

Forum: Education
Agenda: On measures to promote equity of access to online learning resources
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Introduction

In the course of recent history, the advent of the Internet has also become a very powerful and resourceful learning tool. As a rich educational material, a prominent feature it boasts is, quite simply, its convenience. Its convenience is unparalleled, for a simple Google search, and a click of a button will open a world with a myriad of information. As such, people no longer need to spend hours toiling for information at the library. Instead, they can just use Internet, to access anything they want. Making the process of gathering information more efficient. For this reason, in an ever-more connected world, enhancing the accessibility to online learning resources is crucial,

Rapid advances in technology have made distance learning easy. Online learning can be described as a tool that makes the teaching and learning process more student-centered, innovative, and even more flexible. It's easier, more convenient and even cheaper than the old days when students had to go to the library to search for materials manually. Libraries are inherently expensive to build and maintain, and thus inadvertently disadvantage poorer districts and have succeeded in bringing convenience to education stakeholders. But before we begin our discussion of online education, the chair would like to focus on the factors that bring online education to life: building the infrastructure of the network.

Internet is genuinely cheaper and more efficient than other learning methods. Although to maintain the infrastructure to support it in order to provide the appropriate seed of transfer, download, and view content on multiple devices simultaneously (known as broadband speed) is an expensive final export. The construction and maintenance of Internet infrastructure requires highly skilled workers and capable organizations to support its day-to-day operations, not to mention the fact that Internet infrastructure involves proprietary technologies that are advanced and owned by only a few countries, for example like the United States, China. Not to mention all the equipment had to be purchased from those countries' companies who own the technologies. It create dependence on these companies, and cause problems that may have worldwide implications. Chair want to remind all delegates that building Internet infrastructure will create governments to spend high financial expense that would have to be fully covered by the local government, unless subsidized by the international community. Delegates must realize that developing their own 5G or even 4G networks is not feasible for less economically developed regions.

Once a district has successfully established an Internet infrastructure, it can provide an infrastructure of online learning resources for students, but the issue of integrating online learning resources into its educational system will inevitably arise. Relevant technology companies in developed countries have successfully integrated online resources into their education systems. However, even in developed countries like the United States or Germany, there are still many schools that do not have robust online learning resources due to financial problems. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect a complete online system to be successfully developed in developing countries. Instead, delegates could explore a limited rollout in certain areas of the developing world to apply alternative online learning systems for developing countries.

The COVID-19 epidemic has led to school closures in more than 188 countries (as of April 2020), putting more than 1 billion children at risk of being left behind. In an effort to make learning accessible to children around the world, countries have been implementing distance learning programs. However, many of the world's children, especially those from poor families, do not have Internet access, personal computers, televisions or even radios at home, which exacerbates the impact of existing learning inequities. Students who do not have access to the technology needed to learn at home have limited means to continue their education. As a result, many are at risk of never returning to school, undoing years of progress in education around the world." The word "equity" stands here for this committee to make it possible for people to have access to online education. Many of these countries are exploring alternative methods of providing continuing education using technologies such as the Internet, television, and radio. However, in many low- and middle-income countries, especially for poor families, access to these technologies is limited. Online platforms are the most common means by which governments provide education during school closures, with 83% of countries using this method. However, this may only reach about a quarter of the world's schoolchildren. And three-quarters of the students not covered by distance learning policies come from rural areas and/or from the poorest households. These data suggest that policies to expand access to online education need to be established.

The committee's key questions also include how to equitably and realistically deliver Internet access (and by extension, online learning resources) to areas that do not have access. These areas are often rural, poor, sparsely populated, or a combination of all of these factors. These areas may even be in the midst of armed conflict. For building Internet infrastructure is a difficult problem for governments and delegates.

All of the above goals will taken in long-term, and will need years or even decades to operate. There is simply no viable short-term solution that can be reliably implemented on a national scale, other than a technology rollout. Delegates could try to fund the development of low-bandwidth education systems, although their effectiveness is questionable. After all, a well-educated population is the cornerstone of domestic tranquility. However, not everyone

has access to online educational opportunities, partly due to a lack of available financial resources. That's why the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization are here today to propose a framework to expand access to online learning resources in areas that lack investment and, hopefully, build digital equity.

Key Terms

Broadband

A high-capacity transmission technology that uses a wide range of frequencies so that large amounts of information can be communicated simultaneously. Individual countries set their own standards for what Internet speeds are considered broadband connections, but the international standard is about 25Mbps/download and 3Mbps/upload. Broadband is also the international standard for accessing reliable Internet because it enables streaming, downloading and viewing content on multiple devices simultaneously, as accessing 4G or 5G alone is often not enough.

Broadband Gaps

Broadband coverage gaps across countries. Refers to countries that only have broadband coverage in certain areas, thus leaving gaps in broadband coverage. These broadband gaps are usually the result of market failures, where companies have no incentive to build broadband networks in these areas because it is unprofitable to do so.

Censorship

Since our committee's goal is to provide equitable access to online learning materials, it must also address the issue of censorship. Censorship is the suppression or banning of any part of books, movies, news, etc. that is considered obscene, politically unacceptable, or a threat to security. It is a practice often used by authoritarian regimes to limit citizens' access to information in order to promote their political development.

COVID-19

2019, an ongoing pandemic that originated in Wuhan, China. The exact origin of COVID has not been discovered, although it is believed to be at least partially from bats. COVID has infected millions of people worldwide and caused the largest GDP contraction in history - it has also been a major catalyst in forcing businesses and individuals to take their work and studies online.

Digital Equity

Digital equity is the condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capabilities they need to participate fully in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital equity is a necessary condition for civic and cultural engagement, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services. That's what our Commission is here to achieve today.

