



INNOVATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE

14-16 September 2022

The Tenth Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF10) on Open Learning, co-hosted by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and Athabasca University (AU), was held in Calgary in Canada between 14 and 16 September, 2022. The theme for this year's conference was *Innovations for Educational Resilience*. The University of the South Pacific (USP) was represented at this forum through the Centre for Flexible (CFL) Learning which hosts the Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD); COL's regional center in the Pacific. A team of five staff based at CFL attended the conference and presented papers based on the above theme.

Recognized as one of the biggest international conferences on open, distance and technology-enabled learning, this event was held in a hybrid format to allow for broader participation of key stakeholders from the education sector, COL's focal points based in the nine Commonwealth Pacific countries, TVET providers, heads of tertiary institutes, educators and key players in the field of Open, Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL) from around the Commonwealth countries and beyond. There was a large representation from the Pacific with 35 participants from 11 Commonwealth countries that included Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Australia, New Zealand, Kiribati, Nauru, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

The purpose of this year's conference was to provide a space and the opportunity for participants to share, analyse and provide feedback on good practices that contribute towards improving the quality of education. It also gave an opportunity to participants to share insights on how technology and innovations can be leveraged to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education for lifelong learning.

Apart from paper presentations and keynote addresses by major policymakers and experts in the field of open, distance and technology-enabled learning, there were special panels and workshops that shed light on relevant topics such as climate change and resilient education. The different sessions provided the basis for more discussions on how innovation in education has been fostered so far, especially during lockdowns and what can be done to make our education systems more robust, resilient and sustainable.

Presentations by CFL

There were three presentations made by CFL on the following topics:

1. Title: e-Proctoring exams at a regional university during COVID-19: Understanding the challenges (Rajni Chand and Mohammed J. Hussein)
2. At-Risk Students: An early intervention System (Rajni Chand, Afshana Anzeg and Sharishna Narayan)
3. Semester Zero: An innovative orientation and nurturing program (AUTHORS: Rajni Chand, Raveena Goundar and Pratish Raj)

Special Session on Open, Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL) in the Pacific.

A special parallel session on ODFL in the Pacific was held on 15th September at Room Glen 201/202 @ Telus Convention Centre. In attendance were key people in the field of education who are playing a prominent role in advancing the transition to ODFL in the Pacific. This event was co-chaired by The Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, Prime Minister of Samoa and Professor Asha Kanwar, President and CEO, COL. Key representatives from COL were also present at the session.

This session also gave an opportunity for key project leads to talk about the progress made on the 'Partnership for ODFL in the Pacific Project' which is currently being implemented by the COL and PACFOLD – USP, supported by New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). Apart from a review of recent progress made in ODFL in the Pacific, there were also discussions on good practices and insights for a way forward.



Significant presentations were made by the following key policy makers, stakeholders in education and COL's project leads working on the Partnership for ODFL in the Pacific project:

- **The Honorable Prime Minister of Samoa, Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa** - who gave the opening remarks and reiterated the importance of ODFL in increasing access to education in the Pacific.
- **Director CFL and PACFOLD, Dr. Rajni Chand** – gave an overview of PACFOLD and the level of support that the center is providing to COL in executing the Partnership for ODFL project in the Pacific since its inception in 2020.
- **Dr Tony Mays, Education Specialist: Open Schooling, COL** – gave an overview on the work done so far in developing Open Educational Resources (OER) repository for various levels in primary and secondary education and the online searchable ODFL course catalogue for the Pacific that is being developed by his team.
- **Mr Robert Okinda, Adviser: Skills, COL** - talked about the implementation of the online TVET toolkit for Pacific TVET practitioners.
- **Ms Frances Ferreira, Acting Director: Skills, COL** – gave an update about her workstream and the work she has done so far with development partners such as NGOs and CSOs in the Pacific, especially skills training opportunities for youth, women and people with disabilities.
- **Dr Anjeela Jokhan, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Heritage and Arts, Fiji** - talked about the strategies employed by the Ministry of Education in Fiji to continue teaching and learning during lockdown. She commented on how COL assisted them in accessing OER and other learning materials during lockdowns. She also noted that teachers need training on online learning.

- **Ms Kirsty Pelenur, Deputy High Commissioner of New Zealand in Canada** - broadly spoke about NZ's partnership with COL in 2020 and their aim of increasing access to education in the Pacific. She stated that MFAT's focus is to help Pacific Island States improve the quality of education provision so that youth, women and children with disabilities are equipped with lifelong skills needed to succeed in life and work.

Overall, the conference covered a wide range of issues and involved many different partners from the Commonwealth and beyond. A lot of discussion was generated about the issues that countries in the Commonwealth are facing in the key areas and it gave the participants a chance to evaluate their successes and challenges related to the key areas of the research and determine the actions that could be implemented for improvement.



CFL staff representing USP at PCF10: From left: Mohammed Hussein, Dr. Rajni Chand, Afshana Anzeg, Raveena Goundar and Sharishna Narayan