

Lauren Kirby:

Welcome, everyone. And thank you for joining us today for the second session of the CivicSpace.tech Webinars Series, Robots, Drones, and Artificial Intelligence. Who's Watching Us 24/7? I'm Lauren Kirby, a Senior Civil Society Specialist on the Civic Power and Citizen Engagement Team in USAID's Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Center. Earlier this month, the DRG Center together with our partners at FHI 360, Internews, and ICNL launched the new online CivicSpace.tech resource to look closely at how a variety of emerging technologies are influencing civic space and the DRG sector.

Lauren Kirby:

2020 has proven that technology is firmly intertwined with all aspects of our lives, with our work, in our personal networks, and with our engagement as citizens in political societies. The reality is that the rapid uptake of a range of expanding technologies will only continue and their influence over democratic norms will only grow. Recognizing this, we know there is a critical role that democracy practitioners should play in considering the unintended consequences that these technologies may have on our local and global communities. This includes being more involved in conversations about the development and deployment of these technologies, debating and discussing how they can be used or misused, and engaging with these technologies ourselves as end-users. That engagement begins with us learning more about and deepening our collective understanding of these tools. And that's why we're here together today.

Lauren Kirby:

We had a short poll at the beginning to see who's joining us. And I can see from those results that we have folks working on all different regions of the world and across a variety of development sectors, seeing this diverse group online today, I'm thrilled you can join us for the vibrant panel discussion that we're about to have looking at smart cities, big data and robots to name just a few of the technologies featured in our new resource and how these intersect with democratic rights, norms, and themes such as privacy, peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and public security. Before we launch into that discussion, we'll first hear from the Deputy Director of USAID's Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Center, Don Chisholm. Let's hear from Don now.

Don Chisholm.:

Welcome. My name is Don Chisholm and I'm the Deputy Director of USAID Center for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance. USAID is committed to advancing individual rights, freedom of expression, and the promotion of democratic norms and practices as important standalone goals, as well as a means to advance self-reliance. We know that digital tools have ushered in a range of opportunities to elevate citizen voices, advanced civic participation, and engagement, promote transparency, and hold governments accountable. And in parallel, we know that we can shape technologies of the future to ensure they promote democracy or whatever. At the same time, we see how new technologies have also unleashed a set of challenges to democratic societies. Specifically, we recognize the need to address the growing threat of digital authoritarianism. This is true, especially as governments and other malign actors become more adept at restricting online civic spaces and using technology to limit civil and political rights.

Don Chisholm.:

This is why USAID-DRG Center partnered with the Strengthening Civil Society Globally Activity to create a new online CivicSpace.tech resource. This interactive tool will serve as a knowledge hub for

practitioners and citizens looking to expand their engagement with the positive and negative components of these new technologies in democratic and civic spaces. We're excited to continue to work with you on addressing many of these key issues. We also hope this resource will serve as a useful tool for local democracy partners and activists, as you navigate the rapidly changing digital technology landscape in your daily work. Thank you very much.

Lauren Kirby:

And now we also have a short video to give you a quick overview of the new online resource itself, which we'll start now.

Barney Singer:

Welcome to CivicSpace.tech, an interactive resource for understanding the benefits and the risks of using digital technologies in a democracy, human rights and governance space. USAID's Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human rights, and Governance and SCS Global Partners, Internews, ICNL, and FHI 360 developed CivicSpace.tech in order to help you understand and to be prepared to use digital technologies in DRG related work, whether you are from civil society, from the donor community or within government CivicSpace.tech can help you maximize the benefits and minimize the challenges associated with various digital technologies when you are undertaking activities on like to promote democracy, human rights and good governance. You can use CivicSpace.tech to learn about 14 specific technologies or trends that affect DRG work. You can assess which ones might help or hinder your work. And you can best prepare yourself to engage with policymakers and partners.

Barney Singer:

Let's take a look at the site in this brief video. From the homepage, you can search for topics you want to learn more about or use the filters to discover solutions, trends, and threats relevant to your work. Simply choose your fields and a selection of suggested topics will appear, refine the results by choosing Sustainable Development Goals or Principles For Digital Development. You can find more information on the SDGs and the principles via links on the individual topic pages or at the bottom of the homepage.

