COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE 3RD OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) CONFERENCE

At its 3rd Open and Distance Learning conference held from 19 – 20 October 2016 in Swakopmund, under the theme “Promoting Lifelong Learning in Open, Distance and eLearning through inclusive and equitable quality education”, the Conference noted the following key issues arising from the deliberations over the two days:

1. STRENGTHENING NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION
The Conference noted the collaboration amongst the ODL institutions in Namibia, facilitated through NOLNet. The conference resolved that this model of collaboration should be shared with other member states in the SADC Region and beyond. The Conference appreciated the efforts taken by the two Ministers of Education to spearhead the process to get the National ODL Policy considered by the Namibian Cabinet. The Conference was of the opinion that the implementation of the National ODL Policy will further enhance and strengthen collaboration amongst the ODL institutions. The Conference called for collective, concerted and decisive efforts from NOLNet partner institutions to enhance positive public perceptions of ODL.

2. ROLE OF ODL IN ADDRESSING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDG)
The Conference called on ODL institutions to develop programmes that address the country’s National Development Agenda. The Conference called on ODL institutions to meet their mandate of providing sound, relevant and quality education to all learners. The Conference acknowledges the important role of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in addressing national development challenges. The Conference observed that ODL institutions have not given TVET the same attention as other forms of education. The Conference is convinced that by neglecting the delivery of TVET through ODL, we will continue to experience a high unemployment rate and a slow pace of economic growth and development. The Conference noted that there is a discrepancy between the SDGs and the curriculum at educational institutions, hence it calls for a realignment to address the gap.

3. INTEGRATION OF ICT IN TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT OF ODL
The Conference noted with appreciation the introduction of various learning management systems (Notesmaster and Moodle) and open courseware (MOOCS and OER) in transforming the delivery of ODL. The Conference calls on ODL institutions to take advantage of technology and share best practices in programme design and delivery. The Conference wishes to put it on record that social network systems promote student collaboration and that ODL institutions should make use of them. ICT has the potential to facilitate learning, however poor internet connectivity and low bandwidth hampers the full integration of ICT in education at all levels. The Conference resolves that ODL institutions should jointly approach service providers such as MTC, Telecom and the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology for support to address the issues of inadequate infrastructure and low bandwidth.

4. INCREASE ACCESS THROUGH ODL
The Conference wishes to affirm that education is a fundamental human right that cannot be confined to the conventional system only and that all citizens have the right to pursue it irrespective of their social or economic conditions. ODL has the capacity to reach the unreached. The Conference further resolved that ODL institutions should put policies in place to regulate ODL delivery. The Conference observed that the growing demand for ODL programmes through increased enrolments is an indication of the confidence that students have in ODL programmes. The Conference resolved that ODL institutions should conduct a needs analysis on the current accessibility.

5. IMPLEMETATION OF ODL POLICIES
The Conference noted the various good policies which have been developed to facilitate ODL delivery. The Conference therefore appeals for the speedy implementation of ODL policies. The Conference wishes to caution against well-developed policies being allowed to accumulate dust because of lack of implementation due to various factors such as inadequate infrastructure, human and financial resources and most importantly, lack of commitment. All ODL providers should make good on their intentions to change the general public perception about ODL.

7. CONCLUSION
The 3rd ODL Conference expects all stakeholders in the ODL fraternity to take this Communique seriously and to act with urgency to ensure that no one in Namibia is excluded from any form of education.

Issued 20th October 2016