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| Information Technology and Youths |
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**Introduction**

The definition of ‘information technology’ varies between different professions, although as defined by the Information Technology Association of America (ITAA), the general definition of information technology is “the study, design, development, implementation support and/or management of any computer based information systems, particularly software applications and computer hardware” (ITAA, 2007). In 2008, youth aged fifteen to twenty four accounted for roughly 18% of the global population with majority of them populating the developing world (Halewood &Kenny, 2008). Statistics showed that in comparison to 1970’s 21% enrollment in secondary education, the rate was at 67% in 2002 due to a major role of greater spread of information technology. Varying from region to region, information technology has academic effects, economic effects and social effects on youths in society. This paper discusses youth’s access to and the use of information technology for their personal benefits and their contributions to society with the implementation of further programs to assist them.

**Research Question**

The research question identified in this paper is general and broad, yet a very important one, “How has information technology positively affected the lives of youth’s in underserved societies in the modern world and what kind of new programs are being introduced to further assist them in attaining their goals and contributing to society?”

**Methodology**

The research acquired for the formation of paper was done through a study of broad area of topics concerning youths and information technology. A large number of articles, journals, and statistical data were studied in order to write an effective, efficient and accurate paper. The types of methods that have been used to acquire the information were through the use of online journals and articles and UOIT library database journals, articles and statistical studies. The information collected was from numerous organizations and databases. Through an analytical study of obtained research, the most useful and relevant notes were picked for the use of this paper.

**Discussion**

An article published by YMCA claims that “by learning technical skills youths build self-esteem and are able to gain suitable employment, pursue educational objectives, partake enthusiastically in civil life, and start their own income-generating activities” (YMCA, 2005). Although, with the progression of information technology, many developing countries are left behind to fend for themselves. In a comparison study, YMCA showed that United States has more computers than the rest of the world combined together and in comparison some regions such as Africa show that less than 1% of the African youth have access to information technology (YMCA, 2005). To successfully resolve this issue, numerous programs such as the YMCA youth and technology initiative, Committee for Democratization of Information and Technology, World Bank, IREX, Internet Access and Training Program, Global Connections and Exchange, etc have made initiative to successfully provide these unprivileged youths with the necessary tools and equipment to actively participate in the local and global community. YMCA in its article claims that when underprivileged communities are provided with access to information technology, youths benefit in a number of ways including

* Increased self-esteem
* Increased perception of self potential
* Higher education attainments
* Increased motivation and the ability to create self owned businesses (YMCA, 2005).

*Academic Effects*

In practice, a digital communications studio program started by the YMCA in Gambia provides training in graphic design and web development to youths that are interested in careers in the field of information technology. Data showed that over ten thousand youths had participated in the program, six thousand got trained in basic computer skills, government officials were trained and computer training was also provided to primary and secondary students (YMCA, 2005). Furthermore, in regions where English is not the dominant language, internet use is taught in the local language since English language is not a precondition for the use of internet and as indicated by research, is the mother tongue to less than half of all internet users (Curtain, 2002). In comparison to younger people, Information communication technologies (ICTs) are used as a resource for learning and education as a cost-effective learning method by older audiences in underserved communities. In these communities, broadcast media is used to combine entertainment and education to provide citizens with important information on issues such as health topics, politics, etc (Halewood & Kenny, 2008). In order to provide societies with future community leaders and mentors, younger people in present age need to have access and training in technology for personal benefits and to be resourceful to their local communities.

*Economic Effects*

The release of a force of young people skilled in the field of information technology has had numerous benefits to local population as well as themselves. Local communities have seen a lot of growth due to a new flow of skilled computer-literate young people that are a major asset to a local technology firms. Agendas such as the YMCA technology programs help provide innovative training to youths and then connect them with potential employers through internships and employment while breaking down the social barriers between the youths and local companies. Apart from being beneficial to local businesses, outsourcing has also created a lot of opportunities for youths in developing countries. A study conducted between 2002 and 2004 covering three call centers in Indian showed that 60-70% of the employees were males between the ages of eighteen and thirty (Halewood & Kenny, 2008).

*Social Effects*

One of the greatest benefits of information technology to societies is the availability of numerous communication channels. A general survey on information communication technologies (ICTs) conducted in the rural areas of three developing countries showed that the primary usage of phone was to stay in touch with relatives and friends while broadcasting technologies was used for entertainment, news, and information on prices and services (Halewood & Kenny, 2008).

Another major social benefit of information technology was the engagement of youths in local and global politics. A nineteen country survey of European political participation concluded that regular internet users were more likely to be a part of a civic organization, have actively taken part in a product boycott and signed petitions, and more likely to have donated to a political party (YMCA, 2005). In addition IREX claims that the internet serves as a mean of public education, observing elections, and watchdogs for fighting corruption in businesses, education system and within the government (IREX, 2007). IREX programs in Eurasia also helped youth’s discussions about elections and their outcomes. Moreover, the Internet Access and Training Program (IATP) in Eurasia held seminars for first time voters to help them learn their political rights and duties, voting procedures and local election rules (IREX, 2007). Information technology also serves as a tool to raise awareness on social activism issues such as domestic violence, civil rights, and the societal incorporation of people with disabilities to further eliminate any forms of abuse and/or discrimination (IREX, 2007).

IREX also started a program called ‘Tech Age Girls’ specifically designed for girls and women to encourage them into leadership roles in the fields of technology through training, mentoring, hands-on knowledge, and community services (IREX, 2007). In this program, girls aged twelve to sixteen are matched with a female mentor that guides them through a concentrated training program in web designs and leadership skills. The young participants complete their internships and eventually implement new projects in schools and community upon return to their local regions. The program is currently in progress in Eurasia, Russia, Indonesia, Lebanon etc and expanding to other regions such as Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Turkmenistan (IREX, 2007). One of the major reasons for the implementation of this program is to show that women can be successful leaders in the fields of information technology.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, research has indicated that the access to and the use of information technology and ICTs are a powerful tool and a necessary factor in attaining self-esteem, education, and employment. Furthermore the introduction of technology training, digital communication studios and public computer schools has evidently had a measurable effect on skill development, community education, violence prevention, female participation, political information and participation, etc in underprivileged countries. In addition, governments should concentrate on the need to implement policies concerning the increased application of information technology in all walks of life. Steps such as these would not only increase the literacy and skill rate in developing countries, but also improve the demand and the employability of skilled youths in the information technology sector. The United Nations created criteria of four recommendations for governments consisting of employability, equal opportunities, entrepreneurship, and employment creation to further assist youths in attaining their goals (Curtain, 2002).

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