Barney Singer:

Anytime you want to start your search over, just click the reset button. Each topic page covers what the topic is about and its impact on your work. Dive even deeper with the options on the right, including key questions to reflect on when exploring the technology, curated case studies of recent uses of issues, additional resources, references, unrelated topics. Expandable fields offer more context and information. Live links, take you to original sources while cogs signify links to other CivicSpace.tech topic pages. To get back to the homepage, just click CivicSpace.tech at the top of any page, everything you need to know all on one simple user-centric site, CivicsSpace.tech.

Lauren Kirby:

Now to look at how this resource and these issues are affecting our sector, our partners, and our programs. As we go forward, I want to encourage you to submit questions in the Q&A chat pod at the bottom of your screen, where you can also upload or like questions that have already been submitted. To take us forward to the panel, I want to introduce Ona Flores. Ona is a Research Adviser at the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, where she leads ICNL support to the UN special repertoire on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Prior to this position, she was a staff

attorney at the Inter-American Commission on human rights where she focused on issues related to freedom of expression and internet freedom. Ona, now over to you.

Ona Flores:

Thank you, Lauren. Welcome, everyone. It is a great pleasure to connect with you today. Of the 14 specific technologies and trends that are covered by CivicSpace.tech, we will center our discussion today on robots, drones, and smart cities technologies, many of which are now powered with artificial intelligence or machine learning capabilities or facial recognition tools. This audience understands the value and importance of these technologies. When you use to further democracy, human rights, and civic space, we know many of you have already implemented projects involving these technologies as part of your DRG programming, whether it was a public security project or disaster preparedness programs. At the same time, we know that the deployment of these emerging technologies can carry significant human rights risk or related impacts that could constraints civic space. Our panel discussion will help us today to stern some of these risk and propose ways to address them.

Ona Flores:

We have a fantastic group of experts. Let me welcome them to the session. Welcome, Jon. Jon Camfield is the Director of Global Technology Strategy at Internews, where he leads Internews internet freedom portfolio, which is dedicated to advancing digital rights and safety through supporting local advocacy campaigns, digital safety to development, and innovative training and support programs. We have with us also today, Maria Paz Canales, she's the Executive Director of Derechos Digitales, a nonprofit organization working across Latin America on human rights in the digital environment, particular freedom of expression, privacy, and access to knowledge and information. And we have Jared Ford with us. He's a Senior Advisor of Digital Technologies Civic Activist in the media at USAID Center for Democracy, Rights, and Governance where he manages programs and provides technical leadership on digital technologies and civil society strengthening. Prior to joining USAID, he has spent 15 years working in over 30 countries on democracy and governance programming. Welcome again, everyone.

Ona Flores:

So we will have two rounds of panel discussion and then we'll move to audience questions. So I remind everyone to submit your questions in the Q&A box or upload some of the pre-submitted questions. So for our first round of discussion, we would like to ask this panel to share with us what are the key concerns and challenges of the use of these emerging technologies in civil society and civic space programming? I'd love to start with you, Jon.

Jon Camfield:

Sure. Thank you. I see the big overarching challenge of these emerging technologies is that they really break our real-world expectations and norms about what is private and what works in ways that are kind of weird, to be honest. So in normal days around the world, we are used to accepting a lot of one-offs trade-offs in our privacy and security for commutes or for safety and security that might be having a CCTV camera tracking who enters or exits the building or looking at a park space or a public space. It might be our expectation that our mobile phone has mapping capabilities that helps us see where we are, helps us find our phone if we lose it. When you link these together, particularly when you layer on them on top of a smart city infrastructure or combined them with digital IDs and bring in things like facial recognition, they can go through all the video feeds and connect a face to an identity.

Jon Camfield:

You really set a new world of scale and all these individually acceptable, "Oh, that's fine. We need that security camera to make sure that no one on authorized enters is building." That turns into a massive invasion of a private life when this is all tied together. And this clip is made worse because these systems, especially when we're looking at smart cities are not designed openly, not designed with the community, not even designing in the countries where they're being rolled out in many cases. And that has a lot of impact on the citizens and there's no reasonable or effective way to withdraw one's consent from being part of this system. You're going to be seen by all these video cameras, you're going to have to use your ID to conduct commerce, to be a citizen, to vote, to complain about local governance problem. These are all suddenly tied together and bundled up.

