



YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON TECHNOLOGY FOR DEMOCRACY



INSIGHTS FROM AN ONLINE YOUTH CONSULTATION

November - December 2021

ACTIVITIES IN NUMBERS

4 WEEKS ONLINE CONSULTATION



98

PEOPLE AS MEMBERS OF THE
ONLINE GROUP ON TECHNOLOGY
FOR DEMOCRACY

39

INSIGHTFUL ENTRIES AS PART
OF THE E-DISCUSSION BY
PARTICIPANTS FROM 17
DIFFERENT COUNTRIES



6 YOUNG MODERATORS FROM
ACROSS REGIONS.
YOUNG PEOPLE FROM THE
GLOBAL SOUTH AS MAJOR
CONTRIBUTORS

THEMATIC AREAS EXPLORED:
DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT,
DIGITAL INCLUSION,
DIGITAL FREEDOM,
MULTISTAKEHOLDER PROCESSES,
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT.



BACKGROUND

Digital technologies provide opportunities for participation, accountability and transparency and are transforming economies and societies around the world. There is a pressing need to explore how technology can contribute to make democratic governance more resonant and relevant for people.

Digital spaces can expand avenues for youth participation in democratic processes and dialogues with decision-makers, and digital technologies can support civic activism. At the same time, persistent digital divides are excluding parts of the global population and many young people experience threats when engaging in online spaces.

Young people's innovative ideas and bold action is needed in supporting democratic practices and fostering inclusive societies. It is against this background that the youth consultation on technology for democracy was hosted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) between 15 November and 12 December 2021. The youth consultation set out to generate new, youth-led ideas and identify tangible solutions on how digital technologies can support democratic practice. It identified and consolidated input from youth, bringing the insights to the Technology for Democracy Initiative, including as input to research and programming, where it will be used as input to a multi-stakeholder push for protecting and promoting democracy and human rights and raising commitments to strengthening digital democracy.



Tech for Democracy

The consultation was moderated by young people that also identified the guiding questions for the consultation and reviewed the present insights paper. The online youth consultation is hosted on [SparkBlue](#) by UNDP's [Communities of Practice on Governance for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies](#) and through the [UNDP Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace](#) in context of UNDP's contribution to the [Technology for Democracy Initiative led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark](#).

MODERATORS

Mr. [Yurii Romashko](#), Institute of Analysis and Advocacy, Ukraine

Ms. [Farida Nabourema](#), Togolese Civil League, Togo

Ms. Lei Motilla, [AI4Gov](#), Philippines

Mr. Syed Ommer Amer, [Daastan](#), Pakistan

Ms. Pamela Cazar, Yo si puedo & [DreamLab Quito](#), Ecuador

Ms. Sophia El Bahja, [NoBox Lab](#) and Tafanoun, Morocco

HIGHLIGHTS

The consultation on technology for democracy provided a space for young people to exchange, connect, and spark ideas within two overall thematic areas. The following presents highlights from the consultation under each of the thematic areas.

- The use of digital technologies in order to enhance democratic institutions, processes and practice, including through support to participatory democratic mechanisms and citizen engagement in formal governance processes.

For technologies to work for human rights and democracy, participatory and inclusive processes are key, especially in algorithmic design and implementation of technology that influence the day-to-day lives of citizens. Furthermore, there is a need for norms and legislation to regulate digital platforms, to establish codes of conduct for tech companies, and to strengthen policies that promote intellectual property rights, especially from the global south.

Technology can help increase accessibility of information. However, it is critical for access to technology to be equal and equitable in order to leave no one behind. A participant suggested to establish a United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of internet and access to information.

Safety is a key concern in regard to the use of technology. Women are prone to experience abuse and threats when engaging in the digital sphere, and technologies can be used to track journalists, activists, and human rights defenders.

Digital technologies can support civic engagement by promoting social movements and messages of tolerance. As for elections, technologies can enhance voter outreach and education. However, there is a need to foster norms regarding digital voting and integrity.

There are barriers to digital freedom such as the persisting divide in access online, low levels of literacy, threats including gender-based violence, surveillance, cybercrime, misuse of biometric data, and a discriminatory and biased nature of algorithms. At the core of digital technologies should be privacy and protection of personal data, inclusiveness, justice, transparency, and accountability.

The agendas, stakeholders, and understandings of democracy and technologies varies between countries, presenting a need for context-specific efforts towards making technology work for democracy and human rights. At the same time, there are similarities between different societies such as the need to overcome the digital divide.

