



Commentary:

Contributions of Open and Distance Education to the Social-Political and Economic Development of Africa

Graduation Lecture delivered at the
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The Visitor to the Open University of Tanzania;
Distinguished Chancellor of the Open University of Tanzania, The
Hon. Mizengo Kayanza Pinda;
The Pro-Chancellor, Open University of Tanzania;
The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Elifas Tozo Bisanda;
Other University Vice-Chancellors and Heads of Institutions present;
The Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans and Faculty Members;
Distinguished Guests;
Dear Parents of Graduating Students;
The Successful Graduands of the Day;
Members of the Press
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to be in your midst today, over 4,000 kms away from Abuja, Nigeria. I want to thank the Vice-Chancellor of the Open University of Tanzania, Professor Elifas Tozo Bisanda for the honour accorded me to deliver the keynote address at this 41st Graduation ceremony of the University. He broached the idea briefly, during our most recent encounter at the 44th Executive Board meeting of the Africa Council for Distance Education (ACDE) held at the University of South Africa (UNISA), in Pretoria. He said much more. His promise of a tour of some wonderful landmarks as well as the natural allures of the Republic of Tanzania, and the hospitality of the people was indeed exciting. However, I soon returned to the dynamics of university administration in Abuja and could not luxuriate further in the world of those exciting promises until I received a formal invitation from him, some weeks ago.

Professor Bisanda has been around for a long time in the ODL landscape in Africa and especially in Tanzania, where he has assumed the status of a colossus in open and distance learning. An Engineer by profession, he has since transited like many of us into the open and distance learning realm. In the Invitation, I was required to speak on the “Contributions of Open and Distance Education in the Social-Political and Economic Development of Africa”.

But, first, I bring warm greetings from the Council, Management and Senate of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Abuja. We viewed this invitation very warmly as a sign of brotherliness that we seek to entrench between peoples of Africa in general, and more especially between the faculties of ODL practitioners and our two institutions. The slogan in my country, Nigeria for this type of gesture is to retort that *‘we shall certainly retaliate’*.

I have visited Tanzania in the past; to Dar-es-Salam and Arusha, at two different times on issues bordering on open and distance learning, but this is my first time in Mwanza, the city hosting the Convocation ceremony this year. Please believe me when I say that I found this city fascinating. Stooping down from the air, what we saw are mountainous

hills interspersed with green vegetations, and the beautiful view of the world- famous Lake Victoria. I eagerly anticipated landing to breathe in the air. It reminds me of the central Plateau region in my country.

Let me now congratulate the students that are graduating today. This must be a great day for you and your parents, families and friends. For some of you, it is another laurel added; but to the green ones, this must certainly be a day of joy. It certainly is the completion of a new phase in your life. The Open University of Tanzania, which was established in 1992 has really come of age. The world has moved a notch higher in manner and approach of the delivery of education. We now live in a time of far-reaching changes, and your university, OUT, is at the forefront. It is fantastic to note that the tools that they have used for delivery of your teaching are becoming the globally accepted form of instructional delivery. Yet some few years ago, it was still being looked at with some suspicion. Thanks to the global experience of the COVID 19 pandemic, there is a convergence of delivery methods. You can raise your heads further high. My prayer is that you will find favour in whatever you lay your hands, after this graduation.

A cursory look at this topic will show us that this is a very broad topic. But for the mindfulness of not taking too much time from the graduating students, who are expectedly eager to collect their certificates after the rigorous exercise of self-directed learning and to start reaping from the newly acquired competencies and skills, I could say we will be seated here for the whole day. Actually, the broadness of the topic is itself a good context as it gave me the latitude to situate my discussion within a specified scope.

Does Africa Need Open and Distance Learning?

To address the topic given to me, there is but a pertinent question to ask. Does Africa really need Open and Distance Learning? This question is very germane as it seeks to put emphasis on the rationale for the scope of our discussion today.

To many people outside the continent, Africa had always been a metaphor of contrasting issues. To the West who had the exploitative

conquest of Africa, Africa is known as a continent in a perpetual state of chaos manifesting prolonged crises of governance. Political instability, bad governance and chronic internecine conflicts had been known to plague many countries for several years. Even now that most countries have taken to the ideal of democracy, there is still as much perception of unorganised administrative malfeasance in all our human endeavours. Poverty and malnutrition still have manifest visibilities on human life. Except for the miraculously low occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, Africa had always carried the top spot in human frailties. HIV/AIDS pandemic, Ebola, and ethnic cleansing have all connived in claiming the lives of many people in the continent and made Africa the unenviable dark continent of the world.

The result of these malfeasances in governance is the downward trend and, in some cases, a total absence of social provision of services such as health, education, and housing except for farming which was thriving, but only at the subsistence levels within the continent. According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation, about 265 million people in Africa are hungry and poor (living on less than 1800 calories per day). If we add these to corrupt practices of governance by the persons in government, it would be clear that no developmental indices could be gauged as satisfactory in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

The response from the rest of the world was that, aid, came in from donor countries to alleviate the growing inadequacies in all human indices. In fact, at one time in our history, the World Bank and the IMF virtually ran the economic policies of the debt-ridden continent, recommending regimens of budgetary belt-tightening known technically as the Structural Adjustment Programme.

Amongst the social indices of living, and because somehow people still had access to traditional medical practitioners and rural housing; education, as always, took the bulk of budget cuts with the attendant consequences. School systems in our continent have not been well funded and incentivized, with higher education and universities bearing the brunt of the challenges. What the rest of the world especially the western countries through their institutions of

intervention did was to rightly focus on redeeming the worsening state of education. This they did by focusing rather on the provision of primary education. So, the World Bank, International organizations like UNESCO and several rich countries had stepped in with aid packages according to what they thought could help the continent of Africa.

The challenges of the Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which lapsed at the turn of the century, and more recently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which came into force in 2015, make obvious the need to tackle the problems of poverty, poor governance, economic and social insecurity, and inter-ethnic conflagration, inter-religious wars, poor working conditions and the continuing exploitation of the human populace by her leaders and foreign countries. It became clear that to revive African democracies and upscale their development, Africa needed a new strategy which aimed at educating the people of Africa for Africans.

Hitherto, in modern Sub-Saharan African societies, the major agent affecting the process of education has been the traditional education system, whose distinguishing features are face-to-face interaction between teachers and students, structured courses of study, fixed locations for learning, fixed timetables, and a system of certification. Many nations throughout Africa realised the paramount significance of formal education and made very serious efforts to provide human and material resources for the purposes of educating the citizenry in this way. However, for various important reasons, many of the countries in Africa have not been able to fulfill the promise of providing education to the entire population through the conventional education system. Indeed, many reports indicate that Africa is still far behind other regions of the world at all levels of educational development. The direct implication of this scenario is that Africa is less competitive, less resourceful, and ill-equipped to assert itself in the global community. All these demands that education in Africa must be stepped up if the continent is to realise its potential.

