



Address by the Special Guest of Honour

His Excellency
President Olusegun Obasanjo
Former President, Federal Republic of Nigeria

Let me thank you Professor Okebukola and Professor Goski Alabi for what you have said about me. Let me also acknowledge the Ministers present at this Conference. I also acknowledge the Nigeria High Commissioner to Ghana, Members of the ACDE Executive Board, representatives of the Africa Union, the Secretary-General of the Africa Union, both the outgoing and incoming, President of the Commonwealth of Learning, Asha Kanwar, representative of UNESCO, Director-General, Ghana Tertiary Education Commission, Professor Mohammed Salifu, Distinguished Vice-Chancellors, Presidents, Directors in the Academia, Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me before I start, let you know my bias or rather prejudice. I am a proud product of Open and Distance learning and therefore if you hear me saying good things about open and distance learning and if you hear me recommending it, you should remember that I am biased and I have no apologies for that.

I thank you for inviting me to the 6th ACDE Triennial Conference as Chief Guest, I am pleased to know that since ACDE was established in 2004 and has been unwavering in the pursuit of the goal of being a major player in the promotion and advocacy for open distance learning including e-learning in Africa. As I begin my brief remarks, allow me to reflect with you that what was abhorrent about Covid-19, in terms of handicapping our movement, has become a catapult for projecting the role of open and distance learning in the delivery of quality education. If you like there's some good and evil in Covid-19. The age-long debate about the quality of distance education and which is likely rested on ignorance is increasingly shifting in favour of those who have said

that there is little or no difference with face-to-face delivery. If anything for the amount of ground to be covered I think the walls of world Universities have become constrained and the earlier we remove the walls, the more we will be able to achieve and for me if only for that, well Covid-19 is not the evil or the unmitigated evil that will have seen it to be. When the Covid-19 lockdown was at its peak, educational systems all over the world were literally forced to engage in open and distance learning. Teachers and School Administrators in spite of the limitations of technology especially in Africa tested the ODL pudding and found its taste to be sweet.

No country is exempt from deploying some form of ODL in its educational system rounds of ODL lovers will appear to be swelling rapidly, herein is the importance of the theme of your conference - open and distance learning the Continental Education Strategy for Africa and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal for SDG 4: Engagement. It seems to provide an opportunity for us to explore how best SDG 4 and Goal 2 of Africa's agenda for 2063 can be achieved using ODL as a tool. My quick remark will be centred on doing ODL right to achieve global and continental goals as you are aware I am a product I said it before and I will say it again I am a proud product of the ODL system having obtained my Doctorate Degree from the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) I am quite satisfied with the rigour of the training I received from the National Open University of Nigeria and I am pleased that I went through all that the typical learner was exposed to Online and On-site Facilitations, Intensive Research Methodology, Data Gathering and Analysis of the Doctoral Thesis and Defense of the Research Proposal and the Final Thesis that made it more rigorous because I had to defend my thesis with the internet and completely open so as my university - the open university. Even though the defense of my thesis was tough but intellectually enriching today with my PhD and from the National Open University of Nigeria I ,feel immense fulfilment and joy at my certificate is not one of those that you will say is only honorary, it was something that was spectacular for that matter. But let me say that a cloud doubt of surrounds the quality of ODL delivery system that will not vaporize overnight. I experienced the rigour and I am aware that we can still improve on our practice if we are to block out the skepticism of those

still in doubt, I applaud the efforts of the ACDE in standard setting but we must go beyond the paper on which the standards and policies are written to faithfully implementing these standards on the ground. In my view, the soft under-belly of ODL delivery in Africa is the gap between theory and practice. This gap must be bridged urgently if we are to deploy distance education in Africa's quest to attain the sustainable development goals SDGs and the Africa Union Agenda 2063 the Africa we want.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen a blight in the socio-political environment in Africa is the increasing violence, radicality, ethnic and religious tensions, political intolerance and conflict emanating from the mismanagement of diversity. Our region is noted for the large army of out-of-school children and high illiteracy rate. My own country Nigeria can boast unfortunately of 14 million out-of-school children. What is your Council and the members doing about this? You must show relevance in solving this and other challenges facing the continent through the courses we deliver and how you deliver them. We should harness this comparative advantage of numbers in your contribution to the progress of Africa, there is a need to have a framework for quality assurance and standards that will provide some direction and guidelines for institutions and National bodies in Africa, ACDE can provide some leadership in this area. ACDE should work closely with the African Union Commission, UNESCO, Commonwealth of Learning, Development Partners and in particular National Governments to develop and implement the framework. Our situation where we still have a large army of out-of-school children is preparing the ground for the Boko Haram of tomorrow.

Finally, I wish the African Council for Distance Education the best as it champions the Open, Distance and E-Learning agenda in Africa and every success in the 6th Triennial Conference. Thank you for listening and happy deliberations and happy conference.