“TECHNOLOGY FOR DEMOCRACY IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE WE'RE IN A CONSTANT STRUGGLE TO CLAIM OUR SPACE AS CITIZENS IN INFLUENCING PUBLIC POLICIES AND SERVICES THAT SHAPE OUR DAY-TO-DAY LIVES. AS YOUNG DIGITAL NATIVES, WE HAVE FRESH EYES AND CREATIVE MINDS TO LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY IN AMPLIFYING VOICES, DEMANDING ACCOUNTABILITY FROM DUTY BEARERS, AND CONTINUOUSLY BRIDGING DIVIDES IN SOCIETY.”

Lei Motilla, co-moderator
of the consultation, 2021.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Opportunities and challenges for youth engagement towards strengthening democratic norms in the digital era.

Young people recommended a combination of online and offline approaches to youth empowerment in context of challenges posed by the digital divide and in order to leave no youth behind.

Online channels can amplify youth voices on governance and peacebuilding, but the effectiveness of online engagement depends upon the specific situation and institution. In the digital sphere, young people still need to proactively claim their space.

Among the challenges identified by the young participants were young people's limited influence on the development of technologies and the lack of norms relating to their use. Furthermore, often, it is not safe for young people to hold decision-makers accountable and to use technology for democracy, and some young people experience threats following their engagement in the digital sphere, which can have violent consequences. The lack of training and education on using technology was highlighted as a challenge for young people to strengthen democratic norms in the digital era.

Young participants emphasized an opportunity for the United Nations to strengthen youth engagement in processes relating to technology as a way of supporting inclusive and participatory governance. It was suggested to establish youth engagement mechanisms that are integrated and build on established initiatives and mechanisms.

YOUTH INITIATIVES

- Institute of Analysis and Advocacy is a think tank promoting accountability and transparency in public finance and various public services (e.g. public health) in Ukraine through the use of analytics, digitalization, and advocacy.
- Farida Nabourema from the Togolese Civil League uses technology and online spaces to hold accountable leaders, mobilize citizens and raise awareness of democratic norms and human rights.
- DreamLab Quito in Ecuador has been developed by young people for young people to strengthen community resilience and promote opportunities for development, peaceful coexistence and solidarity.
- AI4GOV is a youth-led start-up in the Philippines building participatory civic and govtech solutions with analytics, machine learning, and community organizing to improve public services and promote co-creation in local development.
- As a social enterprise based in Pakistan, Daastan leverages technology to bring accountability and transparency in the book publishing industry seeking to 'put a book in every hand'.
- NoBox Lab in Morocco aims to unleash the full potential of young people and children by supporting life skills, providing a platform for youth to raise their voice, and facilitating a social innovation lab.

YOUTH INSIGHTS

DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What are your experiences in expressing your needs and aspirations to local institutions in the digital sphere and through online channels?
2. How do you claim a space in decision-making processes in the digital sphere?
3. How do you use technology to hold accountable decision-makers for advocating for peaceful, just and inclusive societies?

KEY OPPORTUNITIES WERE EMPHASIZED:

- Technology can be used to provide a space for dialogue and coordination between young people and decision-makers, development partners and other stakeholders.
- Technology can be used to amplify youth voices, enhance mobilisation and advocacy efforts, support movements, promote voter outreach and education campaigns through online channels, and promote accountability.
- Twitter and social media handles can be used to connect with politicians and the police, but physical meetings and phone conversations can be more effective ways of communication with certain institutions.
- Young people expressed the importance of being proactive and seeking opportunity in order to claim a space to engage in politics and civic affairs.

KEY CHALLENGES WERE HIGHLIGHTED:

- Young people do not have sufficient influence on technological development and the development of education on technology and digitalization.
- Participation of youth in the digital sphere is limited to a segment of youth with access to technology, literacy, and network connectivity.
- As citizens, young people cannot always use technology to advance democracy and participate in politics, as they may face retaliation for pro-democratic activities.
- There is a need to increase youth participation in governmental programmes and community development including through online avenues.

KEY MESSAGES CAN BE DRAWN FROM THE CONSULTATION:

- Youth leadership around digital technology is important at the United Nations. For instance, the United Nations could establish a youth task force aimed at enabling youth engagement and youth influence upon processes relating to technologies, internet governance, innovation, and digital cooperation in context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Human Rights frameworks. Such a task force should be integrated with existing initiatives by ITU, UNIDO, WIPO, and the UN Interagency Network on Youth Development (UN IANYD), as well as connected to established processes such as the Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals and the Internet Governance Forum.
- There is a need to allocate resources to the promotion of knowledge and skills on new technology, information, human rights and civic engagement including in conflict-affected societies.

