UNISA
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

**ADDRESS FOR THE V CONGRESSO BRASILEIRO DE EDUCAÇÃO
SUPERIOR A DISTÃNCIA 2008[1]**

**NEW FORMS OF MANAGING DISTANCE EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
ADVANCING OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING IN AFRICA**

A Changing Global Dynamic

In the past few months, South Africa has received in short order, three very significant and high-profile delegations, from China, India and France. These were not merely courtesy visits. They were aimed at strengthening economic ties and collaboration on a hitherto unprecedented scale and across a variety of fronts. In another turn of events, South Africa, represented by President Mbeki has just taken up its chairpersonship of the UN Security Council, a first for an African country. These seemingly random events are very significant in that they offer up evidence of a continent that is coming into its own as a global player and they provide in a very concrete manner, acknowledgement by the rest of the world, that Africa is a wakening giant; a giant that has vast potential not only in terms of is economic growth and development but also in terms of the role that it could play as a future global power. In short, it is becoming evident that Africa has the potential to influence in a very fundamental manner, the balance of power as we know it today. It must however be acknowledged that any lasting growth must be driven by an educated and skilled citizenry.

---

[1]Address on the occasion of the V Congresso Brasileiro de Educação Superior a Distãncia, Gramado, RS , 2008. 22 – 25 April 2008. Delivered via teleconferencing.

Despite recent disappointing events in the Sudan, Kenya and Zimbabwe, the Continent of Africa is enjoying levels of stability and relative prosperity unheard of in past decades. This can largely be ascribed to the process of democratisation that has taken root in many countries after years of totalitarian rule. And as Africans increasingly embrace democracy and a more uniform commitment to peace, spaces are being opened up for the rebuilding of people and communities, for the kind of social development and advancement that is fundamental to socio-economic growth and stability. And it is in these spaces that education, which has been a very lamentable "casualty of war" can and must take root, prosper and flourish. Positive developments are gradually changing the environment and the climate of engagement for higher education in Africa

Yet we would be remiss if, in our cautious optimism about our Continent's future, we were to ignore the very real problems that we continue to face: ongoing wars which seem to impact most disastrously on the most helpless - women and children; the scourge of HIV/AIDS which continues unabated and which has seen an alarming increase in child-headed households; poverty levels which ensure that the poorest of the poor remained trapped in an endless cycle of misery; completely dysfunctional or lacking infrastructure and IT access, and a brain drain that has seen the cream of our continent leaving for other countries where their services are required and appreciated.

Furthermore it is achingly clear that the damage that has been inflicted upon many countries over decades of conflict, totalitarian misrule, and gross neglect will never be repaired by traditional rehabilitative programmes. Africa finds itself trying to play "catch up" in a world whose transformation is being propelled by technologies that have created an unstoppable momentum. Given these stark realities, and understanding that over half of Africa's population is under 16, it is understandable that distance education is seen as a viable means of providing access to large numbers of students, in support of Africa's growth imperatives. Nation building and economic reconstruction require human resources and distance education is seen as a means of accelerating socio-economic development in Africa through the production of appropriately educated and skilled human capital.

Article 9 of the World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21ª Century states the following:

(a) In a world undergoing rapid changes, there is a perceived need for a new vision and paradigm of higher education, which should be student orientated, calling on most countries for in-depth reforms and an open access to policy so as to cater for ever more diversified categories of people, and its contents, methods, practices and means of delivery, based on new types of links and partnerships with the community and with the broadest sectors of Society.

(c) To achieve these goals, it may be necessary to recast curricula, using new and appropriate methods so as to go beyond cognitive mastery of disciplines. New pedagogical and didactical approaches should be accessible and promoted in order to facilitate the acquisition of skills, competencies and abilities for communication, creative and critical analysis, independent thinking and team work in multi cultural contexts, where creativity also involves combining traditional or local knowledge and know-how with advanced science and technology. These recast curricula should take into account the gender dimension and the specific cultural, historic and economic context of each country..." [2]

Clearly then distance education and open learning in Africa is without doubt an idea whose time has come. It is driven by the tremendous impetus for technical and intellectual advancement and drive towards human capacity building and training throughout the Continent. In a world where 72 million children remain out of school, one in five adults is without basic literacy skills, and many pupils leave school without acquiring essential skills and knowledge,[3] it is an appropriate and urgent response to decades of neglect and lack of investment in higher education over the years to meet the challenge of the times. We have now reached a stage when no one country in Africa on its own can be expected to marshal the necessary resources for the massive investment required by higher education.

