

# **Institutional Development: Twenty Five Years of the Largest Open Schooling System in the World**

by

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## **1. PROLOGUE**

At the time of Independence, India inherited a system of education which was not only quantitatively small but also characterized by structural imbalances. Only fourteen per cent of the population was literate and only one child out of three had been enrolled in primary school. As education is vitally linked with the totality of the development process (education being "the basic tool for the development of consciousness and reconstitution of society," in the words of Mahatma Gandhi), the reform and restructuring of the educational system was recognized as an important area of state intervention. The need for a literate population and universal education for all children in the age group of 6-14 was recognized as a crucial input for nation building and was given due consideration in the Constitution as well as in successive Five Year Plans.

This policy has culminated in the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 notified on 27th August, 2009, popularly called RTE Act. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) or Education for All Mission had already been launched by the Government of India for achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) in a time bound manner(SSA,2000).

The Govt. of India is now moving towards universalization of secondary education, for which the RMSA (Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan or National Secondary Education Mission) has been launched.

## **2. GENESIS OF OPEN SCHOOLING IN INDIA**

The idea of introducing the Open Schooling in India was first considered in the early seventies of the twentieth century. In August 1974, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) appointed a Working Group to examine the feasibility of setting up an Open School. Taking note of the fact that the country was facing the persistent problem of school drop outs, it was felt that in the interest of individuals as well as of the nation the drop outs may be provided an opportunity to come back to the mainstream and continue their education. The problems of education of girls and children belonging to rural and economically backward communities, and persons living in difficult contexts, may also be addressed. It was realized that unless the Open Learning System is provided for, where the children as well as adults can take advantage of opportunities for education at their own convenience and at their own pace, it will continue to pose a very difficult situation.

In November 1978, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and NCERT organized an International Seminar on **Open School** which was attended by experts on Distance Education. As a follow up of the International Seminar, the CBSE set up the "Open School" in July 1979, as a Project. It was the first of its kind in India. **In fact, this came up before the first Open University in India, i.e. Andhra Pradesh Open University (1982) and Indira Gandhi National Open University (1985).**

### **3. DECADE OF EXPERIMENTATION**

The Open School Project was started in 1979. However, it was only in 1981-82 that registration of learners started; 1672 were enrolled. In 1983-84, the first Secondary level examination of the "Open School" was conducted. The annual registration figure after a decade rose to 60,000. Encouraged by the growing demand for continuing education through ODL mode, the Open School decided to start the Senior Secondary Courses in 1986. The study materials were developed in Self Learning mode. In consonance with the policy of welfare of disadvantaged people, the Scheduled Castes (SCs), the Scheduled Tribes (STs), girls and Women, Ex-Servicemen, and Handicapped candidates were exempted from tuition fee. Resource-cum-Study Centres of the Open School were set up in many cities. In 1989, the first examination in the Senior Secondary course of Open School was conducted by CBSE.

### **4. NATIONAL OPEN SCHOOL (NOS)**

The National Policy on Education (NPE-1986) suggested strengthening of the Open Schooling system by extending open learning facilities at the secondary level in a phased manner over the country as an independent system with its own curriculum and examination leading to certification. During 1987-88, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India initiated the preparation of a project Report for establishment of a National Open School as an autonomous organization. In pursuance of the Policy perspective, the National Open School (NOS) was set up as an independent body on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 1989. The pilot project of CBSE on Open School was amalgamated with NOS, which was vested with the authority to register, examine and certify students up to pre-degree level courses. It was a significant milestone in the history of open schooling in India when it was given the status of an independent sub-system of school education. NOS had 3 Departments – Academic, Evaluation and Examination.

### **5. NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF OPEN SCHOOLING (NIOS)**

Soon after the turn of the century, in July 2002, the MHRD amended the nomenclature of the organization to National Institute of Open Schooling with a mission *to provide relevant continuing education at school stage, and through it to make its share of contribution to:*

- *universalization of education,*
- *greater equity and justice in society, and*
- *the evolution of a learning society.*

The status was enhanced and its scope of work was expanded. Two new Departments were added: Vocational Education and Student Support Services. The Department of Examination was renamed as Department of Evaluation.

