



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Information for All
Programme



African Centre
of Excellence
for Information Ethics



United Nations
Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization



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Hyderabad Declaration

Three Day Online International Conference

on

Access to Information in Time of Crisis – The UNESCO Information for All Programme Priorities and the COVID-19 Pandemic

organized by

**India Centre of Excellence for Information Ethics (ICEIE), Centre for Digital
Learning, Training and Resources (CDLTR), University of Hyderabad (India)**

**African Centre of Excellence for Information Ethics (ACEIE), University of Pretoria
(South Africa)**

**Russian National IFAP Committee, Interregional Library Cooperation Centre
(Russian Federation)**

**UNESCO Chair on Language Policies for Multilingualism, University of Santa
Catarina (Brazil)**
under the Auspices of

UNESCO Intergovernmental Information for All Programme (IFAP)

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Preamble

The Hyderabad Declaration is adopted by the participants of the International Conference on Access to Information in Time of Crisis - Tackling the Information for All Programme's Priorities to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic. Participants were policy makers, Government officials, academics and international figures. They stemmed from Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Dominican Republic, France, Germany, India, Kenya, the Philippines, Russian Federation, South Africa, Sweden, USA and Zimbabwe.

The International Conference participants come together under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Plan of Action adopted by all UN Member States to protect the planet earth and improve the lives and prospects of everyone as it recognises public access to information within Sustainable Development Goal 16, covering the need to promote peaceful and inclusive societies (Target 16.10.2).

Under the Hyderabad Declaration:

We *acknowledge* the significance of priority areas of the UNESCO Information For All Programme (IFAP), and *support* its endeavour to provide a platform and framework for all stakeholders to participate in international deliberations on access to information.

We *recognise* the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We therefore commit *to* proactive disseminate information for development.

We, the participants of this conference and the signatories to the HYDERABAD DECLARATION, affirm the following principles:

Principles

1. *Information for Development*

Monitoring and reporting of SDG 16.10.2 should be encouraged in response to the current global health pandemic and future crises. The pandemic exposed many latent and apparent inequalities in all nations, both developed and developing. Hence, there is a need to strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks. Appropriate means and policy mechanisms to identify disinformation and empower citizens against infodemia, should be developed and distributed towards building resilient communities and societies and mitigate future health and information crises.

The following recommendations stem from the presentations and deliberations:

- Include basics of epistemology of the scientific methods as a component of Media and Information Literacy.
- Promote as an urgent need the boosting worldwide of Media and Information Literacy programmes in all educational and training contexts.
- Foster cooperation between UNESCO/IFAP and WHO to create a common working group assisted by psychologists and social media experts to adapt existing anti-fake and post-truth news material into a positively double bound version to be disseminated appropriately in social media by experts.

- Establish mechanisms to counteract misinformation or disinformation, and ensure the dissemination of truthful information help to prevent vulnerability.
- Attests that acts demonstrating mistrust and suspicion not only increase inequalities and poverty among the vulnerable sections but will not build resilient communities to face any crisis situation caused by unforeseen developments, natural and man-made disasters, health disasters or information disasters (infodemics and others).
- Ensure that policy formulation should appropriately conform to traits and practices of a broadly bottom-up approach (participatory) to overcome the problems of policy deficit.
- The governments and private media houses should acknowledge the citizenry and their fundamental right to access to information for their own development.
- Right to information should be made a fundamental right.
- Facing the risk of strengthening geopolitical imbalances and conflicts due to unequal access to information regarding health issues, it is necessary to seek a more balanced distribution of research results on health and related issues through international cooperation with the participation of international and regional platforms.
- Enhanced international cooperation is necessary to promote open access to Big Data international platforms and centres on pandemics since they constitute the main fuel for research projects using AI and AI international library algorithms. The least developed and developing countries should be assisted to achieve full utility levels in the space and thus foster development of their nations and peoples. The use of new information technologies could be an opportunity for countries whose development is affected by the technology gap that would witness a technological leapfrogging into post-industrial development phases.
- Reaffirm the principle of sovereignty of States in order to contain the political interference facilitated by the opportunistic use of health issues and pandemics by some States proxy fighting for geopolitical purposes and control of resources. Establish mechanisms so that GAFA (Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon) are not able to monopolise new information tools allowing sovereign States to negotiate international legislation to secure the most possible open access to health databases. Promote the development of cloud storage technologies and capacities

should serve the principle of the sovereignty of each State over its own data. Each State should be in a position to build databases on spatial space and information on the population on its own territory, in order to maintain control over its future and sovereignty.

- Establish mechanisms warn of the dangers against misuse of Big Data and AI programmes with regard to access to private and personal data, in order to strengthen the protection of citizens, private companies and the sovereignty of States.
- Defend the above-mentioned point by UNESCO member States through the largest possible global and regional alliances but also with the least developed countries in order to promote a globally balanced access to information on pandemics and related issues.
- Promote free access to credible open scientific information and data, to facilitate research into vaccines and therapeutics (including drugs and antibodies).
- Report public health measures essential to contain the spread of the virus.
- Develop free Educational Resources (RELS) to keep citizens up-to-date on the virus and help ensure compliance with public health notices, and facilitate and mobilise resources to allow learning to continue remotely.

