacher development (COL & AFTRA, 2026). The South African Council for Educators, which represents more than 500,000 teachers, has worked with COL since 2024 on digital and pedagogical competencies, gender-responsive approaches and communities of practice.

More than 1,500 educators and ministry staff have been trained, 66% of them women, through 13 micro-courses and five CPD courses (Job et al., 2026).

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Members can accelerate in partnership

Make digital-age teacher development a shared Commonwealth enterprise: regional, recognised and affordable.

MILESTONES

1. **AT CHOGM26**
   Prioritise teachers
   Recognise teachers' digital and AI-ready pedagogy as central to every education and skills commitment.

2. **BY MID-2027**
   Set the standard
   Adopt competency frameworks for digital pedagogy, including AI literacy and inclusive, gender-responsive teaching.

3. **BY END 2027**
   Build pathways
   Offer open and distance CPD with micro-credentials that count towards registration and promotion, co-designed with teacher regulators.

4. **BY CHOGM28**
   Share at scale
   Pool courses, open resources and mentors regionally so that every teacher can access quality development.

5. **BY 2030**
   Sustain
   Make communities of practice and mentoring funded, permanent features of national teacher systems.

WE CONTINUE TO ACT

COL will co-design courses and frameworks with ministries and regulators, share open resources and mentoring models, and track teacher and learner outcomes.

GHANA AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA (continued)

Between December 2025 and April 2026, 4,896 teachers enrolled in a course on integrating virtual laboratories into STEAM teaching. In Seychelles, a cascade model trained 71 master trainers, who in turn reached 554 teachers from 37 schools. In the Caribbean, more than 950 teachers in Belize and Jamaica took part in COL's STEAM Teachers Initiative between December 2025 and February 2026.

Overall, COL's teacher education work has trained more than 15,000 teachers, supported 15 ministries and national agencies and developed more than 110 open and distance courses, strengthened by the Network for Open Teacher Education in sub-Saharan Africa. Recognition is following: in India, 40 hours of COL's Teacher-in-the-Loop AI training now count towards teachers' mandatory annual professional development.

Regional collaboration is turning teacher development into a shared, affordable Commonwealth enterprise.

TEACHER NETWORKS AT A GLANCE

80+
educators certified in mathematics teaching in St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines (2025)

86
teachers in Barbados, Dominica and Grenada earned COL-endorsed micro-credentials (2026)

70+
participants, including from Rwanda, strengthened an open teacher education network at two regional events (2026)

45
master teachers in Togo trained in digital and pedagogical skills, who reached 125 more educators through a cascade model by February 2026

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Unlocking Credentials

Micro-credentials for quality, digital and lifelong learning

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CHANGE VIA SMALL CREDIT-ABLE THINGS

*94% of employers are willing to offer higher starting salaries to graduates with micro-credentials, and twice as many students are likely to enrol in a programme offering credit-bearing micro-credentials (71%) as in one with none (35%).**

* Source: Coursera (2026), a survey of more than 3,500 learners, employers and university leaders.



The Caribbean convenes in Trinidad and Tobago, March 2026, to work on a regional micro-credential framework, standards and registry.

CREDENTIALS COUNT FOR LEARNERS AND EMPLOYERS

While institutions favour large programmes, with credit locked into a single institution, learners increasingly need shorter, flexible, affordable and work-relevant learning they can take while they earn, care for others, and move across borders. Employers require credible evidence of specific competences.

Learning is citizenship: every learner should have the right to have knowledge recognised, however it was gained. Micro-credentials will not solve structural pressures alone, but they can make post-secondary education more responsive. A learner may evidence a skill, stack it towards a larger award, or use it for recognition of prior learning at a university, college or TVET institution (UNESCO, 2022).

Trust is the currency.

The Commonwealth Micro-credential Framework for Lifelong Learning provides a shared language, metadata and quality assurance for trust across institutions, sectors and borders (COL, 2025), and a new guide helps governments and regulators implement it (Palmer et al., 2026). Verifiable digital credentials then let learners carry proof of their skills with them, under their own control, and credentials co-designed with industry deepen trust and create frictionless transitions between learning and work (OECD, 2026).

For small states, shared frameworks matter even more. No single country can maintain every specialist programme, but trusted credentials let learners combine learning from many providers.

CASE STUDY – THE CARIBBEAN

In March 2026, Caribbean partners met in Trinidad and Tobago to work on a regional micro-credential framework, common standards and a registry, so a short course completed in one country can be trusted in another and across the CARICOM Single Market and Economy.

The OECS Commission, under a 2025 MOU with COL, took an active part in drafting and validating the sub-regional micro-credentials framework, and ten micro-credential courses and a policy will be developed at Dominica State College.

In June 2026, a COL study tour took participants from Barbados, Canada, Namibia, St Kitts and Nevis and Trinidad and Tobago to see the infrastructure in action. VerifyTT, Trinidad and Tobago's national digital credential platform, is built on the W3C Verifiable Credentials standard: approved organisations issue tamper-proof credentials that individuals hold in a digital wallet and share with employers, including through EmployTT. The University of Trinidad and Tobago uploads awards directly through a system link, and the National Energy Skills Centre is building stackable micro-credentials and digital badges for its technical programmes.

The lesson was clear: technology is the easy part. Trust depends on governance, learner consent, data protection and institutional readiness, built through regional cooperation.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Members can accelerate in partnership

Make learning count everywhere: adopt a common micro-credential framework and connect trusted registries, so that credentials travel with learners.

MILESTONES

1. **AT CHOGM26**
   Endorse
   Recognise the Commonwealth Micro-credential Framework for Lifelong Learning as a shared reference for national systems.

2. **BY MID-2027**
   Align
   Link micro-credentials to national qualifications frameworks and make recognition of prior learning a practical entitlement.

3. **BY END 2027**
   Pilot trust
   Pilot verifiable digital credentials and a regional registry, starting with the Caribbean, with employers co-designing priority credentials.

4. **BY CHOGM28**
   Recognise each other
   Agree mutual recognition among participating states and quality assurance agencies.

5. **BY 2030**
   Portable for life
   A learner's verified skills travel with them across the Commonwealth, for work and further study.

WE CONTINUE TO ACT

COL will support framework adaptation, quality assurance, institutional implementation and regional registries, sharing guides and open tools.

THE CARIBBEAN (continued)

VerifyTT already supports certificates of character and employment verification letters, and iGovTT is exploring links to the national identification system and offline verification: one trusted platform serving education, government and employers. Participants agreed to keep the network going, sharing lessons on governance, technical standards and interoperability.

COL's status review of micro-credentials across the Commonwealth found flexibility to be the strongest national motivation, followed by lifelong learning, employability and industry-linked provision. The barriers were equally clear: weak incentives for providers, quality assurance, industry recognition and supporting policy (COL, 2025).

The Commonwealth framework responds directly, with shared essentials that each country can adapt.

Framework implementation is also under way in Eswatini, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka, with a Pacific framework in planning. Sierra Leone validated a draft national framework with more than 80 stakeholders in December 2025, and Sri Lanka's Cabinet has approved an agreement with COL on a national framework. Implementation will follow in ten post-secondary institutions, each developing at least ten micro-credentials, with quality assurance also being further explored with Mauritius.

THE COMMONWEALTH FRAMEWORK: ESSENTIALS

- Clear definitions and quality-assured assessment.
- Recognition of prior learning and stackable pathways.
- A registry, shared metadata and digital verification.
- Credentials co-designed with employers, so learning is trusted.
- Room for each country to adapt, while keeping the essentials intact.