Jon Camfield:

And there were countless case studies, even in the most developed countries where the systems behind these, AI behind these amplify bias and inequalities and have poorly trained models or very focused models on people who frankly look a lot like me and not a lot like the rest of the world. And this is incredibly problematic when you merge this together with this lack of transparency. These are bad problems even when you have a strong policy, even when you have strong regulatory mechanisms, even when we have a strong democracy, even when you have a strong civil society advocacy or set of organizations able to speak up. When you take any of those away, this is incredibly dangerous to have all these technologies linked together and feeding into this constant surveillance society. Technologies are out there. We're not going to put those back in the box. So we really have to figure out what are the responses for us as implementers and for organizations as advocates, or organizations as watchdogs that we should try and contain these and manage these in privacy-respecting ways.

Ona Flores:

Thank you, Jon. I think that was an excellent introduction to our topic today. With that, I want to turn to Maria Paz. Maria as explained by John, the deployment of these technologies create a real risk also for individuals to be subjected to surveillance by governments, law enforcement, or the private sector. And do you think these risks outweigh the benefits for example, for these technologies, and how do you take into account the chilling effect of people's ability or willingness to exercise their fundamental freedoms that is created by this surveillance?

Maria Paz Canales:

Thank you very much, Ona. Thank you very much, USAID for the invitation on this conversation today. I think that taking the conversation in the point where John left us. There is a very difficult balance to strike here in order to achieve the goal that Ona was mentioning, to really leverage the power of these technologies for better societies, more democratic societies, and more space for the citizens to be part and exercise their rights in the best way. But the problem with the majority of the cases that Jon was pointing out is that the introduction of these technologies happen in contexts that lack of those infrastructure, either in terms of knowledge, but also in terms of normative and institutional structure. So many of the processes of implementing the technology happened with a lot of lack of transparency in the decision-making processes of the adoption and then the regulatory framework to be able to oversight them and have accountability for the results of those implementation, which is a more long-term process.

Maria Paz Canales:

And there are examples of these in my region. I work mainly in Latin America as was pointed out by Ona in the presentation. One concrete example of this is the implementation or the start of the implementation of the smart city plan for the City of Santiago that happened precisely a few months ago in the middle of the pandemic without processes being put in place for enabled meaningful participation of the community of City in moving forward the plan and provide more input to the authority as well were the needs that need to be considered in this. This resolved many cases in that even behind the implementation of these technologies, there are very legitimate purposes that the governments or the different agencies or the bodies implementing the technologies want to pursue to the deployment of these technologies. At the end, the implementation is [inaudible 00:18:33] against the exercise of the rights of the citizen, and going further in concrete examples that are featured in the website Civic Space resources.

Maria Paz Canales:

We can talk about the public safety narrative that I have been deployed in Latin America for the use of facial recognition cameras in public space, for example, in Argentina, Valeria, Aquila, Chile, Mexico, Paraguay among others, all these happening without a specific regulation for these type of technology. And without having, for example, general data protection framework that could fill that space and provide more guidance. And our example of use of technology, a feature in the website is the use of drones that also have been leveraged for being part of the public safety strategies in Chile. Here a local government initiative that illegally want to support the law enforcement, but according to the information that Civil Society have obtaining to your requests, in the majority of the cases are not being used by prosecutor for supporting criminal investigation, but rather they have an effect of displacement of the use of the public space of the more vulnerable population that feel afraid to be subject to this type of control, such as me immigrant, nighttime workers, sexual workers in the [inaudible 00:19:55] population after [inaudible 00:19:56] on ordinary people.

Maria Paz Canales:

They are all discouraged of the use of the public space because of the deployment of these technologies. And this is not taking into consideration in the moment of making a decision of moving forward with this. Another example is what happened since 2014 in the [inaudible 00:20:15] of Chile in the indigenous communities of the Mapuche of people that has a permanent conflict with the state of Chile. And they have been surveilled consistently by drones that are deployed by the government forces, military forces in many cases, and they report these as highly disruptive for their traditional way of leaving. And even they have suspicious about some kind of substance. And in some cases have been thrown by these devices in order to intimidate them.

