

# The Knowledge Economy and Social Impact

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*There is not a one-size-fits-all definition of “social impact.” In fact, in a Google search for “What is social impact?” more than 400 results appear. This chapter will highlight global initiatives led by OneSight, an NGO that is utilizing new technologies to combat the vision care crisis, and CanopyLAB, a software company that has teamed up with over 120 NGOs around the world to create and provide online courses utilizing artificial intelligence.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Knowledge Economy which has seen the rapid growth in technological advances has made our planet much smaller, and more connected. The NGO global community and the private sector are taking advantage of these constant advances to improve lives in the most needed and neglected communities around the world. This chapter highlights how international NGOs and a software company which all have social impact in their DNA are using Information and communications technology (ICT) as tools to improve lives throughout the globe.

## **THE CURRENT GLOBAL VISION CARE CRISIS**

Vision is considered by many the strongest of our senses. Without vision one finds it difficult to learn to move, read, attend school and to earn a living. Raising awareness and engaging all sectors of society is fundamental in combating the vision care crisis. Deloitte and OneSight(OneSight, n.d.) joined forces

to develop the *The Bringing Vision Care Crisis Into Focus* (Wong et al., 2016) study which concluded that many barriers including physical, economic and cultural prevent 1.1 billion people on the planet (1 out of every 7) from receiving a basic eye examination. One of the key findings was that no age group is untouched by this crisis. Vision impairment is intergenerational and impedes children, adults and the elderly from focusing on their daily activities. In October of 2019 the World Health Organization published its first *World Report on Vision* specifically targeted at Ministries of Health, Researchers, Development Agencies, Practitioners, the NGO community and policy-makers dedicated to the field of eye care. The report was produced to assist the international community develop a shared global agenda on vision. The aim of this report is to provide stakeholders support in the massive challenge to improve eye conditions and reduce vision loss to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG target 3.8 which is focused on universal health coverage.

## **APPLYING NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN COMBATING THE GLOBAL VISION CARE CRISIS 80% OF LEARNING IS VISUAL**

An analysis of the *Vision To Learn* model to determine its effectiveness conducted by the Mattel Children's Hospital at UCLA (Slusser & Dudovity, 2013) in 2013 found that 80% of classroom learning is visual. In addition, over 20% of students have a vision problem that can be identified by screening and over 80-90% of those defects can be corrected with glasses. In the United States and around the world, low-income and minority students are disproportionately affected by untreated visual impairments. This segment of the population also has limited to no access to corrective lenses.

The *Lancet Global Health Commission on Global Eye Health: VISION Beyond 2020* (*Lancet Global Health Commission, 2021*) a commission of 73 experts from 25 countries globally conducted research in eye health concluded that improving eye health is essential to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Their report clearly states that vision enables better educational outcomes, and increases work productivity, reducing inequality. Eye health is a global public priority, transforming lives in both poor and wealthy communities.

OneSight, an independent NGO, is mobilizing the latest technologies to combat the global vision care crisis. They do this through two successful models which include free charitable vision clinics that manage a specific community need lasting 1-2 weeks, as well as more permanent self-sustaining vision centers. Both sides of their programming require the latest technology to allow them to make the glasses that people need to see clearly. OneSight deploys state of the art equipment and develops new virtual tools to continue its mission of eradicating the vision care crisis for good.

To date they have impacted over 45 million people in 53 countries, and have operated nearly 2,000 charitable clinics serving refugee camps, indigenous populations and low income families that face barriers in accessing vision care resources. These models have provided immediate access to eye exams and glasses, and have established 197 sustainable centers, creating jobs, educational opportunities, and permanent access to vision care. Innovation and technology play an instrumental role in reaching people in need in the most remote areas of the world.

In June of 2018, an expedition team of 46 OneSight volunteers embarked on a mission to the most remote areas of the Amazon River in Brazil to provide vision care to 2000 people in the villages of Muritinga, Cuia, Iguapenu, Sao Felix and Sissaima. OneSight transformed small boats into portable vision treatment centers that navigated the river to perform checkups and tests on board using cutting-edge

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