ACADEMIC JOURNALS
expand your knowledge

Educational Research and Reviews

Full Length Research Paper

Equitable access to education and development in a knowledgeable society as advocated by UNESCO

Chemulwo Monicah Jemeli[1]* and Ali Muhammed Fakandu[2]

[1]Department of Information Science, Faculty of Education, Paul's University, Kenya.
[2]Abdullahi Fodiyo Library, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria.

Any vision of knowledge societies must affirm the core aspirations for peaceful and sustainable knowledge societies in a way that acknowledges the interests of all stakeholders. It is essential to recall that knowledge societies are concerned with human development, not only with technological innovation and its impacts. This report focuses the role equitable access to education play in achieving equitable knowledge society. UNESCO's vision of equitable knowledge societies builds on equitable access to education. The widespread recognition that equitable access to education is a major driver of economic competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven global economy has made high-quality equitable access to education more important than ever before. The imperative for countries is to raise higher-level employment skills, to sustain a globally competitive research base and to improve knowledge dissemination to the benefit of society.

Key words: Education, equitable access, knowledge society.

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2014), as a specialized agency of United Nation (UN), was established in 1945 with the aim of promoting security, peace and international cooperation. One of the fundamental objectives is to provide citizens with the opportunity to access free information and knowledge, as well as exercise their ideas and interest freely. Its equally ensures sustainable intercultural dialogue and development based on the framework of human right as established in 1948 by Universal Declaration. The five main programme objectives of the UNESCO include natural science,

education, culture, social and human sciences, as well as information and communication. All the activities in the programme aimed at promoting two priorities in the world. These are the establishment of equality as fundamental human right, development of Africa as a continent, building blocks for social justice as well as economic necessity.

Developed countries today have undergone social and economic transformation that individuals and organisations knowledge become visible the vital agent of effective development of societies or organisations. Information and knowledge society has become a

Corresponding author. E-mail: monicakiprotich@gmail.com.

prerequisite as a result of the fast advancement in information and communication technology (ICT) and also the growth of global competition. According to Vandermoote and Delmonica (2000), the social and economic restructuring skills and experienced in information and knowledge society provides the based for the implementation of social contract creating very high level of equality, welfare and equality among its people.

UNESCO main priority is to ensure equal access to education for all and to protect the fundamental human right which is a key in sustainable development and maintain peace within and among nations. This goal is aimed to be achieved in Dakar at the Millennium Development Summit which requires the commitment on equity, access and standard education at both primary and secondary level, that is, to close the gap of digital divide between the have and have not. Another priority is to ensure constant justice in the equal share of education particularly cultural, linguistic and economic needs and the global one, in light of the reality of growing interdependence between nations.

UNESCO believes that the coming of universal knowledge societies is important for human and economic development. Through universal knowledge societies, UNESCO promotes an environment where individuals have the abilities and not only getting information and transform it into information and knowledge. This knowledge enables people to improve their lives and contribute to both economic and social growth of their societies. The issue of developed nations enhances the role of UNESCO's contribution to world Summit on information society by sensitizing other nations about the need for human development. Internet technologies should be seen as devices that can be used to enhance productivity and improve economic development, work creation, employment and enhancing life quality of all in the population. They further improve communication among individuals, countries and lifelong learning.

The emergence of universal knowledge societies needs national authorities and other major stakeholders to develop and build learning institutions for better economic and social development. Nations with citizens who have high levels of competencies, experience and the ability to embrace and utilize information to improve new products and services, are most likely to be successful in a world of rapid technological complexities. Information and knowledge societies are well equipped to enhance the universal social and economic development and sustainable environment. These are the main goals of sustainable economic development and which also ensures the respect of human rights. Knowledge is key ingredient for the sciences, social and cultural life by enriching people with experience and contributes to intercultural communication and international cohesion. In 2007, UNESCO documented an influential world report

which gears towards having universal information and knowledge society. This knowledge society will transform nations and especially developing nations and create opportunities for better communication and development.

Universal knowledge society will reduce the challenges resulting from social inequalities and non-inclusivity. The report emphasizes human aspects of development for example as literacy, education, access to information and freedom of expression. Reducing the digital divide will enhance the development of knowledge societies which will improve access of useful and relevant knowledge. The goal of knowledge society is a critical and original contributor of the discussions and outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society. Since 2007, UNESCO has collaborated with many governments and other stakeholders in its 192 Member States and ten Associate Members to build on vision of reaching beyond the recommendations outlined in the World Summit on the Information Society documents. UNESCO sought the lasting and sustainable development geared towards social and economic growth through universal information and knowledge societies.

