



MOBILIZING AND INSPIRING ACTION WITH TECHNOLOGY

WORKSHOP | KATHMANDU, NEPAL, 19-21 FEBRUARY 2020



BACKGROUND

As part of its initiative on Partnering with Civil Society in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the World Economic Forum and Digital Rights Foundation, in collaboration with institutional partners, invited participants to a two-and-a-half day workshop on 19-21 February 2020 in Kathmandu, Nepal. The workshop focused on the implications of digital and emerging technologies for organizations promoting advocacy and mobilizing people-powered action.

The plenary discussions surfaced regional perspectives (including South Asia and beyond) on the following topics: technology interventions for advocacy and organizing; strategies for organizational change in a digital world; foresight and preparing for new threats; accelerating digital rights; and capacity-building for advocates. These topics were then explored within community workstreams to highlight existing tensions, facilitate shared learning across regional contexts, and

identify potential opportunities for stakeholder(s) action in three areas: civic engagement; transparency and open data; and digital rights.

These topics were discussed prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition to an increasing mortality rate and widespread anxiety, the pandemic has caused significant behaviour change for advocates in their support networks, communities and national contexts. These include rapid shift to virtual connectivity platforms; increased use of social media; impacts on economic value chains and gig work; emergency health surveillance mechanisms; mandatory quarantines and social distancing measures; emergency funding and stimulus plans; and widespread misinformation and disinformation related to the virus. These shifts have occurred rapidly in East Asia, Western Europe and North America and are expected to also occur in other parts of the world as the virus spreads.

KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The following represents key issue areas identified across workshop sessions and participants; related tensions 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 building momentum for digital rights advocacy in South Asia (and elsewhere) and articulating digital rights in context

Tensions that surfaced:



Trust in government is declining



Governance



Reactive vs. proactive civil society



Finding common issues (beyond internet shutdown) amid various experiences in the region

Potential opportunities for stakeholder action:

1.

Virtual meetings to bring together key organizations and movements on articulating digital rights in the midst of a global pandemic and how to engage companies, citizens and governments in the new normal

2.

Regional collaboration led by Digital Rights Foundation and other organizations in South Asia to contextualize digital rights in the region and identify opportunities for further coordination

2.

KEY ISSUE AREA

Digital rights are not well understood by a public that needs to be mobilized

Tensions that surfaced:



Lack of resources and capacity for advocates to invest in strategic communications



New skill sets to merge policy expertise with communications



Access to media channels interested in featuring content on digital rights



Declining attention spans, resulting in reductionist and simplistic content on digital rights to the public



Language as a barrier to access and civic engagement due to Anglo-centric, Western focused digital products

Potential opportunities for stakeholder action:

1.

Programme support or creation of specific PR firm(s) for communicating digital rights effectively -- through related human stories, art, culture, and cinema

2.

Skills transfer and/or support from campaigns, advocacy labs and the private sector on strategic communications and legal support

3.

Programme support for investigative independent media -- in the short-term reality of the pandemic and beyond

KEY ISSUE AREA

3.

With increasing signals of future threats, there is a missing mechanism and architecture for civil society to take strategic action collectively

Tensions that surfaced:



Missing mechanisms for learning and reflection beyond in-person workshops and across regional advocacy communities



Tensions between INGOs and movements on where to focus, what to prioritize and who should lead



Engaging with all forms of "civil society"



Local civil society engagement

Potential opportunities for stakeholder action:

1.

Collaborative evidence base and virtual coalition building on specific threats in the short-term (COVID-19) and for the long-term

2.

Focused engagement of youth and "Generation C" to discuss the future generation of digital rights activists during and after the pandemic

4.

Civil society has a **limited understanding of trade-offs** in selecting tools and platforms for civic engagement

Tensions that surfaced:



Diverse and conflicting experiences across civil society with popular and bespoke platforms (e.g. Facebook, donor-funded civic engagement apps, etc)



Understanding how organizations can achieve "minimum viable data" while still using the benefits of popular civic engagement tools

Potential opportunities for stakeholder action:

1.

Collective resource on civic engagement capacity building among advocacy organizations and movements -- in collaboration with organizations providing strategic resources during COVID-19

2.

A "civil society" single sign-on or alternative mechanism to allow for limited data access

KEY ISSUE AREA

5.

Need for shared understanding of how digital affects civic engagement – in addition to other global threats (e.g. climate change, COVID-19)

Tensions that surfaced:



Global vs local interests across civil society



Changing landscape of influence and changing leverage points with industry



Changing priorities in people and communities as they cope with crisis

Potential opportunities for stakeholder action:

1.

Mapping on how technology impacts strategies, context and horizons for advocacy and where new leverage points are for organizations and activists to make change internally and with other stakeholders – in the wake of COVID-19 and beyond

Key Action Steps

This workshop explored where organizational change is needed in an increasingly digital world, and where strategic cross-sector alliances will be needed for stronger advocacy and activism. Below are short-, mid-, and long-term opportunities for collective action, expertise/knowledge-sharing and platform engagement.

APR
AUG

SEPT
DEC

DEC
2021

SHORT- TERM (COVID-19)

PARTICIPATE

World Economic Forum
COVID-19 Action
Platform

WRITE

Forum Agenda

VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Articulating digital rights during and after COVID-19, surveillance, resources for civil society, etc.

COLLABORATE

Collective resource on civic engagement capacity building (in collaboration with existing trackers and resource pages)

MID-TERM (COVID-19)

PARTICIPATE

Regional collaboration on digital rights in South Asia

MAPPING

Impact of technology on the future of civic engagement and advocacy

ENGAGE

Skills transfer on strategic communications and/or legal support

COLLABORATE

Collective evidence base and virtual coalition-building on specific threats for civil society

LONG-TERM

MAPPING

Impact of technology on the future of civic engagement and advocacy

ENGAGE

Focused engagement of youth and "Generation C" to discuss the future of digital rights

PR FIRM

Supporting strategic communications for digital rights

SUPPORT

Driving visibility for investigative independent media

Sign up here

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