More highlights from Day 5

Feminist Movement Building for Progressive Tech in Africa

This session built upon Uganda-based organisation Pollicy's work on Afrofeminist Data Futures to identify challenges, opportunities and avenues for collaboration in building a feminist movement for progressive technology across Africa. "We are particularly interested in bringing together African feminist researchers, academics, civil society, communities and governments to promote a technology discourse that prioritises the needs of African women and is built upon the Feminist Principles of the Internet," Neema from Pollicy stressed, before sharing data from the organisation's feminist research reports. Feminist data was framed as "grounded in principles of consent, understanding how power works and awareness that people you collect data from are the ones who know about their own realities."

A rich and lively conversation opened around what it means to collect and analyse data with quality and integrity. "Data can guide what we know and how we operate, it is the basis of knowledge. However, data collection is often done in a very dehumanising way, with no regard for ethics and in a way that re-traumatises respondents," participants said. "We find that basic population estimates often do not exist for LGBTQIA+ persons or forced migrants, allowing governments to deny their very existence. Data collected on marginalised groups makes them visible and puts forth a case to provide for their needs," another one added.

In this context, how do we rebuild trust? "Time and pace matter, so it is more about building process than one-time-off events. Podcasts and short recordings that are distributed and available along time are entry point offers for engagement," a participant said. The need to approach trust as suspending judgment of each other, rather than restoring trust in monopoly infrastructure, was also raised. Another key issue raised was the need to accompany women in shared learning spaces. The African School on Internet Governance was presented as an example of women learning about internet governance, with over 50% of participants being African women. "We are very intentional about selection, about having women there, and also about assuring there is feminist content," APC's Executive Director Chat Garcia Ramilo said.

Online Gender-Based Violence in Uganda

In this session, Uganda-based WOUGNET presented their work to counter online gender-based violence, an issue that increased during the pandemic.

The organisation has run several campaigns, including one with Take Back the Tech! which included creating an animated book on "Understanding online gender-based violence", the forms it takes, who is the target, who is vulnerable, how this violence can be handled or reported, and the legal frameworks for these types of violence in Uganda. For campaigning they found social media,

including Twitter, useful, with hashtags such as #StopOnlineGBVUG #AskForConsent and #FreeToBeOnline, but to try to reach as many people as possible, WOUGNET also used radio – a key medium in Uganda – and local languages.

A challenge raised was that people don't usually know what this violence is, including perpetrators. "We often find that perpetrators are so embedded in traditions that they are not able to see how they contribute to violence, so awareness on this is also key." Another campaign, under the motto "Ask for Consent", was shared as an example of an initiative to respond to this and show that online violence is real violence, with voices such as Judith Heard sharing her experience.

Protecting female journalists from online harassment was also raised as crucial. "Legislation on freedom of expression in digital spaces should be improved, including tackling of online harassment." Journalists working with WOUGNET shared their stories and broke down describing harassment they face on a daily basis, including public shaming, cyberstalking, doxxing and trolling. This has led many to withdraw from these spaces, even though their voices are needed there to represent issues from their communities. The issue of mental health was also mentioned as a big issue. "Unfortunately, most journalists are not concerned about this," a journalist commented. "In the newsroom you learn to be as tough as nails because sexual harassment is real. Some women journalists have left because of the challenges they experience."

In the absence of more mainstream media coverage, participants raised how important the role of online content producers is in the production of content. "They have stepped in to fill in the gap that mainstream media is not filling in."

Advancing privacy and data security: Experiences from APC members in the global South

This session, led by APC members TEDIC from Paraguay and Unwanted Witness from Uganda, addressed the issue of the right to privacy in the age of data exploitation, by presenting the cases of legislation in Paraguay and Uganda.

Both cases were introduced as a past-future exercise, as in the case of Uganda the country already has a law on data protection in place, while in Paraguay several actors are in the process of advocating for one since last May. The presenters offered a space for sharing experiences and lessons from different privacy and data protection advocates, including success stories, challenges, and ways forward.

Some of the challenges experienced so far in the process mentioned by Eduardo Carrillo from TEDIC pointed to the fact that laws acquire a life of their own in the legislative debate, which can result in quite a different output and also that the results can potentially be weaponised in some way. Additionally, ensuring an independent authority suited to address data protection in the light of global South contexts is a major challenge. In spite of these challenges, the collaborative effort carried out so far showed allies in Congress that this bill was collectively built.

In the case of Uganda, Dorothy Mukasa explained that although they do have a national data protection law, the current challenge is its full enforcement, which is the case for several other countries in Africa. There are budgetary excuses to deny data protection authorities their independence, as well as laws with many exceptions regarding national security and collection of data, which gives more room for abuse.

There was agreement that the role of civil society in this context is crucial, particularly in terms of the accountability of data protection institutions and in using data protection standards as a way to measure effectiveness and enforcement of the law. Having public institutions backing up civil society advocates was also mentioned as a key factor to support the advocacy efforts.

The members and staff participating highlighted the importance and urgency of building bridges between countries in the global South around data protection and privacy as a way to share knowledge and to rely on specialised coalitions that can intervene in a timely way to counter rights violations taking place in these countries, which many times seem to be the norm.

“We don't just need a human rights-based approach but an intersectional global South one, too,” was one of the main conclusions of this session.

PARTY!

After getting in the celebration mood with the Best Futures Awards, we arrived at our final moment together in this journey and in the best way possible: the party! This was a moment of celebration for being together and a space for conversation, music, dancing and a special performance by Runa Jazz.

Before being amazed by Runa Jazz, we were able to enjoy a live singing presentation by Pavel from BlueLink, who made Elvis Presley proud and led the Happy Birthday chorus for our dear Valeria Betancourt from the APC team. From the roots of the Andes, Runa Jazz gave us the opportunity to listen to traditional instruments and enjoy amazing pieces of music, combining Afro-Kichwa ancestral melodies with contemporary harmonies such as jazz. Their rich mixture of the musical traditions of Ecuador, Latin America and the world created a unique moment to celebrate the diversity of the APC network together.

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