### **6. OVERVIEW OF ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF NIOS**

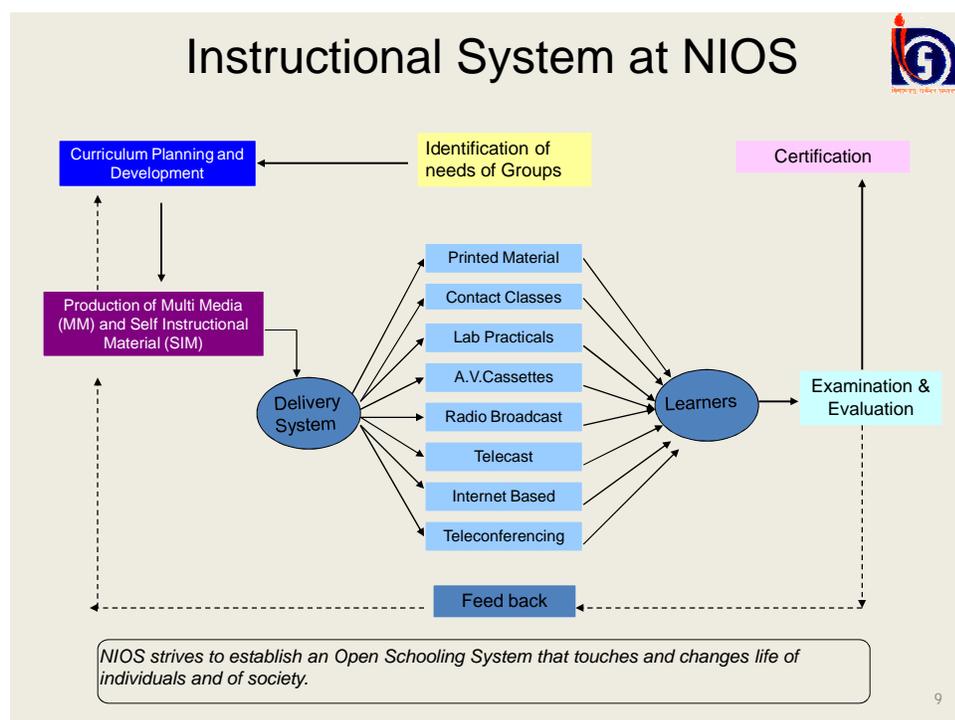
The role and functions of NIOS can be placed in three major categories.

- (i) Institutional Programme Delivery
- (ii) National Lead Role
- (iii) International Role

## 7.1 Institutional Programme Delivery

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) provides opportunities to interested learners by making available the following Courses/Programmes of Study through open and distance learning (ODL) mode.

- Open Basic Education (OBE) Programme for children (up to 14 years),
- Open Basic Education (OBE) Programme as Equivalency Programme for neo-literates, school dropouts/left-outs (adolescents and adults above 14 years of age)
- Secondary Education Programme
- Senior Secondary Education Courses
- Vocational Education Courses/Programmes
- Life Enrichment Programmes