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CHOGM ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA 2026

Digital Skills for Youth

From connection to livelihoods

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NEARLY THREE IN TEN

*In 2025, an average of 27.9% of young people in low-income countries were not in employment, education or training.**

* Source: ILO (2026).



Girls loving open ICT, YAPO, Tanzania, 2023. Credit: COL.

CONNECTION IS NOT ENOUGH

For most young people, including those who are excluded, the internet arrives through a phone. In 2025, three in four people were online, but only 34% in the least developed countries, and 280 million more men than women (UN DESA, 2026). But connection alone does not create opportunity! Young people need digital skills that turn access into income, learning and participation.

The world of work is moving fast. Employers expect 39% of core skills to change by 2030 (WEF, 2025), and AI is reshaping entry-level jobs first. Digital fluency is now the gateway to entrepreneurial, green, blue and creative pathways, and to safe participation in democratic life.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General has pledged to advocate for funding so that COL can expand its digital skills education to more than 10 million young people (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2025). Reaching them means learning that is mobile-first and low-bandwidth; self-paced in short, stackable units; applied to real tasks such as listing a product, taking a digital payment or keeping records; and recognised by employers and national qualifications.

Safety matters as much as skill. Every learner needs basic cyber-hygiene, data protection and the confidence to recognise scams, misinformation and abuse online. Young women, rural youth and young people with disabilities are least likely to be online, so programmes must be designed around them from the start.

CASE STUDY – FROM 100,000 TO 10 MILLION

COL has already shown that digital and community-based skills can reach young people at scale. When COVID-19 closed classrooms, COL's partnerships with Coursera, Udemy and Grow with Google provided online skills scholarships across the Commonwealth, giving immediate access to employment-oriented learning. Between 2021 and 2024, 94,804 learners from at least 25 Commonwealth countries took part. In India alone, the COL–Coursera–Google Skills Online Programme has recorded 77,018 course enrolments and 21,945 course completions, and learners in St Vincent and the Grenadines have earned 1,957 certificates through Skills Online.

For those furthest from opportunity, community support made the difference. Through GIRLS Inspire, COL and partners combined life skills, vocational preparation, community mobilisation, links to employers and access to credit: 38,348 women and girls have completed training since 2021. Through Lifelong Learning for Farmers, mobile learning has reached more than 1 million farmers.

Platforms bring scale, but people bring change. Digital skills land when learners also have local facilitation, mentoring, recognition, and routes into work or enterprise.

Countries are ready to build on this. In Papua New Guinea, the Department of Education's Flexible Open and Distance Education team has already scoped the skills that disengaged young people most need as a basis for national learning pathways. In Grenada, the National Training Agency has brought more than 40 stakeholders from government, industry and civil society together to

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Members can accelerate in partnership

Equip 10 million young people with digital and entrepreneurial skills, starting with those not in employment, education or training.

MILESTONES

1. AT CHOGM26
   Commit
   Back the Secretary-General's call to equip 10 million young people with digital skills, working with COL.

2. BY END 2027
   Platform
   Deliver mobile-first, recognised modules with mentors and online safety built in.

3. BY CHOGM28
   Connect to work
   Link graduates to placements, apprenticeships and enterprise support, co-financed with private partners.

4. BY 2030
   Ten million
   Reach and verify 10 million young people, at least half of them young women, with measured gains in income and enterprise.

WE CONTINUE TO ACT

COL will provide open courseware, technical design, quality assurance and an evidence framework, working with governments, institutions and civil society.

FROM 100,000 TO 10 MILLION (continued)

shape the digital transformation of TVET with COL support, and Grenada is emerging as a model for other small states.

COL's design for the next stage follows the evidence: short modules in local languages, built for mobile and low bandwidth; community learning hubs and peer mentors; basic cyber-hygiene, data protection and safe conduct for every learner; credentials recognised by national frameworks; placements with small businesses that need digital help; and an inclusion premium that rewards reach to young women, rural and island communities and young people with disabilities.

Success should be measured by completion, certification, income and enterprise, not by enrolments alone.

PROOF OF REACH

94,804
learners in online skills scholarships, 2021–2024

38,348
women and girls completed training through GIRLS Inspire

21,945
Skills Online course completions in India

1,000,000+
farmers reached through mobile learning

> *"... to advocate for funding of our core priorities as well as for partners, such as the Commonwealth of Learning, to expand its digital skills education to over 10 million young people."*
>
> The Hon. Shirley Botchwey, Commonwealth Secretary-General, opening remarks to the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting, October 2025

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CHOGM ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA 2026

Future Green Skills

Climate-smart livelihoods, starting with agriculture

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OUR WORLD NEEDS GREEN SKILLS

*Closing the gender gap in farm productivity and wages in agrifood systems would add nearly US$1 trillion to global GDP and cut the number of food-insecure people by 45 million.**

* Source: FAO (2023).



Partner ADPP trained rural women and girls in sustainable agriculture, entrepreneurship, literacy and savings, Mozambique, October 2025.

GREEN IS MORE THAN FARMING, BUT FOOD IS ECONOMICALLY CRITICAL

The 11 years from 2015 to 2025 were the hottest on record (UN DESA, 2026). Climate change is already reshaping how people farm, build, travel and earn, and the green transition is creating work: renewable energy alone employed 16.6 million people in 2024 (IRENA & ILO, 2025).

Yet training, training spaces and trainers have changed far less than work itself. Most of the world's workers, 57.9%, are in informal employment, where informal apprenticeships remain the main route to skills. For millions of rural families, and especially women farmers, green skills begin with climate-smart agriculture: soil health, water harvesting, seed spacing, record-keeping, and access to markets and credit.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) must become an ecosystem where governments set policy and funding; institutions practise open and flexible TVET; industry co-designs curriculum and validates skills; and technology partners provide mobile and AI-enabled tools that link informal and formal learning and recognise what people can already do. Indigenous and local knowledge matter too: skills for life, community and land, not only for work.

Women produce much of the world's food but have less access to land, credit, extension services and technology. Closing those gaps is one of the fastest routes to resilience.

CASE STUDY – WOMEN FARMING FOR RESILIENCE

Through COL's Empowering Women and Girls (EWG) initiative, supported by the Government of Canada, partners in Malawi and Mozambique combined climate-smart agriculture with literacy, savings, entrepreneurship and rights. In Mozambique, ADPP trained rural women and girls in sustainable agriculture; in Malawi, women began their own community training sessions using offline digital content.

More than 56,000 women and girls took part in climate adaptation activities, including tree planting, rainwater harvesting, soil fertility improvement and climate-smart farming. Between 55% and 65% of female farmers adopted sustainable practices, reducing their dependence on costly external inputs.

The results were economic as well as environmental. Farm yields rose by 40–60% and household incomes by 70–75% compared with baseline, improving food security and resilience to climate shocks (COL, 2025). Thirty-six self-learning videos on climate resilience now give communities a replicable resource.

The approach builds on COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers model, which has used mobile learning to reach more than 1 million farmers and links certified training to credit and markets. An independent study found that it generated 16 times the value of the investment in India; in Antigua and Barbuda it supports smallholders and backyard gardeners, alongside a Farmer Information System adapted from Jamaica.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Members can accelerate in partnership

Put green skills, starting with climate-smart agriculture, at the heart of TVET, agricultural extension and community learning, with women and young people first.

