Literacy and Competencies
Required to Participate in Knowledge Societies

SUMMARY

WSIS+10: Overview and Analysis of WSIS Action Lines C3 Access to Knowledge and C9 Media

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The 21st century is an era of change. The globe is under the influence of three major world trends: the revolutionary development of information and communication technologies, the transition to a knowledge society and the new learning mode of the Net Generation. These trends have generated a shift in the educational paradigm, giving rise to the need to cultivate new competencies for citizens in knowledge societies.

The aim of this report is to explore the literacy and competencies required for citizens, communities and nations to participate in future knowledge societies, with specific reference to the implementation of WSIS Action Lines C3 (Access to Information and Knowledge) and C9 (Media).

Many novel literacy concepts have been put forward in response to the new social and technological environments. Some are independent and novel, such as digital literacy and information fluency, whereas others are compound concepts such as multiliteracies, transliteracy and media and information literacy (MIL). Recent studies have indicated that future society will comprise the semantic Web, Big Data, cloud computing, smart phones and apps, the Internet of things, artificial intelligence and various new gadgets. In short, it will be an information and communications technology (ICT)-based society. Given the complexity of the next society, this report adopts an integrated approach towards new literacy training by establishing a literacy framework of “21st Century Competencies”. The following key future competencies, classified into three categories, are identified as essential to future society: (1) conceptual competencies: connectivist thinking, innovative thinking and problem solving, critical thinking, reflective thinking and positive thinking skills; (2) practical competencies: media and information literacy (with ICT skills as a key component) and learning skills; and (3) human competencies: social networking skill and virtual collaboration, self-management, humanistic consciousness, digital citizenship and cross-cultural interaction skill.

The cultivation of the 21st century competencies is essential to the implementation of the C3 and C9 Action Lines, as their fundamental spirit is to provide information and education for all. Every citizen is entitled to the updated literacy training required for full participation in the knowledge societies.
In reviewing the current status of the implementation of WSIS Action Lines C3 and C9, it has been found that access to information has improved as ICTs have developed, most notably in relation to the growth of mobile phone use. Mobile phone use in developing countries has created a “leapfrog” phenomenon that enables millions more people to access the information society. Although a digital divide still exists amongst countries and marginalised social groups, attention has shifted from material access to actual use and application, which has been coined the “digital use divide”. Freedom of the press has not exhibited much improvement in the past decade, but the emergence of “we media”, such as social media and blogs, has offered ordinary people unprecedented opportunities to express their views and contribute to media pluralism. Other enablers in the implementation of WSIS Action Lines C3 and C9 include the OER movement, the groundswell movement, the multi-stakeholders’ approach combating the global digital divide, citizen journalism, education reform, mobile technology adaption and the strong sense of social justice upheld by the Net Generation. Barriers and challenges remain, generated by the global digital divide and a lack of access to ICTs due to low SES, race, gender, age, disability, language and political instability, in addition to restrictions in freedom of the press rooted in political reasoning and media concentration.

Recommendations for tackling these issues include:

1. Maximising mobile technologies and promoting m-learning;
2. Cultivating 21st century competencies with objectives such as responding to the specific needs of the new socio-technological environment, narrowing the “digital use divide”, fostering media pluralism and contesting restrictions on freedom of speech;
3. Establishing collaborative networks and strategic partnership;
4. Education reform and Teacher Training;
5. Contextualising initiatives for specific cultural settings; and
6. Considering the power of individuals (particularly the Net Generation) in the civil society when suggesting that more research should be conducted in this respect.

This report concludes by proposing the promotion of the new literacy for everyone in the mobile era so that future global citizens can participate in high-tech knowledge societies while maintaining the humanistic consciousness to fight for social equality and the right to information. This is also in line with the mission of the Millennium Development Goals.