

State Open University Vice Chancellors' Forum

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BAOU
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for All

**Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar
Open University**

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and



CEMCA

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

Theme: National Education Policy - 2020: Opportunities and
Challenges for Open and Distance Learning Universities

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Venue: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat

**Speech by Dr B. Shadrach, Director: CEMCA, at the inaugural session on
4 August 2023**

Dear Vice Chancellors

Greetings from the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia!
The regional center of the World's one and the only institution that
promotes Open and Distance Learning for more than three decades
now!

The heads of states of the Commonwealth who met at CHOGM in
Vancouver chose to establish a global institution that would promote
ODL in 1987 and we have been in existence since then! It is headed by
Professor Asha Kanwar, who will address us shortly, and has been a
champion of ODL globally. In India, as per the request made by the
Indian government, CEMCA is in existence since 1998 when a donor
country agreement was signed in Vancouver between the Ministry of
Education and Commonwealth of Learning!

If you like, CEMCA is your ally, partner, and advocate in the region, and more specifically in India.

Today, I am thankful to Professor Ami Upadhyay who has brought almost half of the world's OU under this roof. Of the 33 OUs in the world, some 13 of them are here in this room and a few more are likely to take part online. This is commendable! I wish to thank Professor Nilesh Modi, Professor Ami Upadhyay and Dr Pema Samdup and Ms Joyce Sunny for making this possible. I thank each of the VCs who has taken the time to come out and join the Forum. It is your Forum and your space.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank all those in BAOU who are making our experience memorable by lending their services. Let me also thank my colleagues, Ms Sheriya Sareen, Dr Varun Ashokan, Ms Shipra Sharma and Ms Joyce Sunny who are supporting us online as rapporteurs of this event, sitting in the offices of CEMCA in Delhi. Let me also thank expert panelists who have joined us to enlighten us, and the VCs who shall join us online!

Although globally ODL – Open and Distance Learning is evolving into Online and Digital Learning, for a country like India, the contours are not that simple. This is not that easy change of acronyms. We are having to labour it and achieve it over a period.

Among the 1100 plus universities and 45000 plus colleges, India caters to around 40 million students with 1.5 million teachers. The aspiration is to double this number in about 12 years' time! Should I say, doubling all these numbers? 2000 plus universities, 100000 colleges, 80 million students and 3 million teachers!

Or is ODL the answer? And we are already beginning to witness this! The NEP 2020 opens numerous avenues for us in the Open, Online, Distance, Digital landscape. Blended and Hyflex learning seems to be a new mantra. The aspirations of India require to be met in rural and remote Bharat, among the most backward and disadvantaged communities, among women, persons with disability and among all sections of the society. When one considers the possibility of them entering the education landscape, it is the ODL systems that are apparent!

The notion of lifelong learning is becoming a reality. The recent Bali manifesto states exactly this! “We reiterate the need to extend lifelong learning opportunities to every individual, including all vulnerable groups, such as women, older people, ethnic minorities, Indigenous people, migrants, rural populations, and people with disabilities, and we commit to the principle of ‘leaving no one behind’.”

The NEP recognizes this idea in its very first paragraph: Education is fundamental for achieving full human potential; for developing an equitable and just society; and for promoting national development. And, the aspirations are to make India, a global knowledge superpower! To instil pride in our learners in being India, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support human rights, sustainable development, sustainable living, global wellbeing; therefore, being truly global citizens.

As leaders who can realise the above goals, we are gathered here to ensure that learning imparted through our institutions and ODL systems are outcome-based, multi-disciplinary, employment-oriented, and transformative.

NEP 2020 opens several opportunities and avenues to help us achieve the above. Not only does it advocate for equivalence of degrees and

recognition of credentials, but it does also emphasise upon choice-based credit system, multiple pathways with multiple entry points and exit points, accumulation of credits and micro credentials, incorporating apprenticeship, embracing internationalization, and aligning with credit frameworks and preparing towards credit transfer frameworks.

Dear Vice Chancellors, we need to lead the way! We need to be showstoppers!! We need to be superstars!!!

We need to prepare ourselves, make our institutions resilient, invest in tech-enabled practices, equip our teachers, enhance our support systems for students, excel in quality and innovate assessments, teaching and learning and embrace blended learning designs! And, above, be aware and agile of the opportunities (as well as challenges) posed by the new tech tools and applications – be it Extended Realities or Generative AI or any innovation in the pipeline. We need to be prepared to face the new world.

This VCs Forum is intended to deliberate upon all of these! In closing, may I leave some interesting thoughts for you to mull over?

- a) We need to network among the OUs, especially to share our knowledge and learn from each other. Perhaps, it exists in spirit but not in letters. Have we thought about coming together in the form of an Association of Indian Open Universities? There is a lot to gain.
- b) There is a lot spoken about universities and their constituent colleges in NEP 2020. While we are OUs, do we also consider OCs? Is the concept helpful? Who do we handhold and support? Can we move beyond our own study centres to embrace a big brother role in producing OCs in every district of our nation?

- c) Can we take a cue from NEP 2020 and look at credit transfers within our OUs, if these are already not in place. Can this forum think through the implications and benefits of such a cooperation?
- d) Can we think about joint degree programmes? Something that the campus institutions are racing forward to doing. Can these be within and among the OUs in India; and/or with OUs elsewhere? Can we also look at the Commonwealth MBA programme in which many universities collaborate and award degrees, as an exemplar?
- e) Can we, by way of collaboration, identify a niche subject or topic for each of our OUs and become leaders in our rights. Can each of our OUs anchor a particular programme in which others rally behind?
- f) Can we think through the cluster approach outlined in NEP 2020?

Colleagues, thank you for your attention!