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Human Rights, Global Equality, and Access to Knowledge Bridging the Divide: Toward a Universal Framework for Knowledge Justice.

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Abstract

Based on the international human rights law, capabilities approach and postcolonial epistemology, argues that the current global orders that govern knowledge are not neutral- they are the product of certain historical and economic interests that have to be acknowledged, challenged and restructured. The article identifies four structural constraints, which are interwoven and interfere with fair access to knowledge worldwide. Firstly, there is the digital divide, a crisis of infrastructure, affordability, and skills which has left over 2.7 billion people virtually excluded to the global information economy. Second, the international intellectual property regime, which is based on the TRIPS Agreement, commodifies systematically scientific, medical, and educational knowledge, making it unavailable to institutions and persons in the Global South. Third, linguistic hegemony - the prevalence of over 56 percent of online knowledge in English - silences the indigenous knowledge systems and omits non-Western intellectual traditions. Fourth, censorship imposed by states and internet shutdowns reported in over 70 countries deprives citizens of the epistemic conditions to participate in democracy and make informed self-governance. It is against this backdrop that the paper assesses the potential and shortcomings of available multilateral initiatives, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the Open Science Recommendation by UNESCO, and the World Summit on the Information Society, and concludes that each of them is inadequate to tackle the structural dimension of knowledge inequality. It in turn recommends a new binding multilateral instrument the Universal Knowledge Access Protocol (UKAP) that is based on four pillars: universal digital connectivity, mandatory open access to publicly funded knowledge, multilingual knowledge infrastructure and binding standards of internet freedom. The article concludes that epistemic justice that is fair and equal distribution of the conditions of knowing is inseparable with the larger project of global human.

Keywords

Human Rights, Digital Divide, Global Equality, Open Access , Knowledge access.