EXAMPLES OF INITIATIVES WERE RAISED:

ACCOUNTABILITY LAB seeks to improve democracy through accountability of the people in power. For example, the Integrity Icon initiative has the purpose of improving democracy through naming and faming of government officials instead of shaming people.

The Pakistan Citizens Portal is a mobile application, enabling citizens to file complaints and hold government entities accountable.

More Democracy, an NGO in Germany, is enhancing citizen access to participation in public discussions.

A youth-led initiative mobilized citizens through online groups in order to hold accountable leaders and defend democracy.



YOUTH INSIGHTS

DIGITAL INCLUSIVITY

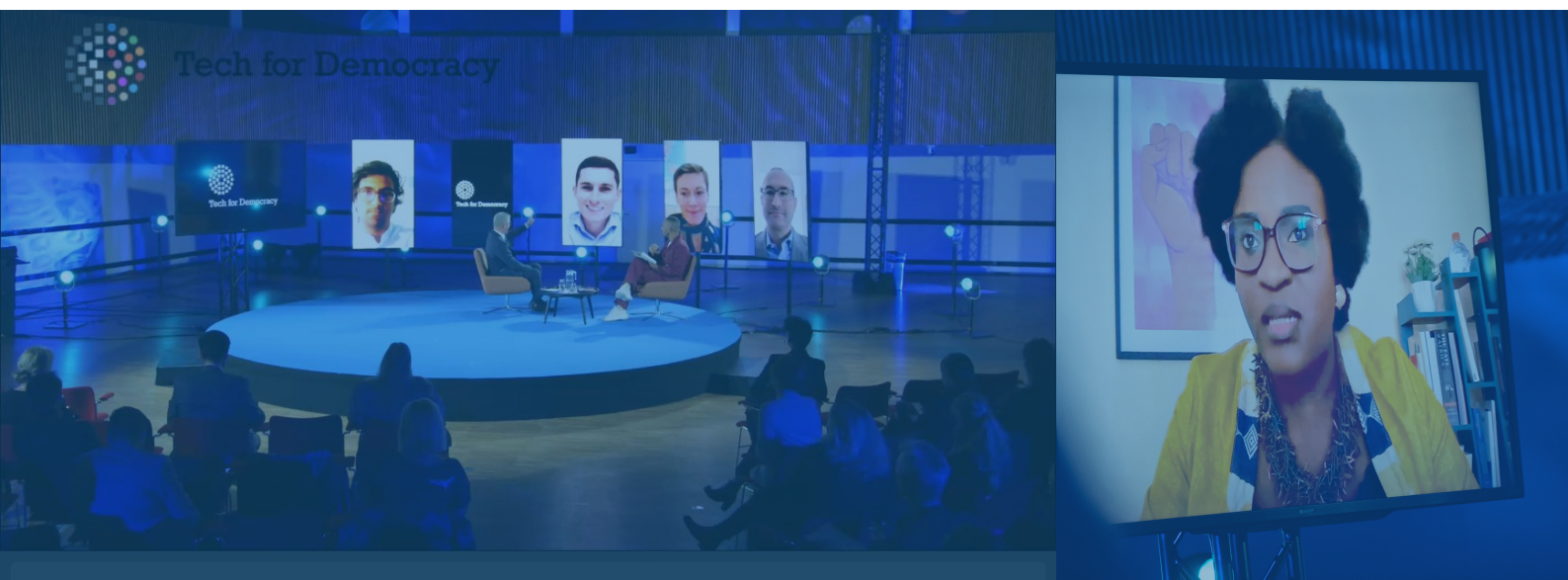
GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Think of a time when you were part of an online consultation/meeting/workshop, were there as many women as men? And do you think gender representation is different in the digital sphere compared to offline engagement?
2. How can technology help in tackling the digital divide and increase participation, in particular of those at risk of being left behind?

KEY OPPORTUNITIES WERE EMPHASIZED:

- Some young participants had observed that women may attend online meetings and events more often than physical meetings and reflected on how online engagement can overcome barriers to participation such as safety concerns and travel considerations. However, it was highlighted that it is critical to support women's meaningful participation and not only representation, because the latter may not tackle social and cultural norms relating to gender roles.
- Designing participatory workshops that fosters a space for dialogue for young people from vulnerable and marginalized groups to share the context of their own social realities, enable access to information, promote meaningful engagement, and increase the understanding of technology in the context of diverse social realities as a way to provide a more equitable support of young people in promoting democratic principles and practices.
- The provision of affordable technology access to young people and families in need can improve social wellbeing, promote economic growth, and provide incentives to use technology to raise more diverse voices in advancing democracy.

