

**Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University
Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA)**

Theme paper
For
Stakeholder's Meeting

Date: 06-04-2018

Time: 10:30 AM to 01:30 PM

Venue: Conference Hall, Indian Institute of Bank Management

Jawahar Nagar, Khanapara

Guwahati-22

THEME PAPER FOR STAKEHOLDERS' MEETING

Introduction and rationale for the stakeholders' meeting and brainstorming session

Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University organised an International Conference on 'Developmental Interventions and Open Learning for Empowering and Transforming Society' in NEDFi Convention Centre, Guwahati on December 16-17, 2017. The guiding objective of the Conference was to develop concrete ideas on the role and status of developmental interventions and open learning in addressing relevant social issues and challenges. The other two objectives of the International conference were as follows-

- i. To explore best practices and innovation on open learning and developmental interventions in improving access to quality of life.
- ii. To explore the issues faced by the developmental service providers across social sectors and open learning institutions in imparting stated benefits to the societies.

It was widely held in the Conference that the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode needs to be empowered. It was also held that the ODL institutions also need to transform themselves before assuming a role of transforming society. The keynote address of Prof Asha Kanwar, President and CEO of Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver, Canada was very enriching for the audience as it talked about a promising role of open learning in achieving the developmental objectives. In this regard, she cited several case examples from across the world. As the keynote speech was quite comprehensive, the Honourable Vice Chancellor of KKHSOU urged the Directorate of CIQA to organise a brain storming session with the esteemed members of the Board of Management, Academic Council and other stakeholders for developing a roadmap for the University. In order to enable the members to develop the premises and thoughts for developing the roadmap, following points from the keynote speech have been extracted with questions for debate and discussion.

Perspective 1: Increase in GER

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in tertiary education has increased to 27% but is far short of the rich-country average of 40-70%. The World Bank tells us that for a country to achieve sustainable development the tertiary enrolments should be in the region of 40-50%. In Assam, the GER in tertiary education drops to about 13%, which is only half of the national average. This is similar to the 13.7% average of the GER at the national level for STs. The SC total of 19% GER is again below national enrolments in tertiary education. Only 2.3% of India's workforce has undergone formal skill training. This is 80% in Japan and 96% in South Korea. As our PM says, we need to train our population in skills at speed and scale. Social disparities seem to be higher in India than among other Asian counterparts.

Question: What role can open universities play in achieving a higher rate of GER? What would be the role of KKHSOU?

Perspective 2: Goals and objectives of KKHSOU Programmes

Goal 4 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that the global community adopted in 2015 aspires *to provide inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all* by 2030.

Learning is a key to sustainable development. Learning must lead to three things: economic growth; social inclusion and environmental conservation

- i. **Economic growth**: Economic growth implies income generation, employment opportunities, career progression and increased mobility of learners after successful completion of their academic programmes (COL's Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme is offered in 11 countries. Raymond Loh, an alumnus of Wawasan Open University, Malaysia completed a programme in his early fifties and started a moving and relocation service which now has a presence in 40 countries.)
- ii. **Social inclusion**: Social inclusion implies women empowerment and uplift, entrepreneurship and mainstreaming (Some women in India as a part of COL's L3F project, have learnt agriculture and enterprise development skills using basic mobile phones. They have established companies in agriculture and livestock in which they are shareholders and have generated enough assets within a space of three years to pay back their loans and support selves and their families.)
- iii. **Environmental conservation**: Environmental sustainability is a central concern for all of us. (A recent study conducted in Botswana showed that the carbon footprint of a distance learning student was only one tenth of that of a campus-based student, without a negative impact on learning outcomes.)

A World Bank study shows that one additional year of schooling for women can result in a 20% increase in their income. Even a 0.1% improvement in a country's education equality can result in an over 23% increase in per capita income. In Ethiopia, six years of education can result in a better contribution to soil conservation and more environment-friendly agricultural practices. There is a clear link between education, economic growth, equity, environmental conservation, sustainable development.

Questions:

- i. How can the KKHSOU programmes contribute towards economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation in respect of learning?
- ii. Can ODL contribute to development and transform societies? How can we extend the reach of KKHSOU to cover more people and places by adopting effective methods and ideas?

Perspective 3: Use of Open Educational Resources by KKHSOU

Openness is an evolving concept and the three aspects of openness are interrelated and can be described as access, content and technology. Open universities have already increased access, as we have seen. Open Educational Resources or OER are a fairly new dimension of

openness. Open universities have always been proud of their quality content and this often generated an additional revenue stream for the institution. Now there are millions of pages of open content available on the web. Often up to 80% of faculty time is spent on course development. The use of OER can free some of this time for more student support and lower the costs of programme/course fees. Some open universities in the Commonwealth are developing OER policies and building the capacity of their staff to harness the potential of OER. The rise of OER signals three shifts for ODL institutions. Traditionally open universities have an industrial model – *the open universities of the future will be a more connected model*. There are course development teams within the university responsible for creating content. Now the teams will be dispersed around the globe and will adopt/adapt existing OER. *The rise of OER will encourage the student to be a producer rather than simply the consumer of content.*

If we compare the internet subscriptions per 100 people we find that 62% of the urban population has access to the internet as compared with 14% in rural areas. Way back in 1986, Desmond Keegan said that ‘many of the distance teaching universities...have closed and rigid structures are inflexible and slow to respond to community education needs’. If we look at the student to teacher ratio in our open universities, it varies vastly from 1 to 12 in one case to 1 to nearly 9000 in another.