2. Information Literacy

COVID-19 changed the landscape of education: going from face-to-face to online education, leading to internal lockdowns impacting 80% of the world's population. Opportunities abound, but so do challenges. Access to ICT infrastructure and the ability to differentiate between appropriate tools and content have become core requirements of education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Just as stark as the need for access and skills is, so prevalent are the obvious absence of experienced teachers, learners and parents in less developed societies and rural communities. Media and Information Literacy (MIL) awareness and training, together with national policies and strategies, are central tools in tackling the COVID-19 infodemic.

The following recommendations stem from the presentation and deliberations:

- Indigenous languages should be actively in play in unpacking the pandemic.

- Proactively cultivate more media and statistical literacy skills early on in education and through adult learning to enable citizen empowerment in light of infodemic.
- Promote a policy stance that is supportive of establishment of community radio stations as life-saving during the pandemic and beyond with programming quotas from national broadcasters.
- Develop sustainable MIL mainstreaming through the integration of MIL policies in youth organisations.
- Mainstream media and information literacy (MIL) into policies and programs of youth organizations that will enable young people to reach not only their peers but also the larger community.
- Encourage the youth to find creative ways to address misinformation.
- Involve and empower young people and the youth to play a contributory role in combating misinformation by promoting analytical thinking over quick judgments on various issues. Young people can educate each other, and other citizens, on how to manage their biases.
- Place more emphasis on intercultural dialogue and diversity of voices in the MIL Framework in Youth Civic Engagement and amplify voices from all communities—with or without internet access.
- Help ensure the use of new/social media as well as traditional and folk media in mainstreaming MIL so that connected and disconnected communities will be reached and heard.
- Pursue the adoption of a National MIL Policy Framework covering communication-related sectors to achieve coherence and consistency in policy and programme planning and implementation.
- Establish MIL policies that intersect with development sectors of media, information and technology as drivers of progress in the areas of education and literacy, health, gender and development, peace and reconciliation.
- Ensure youth involvement as a prerequisite in all policy and programme development. Not only are young people the major users and producers of media and information, their participation also provides a platform for civic engagement and leadership.

- Target transnational and national technology companies in MIL policy advocacy, especially since their policies, programmes, and services have significant impact on individuals and societies.
- Pursue new and emerging research areas to make informed MIL policies and programmes. These areas include social media influence and impact, disinformation studies, community standards and policies, and economic opportunities and digital space. Research approaches must evolve from interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary to transdisciplinary engagement. We should also do more meta-research to establish correlations and patterns.

3. *Information Preservation*

Investment in community support is not a work of charity: preserving cultural heritages and indigenous knowledge systems is the hallmark of acceptance of the diversity of human beings and their social structures. Investments in information collection, provision, use and storage technologies build resilience and strengthen crisis management. Information and communication technologies have become the lifeline and central features of this new-normal.

The following recommendations stem from the presentations and deliberations:

- Establish a communication strategy as well as a multi-stakeholder involvement for communication of COVID-19 data and information considering its complexity, ensuring high ethical standards and engagement by those involved to avoid counter-productivity.
- Demand that COVID-19 related laws and regulations should be equally applicable to all citizens, visitors and others irrespective of their race, economic and or social status.
- Require proper utilisation of grants and loans on behalf of the public; and heavy punishments for the misuse of public funds.
- Ensure easily online accessible formats with the help of digital technology of Libraries/Archives both of a public and private nature contain invaluable knowledge base on cultural traditions, knowledge systems, Intangible Cultural Heritage and other documentary and evidential heritage for posterity.

- To setup a Consortium of Documentary Heritage Institutions involving all stakeholders on the basis of a Private Public Partnership models along with the creation of special funds for digitisation and Digital Archiving of Libraries and Archives to explore the knowledge available in these resources and plan for their utilisation for sustainable development of mankind.
- Develop a Disaster Risk reduction policy to safeguard documentary heritage in disaster's situation.
- To develop a centralised Digital Repository for Universal Access to and Digital Preservation of Documentary Heritage.

4. *Information Ethics*

Citizens and countries should maintain their right to privacy whilst also respecting the right to information during times of crisis. This is moral balancing act, in consideration it not only promotes universal access to quality and accurate information, but also supports the right to be forgotten. Specifically, in consideration of the vast information being collected – health and medical records, economic, education and social engagements – information integrity must be maintained. Governments, private sector institutions and multi-national tech companies, must adhere to the notions of human dignity, autonomy, social justice, and the underlying ethical principle of do no harm. Failure of those in positions of power, to observe this, could lead to the usage of fear and data to manipulate the public, effectively contravening their civil rights and liberties.

The following recommendations stem from the presentations and deliberations.

