How can stakeholders cooperate more effectively in the digital realm, and how can marginalized stakeholders be included?

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According to UNESCO, "literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute, and use printed, and written materials associated with varying contexts" (UNESCO). However, there is no such consensus or clarity around a standard for digital literacy. Without such a global or uniform definition, it is difficult for the world to address digital cooperation issues and measure progress.

Imagine the impact if the UN were to support a comprehensive framework for digital skills and intelligence and endorse a global standard for a definition of digital literacy and skills. This could aid in achieving a measurement and reporting methodology while enabling individuals, organizations, and nation states to track their progress over time.

The Current Landscape

This is a pressing issue. While 50% of the world is technically connected to the internet, how many are making meaningful use of its power? Similarly, how many truly have the digital skills necessary to transition from consumers of technology into creators, makers, and doers empowered by technology?

Digital literacy is important. The SDGs repeatedly underline the importance of technology and inclusion as enablers of development. The pairing is essential – unless concrete efforts are made to give everyone access to the right skills, digital tools risk being a force for inequality. Without this foundation, there cannot be true inclusion, an especially dire challenge for forgotten stakeholders.

However, a shared definition is still lacking. Microsoft has its definition of digital skills, Mozilla has its, and so on and so forth. Imagine the capacity-building that could take place if there was a standard framework for achieving digital literacy. Without this clarity, there is a huge diversity of definitions and frameworks, and with them, uncertainty for people about what skills are needed, as well as where to go and what to do to achieve digital literacy. Everyone risks being a forgotten stakeholder because no-one can reliably, and comparably measure their status and progress. The problem is worse still for those suffering from other forms of exclusion, such as poverty or low literacy.

Seeing the value in coming up with a standard definition for digital skills is paramount to achieving the SDGs and combatting the challenges associated with digital issues.

Digital Cooperation to Define Digital Literacy

I therefore suggest taking a practical approach, working together to support, protect, foster, and prioritize a shared definition for digital skills. Such a definition could provide a key reference point for governments, funders, and others with a mission to build human capital and give everyone the best possible chance in a digital world.

An example that individuals, organizations, and countries could consider is the DQ Institute Digital Intelligence Framework, which highlights three critical categories of skills. These include digital citizenship, digital creativity, and digital entrepreneurship (DQ Institute).

Further, the DQ framework is broken down into eight specific skills, including (1) Digital Identity, (2) Digital Use, (3) Digital Safety, (4) Digital Security, (5) Digital Emotional Intelligence, (6) Digital Communication, (7) Digital Literacy, and (8) Digital Rights, as further illustrated below.
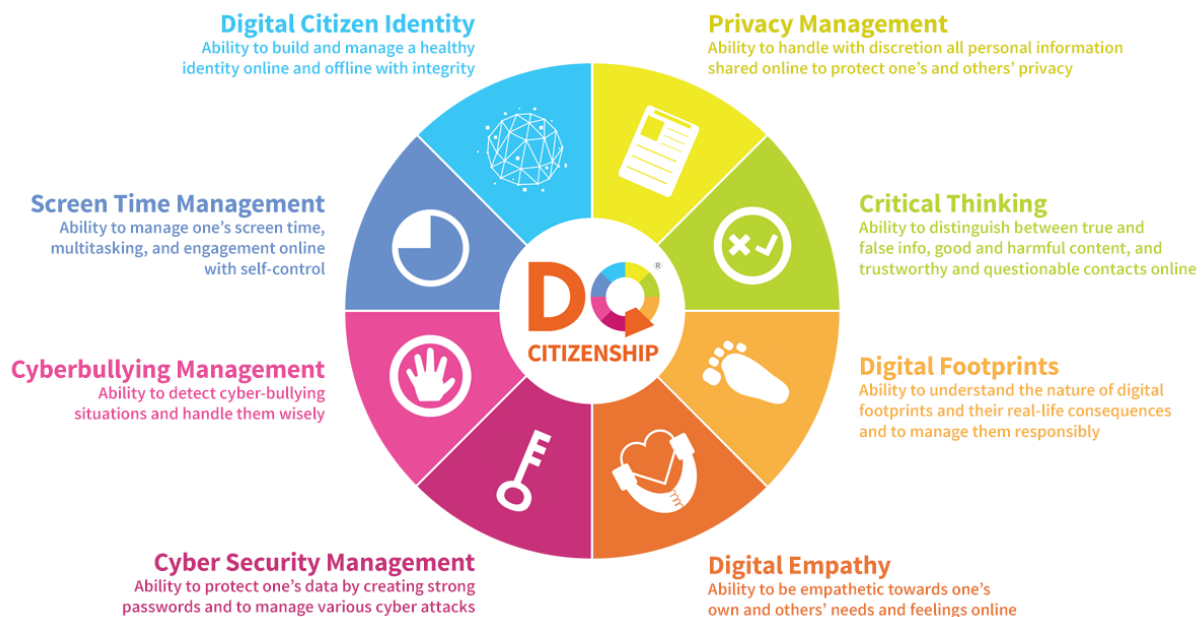
The process of creating an open, global standard needs to be a consensus-driven process in which all stakeholder voices are heard. Acknowledgement and recognition of such an effort for a digital literacy and intelligence framework and definition can inspire many to join such efforts to work collaboratively for long-term impact. With so many digital inclusion events and activities being supported by the ITU, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNHCR, and a variety of other UN bodies, there is clear agreement on the importance of the subject, and the energy and expertise necessary to make progress. Imagine the impact of working with an agreed-upon foundation and not having to create a new framework for each event and activity around the world.

There is also a precedent for this sort of cooperation. One example of a multi-stakeholder group is the Digital Intelligence Coalition, a group formed by the IEEE, OECD, the DQ Institute, and the WEF, and has a similar purpose – establish a global set of digital standards.

I recommend creating such global cooperation on a broader level still – one that recognizes an open and consensus-building paradigm of standards development and forms a strong foundation, enabling innovation and growth.

Reference Material:

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