

Adding Global Value

Presentation Transcript

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Chairman, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates,

I am very grateful to the Chair of the COL Board of Governors, Dr Linda Sissons CNZM for her insightful introduction. It is an honour to present my organisation, the Commonwealth of Learning to you. The purpose of my presentation is to highlight how COL adds value not just to Commonwealth Member States but also to the wider global community

As you know, COL is an intergovernmental organisation established by Commonwealth Heads of Government when they met in Vancouver for CHOGM 1987.

Our mission is to help Commonwealth member states to use existing and new technologies for expanding access to education and training.

Our Strategic Plan for the next six years is entitled 'Learning for Sustainable Development'

COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development. Learning must lead to opportunities for economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation.

This aligns us closely with Goal 4 of the 17 SDGs identified by the international community. This standalone goal on education focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030. This strategic alignment will enable COL to add global value in a systematic manner.

For this reason, our strategic plan is organised in two sectors: education and skills, with gender as crosscutting. Education and skills are a key priority for all Commonwealth countries and underpin the achievement of all the other SDGs.

By harnessing the potential of existing and new technologies, COL will scale up its impact.

We have given you a document entitled 'Adding Global Value' which demonstrates how COL is working with partners to transform the idea of sustainable development into a concrete and actionable reality. I will give you five examples.

The first is the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth. Ministers of Education had directed COL to develop an institution of, for and by the small states. All 31 small states are active members of this consortium

It has been an effective platform for connecting the Commonwealth, fostering collaboration and building capacity.

The courses developed collaboratively under this initiative are being offered in ten institutions in eight countries.

The participating states are scattered all over the world. In order to facilitate the mobility of students and qualifications across national boundaries, VUSSC developed a Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF). The objective of the TQF is to establish the quality and comparability of the qualifications. This has become a useful instrument for accreditation even in non-Commonwealth countries.

The National University of Samoa offers the VUSSC developed Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture. The first group of students who graduated are already in full-time employment. Vaelua, a graduate of this diploma plans to carry her qualifications to the University of the South Pacific, where she will pursue a further degree.

My second example is the World Open Education Resources Congress that COL organized jointly with UNESCO at their Paris headquarters.

The seventy countries present agreed on the Paris Declaration. The Declaration urges Member States to offer all publicly funded educational materials as OER and to encourage the development of OER not just in English but in other languages as well to suit different cultural contexts.

OER are educational materials in any format, print or digital introduced with an open license so that anyone can use reuse or adapt them as required. The use of OER can reduce the costs and improve the quality and effectiveness of education.

The impact of this Declaration has led to the development of OER policies in South Africa, Mauritius and India, to name a few and several non-Commonwealth countries including China, Indonesia, Netherlands and Argentina.

COL is now globally recognised as a leader in OER and its several publications have been translated into Chinese, Ukrainian and German.

My third example of Technology Enabled Learning demonstrates that internet-based learning transcends national boundaries. These are the graduates of the Commonwealth Certificate for Teacher ICT Integration in Antigua and Barbuda. UNESCO is using these resources in non-Commonwealth countries such as Oman and Mali.

As Jacqueline Peters-Richardson says that lessons learned from completing the course empowered me to deliver more effective teaching and learning.

COL has provided technology-enabled learning to the field staff of international organisations such as World Bank, WHO etc. Dania al Yamani of the UNHCR office in Damascus, says and I quote ‘Since the security situation in my country deteriorated, it has become difficult for me to register and attend courses. eLearning

was the solution for easing this problem and keeping the door open for me to gain new experience and knowledge'. Unquote.

My fourth example is COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers project. Under this initiative, which is being implemented in seven countries, COL catalyses the links between the civil society, experts and financial institutions to develop multi-media based learning. Research shows that for every dollar invested, income and assets worth \$9 have been generated among these farmers who became lifelong learners using basic mobile phones.

In the last one year in Tanzania, over 3000 women who learned farming techniques using mobiles, radio and TV, started agri-enterprises.

Through mobile learning, the Batwa community in the remote forests of Uganda learned scientific honey and beekeeping practices which has resulted in two meals a day and schools for their children.

COL had developed a computer to mobile technology with the University of British Columbia, to reach the farmers in remote locations. This technology is now being deployed in Afghanistan and as Prof Qayumi of UBC says 'LIVES is highly effective and less costly for mass education, particularly for those challenged by illiteracy and those populations isolated by geography or culture, such as girls.'

My final example relates to Massive Open Online Courses or MOOCs, which have had a phenomenal rise in the last three years. COL has been providing technical advice to partners in developing countries on how to offer MOOCs for Development. Our MOOC on Mobiles for Development reached participants in 116 countries.

COL's MOOC for Malis or gardeners was offered through basic mobile phones and offered jointly with the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur. Here is Niharika Verma who learned about 22 new crops and used this free opportunity to prepare for her advanced exams.

In partnership with the African Virtual University, COL offered a MOOC to train teachers. In addition to Commonwealth countries, participants from the US also registered.

What has been our impact? COL commissioned an external evaluation to assess its impact over the past nine years and the report states, 'COL has had a major impact on individuals, a limited impact on formal institutions and a significant impact on community based organisations ... is highly respected and well regarded, flexible and nimble organisation which leverages partnerships...to achieve outcomes'.

Honourable Ministers, as you have seen, COL adds global value by one, promoting 'learning for sustainable development'; two, supporting innovations for affordable and accessible technologies and three, by serving the last person in the queue.

With that let me thank you for your contributions, both financial and intellectual, and for your kind attention.