



# President's Quarterly Report

July – September 2021

## Board Matters

The Audit Committee and the Board met virtually in July, with the next meeting of the Audit Committee to be held on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2021.

Mr Amit Khare, Secretary, Higher Education, who represented India on the Board retired in September. We appreciate the additional financial support provided during his term.

Mr Philip Parham completed his term as the UK's representative on the COL Board in September. We are grateful for his close engagement and guidance.

I extend a warm welcome to HE Dr Hajo Sani, the Nigerian Ambassador, Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, as the new Board member representing Nigeria.

## General

This is my first quarterly report under the Strategic Plan 2021–2027. The redesigned format presents a high-level overview of COL's work. Some highlights are provided below:

The imperative of achieving 100% expenditure as directed by the Board is being addressed with proactive measures in place. This includes COL's strategy to address the risk of underspends. As at 30<sup>th</sup> September, 53 % of the programme budget has been spent/committed as compared to 26% at the same time in the previous year. As for human resources, four recruitments at the Adviser level have been made to support the programme. The process for filling additional new positions is underway. An independent Human Resources review has been commissioned.

COL's Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) platform won a prestigious [Brandon Hall Group Gold Excellence in Learning Award 2021](#). C-DELTA is designed to help students and teachers become competent digital education practitioners. COL

has launched a new platform, [COLCommons](#), that offers free micro-courses in professional areas for just-in-time learning for teachers and students.

The Association of Commonwealth Universities has invited COL to participate in the [Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning](#) project to develop and strengthen quality assurance systems for 12 universities in Ghana and Nigeria.

The COL-Coursera Workforce Recovery project continues to skill and reskill citizens around the Commonwealth. Building on the success of this partnership, the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago has launched a national programme to scale up skilling. After Guyana and Barbados, this is the third government in the Caribbean to take ownership of this COL initiative.

## President's Activities

The recent report of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has drawn urgent attention to the need for mitigating the adverse changes to the planet's ecosystem. How can COL contribute? I have constituted a High-Level Panel to develop an agenda for action to address the issue of how distance learning and technologies can foster environmental conservation. I am delighted that internationally acclaimed expert and Nobel laureate, Dr Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary of the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm Conventions and former Minister for Environment and Energy in Seychelles will Chair the panel. Ministers from eSwatini, Fiji, Malta and Trinidad and Tobago will be joined by Assistant Director- General for Education, UNESCO; Deputy Secretary General, Commonwealth Secretariat and the Directors of UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning and UNESCO Institute of Information Technology in Education, to address the issue of the climate crisis through the power of education and training. The resulting report will be presented to Commonwealth Ministers of Education.

With no travel possible, I was able to accept several speaking invitations from institutions/organisations in China, Germany, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, and South Africa by contributing videos for their events. The common concern is how technologies can be harnessed to build resilient systems of education in a post-pandemic world. Speeches are available [here](#).

COL participated in the 2021 Global Education Summit through an online panel on 'Getting Girls Into and Back to School.' I moderated the discussion which included ministers from Botswana and Guyana. Open schools were proposed as a cost-effective and flexible option to ensure girls' return to school, mitigate the impact of learning loss and provide safe spaces.

A kitchen garden app developed for and by Nauruans, with COL support, was launched in the presence of the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Environment, Hon Rennie Gadabu. This app, which is unique to Nauru, is expected to lead to diverse food production and better nutrition.

A meeting was held with ministers the Hon Nyan Gadsby-Dolly and Hon Lisa Morris-Julian, Ministry of Education, Trinidad and Tobago to discuss how COL

could support the development of a national open school and propose strategies for learning remediation as schools reopen.

Even as many countries open borders, the pandemic continues to exert an adverse impact on development. Extreme poverty is on the rise and progress towards food security is declining. Quality education and lifelong learning are seen as the way forward. The two major issues at this time have been equity and quality. More than 11 million girls are expected to drop out of school. Widespread learning loss has been reported. As governments face resource constraints, the role of open and distance learning (ODL) becomes a viable option for accelerating progress towards achieving SDG 4. ODL can increase access, improve quality, reduce the costs of education, all with a lower carbon footprint. This is the moment for COL to play a bigger role in transforming education systems.

However, continued closures and lack of digital infrastructure are delaying the scheduling of many COL activities and impacting the ability of partners to deliver. In spite of all these challenges, COL staff is working hard to achieve the targets expected for this year and positive progress is being made.

