



M-2009 Statement on International Development and Open, Distance and Flexible Learning

(forwarded from the M-2009 World Conference*
to the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education / WCHE2009)

Education is widely seen as a foundation for development, and the key to good health, self-determination, security, economic sustainability and macroeconomic stability. It lies at the heart of the internationally-agreed development goals to cut poverty by 2015.

Four-fifths of the world's people live in emerging nations and developing economies. These countries are key players in growth. Yet as the World Bank observes, the deepening global recession, rising unemployment and volatile commodity prices are seriously affecting progress toward poverty reduction. The recent food crisis has thrown millions into extreme poverty. Falling global demand for commodities and products is causing deteriorating growth prospects in developing countries that will further slow the pace of poverty reduction, directly affecting the lives and livelihoods of billions.

Universities play a critical role in supporting the professional development of practitioners in all spheres to achieve development goals. Open, distance and flexible learning are a proven means to provide higher education for all, to develop the skills of practitioners in their work place and to provide rapid educational interventions on a large scale.

The M-2009 World Conference placed firm emphasis on practical and concerted action by distance learning agencies and institutions. Participants expressed commitment to work together to deliver educational responses, resources and technologies for development, including:

- > skilling teachers in open, distance and flexible learning practices; in managing effective institutional partnerships for development; and in the assessment and recognition of prior learning
- > promoting lifelong learning for women and other priority groups
- > building open research laboratories to link practitioners and institutions for appropriate research enquiries
- > strengthening the value of open educational resources for development by identifying content and language gaps, and by widening awareness of existing repositories
- > rethinking the modalities of North-South partnerships to improve international cooperation in higher education
- > taking this agenda for action to the wider memberships of EADTU and ICDE and to UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education.

* M-2009 has been a one-time merger of the bi-annual conference of the world organization ICDE (International Council for Open and Distance Education) and the annual conference of the EADTU (European Association of Distance Teaching Universities). It took place 7 -10 June 2009 in Maastricht, The Netherlands.