Distance education promises the appropriate degree of innovation and flexibility and to allow collaboration and cooperation across countries. It is best able to maximise the mutual recognition of qualifications and transfer of credits that the SADC Protocol on Education and Training, of NEPAD, and of the more recent Algiers Declaration of the Ministers of Education of the Member States of the African Union (April 2005), as well as the Strategic Framework on Education and Human Resources, 2015 of the African Union. Distance education and open

---

[2] World Declaration on Higher education for the Twenty-First Century.
http:///www.unesco.org/education/eduprog/wche/declaration_eng.htm pg 8

[3] UNESCO: Education for All – Global Monitoring Report 2008.
http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php.url_do =do_topic&url_section+201.html

learning are best set to bring into the learning bracket many whom our societies had deprived of opportunities for education either because of poverty, war and conflict or due to family circumstances. It gives effect to the lure of lifelong learning. Furthermore, with the advances of technology, the demands of the information society and the challenges of total human development it enables the whole of society to be beneficially engaged in development and human advancement.

But we all know that the backlog and deficits are enormous. We are aware open learning and distance education is not going to materialise without a major investment in technology, infrastructure and people. Contrary to some opinions on this matter, distance education does not come on the cheap. We need to build expertise in distance education in all our countries. Even more important, we must ensure that distance education is quality assured, relevant and flexible and uses innovative modes of delivery and modern technology, and commits to high levels of learner support. We need too, to acknowledge that Africa has a particular set of needs and challenges that might not be consonant with the paradigm of open distance learning in other international bodies and this requires us to be discriminating and pragmatic. International best practice can be of assistance up to a point. Thereafter the distance education provider in Africa must be creative and innovative, ever cognisant of available resources and technology. These African-specific challenges and needs gave rise to the establishment of the African Council for Distance Education.

The ACDE is a pan-African association of leaders, practitioners and providers of distance education, and of planners and policy-makers, of scholars and researchers. It is a forum for discussion and debate, for the promotion of and advancement of distance education in Africa. Indeed, its mission is "to promote the use if methods of open and distance learning to increase access to education and training in Africa." The Council seeks to advance distance education and open learning in higher education throughout Africa by providing occasions for networking and collaborations among distance education institutions, researchers and practitioners, by promoting scholarly research and studies in distance education, and by the provision of expertise and advisory services in distance education. Obviously distance education cannot be the sole means of higher education, but it does meet the needs of developing countries and it dovetails with the development goals of many countries on our Continent. However, success in ODL relies to a large extent on the sharing of available resources, on collaboration rather that

competition. The statement released by the Vice-Chancellors at the end of the ACDE Conference in Eggerton puts it succinctly:

> The ACDE is inspired by the new spirit in Africa, and wished to affirm, contribute and give expression to the African Renaissance and Nepad's commitment and pans to support the immediate strengthening of the university system across Africa including the creation of specialised universities, where needed, building available African teaching staff.

Open Distance Learning: Philosophy and Practice

The terms open learning and distance education represent approaches that focus on opening access to education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners. [4] The term ODL has become the internationally preferred label for innovative non-traditional modes of delivery whose defining purpose is to overcome barriers to access.

"The Historical evolution of distance education has been in four main phases, each with it own organisational form, derived from the main form of communication.

- Correspondence systems originated at the end of the nineteenth Century, and are still the most widely used form of distance education in less developed countries, Based around a study guide in printed text and often accompanied by audio and video components such as records and slides, interaction in the correspondence method is by letters and other written or printed documents sent through postal systems

- Educational television and radio systems use various delivery technologies – terrestrial, satellite, and cable television and radio – to deliver live or recorded lectures to both individual home-based learners and groups of learners in remote classrooms where some face-to-face support might be provided. Some systems offered limited audio or video-conferencing links back to the lecturer or a moderator at a central point.