## Programme: Progress against Outputs

Instead of reporting activities under each initiative, we are reporting progress against the outputs identified in the Annual Implementation Plan 2021–2022. This links with the Theory of Change in the Strategic Plan 2021–2027.

There is progress against all ten indicators and trends indicate that targets will be met and, in some cases, exceeded. In two instances, the targets have already been exceeded, and will need to be revised upwards.

### Building National Resilience

#### Government staff/officials trained/sensitised



**174** government staff/officials trained or sensitised in ODL, OER, TEL, GE or COL models.

target: **881**

**20%**

An M&E course was offered to officials of the Ministry of Education and staff of pilot open schools in Belize. A Training of Trainers workshop through TEL was organised at the Ministry of Education, Seychelles.

#### Support for national policies/ strategy development



**1** policy/strategy developed

target: **12**

**8%**

An 'ICT in Education Policy and Strategy' for Cameroon has been finalised and sent to the Minister of Basic Education for adoption.

## Strengthening Institutions

### Institutional staff trained



**3,671**

staff/faculty/trainers trained in ODL, OER, TEL, GE, or COL models

target:  
**12,395**

**30%**

In Nigeria, an Employability Workshop at the National Open University of Nigeria resulted in the establishment of an Employability Task Force. Teachers from universities were trained in Open Educational Resources (OER) policy and practice in India. Staff from institutions in Guyana completed a series of online training workshops designed to familiarise them with national standards for approving and accrediting ODL programmes.

### Institutional policies/strategies developed



**21** institutional policies/  
strategies developed

target:  
**60**

**35%**

In Bangladesh, educational leaders from 20 universities developed institutional OER policies. A report on 'The transformation of Namibia College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) into an Open University' was completed.

### Learning opportunities developed/improved — courses and learning resources

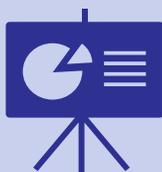


**75** courses developed or  
improved with COL support

target:  
**195**

**38%**

To support increased access to learning, NAMCOL developed four short courses on online learning for staff and students, while 22 blended courses have been developed at the Fiji National University on problem-based learning. Two courses relating to Persons with Disabilities (PWD), 'Introduction to Assistive Technologies' and 'Introduction to Disability Needs Assessments', were offered online. A total of 37 content modules were developed by Vidiyal, a community-based organisation in India, for a MobiMOOC on ecologically sound agricultural practices.



**938** learning resources  
developed with COL support

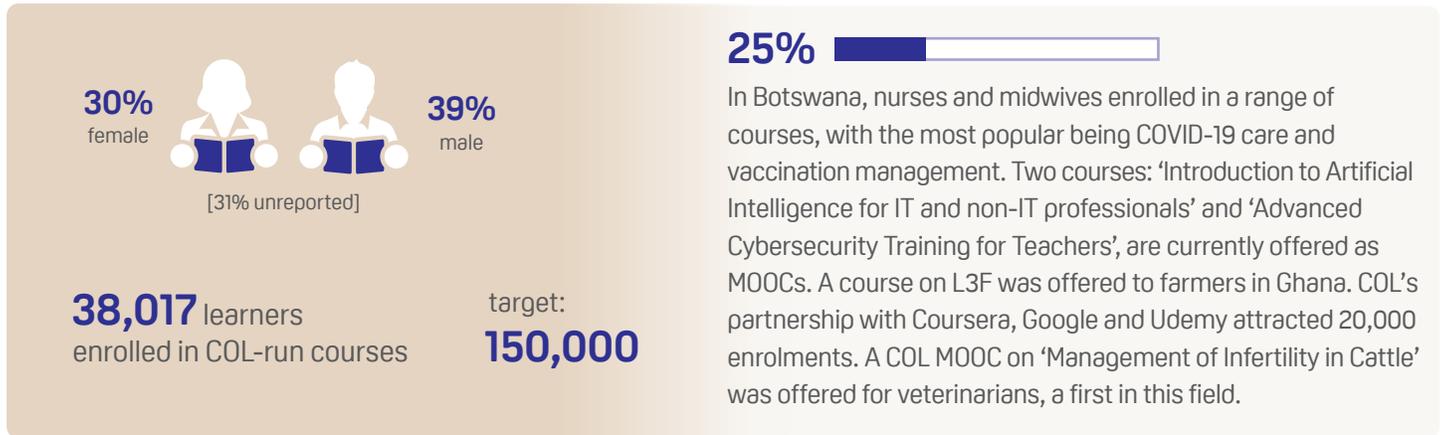
target:  
**15**

### Exceeded

Under Open Schooling, 660 OER in video format have been developed and uploaded on YouTube to increase access to secondary education in Kenya and Tanzania. The videos were also broadcast by Elimu TV, an African education channel. In the Pacific, ten consultative workshops were completed for the design and development of an ODL Course Catalogue and Online TVET Toolkit with stakeholders from nine Pacific countries. The targets in this case were vastly underestimated and will be revised accordingly.

