GYA Focus Area 2020-2022: Enabling Access to Education

Final Report, July 2022

May 2021: The focus area attempted to collect information related to the subject of *enable access to online education*. At regional level, bandwidth and connections were noted to be the problem of access based on available reports. However, both co-leads of the group were severely impacted by the pandemic as both their countries ran into severe COVID-19 waves which disrupted the initial work plan of the focus area.

June 2021: Engagement was attempted with the poor community regionally. Unfortunately, we noted that the communities with poor bandwidth and connections were similarly the areas that faced challenges of access to vaccines and health care. As the aim of the focus group had been to focus on those communities with the greatest need, the continuous lockdown and health concerns relating to meeting the unvaccinated, led to further delays in the work of the group.

December 2021: As some COVID-19 restrictions had been eased, discussions about possibly enabling access to online education with Non-Governmental Organizations were attempted.

April 2022: Proposal write up was completed.

May 2022: New member recruitment from the 2022 incoming GYA members was carried out during the new member science leadership programme of the GYA. Further work on the originally proposed topic of enabling access to online education was deemed to become more feasible with the new topic of and using "Mobile Learning Labs" with self-directed content without the requirement of bandwidth and international or interstate Wi-Fi connections. Jane Yau presented this new idea during the *Speed-Dating Edition of GYA Member Lightning Talks,* entitled *"Mobile learning".*

As the spirit and objective of this focus group was focusing on online education, and as that coincides with the objectives of the GYA Science Education working group, the focus group has decided to move this initiative under the umbrella of the GYA Science Education working group from June 2022 onwards.

Further considerations and suggestions

It is intuitively understood that infrastructure gaps are the main hurdle for better internet access across these regions. However, any delay in improving the quality of education in whichever way for any individual may potentially sabotage the future of a numerous children.

Continuous engagements would be essential in reaching those who need to enable access to Online Education. It turned out that there was a certain irony to making things online while trying to reach those who could not connect to us due to limited access. Therefore, it is hoped that an off-line solution, as well as in-person outreach may succeed in bringing content to, and engage with those who cannot be reached via online ways.

As the world faced the COVID-19 pandemic in the past two years, existing problems were interconnected to each other such as health issues, infrastructure, educational as well as social issues. Therefore, transdisciplinary teams would be needed to solve these collective issues. Increased networking and recruitment of additional passionate GYA members would be some of the key next steps to consider before a successful project on enabling access to online education could be run.

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