- Multimedia systems encompass text, audio, video, and computer-based materials, and usually some face-to-face- learner support delivered to both individuals and groups. In this approach, which is that used by the open universities, instruction is no longer the individual's work, but the work of teams of specialists, - media specialists, information specialists, instructional design specialists, and learning specialists. Programmes are

---

[4] Open and Distance Learning: Trends, Policy and Strategy Considerations. Unesco 2002, pg 7

prepared for distribution over a large number of learners, usually located across a whole country.

- Internet- based systems in which multi-media (text, audio, video and computer-based) materials in electronic format are delivered to individuals through computers, along with access to databases and electronic libraries, and which enable teacher-student and student-student, one-to-one, one-to-many interactions, synchronously or asynchronously, through e-mail, computer conferences, bulletin boards, etc." [5]

In his paper entitled "Fifth Generation Distance Education" Professor Jim Taylor of the University of Southern Queensland makes mention of a 5th generation ODL Model which is based on the 4th generation mentioned above, but which aims to capitalise on the features of the internet and the web. It is clear then that ODL is an evolving mode of delivery, driven by the dual imperatives of emerging technologies and increased access.

Open Distance Learning is a form of education that combines the world of work with learning with mutual benefit. In other words it is possible to receive early benefits as the learner progresses with her/his studies. Besides the economic advantage, distance education may have a more immediate social impact. It is a means to satisfy missed opportunities and improve one's training for the job. In other words, it may give the learner a feeling of satisfaction and personal fulfilment.

In modern society, higher education has become a critical rite of passage. It marks maturity and gives capacity to engage the world out of school. "It is", according to Michael Thorne, "a transformative experience in people's lives when identities may be decisively shaped" [6]. Higher education is an important element in the formation of character, in providing skills and "to nurture a reflective quality", the capacity to think and formulate thoughts independently, to analyse and evaluate situations critically even before one becomes a producer and creator of knowledge.

---

[5] Ibid, pgs 23,24

[6] Neufeld, B (1999) Conceptual distinctions in university planning, In Peterson (Ed). Pg 29

Open Distance Learning in Africa, though, remains an alternative or complementary mode of learning. Open Distance Learning has become a policy option for a growing number of African states, particularly in light of its potential to provide higher education en masse. For many who have attended school, a university or college is the place to go, a logical "next step" in their education journey. For many, however, for whom life circumstances have rendered university attendance a distant dream, ODL offers another opportunity. They can better their chances, and improve their qualifications by devoting themselves to distance education. ODL then, provides an opportunity to those who, because of a lack of finances or other disadvantages such as disability, or historical disadvantage or other forms of discrimination, may not be in a position to access higher education.

Much distance education learning theory is built around the notion of the adult learner who is assumed to be self-directed, problem centred, results orientated, independent and wanting choice and accordingly, distance education is best suited to a mature learner, a person with the capacity to assess his or her circumstances and make life choices. Those who are self-directed learners benefit most from distance education. In distance education, learners become "active discoverers and constructors of their own learning." In other words they are not mere passive recipients of information, they digest, engage and reflect from their own experience and discover themselves anew. That is the reason the 'learning' paradigm describes open distance learning more accurately. The learning paradigm addresses better the situation of the non-traditional learner. It places the learner at the centre of the learning cycle, not in isolation but as an interactive participant where the educator does not only impart knowledge but also learns and discovers from the insights and experiences of the learner. The American Council on Education describes this process aptly:

> ... non-traditional study is more an attitude than a system... This attitude puts the student first and the institution second, concentrates more on the former's needs than the letter's convenience, encourages diversity of individual opportunity rather than uniform prescription, and de-emphasises time, space, and even course requirements in favour of competence and, where applicable, performance[7].

---

[7] Hanson, Katharine H., Meyerson, Joel W. International Challenges to American Colleges and Universities: Looking Ahead. American Council on Education, Series on Higher Education, 1995 by American Council on Education and the Oryx Press, Phoenix, Arizona, USA.