## Improving Lives and Livelihoods

### Gender-responsive learning opportunities developed and offered through ODL



### Learners mentored and linked to services and financial resources



### Partnerships with labour market, finance and service industry established



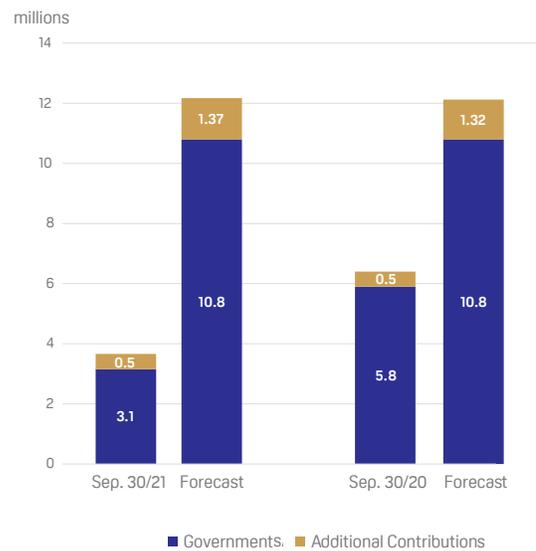
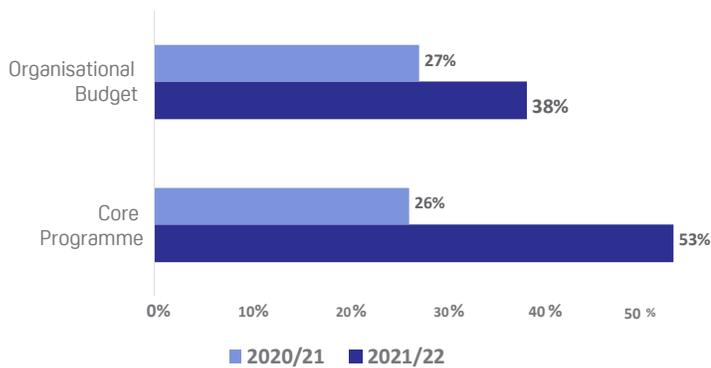
### Community members sensitised



## Revenue and expenditure

During this quarter, contributions were received from 18 countries totalling \$3.1 million (as compared to 19 countries totalling \$5.8 million for the same period in the previous year). The difference in amount can be attributed to the fact that five major donors had contributed at this time last year as compared to two major donors this year.

COL is forecasting additional contributions of \$1.37 million from grants and service fees. Deferred revenue of \$1.1 million was on hand at the beginning of the financial year which will be recognised as revenue during the year as activities related to these funds are completed. \$500,000 from these sources has been recognised to date.



COL has estimated that 53% or \$2.7 million of the core programme budget has been spent and/or committed at September 30, 2021. This is an increase of 27% over the same period a year ago.

At the organisational level, 38% of the total annual budget of \$12.2 million has been spent and/or committed at the end of the first quarter (as compared to 27% for the period ended September 30, 2020).

## Communications

COL published 23 news releases. A total of 15 new videos were released on the organisational YouTube channel with 23,200+ views. The social media presence has grown to 274,400+ followers on Facebook and 11,400+ on Twitter.

COL's Facebook posts reached over 655,300 users, and its tweets earned over 336,500 impressions.

During this reporting period, COL was mentioned 15 times in media from 11 countries.

### Recent publications and resources:

- *Connections* (vol. 26, no. 2)
- *Journal of Learning for Development* (vol. 8, no. 2)

- Report on the Baseline Study on Technology-Enabled Learning at Model Institute of Education and Research, India
- Report of the Massive Open Online Course on Learning to Learn Online
- The Impact of Technology-Enabled Learning Implementation at Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology

They are available on OASIS, COL's open access repository.

*Professor Asha S. Kanwar*  
*President & Chief Executive Officer*  
*October 15, 2021*