

Promoting Learning for Sustainable Development



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Chair, Secretary General, Excellencies. Thank you for the opportunity to be ‘virtually’ present and to briefly share with you some examples of what the Commonwealth of Learning does. We have sent you a more detailed report of our work during this financial year.

As you know, COL is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1987. Our headquarters are in Metro Vancouver and we have a regional office for Asia in New Delhi.

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

COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development. Learning must lead to three things: one, economic growth, two, social inclusion and three, environmental conservation.

First, how has COL supported economic growth?

Millions of farm families do not have access to learning in developing countries. COL offers a new approach called the Lifelong Learning for Farmers. This unique programme has lifted thousands of farmers out of poverty. Research shows that for every dollar invested, income and assets worth \$9 have been generated among farming communities in India.

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 opened up new possibilities for their children, who now go to school.

In the last one year in Tanzania, over 4500 women who learned farming techniques using mobiles, radio and TV, started agri-enterprises. This programme is also being implemented in Ghana Jamaica Kenya Mauritius and Sri Lanka.

Skills development is a major priority for most governments. Using video and television, COL has trained thousands of young people in various trades. As a consequence of this training. Eunice Maganga from Kenya is now a trained construction worker and her income has increased by 150%. This programme has impacted young people in large countries such as Nigeria, Ghana as well as small ones like Nauru.

Two, how does COL’s work to support social inclusion?

Thanks to grants from Canada and Australia, COL is using distance learning and technology to support the schooling and skilling of 45,000 girls and women. They will have the opportunity to either complete

secondary school or be trained in skill for employment or entrepreneurship over the next three years in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mozambique and Tanzania.

As countries achieve success in providing universal primary education, there are still significant barriers preventing many young people from entering secondary education, particularly girls. Open schools provide flexible learning opportunities by using a range of technologies from print to the internet. COL assessed the Social Return on Investment of Open Schooling in Belize. The study concluded that for every dollar invested, there was a SROI of \$8.59. Through COL support, Matelot fishing village in Trinidad & Tobago recently initiated an open school.

We know that not everyone in the Commonwealth has internet connectivity. To overcome this, COL developed Aptus a low-cost offline virtual classroom that provides learners in remote locations with access to digital resources.

Allama Iqbal Public School in Swat, Pakistan is using Aptus since January this year and a study shows that the learning outcomes of the students have improved as have the practices and motivation of their teachers. Aptus has recently been deployed in Kiribati, Samoa and Fiji.

Third, what is COL's contribution to environmental conservation?

Ministers of Education directed COL to establish a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). All 31 small states of the Commonwealth are active members of this consortium. Environmental sustainability is a central concern for all the states. VUSSC is offering online courses in eco-tourism, sustainable fisheries and students have already graduated in Sustainable Agriculture from the National University of Samoa. All the students who graduated already have full-time jobs.

Working with partners in the University of South Pacific, IIT Kanpur and UNESCO, COL offered a Massive Open Online Course or MOOC on Climate Change. 70% of the participants were from the Pacific region.

COL has also helped the Centre for Environmental Education, India to develop a Green Teacher programme which ensures that teachers inculcate environmental concerns amongst school children.

These, in short, are a few examples of how learning leads to sustainable development. COL is widely acknowledged as a leader in technology innovations and develops replicable models to scale up its impact. Every three years COL organises a Pan Commonwealth Forum on Education which attracts a large global audience of anywhere between 600-800 participants. The next Forum will be held in Malaysia this November.

Excellencies, as you have seen, COL promotes 'learning for sustainable development'; supports innovations for affordable and accessible technologies and serves the last person in the queue.

COL is your organisation and it works for you. COL will continue to respond to your needs and priorities. We are very grateful for the voluntary financial contributions and the intellectual inputs that we receive from your countries and hope that you will continue to find COL worthy of your support.