

# Open and Distance Learning and Feminism: Discourses of Access to Justice, Liberty and Livelihood

By

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“Education must be at the core of our nation’s development and poverty reduction strategy. The inescapable consequences of the cost of lack of education, includes eternal poverty, unemployment and low income” President Olusegun Obasanjo at the launching of NOUN, 2002.

## **The Context: Becoming Aware**

By formulating the national policy on education (NPE) in 1977, it was apparent that successive governments in Nigeria were becoming aware of not only the challenges of mass illiteracy and widespread ignorance due to the attendant failure in the delivery of education-the most important instrument of change in any society but the need for a remedy. Based on this conviction, Nigeria government by ‘an Act of the National Assembly, specifically signed-on to the ODE strategy the ODE strategy formally establishing on 2 July,1983, the National Open University(NOU)(NOUN, Profile:2006:3). Unfortunately, this determination to provide Education for All (EFA) by the year 2015 through the ODE Programme life long new way of learning educational strategy that would enable “those who can benefit from higher education to be given access to it through universities or correspondence courses, or *open universities*, or part-time and work study programmes” (ODLP Blueprint, 2000) was however, suspended on 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1984 by the General Muhammadu Buhari/Idiagbon Military Government that overthrew the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. Never the less, after a lull, the entrenchment of democracy in 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo as the new helmsman, provided leadership and direction to other African countries in their aspiration for Education for All (EFA) in 2000 by resuscitating and launching on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2002, the National Open University of Nigeria.

The uniqueness of this premier springboard for modern-day open and distance learning on the one hand, is its objective(earlier stated in the abstract )aimed at bridging the yawning gulf between the demand and supply experienced in the so-called ‘conventional’ and ‘traditional approach’ of disseminating and acquiring knowledge that previously limited opportunities through

its “flexible, learner driven, self directed form (Jegede,2004) of learning completely devoid of socially induced physical transactional constraints. On the other hand, is its commitment to the provision of equal access to education to every prospective candidate’s application according to the peculiar needs such as: those who left school either for having matured or who did not avail themselves of the opportunities to go to school but are still within the age range for universal basic education (UBE) to have a second chance to re-enter the knowledge arena and become literate. These democratic objectives fits into feminism’s compelling conviction that education as a tool for national and personal development is an inalienable right of citizens embodied in discourses of access to justice, liberty and livelihood. For women(as wives and mothers) therefore, ODL’s flexible learning schedules is expected to boost their attaining educational emancipation either as workers and professionals who desire to acquire skills on an ongoing basis but cannot quit their job or business to study in a conventional university to choose between continuing with full-time studies or combining work with studies or to stay-at-home-mothers or those in low-skilled employment who desire economic development so as to eradicate poverty whose aspiration for tertiary education was hindered for reasons such as: academic deficiencies at O/Level; or early marriage after secondary education but now though matured are still willing to have a second chance to re-enter the knowledge arena and become literate. Based on this narrative, this paper will examine how ODE’s policy of accessibility to education will facilitate women’s socio-economic development so as to meet the democratic aspiration of education for all by the year 2015-the target date for the global attainment of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs).

### **Discourses of Feminism, and Democratic Values of Justice and Liberty.**