MILESTONES

1. **AT CHOGM26**
   Commit
   Commit to green skills as part of a just transition, anchored in national TVET systems, with explicit targets for women, young people and rural communities.

2. **BY END 2027**
   Map and deliver
   Map green skills readiness and demand in priority agrifood value chains, and align agriculture and TVET policies, in open, tech-enabled, blended delivery.

3. **BY CHOGM28**
   Recognise and certify
   Certify green skills and knowledge intermediaries through micro-credentials and recognition of prior learning; update TVET curricula and trainer development.

4. **BY 2030**
   Ecosystem in place
   Aligned national systems deliver recognised green skills pathways, from informal apprenticeships to formal qualifications.

WE CONTINUE TO ACT

COL will share proven models, support policy alignment, open learning content and trainer development, and help partners measure skills, yields, incomes and resilience.

WOMEN FARMING FOR RESILIENCE (continued)

In Dominica, COL and The UWI Global Campus run a Farmer Field School with the Ministry of Agriculture: in February 2026, 37 Indigenous Kalinago farmers completed its second six-week cohort, and the documentary 'Harvest & Heritage' follows farmers applying what they learned (COL, 2026). In Namibia, COL has helped train 300 community members in livelihood skills such as horticulture and poultry production, and supported a strategy to digitise learning resources for climate-responsive livelihoods and food security.

Systems matter too. In Zambia, the Ministry of Technology and Science and the regulator TEVETA built an enabling architecture for open, distance and flexible TVET, with policies, standards and a national monitoring framework. More than 30 institutions are engaged, 11 providers have developed implementation strategies, and the Technical and Vocational Teachers' College prepares more than 900 graduates a year.

Together, these show that aligned governance, institutional capacity, industry partnerships and community-based delivery can make green skills a route to livelihoods.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

56,000+
women and girls in climate adaptation activities

40–60%
increase in farm yields against baseline

70–75%
growth in household income against baseline

16×
value of investment generated by Lifelong Learning for Farmers in India

> *"EWG did not just teach farming – it taught me to challenge barriers. Learning to space seeds improved yields; learning about rights gave me confidence to control the income."*
>
> Orlanda Varela, farmer, Mozambique (ADPP partner community)

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Blue Economy Skills

Large ocean states need ocean-ready youth

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LARGE OCEAN STATES

Seychelles' exclusive economic zone covers about 1.4 million km², almost 3,000 times its land area. For island states, the ocean is the economy, and its future depends on blue skills.*

* Source: Government of Seychelles, Ministry of Fisheries and Blue Economy (n.d.).

BLUE IS BIG

Thirty-three Commonwealth Member Nations are small states, many of them island nations better described as large ocean states. Their fisheries, tourism, shipping, energy and biodiversity depend on healthy seas, and tourism alone provides around 11% of employment in small island developing states (UN DESA, 2026).

The ocean agenda is accelerating. Only about 10% of the ocean is protected, so reaching the 30% target means tripling coverage in four years, and the High Seas Treaty, in force since January 2026, commits countries to capacity building and the transfer of marine technology (UN DESA, 2026). Every one of these commitments needs people with the skills to deliver it.

Blue economy skills combine ocean literacy, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, marine tourism, pollution and waste management, and ocean data, drones and robotics, with the entrepreneurship to turn them into livelihoods. Small states cannot each build this capacity alone. Shared, open courses and regional cohorts make specialist learning viable.

For many island states, the ocean economy is also where young people's jobs will be, in tourism, fisheries, shipping and ocean services, if skills systems prepare them for it.

CASE STUDY – CARIBBEAN YOUTH ROBOTICS

COL's Youth Robotics for Blue-Green Resilience and Prosperity project, delivered with Antigua and Barbuda's Ministry of Education and a regional council of ministries, tertiary institutions and industry, invited Caribbean young people to design technology for their own challenges, and 117 signed up (COL, 2026a).

Seven design teams of seven, aged 16 to 23 and mentored from Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, are building robotic responses to sargassum seaweed on beaches and at sea, wave energy, destructive waves, soil health and farm security. One team has moved from a food-security brainstorm to an AI-vision land rover with soil-nutrient sensing; another has worked through early design challenges to hull and conveyor designs.

The other participants form a research, media and advocacy team, running six youth-led webinars on themes from ocean health to coastal resilience and writing a youth publication for CHOGM.

Teachers are part of the design. All 500 places on a free, 12-week robotics in education course, built on open educational resources, filled within days of its announcement in September 2026, and the UWI Global Campus is exploring certification so that the course outlives the project. The teams present their prototypes at the CHOGM Youth Showcase in St John's on 3 November 2026.



Young people on a mangrove field trip at the STEM Summer Camp in Antigua and Barbuda, the COL-supported project that launched the Youth Robotics for Blue-Green Resilience and Prosperity programme, 2026.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Members can accelerate in partnership

Treat blue economy skills as national infrastructure for large ocean states: build the systems, trainers and young innovators for a sustainable ocean economy.

MILESTONES

1. **AT CHOGM26**
   Recognise and commit
   Recognise ocean skills as core to resilience and prosperity, and commit to building them through national skills systems.

2. **BY MID-2027**
   Map skills
   Map blue skills needs, from fisheries, aquaculture and tourism to ocean data and marine protection, with ministries and employers.

3. **BY END 2027**
   Share courses and certify
   Offer open, stackable blue economy courses and micro-credentials for teachers, knowledge intermediaries and mentors through VUSSC.

4. **BY CHOGM28**
   Grow innovators
   Run national and regional youth challenges on ocean protection and High Seas Treaty capacity building, with an anchor institution.

5. **BY 2030**
   Pathways to jobs
   Build recognised blue skills pathways and youth-led ocean enterprises in the island states that choose to take part.

WE CONTINUE TO ACT

COL will co-create open blue economy courses, train teachers, knowledge intermediaries and mentors, and connect young innovators and institutions through South–South cooperation.

CARIBBEAN YOUTH ROBOTICS (continued)

The model is regional by design: focal points helped recruit participants, mentors work across borders, and the story of five mentor countries working together is part of what the young people will present.

Teams work to common rubrics and scoring sheets, and monitoring of participation and learning continues to March 2027, so that the evidence can inform the next cohort.

The project continues a longer story of small states leading on ocean learning. With the University of Seychelles and the James Michel Blue Economy Research Institute, COL has developed four MOOCs on ocean governance, marine resources, blue finance and coastal management, building on a first Blue Economy MOOC launched through COL's Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) in 2017 (COL, 2020). More than 6,000 learners from over 70 countries have now enrolled (COL, 2026b).

YOUTH ROBOTICS AT A GLANCE

60+
Youth Researchers and Advocates lead blue-green challenge webinars

7
design and prototype teams of seven formed, aged 16 to 23

5
Caribbean countries mentoring the youth teams

500
places on a free robotics in education course for teachers, filled within days

> *"What empowers me most is knowing that as youths, we're building our own technology to solve our own regional challenges and seeing how our different strengths come together to build something real that can actually help others."*
>
> Krissan Gardner, 21, Jamaica, Youth Robotics participant with a team mentored from Trinidad and Tobago, 2026

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Orange Economy Skills

Turning creativity and culture into livelihoods

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CREATIVITY AT WORK

*Cultural and creative industries provide more than 48 million jobs, almost half held by women: 6.2% of all employment and 3.1% of global GDP. No sector offers opportunities to more young people under 30.**

* Source: United Nations (n.d.), citing UNESCO data.