Returning to the original question, *Does Africa need Open and Distance Learning?* It is clearly an important question to consider in

our quest to aggregate the contributions of ODL to the socioeconomic development of Africa. Since the realisation that whatever development strategies Africa designs, it must be dependent upon skilled human power it will be able to create. It became clear that the conventional residential educational delivery institutions alone cannot create such quantum of human capital as quickly as Africa needs it. Africa does need to deploy distance education.

The weaknesses of the conventional education systems are best crystallised by the notion of the iron triangle of education. The iron triangle of education describes the relationships between the vectors of access, quality and cost in education. Within the formal, campus-based education systems, it is almost impossible to increase access, without a consequential increase in cost and potential decrease in quality. It is also impossible to increase cost without a consequential decrease in access, as demonstrated by the number of people admitted into the system. The examples of expensive elite universities that admit a limited number of students per annum, to provide them with ‘quality’ education and training demonstrate that quality and access are not compatible entities in a conventional higher education system. Indeed, only an infinitesimal percentage of applicants are able to gain entrance into such conventional universities. A good example is that of Nigeria. The table below shows the gap existing between demand for university education and supply.

Table 1: University Admissions in Nigeria

S/N	Academic Session	Total Application	Total Admissions	Unsuccessful	% Unsuccessful	Noun Admission	NOUN Tot. Adms
1	2017	1,882,559	582,943	1,299,616	69	48,283	8.28
2	2018	1,793,018	588,085	1,204,933	67	48,250	8.20
3	2019	1,989,682	629,651	1,360,031	68	51,001	8.10
4	2020	2,110,623	596,718	1,513,905	72	48,233	8.08
5	2021	1,428,209	605,385	822,824	58	53,313	8.81

Source: National Bureau of Statistics 2018 and Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board 2022

Yet, according to UN estimates, the population of humans on this planet reached an estimated 8 billion people by the 15th of November (UNDESA 2022). What is of interest to us is that “more than half of the projected increase in global population up to 2050 will be concentrated in just eight countries: *the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines and the United Republic of Tanzania...*” (UNDESA 2022, p.9). This projection illustrates the fact that African countries are expected to contribute more than half of the global population increase anticipated through 2050. The implications of these social realities on the education sector are clear to a careful observer. With an increasing population comes an increasing demand for basic and secondary education, and of course, higher education. The development and growth of higher education systems in terms of participation rates in many parts of the world have been very rapid in response to the population growth rate. However, while the technologically advanced countries are boasting about 70-80% (89% for the USA in 2009) participation rates, BRICS average 37.5%, while Africa lags at around 9.4% (Webbstock 2016).

While Africa accounts for only about 16% of the world’s total population estimates, more than 65% of the African population is between 16-35 years of age. This makes Africa the continent with the highest population of young people. The problems that have faced many African nations and prevented them from pivoting into the class of the most developed regions of the world include severe brain drain, where the most qualified medical practitioners and data scientists are in flight out of the continent; economic inadequacy, as most national economies cannot sustain the growth of their countries; internecine wars occasioned by social unrest and insurgencies.

It is in this context that distance education can be viewed as an appropriate method of delivery of education that could mitigate the illiteracy and enlightenment level of the masses of people in the content.

Originally, distance education was aimed at providing people who have missed an educational opportunity at one level or another a way to

recapture what they have lost without necessarily going back to the four walls of a brick-and-mortar classroom. In other words, distance education was designed to provide people with a second chance to receive an education. But as we shall see later, *the raison d'être* has since changed in modern-day living.

Early distance education endeavours in Africa covered a range of applications, from formal degree programmes offered by the University of South Africa (UNISA) from 1946 onwards to a broadly based adult education campaign conducted by the Institute of Adult Education at the University of Tanzania during the 1960s. Initially, UNISA relied mainly on printed materials issued in the “correspondence” model with minimal contact, while the Tanzanian project used a combination of radio, printed pamphlets and community-based group work.

Community and adult Education programmes through distance education using radio were very common in several counties in Africa. The INADES Foundation, established in 1962 in Cote d'Ivoire as a private initiative was later extended to Burkina Faso, Togo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Burundi, Chad, Rwanda and Zaire (this was initially confined to these French-speaking Africa), and Ethiopia and Kenya. The programmes offered by the INADES Foundation were mainly in Agriculture and allied fields. It also helped local communities engage in development initiatives through project formulation, etc. More recent projects covered a similar range of target audiences and programme types, with one of the most significant changes over the modes, as more and more ICT options became available. Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) and community radio were the major instruments that helped this growth.

Distance learning is already being used to train large number of teachers for primary, secondary and tertiary levels in Africa. It is estimated that distance learning institutions are in existence in 34 African countries. In the forefront of these efforts are countries of South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Malawi, Zambia, Rwanda and Zimbabwe which have been utilizing distance education programmes for decades. In recent years, rapid

developments in internet technology have given rise to the possibility of instructional competency based on the idea of lifelong learning independent of the physical distance to a particular educational institution.

Overall, therefore, research has been reported to the effect that using DE may help solve the problem of the Sub-Saharan Africa (Arger, 1990) by utilizing its comparative advantage through the following:

- a) Avoid the opportunity cost of taking people out of their normal employment for training
- b) Reach a large number of individuals
- c) Democratise education – by widening access and participation
- d) Raise educational standards through the use of high-quality materials
- e) Be cost-effective and more efficient than traditional college campus-based educational systems.

In keeping with its developmental aspirations for the continent, the African Union embarked on *Agenda 2063, The Africa We Want*, which envisions “a long-term 50-year development trajectory due to ongoing structural transformations; increased peace and reduction in the number of conflicts; renewed economic growth and social progress; the need for people-centred development, gender equality and youth empowerment; changing global contexts such as increased globalization and the ICT revolution; the increased unity of Africa which makes it a global power to be reckoned with and capable of rallying support around its own common agenda; and emerging development and investment opportunities in areas such as agri-business, infrastructure development, health and education as well as the value addition in African commodities”.

To achieve this dream and turn it into reality, various countries turned to a responsive model of education that is geared towards mass access to all Africans irrespective of their geopolitical locations, political affiliations, economic capabilities, levels of preparedness, gender, age, race or disability status. This is where open and distance learning and its recent manifestations in form of digital education and online

learning became the *sine qua non* for achieving Africa's development agenda in this second decade of the 21st century.