Open in distance education usually signifies that entrance requirements are simplified or judged from the readiness of the individual candidate to undertake tertiary studies. 'Open', however, also implies a readiness to face up to the learning future and adapt and develop as circumstances dictate. 'Distance' suggests that the learner and the educator undertake the transmission and learning tasks without being mediated by time or space. Open distance learning advances the ideal of lifelong learning and continuing education. It concretizes the reality that for most of us life lived to the full is a learning opportunity and an environment of discovery.

It has, however, long been recognized that learning in these circumstances takes place most effectively where courses are designed with an awareness that the learner may be engaging the material in isolation from class or other learners. If enthusiastic, he or she may engage other members of the family and any local educated people like teachers. The demand therefore is that the learner must receive the learning material in a manner that will engage her/him and with which the learner can interact creatively. The language of the text must be very clear and as plain as necessary. Jargon or technical expressions, depending on the level of studies, must be carefully explained and illustrated. It has been found that illustrations, case studies and examples provoke thought and understanding. Learning materials development, therefore, becomes a core element of pedagogy in distance learning.

Student support is another critical element. With a system of support available to a student, the sense of isolation can be minimized. Support takes the form of counselling and advice about study methods, essay writing, research and use of the computer and library, communication with the tutor or lecturer, assessing the problem in order to benefit from an enquiry from the professor and, of course, programmed tutorial and study groups either with the professor or with a peer group. Another necessary instance is that the student must have confidence in the effective management of the system - that enquiries are responded to in reasonable time that lecturers respond to telephone messages, that scripts are marked and comments detailed and helpful, that examinations are well organized and results published in a timely manner.

Of course, with advances in technology, much of open distance education is driven by technology. Courses are designed with technology in mind and ICT is increasingly being used to

assist in learning. This technology enables the student to have direct and immediate access to the lecturer, may participate in chat rooms with other learners and the lecturer, to transmit materials by electronic mail, may access the digital library and browse the internet doing their own research or may have lectures posted on the web. There is also a growing trend whereby some courses are available only via electronic means. Telematic centres and multi-medium learning models established in many institutions offering distance education either in dedicated distance education institutions or in dual mode institutions which are principally contact learning institutions but operate limited distance education programmes.

In Africa, this most advanced form of technology is not a viable medium for most ODL learners. Many live in very remote areas, generally in isolation. Coping with book learning is itself an innovation and the investment necessary to navigate the computer may become a barrier. Because of the acknowledged educational benefit of the computer, the university committed to ODL, may be obliged to provide learning centres decentralized from the main campus and train learners in the use of the computer and establish a computer laboratory.

When it comes to Africa, there is some tension between the traditional "western" understanding of the various generations of ODL, and their practical implementation in the African context. Given the fact that most of the modes have originated in western countries in response to the technology advances that have been made in those same countries, it stands to reason that African countries, the majority of whom already have severe and critical higher education obstacles to overcome, will not be in a position financially, technologically or infrastructurally, to keep abreast of changing delivery modes. Furthermore, given the diversity of the student population, their varying levels of computer literacy, language literacy and financial wherewithal, it is most unlikely that any given mode or generation of ODL will offer African distance education institutions a suitable "fit". What is likely, is that if African ODL institutions hope to service all of their students according to their needs, they will have to use a selection from the spectrum of the modes, from pure paper-based delivery through to high tech online delivery, gradually working towards the most technological efficient mode that they can support.   This brings with it an entire range of complications, particularly as regards infrastructure, systems and process alignment, methods of assessments and so on. It would seem that that if Africa is to bridge the educational divide by means of ODL, it will have to have to the confidence and innovation to create an "indigenous" ODL model that takes into account the size and shape of

the students who seek access, as well as the socio economic conditions which bind them. Until that happens, African ODL institutions are likely to vacillate between the various delivery modes, without ever achieving a suitable "fit", and this will continue to impact upon institutional efficiency, service delivery, learner support and throughput rates.

In the words of Badat :

> To be a free people is to have the courage to be the authors of our own destiny, to be pioneers rather than just imitators, to push to the limits the bounds of possibility, and to take responsibility fro making decisions and choices.....Ultimately, however, we must develop our own thinking and ideas, devise our own approaches...[8]

Having established the philosophy and practice of ODL, I now wish to turn to the questions of Access, Quality, and Success.