Mandatory and equitable access to education in knowledge society

UNESCO's major role in its vision is education and the organization endeavour to enhance education system all over the world both child and adult education. Education is one of the core mandate areas in UNESCO's work. This education system promotion involves technical training, vocational training and informal education and literacy. Equity in education has been an important role for UNESCO's mandate. Many children in developing countries are being sidelined against their right to education and the opportunity for them to enhance and develop their talents and skills. UNESCO collaborates with governments nationally and other development mind partners to provide free education cutting across the gender.

This means that UNESCO is committed at providing universal education for all irrespective of their background, disability, culture, race, gender and colour. In one of the UNESCO's sponsored world education forum, it was noted that more than 170 governments agreed to support the six goals of universal education by 2016. These governments reinforced their commitment to primary education and equality in gender as indicated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). MDG goals strive to ensure that children all over the world are provided with free and high quality primary education in order to eradicate gender inequalities prevalent in both primary and secondary education. Also its goal is to promote the achievement of important life skills which entails numeracy and literacy skills by adults and

children.

General Director of UNESCO few years ago chaired the "Working Group on Education of the Broadband Commission for Digital Development" which published an impactful report on how technology can be employed to promote universal access to education by the year 2013. The report emphasized on the need to address the association between policy obstacles and educational needs concerning Information Communication Technologies, its affordability and the internet connectivity. Particularly, the report insisted on the need of enhancing Information Communication Technologies and internet connectivity; imparting ICT skills to students and teachers; enhancing resources for open education and mobile learning, promoting local content development and local languages content; including ICTs during job training and lifelong learning. The report emphasized the need for systematic enhancing access to education and involvement of the same as well as promoting high quality universal access of education.

UNESCO promotes the use of ICTs in learning through a comprehensive and holistic method; deal with challenges of education for all; ensure provision of quality education and teaching; promote professional enhancement and very efficient learning management, administration and leadership. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics has initiated a list of critical indicators on how to incorporate ICTS in learning, which is a part of a multi-agency network on assessing ICT for development's task to initiate a measurable evidence base for World Summit on the Information Society results. In its activities, UNESCO has realized that the association between ICTs and literacy is more complicated, noting three major cycles in its development which it manifests as electronic readiness, electronic intensity and electronic impact.

The greatest mandate of UNESCO's two fundamental priority areas of action includes equality in gender. During World Summit on the Information Society, UNESCO documented a report dealing with gender problems in the technological world of information explosion. All through its task on World Summit on the Information Society follow-up up to now, it has created the need for promoting gender equality in information access and ICT resource which ensures universal access to information. In developing countries, women are more disadvantaged in accessing internet technologies as compared to men, due to the fact that most women earn less income, have little education qualification and experience and inaccessibility of ICT resources due to their location leading to difficulty in easy access. UNESCO partners with other likeminded UN networks and partners to find and solve certain focused obstacles hindering women from accessing and utilizing internet technologies to enhance their quality of livelihoods and living standards and in documenting and access of certain content of value to women. Gender equality and sensitivity performs

a critical role in most of the UNESCO functions, tasks, initiatives and activities described in the documented report, including capacity building, policy development and open educational resources.

Mobile Phone Literacy project empowers girls and women through project documentations, provides them with effective practices of promoting the importance of mobile technologies for economic and cultural development as well as promoting literacy education among girls and women. Various case studies across five regions have been developed to analyze the strategies for successful mobile technology literacy projects for girls and women. Key lessons noted and policy recommendations made for future developmental activities have been derived and disseminated through the regional consultative workshops for Africa, Asia, Pacific, Latin, North America and the Caribbean. The sensitive indicators of gender for Media were documented in 2014 and they are now being acted upon by agencies such as the international federation of journalists and the national broadcast associations.

