

The Dynamics of Changing Societies and the dynamic role of ODL in creating the future

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Abstract: As we approach 2015, the deadline set by the international community for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we find that several developing countries in Asia will not achieve the MDGs or Education for All (EFA) goals. Even beyond that deadline, poverty will continue to dominate development discourse, along with issues of population and climate change. Education is fundamental to the development of societies and Open and Distance Learning (ODL) captured the imagination of policy-makers forty years ago, as they sought to increase access and equity, improve quality and relevance and cut costs. ODL flourished in the formal education sector. However, in the 21st century, citizens will need to become lifelong learners who continue to learn, re-learn and un-learn in order to remain competitive within the global knowledge economy. Policy-makers will need to expand the scope of ODL to cover not just formal education but the non-formal and informal sectors as well. ODL has played a supplementary and complementary role to the entire education sector and tried to follow the existing paradigm. ODL must play a transformative role by catering to the needs of changing societies and harnessing the available technologies to provide learning for development. As we witness the need for more diverse, flexible and cost-effective approaches to learning, will ODL have a 'second coming' in the twenty-first century?