## 7.2 National Lead Role

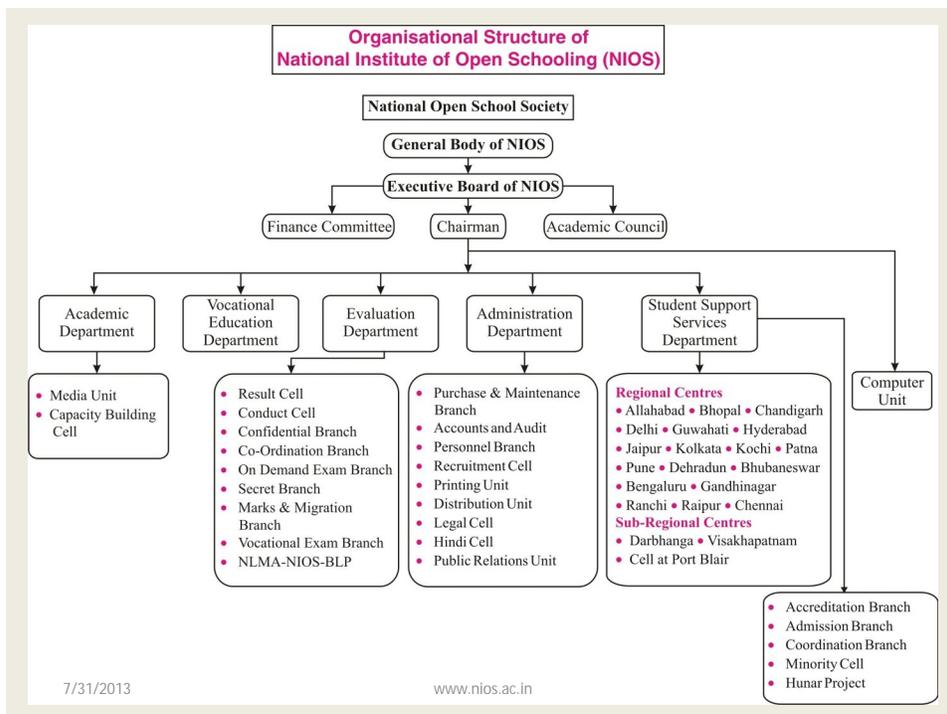
- A major thrust under the national lead role of NIOS is promotion of Open Schooling in the States. As a result of advocacy, consultancy and resource support by NIOS, 17 states of India have already set up State Open Schools (SOSs).
- A "National Consortium for Open Schooling (NCOS)" has been set up. Its Secretariat is located in NIOS. Chairman, NIOS is its Chairperson. NCOS deliberates on matters related to upscaling of Open Schooling programme in India. Its Secretariat performs coordination and clearing house functions in matters related to Open Schooling.
- Certain other activities regarding open schooling under the national lead role of NIOS include:
  - (i) Planning, coordination and maintenance of standards
  - (ii) Establishment of a National Data Base
  - (iii) Dissemination of information about programmes and activities
  - (iv) Capacity Building of functionaries at national and state level.
  - (v)

### 7.3 International Role of NIOS

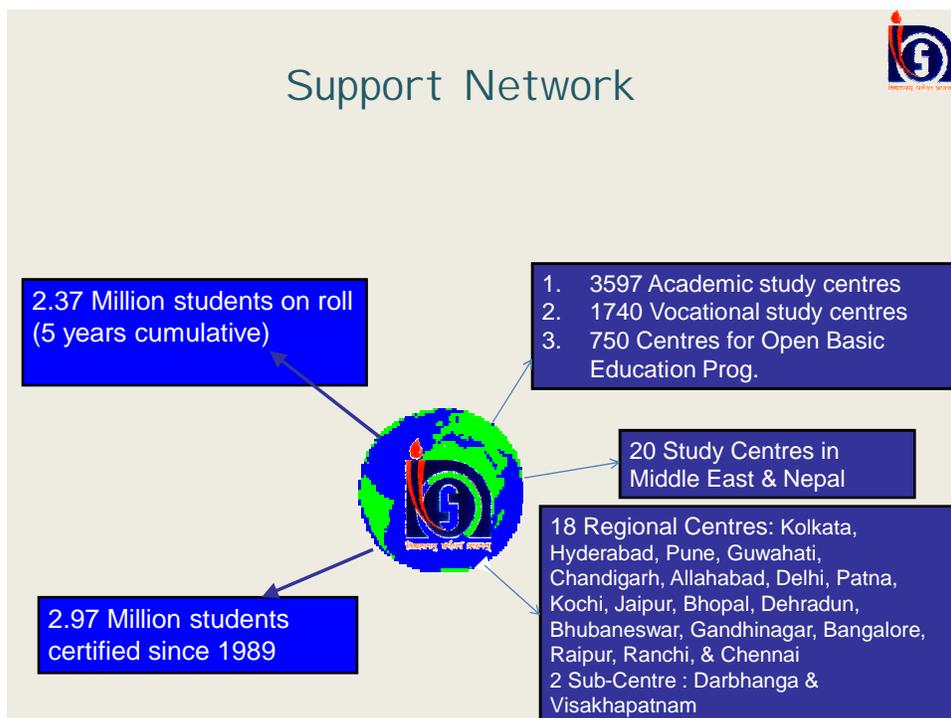
The international role and functions of NIOS include:

- Advocacy and consultancy in open schooling for developing countries
- Capacity Building - ICTOS (International Centre for Training in Open Schooling) was established with the help of COL and UNESCO
- Collaboration with organizations like COL, UNESCO, UNFPA in matters related to open schooling
- Organizing international conferences, meetings, workshop etc.
- NIOS plays active role in COMOSA (Commonwealth Open Schooling Association)
- COMOSA Journal of Open Schooling of international standard

## 8 MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF NIOS



## 8.1 Support Services at NIOS



## 11. NEW INITIATIVES TAKEN

As mentioned earlier, 2009 was an important landmark in view of the fact that the Right to Education Act was implemented. At the same time the RMSA was also launched for Universalization of secondary education. In the context of RMSA, NIOS has assumed greater importance.

