**Technology for Democracy Cohort – meeting record 28 July 2022**

**Summary**

Increasingly the digital and online space is where people seek to exercise their rights; this provides opportunities to empower citizens and society overall but also presents challenges that require a multi-stakeholder approach and greater international co-operation between states, civil society, individuals and the private sector.

Over **90** participants (drawn from the organisations listed at the bottom of this document) met virtually for the first Technology for Democracy Cohort meeting on 28 July 2022. Sessions for each of the three Cohort Strands collated ideas and examples of existing initiatives for the Cohort to consider moving forwards. These are listed below incorporating suggestions provided separately by civil society and collated by Access Now.

Other key points discussed:

* We need to ensure the work of the Cohort is practical: focused on real world applications, and possible solutions to shared challenges.
* Plan for a frequency of monthly meetings for the Cohort (mostly virtual) with the next in the first half of September (date TBC).
* Plan to hold an in-person/hybrid meeting of the Cohort at the Tallinn Digital Summit on 10/11 October. Also expect a public launch of the Cohort at this event – communication ideas will be shared with Cohort participants.
* We will look for further opportunities to meet in person or in hybrid format in the run up to S4D2 Summit in 2023, and also how to communicate the work of the Cohort to wider audiences and partners. Welcome ideas and suggestions from participants on both of these points.

**Work Streams**

**Strand one**: **Technology to support open and secure access to the Internet**.

The Cohort members will consider how technology can assist people around the world to retain access to the open, free, global, interoperable, reliable and secure Internet, to enable inclusive participation in the online world, and to promote the enjoyment of human rights online. The work of the Cohort will be in line with principles outlined in the Declaration on the Future of the Internet, and build on existing work by civil society organisations, international groupings (including the Freedom Online Coalition), and industry, to further strengthen the enjoyment of human rights online, and push back against politically motivated government imposed shutdowns and restrictions.

**Ideas/contributions/comments**

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| 1 | Internet measurement - Facilitating data collection and reporting on internet shutdowns and network disruptions, as through the NetBlocks TPD Program – real time view of internet disruptions. Open call to organisations to view and collaborate. Advocated dual approach – cohort participants could contribute – company data can be protected/consider how open the data can be, keeping in mind company interests |
| 2 | Scope and whether strand focuses on interruptions/shutdowns only or more subtle stuff too like politically motivated ads |
| 3 | Recommendations regarding defining the intersection of “free speech”, privacy and harassment/threats/violence from any source, including governments, militias, or citizen groups.  |
| 4 | Recommendations/framework for identifying dual use technology and what elements/factors define use as negative/illegitimate versus legitimate. |
| 5 | Protect net neutrality |
| 6 | Protecting encryption from legal barriers/challenges  |
| 7 | Building collaboration around the use of anti-censorship technologies (decoy routing, refraction networking, collateral freedom strategies, etc.) |
| 8 | Internet Freedom technology funders need to better coordinate, figure out overlaps and gaps of funding. need for more funding to support alliance building and information sharing across borders |
| 9 | Funders need to be more flexible in terms of allowing emergency funding for use of internet freedom technologies during emergency situations |
| 10 | Frameworks/commitments at national level to providing access and to not shutting down the internet. There are lots of recommendations in the SR’s report. |
| 11 | Funders should require an internet freedom preparedness plan as part of proposed programming and budget or a grant request.   |
| 12 | Responsible reporting – how can the data be used against proponents of democracy and human rights defenders |
| 13 | Economic impacts of shutdowns to GDP and the digital economy - supporting and promoting mechanisms for economic impact assessment, both mitigation and deterrence aspects. |
| 14 | Need for multiple solutions that are constantly iterating and changing to minimise risk of being targeted by malign actors. Creating a space where information on different communication platforms can be reviewed by civil society groups  |
| 15 | A ‘mechanism’ that multiple stakeholders contribute to may be a good project for this cohort, in line with recommendations in the recent OHCHR report on internet shutdowns. |
| 16 | Scope question around whether the Cohort will look at the longer-term aspects around internet restrictions including legislation as well as the short term responses.  |
| 17 | UN concept of meaningful connectivity – consider in the context of measurement. Measuring/monitoring work has developed in an ad hoc way, good to keep a flexible/dynamic approach needed to adjust for different country contexts. Caution around imposing a measurement framework. |
| 18 | Need to think carefully about how we collect data to avoid targeting by malign actors – e.g. if specific app or platform highlighted by the Cohort. Importance of risk assessment as we decide what the cohort will focus on. |

**Web resources**

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| https://netblocks.org/projects/observatory/third-party-data |
| <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/meetings/statistics/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2022/04/UniversalMeaningfulDigitalConnectivityTargets2030_BackgroundPaper.pdf>  |
| <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/07/states-increasingly-block-protesters-justice-send-chilling-message-rights-un>  |
| <https://www.accessnow.org/keepiton/>  |
| <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=a%2Fhrc%2F50%2F55&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>  |
| <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/internet-shutdowns-un-report-details-dramatic-impact-peoples-lives-and-human>  |
| <https://netblocks.org/cost/>  |

**Strand two**: **Harnessing the potential of technology for the benefit of open, democratic societies.**

The Cohort members will take forward activities aimed at enabling the implementation of core shared principles, from protecting human rights, and other shared values, to ensure technologies are developed and deployed in a free, responsible, secure and resilient way which supports and strengthens democracies and democratic participation. It will provide space to consider how new and emerging technology can be used for malign purposes, and consider appropriate safeguards to prevent technologies undermining democracies and democratic freedoms.

**Ideas/contributions/comments**

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| 1 | Recognise that safeguards can also include regulation of mechanisms that solicit or accept payments that fuel undermining democracy.  This would include cryptocurrencies as well as credit card or other forms of currency transfers. |
| 2 | Call for a moratorium on spyware technologies |
| 3 | Defend the right to privacy, and ensure strong safeguards against and oversight of government and private company surveillance. |
| 4 | Protect encryption |
| 5 | Technical/legal measures against manipulation of public opinion (e.g., through targeted/personalized political ads)  |
| 6 | Forging common definitions of and approaches to digital due diligence and risk assessment |
| 7 | Promoting regulatory frameworks for data-driven technologies (AI, facial recognition, IoT) |
| 8 | Democracy community need to begin discussing, engaging with each other and tech companies about how emerging technologies (eg NFTs, blockchain, Wed3, metaverse, cryptocurrency etc) will affect (positively and negatively) the future of democracy, putting in early safeguards, guiding principles in place as techs are still being developed.  |
| 9 | We could complement UN work  - including the development of human rights due diligence guidance on UN use of technology; the Denmark/South Korea resolutions on “new and emerging technologies” and human rights; and work at B-Tech on business models  |
| 10 | Study gendered impacts of new and emerging tech |
| 11 | Open consultation with industry - good to hear more about how companies plan to contribute in the data space |
| 12 | Due diligence and risk assessments – there are various initiatives to help companies understand how their policies/projects impact on human rights. More consistency the better in the legislative process, recognising country specific contexts and jurisdictions |
| 13 | Important to keep in mind the broad range of values across different jurisdictions and suggest focussing on values to develop global ties |
| 14 | A focus on algorithms and how these can exclude marginalised groups |
| 15 | German work on hackathons and media training on disinfo. Important for this Cohort to deconflict with Cohort on Disinfo.  |
| 16 | Initial exchange of best practices, and challenges, in promoting the design and use of new technologies in line with core values.  |
| 17 | Explore the development of a framework for assessing online disinformation threats to elections and democracies, collaborating with other Cohorts as appropriate. |
| 18 | Work together to develop a deeper understanding and evidence base of the impacts of unjustified data localisation measures, and explore alternative solutions and policy responses.  |
| 19 | Work together to explore the potential of data innovation: building on the experience of the UK-US Privacy Enhancing Technologies Challenge, explore Members’ activities in promoting ‘data innovation’ for the public good, and possible actions through an ‘Ideas Marketplace’. |
| 20 | Exchanges on approaches to developing and implementing effective data protection regulation: consider bringing together policy actors, and regulators from member countries to explore effective approaches to data privacy.  |
| 21 | Exchanges on approaches to enabling trusted government access to data held by the private sector, for national security and law enforcement purposes. |
| 22 | Exchanges on regulatory sandboxes: consider possible opportunities for testing and pilots among member countries.  |
| 23 | Hackathons: work with the private sector to sponsor a series of hackathons throughout Member countries. Ideas might include building new monitoring solutions, or anti-throttling tech.  |
| 24 | Possible joint work between strand 2 and strand 3, focused on Digital Public Goods |
| 25 | Finnish innovation fund Sitra project called "Digital power and democracy". In Spring we've published a study titled "Tracking Digipower", which might give some interesting perspectives and framework for the work done in this cohort (and maybe especially in strand #2) |

**Strand Three: Technology for good governance.**

This strand focuses on the transformative power of digital technologies for more open and inclusive governance, and more efficient and innovative e-governance solutions. The aim is to explore and share existing knowledge, skills and practices on how countries could accelerate open and interoperable digital governance that incorporates human rights safeguards to protect against the exclusion of marginalised people. This strand will explore the potential for co-design and co-development of these tools with civil society, and the role of assurance tools such as human rights due diligence requirements and impact assessments. Among others, the Cohort´s work supports the global mission of the UN in attainment of sustainable development goals.

**Ideas/contributions/comments**

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| 1 | Estonian pledge around encouraging countries to take ownership of their digital futures, and on digital development one possible outcome could be around helping governments with data collection transparency – best practice of digital service implementation at the planning stage, to enable citizen trust in data storage. |
| 2 | Leverage existing mechanisms that track human rights violations, including via the OHCHR. |
| 3 | Statement or declaration about commitment to using more digital means of democracy (co-creation with civil society) - this to go beyond e-governance in terms of access to and management of services, but also how more digital means provide opportunities for the engagement of citizens in decision making.  |
| 4 | Compiling examples of best practice (possible link with the deliberative democracy cohort here?) and/or trialling pilots to develop the evidence base of where digital means can facilitate this engagement.  To be used to learn what might work at a more micro level that could be scaled up. |
| 5 | Developing guidelines for human rights impact assessments previous to the deployment of data-driven technologies by governments  |
| 6 | Developing good practices guidelines and model legal frameworks to foster transparency in digital electoral campaigns |
| 7 | Recognition from funders/governments and private sector that civil society organizations are often stretched thin with very small budgets. There needs to be a way to provide support for civil society groups, in particular those working with communities most vulnerable to negative effects i.e. orgs have the resources (aka. money) to participate in coalitions like S4D, to conduct outreach and activities and making sure existing mechanisms (especially those set up by private companies) are easily accessible, transparent and have accountability to the public.  |
| 8 | Connecting/Promoting civic/government technologists who are working on technologies to advance transparency, good governance, service delivery locally, to allow for sharing of lessons, increased networking cross-regionally, and highlighting the positive uses of technology that advances democracy.  |
| 9 | The Accountability Lab in South Africa: making governance work for people by supporting active citizens, responsible leaders and accountable institutions. INL Bureau-led Anti-Corruption Solutions through Emerging Technologies initiative (ASET) to convene multidisciplinary communities to develop **people-driven** and **technology-powered** innovations which support good governance and mitigate corruption risk. Emphasise the importance of hackathons as facilities for building multidisciplinary communities (which include but don't only comprise technologists) that can be onboarded onto dynamic conversations and developments around the various governance problems we are facing, as well as inform the development of effective technologies that respond to them. Significantly, the emphasis should be placed less on the technologies and more on the communities of practice which are themselves the technology for change.  |
| 10 | Support initiatives which build shared understanding of how governance challenges are handled and can be supported with (rather than solved/supplanted by) technology. |
| 11 | Create more opportunities for technologists to link directly into and problem-solve with governance and accountability practitioners, and build networks and communities of practice out of this  (hackathons can do this well). |
| 12 | Strengthening legal guarantees and standards for freedom of information as well as open data, contracting, ownership, and governance practices which are underpinned by proactive disclosure.  This is the essential infrastructure that supports efforts to bring technology to respond to our biggest governance challenges and opportunities. Many of us in the global majority don’t have these in place and get left behind by technology-driven initiatives. |
| 13 | Build better knowledge about *how* transparency and technology enhance good governance rather than only that they do. Using this knowledge to model and enhance local advocacy for demand. |
| 14 | Provide greater support to initiatives which 1) support communities to identify their biggest governance challenges, 2) develop popular understandings of how freedom of information and technology can be applied to these challenges, 3) co-create infrastructure that supports technology-powered solutions. |
| 15 | Amplifying the visibility and lessons learned in the co-creation of technology-powered solutions to governance challenges between the public and private sector, and civil society. Showcase *how* cooperation is approached, unfolds, and makes impact. |
| 16 | Models of different ways to govern, enabling policymakers in other countries to learn from other jurisdictions particularly around legislation. |
| 17 | Need to grapple with tension between efficiency provided by automation in egovernance systems and the high potential for discrimination adn marginalization inherent in algorithmic decision making. While tech has been able to address petty corruption, need to understand better at what cost? A hybrid tech/analogue solution is needed. |
| 18 | Also need to remember when we talk about users, these are people (unless we want to be protecting the human rights of bots). Think about language we use and how it can dehumanize people we are trying to help. |
| 19 | Lack of connectivity in rural areas is a big challenge for countries like Albania as they go through the process of digitisation – how can this process be inclusive for all citizens? Simplicity is key (easy clicks for less digital literate) and that connectivity is a challenge but step by step is possible. Urban poor also need to be considered, linked to affordability of internet services. Also access for those undocumented people who cannot even obtain a SIM card without papers, and hence can’t get online. |
| 20 | Integrating a gender-based approach to this Strand. |
| 21 | The Action Coalition for Responsible Tech, organized under the Tech for Democracy Initiative. There are several strands, one of which is on "policy coherence" looking at how different regulatory approaches are consistent (or not) with the UN Guiding Principles on BHR. Technology can work for and against democracy and human rights. Through this Coalition we aim to support and promote human rights considerations in the development and use of technology |
| 22 | Good case studies with policy and civil society action is the BIT-ACT research program at the University of Bologna. We investigate how digital media, algorithms and artificial intelligence help the fight against corruption from the grassroots across the worldERC research project BIT-ACT on how citizens and civil society actors use digital media and ICTs to fight corruption from the grassroots. |

**Web resources**

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| <https://www.hackcorruption.org> |
| <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/08/17/korean-policies-of-cybersecurity-and-data-resilience-pub-85164>  |
| [UniversalMeaningfulDigitalConnectivityTargets2030\_BackgroundPaper.pdf (itu.int)](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/meetings/statistics/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2022/04/UniversalMeaningfulDigitalConnectivityTargets2030_BackgroundPaper.pdf) |
| Mhlambi, Sabelo, (2020) “From Rationality to Relationality: Ubuntu as an Ethical and Human Rights Framework for Artificial Intelligence Governance,” Carr Center Discussion Paper Series, Harvard Kennedy School. |
| <https://www.atingi.org/digitalenquirerkit/> |
| <https://www.humanrights.dk/projects/action-coalition-responsible-technology> |
| <https://site.unibo.it/bit-act/en> |
| <https://www.sitra.fi/en/news/a-fair-data-economy-and-digital-education-would-provide-security-for-finland-in-the-era-of-information-warfare/> |
| <https://www.sitra.fi/en/topics/digital-power-and-democracy/> |

**Invited Participants**

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| Countries | UK, Estonia, Chile, India, Indonesia, Germany, Denmark, Finland |
| Lead NGO partner | Access Now |
| Organisations / companies / entities | Freedom House, Alliance of Democracies, IDEA, OGP, DT Institute, Democracy Reporting International, DT Institute, Global Network Initiative, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative, Digital Impact and Governance Initiative, Common Cause, National Democratic Institute, Article 19, Southern Poverty Law Center, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, PEN America, Free Russia Foundation, International Republican Institute, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Committee to Protect Journalists, International Forum for Democratic Studies, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Tunisian American Young Professionals, Amnesty International USA, DoS/DRL, Congreso Visible Uniandes, National Democratic Institute, Global Partners Digital, AIR-Alliance for Innovative Regulation, Hong Kong Democracy Council, SAIS, Johns Hopkins University, Stanford Global Digital Policy Incubator, Digital Forensic Research Lab, ANDI - Communication and Rights / Foro Ciudadano de Las Americas, Anti-Corruption Law Program, Washington College of Law, Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, FINESTE, Open Society Foundations, Institute of Public and Private Policies/Albania, Public Citizen, WWC Global, Carter Center, Accountability Lab, Europe Foundation, National Centre for Social Research, The Asia Foundation, Ford Foundation, Netblocks, Doublethink Lab, CEIP, Amazon, Twitter, Cloudflare, Paradigm Initiative, Derechos Digitales, WFD |