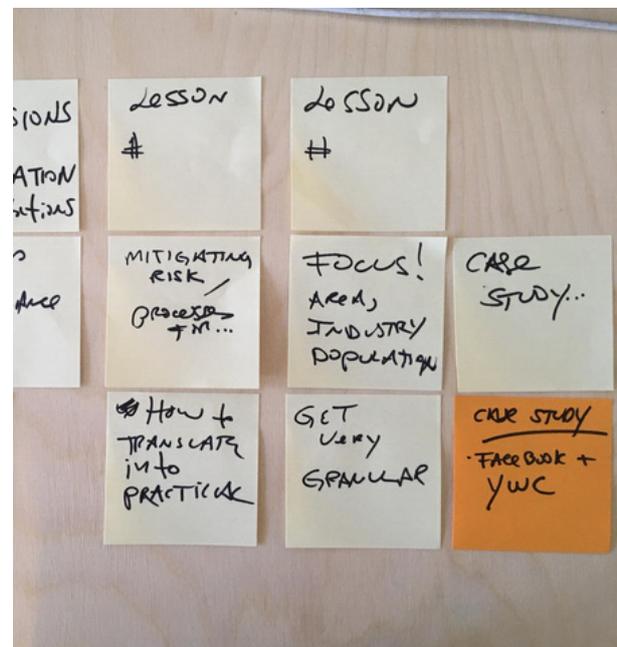




# MINIMIZING TRADE-OFFS IN TECHNOLOGY FOR GOOD

WORKSHOP | MONTREAL, CANADA, 5 - 6 MARCH 2020



## BACKGROUND

As part of its initiative on Partnering with Civil Society in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the World Economic Forum and Element AI, in collaboration with institutional partners, invited participants to a two-day workshop from March 4-5, 2020 in Montreal, Canada. The workshop focused on how industry and civil society can form long-term strategies and partnerships for minimizing tradeoffs in the design, deployment and use of technology.

The plenary discussions provided several case examples for how industry engagement of civil society can provide strategic intelligence and contextual expertise for co-designing and deploying technology, as well as methodologies for evaluating the impacts of its use across the diversity of stakeholders -- including marginalized populations. However, these discussions also surfaced existing tensions and challenges in the structure, power dynamics and sustainability of current technology partnerships between industry and civil society: the costs for civil society's engagement with industry-led technology for good projects; identifying the right partners from the diversity of "civil society"; and missing models for activating civil society and finding "minimum viable consensus" in design and

deployment decision-making. These topics were then focused within discussion groups to define and structure what the "terms of engagement" should be when industry and civil society enter into partnership to co-design technology interventions.

Understanding how to structure and co-design technology interventions in partnership with civil society has become particularly relevant as the application of digital and emerging technologies has become the main feature of institutional response in the current COVID-19 crisis. Government and industry response to the pandemic has brought to public attention a range of challenges and trade-offs in technology design and deployment: rampant techno-solutionism as a feature of COVID-19 response; emergence of new invasive data collection in the form of "surveillance humanitarianism"; privacy and "ethics" as an insufficient catch-all for potential harms related to technology deployment during the pandemic; and a missing mechanism for decision-makers to activate civil society experts with experience in deploying digital interventions in emergencies.

- **Sonja Betschart**,  
Co-Founder, WeRobotics
- **Rhodri Davies**,  
Head of Policy, Charities Aid Foundation
- **Sherif Elsayed-Ali**,  
Director, AI for Climate, Element AI
- **Mark Latonero**,  
Senior Researcher, Data and Society & Fellow, Harvard Kennedy School
- **Linda Raftree**,  
Co-Founder, MERL Tech

## KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The following represents key issue areas identified across workshop sessions and participants; core concerns and challenges that surfaced; and potential opportunities for both individual and collective action.

**These opportunities reflect potential next steps in the short-term reality of the pandemic, and in the medium term in understanding potential new leverage points and new normals with other stakeholders.**

KEY ISSUE AREA

# 1

## Need for defining the terms of engagement for civil society and industry partnerships for digital and technology interventions

Core concerns and challenges:

Iterative process for communicating and agreeing on principles (including levels of transparency, details on legal and compliance in sharing, and length of engagement)

Phases and steps for engagement across the design process (including problem definition)

Protections, liabilities and resourcing for civil society intelligence

Data sharing

Mechanisms for communication to end-users and accountability (e.g. defining “minimum viable consensus” and representativeness of impacted users)

Best practices for managing engagement

Need for reusable templates for incorporating and updating existing frameworks, compacts and agreements on the responsible or ethical use of technology

Potential opportunities for stakeholder engagement:

### 1.

**Playbook / Collaborative:**

**Civil Society Engagement in Technology Design and Deployment: Terms of Stakeholder Engagement in Technology Partnerships**

A collaboration involving industry and civil society experts to define and detail terms of engagement for short-term and medium-term technology partnerships in the form of a “playbook” -- drawing on experiences of previous partnerships across humanitarian, development and advocacy technology interventions

### 2.

**Virtual meetings on best practices and minimizing trade-offs related to technology design and deployment in COVID-19 response**

Discussions among decision-makers, practitioners and funders on resourcing and supporting technology interventions in the current crisis and the need for local civil society expertise

KEY ISSUE AREA

# 2.

## Need for trusted intermediaries or platforms to help navigate civil society-industry partnerships and alleviate pre-existing tensions:

Core concerns and challenges:

Unequal relationships and power dynamics between civil society and industry

Misalignment in problem definition and needs assessment

Need to recognize diversity of organizations (and values) within “industry” and “civil society”

Feedback fatigue for civil society and limited transparency of the impact of feedback

Overrepresentation of international NGOs as civil society in technology discussions

Lack of understanding among industry leaders on specific value propositions of civil society engagement in technology design and deployment -- often limited to communicating or marketing products in emerging markets

Identifying the right partners and expertise needed

Facilitation to help work through details on executing abstract frameworks and principles into action

Potential opportunities for stakeholder engagement:

### 1.

#### Sandbox: Minimizing Tradeoffs in Technology Interventions

An “accelerator” for small cohort of leaders from civil society, industry and philanthropy to learn how to converse, ideate, and collaborate on technology intervention to enable trust and participation through a “playground concept” -- with a focus on high-impact, large scale technology interventions (e.g. AI for Climate). This accelerator will take the form of a series of specific meetings hosted by neutral platform partners.

### 2.

#### Virtual meetings hosted by World Economic Forum on responsible design and deployment of technology

## KEY ISSUE AREA

# 3.

## Missing mechanism for decision-makers to activate civil society experts with experience in deploying digital interventions in COVID-19 and beyond from the Global South

### Core concerns and challenges:

Technology as main feature of institutional response with no institutional controls for ensuring safety, efficacy and security

Disparate communities of academic and civil society experts across regions

Silos across disciplines, sector experiences, terminology and language

Privacy or “ethics” as insufficient catch-all for potential harms related to technology deployment during a pandemic (e.g. misalignment in problem definition, limited impact for intended purposes, opportunity costs for alternative interventions based on existing needs, etc)

Limited experiences of policy-makers and other decision-makers in deploying digital and technology interventions in emergencies

### Potential opportunities for stakeholder engagement:

## 1.

### Research Initiative: Co-designing Digital Interventions with Local and Regional Civil Society: COVID-19 and Beyond (PI: Mark Latonero)

A research collaborative involving a network of researchers and civil society experts focused on:

- Bringing together existing knowledge from past humanitarian and development interventions in order to analyze and diagnose emerging crises (COVID-19) and the efficacy, safety and security of new interventions;
- Designing mechanisms to activate academic and civil society experts across the Global South for local, regional and global institutional response in COVID-19 and beyond -- based on successes and failures of existing civil society engagement in technology interventions;
- Creating an architecture for sharing and making knowledge more transparent

# Key Action Steps

This workshop explored how civil society engagement can enable companies and other stakeholders to minimize tradeoffs in the design, deployment and use of technology; and additionally, where strategic cross-sector alliances will be needed.

Below are short-, mid-, and long-term opportunities for collective action, expertise/knowledge-sharing and platform engagement.



## SHORT- TERM (COVID-19)

### PARTICIPATE

World Economic Forum  
Social Sector Mobilization  
Platform

### WRITE

Forum Agenda

### RESEARCH

Co-Designing Digital  
Interventions with  
Civil Society

### VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Technology deployment  
during COVID-19, responsible  
design, surveillance  
humanitarianism, etc.



## MID-TERM (COVID-19)

### COLLABORATE

Terms of Stakeholder  
Engagement in Technology  
Partnerships

### RESEARCH

Co-Designing Digital  
Interventions with  
Civil Society

### VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Technology deployment  
during COVID-19, responsible  
design, surveillance  
humanitarianism, etc.



## LONG-TERM

### COLLABORATE

Sandbox: Minimizing  
Tradeoffs in Technology  
Interventions

### VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Technology deployment  
during COVID-19, responsible  
design, surveillance  
humanitarianism, etc.

### RESEARCH

Co-Designing Digital  
Interventions with  
Civil Society

# Sign up here

to learn more about or participate in  
specific opportunities listed above.