### 11.1 Vision

To provide "Sustainable inclusive learning with universal and flexible access to quality school education and skill development."

### 11.2 Mission

- Providing relevant, continuing and holistic education up to pre-degree level through Open and Distance Learning System.
- Contributing to the Universalisation of School Education.
- Catering to the educational needs of the prioritized target groups for equity and social justice.

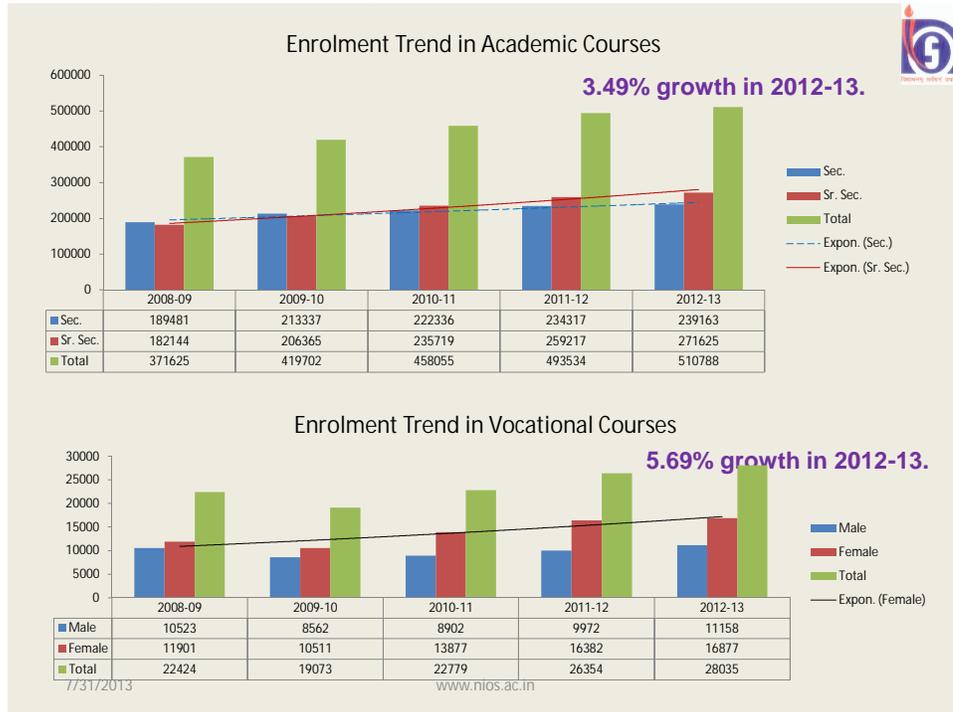
The programmes and activities of NIOS are now being formulated and implemented in the light of its Vision and Mission ensuring access, equity and quality. Some new initiatives taken by NIOS currently are:

### 11.3 Universalization of Secondary Education

As envisaged under RMSA, the Open Schools are required to make provision of offering Secondary Education courses to 12 million students. With current enrollment of about 44 million learners in Open Schools in India, extensive enrollment drives are required to be visualized and operationalised by them to meet of the target envisaged by RMSA. In this context NIOS and the Technical Support Group, RMSA have jointly prepared a Framework for implementation of the Open Schooling Programme in the country. The Framework has made provision of financial and other requisite resource support to NIOS and State Open Schools (SOSs) for placing the Open Schooling System on a sound pedestal. NIOS as a lead organization in Open Schooling is persuading the existing 17 SOSs to upscale their programmes substantially. Advocacy and consultancy programmes are being organized by NIOS for the remaining States to set up SOSs.