Online Learning Resources

Any and all online or technology-based resources related to the education of individuals. The definition of online learning resources is technically extremely open-ended, but the Chair still urges delegates to remain focused. The Chair will note that the definition of online learning resources has been overly broadened to the point of adversely affecting the debate.

Telecomm corporations

While most nations have their own individual network provider (US: AT&T, Verizon China: China Telecomm, china mobile, etc.) there are only a few Telecomm corporations that hold patents for the hardware that enables broadband network access. These corporations include most notably, Qualcomm and Huawei.

The Internet

A revolutionary communication system, created in the second half of the 20th century, has completely changed the world. It is the main topic of this committee and delegates are advised to familiarize themselves with the concept of the Internet.

General Overview

Developing Countries

Most countries that still largely lack broadband Internet capable of streaming, downloading, and browsing on multiple devices at the same time are developing countries. Most developing countries have not yet developed a comprehensive broadband network throughout their countries, and existing coverage is often slow and available only to large cities. The Commission's primary focus will be on providing adequate broadband access to these countries.

Developed Countries

While most developed countries have comprehensive broadband coverage, some nations such as the United States still have several broadband gaps as a result of market failures that have not been appropriately addressed by governments. While the primary focus of this committee will not be to provide developed countries with comprehensive broadband access, certain delegates may try to fight for subsidies for their own nations if they wish to do so.

Access to broadband

Access to broadband is essential for individuals to effectively access the global internet, however it is also incredibly expensive both to build and to maintain. It is why even the most developed countries of the world still have broadband gaps. This committee should be principally seeking to provide access to broadband networks—not 4G (though delegates may have to specifically delineate what exact internet speeds by their definition qualify as broadband speeds).

Availability of internet access

In addition to providing people will access to broadband networks, delegates should also be trying to provide the people with unfettered access to the uncensored internet. This means an internet that is not censored to an unacceptable degree (censorship of certain illicit websites may be permitted, though even that needs to be clarified by individual delegates).

Future Prospects

Several prominent technology companies are currently experimenting with high-speed broadband access via satellite technology. Most notable are the efforts of Facebook, SpaceX and Bloom, which are already underway to provide a globally available broadband network that may even be cheaper to operate than existing networks providers. Microsoft is also experimenting with providing universal broadband coverage over unused radio waves, although so far they only plan to roll out the technology within the United States.

Telecommunications companies

Telecommunications companies set the prices for the hardware and services needed to build broadband networks, so they do influence the final resolution of our committee. Committee members may debate whether to simply use a bidding system to select the cheapest provider for each region or to assign certain companies to certain regions - whichever approach the representatives choose, the focus should be on providing broadband access to those regions.

Timeline of Events

Late 1960s -- Invention of the Internet in the United States

1982 -- Invention of 1G allows for wireless communications

Early 1990s -- 2G invented and became standardized and used globally, allowing much faster data speeds

Late 1990s - First international forums created, allowing for fast communications across the globe

2001 - 3G is invented, though the widespread use of 3G didn't begin until 2007 due to technological difficulties in the rollout of the technology

2009 - 4G LTE is invented, and like 3G, the rollout and widespread availability of 4G wasn't made available until the mid-2010s

2016 - UN declares access to internet a universal human right after Egypt shut down it's internet

2019 - 5G is invented, and the rollout of which is currently underway. Experts predict though that this time, unlike previous generations of networks, 5G will be made widely available far more quickly with certain areas already having coverage by late 2019. The launch of the 5G iPhone 12 only a year after the invention of 5G is a telltale sign that the widespread availability of 5G is just around the corner.

2019-Present -- COVID-19 pandemic

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

While the UN has been encouraging the development of Internet and investment networks in poor areas, the UN has been inactive when it comes to promoting relevant resolutions. This is in part due to their belief that the development of relevant networks is a matter for individual sovereign states to decide for themselves with the support of NGOs. What the UN has formally done is quite significant, although still not an enforceable law. The President was referring to the UN's addition of Internet access to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights after the Egyptian government shut down Internet access across the country in response to anti-government protests demanding democracy change. In addition, delegates were able to adopt "Sustainable Development Goal 4" of UNESCO's 2030 Global Education Agenda.

SDG 4, while very vague and open to interpretation, can still be used as a guideline for the goal of access to online educational resources.

Related Organizations. - UNESCO

- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

- International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

- United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNSDC)

Possible Solutions

International Assistance

Perhaps the simplest and most direct way to help countries lacking broadband access is to provide direct intergovernmental assistance in the form of subsidized/unsubsidized loans, cash infusions, or joint venture projects. This solution is likely to appear in some form in every resolution, as it is the most direct and effective way to provide direct assistance. Nonetheless, the Chairman recommends that delegates include provisions in their international assistance programs to promote prosperity in these areas. Provisions could include uncensored Internet access on this subsidized network or a network operated by the donor for a certain number of years before being handed over to local staff. Recognizing that most forms of intergovernmental international aid are not altruistic, the President could include provisions that would allow NGOs to manage these aid projects, with the government simply acting as a watchdog to ensure that agreements between sovereign governments and these NGOs are not violated.

This aid would primarily pay for two functions: the construction of the Internet infrastructure and its maintenance once it is built (until the network is self-sufficient, it will need subsidies to keep it running, or if it fails to turn a profit, it may have to be subsidized indefinitely)

International Internet Development Committee

International organizations that currently focus solely on promoting international broadband access are few and far between (and only NGOs have such a goal), and those that do exist are usually primarily responsible for other miscellaneous functions. However, a relevant UN-sponsored organization is the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), where delegates could establish a division to support broadband Internet promotion. Delegates could establish an international Internet development committee whose sole focus might be to pool resources to assist developing countries in establishing and expanding their broadband networks. The committee would then serve as an intergovernmental body with additional authority over global Internet development.

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