

Opening Remarks



27 January 2020

COL Focal Points Meeting – Caribbean Region
Rodney Bay, Gros Islet, Saint Lucia

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Dear Deputy Permanent Secretary, Distinguished Focal Points, Colleagues:

It is a great pleasure to be here in Saint Lucia for the Caribbean Focal Points meeting. We are very grateful to Mr. Kendal Khodra, Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development, for representing the minister and for making the time to be with us today. We also appreciate the support and hard work of our Focal Point, Germain Anthony, for organising this regional event. Thanks to each and every one of you for travelling long distances to be here. I am pleased to note that nine Focal Points from the Member States will be participating in this meeting.

St Lucia is a very important member of the Commonwealth and has been a consistent supporter of COL. The Ministry has worked with COL to develop an ICT in Education policy and strategy and this ongoing partnership for the successful implementation of the policy will continue. The Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership platform was launched two years ago in St Lucia and Antigua & Barbuda. Several courses have been developed jointly for skills development. Thank you St Lucia for your dynamic leadership in educational development in the region.

As you know, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was established by the Commonwealth Heads of Government with a mandate to promote quality education and training through the use of open, distance and learning technologies. Since then, COL has become a catalyst for positive change for a third of the world's population. COL's emphasis on lifelong learning for employment, entrepreneurship and empowerment, its global leadership in Open Educational Resources (OER) and innovations in educational technologies have been praised by Commonwealth Education Ministers at their triennial conferences. A report drafted by UNESCO in 2019 to assess its own work in ICT in Education in 2014-2018 cited COL as a model alongside OECD and the European Union.

COL promotes 'learning for sustainable development' which means that learning must lead to social inclusion, economic growth and environmental conservation, which aligns our work closely with Sustainable Development Goal 4. If the targets of SDG 4 are to be achieved by 2030, we need creative and innovative approaches. This is where COL is playing a major role as a thought leader. Even though COL is a small organisation, it successfully leverages the potential of new and existing technologies to achieve speed and scale.

What constitutes our success? One, we have a strong country focus and we tailor our programme to meet the needs of Members States, which is why these regular meetings with you are so important. Two, we are results-oriented and provide evidence of our outcomes and impact—the country reports we have brought for you will give you a summary of what we have done in your country. And three, COL

demonstrates value for money, which means we optimise our resources so that for minimum intervention, we achieve maximum impact.

Let me share some key highlights.

All the Commonwealth small states in the Caribbean are members of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth or VUSSC. The idea for VUSSC was proposed by Ministers of Education, and today it has grown into a robust network dedicated to expanding access to tertiary education. In the past few years, VUSSC has developed 39 courses based on your needs and priorities. The time has come to seize this opportunity and offer these free quality courses through your institutions—this will enable you to reduce the costs to the institution and the students. The VUSSC Transnational Qualifications Framework has received high praise globally and you can use it to promote student mobility within the region and beyond. COL supports partners in harnessing technology to increase access to competency-based skills training, and one of the major achievements has been the development of a competency-based certification system known as the Caribbean Vocational Qualification.

COL is also collaborating with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the University of the West Indies to offer a joint qualification on youth development which is offered by 17 institutions in 15 Commonwealth countries, including by the University of Guyana.

A partnership between COL and UWI's Sir Arthur Lewis Institute for Economic and Social Studies seeks to strengthen staff capacity to develop and deliver an online MSc degree in Development Studies in Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

COL is collaborating with 11 higher education institutions across the Commonwealth to offer the CEMBA/CEMPA programmes. The University of the Commonwealth Caribbean in Jamaica is an active member of this partnership. COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers is offered by Jamaica's Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) which has also hosted farmers and extension staff from Antigua and Barbuda, a nice example of regional cooperation.

In addition to these pan-Commonwealth and regional initiatives, COL has been making special efforts to deepen its work in each of your countries and this targeted approach is beginning to deliver results.

Belize is one of the countries in the region to have embraced our open/innovative schooling model. Digital OER content has been developed and preparations are underway for its piloting in selected schools and outreach centres.

In Dominica, COL partnered with the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development to educate citizens about mitigating climate-change risks and becoming better prepared for future disasters. Five locally produced public education messages have been broadcast on Dominica's radio stations.

In Grenada, COL has assisted the development of A Practical Handbook for the Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions.

Several participants from the region are benefitting from the MOOCs on Sustainable Business and Technology Enabled Learning including from St. Kitts and Nevis and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

COL is supporting The Bahamas to strengthen the schools affected by Hurricane Dorian by deploying the COL-innovation the APTUS.

These are just some examples of COL's work.

What do we hope to achieve at this meeting? Let me outline three key objectives. One, we need to hear from you about your priorities and how these can be addressed by COL.

Two, this is also an opportunity for us to provide a summary of what we have done in your countries since 2015. We will present the final report to your Ministers when they meet for CCEM in Kenya next year.

Three these face to face meetings are an excellent forum to remind you of COL's purpose, its organization and its programmes. Since you are our ambassadors in the field it is important you know what we do. This is also an opportunity to strengthen our engagement and forge partnerships with other colleagues in the region.

At the end of the two days we hope to have very clear guidance and directions from you for our next strategic plan 2021-27.

It is my pleasure to introduce you to our Dr Balaji, our Vice President Dr Moses Tenywa who leads our work in agriculture and livelihoods and of course Dr Mairette Newman, the ES responsible for VUSSC.

Let me once again thank our hosts St Lucia and each one of you for your presence and for being COL's voice and visibility in the field.