NIOS is to play a major role in scrutinizing the Plans of Action of the States for up scaling of their Open Schooling programmes. It is expected that with resource support from RMSA and NIOS, the State Open Schools would contribute substantially to meet the targets of enrollment envisaged under RMSA.

The following table shows the growth in enrolment from 2008-9 to 2012-13.



### 11.3 Training of Untrained Teachers

NIOS has launched a two year Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed.) programme for training of substantial number of untrained teachers at elementary stage in the country, which has become mandatory under the RTE Act, 2009.

#### 11.4 Equivalency Programme for Adult Neo-Literates

Under the Sakshar Bharat (Literate India) Programme, efforts are being made that neo-literates do not fall back into illiteracy. It is being taken care of by NIOS through an Equivalency Programme. This programme has three components.

- (i) Basic Literacy Assessment:- Around 29.2 million adults have already been assessed during last two years. Of these, nearly 21.2 million have been certified.
- (ii) Equivalency Programme for Adults: After making necessary preparation, NIOS is going to launch the equivalency programme for neo-literate adults at three levels:
  - Level A equivalent to Class 3.
  - Level B equivalent to Class 5.
  - Level C equivalent to Class 8:
- (iii) Skill Development: In this connection, 10 Vocational Education programmes for Skill Development have been identified. NIOS has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Literacy Mission Authority (NLMA), Government of India for facilitation of skill development of adult learners under the Sakshar Bharat Programme.

#### 11.5 Inclusive Education for Equity

NIOS has taken several steps to facilitate education of disadvantaged like:

- making rules, regulations and norms more friendly to persons with disability.
- Preparation of Talking Books and e-Books for visually impaired learners.
- Uploading of learning materials in the website making them compatible with screen reader for visually impaired.
- Producing material in Braille.

NIOS has won the two following prestigious awards for its work towards inclusive education for equity.

- (i) **The Social Impact Award 2012 instituted by the Times of India in partnership with JP Morgan**
- (ii) **The National Award for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2012 instituted by the Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** for making its website completely accessible for persons with disabilities.

#### 11.6 Extensive Use of ICT in Materials and Methods

- An ICT based **On Demand Examination System (ODES)** has also been operationalized in the Regional Centres of NIOS. During the year 2012-13, 20,048 learners appeared under ODES. Of these, 6524 learners were certified.
- NIOS has a collection of about 350 audio/video educational programmes that are broadcast on “Gyan Vani” and telecast on “Gyan Darshan” Channels. The video programme have also been uploaded on You Tube. Efforts are on to provide multi media materials to learners through multiple media.
- In order to help learners, NIOS has introduced a Web Radio with global accessibility in collaboration with CEMCA (Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia). There is a daily schedule of three hours of live Personal Contact Programme (PCP) and six

hours of pre-recorded audio programmes that are uploaded on the Web Radio. The Web Radio called Mukta Vidya Vani (Open Education Voice) can be accessed through the NIOS Website [nios.ac.in](http://nios.ac.in). About 500 live PCPs have been telecast from July 2012 onwards.

### **11.7 Vocational Education Programmes**

The Vocational Education Programmes of NIOS are offered by NIOS (i) to meet the need for skilled and middle level human resource for growing sector of economy, both organized and unorganized, (ii) to prepare learners for self-reliance and gainful self-employment, (iii) to attract sizeable segments of population to varied Vocational Education Courses, and (iv) to enhance individual employability by providing professional skills in various vocations. NIOS offers Vocational courses in the areas of Agriculture, Business and Commerce, Computer and IT, Engineering and Technology, Home Science and Hospitality Management, Health and Paramedical etc. The admission in Vocational Education Courses during 2012-13 was 28,035. Of these, 60.20 percent were female and 39.80 were male students.

### **11.8 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

NIOS has prepared a Framework for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Now it is in the process of developing the Assessment Tools.

### **11.9 Integration of Vocational Education Courses with Academic Courses**

NIOS offers 10 Vocational Education Courses at the Secondary level and 20 Vocational Education courses at the Senior Secondary level in conjunction with academic courses.

### **11.10 Barrier free education to Jail Inmates**

As a social responsibility, NIOS has set up 140 study centres in Jails (position in July 2013). The facilities and relaxations provided by NIOS inter alia include the following.