Young people develop creative business ideas in YUT PAWA, run by V-Lab, Youth Challenge Vanuatu and the Marama Youth Foundation, Efate, Vanuatu, 2023. Credit: Marama Youth Foundation.

ENTREPRENEURIAL CREATIVITY MATTERS

The orange economy turns creativity, culture and ideas into livelihoods through arts, design, music, film, animation, fashion, heritage and digital content. World exports of creative services reached US$1.4 trillion in 2022, up 29% since 2017 (UNCTAD, 2024).

For small states and young people, it offers low capital and high reach: a phone and a skill can reach a regional or global market. Creative skills are also among the most motivating routes back into learning for disengaged young people, including boys and young men in difficult social conditions. Cultural production can also earn income while keeping identity and heritage alive (UNESCO, 2023a).

Talent is not the constraint. The gaps are in the systems around it: financing, protection of intellectual property, distribution, data, and institutional support (UNESCO, 2023b). Education must nurture and grow creative capability, not simply certify knowledge (Easton & Djumalieva, 2018). Developing learners' creative confidence, critical thinking, digital production, collaboration, entrepreneurship, financial capability and an understanding of intellectual property and markets must start in school, well before occupational training. Teachers and trainers need support to achieve this.

Generative AI also raises the stakes and offers huge potential to democratise participation. Creators need the skills to use new tools, and to protect and earn the rewards of their own work.

CASE STUDY – CREATIVE PATHWAYS IN SMALL STATES

Community-based youth programmes in the Pacific show what is possible. In Vanuatu, the YUT PAWA youth challenge programme brought together young people who were outside education and work to develop creative business ideas, combining their talent with enterprise skills.

In the Caribbean, COL is working with partners on the next step: a connected pathway from creative talent to recognised capability, and from capability to employment, enterprise and further learning. The emphasis is on a pathway, not another collection of courses. The Caribbean Association of National Training Authorities (CANTA) is already curating training resources on fashion design.

Such a pathway can connect early exposure to creative and digital production in schools; modular occupational and enterprise learning; portfolios and practical assessment; mentoring, apprenticeships and work-based projects; micro-credentials where useful; intellectual property, financial and business skills; and access to commissions, enterprise support and markets.

Rather than begin with an over-specified regional programme, COL proposes pathfinders: two or three priority creative value chains, such as digital media and content, animation and gaming, music and audiovisual production, fashion and design, or cultural heritage. Each is chosen on evidence of market opportunity, mapped from school to market, and tested with explicit measures of livelihood progression.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Members can accelerate in partnership

Build recognised pathways from creative talent to livelihoods, starting with a few priority value chains in each region.

MILESTONES

1 **AT CHOGM26**

Recognise

Recognise creative skills as economic skills and invite regions to lead orange economy pathfinders.

2 **BY MID-2027**

Choose value chains

Select two or three priority creative value chains on evidence of market demand and existing strengths.

3 **BY END 2027**

Map and design

Map occupations and gaps; design flexible pathways from school through training and mentoring to enterprise and markets.

4 **BY CHOGM28**

Demonstrate

Run modest demonstrations that measure income, enterprise and progression, including for disengaged young men.

5 **BY 2030**

Scale what pays

Scale proven pathways regionally, with portfolios and micro-credentials recognised by employers and qualification bodies.

WE CONTINUE TO ACT

COL will bring expertise in open curricula, teacher and trainer development, hybrid delivery, quality assurance, recognition and evidence.

CREATIVE PATHWAYS IN SMALL STATES (continued)

The first step is a scoping process that brings education, training, culture, youth, business and trade institutions together with creative practitioners, employers, regional bodies and potential financing partners. It would map the occupations, capabilities, existing programmes and missing links in each value chain, and decide which elements should be national and which should be shared regionally.

Small states can combine regional cooperation with national ownership, using hybrid provision to overcome limited scale, dispersed populations and connectivity constraints. The aim is to move from celebrating creative talent to developing, protecting and commercialising it, so that young people can build livelihoods while projecting their region's identity and ideas to the world.

At CHOGM26, the Commonwealth Business Forum's new focus on the orange economy offers a platform to connect creative industries, investors and skills providers. Local-language digital content is part of the opportunity: it is the content that makes digital platforms useful in-country.

PATHFINDER VALUE CHAINS TO CONSIDER

- Digital media and content
- Animation and gaming
- Music and audiovisual production
- Fashion and design
- Cultural heritage

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Frugal Educational AI

Affordable AI, under local control

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AI IS CONCENTRATED

Five companies held an estimated 71% of the world's AI computing capacity at the end of 2025, up from 63% in early 2024. That concentration limits education systems' influence over price, terms and control.*

* Source: Epoch AI (2026).



AI Impact Summit speakers after a discussion on Frugal AI convened by COL's President, New Delhi, February 2026.

SIMPLICITY MATTERS

Artificial intelligence opens new possibilities for teaching, learning and education administration. Whether it is affordable depends on fiscal space and national capacity.

When institutions rely on overseas AI services, per-user and per-query charges become a recurring foreign exchange outflow that rises with use. Cloud-only tools also need reliable, high-bandwidth connectivity that many schools lack. Access alone is also not a benefit: the UN's Independent International Scientific Panel on AI (2026) finds that access to AI tools does not produce equal benefit without accompanying investment in data, skills, workflows and institutions.

COL's Frugal AI approach positions AI in education as a digital public good and starts from the capability a task requires and the infrastructure institutions already have in place (COL, 2026a). A college, ministry or open university can host an open model on a workstation or modest server, turning an open-ended running cost into a planned investment in equipment and skills that stay in the country. Cloud services remain an option where they add value, while keeping humans in the loop.

Agentic AI raises the stakes. Systems that browse, use tools, and act with limited human oversight need stronger institutional controls than acceptable-use guidance alone.

CASE STUDY – FROM GABORONE TO NEW DELHI

At the India AI Impact Summit in February 2026, COL launched the Gaborone to New Delhi Compact on teacher-led, localised and frugal AI for equitable education (COL, 2026b). Signatories endorse its principles, appoint policy and technical focal points, and join or observe a 12-month pilot with reviews at months six and twelve.

A technical annex sets out a sovereign education-AI reference architecture: open and interoperable, low-cost, locally governable and teacher-mediated. It describes eight layers, three tiers of risk-based teacher oversight and four hosting options, so that institutions can match controls to the stakes of each activity.

Mauritius offers the first example. With COL support, the Higher Education Commission has issued national guidelines on AI in higher education, developed benchmarks for technology-enhanced learning and worked on a national higher education strategy for 2025–2035. COL has since trained an initial team of the Commission's technical staff to build, test and maintain AI-enabled applications under institutional authority.

The Mauritius experience could be codified as a support package for higher education commissions, quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions across the Commonwealth.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Members can accelerate in partnership

Join the Gaborone to New Delhi Compact and explore how shared Frugal AI capability can lower costs and strengthen national capacity.

MILESTONES

1 **AT CHOGM26**

Join

Encourage ministries and universities to sign the Compact and name policy and technical focal points.

2 **BY END 2027**

Pilot

Run 12-month pilots in two or three countries using the reference architecture: open models, local hosting and teacher oversight.

3 **BY CHOGM28**

Report

Publish pilot costs and value for money, and use the results to decide whether pooled procurement, open-source software and training are worthwhile.