Disabled persons

Men and women with disabilities frequently have many limitations within communities. Information Communication Technologies can have a positive effect on their capability to access information services, social and monetary opportunities, as well as to engage fully in public lifestyles. But IT itself, services and content should be available and accessible to the disabled if these benefits are to be realized. UNESCO has collaborated with the International Telecommunication Union and other enterprises to provide a way in which the disabled to access data and information. World file developed creative ways for empowering the disabled and was posted in 2013, and built on five local researches to utilize an important assessment of current regulations and strategies of information, also as the ability and demanding circumstances for the disabled to employ information technologies obtain the right of access right to information services and statistical data. These obstacles include all ICTs from hardware devices, software programs and the strategies in which statistics are managed, allocated, disseminated and accessed.

The way forward

Information and knowledge access is at the center of UNESCO's goals to market universal to information societies. The 10 years since World Summit on the Information Society have stressed on competencies and content rather than infrastructural access will persist on. In the next subsequent years, there will be great growth in the amount of individuals having access to information

technologies and thus getting more access than previously it was. The continuous connectivity of broadband networks will further enhance the efficiency in information access especially for enterprises, learning institutions and those privileged to access networked computer resources or devices.

This increase in information access and communication devices should be characterized by great information resources access that individuals, enterprises and societies require so as to change information to knowledge which can promote their livelihoods and living standards. UNESCO and other agencies in this line of action will endeavour to promote the need and necessity of creating and enhancing access to all to, promoting locally created content. Further UNESCO will access to information by all across all cultures, resources and reaching out to those who non-privileged in the society. Open information will be a key area of concern for all stakeholders involved. It will also be great to create more result-oriented measures for inclusivity, cultural diversity and empowerment among the disabled.

All nations, developed and developing have unprivileged persons in their populace who earn very low income levels, lower average life, high poor health conditions, high rates of maternal mortality and who are highly malnourished as compared to other individuals in the population (UNDP, 2010). These are actually the groups of individuals who can use more effort to enhance their education and to gain other competencies, and their children can gain a lot from enrolling in institutions of learning. These groups in society, however, are usually do not benefit from accessing elementary education programmes, even in developed nations where there is improved access to education (UNDP, 2003). Underprivileged people and groups do not only experience less years of learning, but also likely to obtain a lower quality of basic education through having novice or less qualified teachers as well as going to school with poor inferior infrastructure and few learning resources (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2002).

Promoting universal access to basic education is important for the creation of true information based society (Vandermoote and Delmonica, 2000). Recent empirical data indicate out of three hundred million children in the 5-16 age sets, close to fourthly million have not been enrolled in school and nearly 84 million drop-out of school (UNESCO, 2004). Also another challenge is the lack of vocational competencies where National Service Scheme data (2001-2002) shows that those people who are in the labour force aged 14-28, only four percent have obtained formal vocational training and another 6% revealed to have obtained non-formal vocational training (UNESCO, 2011). This six percent is far higher in developed nations with eighty percent in South Korea, seventy percent in Japan, 65% in Germany, 58% in UK and even less developed countries, 18% in Mexico and twenty percent in Botswana (UNESCO, 2009). Lack of employment arises from lack of cohesion between the competency requirements of the market and the competency base of the job seekers themselves.

Out of the fifty million primary level children not enrolled in school, 65% are girls and about a quarter is from sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia and another 35 million are in war-afflicted nations or developing nations (UNESCO, 2010). Thousands of children drop out of school prior to reaching grade six due to the fact these learning institutions are very crowded, not safe, ill-equipped, poorly managed and have less trained teachers (WIPO, 2003). If contemporary trends persist, 68 out of the 96 nations that have not attained equal access to literacy will not be able to reach universal knowledge society (Andreotti and Souza 2008). Therefore, it is a requirement to promote universal access to literacy to enhance equal knowledge society (UNESCO, 2014).

The role of universal access to education towards universal information society

Information societies are about abilities to find, produce, process, remodel, share and utilize information to construct and use expertise for human improvement (Rodes et al., 2003). UNESCO (2005) report explains an information society as one which is supported by its different cultures and its abilities. This is due to the fact that, every society has its own knowledge base and it is important to strive at connecting these knowledge bases that already exists in the society. This may be mixed with the new ways of expertise, dissemination of knowledge retention and acquisition. Literacy is first and fundamentally an essential human right, documented in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which noted that basic training will be free, mandatory and that higher level of learning can be similarly provided on the idea of benefit (UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network, 2009). This pledge was emphasized in various international global forums in the course of the nineties, and recently within the Dakar blueprint for action (2000), which reaffirmed training as the important thing for sustainable improvement in development and peace and balance within and amongst developed nations. Thus it is an imperative way for effective engagement in the societies and nations of the 21st century that can be tormented by high rate of globalization (UNICEF, 2004).