The Prognosis: Now that Africa has embraced ODL

The concept and practice of ODL in Africa has come of age since the emergence of the University of South Africa as the first distance teaching university, and perhaps the first distance education institution in the world.

One of the foremost harbingers of DE to Africa was the International Extension College. This College provided advice and support in distance education and flexible learning to many African countries at independence. Over a period of 35 years, IEC was instrumental in supporting the establishment of organisations such as the South African Institute of Distance Education, Sudan Open Learning Organisation, South African Extension Unit, Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre, Botswana Extension College, Malawi College of Distance Education, Mauritius College of the Air, the Namibian Extension Unit and the Women in Fisheries Industries Project. Many of these organisations later metamorphosised into distance higher education institutions in their respective countries. Over the past forty years a number of open universities, distance higher education colleges and institutions have now been established on the African continent.

There are presently more than 20 open universities on the African continent and over 100 distance teaching centres that are part of existing campus-based institutions (ACDE 2022). The South African experience with distance education is one of the most successful on the African continent. Apart from the University of South Africa, which is a dedicated ODeL institution, many other universities in South Africa also offer structured distance education programmes as part of their institutional arrangement. Indeed, these distance education centres and UNISA account for over 50% of all registered university students in South Africa as at 2020.

Table 2: Number of Students Enrolled in Public HEIs in South Africa, by attendance mode, 2019

Institution	Contact Total	Distance Total
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	33,475	466
University of Cape Town	28,603	38
Central University of Technology, Free State	21,225	0
Durban University of Technology	35,442	0
University of Fort Hare	16,982	0
University of the Free State	37,075	430
University of Johannesburg	50,064	526
University of Limpopo	21,490	0
Mangosuthu University of Technology	14,328	0
University of Mpumalanga	3,471	0
Nelson Mandela University	29,478	12
North West University	44,647	19,024
University of Pretoria	48,943	1,651
Rhodes University	8,247	0
Sefako Makgatho Health Science University	6,456	0
Sol Plaatje University, Northern Cape	1,994	0
University of South Africa	0	342,797
University of Stellenbosch	31,523	0
Tshwane University of Technology	66,552	1,121
University of Venda	16,783	0
Vaal University of Technology	21,927	0
Walter Sisulu University	33,572	0
University of Western Cape	23,784	0
University of Witwatersrand	40,710	180
University of Zululand	17,738	0
Total	704,021	370,891

Source: National ODL Policy & Practice in the Commonwealth, 2021

The Republic of Tanzania was not also left out, as Salum R. Mnjagila noted in his paper, *Tanzania Open and Distance Learning for out-school-youth*, the National Correspondence Institute (NCI) commenced distance education under the University College of Dar es Salaam in 1969, to serve underprivileged literate, but isolated youth throughout the country with the aim of expanding access to education to all. The Republic of Tanzania has since established ODL institutions at various levels including the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) at the NCI, Tanzania Global Learning Agency (TGLA), Tanzania Institute of Education, Moshi University Cooperative and Business Studies, International Education Centre (IEC). The Tanzania Open University came into force in 1992. Whilst ODL penetration had remained mostly at higher educational level in most SSA countries, Tanzania had gone further to deepen it. Mnjagila noted that the ODE target included primary school leavers who were not absorbed in the formal secondary education system, primary and secondary education drop-outs, government and private sector employees who had no secondary education, adult learners who aspire to acquire professional skills and disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

Ditto, in Nigeria where I come from. The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was established in 1983 to drive the ODL revolution in Nigeria. The primary objective was to provide access to a wider population of higher education seekers which were hitherto denied by the limitations of the conventional university system. Unfortunately, NOU was closed down in 1984 and licensing of private conventional universities became the favoured alternative, with the hope that these would complement and ameliorate the inadequacies of their public counterparts. As access gaps remained and expanded further, this led to the resuscitation of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in 2002. Also, the National Teachers Institute, another single mode institution was established in 1978 to increase the production of professional teachers, as well as, to enhance and increase their training for the universal basic education programme in Nigerian schools. The Institute offers National Certificate in Education, Bachelor's degree and postgraduate diploma in education programmes through the distance learning system. But before NOUN and NTI, there had been a form of DE offered by the University of Lagos, Lagos through her

Correspondence Institute and the Ahmadu Bello University Institute of Educations' Adult learning programmes. Of recent, the Nigeria University regulatory commission has now licensed 17 conventional universities, including 4 privately owned universities to commence offering education through the ODeL mode.

Many other African countries have since followed the oldest distance education university in Africa, the UNISA. The Zimbabwe Open University was established in 1999 while the Sudan and Zambia Open Universities were also established in 2002. The Open University of Zambia came into existence in 2004, and that of Mauritius in 2010. It therefore became imperative for an African continental agency to be established to bring all these universities and non - tertiary providers of ODeL under an umbrella. The African Council on Distance Education was established in 2004 as a coordinating agency for distance education practice in Africa. The Council has over 34 members providing distance education on the African continent.

Open and distance education as it is being practiced today will not be the same in the next five years. Just as traditional universities will no longer be merely conventional and campus-based. They are already embracing features of flexibility and remote teaching and learning by leveraging on emerging eLearning solutions. Being flexible in nature, open and distance learning institutions would lead the way, becoming universities of convergence, and fully engaged in networked learning. We are already witnessing this in our various institutions. Even though the use of traditional technologies of ODL in form of print and audio-visuals will continue to hold sway to meet the needs of the most indigent and disadvantaged learners. The growth of ICTs has made digital learning through computing and mobile technologies the order of the day, enabling distance learners to review, speed up or substitute some or all of what normally occurs in conventional university classrooms or traditional distance learning textual materials through electronic links. Thus, technology is bringing about a fundamental change in the very structure of higher education and open, distance and digital learning is the major driver of this change if policymakers are willing to accept this analysis.

What then are the contributions of Open and Distance Education to the Socio-Economic Development in Africa?

We have affirmatively answered the question that Africa indeed needs open and distance learning and explored its trajectory on the continent over the past few decades. The next logical question is to examine the contributions of ODE to the socio-economic development of Africa? The frequency of this sort of question is instructive. It calls attention to the weight of expectations placed on distance learning institutions. The expectation is that distance education, if it must be relevant, must serve as a one-stop solution for all the ills of the conventional system. Thus, if the conventional mode of university education is criticised for its failure to ensure adequate access, quality, relevance, cost, and governance (Odekunle, 2014), open and distance learning institutions are viewed as possessing the magic wands to solve all the problems.

a) Improved Access to Education

Many African nations started to employ open and distance learning strategies as tools to accelerate the pace of educational development within their borders especially to meet the various international set goals such as the MDGs and the SDGs on education of various international agreements on education especially since the early 70s.