Maria Paz Canales:

The last example that I want to point it out to you. It's also related with the use of drones, but in the context of social protest that happened on the end of 2019 in Chile, in which this type of device also was used for surveilling the protestors, majority of them peaceful protestors, without having any kind of regulation about the use of this technology and only a few technical specification coming from the [inaudible 00:21:17] authority. In the right side, though, I have to say that these technologies, during this context of protest also have great power in terms of providing a possibility of bringing [inaudible 00:21:32] to a public opinion about the abuses from the police. And there have been used by journalists for reporting and later are trying to be implemented also for using in the claims in the judicial system against this brutality of the police.

Maria Paz Canales:

So finally, I just want to provide the last point that these civilians technologies, particularly facial recognition and the use of biometric have gone in their implementation long far from the impact only in the civic [inaudible 00:22:05]. There's [inaudible 00:22:06] civic and political rights, and also move to a relationship between the state and the citizenship in the offering of services and welfare, all that kind of things.

Maria Paz Canales:

And we have examples from Brazil, for example, how many use of these technologies, particularly facial recognition have been implemented for the access of subsidized public transportation, in Chile for the access of the food in the public school and in [inaudible 00:22:32] for the access of welfare benefits for children, elder, and disabled people. And in all these cases we can see that they support a benefit offered by the state are conditioned to exchange of this very sensitive information without any transparency or oversight of the [Lotta 00:22:51] and with the uncertainty about how this data could be used later by the state of white third parties with all their purposes and combine it with other sources of data and [inaudible 00:23:04] discrimination. So this is a little bit of the Panorama that I want to share. Thank you.

Ona Flores:

Thank you, Maria Paz. I think this is a great overall view of the issues that are involved and especially the impact that it has on the exercise, not only on the right to privacy, the right to peaceful assembly, as you mentioned, the right to freedom of expression. And also the right to access to public benefits, as you said and mentioned. And with that point, I actually want to turn to Jared now, because this issue of inequality of the impact of the use of these technologies against certain populations, especially populations at risk of discrimination has received increased attention and international law with new reports from special [rupetors 00:23:56], or even the officers or high commissioner for human rights. Jared, can you expand on how these technologies can worsen inequality and marginalization? Thank you.

Jared Ford:

Absolutely. So thanks, Sona. Happy to join the conversation today and to address inequality. I think it's important to note as the examples we've heard, inequality is one of the fundamental problems in developing democracies. Inequality and discrimination prevent people from exercising their fundamental human rights and participating fully in democratic societies. There's abundant evidence that shows that the exclusion of marginalized communities can be a key factor in leading towards instability and conflict all which is why it's very important to examine exactly how emerging technologies are impacting on inequality itself. I think both Maria Paz and Jon provided great examples of how marginalized communities are, especially at risk for abuses of privacy, government surveillance. But we're also finding out very clearly that emerging technologies are further deepening this inequality. I think there are a couple of different drivers. Two, I'll highlight today. One is bias another is on equal access.

Jared Ford:

So in terms of bias, we know that AI, Artificial Intelligence enabled tools which use algorithms taking a look at historical data often amplify pre-existing bias in that source data. Beyond the data itself, the design of the algorithm. So how the data is collected, how it is coded, how it is used to train the

algorithm all further preexisting biases. Unfortunately, or fortunately artificial intelligence and that bias is pervading all sectors of society. So we're seeing it in a healthcare allocation decisions and job applicant screening and interviews, in higher education, in financial service decisions, and then most perniciously and problematically in security sector and criminal justice. So for criminal justice, we've seen it used in predictive policing and then helping judges to evaluate whether or not defendants will re-offend? In both of these cases, there's substantive evidence that in fact, the use of algorithms further creates these inequalities and reinforces bias.

Jared Ford:

One by sort of abusive and aggressive over-policing of marginalized communities and also over-criminalization of minority defendants. So turning to lack of access, and I think as [inaudible 00:26:59] have also mentioned smart cities, digital ID systems, these are great examples where existing lack of access can actually reinforce inequality. Most smart city technologies are made for folks who are already digitally connected. So when a municipality offers a service for residents to report on issues in a neighborhood through an app that assumes that those residents have smartphones, know how to use the application, have the time to make those reports. And what we're seeing in city after city is that advantaged communities are getting their needs met through a lot of these technologies while disadvantaged communities are falling further behind as they are left underserved.

