The growing demands for more education, the lack of financial and, more importantly human resources, the erosion of quality in education systems, and the demands of the knowledge era for skills are propelling political leaders to crusade for educational reform – including making access to learning an easier process. Those with responsibility for developing skills and knowledge to meet national needs – in the arts, science, business, agriculture, technology and administration – are resorting to new and old technologies for this purpose in both developed and developing countries. Increasingly, educational institutions have taken education to their students regardless of the barriers of space, time, prior knowledge, gender and affordability. They are active in sectors as diverse as literacy programmes (Allama Iqbal Open University in Pakistan) to doctorates in education (The U.K. Open University). Some have only a few thousand students (University of Papua New Guinea) compared to others with as many as 400,000 students (Indira Gandhi National Open University). Some have been in distance education for about 50 years (University of South Africa) and others are brand new such as the University of Sarawak in Malaysia. Their offerings in distance education include courses from family medicine to philosophy, from computer science to art history, from communication technology to English language and literature. However, their effective reach remains inadequate.

Communications and information technologies that are coming into vogue possess enormous potential in educational delivery. Technology, however, does not teach. It enables the delivery of teaching and shifts the responsibility of learning from the teacher to the learner. This requires governments and agencies such as the World Bank, UNDP and the Regional Banks to bring distance learning into their sights, to give it a higher priority and to create an environment in which it can be used effectively. They can do so in the following ways: