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Open Educational Resources : the RELIEFH Ecosystem for Gender Equality

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Extended summary

In our modern globalized society, open educational resources (OER) are taking advantage of the digital revolution and networking to become one of the main propellants to free knowledge access movement. Taking advantage of free software and open-source achievements, free access has become a deliberate choice of a globalized information society, deeply rooted in innovative information technology. Open access movement has therefore taken on different shapes and trends, stemming from open initiatives that have covered a wide range of domains, services and products, such as computer codes and software, data and document archives, learning resources and education systems, scientific research and publications, file formats and standards, etc. These versions of free access contribute to the emergence of new societal values inscribed in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as "quality education", "peace, justice and strong institutions", "good health and well-being", "gender equality", etc. From the SDGs emerged countless more specific societal values such as "environmental protection", "equal opportunities", "living together", "education for all", "gender equality", etc. Means and guidelines adapted to each of these values have been designed and deployed within the framework of the United Nations 2030 agenda to end poverty, hunger, AIDS and discrimination against women and girls.

Recognizing that actions in one area of the SDGs will affect outcomes in others, quality education (SDG4), heavily marked by OER and open education, sits at the crossroads of all other objectives and necessarily benefits from their results. As a globally widespread ecosystem, like open archives, OER and open education can give anyone a voice, access to information and education, and the ability to connect with peers and train others. However, the studies also point to extreme inequalities in digital empowerment and significant technological barriers to digital participation. Among the obstacles to OER adoption, the technological challenge seems particularly important. These are more specifically reflected in the high costs and low speeds of Internet access. The difficulty of knowing where and how to find educational

resources is also noted as a major obstacle. The biggest difference between the North and the South particularly concerns the difficulties for teachers in the South to find resources adapted to their local contexts.

In this article, we argue that while these technological barriers must certainly be removed, the potential for openness can only be fully realized when societal and economic barriers are also minimized. Gender equality is one of them. There is no doubt, in fact, that education enhances human potential and therefore gives women a fundamental human right to self-determination which elevates their social and professional status. We therefore focus on OER as a catalyst for quality education in the Francophone context that promotes the social value of gender equality. Our objective is to present a French-speaking OER editorial policy led by the *Institut de la Francophonie pour l'Ingénierie de la Connaissance et la Formation à distance* (IFEF), as a specialized body of the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF). As such, the editorial policy of the IFEF is resourced first of all in the principles of the SDGs but also in the historical legacy of the openness movement which major periods and major trends are here explored.

In fact, although the French-speaking movement around OER is recent and its tools and products are limited (compared to the tools and products of the Anglo-Saxon world), the French-speaking continues to play a promoting role in mobilizing actors and partners producing OER, in particular by and for the developing countries. OER movement in Francophonie has made significant progress in recent years, although there is still a need for awareness and understanding of the benefits and opportunities offered by their development and use. In the absence of organized institutionalization, OER in Francophonie are struggling to take a prominent place in the educational landscape and the educational policies. They still depend on personal initiatives, political decisions and associations that try to influence conducts and practices.