- Waiving of accreditation fee for becoming study centre.
- No fee is charged from jail inmates for registration in NIOS courses, transfer of credit, and examinations.
- Free of cost supply of study material.
- Examinations are conducted in jails.
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### **11.11 Capacity Building**

As a follow up of the recommendation of a study conducted by the Commonwealth of Learning, NIOS has set up a Capacity Building Cell for orientation and training of the Open Schooling functionaries. Two Capacity Building Workshops have already been conducted. Training packages are being developed for training of various types of Open Schooling functionaries.

### **11.12 Research and Development Programmes**

Under the Scheme of Grant-in-Aid for Research Projects in Open Schooling (GRPOS), research Projects are undertaken by NIOS Faculty; research grant is also provided to outside institutions of repute.

### 11.13 Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

- The admission to NIOS courses is entirely online. The services related to study centres and learners have been made online. For learners of NIOS, a Single Window Student Information System has been placed on the NIOS Website. It inter alia includes information about admission, PCP Schedule, Assignments, Course material, Syllabus, Sample question papers and performance of students
- NIOS has started Learner Support Centre (LSC) on the pattern of a call centre. The LSC is a user friendly, simple, convenient and efficient system with a Toll Free number 1800 1809393. The LSC is supported by IVRS and is equipped with Learner Support Executives. Besides attending a large number of calls, the LSC responds to about 80-100 emails every day.
- **On-line Education and e-Learning:** NIOS is developing a platform using open source software (MOODLE) for online courses which are integrated with existing NIOS OER course content

- **Virtual Open Schooling (VOS)**

NIOS is developing a technological framework in collaboration with CEMCA to start Virtual Open Schooling to offer its courses online as MOOCS having online evaluation system for certification.

- **Mobile Learning**

NIOS is developing mobile technology framework to provide academic support to its learners through mobile phones.

### 11.14 Media Programmes

- **Mukta Vidya Vani Webcast:** NIOS launched on 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2012 the “Mukta Vidya Vani” an internet or web based platform where audio services from NIOS Audio Studio are streamed 24x7 via internet. Live interactive Personal Contact Programmes are conducted (from 2.00 pm to 5.00 pm) through the Mukta Vidya Vani. During the year 2012-13, 362 live PCPs were transmitted.
- A High Definition Video Studio facility has been set up in the Media Unit of NIOS for production of in-house video tutorials.

### 11.15 International Collaboration

- NIOS collaborates with International organizations like COL, UNFPA, UNESCO, etc. and organizes advocacy and consultancy programmes for individual developing countries, generally in Asia and Africa, in the area of Open Schooling.
- MOU has been signed with Open Polytechnic, New Zealand to work together in vocational education and RPL.
- For starting Open Schooling Programme in Afghanistan, NIOS prepared a feasibility report in collaboration with UNDP.
- An International Conference on “Education for All: Role of Open Schooling, was organized from 13 to 15 March, 2013 in partnership with COL, UNFPA, and Intel.

- NIOS has played a lead role in COMOSA (Commonwealth Open Schooling Association) founded in 2009-10. Chairman NIOS was elected its founder Chairperson.

## Epilogue

In its endeavor for “reaching the unreached”, the Government of India has visualized that the Open Schooling system has potential to contribute substantially for Universalization of school education. The National Institute of Open Schooling, since its inception on 23 November 1989, has been discharging a lead role for promotion of open schooling at national level and at international level.

In this paper, the journey of NIOS from a project to becoming an organization of International repute has been depicted. In the process of “NIOS on the move”, the visionary leadership of Father TV Kunnunkal, founder Chairman, Prof N.K. Ambasht, Chairman in 2002 (when NOS became NIOS), and Dr. S.S. Jena, (the present Chairman since Sept. 2009) needs to be appreciated and acknowledged. The paper highlights how NIOS continued moving ahead steadily. There are moments when a big thrust needs to be given to place the system on a sound pedestal. In order to contribute substantially to the Government of India’s resolve to universalize secondary education, NIOS is taking several initiatives which are proving extremely useful not only for placing the programmes and activities of NIOS on a sound pedestal but also in the areas of promotion of Open Schooling in the States of India and in several developing countries of Asia and Africa. In its Silver Jubilee Year (2013), NIOS has rededicated itself to the cause of Open Schooling.

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