Questions:

- i. How can we benefit from world class quality contents?
- ii. What should be the benchmark or modalities for ensuring that we are able to give attention to each student? Are we more flexible today?
- iii. Can we harness the power of ICTs to help resource-poor people, women and those with disabilities to access learning at their own pace, place and convenience?
- iv. How open are we to ideas? How much emphasis do we give to community development and outreach? Or to lifelong learning?
- v. Do our programmes have the academic content and the skills required for livelihoods?
- vi. By 2020, 50% of India’s internet users will be located in rural areas and 40% will be women (BCG, 2017). Are we preparing for these developments?

Perspective 4: Reducing dropout and improving learner engagement

The output rate of the open universities during 2016 shows a great variation in results – from 2% to 39%. 80% dropout can happen due to non-completion of assignments. According to Holmberg, two-way communication and feedback strengthen learning. Research shows that instant feedback and keeping the learners engaged can contribute to keeping motivation levels high.

Let us be open to new ideas. As Victor Hugo said, ‘you can’t resist an idea whose time has come’. *Open universities, instead of resisting the idea of OER, must be ready to embrace*

open content. The learner must be at the centre of everything we do – instead of making them passive consumers of knowledge, let us encourage them to become active producers of OER.

Open universities have been so busy developing courses that they have paid inadequate attention to research and innovation. Only four open universities feature among the over 5000 ranked institutions – these are the open universities of UK, Israel, Netherlands and Greece. When will we see Indian institutions in such tables? We know that ODL has reached people in unreached places with methods and innovative ideas that have made educational success possible. But what has been the impact of ODL on development? There are very few studies in this area. Alan Tait (2014) examined the mission statements of 12 major open universities and found that the focus was on access, equity, equality, democratization, social justice, transforming society and development. However, he found that “nowhere is there proposed a theoretical and substantive understanding of what development is, or how it works, nor...what should be done in terms of curriculum and pedagogy to support such aims”. If the children cannot come to school, the school goes to the children. COL works with this boat school which picks up children from their villages in a flood-prone region of Bangladesh. These boat schools are also fitted with computers and solar generators to service students from the most resource-poor and remote region. In our planning, could we start with remote regions rather than urban centres? How can we redistribute infrastructure and resources for better learner support in far-flung places?

Questions:

- i. How can we decrease the high dropout rates?
- ii. Only four open universities feature among the over 5000 ranked institutions – these are the open universities of UK, Israel, Netherlands and Greece. When will we see Indian institutions in such tables?

Other Strategic Inputs from the Keynote for Developing the Roadmap for KKHSOU

What then can we do as open universities and ODL providers?

First, embrace lifelong learning and strengthen our outreach function to open up education to wider constituencies especially the unreached. Lifelong learning includes the whole spectrum of formal, non –formal and informal learning.

The **second** step would be to inspire and mobilise our staff to contribute to development. Let us train staff in the different aspects of effective distance learning delivery. Capacity building in curriculum, effective learner support, assessment techniques and the adoption and adaptation of OER and MOOCs would be some areas of focus.

The **third** strategy is that in order to scale skill development, it is important to develop need based courses, which open up opportunities for livelihoods. This can be done in partnership with industry and the service sector. Industry partnership is essential to create curricula that are appropriate and relevant to make learners employable.

Conclusive remark in the Keynote

Let us understand the magnitude of the challenges that we face today. And take an ecosystem approach to solve them at scale. When done right, the kind of open learning we offer will result in social inclusion, economic growth and environmental conservation – all elements of sustainable development. But to transform society, ODL must transform itself first.

Agenda for the Brainstorming Session in the Stakeholders' Meeting:

- i. We may discuss the perspectives and corresponding questions as outlined above for developing the roadmap premises. In this regard, it may be noted for that the year 2018 has been chosen for strengthening the following in KKHSOU:
 - a) Examination Reforms
 - b) Internal administration
 - c) Digitisation of records and processes
- ii. The year 2019 may focus on
 - a) Preparedness for NAAC accreditation
 - b) COL review
 - c) Strong presence on the online and ICT enabled domain
- iii. The University has revamped plans for SLM Audit, developing the mechanism for collection of learner's feedback, organising interactive meeting with the study centres and stakeholders, conducting research workshop for faculty etc.
- iv. Based on the above, we may endeavour to develop a roadmap for KKHSOU in the context of the emerging trends in the ODL scenario.
