

# Responding to the Nadi Declaration: Can Education Deliver?



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Chair, Secretary General, Excellencies, Colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity to brief you about my organisation the Commonwealth of Learning. We've given you a detailed report of our work this year, so I won't go over that but present COL's response to the Nadi Declaration, the communique from the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers that was hosted by Fiji last February.

As you know, COL is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government at the 1987 CHOGM. Canada offered to host the organisation and we've been in beautiful British Columbia since.

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 economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation.

Let me give you a summary of the results achieved in the first four years of our current strategic plan 2015-2021. Of our target of providing improved and sustainable livelihoods to 300,000 people, we have already reached over 187,000. We aimed to increase the organisational capacity of 470 institutions, we have evidence that 276 institutions across the Commonwealth have enhanced capacity due to COL interventions. Our goal is to provide equitable access to quality education to 1.4 million people and we'll need to work a lot harder to achieve this target in the next two years since we're only at the half way mark.

Even though we are a small organisation, we leverage the potential of new and existing technologies to achieve both speed and scale. We have activities in 47 Member States.

How can technologies help us to address the question posed at the 20th CCEM—can education deliver for sustainability and resilience? Let me take five recommendations from the Nadi Declaration and give you examples of COL's response.

First, ministers stressed the need for quality education regardless of circumstances. Let me share three examples.

The first cohort of out of school youth in a remote fishing village in Trinidad & Tobago graduated through a COL-supported open school. Open schools provide flexible learning opportunities through the

use of technologies. The entire curriculum was structured around fisheries which addressed the livelihoods needs of the young people.

These young students go to a COL-supported open school in Belize. Research shows that every \$ invested has resulted in \$ 8 worth of benefits to students.

In Mozambique COL has worked with 15 schools in all regions of the country to develop quality content in Portuguese—staff have been trained in technology enabled learning and the courses will be piloted this July.

Second, the Nadi Declaration identifies ‘high quality teaching’ as a priority.

Integrating technology into teaching is often a challenge for teachers in both developed and developing countries. In partnership with Athabasca University, Canada, COL recently offered a MOOC on Technology Enabled Learning in teachers from 73 countries around the world participated, including from 43 Commonwealth member states.

COL is supporting school-based teacher development in The Gambia, Kiribati, Sierra Leone and South Africa with the objective of improving learning outcomes.

Third, the Nadi Declaration calls on the educational community to ‘enable success, future education and employment.’

COL has established a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) and all 31 small states of the Commonwealth are active members of this consortium. Leafaitulagi Vaaelua is a graduate of the VUSSC diploma in sustainable agriculture offered by the National University of Samoa and is already in full-time employment in her country.

COL’s Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme is offered by universities in 11 countries. After graduating from this programme, Annelise, a former mathematics instructor in Mauritius is now a deputy rector of a secondary school.

In Uganda, 95 boys and girls received advanced ICT skills training for six months—of these 74 are already employed or self-employed.

Fourth, the Nadi Declaration draws attention to the ‘need for climate change awareness and increased awareness of green and blue technologies’

COL worked with the National Teachers Institute, Nigeria, to develop a Green Teacher course which aims to ensure that teachers inculcate environmental concerns amongst school children from an early stage. This is being offered online to teachers in the country.

Working with the Blue Economy Institute in Seychelles, COL supported the development of an online course in this emerging field which was offered free by the University of Seychelles.

COL has developed a solution for backing up the data of educational institutions on the cloud so that records are not lost when disaster strikes. This is being implemented in Dominica with support from Jamaica, a nice instance of Commonwealth cooperation.

Fifth, the Nadi Declaration is firm in its commitment to ‘tackle gender disparities in education, whether that be boys or girls’.

Women's equality and empowerment are central to COL's vision of promoting learning for sustainable development. With support from the governments of Canada and Australia, COL launched a project to empower women and girls.

COL has worked with partners in five countries, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mozambique and Tanzania, to skill girls for livelihoods so that child early and forced marriage can be prevented. In Bangladesh we partner with the boat schools to bring education and training to remote unreached communities.

In the last three years, over 63000 girls have received skills training, more than 11000 of them have found new sources of income generation and 1181 child early and forced marriages have been averted.

Finally, the Ministers urged us to strengthen educational partnerships

COL is collaborating with COMSEC and the University of the West Indies to offer a joint qualification on youth development. This initial partnership has now expanded to include 14 institutions around the Commonwealth.

COL is working with ACU on a higher education project where it provides quality assurance expertise to 18 universities in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

COL's triennial Pan Commonwealth Forum is being organized in partnership with the Open University, UK in Edinburgh this September and I hope you will join us as we expect large numbers of delegates from your countries and Ministers of Education. We have 15 partners for this event which includes UNESCO Paris, UNESCO IITE, Moscow and UIL, Hamburg.

These, in short, are a few examples of our work. To the question, can education deliver, the answer is yes. One, learning leads to livelihoods enabling the individuals and communities to become resilient. Two, the use of technologies appropriate to the context is critical to these interventions. Three collaboration rather than competition is key.

With that let me thank you for your contributions and for your kind attention.