- Events and crises such as these should not be about issues of influence or persuasion and false senses of moral or ethical superiority. First and foremost, it should be about long term public good. Ideally, an international advisory body with public good and public interest as its core concern and able to cut through the subjectively politicised layers of the information domain to provide objective assessments and advice (easily accessible), could potentially break or at least weaken the current cycle.
- Critical thinking has been in short supply as governments and media houses have been driven by emerging and often unreliable information and have aggressively demanded that the public trust them. All current indications are that this should not

be the case owing to the presence of various vested interests. Skills in critical thinking and critical research approaches should be taught to those who can form the nucleus of trainers that can impart these valuable skills and knowledge to wider public in their home country through seminars and/or short courses.

- Beyond protection of individual interests, need to consider the collective challenges (competition, democracy, discrimination, etc.) our digital societies are facing.
- To set up interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholders, transparent (open to public debates) national and international Data Ethics Agencies in order to evaluate the risks caused by AI systems, robots and emerging technologies and to raise public awareness.
- Reaching the Unreached – Creatively blend/integrate the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) with community media to address the digital divide and include the marginalised and vulnerable communities – women, rural populace, the poor, illiterate, children, indigenous groups, and people with disability – in the infosphere.
- Debunk disinformation/misinformation – During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media have been sites of ‘infodemic’ fuelled by myths, stigmatisation, conspiracy theories, and rumour-mongering that have led to serious consequences. It is essential to build collective fact-checking capacities of local communities to counter misinformation.

5. *Information Accessibility*

Universal access to quality, accurate and safe information are core themes of Information in Times of Crisis. Policy recommendations and good practices must be encouraged and put in place to advance public access to information, whilst saving lives and building trust in the context of IDUAI 2020 through and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The democratisation of knowledge goes hand in hand with a plurality of voices.

The following recommendations stem from the presentations and deliberations:

- Harness social media for better access to information in line with CDC proclaimed “Be First, Be Right, Be Credible”.

- Use of technologies like AI/ML/Blockchain to ensure access to accurate information during public health emergencies.
- Invest in a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary task force to face current and future moments of infodemia.
- Develop information technologies that can combine efforts to identify and refute disinformation.
- Multiple formats to make the citizens reflect on their belief systems, to be aware of the process of doing science, through Media and Information Literacy combined with Science Education, Health Education and Promotion so that subjects can learn how to identify disinformation related to science.
- Establish universal and enforceable standards – demanding that restrictive action against information sources is only taken against specific, demonstrably false, information.
- Demand transparency and accountability for restrictive actions by governments and digital platforms – ensuring open and public scrutiny for actions that limit information accessibility.
- Require open dialogue – preventing actions that counter free access to information in a unilateral manner.

6. Multilingualism

Multilingualism can promote access to information and save lives during times of crisis. International collaboration leads to understanding the virus better, developing vaccines and sharing the latest news and findings. Global citizen networks are kept up to date due to real time communication across various media and in numerous languages. However, together with including majority language groups, we also see the exclusion of languages which are not mainstream. Countries or states must therefore ensure access to information in indigenous languages to protect disadvantaged and minority populations. This is an appropriate time to design actions for the coming decade, considering the effects of the ongoing pandemic on the future of indigenous peoples, their languages and multilingualism.

The following recommendations stem from the presentations and deliberations:

- *Recognise that Multilingualism promotes unity in diversity and empowers all sectors of the populations and nation states to contribute towards the containment of pandemics and resilience mechanisms.*
- *Making a deliberate effort to promote multilingualism for enhancing Media and Information Literacy (MIL).*
- *Promote multicultural interventions in handling crisis to demystify health sciences.*
- *Promote the basic ideas and political and practical approaches to support, preserve, and revitalise indigenous and minority languages that have been formulated in final documents of UNESCO IFAP conferences held worldwide since 2008 on promoting multilingualism and linguistic diversity.*
- *Promote teaching and learning more foreign languages in education systems.*
- *Initiate and support serious development of new areas of science – politics, economics, ethics and futurology of the language sphere and multilingualism.*
- *Encourage coordinated efforts by UNESCO and WHO to protect communities speaking vulnerable and endangered languages.*
- *Invest in translation or interpretation of information, which should be culturally adapted and transmitted by electronic, print, and human means. That is, Television, radio, telephone calls, caller tunes, SMS, emails, apps like WhatsApp, and all other effective formats of social media, newspapers, pamphlets, and traditional announcements with drums in the language of the target groups should be employed.*
- *Create National Multi-Stakeholder Consortia for the involvement of indigenous peoples and their allies at multiple levels in the planning and execution of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.*
- *Systematize the practices of the Member States in using indigenous languages to the information and communication about COVID-19 and the use of indigenous languages in public health care systems for indigenous peoples.*
- *Produce a Common Framework of Reference for Indigenous Languages, which takes a step forward in relation to the UNESCO Atlas of the Languages of the World, with concrete provisions for its technological equipment and its increasing use in the areas of health, education and sustainable development.*

Conclusion

The signatories of the Hyderabad Declaration will therefore endeavour to harness the conference outcomes towards organising events and promoting global dialogue, thereby observing the UNESCO IFAP objectives.

This document was drafted and agreed by the participants of the conference.
