More highlights from day 4

Tech Giants and Accountability for Violence in Asia

This session focused on sharing strategies to enable stronger corporate accountability for abuse propagated on tech and social media platforms. Facilitators from Media Matters for Democracy (MMfD) in Pakistan began by discussing how, apart from a few instances of genocidal violence in Myanmar and India, tech platforms remain unresponsive to issues across Asia like incel groups, data breaches and online violence. Beyond accountability, MMfD also hoped to explore ideas for potential collaborators and creating media attention. One participant made the point that tech whistleblowers have so far been Western people and media attention has responded accordingly. Recent revelations have also shown how platforms like Facebook put profits before hate speech and misinformation. One person pointed out how pursuing regulations almost always ends up with over-regulation and a power grab by governments, while another participant said Asian governments are often happy to use hate speech online and so are not invested in changing the status quo.

Some suggestions for MMfD included pitching evocative human stories rather than just issue analyses to the media, and to first build momentum with allied media rather than mainstream media. One participant expressed pessimism about how much media coverage can create change, and it might be better to not be so antagonistic and instead engage more directly with Big Tech. Other suggestions were to engage tech employees to turn whistleblowers, explore consumer rights movements as well as take pointers from the rich history of movements globally that have held corporates in other industries accountable, such as mining and chemicals. The group also suggested various potential collaborators and partners like Digital Empowerment Foundation, Point of View, SPACE, Privacy International, MIDO, 7amleh, SMEX, Stop Hate for Profit, Ranking Digital Rights and the Global Network Initiative (GNI). The session ended with the question of whether APC should also consider joining the GNI.

The gap between civil society and technologists

This session, organised by APC member in Taiwan Open Culture Foundation (OCF), addressed the challenges emerging from the lack of a common language between civil society and technologists, as most individuals and organisations still have a hard time to adopt digital tools, initiate digital projects or communicate with technologists.

It was raised that technologists very often explain things with too much detail and it becomes very complicated for civil society organisations to understand, when they just want to know how to use the technology and how their problems can be solved through it. There was emphasis placed on the fact that both sides need to learn how to communicate with each other better. Some ways of helping in this communication that were mentioned are hackathons, which can be a creative space where these two groups could meet, and adopting storytelling methodologies as an important tool to explain technology to civil society groups.

Other important related points were raised, such as the need to rethink what it means to be a "technologist" today, and what the real balance is between developing and using technology.

As the next steps identified to help people be less afraid of technology and build confidence among CSOs to be more familiar with technology, there was a proposal for collaboration between APC members: to develop a workshop to train technologists on how to communicate with CSOs.

OpenStreetMap and Open Environmental Data

SPACE used this session to explain what OpenStreetMap is, how citizens can input data into it, and why it's important to build this public and open database. Such open maps in Europe have already reached a stage where they can challenge Google Maps, but are lagging behind in user and government uptake in developing countries. Discussion included how apps like OsmAnd and Organic Maps build on OpenStreetMap data to give alternatives to users. Even Amazon and Facebook have decided to invest resources into OpenStreetMap to try to diminish Google's monopoly in this area. SPACE then explained how they leverage OpenStreetMap for environmental resilience in Kerala, India in response to floods and landslides, for which they were able to scale up their mapping of streams and water bodies by using open data from the US government's Digital Elevation Models (DEM). They've also seen how some European data sets can be deployed to enrich Indian data for landslide susceptibility maps. The discussion ended with the conclusion that there is already a lot of open data in the world that we are not liberating and using, and North-South partnerships could play a big role here.

Social media companies' content moderation policies especially in cases of occupation and conflicts and how they are playing against vulnerable groups

The session "Social media companies' content moderation policies", facilitated by 7amleh, took us through the experience of defending Palestinian rights and how the reality of occupation on the ground is being replicated in online spaces, with more and more surveillance and aggressive control of social media. Among the strategies used are denial of access to technology to Palestinians (online borders are controlled by Israel, in the same way as physical spaces), massive surveillance, policies and practices designed to silence human rights defenders, development of coordinated disinformation campaigns to censor, suppress and harass human rights defenders, and increasing pressure on companies regarding content moderation.

