Increasing Inclusion in Data and Digital Rights Discussions

Moderator: Anastasia Kalinina, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Office, reState

Digital regulations are often set by one or a group of countries without taking into full account the effects on women and non-dominant populations. As the scientific community proceeds, we need to consider how to more actively engage these communities to ensure that measures take their needs into consideration. This panel session discussed the issues that need to be integrated into digital regulations and their implementation from a gender perspective. How can we work across stakeholder groups to pay attention to the gender gap, and the participation of women in the design and implementation of digital regulations? The panelists shared examples of how they are integrating groups in the design and development phase and working with non-dominant communities when shaping digital regulations at all levels.

The initial event on this topic took place as part of the event of the UN Science Summit Sessions on "Key Challenges and Objectives for Digital Cooperation, Governance and Regulation" (Link to recording). The 9th edition of the Science Summit around the 78th United Nations General Assembly (SSUNGA78) took place from 12-29 September 2023. The People Centered Internet (PCI) organized nine sessions in conjunction with the International Science Council from Sept 20-22 to discuss the future of digital in achieving the SDGs. The sessions took a people centered approach; this means to discuss how scientific and digital collaboration can only be advanced through human feedback loops. The People Centered Internet sessions explored the parameters of this approach focusing on specific use cases where this is needed to achieve the SDGs and discussing the recommended enabling policy, regulatory, and financial environments, that are required to support genuinely global scientific collaborations across continents, nations, and themes. Speakers from each panel summarized the most important results in a stocktaking (Link).

Speakers

- David A. Bray, Leader, World Economic Forum and World Keynoter, Fortune 500s UN SxSW

- Jane Coffin, Former Senior Vice President, Internet Growth at Internet Society

- Tara Denham, Civil Servant, Global Affairs Canada

- Anriette Esterhuysen, Senior Advisor Internet Governance, Policy Advocacy and Strategy, Association for Progressive Communications

- Neema Lugangiri, Member of Parliament, Tanzania

- Justina Mashiba, Chief Executive Officer, Universal Communications Service Access Fund

Summary of Increasing Inclusion in Data and Digital Rights Discussions

Prepared by Anastasia Kalinina, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Office, reState

reState Foundation Highlights Key Takeaways from UN General Assembly Science Summit Panel on Digital Rights and Inclusion

The 9th edition of the Science Summit around the 78th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA78) took take place from 12-29 September 2023. In collaboration with the People Centered Internet, reState Foundation has organized three sessions in conjunction with the International Science Council from Sept 20-22 to discuss the future of digital in achieving the SDGs. The sessions took a people centered approach; the discussions revolved around how scientific and digital collaboration can only be advanced through human feedback loops. The People Centered Internet sessions in collaboration with reState Foundation explored the parameters of this approach focusing on specific use cases where this is needed to achieve the SDGs and discussing the recommended enabling policy, regulatory, and financial environments that are required to support genuinely global scientific collaborations across continents, nations, and themes.

During a panel titled "Increasing Inclusion in Data and Digital Rights Discussions", the discussion revolved around the critical issue of digital regulations and their often unintended neglect of women and non-dominant populations. As the scientific community forges ahead, it's become imperative to actively involve these communities to ensure their unique needs are considered in policymaking.

Moderated by Anastasia Kalinina, Co-Founder and CEO of reState, the panel featured an esteemed lineup of speakers:

- Justina Mashiba, Chief Executive Officer of the Universal Communications Service Access Fund

- Neema Lugangiri, Member of Parliament from Tanzania

- Dr. David A. Bray, a leader at the World Economic Forum and a prominent voice at Fortune 500s and UN events

- Tara Denham, a Civil Servant at Global Affairs Canada

- Anriette Esterhuysen, Senior Advisor on Internet Governance, Policy Advocacy, and Strategy at the Association for Progressive Communications

- Jane Coffin, former Senior Vice President of Internet Growth at the Internet Society

Justina Mashiba kicked off the discussion by shedding light on Tanzania's remarkable journey to bridge the digital divide. The Universal Communications Service Access Fund, under her leadership, has made substantial strides since its inception in 2009. The organization's primary mission is to extend communication services to underserved rural areas, where women and children constitute a significant portion of the population. Mashiba revealed that, to date, they have connected close to 15 million people, with a staggering 80% of this population being women and children in rural areas. Their efforts also encompass providing ICT gadgets to public schools, with a particular focus on empowering girls with access to the internet.

Neema Lugangiri, a Member of Parliament in Tanzania, emphasized the need for more women in leadership roles, not just in Tanzania but worldwide. She firmly believes that placing capable women in leadership seats is a valuable lesson other countries can learn from Tanzania. Lugangiri also unveiled her

brainchild, the Omuka Hub Center, designed to impart digital skills and literacy to girls, youth, teachers, and government officials in peripheral regions.

Dr. David Bray brought a sense of urgency to the discussion, stressing the need to address inclusion issues promptly. He pointed out that technology is advancing exponentially, and while we strive to include communities and countries, we must keep pace with the rapid changes in the tech landscape. Dr. Bray raised a critical question: Is it fair that people who are not yet online might be subject to online policies?

Tara Denham, a Civil Servant at Global Affairs Canada, emphasized the importance of consultation in policy development. She highlighted that narrowing the scope of who is consulted on policies leads to policies that only reflect a particular portion of society or community. Denham advocates for collective learning and challenging each other in the policy development process. Consultation, she emphasized, does not equate to veto but rather involves the inclusion of multiple voices.

Jane Coffin shared an inspiring story about the F. Chicks, a group of technical women in sub-Saharan Africa who received support and mentorship to overcome cultural and religious barriers. Coffin stressed the significance of organizations championing the cause of underrepresented groups in the tech sector and helping them navigate the challenges they face.

Key Takeaways:

- The panel highlighted the pressing need to engage women and non-dominant communities actively in shaping digital regulations and increase the representation of women in leadership positions globally.

- Tanzania's remarkable initiatives are a great example of bridging the digital divide, particularly in rural areas, with a focus on women and children.

- Urgent calls were made to address inclusion issues to keep up with the fast-paced tech landscape, and to support and mentor underrepresented groups in the tech sector.

- Consultations should be more common in policymaking, focusing on the importance of multiple voices in crafting policies.

As we navigate the ever-evolving digital landscape, we're reminded that the future belongs to those who dare to dream and those who empower others to dream alongside them. The poetic vision of this future is one where every woman, child, and marginalized community member has not just access but a voice in the digital realm.