WE CONTINUE TO ACT

COL will supply the architecture, curation, training and assurance; every system we support must belong to the Member Nation, within their defined governance and team capacity.

FROM GABORONE TO NEW DELHI (continued)

The potential uses are practical. A ministry could build locally governed dashboards that draw on several education databases, or a regulator could query policy and administrative records, without sensitive data leaving national or institutional control.

Institutions and agencies in Malaysia, Samoa and Vanuatu have also formally engaged, and partners are consulting stakeholders and testing pilots to establish value for money. India is a co-development partner, and COL's Teacher-in-the-Loop AI already works with its national examination boards. In Jamaica, a scoping mission with the Vocational Training Development Institute and CANTA explored Frugal AI for TVET in February 2026, and the University of the South Pacific endorsed the approach at the Compact's launch, where COL's session also brought in leaders from Fiji, Kenya and Mauritius.

Commonwealth cooperation can pool development costs and share software via open licences, training and experience, instead of each country buying similar services separately.

COL's role complements the Commonwealth Artificial Intelligence Consortium: the Consortium focuses on compute, skills and partnerships; COL on education, implementation and local capability.

THE COMPACT AT A GLANCE

8 layers in the sovereign education-AI reference architecture

3 tiers of risk-based teacher oversight

4 hosting options, so controls match the stakes

12 month pilot, with reviews at months six and twelve

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CHOGM ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA 2026

Sovereign AI

Data, languages and cultural heritage

TALKING POINT 11
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THE SOVEREIGNTY GAP

*Private investment in AI infrastructure approached half a trillion dollars last year. Public investment in AI capacity for developing countries is, by comparison, "a rounding error". The AI divide risks becoming "a development gap, a security gap and a sovereignty gap".**

* Source: UN Secretary-General, Global Dialogue on AI Governance, Geneva, 6 July 2026 (United Nations, 2026).

DATA, AND WHERE IT GOES, MATTERS

AI sovereignty is an extension of national responsibility for education, citizens' data and cultural heritage. Countries need the capacity to decide what AI systems learn, how they are used and who is accountable. Today, about 75% of the computing power of the world's 500 largest AI supercomputers sits in one country and 15% in another, and most countries lack the expertise to assess frontier models (Independent International Scientific Panel on AI, 2026).

Sovereignty does not mean isolation: no country owns the whole AI supply chain. A practical approach is a hybrid one, where non-sensitive tasks can use external cloud services while learner records, assessments and administrative data stay on nationally governed systems under domestic law. Drawing on several AI suppliers also reduces exposure to price changes, export controls and outages.

Sovereignty is also critical for language and culture. Some open models now work across 140 languages, yet models trained mainly elsewhere may poorly reflect national curricula and local languages, and exclude Indigenous Knowledge. Open models can be further trained on authorised local material, with communities deciding what is used and how knowledge is represented (Lewis, 2020). Japan's experience shows that such adaptation can improve performance in a national language without building models from scratch (Fujii et al., 2024).

CASE STUDY – STUDENTS AND SOVEREIGN AI

In February 2026, the India Student Community for AI launched within the GPAI community, and over 60 students joined its AI Impact Summit satellite event. With support from COL and its Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, and GPAI expert centres in Canada, France and Japan, it has become the Commonwealth Student Community for AI Governance, with cohorts in more than 20 countries by August 2026.

The community works through four pillars: national student coalitions, interdisciplinary research, evidence-based policy advocacy and institutional reform, from curricula to academic standards.

Language and data sovereignty run through every cohort's agenda. In Sri Lanka, students working with the Ministry of Education prioritise Sinhala and Tamil language technology with human oversight. Kenyan students are developing Kiswahili voice AI and, in August 2026, submitted a memorandum on the draft national AI policy calling for a youth seat on the National AI Council, subsidised computing for academic research and a right to explanation for automated decisions.

In Pakistan, students at Allama Iqbal Open University are working on tiered AI policy and rural AI labs; Maldivian students focus on Dhivehi; Australian students on safeguards for Indigenous cultural and intellectual property; and African and Caribbean cohorts on open-source tools in local languages, shared climate-prediction tools and cultural data sovereignty.



Members of the India Student Community for AI at an official satellite event of the AI Impact Summit, New Delhi, 18 February 2026.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Members can accelerate in partnership

Keep sensitive learner data under national jurisdiction, and adapt open AI models to national languages and curricula through Commonwealth partnerships.

MILESTONES

1 **AT CHOGM26**

Name focal points

Identify national focal points for education data and AI to work with Commonwealth partners.

2 **BY END 2027**

Classify data

Start classifying which education data may use external services and which must stay on national systems.

3 **BY CHOGM28**

Adapt models

Universities join Compact partnerships and begin adapting open models to national languages and curricula, with community consent.

WE CONTINUE TO ACT

COL will broker university partnerships, share methods and the reference architecture, and support young people's voice in AI governance.

STUDENTS AND SOVEREIGN AI (continued)

Their message is consistent: open-source language technology can counter algorithmic bias and the neglect of local priorities. These views can inform the Commonwealth Youth Forum, whose outcomes will be presented at CHOGM in St John's.

Regional policy is moving the same way. In the Caribbean, a regional AI task force has called for a harmonised, rights-based framework, a Caribbean data commons and resilient regional computing.

University partnerships supported by COL, including through the Gaborone to New Delhi Compact (COL, 2026), can pool computing capacity, expertise and methods, so smaller countries can take part while retaining control of their data and cultural resources.

A HYBRID, SOVEREIGN APPROACH

- Learner records, assessments and administrative data stay on nationally governed systems.
- Non-sensitive tasks can use external cloud services where they add value.
- Several suppliers reduce exposure to price changes, export controls and outages.
- Open models are adapted to national languages and curricula, with community consent.
- Universities share computing capacity, methods and evaluation.

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Safe and Human Technology

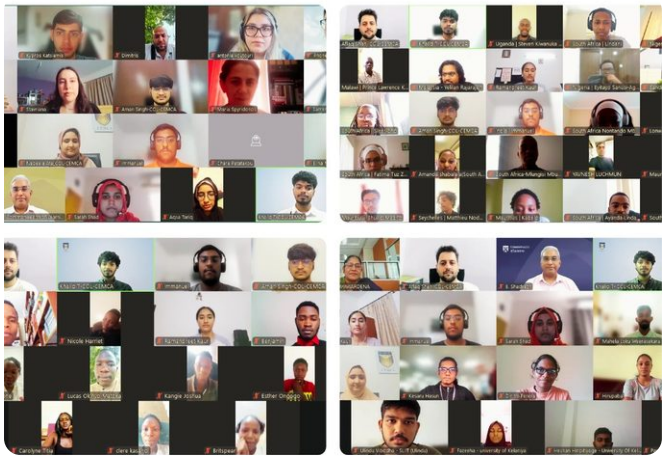
Protecting and empowering learners

TALKING POINT 12
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HARMS ARE ALREADY HERE

Studies suggest that between 16% and 58% of women have experienced technology-facilitated violence. The rapid rise of AI, including deepfake abuse, is adding new forms of harm.*

* Source: UN Women (2025).



Students from across the Commonwealth meet online in Voice of the Youth in Global AI Governance, the Commonwealth Student Community's route to CHOGM, 2026.

LEARNER SAFETY MATTERS

Protecting learners is a public responsibility. Social media and other digital platforms can expose young people to bullying, harassment and misinformation, and AI services can give inaccurate advice, reproduce discrimination, expose personal information and generate harmful content, including material used to harass, exploit and deceive. These risks bear on child protection, mental health, equal opportunity and public trust, and they fall hardest on women, girls and young people. There is a quieter risk to learning itself. The UN cautions that AI can create an "illusion of competence", as short-term task performance rises while durable learning weakens (Independent International Scientific Panel on AI, 2026).

Safeguards therefore belong in education policy, public procurement and institutional accountability, and the UK's product safety standards for generative AI in education show what this can look like in practice (UK Department for Education, 2026). Local control helps: institutions can define permitted uses, draw on approved resources, limit data collection and transfer, and restrict access to sensitive records. Local hosting alone does not make a system safe. AI agents that use tools or change records can disclose information or act before a teacher reviews the output, so controls must limit agent authority as well as protect content (Australian Signals Directorate, 2026). Safeguards need testing in local languages and settings, trained staff, security updates, transparency, and accessible ways to report harm and obtain human review and remedy.

Protection alone is not enough. Young people also need teaching and support to understand and manage these risks.

CASE STUDY – LEARNERS AND TEACHERS MUST DRIVE

Students and teachers must set the agenda. Through the Commonwealth Student Community for AI Governance, cohorts in more than 20 countries have called for student-led guidelines on academic integrity, audit trails and disclosure, a shift from bans to accountable use, alongside transparency, privacy and a right to explanation for automated decisions.

Their Global Virtual Conclave is working in four tracks: labour-market transitions and the future of work; local language preservation; transparency, sovereignty and privacy; and the energy and water footprint of computing infrastructure. Supporting learners through empowering teachers, COL's Teacher-in-the-Loop AI (TiL-AI) builds human oversight into learning design. It is teachers, not software, that must set the task, can intervene at any point and approve what learners receive. They co-create resources with AI agents, then validate them with peers and mentors, and a record of provenance shows what has been checked. The resulting open resources are shared in a public repository for other teachers to reuse and adapt: more than 1,500 peer-reviewed resources have already been published.

In India, 180 secondary mathematics teachers working with the national examination boards CBSE and CISCE now act as co-designers, validators and quality filters of AI-generated learning resources. Forty hours of TiL-AI training are formally recognised towards the mandatory 50-hour annual professional development requirement, making safe, critical use of AI part of teachers' professional standing (COL, 2026).

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

Members can accelerate in partnership

Build learner protection, accountable human oversight and controls over agent actions into the use of new technologies, such as AI, in education, and listen to young people.

MILESTONES

1. **AT CHOGM26**
   Hear young people
   Consider Commonwealth Youth Forum outcomes on AI and the GPAI-supported AI Youth Conclave on learner safety and cybersecurity, and support a time-limited expert working group, in harmony with the Commonwealth Secretariat group.

2. **BY END 2027**
   What guardrails mean
   Draft requirements for age-appropriate use, transparency, data protection and agent permissions, and test them in local languages with educators, learners, parents and security teams.

3. **BY CHOGM28**
   Train and showcase
   Train teachers and security teams, test containment and recovery, open routes to report harm and seek redress, and showcase AI, digital safety and wellbeing literacy in curriculum and teacher development as a model of implementation.

4. **BY 2030**
   'Lock in' the youth voice
   Demonstrate how your country has locked in the formal voice of young people in national AI and education governance.

WE CONTINUE TO ACT

COL will work with partners on shared safeguards, testing methods and staff training, and support youth participation in AI governance.

LEARNERS AND TEACHERS MUST DRIVE (continued)

The same principle runs through the reference architecture of the Gaborone to New Delhi Compact: three tiers of teacher oversight matched to risk, with logging and controlled access. Its next revision should also set out what an AI agent may do: each agent needs a named owner and access limited to an approved task, consequential actions need human approval before they run, and security teams must be able to suspend and restore services.

Teachers are shaping the rules: in the Eastern Caribbean (Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Saint Lucia, St Kitts and Nevis, and St Vincent and the Grenadines) and in Rwanda, in line with frameworks of the Inter-University Council for East Africa, based in Uganda.

COL partners' pilots offer settings to test these safeguards with educators, learners and parents. A proposed, time-limited Pan-Commonwealth Learning-focused working group of senior officials and independent experts, linked to existing Commonwealth AI initiatives, may advance the architecture through shared testing methods, procurement requirements and staff training, with small states helping to shape its work.

SAFEGUARDS TO REQUIRE

- Defined, age-appropriate uses, and approved learning resources only.
- Minimal data collection and transfer, restricted access to sensitive records, and agent permissions limited to approved data, tools and tasks.
- Teachers set tasks, can intervene and approve learning resources; consequential agent actions require human approval before execution.
- Testing in local languages and settings with educators, learners and parents.
- Transparency when AI is used, with accessible routes to report harm and obtain human review and remedy.
- Named institutional owners, trained teachers and security teams, protected action logs, security updates, and tested containment and recovery.

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Climate Action

Resilient learning for resilient communities

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LEARNING INTERRUPTED

*Climate change is a direct threat to learning. In 2025, climate shocks disrupted schooling for at least 171 million students in 106 countries / territories.**

* Source: UNICEF (2026).



Women began self-initiated community training sessions, using COL's Aptus frugal network device to reach vocational content, with partner CYO, Malawi, March 2025.

CLIMATE EDUCATION MATTERS

Education is a crucial tool for mitigating and adapting to climate change, especially in smaller countries that are hit hardest by its impacts. Integrating climate education into national teaching and learning gives people the knowledge and skills to drive sustainable practices and innovation, and open and flexible learning makes that education accessible and scalable for diverse populations.

Climate change is also a direct threat to learning. In 2025, climate shocks disrupted schooling for at least 171 million students in 106 countries or territories (UNICEF, 2026). Small island developing states are among the most exposed: cyclones, floods and heat close schools and cut power and connectivity.

Yet education is often missing from climate planning. COL's report to Commonwealth education ministers urges a shift from reacting to shocks to reducing risk in advance (Kwauk, 2022).

Resilience is built in classrooms and ministries as well as in hardware, and above all by teachers who can keep teaching through disruption and help schools, and the communities around them, get back to normal quickly.

THE CONCEPT – LEARNING FOR CLIMATE ACTION

MODELS THAT REACH THE MOST REMOTE COMMUNITIES

COL has developed several models that ensure even the most remote communities are equipped with the tools to respond to climate change. Its Aptus device creates a local network so that phones, tablets and laptops can provide access to digital learning resources without the internet. Low-cost and portable, Aptus has helped learning reach outer islands in Fiji, and teachers in the Maldives were trained to use it. In Malawi, women began their own community training sessions with partner CYO, using vocational content delivered this way.

Cyclones test these models. After Tropical Cyclone Gita struck Tonga in February 2018, damaging the power grid and school buildings, COL provided 25 Aptus devices and 250 tablets to restore classroom teaching, with the Tonga Institute of Higher Education leading the deployment (COL, 2018). In The Bahamas, where schools were still recovering a year after Hurricane Dorian, COL presented 30 Aptus devices and 300 tablets to the Ministry of Education in 2020, preloaded with curriculum-aligned content and backed by a helpdesk (COL, 2020). Both responses came after the storm; the lesson is to prepare before the next one.

Resilience is also institutional. When an earthquake struck Vanuatu in 2024, the learning platform of the Pacific partnership for open, distance and flexible learning was back within a week.