A series of interesting evidence indicates universal access to literacy greatly impacts mortality rates, life expectancy, productivity quality both in rural and town centers self-employment, and average income levels (UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network, 2009). A research study by UNESCO and the OECD examined

seventeen developing countries and noted that human capital investment can for many years lead to great economic and social developments (UNESCO, 2011). The research insisted on reaping great dividends from investing in secondary and tertiary literacy alone is not enough. Literacy plays a key role in enhancing the lives of the deprived and can be useful in dealing many injustices if it will be provided and implemented. Obligatory primary schooling will lessen infant labour, for instance (Vandermoote and Delmonica, 2000).

Literacy is key in information and knowledge society, as a source of fundamental skills and pillar for creativity and innovation, as well as the vehicle for social and economic development (Andreotti and Souza, 2008). Literacy is hence a crucial requirement in developing information and knowledge societies that can enhance development, growth in economy and prosperity. It is not only the way by which people become expert participants in community and the economy, but is also an important vehicle for increasing ICT utilization (Watkins, 2010). Effective literacy in a knowledge society assists in enabling dissemination of information, knowledge and technology related resources (WIPO, 2003).

Literacy, development and adaptation of information, expertise, competencies and values are critical issues for universal information and knowledge society (UNESCO, 2009). This is as a result of a need for inclusive nations whereby all population has universal opportunities to access high quality and relevant education in their lifetime provided through many formal, non-formal and informal ways (Rodes et al., 2003). Therefore, literacy is important to peoples' development and development of their family members, both locally and internationally. As a critical human right ratified in many international frameworks, treaties and built into most national constitutions and legislation, the right to literacy is to be regarded as a right for the achievement of other technological, social, cultural and economic rights, as well as an agent for positive change in the society, social justice, tranquility posterity and peace (Watkins, 2010).

Apart from social and economic function, universal access to literacy also has a critical socialization role by enhancing both individual and group identities, the creation of responsible society and the enhancement of important social engagement based on critical respect human dignity, life and diverse cultural practices (Andreotti and Souza, 2008). Enhancing respect for cultural diversity of different communities can help and promote intercultural dialogue and assist prevention of conflicts and promote the rights of the unprivileged persons in the society, hence developing optimum conditions for meeting development goals in developing societies (UNDP, 2003).

Universal access to literacy will enable women and girls to develop their abilities, because the economic and personal development that literacy creates enable them to make sound decisions for their lives and their dependents. Importance of girls' and women's literacy involves not only reduction in the effects of HIV/AIDS, but eradication of poverty, promotion of health, reduction of early marriages, reduction of female circumcision and improvement of self-esteem and making powerful decisions, hence leading to universal information and knowledge society (UNICEF, 2004). A girl in a developing nation, every year of access to literacy beyond primary level will lead to 30% higher income and a 20% decrease in the risk of her own children dying of diseases that could be prevented (UNDP, 2003).

Increasing universal access to literacy for the nation is one of the critical and powerful strategies of fighting poverty hence leading to universal information and knowledge society. Benefits from equal access to literacy result in great differences in eradicating malnutrition and increasing food surplus (Department of Economic and Social Affairs Secretariat, 2005). A study of 73 nations revealed that great and productive farming arises from access to information through literacy and which accounts for 33% of the reduction in malnutrition realized between 1980 and 1990 (OECD, 2005). Crop production in Kenya and other developing nations can rise up to 25% if farmers have the same equity access to literacy and resources like farm inputs and technology just like those farmers in developed nations (Human Development Report, 1999).

Research indicates that learned individuals are strong and healthy individuals and the cases of HIV/AIDS spread are reduced by half in nations that support universal access to education and information (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2002). For instance, if both girls and boys access equal education, at least ten million new infections of HIV/AIDS can be reduced for many years. A study done in Uganda revealed that those people in rural possessing secondary education have a 85% lower rate of HIV/AIDS infection as compared to those with no education at all (Department of Economic and Social Affairs Secretariat, 2005). The capability of girls to eradicate HIV/AIDS infection is much correlated with their attendance in school, which in education sector, is called a social vaccine against HIV/AIDS (UNESCO, 2004). A study carried out in Botswana found that HIV/AIDS infections can be spread five times faster among illiterate as well as the educated girls (Watkins, 2010). Universal access to literacy enables reduction in poverty and promotes economic development thus equal access to literacy is critical for short and long-term economic development (UNESCO, 2011).

