

IGF 2017 Panel Discussion Report

- Session Title: What digital future for vulnerable people?
- Date: 18 December 2017
- Time: 09:00 – 10:30
- Session Organizer(s): Dr Enrico Calandro and Anri van der Spuy
- Chair/Moderator: Dr Enrico Calandro
- Rapporteur/Note-taker: Yolanda Mlonzi

- List of Speakers and their institutional affiliations:

1. Chenai Chair, Research ICT Africa
2. Dr Wakabi Wairagala, CIPESA
3. Alexandrine Pirlot de Corbion, Privacy International
4. Elonnai Hickok, Centre for Internet and Society
5. Jorge Vargas, Wikimedia foundation
6. Yatanar Htun, Myanmar ICT Development Organisation
7. Ursula Wynhoven, International Telecommunications Union

- Key Issues raised (1 sentence per issue):

- Digital rights advocacy in Africa is difficult because there is no evidence to back claims;
- The consistent failing of ICT policies in Africa which seek to connect the unconnected is caused by the lack of holistic approach when trying to connect marginalised communities;
- Stronger efforts must be put in raising public awareness on what digital rights are and why people should care about these rights;
- Special attention must be given to the type language used when advocating & raising awareness for digital rights, for example privacy can mean different things to different people
- Organisations that host online communities, like Wikimedia Foundation, should continue placing their communities needs first by ensuring safety and privacy as this is critical to the development of such communities;
- Companies that operate in the environment should be transparent about their data retention policies and be clear on what this means for users;
- As the internet continues to evolve and more people get online, there will be a need for partnerships between all stakeholders to drive digital rights advocacy;
- Gender imbalance in the use of ICTs and the internet continues to exist because women in marginalised communities are mostly illiterate, the majority of them do not own mobile phones and fear harassment online;
- Governments and businesses need to be more transparent about protecting users privacy and personal data protection, lack of transparency further exacerbates the digital rights divide;
- The ITU expressed an interest in the digital rights lens when it comes bridging the digital divide and the gender divide, however shared that it is difficult to fully engage in the digital rights dialogue due to the lack of research data and evidence;
- In advocating for and establishing digital rights frameworks, learning for the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (EU GDPR) law would be a reference for Africa.

- If there were presentations during the session, please provide a 1-paragraph summary for each presentation:

Ms. Chenai Chair from Research ICT Africa presented a teaser of RIA's research which focused on the digital rights divide in Africa. The report highlighted the following:

- Most internet usage in Africa takes place in urban areas than in rural areas.
- More men use the internet than women.
- More men than women report experiences of bullying and display of unwanted content online.
- Understanding of digital rights in Africa is still in its infant stages, where many do not know they have rights online or in cases where there is some understanding of digital rights, the topic receives less attention than pressing issues such as access and affordability.
- Privacy concerns online were not a hindrance to use the internet, however self-censorship was a dominant theme among those who participated in the study.
- Participants of the study revealed that while they use the internet to discuss issues that they find interesting, they prefer to do so in closed and private groups rather than public platforms.

The research is ongoing and Research ICT Africa hopes to understand how ordinary internet users define digital rights as this might be very different from the legal perspective.

- Please describe the Discussions that took place during the workshop session (3 paragraphs):

Dr. Wakabi Wairagala of CIPESA welcomed Research ICT Africa's research, stating that digital rights advocacy is difficult if there is no evidence to back it up. He shared that it is important to identify emerging issues and nuances with regards to digital rights in Africa. He unpacked the consistent failing of ICT policies which seek to connect the unconnected and bridge the gender divide. Recommending that the research by RIA should be infused with policy in order to give a wholesome view and in doing so, influence the approach policies should be implemented and measured.

Ms. Alexandrine Pirlot de Corbion from Privacy International emphasized that when it comes to digital rights, especially privacy and data protection, there is a need to raise public awareness so that people understand these issues and are able to hold organisations accountable. According to her, people are concerned about privacy but are not sure how to address their concerns and with whom. Lack of transparency from government and business further exacerbates the digital rights divide. She argued that actors involved in the digital rights space need to work in a preventative way by tackling issues before they become serious harms to human rights online. According to her, GDPR as a model would be a good reference point for Africa to build its data protection policies.

Elonnai Hickok from the Centre for Internet and Society recommended that education and the type of language used in advocating for digital rights is important since issues like privacy can mean different things to different people.

Jorge Vargas from Wikimedia foundation shared that his organization prides itself in being a platform that facilitates open knowledge sharing. Ensuring that its contributors and audiences feel safe online is a priority for the organization. He believed that preserving anonymity for the Wikipedia community is crucial in ensuring that the community grows and thrives. As a result, Wikimedia privacy policy and practices call for minimal data retention and no sign up or sharing of personal information is required. As the internet grows and digital rights evolve there will be a need to build strong partnerships to foster broad and inclusive initiatives to uphold digital rights.

Yatanar Htun from Myanmar ICT Development Organisation shared that even though women in Myanmar are matriarchs they are still at the tail end of having access to ICTs and using the internet. This was due to the following:

- Low levels of education
- Most are not owners of mobile phones, therefore they use their husband's/partner's phones
- Online harassment making them feel confined and restricted online
- Online space not safe nor friendly for women, therefore they need to sign in as males.
- Fears of being ridiculed online through photoshopping of nudes

Lastly, Ursula Wynhoven from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) contributed to the panel by emphasising that conversations like these are important. The biggest challenge for the ITU to engage digital rights work is due to the lack of research data and indicators available in this field. The core mission for the ITU is to bring people online, and there is a strong effort to address the gender divide, with 250 million less women online. While the online space does pose a threat to rights, she also said we must not overlook the opportunities that ICTs and the internet provide in addressing some of these challenges, e.g. women empowerment online. The ITU is interested in multistakeholder approaches in dealing with issues of access and would like to do the same with digital rights.

- Please describe any Participant suggestions regarding the way forward/ potential next steps /key takeaways (3 paragraphs):

Participants in the room made the following suggestions:

- There is a need of representation from the following groups in the research that Research ICT Africa is conducting:
 - People with disabilities
 - People working in the agriculture sector
 - LGBTQ communities
- We should map out best practises of digital rights outreach activities. In response to this suggestion, panellists offered examples:
 - Ranking Digital project – good at assessing private companies
 - CIPESA currently worked on a report highlighting good practises in SADC regions. The paper was presented at the African Union and are hoping for an endorsement by OAU.

Gender Reporting

- Estimate the overall number of the participants present at the session: 24

- Estimate the overall number of women present at the session: 80%

- To what extent did the session discuss gender equality and/or women's empowerment?

A: To a large extent as reflected on the report

- If the session addressed issues related to gender equality and/or women's empowerment, please provide a brief summary of the discussion:

A: Please refer to the above report.