Communities carry climate learning further. Mobile learning through COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers has reached more than 1 million farmers, and women farmers in COL's Empowering Women and Girls initiative adopted climate-smart practices that raised yields and incomes.

GREENING THE LEARNING AGENDA

Initiatives such as 'Greening the Learning Agenda' emphasise embedding sustainability into all levels of education (Kanwar, 2022). When COL consulted 26 Commonwealth countries, they asked for climate literacy in the curriculum, closer alignment of climate and education policies across ministries, stronger teacher capacity and digitised Indigenous knowledge of environmental conservation, as well as devices and connectivity.

The same thinking now shapes COL's programmes. In the next phase of the Pacific partnership, climate content is one of five design gates to pass before delivery scales, and every learner-facing activity is reviewed each year for the quality of its climate content. Teachers are being prepared for climate-responsive teaching, and green and blue skills turn climate learning into livelihoods: climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy and water management on land, and ocean literacy, sustainable fisheries and marine protection at sea.

RESILIENT SYSTEMS, RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

By prioritising climate education and promoting open learning, we can build resilient communities able to respond to long-term environmental challenges and short-term shocks. For education systems, that means assessing climate risks school by school, planning how learning resumes when schools become shelters, and choosing technology that still works when power and internet fail: radio, print, offline and online.

Offline, teacher-led AI can be part of that kit, with compact models on local servers that keep supporting lesson preparation when connections drop, and teachers in charge. And education belongs in national climate plans, budgets and climate finance requests, so that the next cyclone, flood or heatwave finds teachers and learners ready, and the system recovers in days, not months.

A RESILIENCE CHECKLIST FOR EDUCATION SYSTEMS

- Climate risks are assessed school by school, with communities, and mapped nationally.
- Learning can resume within days, even when schools serve as shelters.
- Ministries track damaged schools, affected learners and days of learning lost.
- Teachers and staff are trained in climate literacy and trauma-informed support.
- Radio, offline and online options keep learning going through power cuts.
- Digital and AI tools work offline and keep teachers in charge.
- Education is written into national climate plans, budgets and finance requests.

CONNECTIONS

07 Future Green Skills
Climate-smart livelihoods, starting with agriculture

08 Blue Economy Skills
Large ocean states need ocean-ready youth

THE OPPORTUNITY

Put climate education and resilient, open learning at the heart of national climate action, starting in small island states.

COL will share open content, distance-learning expertise and teacher training, and help partners measure what works.

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Empowering Women and Girls

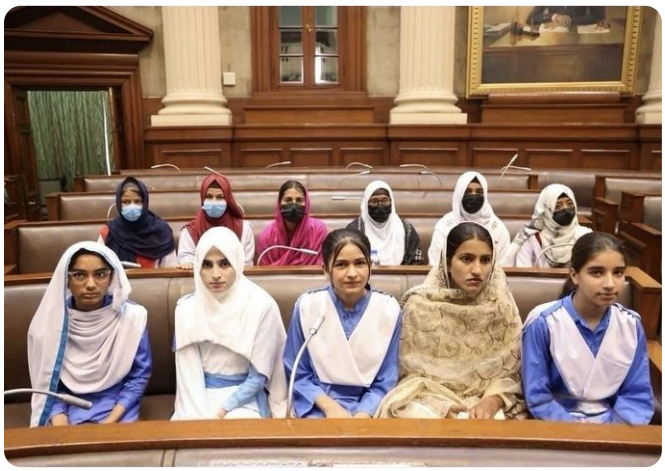
From community voice to national change

TALKING POINT 14
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THE RIGHT TO LEARN

*Young women are twice as likely as young men to be out of employment, education and training, and nearly one in five young women worldwide was married before the age of 18: 31% in sub-Saharan Africa and 25% in Southern Asia.**

* Source: UN DESA (2026).



Girls from Pakistan engage directly with Members of the Provincial Assembly of Punjab as part of EWG advocacy.

EQUITY IS FUNDAMENTAL

Gender equality is not a side issue: it decides whether education and skills reforms succeed. Child, early and forced marriage ends education, while gender-based violence and harmful norms limit what girls and women can learn and earn. In Central and Southern Asia, young women are four times as likely as young men to be out of employment, education and training (UN DESA, 2026).

Lasting change comes when learning, livelihoods and rights move together at every level: the individual, the household, the community and the state. Women need skills and income; communities need leaders, including men and boys, who back girls' education; and community voice must reach the people who make laws.

COL's Empowering Women and Girls in the Commonwealth (EWG) initiative, supported by the Government of Canada, works this way with local partners in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mozambique, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, where between 10% (Sri Lanka) and 48% (Mozambique) of women were married before the age of 18 (Ferreira, 2026; Girls Not Brides, n.d.). It strengthens women's rights organisations, engages men and boys as allies, connects women to skills and livelihoods, and links community advocacy to national policy change.

The approach is rooted in rights. Knowing their rights gives women and girls the confidence to claim education, control income and speak to those in power.

CASE STUDY – PAKISTAN: FROM ADVOCACY TO LAW

In Pakistan, COL has worked since 2016 on long-term advocacy by women's rights organisations, supported with additional funding from Global Affairs Canada, most recently through EWG. This work has contributed to three landmark measures: the Islamabad Child Marriage Restraint Act (2025), Balochistan's legislation (November 2025) and the Punjab Child Marriage Restraint Bill (April 2026), which makes underage marriage a non-bailable offence.

Girls themselves took the case to lawmakers, meeting Members of the Provincial Assembly of Punjab. Across the project, women's focus groups prevented between 192 and 256 early or forced marriages in their own communities in a single year.

A STRONG CIVIL SOCIETY

Support for women's rights and civil society organisations grew from 27 at the start of the project to 451, with 162 strengthened in 2025 alone. Over 80% of them challenged child, early and forced marriage, responded to gender-based violence, supported girls' return to school and advanced women's rights to equal wages, land and leadership, and over 40% reported no early marriages in their communities in 2024–2025.

At the systems level, civil society engaged governments on land and economic rights, representation, gender-responsive budgeting, policy on gender-based violence and the local application of CEDAW.

In partnership with Canada

PAKISTAN: FROM ADVOCACY TO LAW (continued)

Community structures now resolve problems locally: 270 community gender equality committees resolved more than 70% of gender-based violence cases, and in Sri Lanka, school-level redress mechanisms were reactivated.

MEN AND BOYS AS ALLIES

Engaging men and boys has been a cornerstone. Scores on the Gender Equitable Men scale rose from a baseline average of 24 to 56.8 out of 72 across all five countries, with 65% to 80% of men and boys showing highly gender-equitable behaviour, and men's knowledge of gender equality reached 76.4%, up from 15%. Men in project communities are preventing their daughters' early marriages, advocating for girls' schooling and sharing household responsibilities.

AGENCY, INCOME AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

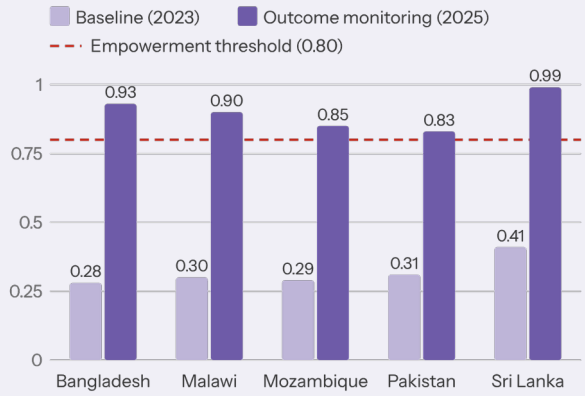
The Women's Empowerment Index rose from 0.32 at baseline to 0.90, surpassing CARE's empowerment threshold of 0.80, and every country met its three-year target (see chart). Between 60% and 75% of women gained greater control over decisions on health, marriage, education and economic participation. More than 28,000 women and girls were linked to financial services and business support, and 65–70% of female TVET graduates entered employment or self-employment within six to nine months (COL, 2025).

