THE 6TH ACDE TRIENNIAL CONFERENCE 2021 COMMUNIQUE

Introduction

The 6th ACDE Triennial Conference was held virtually from Accra Ghana on 28th and 29th September 2021. The conference was hosted by Laweh Open University College, in partnership with the Association of African Universities (AAU), All-Africa Students Union (AASU), Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), Ministry of Education, Ghana and the International Council for Open & Distance Education (ICDE). The 2021 conference was presided over by the honour of His Excellency Chief Professor Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, under whose leadership the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), was established.

The conference was anchored on the theme "*Open and Distance Learning amidst COVID-19: The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) and the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4)".* The conference brought together over 170 participants including Governments, Policymakers, Vice-Chancellors, Rectors, Presidents and other leaders of higher education institutions, scholars, students, educational professionals, development agencies, educational technology investors, and private sector committed to sustainable open and distance learning in the continent and in the diaspora to review and share experiences on the progress made in the field towards the fulfilment of the goals of the CESA and SDG 4. The two days' conference attracted over 600 participants most of whom joined on youtube and Facebook drawn from African countries and beyond.

In line with the aspirations of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa, the ACDE has embarked on a number of initiatives geared at ensuring that, the strengths of ODL is harnessed towards the achievement of both the strategic focus of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA, 2016-2025) and ultimately the SDG 4. This focus necessitated a stakeholder conference to review and share experiences on the progress chalked by diverse stakeholders in the Open and Distance education space in Africa, in a bid to fulfil the goals of the CESA and SDG 4.

Beyond these existing initiatives, the Conference identified the following key issues and critical Success Factors:

1. Commitment and investments from government in infrastructure and resources for ODeL
2. Capacity building in Techno-pedagogical skills
3. Use of Artificial Intelligence, with emphasis on Machine Learning, Block Chain Technology and internet of things in enhancing teaching, learning assessments and examinations
4. Role of Open, Distance, E-Learning and TVET in the skills development agenda
5. Policies that build confidence in ODeL through Repositioning
6. Inclusivity, social Justice and diversity in education
7. Collaborations and partnerships for entrenching and improving response to the new normal

Summary of the Needed Actions

The keys to deploy Open and Distance Learning in the transformational Agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), The Continental Education Strategy for Africa and Agenda 2063 the Africa We Want are:

1. A paradigm shift from the traditional brick and mortar educational concept to one that embraces openness and technology mediation. This requires a lot of advocacy and regulation of ODL in Africa to safe-guard both the practice and quality.
2. A focus on skills, competency, technology, digital literacy and entrepreneurial-based education with particular emphasis on Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning,
3. Capacity Building and Resource Development for ODL in Africa. In this regard, capacity needs developed for all academic staff in blended learning delivery in Africa not only for those in open and distance environments.
4. Need for a heavy investment in ODL to complement the traditional systems of education to respond to behavioural and technological changes
5. Address the Perceptual Challenges of ODL with hard facts, to de-construct the perception that ODL is inferior
6. Collaborate with the Virtual Institute of Capacity Building for Higher Education, Africa to share practices, experiences and innovations from around the continent.
7. Need for national policies on recognition of prior learning and comprehensive national qualifications framework that allow for different pathways and credentialing. In this regards the UNESCO framework for the recognition of prior learning could be a reference point.

RESOLUTIONS

We the delegates attending the virtual 6th ACDE Triennial conference recommend the following resolutions:

1. **Recognize that** traditional methods of teaching/learning are not tenable at all the times
2. **Aware that** the COVID 19 pandemic, has made Open and distance education or technology mediated education an imperative.
3. **Recognize that** achieving SDG 4.3 requires all higher institutions of learning in Africa to come up with flexible modes of teaching/learning and assessments, that allow both women and men to work as well as pursue their studies and acquire needed skills and competences
4. **Cognizant that** embracing technology enabled learning comes with some challenges including, providing the needed resources for all at the national and continental levels, **call on** African governments to prioritize Open and Distance Education and invest in it to cope with the new normal of education
5. **Recognize that s**uccess in transitioning to open distance and e-learning requires concerted efforts of all players/stakeholders in higher education in Africa and collaboration between and among various national, regional and international actors.
6. **Cognizant of** the important role evidence play in decision making **Call on** all actors and players in ODeL to embrace collaboration and partnership in research on innovative approaches in ODeL in Africa.
7. **Aware that** the perceived quality and actual quality of ODL may be compromised **call on** regulatory bodies to pay attention to positioning ODL in making it acceptable to the general public without compromising on quality
8. **Acknowledge tha**t adoption and systematic use of the ACDE Quality Assurance Toolkit will provide a comprehensive tool for self-assessment as it will measure the Institution's strengths and weaknesses against key ODL practices and processes.
9. **Resolve that** ACDE will certify and publish on their website member institutions that adopt and implement the ACDE Quality Assurance standards in collaboration with national regulatory bodies
10. **Cognizant that** human development is critical to the achievement of the sustainable development goals   and Agenda 2063 which is "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena" – **the Africa we want.**