

Ahmedabad Declaration

By the State Open University Vice Chancellors of India
August 2023

We, the Vice Chancellors, and other delegates, who participated in the State Open University Vice Chancellors' Forum, organised by the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU) and the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) on 4-5 August 2023 at BAOU Campus in Ahmedabad, on the theme, 'National Education Policy 2020: Opportunities and Challenges for Open and Distance Learning Universities', hereby declare that:

1. The Open Universities Vice Chancellors' Forum was organised to:
 - a. Take stock of the vision and objectives of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) and the opportunities and challenges it presents for Open and Distance Learning Institutions.
 - b. Discuss the current practices of State Open Universities in the wake of the introduction of NEP 2020.
 - c. Reflect upon effective ways to translate the vision of NEP 2020 into robust implementation measures and strategies.
 - d. Identify the 'niche' of ODL institutions and the opportunities for seizing a leadership position.
 - e. Continue to demonstrate and ensure that higher education is accessible, affordable, equitable and inclusive.

2. The Open Universities Vice Chancellors' Forum also took note of the facts that:
 - a. The Open Universities in India, contribute to almost 11 percent of the learners enrolled in higher education institutions in India.
 - b. This achievement is remarkable given that as opposed to more than 1100 conventional universities and more than 45,000 constituent, affiliated and autonomous colleges, the meagre number of 18 Open Universities and other open systems in the nation contribute to one tenth of the enrolments.
 - c. The Open Universities contribute to more than 50 percent of the female enrolment ratio in India.
 - d. The ODL system is the most preferred choice of education for persons with disabilities and marginalised sections of society.
 - e. There are many exemplars of best practices from various Open Universities in India, including reaching the unreached.

3. We continue to commit to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, on inclusive and equitable quality education, and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. Advocating for SDG 4 as a vantage point to achieve the remainder SDGs, particularly SDG 5 emphasising gender equality and women empowerment, and SDG 8 promoting sustained and inclusive sustainable economic growth, we note the significant contribution of ODL institutions, especially the Open Universities, in this regard.
4. We, recognising the transformative nature of the NEP 2020, commit to the all-round development of the learners in alignment with the 21st Century skills, capable of rational thought and action, possessing compassion and empathy, courage and resilience, scientific temper, and creative imagination, with sound ethical moorings and values. We aim to produce critical, creative, engaged, productive, contributing, and ethical citizens for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society as envisaged by our Constitution.
5. We, recognising the aspirations of the nation in enhancing the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) to 50 per cent by 2035, commit all our resources and efforts towards expanding our reach and sustaining our contribution to the GER growth in the nation, while disregarding any compromise in the quality of education.
6. We reiterate our commitment to lifelong learning opportunities for every individual through our ODL system, especially by reaching the last learner, such as, the migrant workers, indigenous people, rural populations, persons with disabilities (divyang), learners in conflict zones, and other vulnerable groups as the “first choice of education.”
7. We commit to responding to continuous skilling, upskilling, and reskilling of individuals to meet the demands of the future of work by creating courses with involvement from the industry and the marketplace, especially for the marginalised groups through flexible pathways, internships, workplace-learning and other apprenticeship opportunities to enhance skills and employability.
8. We commit to move our Open Universities as multidisciplinary, large, and resilient systems that are agile to changing needs and the demands of the learner-centred curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and student support systems with an overall vision of delivering quality education through ODL, while enhancing and extending our outreach to a diverse set of learners.

9. We commit to collaborate among the Open Universities by forming a Consortium of Open Universities with the intent of achieving the following:
 - a. Share best practices and learn from each other.
 - b. Organise face-to-face and online conferences and workshops to devise implementable strategies and lines of action for realising the vision of NEP 2020.
 - c. Share resources as Open Educational Resources (OER) on a mutual basis to facilitate the right of universities who enter into such agreements to retain, reuse, revise, remix and redistribute for educational purposes, and to also use upto 40% of OER content in their course development.
 - d. To exchange ideas and strategies, especially towards strengthening our partnerships with government and non-governmental actors towards education and skill development.

10. We commit to developing a credit transfer framework among the Open Universities to provide flexibility and choice-based educational opportunities to our learners in India by recognising credits earned in our educational systems and enabling learners from Open Universities to obtain credits from each other.

11. We recognise the need for investing in digital technologies and to become one of the prime users of assistive, adaptive, and user-centred technologies to promote blended learning, mainly by transforming our institutions from massification of education to universalization, but rapidly move on to facilitating personalised learning among the millions of learners with diverse interest, potential and aspirations. We extend our commitment to promoting ODL and Online programmes, adhering to the standards and quality equivalent to the highest quality programmes run by campus institutions and commit to developing our institutional-level blended learning policies towards imparting high quality courses in a blended mode.

12. We also commit to tackling the problems associated with the digital divide by identifying and using appropriate technologies, ranging from community radio to extended realities and artificial intelligence-enabled virtual tutoring possibilities, to ensure that equity, inclusion, and diversity principles are adhered to, and use traditional tools and technologies for learners who do not have adequate access and connectivity to the Internet.

13. Finally, we, recognising the pioneering role that the ODL system has played over the last many decades, commit to innovation and creativity, in the way and beyond, we enhanced access to high quality, employment-oriented, short and long-term courses with flexible exit and entry points as a response to market requirements as well as by way of realising NEP 2020's vision of creating lifelong learners, who

have a global outlook and are exemplars of global citizenship, while retaining their pride in being Indians first.

14. Together, we commit to working towards a common future where Open Universities are recognised for their inclusive lifelong learning practices and for their delivery of quality education and skills to every individual and towards building national resilience as India aspires to become the world's knowledge superpower.

15. We hereby adopt the Ahmedabad Declaration.

Adopted by:

Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Guwahati, Assam
Nalanda Open University, Nalanda, Bihar
Pandit Sundarlal Sharma Open University, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh
Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat
Jharkhand State Open University, Ranchi, Jharkhand
Karnataka State Open University, Mysuru, Karnataka
Sreenarayanaguru Open University, Kollam, Kerala
M. P. Bhoj Open University, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh
Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Nasik, Maharashtra
Odisha State Open University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha
Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala, Punjab
Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, Kota, Rajasthan
Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu
Dr B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad, Telangana
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Facilitated by:

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, New Delhi, India