Access

The purpose of adopting ODL as a policy option is ostensibly to increase access to higher education especially by non-traditional learners. These may be those who may not have adequately met the admission standards set by residential universities, or they may be mature entrants or others who wish to enhance their qualifications. Most may be studying while working but some may be unemployed or women at home. The learners may be doing so out of interest or for recreational purposes; others may need to improve their qualifications either as part of work requirements or for professional purposes.

The critical element in enabling ease of access into tertiary institution is by ensuring that fees are affordable. This can be done either by appropriate bursary schemes, financial assistance by employers or the government ensuring that fees are kept low through a subsidy or loan scheme. Governments are urged to establish a financial aid system for the sole purpose of assisting ODL learners. If the university sets fees as one generally has to do, it is proposed that the fees be set at a level far below that charged by residential institutions. An ODL institution has to be competitive and attractive to deserving learners.

---

[8] Badat, S (2004) *Quality Assurance, Higher Education and Social Transformation: The Governance of Quality and the Quality of Governance of Quality.* Address to the First Biennial Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM) International Quality Assurance Conference. 23 – 25 June 2004 South Africa, Johannesburg. Pg 21

In South Africa candidates for university studies are required to possess a certificate endorsed by the Matriculation Board. Increasingly, however, alternative admission routes have been devised. Increasingly other entrance mechanisms such as the Recognition of Prior Learning are being brought into consideration. This allows would-be learners who may not qualify strictly according to the matriculation endorsement route, to qualify nonetheless on the basis of prior learning or experience. Such prior learning is carefully assessed and evaluated in order to test the capacity of the learner to undertake the studies desired. The South African system, therefore, is not fully open a regards admission but has opened some pathways towards university entrance which can promise a reasonable degree of success for the learner and judge the capacity of the learner to undertake the studies with benefit.

Quality

It is very critical that distance education should overcome the stigma of inferiority that often attaches to qualifications from such institutions. Quality therefore should in the first instance be a self-serving imperative for distance education institutions. The open distance learning institutions has to assure the integrity of its qualifications in order to gain the confidence of the employers, government and prospective students. It must earn the respect of its peers as a centre of excellence in research and teaching. The university must therefore submit itself to stringent scrutiny and regular quality assessments. There has been much debate and a proliferation of literature in recent years about quality assurance in education especially in higher education.

The process surely begins with the quality of academics a distance education institution attracts. University academics should be no less qualified than academics in residential universities. Indeed, as educators, academics in distance education institutions need a qualitatively extra dimension. They must have a passion for and commitment to distance education as a mode of learning delivery, empathy with their learners and skills to participate in a learning mode that demands just as much in terms of creativity and professional expertise from the academic as it does from the student. Besides, academics in distance learning institutions must engage in research in their own discipline but should be constantly researching effective educational delivery models for their learners.

And yet quality assessment in higher education is not as simple as quality control in industry where the product is material and tangible. At universities, quality is judged on the basis of many

factors: the qualifications of academic staff, the facilities especially laboratories, library and general administrative facilities, curriculum and the design of the course study materials, whether electronic or in print, the integrity of the examinations. This process obviously goes to the extent of assessing the impact or reception of the graduates of the institution in the workplace, perceptions by industry as well as the progress of the university's alumni. Some of these can be judged on the basis of the budget allocation to items like the library but others may not be so easy.

Assessing curriculum, for example may not be so easy. It often implies understanding and acceptance of the underlying ideology or understanding the audience or clients it is directed to. In any case, available facilities may limit what is possible to be taught. External quality assurance and assessment is essential for the success of a distance education institution. EQA begins with the accreditation as a service provider for distance education higher education programmes which government through possibly a Higher Education Commission or another independence system or mechanism. It is advisable that Government should adopt a system of accreditation of new courses and adopts rules for degree programmes across the system.

The next level should ideally be even more independent from government. This should be a voluntary system that invites one's peers and experts in various fields, benchmarking standards of programme offerings against other institutions in the country and region. The EQA model should simple and strictly adhered to across the institution; generate confidence and a sense of achievement. It must also seek to achieve international best practices.