Teacher Education: This process of massification was first directed towards the Training of Teachers before it was pointed towards other areas of teaching and learning. For example, Nigeria, Kenya, Malawi, and Botswana in 1976, 1986, 1992 and 1994 set up ODL programmes to train massive and staggering numbers of teachers to enable them prosecute their respective universal primary education programmes (Kamau, 2009; Rumajogee, Jeeroburkhan, Mohadeb and Mooneesamy, 2003). In one year alone (2004), Nigeria produced through its ODL programme, 10,629 trained teachers compared with 30,000 trained teachers produced in 2003 by all the existing government and private teacher training colleges in the country.

Within three years of the commencement of its teacher training programme by ODL, Malawi produced 18,000 trained teachers; normally, it would have taken all Malawi teacher training colleges an estimated 12 years to produce this number of teachers through the

campus-based method of training. Also Botswana and Kenya produced huge numbers of trained teachers within a short time which colleges of education in those countries would have rolled out not only at prohibitive costs but also after many years of teaching and training (Kamau, 2009; Rumajogee, Jeeroburkhan, Mohadeb and Mooneesamy, 2003).

School Enrolment: ODL has indeed increased school enrolment across Sub-Saharan Africa. In Tanzania for example, the establishment of the NCI led to increased enrollment in secondary education through ODL from 6,709 learners in 2007 to 12,345 in 2012. Also, the Open University of Tanzania increased its enrollment from 11,356 learners in 2000 to 68,969 in 2012 (Mnjagila 2012). According to the African Council for Distance Education (ACDE), when a cumulative students' enrolment of 92,568 was reached by OUT, this qualified OUT as the largest tertiary institution in Tanzania.

ODL is considered an important new approach in attempting to resolve the problems of access, quality and equity (SADC, 2009). Mkwizu and Ngaruko in a paper titled *Implied Benefits of Open and Distance Learning in Tanzania* noted that the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) had students' accumulative enrollment of 147,238 from 1994 to 2018/2019 (OUT, 2019), and University of South Africa in South Africa with students enrollment of 350,775 in 2014 to 381,483 in 2018 (UNISA, 2019). They noted therefore, that many people of the respective countries ODL benefited from expanded access to higher education.

Analysis of available statistics in the past 5 years shows that conventional Nigerian universities have consistently granted university admission to less than 50% of candidates that seek admission in them. Below is a table showing application and admission of candidates into Nigerian universities.

Academic Session	Total Enrollment (UG + PG)		Total	% Female	NOUN Enrollment (UG + PG)		Total	NOUN % TOTAL	% Female
	Male	Female			Male	Female			
2017	1,099,921	834,642	1,934,563	43	264,496	206,265	470,761	24	44
2018	1,160,928	880,363	2,041,291	43	287,540	226,620	514,160	25	44
2019	1,227,939	931,523	2,159,462	43	312,654	252,731	565,385	26	45
2020	1,211,831	950,187	2,162,018	44	322,175	259,774	581,949	27	45

Table 3: University Enrollment in Nigeria

Source: National Universities Commission – NUC – Statistical Digest / State of University Education in Nigeria

From the data above, it is clear that NOUN alone offers admission to about 25% of students admitted in Nigeria's over 150 public and private universities.

With the challenges of carrying-capacity confronting conventional universities as evidenced by the above comparative analysis, you will agree with me that the projections of Nigeria's education planners for open and distance education as a remedy were not misplaced. In addition to its involvement in the pursuit of general goals of education in Nigeria, planners evolved some specific objectives for open and distance education. These include among others, the need to provide more access to *quality education and equity in educational opportunities*.

b) Cultural and Religious Enhancement

Most African cultures regard the role of women as primarily that of a home-keeper. Women are therefore, usually unable to leave their spouse and children to travel away to a conventional university system where they can pursue the much-craved training, skills development and education. Women in this category require distance education, since it allows them to sit at home and study for a programme without jeopardizing their marriages or leaving their children without much adequate attention. The issue of women's education is essential for

rural development and women are not well equipped to contribute their useful quota to society because of illiteracy (Azikiwe 1992).

Another group of women that are denied the access to formal education because of their adherence to the Islamic practice of Purdah. These women can only have access to qualitative education through the open and distance learning approach that allows them to pursue their education at a 'safe distance' from the instructors. They can study, turn in assignments and write examinations after adequate arrangements have been made. A woman in purdah can be trained and given the opportunity to contribute her own quota to national development without disobeying any of the injunctions of her religion. Distance education is an alternative that affords this group of women access to quality study materials on any field of their choice without any of the barriers associated with the conventional system and her religious dedication.

The African nomadic people are yet another group excluded by the conventional mode of higher education. These include the Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania; the Hausa/Fulani herdsmen of West and Central Africa and the migrant fisher-people of Nigeria's Niger delta. The social dictates and vocational practices of people in these nomadic societies require that they be always constantly on the move, often with their families, for subsistence or trading. For generations, they were denied access to quality education due to the peripatetic nature of their livelihood. However, with the ODL system, they can remain in their preferred social environments yet have access to qualitative education.

c) Educated citizenry matter in leadership and governance

One of the major outcomes of democratization of education through ODL is the development of a critical mass of educated citizenry that is increasingly available to be harnessed for political leadership in Africa.

One of the most accepted findings in governance and economics is the importance of education in explaining economic outcomes pointing to overwhelming evidence that education affects governance and earnings. Recent literature reports significant effects of political leaders in driving economic policies for the fact that they are

educationally empowered. Yang Yao et al (2020) indeed argue that educational background and attainment play an important role in shaping leaders' ideas and beliefs, which in turn matter for policymaking in the long run.

Given the extent of higher education's benefits to society, gaps in access to higher are matters of great significance to a country as a whole. Higher education institutions assure the relevance of their knowledge, identify skills gaps, create special programmes and build the right skills that can help countries improve economic prosperity and social cohesion, adapt workforce development to the economy and changing demand for the new skills, develop relevant policies.

Open and Distance Learning has provided continuing education that suits the schedule of senior employees needing additional qualifications or special programmes to improve their competencies on the job. This category of personnel in the public service and private organizations whose presence are critical to corporate stability/continuity cannot be released to, and are not able to adapt to, the strict schedule of face-to-face learning in conventional universities. The ODL system has been a veritable avenue for improving competencies in the top echelons of the public service and private organizations across many African countries.