Jared Ford:

So to quickly sum it up, unfortunately, the greater use of emerging technologies is actually deepening inequality. It's important for us to actually understand specifically these drivers so we can mitigate them in our programs and then to give a shout out to the civic space tech tool, across those 14 primers, each of them deal with inequality in their respective ways. So important to check that out. Thank you.

Ona Flores:

Thank you, Jared. And actually, I want to these second round of questions, which if we all agree that these emergent technologies can have a clear negative impact on the right to equality, privacy and data protection and fundamental freedom of speech for assembly and freedom of expression, then what can we do to address those concerns? And especially, I want you to answer this question. All of you, the panel is thinking of our audience, which is democracy practitioners that want to ensure that the work does not further [inaudible 00:29:10], does not close civic space, even further in those countries that they're working on. So I like to start with Maria Paz. So from a human rights perspective, what do you think are the key components of an effective response to these challenges?

Maria Paz Canales:

Sure, thank you. There is a couple of elements that you can have into consideration. So the first one is precisely to look for their regulatory framework or the institutional conditions that are present in the places which you are looking to deploy these different projects because as the three of us mentioned in our previous intervention, is fundamental in terms of deciding the final outcome and the impact that the deployment of the technology can have. Many situations, the same technology with the correct framework, institutional frameworks, and regulatory framework to ensure oversight and guidance and responsiveness of the implementation, its whole life cycle can [conduct 00:30:15] to very positive result. But if they are [inaudible 00:30:18] the same technology or the same technology implementation will end in totally different results and possibility of risk and harm. So that's the first one.

Maria Paz Canales:

The second one is that part of those regulatory frameworks and conversation that can be around implementation of this type of project, they should look particularly for elements of transparency in the corners of the implementation of these different policies on projects, and how to create democratic accountability and legitimacy in the deployment of these technologies, because it's very different if you have those elements in place and you co-create with the community that will be served by the technology, and they can understand the impacts of the technology from the earliest state in order to ensure the success in the deployment and also in order to establish the legitimacy of the implementation. And that always will be better in terms of the value by the community of the specific program that you are looking to implement, considering this technology implementation, because all their lives, they will be resistant and they will feel many times threatened by this time of deployment. And if they are part of this and they have good information on cost and transparency for channeling their needs, they will feel part of these initiatives.

Maria Paz Canales:

The last one that is very linked to that is the implementation of the good practice of human rights impact assessment of the policies that are being deployed. So this is something that started coming from the human rights business guiding principles of the United Nation, but now we have explored the power that this type of evaluation and assessment of the impact of the technology deployment can have in the exercise of the full range of human rights, can be also useful for international agencies of cooperation and for governments in the evaluation of the implementation of their different projects and policy. So I invite you also to explore how do that with the participation of the community and how you need to consideration inside this evaluation, the existence of this regulatory framework that we were talking before.

Maria Paz Canales:

So finally designing and implementing for equality I think is the key issue, but I think Jared probably will talk more about that. Thank you.

Ona Flores:

Thank you, Maria Paz. Jon, I would like to bring you to expand on that last point Maria Paz mentioned because you have 20 years of experience implementing and designing these kinds of projects.

Jon Camfield:

That makes me feel old. From the implementation side, it's shortly just doing everything that Maria just said, like making sure requiring impact assessments, requiring transparency of democratic processes when these tools are being rolled out. From the donor and funder side, ensure that these are fundable activities, push your implementing partners too to do these guardrails, and build them out of their programming. If you're bringing in new technology, do this human rights impact assessment, make sure you're building with the communities that it's being used for. You can't just drop in a technology to a community and expect that to magically work and to not really have some unintended consequences for marginalized populations.