One of the ways in which the institution can evaluate itself is by producing a carefully constructed and fully negotiated strategic plan with all the internal stakeholders who has a clear Vision and Mission, and clear goals and time frames. Academic programmes should also be seeking to advance the same mission in their programmes and procedures. Judged against one's Mission Statement assessment seeks to answer three questions:

- Are we doing the right things?
- Are we doing the right things in the right way?
- Do we achieve what we are claiming' to achieve?

a Dutch quality assurance expert goes on to say that"... every quality assessment and self-analysis has to start looking at the formulated mission statement, the formulated goals and aims and the formulated outcomes... Without a clear picture about why one is doing what one is doing, any assessment of quality is impossible. Is the mission clearly formulated and well-known to everybody? Is the mission statement operationalised in clear goals and aims?" The benefit of subjecting oneself to a quality assurance regime is that one's standards can be judged to have a level of excellence which is widely accepted. If the Quality Assurance Protocol and Plans are benchmarked against international standards, the qualifications of the university will also enjoy international recognition.

Success

Obviously everyone who attends a university is desirous of success and the completion of studies within a reasonable time. In distance education this is necessitated by several pressing factors. The employer may be paying the fees and the need for qualified personnel may be urgent, the learner needs to feel the satisfaction of qualification and the excitement of promotion and for all of them the financial resources devoted to studies are not infinite. There are different levels of success. One must believe that university studies have value even if a student does not succeed in the examinations. The fact that one underwent studies will forever have an impact in the learner's development and intellectual ability. But that is not good enough. The institution should aspire to crown its achievement by awarding the degree nothing is complete until that event.

Clearly success begins with registration. Learners should receive counselling on choice of study programmes and the burden they put upon themselves. Learners should be carefully counselled about study load especially at the beginnings of distance learning courses. An assessment of their time and resources must be undertaken and on the basis of hours available to be devoted to study, advice can be given on an appropriate study load. Learners must also be counselled on the appropriateness of the courses they take especially with due regard to their previous study history and available assistive facilities. Once a learner has been registered an properly counselled, the institution should then take responsibility for monitoring progress, application, undertake regular assessments and the student should then complete the course programme within a reasonable time.

The other element is assessment. The institution must devise an assessment programme for learners beginning from admission until final examination. There should be a system of moderating final papers and the utilization of external examiners in this regard is critical. A variety of tools of assessment should also be resorted to including continuous assessment, essays, projects, portfolios, viva voce as well as written examinations.

It is in fact true that distance education is liable to have a large number of students dropping out or fail. It is important that ODL universities should make a careful assessment of their record in this regard. It is necessary that the institution researches and evaluates the causes of failure or lack of completion of studies, in order to improve their systems.

The way forward

I wish to end, however, by making reference to some of the innovative and visionary developments in Africa to date. We urge all African governments, especially ministers of education, to welcome, applaud and support these initiatives. First, reference must be made to the establishment of the African Council for Distance Education in Kenya on 22-24 January 2004. The ACDE seeks to achieve the following goals:

a) to promote open and distance learning, flexible learning and continuing education in Africa;

b) to promote research and training in open and distance learning in Africa;

c) to contribute to the development of policies essential to the advancement of open and distance learning;

d) to foster continental and global collaboration in open distance learning;

e) to provide a forum where individuals, organizations and governments can deliberate on policy matters on open distance learning;

f) to promote the development of appropriate methods and technologies in education and training relevant to open and distance learning;

g) to provide a forum for interaction, sharing and dissemination of ideas on open distance learning.

At the conference the Vice Chancellors made the following commitment:

> We as members of the African Council for Distance Education wish to take up this challenge. We understand the needs for well-informed, confident and empowered communities. We are conscious of the important role which we as institutions have.

> The ACDE is inspired by the new spirit in Africa, and wishes to affirm, contribute and give expression to the African renaissance and NEPAD's commitment and plans to support the 'immediate strengthening of the university system across Africa including the creation of specialized universities where needed, building on available African teaching staff.[9]

Earlier on this year Unisa was privileged to host an ACDE Stakeholder's Workshop which held out the prospect of exciting and pioneering developments in collaboration in Open and Distance Learning and Quality Assurance on our Continent.