Tech for Democracy conference, the UN City in Copenhagen and virtually, 18 November 2021



KEY CHALLENGES WERE HIGHLIGHTED:

- Women face abuse in the digital space, which should be addressed and recognized as gender-based violence. Women activists and politicians face more abuse in the digital space than their male counterparts.
- Access to technology must be equal and equitable in order to support inclusive, participatory governance processes. It is critical to invest in access to technology in rural areas in order to bridge digital divides and provide all young people with an enabling environment for having a voice in the digital era.
- There is a need for increased awareness and education and skills in technology and digitalization. It is not always that technology benefits everyone and resources can be reserved for the few. Many rely on cell phones as the primary way of engaging online and in virtual meetings.

KEY MESSAGES CAN BE DRAWN FROM THE CONSULTATION:

- Considering the diversity of young people is essential when developing programmes to increase young people's access to technology and to reduce inequality and promote equity.
- The use of social media is not fully effective when used as a standalone approach to youth engagement because it risks leaving behind some young people. For instance, young people living in rural areas of developing countries or young people from marginalized groups in conflict-affected societies may experience challenges of limited connectivity. In some instances, radio programmes can be an effective tool to reach and engage youth.



YOUTH INSIGHTS

DIGITAL FREEDOM

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. In your opinion, what does a safe, gender-responsive and enabling digital space look like?
2. How freely can you use technology to contribute to transparency, enhance access to information, support content creation, counter misinformation and foster tolerance?
3. What are your priorities for making digital spaces safe for youth and addressing challenges of breach of privacy, surveillance and harassment?

KEY OPPORTUNITIES WERE EMPHASIZED:

- Technologies can be used to make information more easily and quickly accessible, to communicate messages of tolerance, and to counter fake news, reaching a different target audience.
- When the digital sphere is characterized by openness and transparency, there is an opportunity for young people to share their perspectives, needs, and aspirations.
- Investments in awareness raising among young people and in technology for democracy programmes for young people can increase democratic practice and foster more safe, digital spaces.
- Promote norms and enact laws that regulate how platforms deal with disinformation, harassment, racism, sexism, bullying, gender-based violence, and other forms of violence online.
- Implement code of conducts for tech companies in order to sanction the creation of technologies that are used to abuse human rights.
- Appoint a United Nations special rapporteur on freedom of internet and access to information.
- Foster democratic norms relating to digital voting and integrity in order to avoid excluding some people from democratic practices, intensifying consequences of the digital divide, and privacy concerns.

A safe, gender-responsive and enabling digital space

“... LOOKS LIKE A PLACE FREE FROM SEXUAL HARASSMENT, TOXIC MASCULINITY AND SOCIAL STATUS QUO ... A PLACE WITH MUTUAL RESPECT WHERE WE CAN ALL HELP TEACH EACH OTHER HOW TO GROW AND BEST DEVELOP TO OUR FULL CAPACITIES AND BEYOND”

participant in the youth consultation, 2021

A safe, gender-responsive and enabling digital space is

“A SPACE WITH HIGH LEVEL OF MODERATION TO REMOVE ABUSIVE TROLLS AND PREVENT FAKE OR ABUSIVE ACCOUNTS BEING CREATED. IT ALSO IS A SPACE THAT IS OPEN TO EVERYONE FROM ANY BACKGROUND AND EASY TO USE”

participant in the youth consultation, 2021

KEY CHALLENGES WERE HIGHLIGHTED:

- The implementation of policies towards the protection of intellectual property is lacking, which is important relating to ideas that emanate from the global south.
- Digital campaigns can be used to spread misinformation and foster divides, including during election periods and through political campaigns.
- Barriers to digital freedom include low levels of literacy, masculinity, threats, lack of diversity, breach of privacy, potential misuse of biometric data, and a biased and discriminatory nature of algorithms and data machine learning.
- Some practices and decisions – including by governments – counter human rights and democratic norms relating to digital surveillance, internet shutdown, and cybercrime laws.
- Technology can be misused to track journalists and human rights defenders, providing threats to their safety and freedom.

KEY MESSAGES CAN BE DRAWN FROM THE CONSULTATION:

- Enabling inclusive and participatory processes towards the development and use of technology can make these promote democratic practices relating to free and fair elections, freedom of speech and expression, human rights and rule of law, good governance, equality, transparency and accountability, freedom of assembly and association, and enhancement of access to information.
- At the core of digital technology should be privacy and personal data, inclusiveness, justice, transparency, and accountability.
- The United Nations have a key role to play in fostering democratic norms including by facilitating the formulation of policies and rules for the development of digital technology for the promotion of democracy and transparency in all countries and enable young people's participation in such conversations and processes.

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youth@undp.org
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