Between 55% and 65% of female farmers adopted sustainable practices, and more than 56,000 women and girls took part in climate adaptation activities, from tree planting to rainwater harvesting; farm yields rose by 40–60% and household incomes by 70–75% against baseline. In Bangladesh, training reached 93 villages, with computer and sewing courses leading to incomes of about 8,000 taka a month.

A MODEL READY TO SCALE

Seven local NGO partners kept programmes running through floods, heat, cyclones and unrest. Awareness-raising on rights reached more than 465,000 women and girls, more than 4,900 community leaders were trained and more than 770 clubs for men and boys challenged harmful norms (Ferreira, 2026). Community-led innovations, such as the human rights board game Tiene Toa, a Walking School mobile learning vehicle and 36 self-learning videos on climate resilience, are ready to be replicated, and a final evaluation will follow.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT INDEX, BY COUNTRY



Source: EWG baseline and outcome monitoring (COL, 2025).

COL's wider equity work is delivering in every other region. For instance: Girls Inspire courses with Gulu University in Uganda and YAPO in Tanzania; a tertiary gender and inclusion policy in The Gambia; and the new Women in STEM initiative (WiSE), which met in Kuala Lumpur in August 2026 with Member Nations including Malaysia, The Gambia and Uganda.

CONNECTIONS

02 New Models for School
Reaching beyond the classroom

07 Future Green Skills
Climate-smart livelihoods, starting with agriculture

THE OPPORTUNITY

Scale community-led models to link women's and girls' learning, livelihoods and rights to national policy change.

COL will share the EWG model, tools and evidence, and support partners to adapt and scale it, with special thanks to Global Affairs Canada for their direct support of this initiative.

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Small State Advantage

Agility matched with urgent need

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SMALL IS POWERFUL

Thirty-three of the world's 42 small states are Commonwealth Member Nations, many of them island nations. What works for them can work for the whole Commonwealth.*

* Source: Commonwealth Secretariat (2026).



Young people gain skills for work and enterprise through nine inclusive courses run by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sport and Social Affairs and COL, with support from New Zealand, South Tarawa, Kiribati, 2025. Credit: MWYSSA.

AGILITY MATTERS

Small states sit at the sharp edge of the world's education future: geographic dispersion, thin institutional capacity, climate shocks, youth out-migration, skills shortages and digital divides, alongside rising pressure to prepare learners for AI, green economies and flexible labour markets.

Yet small states also have an advantage. They can move quickly, collaborate closely and test models that larger systems struggle to coordinate. Positioned as beneficiaries, they will keep receiving solutions designed elsewhere. Organised as a network, they can create, adapt and lead as frontline incubators for frugal, resilient and inclusive education.

The time is right. The Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS, agreed in 2024, set a ten-year course for resilience (United Nations, 2024), and CHOGM now meets in St John's with small states at its heart.

In the Pacific, for example, open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) is how systems can reach young people through community learning hubs, mobile and offline content, teachers developed at a distance, and qualifications recognised across the region.

Pacific institutions must own and lead it, with partners investing for the long term.

In partnership with

NEW ZEALAND
FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE
Manatū Aorere

CASE STUDY – THE PACIFIC: A TEN-YEAR PARTNERSHIP

The Pacific shows what long-term partnership can achieve, and why it matters. Only 26% of people in Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand, used the internet in 2025, the lowest share of any region (UN DESA, 2026). About a third of young Pacific women and a quarter of young men are not in education, employment or training, rural young women most affected (COL, 2026).

WHAT THE FIRST PHASE DELIVERED

With support from New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, COL and Pacific partners completed the first phase of the Pacific Partnership for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning (2020–2025). More than 7,200 educators enrolled in professional development, and some 5,900 young people who were outside education, employment and training completed community-based skills training: a 63% completion rate, with women making up almost two-thirds of participants, at about NZD 81 per trainee. Partners adapted more than 300 open educational resources to local curricula, and after Vanuatu's 2024 earthquake the learning platform was back within a week.

Results reached across the region. In South Tarawa, Kiribati, more than 240 young people completed skills courses; the Coalition for Education Solomon Islands trained 145 young people, including 93 women and 39 with disabilities; and in Naoero, 33 teachers were trained in learner support for open and distance learning, alongside a national OER collection site and an online TVET toolkit.

THE PACIFIC: A TEN-YEAR PARTNERSHIP (continued)

The first phase also taught a hard lesson: too few projects found a permanent place in national systems, budgets or qualifications frameworks.

A TEN-YEAR INVESTMENT, 2026–2036

The next phase is a ten-year partnership with New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, delivered with the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD) at the University of the South Pacific, across Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Naoero, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. It will move proven approaches into national systems, budgets and qualifications frameworks, so that by 2036 Pacific institutions own, finance and deliver them, with COL in support.

The sequence is deliberate: "Ownership comes before scale, and evidence comes before expansion" (COL, 2026). Five design gates, covering safeguarding, recognition pathways, institutional ownership, climate content and evidence readiness, must be passed before delivery scales in any country.

The work has three strands: pathways for young people outside education and work, through community learning hubs, foundation programmes, recognition of prior learning and mentoring; recognised credentials for teachers in open and distance learning, STEM and climate-responsive teaching; and stackable micro-credentials in green skills such as solar installation and climate-resilient construction. At least half of all participants will be women, and at least 65% in the youth stream.

CREATIVE AND DIGITAL PATHWAYS

Pacific young people bring creative and digital talent too, from YUT PAWA's young entrepreneurs in Vanuatu (TP09) to digital skills that turn connection into livelihoods (TP06): pathways that the partnership's community hubs and micro-credentials can recognise and grow.

COL CONTINUES TO ACT

We support small states as a Commonwealth network to strengthen national institutions and build, test and share learning models, and build long-term partnerships to close the digital gap.

DIFFERENT BUSINESS MODELS

Small states	Large states
Shared regional curriculum, platforms and specialist expertise	Distributed national or subnational delivery networks
Common assessment and quality assurance where feasible	National standards with locally adapted implementation
Regional cohorts make specialised programmes viable	Scale lowers unit costs but adds coordination complexity
National recognition with pooled technical infrastructure	Interoperable data, credential and learner support systems

SMALL STATES LEARN ACROSS REGIONS

In Antigua and Barbuda work spans policy, teachers, tertiary education, TVET and livelihoods, and Antigua State College connects through COL's Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) to a network of 33 small states. Grenada's digital transformation of TVET is becoming a model for other small states, and in Dominica, Kalinago farmers are learning climate-smart practice in a Farmer Field School (TP07). Malta, where COL's partnership since 2017 led to the Commonwealth Centre for Connected Learning (3CL; Grech, 2025), has national blockchain-based credentials, which were showcased at COL's Caribbean Focal Points Meeting in March 2026.

CONNECTIONS

06 Digital Skills for Youth
From connection to livelihoods

09 Orange Economy Skills
Turning creativity and culture into livelihoods

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