

Developmental Innovations and Open Learning for Empowering and Transforming Society: A Few Observations

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Education, in particular open and distance learning, (ODL) is a 'public good' of hope in a challenged democracy of India. Thirty five years back (1982) the first open university was established in India (BRAOU-1982) with a resolve to democratise higher education, to upgrade the knowledge and skills of workforce and to provide opportunities for lifelong learning. These are the broad objectives, which continue to guide all open universities and other open learning institutions of today. The ODL aims at energizing and empowering people by unleashing the power of technology to build a society based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. The theme of the conference emphasises this transformative role of open learning.

The conference theme is very relevant in the context of expectations of education to play an important role in addressing the challenges of development in India which include growing inequalities, massive unemployment and environmental destruction. The open universities in India have an important social responsibility to play a leading role in addressing these challenges by appropriately refocusing on their goals, programmes, pedagogy and processes. The open access policies need to be re-examined to reduce inequalities in education. The programmes offered by open universities should be relevant to the sustainable development needs of the nation. The outcomes of ODL should aim at employable graduates for 'Make in India', 'Skill India', 'Digital India' and for such other developmental needs. For this, industry- open-university linkages are very important. The ODL institutions should focus on Open Education Practices to contribute to the creation of knowledge society. All these requires clearly defined goals, interactive pedagogy, result based governance system and reliable parameters of assessment of performance. The Conference is an opportunity to ODL professionals too collectively reflect to bring more clarity to the developmental innovations in ODL and developing neo-institutional framework to realise the redefined goals of ODL. Hope the conference will throw more 'light' on the way forward and generate more 'fire' to ignite minds for transformation action.