

The Colombo Statement: IDUAI 2018

Having attended “The Asian Digital Revolution: Transforming the Digital Divide into a Digital Dividend through Universal Access”, a commemorative event held to celebrate the International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI) in Colombo on 28-29 September 2018:

1. Recalling that the 38th session of the UNESCO General Conference proclaimed 28 September as the “International Day for Universal Access to Information” and invited all Member States, United Nations system organizations, and other international and regional organizations, as well as civil society, including non-governmental organizations and individuals, to commemorate the International Day in a manner which each considers most appropriate;
2. Thanking the Government of Sri Lanka, particularly its Ministry of Telecommunication, Digital Infrastructure and Foreign Employment, Ministry of Education and National Commission for Sri Lanka for graciously hosting the commemorative event in Colombo;
3. Reaffirming that the universal right to information is essential for societies to function democratically and for the well-being of all women and men in an equal manner;
4. Recognizing a shared commitment to the principles of social justice, inclusion and non-discrimination of UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Information for All Programme (IFAP) in advocating a humanistic perspective to the digitization of information across various spheres of life;
5. Asserting the need for using multiple channels to reach out to the citizen’s need and desire for knowledge.
6. Believing that freedom of information is an integral part of the fundamental right to freedom of expression enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which stipulates that freedom of expression encompasses the freedom “to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”.
7. Considering knowledge and education as vital means to achieve sustainable development goals through cultural socialization, political participation and integration within markets, globally regionally and nationally
8. Repeating the view that the full potential of digital networks and media and information applications can be achieved only if there is a fair balance between private and public interests in knowledge;
9. Recalling that information access is not limited to creation of physical infrastructure but also involves the ability of women and men equally, both as individual and communities to use that information. When either of the two components, i.e. access **or** ability to use, lags behind, it widens the digital divide by exacerbating the inequality in how the dividends of digital progress are shared out.
10. Reiterating UNESCO’s Global Priority Gender Equality focus on gender mainstreaming within knowledge societies, in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5;
11. Recalling the 2015 New Delhi Declaration on Inclusive ICTs for Persons with Disabilities: Making Empowerment a Reality and understanding the need for creating accessible Open Educational Resources [OER] to improve teaching and learning experience for the people with disabilities;
12. Recognizing the key role of language within the information process and that UN has proclaimed 2019 as the Year of Indigenous Languages and articulated the need to promote openness in and for all languages;
13. Considering the 2011 Strategy on UNESCO’s contribution to the promotion of Open Access (OA) to scientific information and research and taking into account specific needs in the countries of the South;
14. Observing that the advances in digital technologies are disrupting the traditional ways of working across businesses, governments and in the daily lives of people and that the four key developments are at the heart of this transformation – the Internet of Things, cloud computing, big data analytics and artificial intelligence;
15. Recognizing the contributions from many quarters including governments, private sector and the Free and Open Source Software Communities in extending access to information and knowledge

The participants:

1. Believe that the theme for the conference “Transforming the Digital Divide into a Digital Dividend through Universal Access” addresses directly the challenges and opportunities of the digital age.
2. Assert that achieving full information access is a particular challenge to traditionally disadvantaged groups - such as women, cultural minorities and persons with disabilities – and therefore call upon governments, as the main owners of physical locations and funding resources - to take specific media literacy and other educational initiatives for the empowerment of vulnerable groups in accessing, evaluating and utilizing information, within the framework of the essential personal freedoms and entitlements guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
3. Reaffirm that the networked nature of advanced Information and Communication Technologies demands that the social, legal, ethical, linguistic, web accessibility and technical challenges imposed by their widespread adoption require a multi-stakeholder response.
4. Declare their conviction that universal access to Information and knowledge for both women and men is fundamental to the development of inclusive Knowledge Societies.
5. Appeal to all stakeholders including governments, technology groups, media houses and the civil society to adopt decisively a gendered approach, and resolutely include women practitioners, female CEOs and technology officers in decision making and in the design and implementation of new information access policies, technologies and products.
6. Emphasize the need to promote research around enhanced knowledge and skills, along with improved access to ideas and information, which can encourage and empower citizens to become engaged partners and themselves take intelligent and informed steps towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
7. Welcome the enactment, in several countries, of legislation on access to information, but highlight the need to implement this in a comprehensive and transparent manner - with particular reference both to levels of media literacy and personal preparedness which can safeguard users’ privacy against cybercrime and also to protect professional journalists who remain a major source of reliable information within societies.
8. Reaffirm the importance of empowering all citizens, especially young women and men and persons with disabilities, to develop a culture of openness and to become creators of content and innovation, including through access to information and quality education.
9. Reiterate the understanding of the Dakar Declaration on Open Access for the Global South, and state the necessity for establishing polycentric governance mechanisms for OA research and recommend that institutions and governments urgently collaborate to pilot and develop policies and enabling mechanisms to promote and publicize Open Scholarship and Open Science.
10. Call upon the governments to take firm steps and develop policies to mandate all the publicly funded research are available under Open Access; and also to earmark enough funding for necessary infrastructural and capacity enhancement.
11. Appreciate the Ljubljana Ministerial Statement and Open Educational Resources [OER] Action Plan 2017 which recognizes OER as a strategic opportunity to increase knowledge sharing and universal access to quality learning and teaching resources and call upon Governments and all relevant educational stakeholders, including civil society, to mainstream OER making them more broadly accessible including to persons with disabilities in support of achieving the Education 2030 Agenda.
12. Note the need to ensure institution-wide multi-sectoral training, attuned to people’s divergent and discrete needs, in particular those of disadvantaged groups and individuals, and designed to accustom and familiarize the community towards a more inclusive environment which can integrate the latest available technology (ODL, OER, FOSS, OA, etc.) into learning, teaching and training routines, applying the tenets of universal design for learning including UNESCO’s just published Competency Framework.
13. Recommend that OER be made accessible across media, including smart mobile devices and offline, in flexible and inclusive formats that support their effective and widest possible use, including by

persons with disadvantages or disabilities, to learning, teaching and training, again in accordance with the tenets of relevant best practice.

14. Draw attention to the need to update the educational agenda and teaching curriculum by introducing courses and workshops about Coding which is equally important in today's digital as numerical literacy was in the past.
15. Urge governments and other stakeholders to mandate the necessary funds for researching, developing and promoting new technological applications, services and facilities in an OER framework, making them available to all citizens, including those with disabilities or disadvantages.
16. Encourage UNESCO's Member States to move ahead with the construction of platforms and frameworks for comprehensive collaboration, endorsing and sustaining the efforts of Open Source communities whilst encouraging a win-win give-and-take approach to discussions between OER advocates and their opposite numbers in government and the private sector.
17. Call upon UNESCO and IFAP, its Member States and all stakeholders to continue supporting relevant initiatives, and to play a key role in advocacy, capacity building and dissemination of best practice focused on the goals of more accessible information and enhanced knowledge for all citizens, especially through the principles of Open Access, Open Science, Open Education, Open Data and FOSS, in the context of the right to information, freedom of expression, protection of privacy and adherence to ethical norms and behavior online: all serving as keystones underpinning the accelerated development of inclusive knowledge societies.