The imperative to a consortium of African Open Universities and a continental quality assurance and accreditation agency for distance education in Africa, is at once an acknowledgement of the urgent need for a suitable, systematic and cogent response to decades of neglect and lack of investment in higher education in Africa; an understanding that such response cannot be accommodated by any single country in Africa, and a realisation that Africa needs to design educational offerings, policies, processes and structures that will speak to our African-ness while ensuring excellence, relevance and quality.

First, we must rehabilitate the indigenous African knowledge systems. This means that we must take seriously the challenge to find new ways of knowing, and elevate these into a science that other nations will want to study and understand. We must systematise African knowledge systems into a science second to none. We must therefore refuse to accept that there is 'hegemony' of knowledge that is beyond the reach of Africa. We must, however, be conscious of the role knowledge plays in the construction of the politics of dominance and power in our global world today. From the location of African life, Africa can interrogate what other world systems of knowledge can offer. Ashis Nandy of India affirms that it is precisely the role of universities to legitimise and scienticise indigenous expertise, endorse it and give it currency. No nation will do it for us except ourselves (Hans H Weiler; 2004:8).

Second we must break down the barriers with their impenetrable walls for osmotic effect. The obvious first target is to elevate the reality that all learning is interdependent and that knowledge silos are antithetical to learning. Therefore the organisation of

---

[9] Inaugural African Council for Distance Education in Eggerton, Kenya on 22-24 January 2004.

knowledge or learning areas must be revisited to ensure greater coherence and meaning. This logically leads to breaking down barriers between learning systems in different African countries. The Bologna Process in Europe has revolutionised higher education, enhances shared systems, adaptability of courses, credit transfers and mutual recognition of qualifications. The sooner we ease the intellectual traffic between our countries the better, or we shall forever be trapped in the colonial divides where the first call and loyalty is to the former colonial countries.

Third, African educators must adopt innovative and creative ideas for curriculum reform. The first responsibility of curricula must be to inform and excite. That means that the transmission of knowledge is a fundamental goal, but it must never end there. It must excite learners with ideas, and curiosity and inquisitiveness, so that they wish to dig deeper and to discover more. Such an exercise cannot be confined to national boundaries, especially in our global world. Therefore educators must draw on expertise and knowledge from all over the Continent, and critically evaluate conceptions of history, law and politics in the light of contemporary realities. The new African must have confidence about Africa even beyond their borders.

Fourth, we must share research and research expertise. There can be no reason why African scholars cannot set up research networks and collaborations by research teams in various fields. They could have regular research conferences, publish their research together and benefit from each others advantages. Likewise, by so doing, new research fields will open up, new research priorities will emerge.

Fifth, a new generation of academic leadership is called for. Newly transformative ideas of leadership with Africa as its reference point are called for. We cannot afford to have failed academic leaders in Africa. The academe is a school for leadership inasmuch as it is a nursery for academic excellence, and a sanctuary for idealism. The cloistered existence can only be for a time and purpose. Beyond that, academic leadership calls for engaged leaders worldly enough to dream of a brave new world.

The reality is that we are never going to "renew" universities in Africa simply on the basis of becoming carbon copies of institutions steeped in cultures and situations alien to Africa. And so, if African universities are to serve their purpose, they must surely be

more open and inclusive. We will never meet the African challenge unless we extend access in many and innovative ways, thereby exploiting the potential of every African young person. This means that we must take seriously the educational opportunities women in Africa need to be exposed to after years of neglect and discrimination. Culture, religion, language and class should never be a barrier to the acquisition of knowledge. We must also promote life-long learning, drawing others who might have missed their opportunities, to the learning net. Distance education in the circumstances peculiar to Africa comes into its own. It opens the doors of learning and extends participation to hitherto neglected classes and people, especially adult learners, women, the disabled and those in full-time employment.

