

Educating the one billion children lucky enough to find a place in classrooms and the 60 million students at universities and colleges might cost about \$1 billion dollars. What then would be the cost of:

- providing literacy education to some 900 million adults world-wide;
- making basic education available to 1 billion children;
- re-skilling, retraining and keeping current a world-wide workforce of over 2 billion people who will most likely be working till 2025;
- enabling some 700 million youth to be economically productive; and
- making tertiary education available to no less than 150 million adults who desire it.

The cost of doing this will be high but the cost of not doing it will be far higher.

Governments must look beyond conventional approaches to create systems that deliver mass post-secondary education and training comprehensively and inexpensively. Fortunately, distance learning and new technologies have brought this challenge within our grasp. They have given us new tools for human resource development – namely the open learning institutions in the North and in the South. For the first time in history we possess the means to reach almost every community on our planet in a single moment. This challenge prompted the Commonwealth Heads of Government to create The Commonwealth of Learning in Vancouver, the only Commonwealth agency to be located outside Britain. Since its creation ten years ago it has mobilized efforts in the Commonwealth, which comprises one quarter of the world's population to give access to knowledge to millions who were unreached or unreachable by conventional education systems.

The technological revolution is affecting many facets of economic and social relations. The London Economist has referred to the “death of distance” as the greatest force changing and shaping our society. At the Commonwealth of Learning, for instance, our programming achievements in non-formal education through a combination of talent,