Many captains of industry in Africa today joined their organizations after secondary education and have had to acquire additional education and qualifications from open and distance learning institutions. They proceeded to senior management and eventually to lead their organisations, and become inspirational examples to the younger generation of employees and citizens of their countries.

For example, the Alumni of the University of South Africa (UNISA – one of the leading open and distance learning universities on the continent) comprise at least two former Heads of Government and several serving and current Ministers in different countries in the Southern Africa sub-region. This is equally true of Nigeria, where a former president is an alumnus of NOUN and several past and serving legislators are numbered among NOUN alumni and students. It is

therefore a truism that open and distance learning contributes in significant ways to the development of leadership for political governance.

d) Meeting Special Social Needs

Besides the flexibility of time and space that distance learning provides to students, the adaptability of programmes is one major contribution which distance learning provides to society. By flexibility of programmes I mean, the freedom of distance learning to design courses that meet the specific needs of markets, instead of heavy reliance on established curriculum as is the practice in conventional institutions. In the National Open University of Nigeria, for instance, we have designed courses for a number of professional associations, private and public companies leading to award of certificates. Such courses take into account the specific Nigerian environment in which the professionals operate. In such programmes, the target is to impart and sharpen the ability of individuals to make use of acquired skills.

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e) Special Education Needs

Given the fact that people living with disability constitute about 20% of the global population, it is essential that the educational needs of this cohort of learners form an important part of the educational planning process. In a recent survey of the various disabilities and impairments found among NOUN students, 184 students reported various impairments including, Visual Impairment, Deaf or hard of hearing,

Mobility Impairment, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and Mental Health Conditions. The fact that these learners are actively engaged in their programmes with no reported restriction is evidence that open and distance learning is amenable to the needs and lived experiences of people with disabilities.

At the National Open University of Nigeria, arrangements are made for special needs candidates. Through ODL, we have further enhanced inclusiveness in socio-economic development of our people by enabling special needs candidates (e.g. the hard of hearing, the blind and mobility impaired) to acquire skills and learn at their own pace and convenience. This has led to their being empowered to make a more decent living than they would ordinarily have had.

f) Leadership Development

Given the extent of higher education's benefits to society, gaps in access to higher are matters of great significance to the country. Higher education institutions assure the relevance of their knowledge, identify skills gaps, create special programmes and build the right skills that can help countries improve economic prosperity and social cohesion, adapt workforce development to the economy and changing demand for the new skills, develop relevant policies. Societal benefits include: Higher levels of education correspond to **lower levels of unemployment and poverty**, so in addition to contributing more to tax revenues than others do, citizens with higher levels of education are less likely to depend on social safety-net programs, generating decreased demand on public budgets. Given the extent of higher education's benefits to society, gaps in access to university education are matters of great significance to the country as a whole.

Open and Distance Learning is more readily suited to the schedule of senior employees needing additional qualifications or special programmes to improve their competencies on the job. This category of personnel in the public service and private organisations whose presence are critical to corporate stability/continuity cannot be released to, and are not able to adapt to, the strict schedule of face-to-face learning in conventional universities. The ODL system has been a veritable avenue for improving competencies in the top echelons of the

public service and in private organisations. Also, many captains of industry in Africa today joined their organisations after secondary education and have had to acquire additional education and qualifications from open and distance learning institutions. They proceeded to senior management and eventually to lead their organisations, and become inspirational examples to the younger generation of employees and citizens of their countries.

g) Vocational Training and Promotion of Entrepreneurship

Open and distance learning has enabled many African entrepreneurs who cannot afford to leave their businesses for the four walls of conventional higher institutions, to acquire much-needed managerial and entrepreneurship training to lead their organisations successfully. Today we have many homegrown African entrepreneurial success stories as examples.

h) Self-Discipline and Distance Learners

I cannot avoid commenting on an issue that is dear to my heart, as an important element of ODL and its relationship to sustainable development. As we are all aware, the ways in which the digital world is changing our day-to-day life is remarkable.

Online learning is a great opportunity for students to learn from anywhere with a single connection to the Internet. Still, there are some facts that could cause great trouble for students. Online learning requires students to get online login to certain websites for their lectures, assignments, and queries. The Internet itself is a temptation for the wastage of time. There are myriads of TV shows, games, social media groups, pop-ups, and many other disturbing technology tools. Therefore, a student is vulnerable to all kinds of negative and mischievous distractions which she may not be open to, within the regimented boundaries of conventional institutions and campus-based universities. To overcome this challenge, one needs to be self-disciplined and self-organised for distance and online learning. It is not difficult to follow the discipline that you are imposing on your own self. Understanding the responsibilities and burden that online education entails is critical to students developing their own disciplined and focused study plans.

Students must improve their self-discipline, avoid distractions, and manage their time effectively to excel in an online program. This can be an important carry-over to the wider society because once you have formed the habit of self-discipline and self-organisation as required for a successful distance learning experience, you will be able to transfer such skills to other vocations and responsibilities in life. It is on record that distance learning graduates are better at planning life.

i) Cultivating and Sustaining Lifelong Learning through ODL

Another critical area where ODL has contributed immensely to the advancement of the quality of life in Africa generally is in literacy and lifelong learning. Depending on the model adopted by the ODL institution, one of the major elements is the learner concept whose main business is to acquire knowledge and skills through self-effort. To do this they must cultivate the art of learning. Literacy through reading is an individual's ability to identify symbols and the connection of suitable meaning to them. It is a conscious attempt towards comprehending and obtaining knowledge. It is also a systematic, deliberate task of gaining precise knowledge geared towards a criterion (Kojo, Agyekum and Arthur, 2018).

Literacy also adds quality to life and provides access to culture and cultural heritage. Learning is an intellectual activity which is possible only if a person forms the habit of learning and practices these from childhood. Reading of books is the most suitable medium through which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation (Issa et al., 2012).

Due to the mode of delivery in face-to-face institutions, which depend essentially on the teacher, an ODL student must cultivate the art of studying alone. They must develop a reading culture. Nkordeh et.al. (2017) described reading culture as the process of acquiring positive reading attitude among students and children over a length of time.