Jon Camfield:

I think broadly also supporting advocacy organizations, activist organizations, watchdogs to have the capacity to pivot to these new technologies as they come about, like A, advocacy organization doing work on freedom of expression needs to have a little extra capacity to be watching and looking across the horizon of "Oh, the government's starting to think about doing X or Y. How is that going to impact our work? How's that going to impact our countries right?" And so making sure that these orientations have that capacity to do it, it's absolutely critical.

Jon Camfield:

Hopefully, in and the point of building a lot of these primers was to give really good and balanced data like three from the buzzword Chinese new technology world so that we can look at the technologies, take what is valuable from them and combine that with a good risk awareness of who are our communities, who are we working with? How will this impact them? How can we get the best of this technology without endangering people on the ground who are actually going to be the recipients of this technology? And how do we emerge those two lines together? How do we build it in a human-centered design where they are engaged in that design process, where it's not just ... I've been saying them a lot in just this paragraph. How do we flip that narrative to be a much more flipped question? Someone asked about are there good examples of smart cities? Barcelona is actually kind of the lead use case because it a citizen-led initiative as opposed to a top-down one and have a lot of interesting privacy concerns built into it. And usability concerns from that process.

Jon Camfield:

And then finally, I think one critical piece is there is nothing that's perfect. And so we need to also be working with activists, working with marginalized populations to make sure that they have the tools and practices, and skills to stay ahead of this curve. If it's rolled out, that's going to impact them negatively. They need to know how to protect their privacy, how to continue their lives, and their work safely and securely regardless of what technology emerges, or what unintended consequences happen. We need to make sure that these populations have all the skills that they need and all the tools that work for them that are in their language or translated for their youth to be able to do that.

Ona Flores:

Thank you, Jon. And I will now bring Jared to that conversation. Jared, what would you recommend to the development and to our community to do in taking to account? And I want you to bring some of the Q&A questions, and if you could include in your answer a best practice of good models?

Jared Ford:

Excellent. Thanks, Ona. I think I would reinforce a lot of the recommendations by my colleagues. I think transparent processes, participatory processes once that design with rather than designed for. Ultimately, these challenges are cross-cutting, they require multi-sectorial multi-stakeholder approaches. From USAID's perspective we have the opportunity to work with a variety of actors, so government, civil society, private sector, communities. And I think it's important that everyone has a place at the table.

Jared Ford:

A good place to start with understanding USAID's approach here is the agency's digital strategy. This was launched this last year. It's got two main objectives. One is the responsible use of digital technologies

and USAID programming. And then relatedly how that programming can further strengthen the openness, inclusiveness, and security of country-level digital ecosystems.

Jared Ford:

So ultimately, I think the solutions we're talking about here are the ecosystem and infrastructural level. Ultimately, you can work with different actors to do different things. With civil society organizations, we support them to focus on digital security and digital literacy for the general public. For several years now, USAID's Information Safety and Capacity Project has provided mentoring services support to CSOs to mitigate against digital threats. Ultimately, doing whatever work you can to address digital divides. So some of the best programs at USAID are increasing educational outcomes for girls or finding employment opportunities for at-risk youth. So addressing digital divide means identifying these barriers, lowering them. So folks can participate in the digital ecosystem. And then up-skilling in terms of competency and digital literacy with these tools. Obviously, governments as has been mentioned, need a lot of technical assistance. One like Maria Paz mentioned, to do human rights impact assessments. For example, they could look at better oversight for algorithmic decision-making and finding alternatives or ensuring that there are mechanisms for appeal and redress in any digital system that is deployed.

Ona Flores:

Thank you, Jared. We have a lot of good questions coming in from the audience. So I want to turn our attention to those in the time that we have left. First, I want to direct this to Maria Paz. Maria, could you expand, I think you started mentioning in your last answer, but could you provide some specific examples of projects and programs that enhance protection around privacy, surveillance, or inequality? Projects, perhaps that you've been involved with?

Maria Paz Canales:

Sure. I can think of a couple of projects that we have been working on in Derechos Digitales, my organization in Latin America. So for example, in the case of the use of facial recognition in the region, we have created a repository for the different Latin American initiatives that have been implemented. This type of technology and mapping out the different consequences and engagement that the civil society have with the deployment of this technology. And also in this repository, you can find useful resources if you are a member of a community that have some concerns about the deployment of this technology. So can find a format for your request that you can submit for asking for more information to your local authorities and use also the website as a source of resources for communicating with all others and having more information about what is going on and what are the trends and what are the risks, and what are the possibilities to work on these kinds of issues?

