GUIDE INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP 2010
NEW CHALLENGES FOR E-LEARNING IN CULTURAL, SCIENTIFIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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The successful transition to a knowledge-based economy and society worldwide can be accomplished only through an ongoing cooperation, interaction and dialogue among people and institutions with different cultural, social and economic backgrounds.

This simple but fundamental remark was at the basis of GUIDE International Workshop 2010 which was held in Rome on 18-19 March 2010 and focused on the possibilities provided by e-learning applications for local, national and international development.

The conference was joined by around 200 delegates of more than 50 countries, from Asia, Africa, Middle-East, North and South America, Europe and Russia, with the presence of representative of International Organizations (UNESCO and FAO).

The discussion addressed crucial themes and issues related to e-learning and higher education such as the importance of vocational guidance and professional re-training to enhance countries development and competitiveness, the role of digital technologies in scientific subjects learning and teaching, the problems and prospects of the e-learning advance in developing nations and the evolution of instructional technologies in designing new flexible learning models.

The presentations given by speakers mostly focused on three main topics: the need to improve the capacity building and the spread of ICTs in under-developed and rural areas, the necessity to bridge the gap between education supply and labour market demand, the urge to find new strategies and methodologies of teaching and learning paying particular attention to quality assurance and students' assessment improvement.

Firstly, it was stated that it would be important to produce graduates with the capacities to build and maintain productive workforce and sustain an effective independent economy especially in developing countries. In this regard it was suggested on the one hand to develop national and international communities of practices with the capacity to unleash innovation and creativity and on the other to favour the globalization of English language in courses delivery in order to reach a wider audience. In this framework, GUIDE Association has to play a central role in offering strategic support to institutions for the realization of projects, the constitution of

networking and the evaluation and dissemination of outcomes and results.

Secondly, the debate analyzed the prospect to promote the uptake of Open Educational Resources for teacher and university capacity building. In this regard it was underlined that the skills needed for open source based e-learning differ from those related to other e-learning processes. Hence, a common endeavour is required to help institutions who decide to implement e-learning based on Open Source software and need to build specific capacities on different levels: e-learning management, instructional design, content development, tutoring and technical implementation. In addition to OER, a great interest was shown in new learning opportunities given by mobile devices especially in terms of ubiquitous environments, life-long education, and edutainment.

Finally, it was emphasized the importance to have a learner-centered approach in education recognizing that the learning process has to focus on students rather than ICTs. The human factor, intended as people working in the design, development, and delivery of e-learning services and as persons to whom such services are offered, has to prevail on technology. In this light, a crucial aspect that has to be taken into account is the improvement, evaluation and assessment of quality in the online environment. As a matter of fact, achieving excellence and effectiveness of e-education requires a wide commitment to evaluation and assessment of student's skills and abilities.

To sum up, the two-days meeting led to the following significant conclusions:

- The knowledge-based economy poses new challenges to an increasingly diverse and multilingual workforce. ICTs have to help professionals in both developed and emerging markets collaborate and construct knowledge across geographical, cultural and language boundaries
- Today' s students must be able to think critically, solve problems that are complex, plan solutions, make decisions and collaborate effectively. Only education based on new technologies has the power to catalyze these skills

- The introduction of ICTs could play a vital role in reducing the educational gap in rural, remote and isolated areas
- Open Educational Resources have become a significant feature in any strategy relating to the future of education, and higher education in particular
- The use of new methodological applications such as intelligent agents and/or mobile technology has to be encouraged in order to enhance students' motivation in the learning process
- It is important to improve the quality of learning to create leaders able to participate actively in the shaping of their respective country's future

What has emerged from GUIDE International Workshop 2010 is that distance education is becoming a major and indispensable tool allowing the transfer of ideas, know-how and technological and human resources throughout the world.