ODL through its development of the reading culture does not only increase our knowledge, but it also builds maturity and character,

sharpens our thinking, and widens our awareness in social, economic, political, and environmental issues. It also helps in mental development and is known to stimulate the muscles of the eyes. It is an irreplaceable weapon for all - round growth and the fulfillment of one's potential. Reading is the foundation upon which other academic skills are built. Reading is a very essential way of learning and achieving any global academic breakthrough (Hassen, 2016). It was asserted by Tella and Akande (2007) that the ability to read is at the heart of self-education and lifelong learning and that it is an art capable of transforming life and society.

j) Internalisation of the Higher Education Curricular

Studies show that there is a place for peaceful process of sharing information and knowledge as well as for collaboration for the purposes of knowledge generation among nations. Agents of this process include multinational corporations (Gupta and Govindarajan, 1991), global and regional organisations (like World Bank, UN, UNESCO, AU, etc.), and higher education institutions. Indeed, the UNESCO charter starts with the profound statement that “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.” Without doubt education remains the most effective mechanism of peace and social development.

Scholars agree that sharing knowledge made possible by internationalisation improves the competitive advantage of nations, and avail them with world-class excellence, and flexibility to tackle challenges. (Jianbin, Yanli, and Kaibo, 2014). International and cross-border intellectual exchanges are not the exclusive preserve of conventional universities. But it is also understood that distance learning institutions must walk the extra mile if we are to escape the gaze of suspicion placed on us by the cautious public. We must be seen to do, what we say we do, in order to gain public confidence.

Perhaps because of their special nature and manner of developing their contents for instruction, ODL institutions in Africa have developed special partnerships to advance scholarship and enhance the visibility of the continent through engagement with bodies such as the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) Canada, International Council for

Distance Education (ICDE) Norway, African Council for Distance Education, Kenya, Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU). Presently, the NOUN is one of the Technical Partners of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) Partnership for Enhanced Blended Learning in West Africa (PEBL WA). In this capacity, NOUN has engaged in training academics from 12 universities in the West Africa subregion in the adoption of blended learning techniques. In addition, over 3,000 students are being trained in special entrepreneurial skills and in the use of ICT to enhance their learning and their employability. This project which followed the success of an earlier version in East Africa is contributing immensely to the competence of African universities in the development and management of virtual learning environments and improved access to an even wider population of prospective learners.

Through collaborations and linkages, ODL institutions have established a working relationship for staff and student exchanges. As we speak, colleagues in various faculties are conducting benchmarking and study tours between NOUN and UNISA. We are also expecting colleagues from the Open University of Tanzania in December 2022. We have success stories of student exchanges between NOUN and UNISA and staff between the Indira Gandhi National Open University, (IGNOU), India and NOUN and continue to encourage such practices between our university and partner institutions. This has enriched knowledge, enhanced outlook beyond national boundaries and encouraged continuous re-imagination and search for solutions to African problems.

k) Enhancing Quality and Standards in Curricula

The ODL system requires development of learning materials, instructional videos and other teaching aids that gives the learner a feel of the education experience. These materials, including Open Educational Resources and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are often accessible to a wide range of institutional audiences where they are critiqued and assessed. This has led to the institution of quality in the content, production and use of such materials. Taking the example of the National Open University of Nigeria, the NOUN, is the resident institution for the ACDE Accreditation and Quality Assurance

Agency. The university is also the host institution for Africa's Focal Point for Quality on the ICDE Network. As with other ODL institutions in Africa, the NOUN study materials are available in the public domain and have been found to becoming the main resource of a number of other institutions to enrich their curricula and increase the body of knowledge in the various fields of study.

l) Ameliorating Brain Drain

Open and distance education reduces the effect of external and internal brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing home-grown experts as teachers regardless of their locations and places of work. By their nature of operations, ODL institutions do not require large resident pools of staff. They are able to leverage faculties in conventional and other ODL institutions for facilitation, tutorials and research collaborations. This enriches the curricula and breeds constant review and update of learning materials.

m) ICT Penetration in Education

Open and distance education as of necessity required the use of modern technologies to enable access for the hitherto unreached. In doing this, ODL institutions have taken the lead in ICT competence and penetration. For example, among Nigeria's public universities, the NOUN is easily the leading institution in the use of ICT for learning. This had been a tradition since inception of the university. In its annual statistical digests, the National Universities Commission had acknowledged NOUN as a leader in the use of ICT devices by both academics and students for teaching and learning in the country. I am sure similar testimonies abound in other African countries.

Undoubtedly, the place of ICT in the world of today cannot be over-emphasized. Therefore, we as ODL institutions have led the way in empowering the continent and its large youth population to be globally competitive, resourceful and creative in responding to the challenges of a fast-paced and dynamic world. During the Covid 19 pandemic, whilst conventional universities in Nigeria shut their doors to students and staff, many ODL institutions were able to continue to serve its large student population and conducted its examinations through proctoring

techniques. This ensured that there was no disruption in the academic calendar and students were able to graduate at the expected times.

According to various research, the challenges posed by deployment of technology by our institutions and the use of technology by our students have helped improved the critical thinking and problem-solving skills among our learners which are required in the 21st century. We have started to see our people develop alternative technology platforms *vis-a-viz* others platforms such as Google Docs, Discussion Forums in Blackboard and create various activities that can help to develop the critical skills of learners (Mansbach, 2015). We have to continue to encourage this skill and knowledge attainments.

n) **Deepening Economic Value Chains**

In developing access for wide spectrum of learners, ODL institutions have had to establish institutional presence in multiple locations called Study Centres. The UNISA in South Africa for instance operates from 3 main campuses, while the NOUN has 3 main campuses and over 100 study centres in Nigeria. The Open University of Tanzania also operates from over 30 regional centres in the country.

Perhaps the greatest area of influence of open and distance education is in the socio-cultural context of its presence in different places in any of the developing country and continent. I had alluded to this in the earlier part of this paper, that aligning with the mandate of widening access, is the concept of bringing the *Gown to Town*. This is exemplified by the operations of our Study centres across the length and breadth of Nigeria. For a developing continent like Africa, the socio-economic importance of locating or siting an institution of learning (Study centre) in designated locations is immense, as exemplified by the city status conferred on such “towns” in which such schools as UNISA in Pretoria and OUT in Mwanza, (to mention a few) are situated. There have been substantial increases in the GDP of such cities as they relate to the social and economic services the students generate. The importance of this policy in community/rural development is invaluable. These centres have turned out to be beehives of economic activity and have encouraged the growth of local enterprise in their communities. This ranged from business centres that

attend to student learning and academic needs, retail hospitality - from food to accommodation, provision of security and transportation services, telecommunication, internet data services and extension of public utilities etc.