Maria Paz Canales:

Another example of work in this line of the Derechos Digitales is all the research that we have been doing during the last year regarding the implementation of artificial intelligence technologies in Latin America, and how those in different fields like health or justice or social welfare can have impact in inclusion? So we are about to release this research project, which will have also another specific website showing some of the findings and also trying to advance useful recommendation on the line of the work that I was mentioning, how the different governments or agencies that are looking to engage for type of technology, implementing them as part of their policies can advance in doing the assessment and the human rights impact assessment that I have been talking about in order to avoid the harmful consequences and leverage the good impact of the deployment of the technology.

Maria Paz Canales:

And finally, in a more playful side, advancing the side of the education that Jon was talking about a little bit also. We have the Micro SD project, which is a set of cards that provide in a very concise and uncondensed way useful advice in digital security for activists and journalists. It's a set of cards. So you can find the different threats that can happen to your organization or your type of work, and then useful recommendation that are easy to implement for people that are not necessarily technical, but they deal with technology in their daily life work. So those are some of the ones that I want to share, and I will pass the link in chat for you to see more. Thank you.

Ona Flores:

Thank you, Maria Paz. Yeah, please do share the link. It sounds so I'm pretty interesting, especially the last one. I would like to see how that works. I'm curious. So and you mentioned this and I want to invite the entire panelists because I think this is a question that we could explore a little bit more and we've receive a lot of votes for you from the audience. So what are the risks with Artificial Intelligence in development and what policy solutions or stances should the U.S. government be taken in response to that? So I want to bring first, Jon. Then if you don't mind Maria Paz, to chime in then, and then Jared too. And please be mindful of the time here.

Jon Camfield:

So what are the benefits of artificial intelligence?

Ona Flores:

The risk of artificial ... I know it's a very broad question and I'm asking you to answer in one minute or so, but if you can?

Jon Camfield:

I think Jared already touched on a lot of these in terms of the inherent biases. If you're developing or the training artificial intelligence system on one community and then rolling out for a different community, you have just a mismatch of tool with what you're hoping for it to be used for. And so if the artificial intelligence is looking for patterns and is trained on patterns that haven't been developed with the community it's actually going to be relevant for. If you're doing predictive ... even something completely beneficial of predictive disease modeling of who might be sick based on their web searches or based on their behaviors that are tracked through whatever security surveillance system. You still are going to have different cues from different cultural contexts, from different backgrounds, from different communities that aren't going to pass over to the right community.

Jon Camfield:

So really the training of that system has to be done with the target community very carefully. And if you actually want that to be useful and beneficial and seen and adopted, you're going to have to also design it with them and explain why this tool is being rolled out. What is the value of it? What are they getting from it? And what is their actual privacy loss or potential risks? Where could this data go, where else is this data going to be used? All of that has to be fully transparent. And so I think the community aspect of that and the actual designing with, and not just dropping in technology or technologist is just ... I mean, I know I sound like a broken record there, but that's actually the magic to all of this.

Ona Flores:

Maria Paz, anything to add?

Maria Paz Canales:

Well, I think that also I will sound like a broken record that Jon was mentioning. I think that there is a lot still in terms of creating capacity in these kinds of things from all the sides, from civil society for the community that is impacted like the deployment of the technology in order to understand better then, and then create this legitimacy that I was talking before in my previous intervention.

Maria Paz Canales:

But also in the side of reducing the asymmetry of knowledge that sometimes happen in public agencies that are the ones that are engaged in many times in the implementation of these technologies in order to completely being able to assess the capabilities of the technologies and the appropriateness of the deployment of this solution for the policies that they are looking for to implement. Because in many cases, the conclusion, if you understand better the reach of these technologies or how the contexts interact with the specific technologies that you can decide that, maybe that specific technology is not the one that it will be more impactful to your intervention, maybe there is another one, even one that can be less developed. But it's much better with your institutional context or your [inaudible 00:47:20] framework or the institutional capacities or the community engagement.

