Summary of Session: Governance and Regulation of Education Technologies: How to ensure EdTech serve in children's best interests?

Education Data Digital Safeguards (EDDS)

23 March 2023

https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2023/Agenda/Session/391

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)
- This session focused on calling for the setting up of robust governance and regulating the rapid digitization of education at national levels and considering national, cultural needs.
- Leeway is given to private businesses to become the central infrastructures and means to education globally. This requires thorough oversight, clear rules, and standards to ensure quality education that respects local cultures, values, the individual and the collective. The data extraction and algorithmic capacities of EdTech are a cause for concern and **governments must turn to these by developing the right tools and regulatory mechanisms for oversight.**
- EDDS presented its treatise for governance and regulatory mechanism of oversight of the EdTech sector, with several criteria including **Evidence building** with the education community actively participating; **Dedicated executive authoritative body** protects education's sovereignty; **Consensus across key stakeholders around standards**, protocols, and rules; And importantly a **commitment to the tech sector itself.**

Towards WSIS+20 and WSIS beyond 2025, please share your views on the emerging trends, challenges, achievements, and opportunities in the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines to date
- The biggest challenges will be to strike a balance between the private sector permeating the educational systems of societies globally and what is needed for children and their education.
- Algorithmic decision-making and personalized education are speculative promises that bear little evidence and work counter to child development and cognitive science (e.g., what is the health cost to plug a child into a device for 8 hours a day just because an app promises the child will learn mathematics?)
- **Projects such as GIGA and the Platform Gateway Initiatives can risk developing neocolonialist set-ups** whereby digital 'pipelines' are created that control access and type of information while at the same time those who own these systems, can have total control over populations through their capabilities to extract granular data about individuals. This issue demands strict standards, protocols, and proper governance.
- **The environmental cost of connecting** all educational institutions globally to the internet; providing technologies and gadgetry; enabling data extraction and computation

Tangible outcomes (such as key achievements, announcements, launches, agreements, and commitments (3-5 bullet points)
- EDDS launched its governance and auditing system which can be proposed to governments globally.
- We attempted to engage with Dr. Jelassi, UNESCO and GIGA however we have not received a response yet. It will be an opportunity to sit with supranational organizations and projects such as them to ensure that there is proper oversight, evaluation, and support for all the EdTech companies included in these two projects.

Actionable plan (2-5 points)

- Engage with ITU on the GIGA project and with UNICEF on the Platform Gateway project to propose governance, evaluation, and benchmarking around any EdTech or Big Tech organizations they work with for those projects. **-> any help from WSIS organizers in facilitating this is welcome.**
  - Set up a follow-up event with multi-stakeholder voices, especially representatives from LDCs to identify their concerns (which are already reflected above).
- Develop further evidence base around what products work (which is what EDDS works on with other partner organizations) and showcase the assessment and evaluation framework plus the evidence base at the next WSIS forum.

Suggestions for thematic aspects that might be included in the WSIS Forum 2024 (WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event) (one paragraph)

- Rapid digitization defines educational priorities today. And while digital technologies give hope for convivial futures, today's reality and practices highlight risks that must be addressed with urgency – from normalizing surveillance to cybersecurity risks that can harm children, to automating inequalities, to harming the environment from the growing computational power expected for digitizing every aspect of human life. **WSIS Forum 2024 should consider debating alternative forms of governance such as digital gateways or platformisation of education <u>as public utilities</u> or P2P networks whereby private commercial power is avoided;** or licensing regimes whereby high-quality products are allowed to mediate children's education.