As a further fall-out, it helps to curb rural-urban migration that educational activities ordinarily generate. In addition, the presence of study centres in various locations have helped to create direct and indirect employment for both skilled and unskilled labour.

o) Encouraging Self-Directed and Lifelong Learning Opportunities

The ODL mode of education encourages self-directed learning which produces resilience in the individual learner. In the absence of physical contact, learners are encouraged to overcome the barriers of time and space, and therefore develop skills to interact with virtual environments through a host of modern technologies, course materials and learning aids. Learners are most often able to prepare and harmonize their thoughts ahead of tutorial classes wherein challenging topics are ironed out. This produces a higher level of understanding far ahead of the campus-based contact learner who most often is introduced to a subject in real time and probably takes time to have a grasp of concepts being taught. Also, ODL institutions by their very nature of flexibility have a high vocational content and are readily available to provide life-long learning for varied concepts in modules, for continuous development as well as adult education.

p) Entrepreneurship

Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2004) argued that employment generation is an important measure of national development. Many African countries and other countries world over, assessed their level of development based on the number of jobs created within a given period of time.

Employment generation is another aspect through which open and distance mode of education contributes to development of countries of the Africa. This mode of education makes an individual to be

productive and employable. Without education, it will be difficult for an individual to be gainfully employed especially into white collar jobs.

The remark of Dhanaraian (2001) confirmed that developed nations created more jobs for their citizen through education. He asserted that they make adequate efforts for their citizens to be educated and that some of them have been using open and distance learning programmes to prepare their citizens for employment. Standing (2014) in Tekeli and Gunsoy emphasizes the importance of education especially university and vocational education in women's employment and participation in the labour force. He emphasized that women who missed the chance to secure higher education due to poverty, oppression or marginalization can capitalize on the opportunity provided by distance education to acquire higher education and be gainfully employed into white collar jobs.

On the terrain of economic development aspect of national development of African countries, various Economists such as Onwe (2013) including other social scientists have attributed poverty to lack of education or illiteracy. Onwe opined that education is the driving force for eradicating extreme poverty from a nation. As remarked by Dhanaraian (2001), poverty is a significant signage of under-development of a nation and it is only education and skill acquisitions that can reduce or erased it.

Open and distance education overtime has shown that it is a significant tool to develop the human capital of a nation and reduce poverty. Aderinoye and Ojokheta (2004) posit that open and distance education create an opportunity for all citizens (both young and old) to acquire higher education and secure a profession that will enable them earn white collar jobs and defeat poverty.

Lastly and worthy to note is the fact that, open and distance education helps to reduce poverty level among workers of different categories as the mode of education enable them to upgrade their certificate to a higher level which will in turn earn them promotion and increase their salary structure for better and improved standard of living (Kaufman, Walkins and Guera, (2000) and Ojo ; Olakulehin; Olowola; Adeoye, &

Salawu, (2007). With the opportunity offered by the programmes offers through the open and distance education mode, individuals are able to acquire a profession which helps them to fight poverty and improve their economic status in the society. (Besong, 2014) observed that most people who partake in distance learning programmes of a distance institutions are working class people whose jobs cannot fetch them any reasonable of money that can enable them take good care of their family and extend hands to their relatives unless they improve their educational status. This category of persons embarked on this programme to acquire higher academic qualifications that will earn them promotion in their workplace and uplift them from poverty. Meanwhile, Dhanaraian (2001) posits that the desire to migrate from poverty to person of social status is the reason why many people who missed out on higher education purchase part-time forms and sandwich programme. Through these programmes, people have the chance to obtain university degree and compete with other intellectuals in the society. Khakhar (2001) opines that open and distance education is the most effective strategy to bridge the wide education gap and alleviate people from poverty and hunger.

Africa, what next for ODL Institutions?

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, to answer this question, I share with you a few data from the 2020 Annual Report of the Africa Progress Group, a think-thank of African Elder Statesmen, chaired by Nigeria's former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, below.

While ODL institutions have indeed made significant contributions in expanding access to education, our out-of-school rates are still significant in a lot of sub-Saharan African countries. The case of Nigeria (33.77) and Tanzania (39.72) are instructive. Perhaps due to the ever-growing youth population of sub-Saharan Africa, gross tertiary enrollment rates are still relatively low, despite growing adult education literacy.

ODL has emerged as a growing trend in the attempt to massively educate Africa and gaining wider popularity among Higher Education institutions in Africa.

In the 2020 report, the think-tank recommended among others that lessons learned from good performing countries include:

- a) Expanding the opportunities for formal and *non-formal education provisions* to reach remote locations;
- b) Increased use of technology, especially radio, TV, and mobile phones to deliver quality education in local languages;
- c) Strengthening the capacities of education providers and improving their welfare; and,
- d) Ensuring that our education curricula are *relevant to the socio-cultural needs of the people*.

Therein lies the challenge before us. Our work as ODL practitioners is well laid out. As it is said in the Bible, *the harvest is plenty, but labourers are few*. Let us therefore go out to bring people to the harvest.

We must continue to strengthen our capacities, especially in the use of emerging technologies to reach the yet unreached, widen and adapt existing services to fit African cultural idiosyncrasies, and design new quality standards that will measure and highlight areas/needs for improved efficiencies and effectiveness in the delivery of education to our people through ODL.

Table 5: Literacy and Out of School

Ranking of Countries by Education Literacy Rate		Ranking of Countries by Out-of-School Rate	
Libya	99.95	Algeria	0.35
Seychelles	99.07	Angola	
Mauritius	99.04	Benin	2.79
Djibouti	98.91	Botswana	
Equatorial Guinea	98.26	Burkina Faso	36.27
Cabo Verde	98.11	Burundi	23.7
Tunisia	98.06	Cabo Verde	6.45
Botswana	97.85	Cameroon	6.53
São Tomé & Príncipe	97.78	Central African Republic (CAR)	
Morocco	97.73	Chad	46.59
Algeria	97.43	Comoros	24.92