Maria Paz Canales:

So at the end, those factors need to be weighed in a flexible way. And all of them have a role to play in order to ensure that finally, the deployment of these technologies can be in the result of improving the capacity of the societies to be democratic and the people being able to exercise fully their rights. So I think that's fundamental. We shouldn't be completely enchanted by the magic of artificial intelligence or algorithm decision making, because sometimes there are technologies that are available that could be a good solution, but not necessarily the last generation one. So that's for me.

Ona Flores:

Thank you. Jared, before we go to the last question, I want you to chime in on artificial intelligence specific impacts. And if you have anything to add to this conversation.

Jared Ford:

Yeah. I mean, I think we've covered the risks extensively. I'd like to build off Maria Paz's last point, which is building capacity in key stakeholders to actually engage with these policy discussions for regulatory reform, be it artificial intelligence or other emerging technologies. I think we have to start with the demand side, and that's awareness-raising campaigns. So you want to ensure that folks in a community know about surveillance, know about abuses to privacy. Oftentimes in lead up to elections when there's a change of power potential, this is when we see the greatest internet freedom violations the most acute. So having civil society actors raise up those examples, having watchdog groups do technical analysis of surveillance tools, new smartphone apps for human rights issues. Those add to the conversation create demand.

Jared Ford:

On the supply side, I think there are a couple of models just to refer back to the question you asked me before, what are some successful models for actually being better at regulation? What we've seen for digital rights advocacy, one successful model is fellowships or fellows. So this is where you take activists. You connect them with experts. They develop manuals curriculum, go through simulations, and then they're ready to promote advocacy campaigns and policy when they return to their local country. There are several programs we support, we have regional hubs or regional expert organizations. Derechos Digitales is one of them. And that expertise that can then be shared across the region for organizations working on those issues.

Jared Ford:

On the supply side to sort of help regulators, to help politicians think about these policy discussions, two quick models I'll highlight. One which I think is pretty successful is the House Democracy Partnership. This is an initiative of the U.S. House of Representatives working with USAID and implementing organizations that works directly with countries to strengthen and build effectiveness in legislative institutions. And recent conversations in that body have focused on emerging technologies, their impact on human rights, and how to regulate them better.

Jared Ford:

And then another model, our innovation fellows or innovation offices. So you're partnering government institutions ministries with technology experts, with design experts, so they can educate policymakers and sometimes write policy themselves based on a lot of experience and an awareness of these human rights implications. So hopefully that's moving us towards additional solutions.

Ona Flores:

Well, thank you. I know it was a lot to cover for very complex issues in just 40 minutes, but I think this great panel for their insights, for sharing with us, their knowledge and their experiences, this is really great. And I think, not to add to this broken record, but repeating the importance of building and designing with the community, making sure the community that will be where this technology will implement. It can stay ahead of the curve and be part of the process of designing, but also be consulted and have buying before these technologies are deployed, make sure to embed or include human rights impact assessments in all of your programming. I think those are very, very important messages from our excellent panel. And finally fund CSOs that are working to ensure communities and populations, especially those at risk are a part of this process. So thank you very much. And with this, I will like to then turn back to Laura to close this session. Thank you so much.

Lauren Kirby:

Thank you. Thank you, Ona, Jared, Maria, and Jon for that engaging discussion. And thank you to all the participants joining us here today. And for those of you who joined both sessions of this webinar series this month, we have a very short feedback survey about this session and about the new resource that we'll be putting in the chat right now. I encourage you to fill this out as we're continuing to refine the resource and the website based on your helpful suggestions. You can also provide feedback directly on the CivicSpace.tech site via the contact section.

Lauren Kirby:

As we closeout, I just want to take a moment to thank all the parties who engage in the development of this new platform, in particular, our partners from the SCS Global Activity, including many folks at FHI

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360, especially Barney Singer. At Internews, especially Dan Ensor. And at ICNL, especially Zach Lampell. And finally, I want to thank everyone who played a part in planning this event today, including numerous USAID-DRG staff, particularly Mariam [inaudible 00:53:40], and the girl support team, Sujin Kim and Cheyenne Evans. Thank you again to all the participants for joining us today, to our excellent panelists, and to our organizers. Please check out the CivicSpace.tech resource and share with your networks.