There is no nation that has reached continuous and fast economic development without 50% of its population literacy. Inability to provide equal education chance to girls like boys can lead to many emerging nations not reaching universal information and knowledge society (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2002). Furthermore,

lack of universal access to literacy by both boys and girls will cost emerging nations millions of dollars every year (Human Development Report, 1999). An individual's income increment by fifteen percent every year of education received equates to a three percent increment annually in GDP if high quality literacy is provided to whole population (OECD, 2005). Universal access to literacy is a key framework for the economic growth of a universal information and knowledge society, including democratic nation and universal security (UNESCO, 2011). Universal access to literacy promotes peace all over the world and continuous schooling reduces a male's chance of being involved in violent activities by thirty percent (UNICEF, 2004).

Conclusion

The subject of equal data societies will not seize to be at the core of UNESCO's functions to satisfy WSIS objectives. For some time, World Summit on the Information Society has created the importance of reaching the far side of technology to make sure that ICTs meet human development desires. Equal data societies are societies where individuals have prepared access to information, equal access to literacy and communication devices in languages and formats that suit them irrespective of their individual situations, the abilities to interpret and create them, and use opportunities to change information and competencies into balanced livelihoods. Such societies will be highly equipped to deal with the challenges of financial condition wipeout, access to literacy, sustained development and peaceful existence that also affect our world. UNESCO can still follow them smartly through its own programmes and in collaboration with other agencies.

Since it promotes knowledge and competencies and emphasizes on new ethical values and enhances personal and group empowerment, equity in education access is at the core of economic, technological and social as well as attainment of universal knowledge society. The relationships between literacy levels and characteristics such as income levels, health conditions, and long life are well published in all emerging and developed economies. Lately, the focus has increased in the critical function of universal access to education in attaining universal knowledge society and peoples' efforts to improve livelihoods and enhance quality of life. The strategy in which literacy supports equity in knowledge society is important for taking into account the great impacts of literacy on human development.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

REFERENCES

Andreotti V, Souza LM (2008). Global learning in the knowledge society. Four tools for discussion. ZEP: Zeitschrift fÃ$1/4$r Internationale Bildungsforschung Und EntwicklungspÃ¤ Dagogik 31(1):9-14.

Department of Economic and Social Affairs Secretariat (2005). Understanding knowledge societies in twenty questions and answers with the Index of Knowledge Societies. http://www.unpan.org/cdrom-dpadm/DPADM/Understanding%20Knowledge%20Societies%20(2005).pdf.

Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2002). Education for all: Is the world on track? Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Human Development Report (1999). Globalization with a human face.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2005). International development statistics. http://www.oecd.org/dae/stats/idsonlinc.

Rodes JM, Piejut G, Plas E, Chantrey C (2003). Memory of the information society. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2003). Millennium development goals: A compact among nations to end human poverty. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2010). What will it take to achieve the millennium development goals? An International Assessment. New York.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2014). Building inclusive knowledge societies: A review of UNESCO's action in implementing the World Summit on the Information Society outcomes. France: place de Fontenoy.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2004). Policy guidelines for the development and promotion of governmental Public domain information. http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php.html.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2009). Education for All global monitoring report 2009: Overcoming inequality-why governance matters. Paris.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2010). Education for All global onitoring report. Reaching the marginalized. Paris.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2011). Aid brief: Recent trends in aid to education. Education for All global monitoring report www.efareport.wordpress.com. Paris.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2005). Education For All Global Monitoring Report: Literacy for life. UNESCO, Paris

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Associated Schools Project Network (UNESCO) (2009). Education for sustainable development. Paris.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2004). Girls, HIV/AIDS and education. New York.

Vandermoote J, Delmonica E (2000). Education 'vaccine' against HIV/AIDS. Current Issues in Comparative Education 3(1):56-61.

Watkins K (2010). When learning saves lives: Education and child mortality. World Education blog. Education for All Global Monitoring Report www.efareport.wordpress.com Paris.

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)(2003). Intellectual property: A power tool for economic growth. Geneva.