COVID-19 has escalated the situation, giving more legitimacy to the surveillance industry, 7amleh stressed. "Through geolocation by the Israeli secret service, Israelis diagnosed with COVID-19 were spied on and traced, and surveillance became more legitimised." The pandemic also served as the perfect excuse for more movement restrictions and access to more data from Palestinians. "We live in this dystopia where you're being watched in every way, from every angle. Palestinians are in a way a laboratory for Israel to test their surveillance technology, which then spreads to the rest of the world," they said.

On social media platforms, expansion of the definition of "terrorist organisation" is being used to criminalise human rights defenders, expansion of the definition of "anti-semitism" is being used to

suppress Palestinian voices on social media, and high levels of hate speech against Palestinians are allowed, as documented in the publication "Silenced Net: The Chilling Effect among Palestinian Youth in Social Media".

To counter these injustices, "mainstream media coverage helps a lot, as it puts pressure on the occupation," 7amleh stressed. "Big international global coalitions are also helpful. Your demands are looked at differently when you are part of an international coalition." The session ended with an acknowledgment that what Palestinians face is not only a local issue, but shows us the global trends in terms of surveillance and suppression of expression and dissent. From APC, we're committed to continue using the network's potential to address these threats.

What is meaningful access and digital appropriation? Lessons learned from the context of rural South Africa, and the partnership between Zenzeleni Community Networks and Computer Aid international

This session took a look at how a community network and a Solar Learning Lab can support each other in creating sustainable and meaningful access. Zenzeleni Community Networks and Computer Aid International partnered on an APC member grant to deploy a Solar Learning Lab in Mankosi in rural Eastern Cape province, one of the most under-serviced areas in South Africa. Computer Aid's Solar Learning Labs are built from shipping containers powered by solar energy, and they partner with the private sector, especially Dell Technologies, to provide learning and skills training for underserved children and adults. Zenzeleni works in an area with little transport, water and electricity, 93% unemployment, where 90% people have not completed basic education and most live on USD 1 per day. Before community networks, they spent up to 25% of their income on telecommunication needs.

After setting up in Mankosi, they found that the main problem was lack of devices or knowledge to really use ICTs. This APC project allowed them to think deeply about applied ICTs, especially how to link community priorities with the value of internet access and ICTs – ensuring such spaces reflect people's indigenous languages and values, promoting environmental sustainability where there is no waste management, protocols for dealing with youth and elders, etc. To do this, they developed a systematic and detailed manual to operate the Lab for future deployments. The contexts may be different elsewhere, but the concerns are often the same for local context, languages, etc.

The Lab has been operational for a few months now and offers a broad range of services. They had to introduce people to a formalised way of working and the services were typical internet cafe services such as printing, selling stationary, charging devices, navigation support, how to write CVs, etc. The two-week plan to train local staff took 4.5 months, but they are now proud of their roles and have stepped up in a remarkable way. One trainer has done basic digital literacy, another is doing introduction to business, and another on social media marketing. Amid a dysfunctional school system, they've created a safe and curious space for kids to learn, and since then the teachers have come to ask for training – it took the kids to lead the way. Bringing the lab to this area has meant a whole new world has opened up: initially it was curiosity, but in six months people will see it as a basic need.

Pandemic as a vector for surveillance and other abuses

The session "Pandemic as a vector for surveillance and other abuses", facilitated by Philippines-based organisation Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA), took us through a diversity of experiences on how governments responded to the pandemic and their use of technology in the face of the crisis. Participants were encouraged to share experiences from their own countries – South Korea, Pakistan, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, South Africa and Uganda – to draw on collective knowledge.

