

# BUILDING KNOWLEDGE SOCIETIES IN E-MERGING ASIA: IS OER A SOLUTION OR IS WISFUL THINKING?

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**Abstract:** The technology revolution has brought about much of the economic growth experienced by many parts of Asia in the last 30-40 years. It has helped accelerate economic development but more importantly it has also helped social, cultural and educational development all of which have contributed to faster and greater globalisation, world citizenship and a citizenry that is conscious of its rights and responsibilities. Such broad impacts would be impossible if “information technology” were only a set of technologies. As our use of mobile devices, games, and social networks illustrates, IT can create new awareness. But more importantly, IT enables new models for the delivery of services. The Open Access movement and nested within it Open Educational Resources is one such which is expected to have a tremendous impact on the free access to knowledge, learning and training.

A former DG of UNESCO Dr. Koichiro Matura drew attention to the fact that “*To remain human and liveable, knowledge societies will have to be societies of shared knowledge...*”. Globally, sharing knowledge has been both a theme and constant call for a little while; more recently this call has taken on an even greater urgency as the demands for all levels of learning and training has taken on strong social, economic and political overtones. It is in this context that sharing knowledge/content through *Open Educational Resources* has emerged as a potential game changer in making learning available to much larger segments of people than previous practice of delivering education. Hopes of making knowledge available to all, free of restrictions have been expressed in a series of forums including the recently held World Congress on OER organised by UNESCO in the summer of 2012. That Congress saw member countries of UNESCO sign off on a 10 point declaration, of which five are relevant to this presentation, urging nations rich and poor to:

1. *Promote and use OER to widen access to education at all levels, both formal and non-formal, in a perspective of lifelong learning, thus contributing to social inclusion, gender equity and special needs education. Improve both cost-efficiency and quality of teaching and learning outcomes through greater use of OER.*
2. *Promote the development of specific policies for the production and use of OER within wider strategies for advancing education.*
3. *Facilitate the re-use, revision, remixing and redistribution of educational materials across the world through open licensing, which refers to a range of frameworks that allow different kinds of uses, while respecting the rights of any copyright holder.*
4. *Favour the production and use of OER in local languages and diverse cultural contexts to ensure their relevance and accessibility. Intergovernmental organisations should encourage the sharing of OER across languages and cultures, respecting indigenous knowledge and rights.*

As important as they are, subscribing to a **Declaration** is not sufficient enough to derive benefit from these innovations. For OER to serve higher education and new clients, in greater numbers, and with better learning outcomes, a lot more needs to be put in place within nations and their institutions. The system must take account of, in part, student skills, faculty workload, courses, credentialing, financial models, technology access and more.

If governments do take this declaration seriously and pursue OER as a policy driver to widen learning and training opportunities, it will indeed be a game changer.

This presentation responds to the conference theme “*Expanding the Frontiers of Knowledge Through Open and Distance Learning in Changing Societies*” and reviews the situation in the emerging parts of Asia where the building of knowledge societies through knowledge generation, dissemination and sharing freely is most critically required if the countries that make up this group of nations are to escape from the ravages of poverty and deprivation or move upwards from present levels to higher levels of income. The presentation also explores what is required, what needs to be done and what challenges lie ahead to turn a declaration into a happening.