Implicit in all of these envisaged initiatives is the understanding that we will be producing a new kind of student with a new range of competencies that are more suited to the demands of our changing environment. These competencies will include adaptability, team work, communication skills and the motivation for continual learning.[10] This in turn implies a thorough re-evaluation of for example, curricula, teaching and learning models and methods and assessment practices. In addition, as higher education institutions are being compelled by demand to accept increasing numbers of students, concerns are being expressed that education quality is being compromised in the process - in truth we must acknowledge that we have all heard complaints from business that our graduates are ill equipped or inappropriately qualified for the jobs they are for supposedly trained to do - and so it is perhaps natural and quite appropriate that we should turn our attention to quality assurance as a means of ensuring both quality and relevance in education.

We have noted the context in which ODL has taken root in Africa. We observe that with peace and democratization, there is population growth, rising prosperity, a thirst for knowledge, a need to bridge the skills gap, all in the context of rising expectations, diminishing resources. Conventional higher education will never be able to meet the demands as no resources are available to meet the demands to redress the situation. This is a golden opportunity for open distance education in Africa.

---

[10] Materu, P. Higher Education Quality Assurance in Sub-Saharan Africa, *Status, Challenges, Opportunities and Promising Practices.* World Bank Working Paper No 124. pg xiii

REFERENCES

Below, Patrick J., Morrisey, George L, Acomb, Betty L. The Executive Guide to Strategic Planning. The Jossey-Bass Management Series. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1987, San Francisco, USA

Bryson, John M. Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement (revised edition). Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995, San Francisco, USA.

Du Bois, W. E. B. The Souls of Black Folk. 1903 Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co. [Cambridge]: University Press John Wilson and Son Cambridge, U.S.A., 1903.

Ehlers, T and Lazenby, K. (Eds) Strategic Management: southern African concepts and cases. 2004. Van Schaik. South Africa.

Holly, D (Ed). 1974. EDUCATION OR DOMINATION? " A Critical Look at Educational Problems Today. Arrow Books, London

Kehm, B H. 1999. Higher Education in Germany. Developments, problems and Perspectives. Wittenberg and Bucharest.

Lucas, Ann F and Associates. Leading Academic Change. Essential Roles for Department Chairs. The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series, 2000, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, USA.

McClendon, Bruce W., Catanese, Anthony James (Eds.). Planners on Planning: Leading Planners offer real-life lessons on what works, what doesn't, and why. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996, San Francisco, USA.

National Plan for Higher Education. Ministry of Education. Gazette no. 22329. Notice No. 466. February 2001

Notice 1196 of 1997. The Education White Paper No 3: A PROGRAMME FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION. Department of Education. Pretoria, 24 July 1997.

Oblinger, Diana G., Katz, Richard N. (Eds.). Renewing Administration: Preparing Colleges and Universities for the 21ˢᵗ Century. Anker Publishing Company, 1999, Bolton, Massachusetts, USA.

Peeke, Graham. Mission and Change. Institutional Mission and its Application to the Management of Further and Higher Education. The Society for Research into Higher Education. SRHE and Open University Press, 1994, Bristol, PA, USA.

Peterson, M.W. (Ed) (1999) ASHE Reader on Planning and Institutional Research. ASHE Reader Series. Pearson Custom Publishing, USA.

Peterson, Marvin W., Dill, David D., Mets, Lisa A. and Associates. Planning and Management for a Changing Environment: A handbook on redesigning postsecondary institutions. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997, San Francisco, USA.

Rowley, Daniel James, Lujan, Herman D. and Dolence Michael G. Strategic Change in Colleges and Universities: Planning to Survive and Prosper. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997, San Francisco, USA.

Rowley, Daniel, J., Sherman, Herbert. From Strategy to Change: Implementing the Plan in Higher Education. Jossey-Bass Publishers 2001, San Francisco, USA.

South African Council on Higher Education in the First Decade of Democracy. The Council on Higher Education, Compress. Pretoria. 2004.

The White Paper on "Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa: First Steps to Develop a New System." Notice 1030/1994, 23 September 1994.

Wootton, Simon and Horne, Terry. Strategic Thinking ... a step-by-step approach to strategy, second edition. The Association of MBAS, 2001, Kogan Page Publisher, London and Sterling VA.

ENDNOTES