The main resource around which the session revolved was FMA's publication "Pandemic as vector for state surveillance and other abuses." The research shows that the Phillippine government took advantage of the pandemic crisis to subject citizens to surveillance, leading to serious human rights violations, including harassment of the media and suppression of dissent. There were violations of transparency, proportionality, data quality, security and accountability.

The case of South Korea was also presented. From the beginning of the pandemic, the media have pointed to this country as an example of responding to COVID-19 successfully, comparing it with the response of China, which imposed a lockdown in Wuhan. But is South Korea really a good example, from a human rights perspective? Jinbonet's publication "COVID-19 and the right to privacy" offers an analysis of whether the collection of personal information and the use of surveillance technology really worked in responding to COVID-19, whether there were other larger factors that influenced the success of quarantine, and whether it is possible to improve the Korean model in a less invasive way. Human rights organisations in South Korea have demanded that the collection of data be limited to the minimum possible, and there are still discussions happening on how to review responses to infectious diseases from a human rights perspective.

Militarisation as a framework to address the pandemic was also discussed, "the virus as a war enemy that requires citizens to be soldiers and exceptional measures to be validated." "In Europe, we've sensed a strange conflation of anti-surveillance, anti-EU, anti-vaccination, and rather right-wing and populist streams. So one can have a particular opinion about surveillance issues, but then you find yourself on the same boat with people whom you actually consider quite dangerous to freedom/democracy in number of ways," other participants shared. There was an agreement that, two years into the pandemic, we need to continue reflecting on what are the least intrusive ways to respond to the pandemic and look for the right balance, keeping human rights concerns in mind.

Affordable Connectivity for Community Networks

In this session organised by the Fantsuam Foundation, participants learned more about the many challenges that communities are facing to achieve affordable connectivity in Nigeria, where a large part of the population lives in rural areas and faces numerous barriers to access the country's ICT space. By knowing more about the national context and the obstacles, the participants also discussed some opportunities and tools that could be mobilised in the efforts towards building an enabling environment for the emergence and growth of community networks .

CITAD mentioned an ongoing project being done with the Local Networks initiative in Nigeria and four other countries, in which national school processes around community networks are being built involving different stakeholders. Affordable access to backhaul emerged as one of the more pressing needs in the country in this process, highlighted CITAD. In response, they have been engaged with the Nigerian Communications Commission, the national telecom regulator, and Galaxy Backbone, a private fibre provider, hoping to build a relationship that can lead to concrete positive measures. A national school on community networks in the country will take place in December involving seven local organisations.

During the session, Steve Song gave an informative live demo about how to identify an upstream provider in Nigeria, using an open-source mapping tool called QGIS. In the demonstration, we learned that access to fibre is key to affordable connectivity, since it offers more capacity and lower prices. In addition, the location of the fibre points of presence, the local access points that allow users to connect, are essential for planning, considering the challenges that both the distance and the local geography will pose to bridging a local community network with them. Finally, we saw how visualisation through maps could be a powerful advocacy tool, since you can cross the location of the existing fibre infrastructure with other data, e.g. the population density, or the presence of schools and health facilities. The country's transparency in terms of guaranteeing access to information on the fibre infrastructure, however, is crucial.

Collabora - experience with advanced online editors

APC member Pangea organised this pop-up session to discuss experiences in using the Collabora online editor, an open source NextCloud-based online editor which has similar features as Google Docs.

Marginalised and Unconnected

The Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) brought us on a journey to know more about their work in India through storytelling, beautiful pictures and films during this session. Those who joined could see how a van has been providing connectivity and digital services for marginalised communities while fostering local entrepreneurship. We also heard how connectivity became even more important in face of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the periods of lockdown, the van became an alternative for people to access information about the government entitlements in place, e-health services, and reliable information about vaccination, the use of masks and social isolation measures, among others.

