Nigeria, which is located on the West Coast of Africa, is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and four countries, namely: Cameroon to the East, Benin Republic to the West, Chad to the North East and Niger to the North. Its main rivers are the Niger and the Benue. It is the tenth largest country in land mass in Africa. It has a land mass of 923,768 square kilometres with a population of over 167 million people comprising almost 350 ethno-linguistic groups. The country is made up of 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, as well as 774 Local Government Areas spread over Six Geo-Political Zones. Nigeria gained her Independence on 1st October, 1960 and became a Republic in 1963.

The major export commodity is petroleum. Other products include cotton, cocoa, cassava, rubber, palm oil, etc. Nigeria is also blessed with abundant mineral resources such as tin, columbite, iron-ore, lead, zinc, coal, etc. Nigeria is an active member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU), the Commonwealth of Nations and the United Nations (UN). The country is striving hard to eradicate poverty and illiteracy through job creation and also through the provision of free, compulsory and functional Universal Basic Education. This is in accordance with the MDGs and EFA Goals, the AU Protocols, the Commonwealth ideals, the Transformation Agenda of the present Administration and Vision 20:2020.

**THE USE OF ODL IN NIGERIA**

The Open and Distance Learning programme in Nigeria is operated through the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the National Teachers’ Institute (NTI). The conventional Nigerian higher education system is hard pressed to meet the demands of the ever growing population of the country for highly accessible, affordable and qualitative education. This is because Nigerian universities have low absorption capacity (between 10-15%) on average. The universities cannot admit up to 20% of eligible candidates.

**Table 1:** Summary of the Number of Tertiary Institutions, Learners and Educators in the Nigerian Education System.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Sector</th>
<th>Number of Institutions</th>
<th>Number of Learners</th>
<th>Number of Educators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>842,326</td>
<td>57,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polytechnics</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>603,102</td>
<td>6,651 (academic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monotechnics</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>19,923</td>
<td>1,870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges of Education</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>346,006</td>
<td>36,952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation Enterprise/Vocational</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>1,879</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise Institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Federal Ministry of Education
As indicated in the table above, the continued increase in the population demanding university education in Nigeria revealed that there are more university applicants than those admitted by the universities.

If Nigerians believe that higher education is sequel to national development, then we must discard the mentality of keeping higher education for the limited and exclusive few and embrace in totality Open and Distance Learning (ODL). The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has been the vanguard of improving access and equity in the Nigerian education sector, since its resuscitation in 2002. In 2012, the Government undertook full accreditation of courses offered at NOUN and it is expanding ODL in universities.

Furthermore, ODL provides opportunity for those who are already employed and who cannot afford to resign from their jobs, to maintain their jobs and still make time to attend classes, to improve their knowledge and their academic status. ODL also provides unlimited access to education to all categories of people in Nigeria, especially to those who, due to one reason or the other, could not further their education in the conventional universities or colleges of education on a full-time basis.

NOUN continues to move progressively towards its target, accommodating about 250,000 students annually. Accordingly, it increased its study centres across the country to 50 by 2013. It also had 31 of its programmes accredited by NUC within the period. Thus, through ODL, ordinary Nigerians are provided with alternative opportunity to have tertiary education. Furthermore, ODL programmes in some universities like Abuja, Yola, Maiduguri, Ife, Ibadan and Lagos are also expanding their programmes to attract more students to use the ODL platform to acquire tertiary education.

The Seventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum (PCF7)

The Seventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF7) was zoned to Africa. Following a hosting request by the Federal Ministry of Education, His Excellency Mr. President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR, approved that the event be hosted in Abuja from 2-6 December 2013, at the International Conference Centre.

The theme of the Forum was “Open Learning for Development towards Empowerment and Transformation”. Its sub-themes were:

i) Girls and Women Education;

ii) Skills Development;

iii) Innovation and Technology;

iv) Promoting Open Educational Resources; and

v) Institutional Development.

The Forum drew over 661 participants from 49 countries, ICT corporations, Civil Society Organizations, International Development Partners, experts on Open and Distance Learning, the Media and other Stakeholders.
His Excellency, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR, was represented by the Honourable Minister of State for Education and the Supervising Minister of Education, Chief (Barr.) Ezenwo Nyesom Wike. Some of the key issues that came out from the Forum were:

- National policies should favour girls and women;
- The needs of the boy child should not be overlooked;
- Skill development must emphasize alternative approaches; and
- 10 years down the line, about 40% of universities would have embraced ODL.

**Top Priorities for 2015-2018**

Nigerians expect access to quality education, uninterrupted academic calendar, well-motivated teachers and that the products of our institutions, especially the ODL institutions, would be employable, be employers of labour, etc. The current Administration expects education to serve as an enviable tool for sustainable socio-economic transformation of the society and the achievement of Vision 20:2020. Nigerian education sector has made remarkable progress in addressing the prevailing challenges of the sector, but a lot still needs to be done.

Some of the top priorities include the need to:

- Create more awareness on Girls’ Education;
- Provide ODL centres for adolescent mothers and dropout girls;
- Revive Girls’ Education Movement in schools to improve performance in schools;
- Develop the capacity and skills of teachers to use ICT in the teaching and learning process;
- Ensure proper management and utilisation of resources available to the sector, in order to achieve efficiency, effectiveness, value for more and improved service delivery;
- Develop media facilities and resources to enhance information delivery;
- Dedicate a radio and TV station with a wide area interconnectivity to ODL centres locally and internationally;
- Recruit professional ODL personnel to effectively manage ODL institutions;
- Develop an ODL database accessible to all ODL centres for sharing of information; and
- Explore sources of funding other than the normal annual budgetary allocation from the Government.

**What COL can do to further support Nigeria’s Agenda?**

COL has continued to make a remarkable progress towards supporting Nigeria’s Agenda. The following were credited to Nigeria:
• Her Excellency Mrs. Mariam Katagum is the current representative from Nigeria to COL Board of Governors. She is also a member of the Audit Committee of the Board;
• COL’s Educationist Dr. Abdurrahman Umar, was formerly an Academic Director at NTI;
• COL supported the establishment of the Regional Training and Research Institute for Open and Distance Learning (RETRIDOL) located at NOUN;
• UNESCO-COL Chair on ODL has been confirmed on NOUN; and
• Nigeria was privileged to host the Seventh Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF7) in Abuja from 2-6 December 2013.

Notwithstanding the above, COL can still do the following to further Nigeria’s Agenda:
• Providing technical assistance in the establishment of Nigeria’s Open School;
• There is need for increased advocacy, sensitization and communication strategies to enhance Open Learning in Nigeria;
• There is need for mass deployment of qualified ODL teachers and retraining of serving ones for improved performance;
• Quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms should be strengthened in order to impact positively on education delivery; and
• There is need to revitalise and reinvigorate RETRIDOL to the level of CEMCA, India, to be able to cater for the whole of Africa.

Africa and the Mediterranean Regional Focal Points Meeting
Ebene City, Mauritius
May 2014