Ranking of Countries by Education Literacy Rate		Ranking of Countries by Out-of-School Rate	
Eswatini (formerly Swaziland)	95.47	Cote d'Ivoire	29.36
South Africa	95.32	Djibouti	48.85
Namibia	95.16	Egypt	6.94
Eritrea	93.27	Equatorial Guinea	55.3
Ghana	92.49	Eritrea	44.9
Zambia	92.09	Eswatini (formerly Swaziland)	12.67
Zimbabwe	90.43	Ethiopia	33.85
Gabon	89.78	Gambia	18.19
Uganda	89.4	Ghana	12.94
Burundi	88.22	Guinea	21.91
Egypt	88.19	Lesotho	13.08
Kenya	87.83	Liberia	21.36
Rwanda	86.49	Madagascar	1.96
Tanzania	85.76	Malawi	15.05
Lesotho	85.09	Mali	50.71
Cameroon	85.08	Mauritania	33.85
Congo, Democratic Republic of the (DRC)	84.99	Mauritius	8.65
Togo	84.29	Morocco	9.67
Congo, Republic of the (RC)	82.05	Mozambique	24.89
Madagascar	81.2	Namibia	1.52
Comoros	78.27	Niger	52.04
Angola	77.43	Nigeria	33.77
Guinea-Bissau	77.28	Rwanda	14.08
Nigeria	75.03	São Tomé & Príncipe	12.12
Sudan	73	Senegal	38.28
Malawi	72.94	Seychelles	5.27
Ethiopia	72.75	Sierra Leone	29.74
Mozambique	70.91	Somalia	
Senegal	69.48	South Africa	11.53
Gambia	67.16	South Sudan	62.36

Ranking of Countries by Education Literacy Rate		Ranking of Countries by Out-of-School Rate	
Sierra Leone	66.65	Sudan	38.3
Mauritania	63.95	Tanzania	39.72
Benin	60.95	Togo	21.11
Cote d'Ivoire	58.42	Tunisia	
Burkina Faso	58.29	Uganda	
Liberia	55.4	Zambia	14.9
Mali	50.13	Zimbabwe	0.35
South Sudan	47.9		
Guinea	45.24		
Niger	39.79		
Central African Republic (CAR)	38.27		

Table 6: Secondary and Tertiary Gross Enrolment Ratio in Africa

Ranking of Countries by Gross Enrolment Ratio (Secondary)		Ranking of Countries by Gross Enrolment Ratio (Tertiary)	
Angola	50.67	Algeria	51.37
Benin	59.04	Angola	9.34
Botswana	23.4	Benin	12.27
Burkina Faso	40.71	Botswana	25
Burundi	48.47	Burkina Faso	6.5
Cabo Verde	88.16	Burundi	6.05
Cameroon	60.06	Cabo Verde	23.62
Central African Republic (CAR)	17.14	Cameroon	12.76
Chad	22.56	Central African Republic (CAR)	3
Comoros	59.47	Chad	3.25
Congo, Democratic Republic of the (DRC)	46	Comoros	9
Congo, Republic of the (RC)		Congo, Democratic Republic of the (DRC)	6.6
Cote d'Ivoire	51.03	Congo, Republic of the (RC)	12.67

Ranking of Countries by Gross Enrolment Ratio (Secondary)		Ranking of Countries by Gross Enrolment Ratio (Tertiary)	
Djibouti	51.97	Cote d'Ivoire	9.34
Egypt	87.91	Djibouti	5
Equatorial Guinea		Egypt	35.16
Eritrea	47.7	Eritrea	3.36
Eswatini (formerly Swaziland)	82.41	Ethiopia	8
Ethiopia	34.94	Gambia	3
Ghana	64.57	Ghana	15.69
Lesotho	62.01	Guinea	11
Liberia	37.9	Kenya	11.46
Libya		Lesotho	10.2
Madagascar	36.53	Liberia	12
Malawi	40.28	Madagascar	5.35
Mali	41.03	Malawi	1
Mauritania	36.83	Mali	4.52
Mauritius	95.1	Mauritania	5
Morocco	80.23	Mauritius	40.6
Mozambique	35.41	Morocco	35.94
Namibia		Mozambique	7.31
Niger	24	Namibia	22.89
Nigeria	42	Niger	4.41
Rwanda	40.9	Nigeria	18.21
São Tomé & Príncipe	89.34	Rwanda	6.73
Senegal	43.7	São Tomé & Príncipe	13.38
Seychelles	81.45	Senegal	12.76
Sierra Leone	41.8	Seychelles	17.08
Somalia	26.5	Sierra Leone	
South Africa	104.7	Somalia	
South Sudan	11.01	South Africa	22.37
Sudan	46.62	South Sudan	
Tanzania	29.44	Sudan	16.92
Togo	61.85	Tanzania	4.01
Tunisia	92.87	Togo	14.52

Ranking of Countries by Gross Enrolment Ratio (Secondary)		Ranking of Countries by Gross Enrolment Ratio (Tertiary)	
Uganda		Tunisia	31.75
Zambia	19.93	Uganda	4
Zimbabwe	23.2	Zambia	4.12
		Zimbabwe	10.01

Conclusion

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have spent the last three-quarters of an hour reflecting on a few pertinent questions related to our community of practice – open, distance and eLearning. I make bold to assert that ODeL programmes do not necessarily have to lead to the award of degrees in order to improve the knowledge base and skill acquisition in Africa. ODL can be the nourishing vehicle that can help meet with the ambitious socio-economic and education development agendas such as the *Continental Education Strategy for Africa* and the wider *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want*. Without gainsaying, education will play a prominent role in the accomplishment of these goals and other international development goals that African nations have signed up to.

In the final analysis, there seems to be no end to the palpable advantages and contributions of ODeL mode to African situations in terms of socio-political and economic development and by extension national development of African countries. The foregoing shows that the functional implications and advantages of the ODeL scheme cover a broad spectrum of society to the benefit of everyone. ODeL holds special implication for the women, especially in a developing society of the countries of Africa, such as Nigeria, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda Mauritius and a host of other countries. Lots of market women, traders, itinerant businesswomen, women in Purdah, working women as well as women and girls resident in the sub-rural societies would benefit from this scheme.

Another implication of the address is that ODeL has gone a long way in increasing the literacy level of Africans generally and confirms the long held assertion of Okeke (1995) that education is the most effective strategy for promoting individual empowerment and the United Nations report on human development which states that in sub-saharan Africa education seems to be the only effective means of empowering citizens.

What has become clear is that the kind of education that would be required for the accomplishment of these development targets can also be deeply rooted within the practice of open, distance and digital learning. We in Africa should create more partnerships and networking among ODeL institutional providers within the continent on the one hand, and with the private telecommunications sector, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), on the other hand, to share knowledge and be able to further reduce costs.

I submit that open and distance learning offer important opportunities for the socioeconomic development of Africa in various sectors of human activities over the next few decades. Important manifestations of these are already evident across our continent and I see these often as I travel to different African countries including at OUT in the course of my current assignment.

Once again, I congratulate the Graduands, the Vice-Chancellor and indeed all members of the university community at the Open University of Tanzania, on the auspicious occasion of this 41st Convocation. I wish our graduands success, as they enter a wonderful new and dynamic world of opportunities.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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