As a result of their efforts on the documentation and communication side, DEF also shared a lot of films and resources available for those interested in finding out more. Check out some of them:

- Newsletter on a women entrepreneurship model that DEF has created
- The story of Barefoot Wireless Engineers
- Last Mile Connectivity film
- Internet on Wheels film

- Wireless for Unconnected film
- Connecting the Unconnected through Barefoot Wireless Engineers film

Global Platforms, Algorithms and Slave Labour on the Job

This session began with a look back at the beginning of the so-called platform or gig economy, which was initially introduced with “rosy” promises of greater flexibility, being your own boss and being able to work when you want. But gig workers soon learned that this flexibility came at the cost of a stable income. Moreover, when workers are self-employed contractors, employers are no longer paying into any sort of social security systems. Workers are completely on their own, with no health insurance, social security coverage, or workers’ compensation in case of injury.

The panellists also touched on the increased tech-enabled violations of workers’ rights that have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. One example is the use of surveillance technology by employers of contract workers to track their productivity, whether through the measurement of keystrokes or forcing workers to keep their webcams on while working at home, which has additionally meant a total violation of workers’ private lives – a veritable “Big Brother situation”, as one panellist described it. There are no rules or regulations for the use of these technologies, which has tripled during the pandemic, one of the speakers noted.

A more recent phenomenon that has even further eroded the quality of employment is that of global platforms for freelance work like Upwork, which has 10 million workers around the world. “With the right rules and regulations, it could be wonderful,” one panellist commented, as it could provide workers in countries like India or Thailand with design work, for example, at a decent wage. Because these platforms are totally unregulated, however, what has resulted instead is “a race to the bottom in terms of pay,” pitting workers of the world against each other. Moreover, since labour laws are national, while these platforms work globally, they are completely unregulated. In addition to the total lack of any sort of social security contributions by employers, there are even cases where workers are not paid for the work they have done, and they have no recourse to remedy the situation. “Global capital is using global tech for exploitation at a global level,” as one panellist succinctly summed it up.

What is the solution? One of the key needs is to educate workers so that they are aware of the pitfalls of the gig economy, and also aware of their rights, so that they can fight for them. “If workers can create their own cooperative platform that is competitive, that would be the best solution,” one of the panellists noted – although competing with powerful global platforms is a formidable challenge.

Regulation and technologies: Thinking about policies based on gender, race/ethnicity and territory

This session became a vivid discussion proposed by Intervozes through three crucial questions: 1) How to expand internet access and the use of ICTs, and respect local/regional contexts and traditional territories and peoples at the same time? 2) How to think about internet governance from an intersectional perspective, considering gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality and territory? 3) How to reframe the debate on the democratic, free and open internet and introduce new questions

about technologies, who develops them, and how can they contribute to social and environmental justice?

By sharing their experience in initiatives with social movements, rural women and traditional communities, Intervozes representatives Tâmara Terso and Iara Moura invited the participants to share their own experiences and reflections around the challenges of building internet policies and governance considering the relations between ICTs and traditional/ancestral technologies and the socio-environmental justice, anti-racist and self-determination agenda. It also led to an insightful conversation with other organisations with a lot of experience on the ground, such as Colnodo and the Nupef Institute, around the conflicts embedded in promoting internet access in some territories. Also, on the many struggles needed to make women's, Indigenous, quilombola and other necessary voices heard in international spaces of internet governance discussion, such as the IGF.

The session was an invitation to decolonise our thinking and practices to imagine and build changes towards an internet that is feminist, anti-racist and committed to socio-environmental justice – also to "unbuild" the existing discriminatory technologies and models in place. At the end of the session, Olívia Bandeira from Intervozes shared a systematisation of the discussions, pointing to the APC network as a powerful space to imagine a different internet governance together.

Go back to read the rest of the Dish of the Day!

Revision #9
Created 18 November 2021 20:12:29 by Flavia
Updated 19 November 2021 00:08:16 by Flavia