

Media Development

4/2025

WACC

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Underpin the
Democratic
Digital Sphere



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WACC is an international non-governmental organization that promotes communication as a basic human right, essential to people's dignity and community. WACC works with all those denied the right to communicate because of status, identity, or gender. It advocates full access to information and communication, and promotes open and diverse media. WACC strengthens networks of communicators to advance peace, understanding and justice.

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Membership of WACC provides opportunities to network with people of similar interests and values, to learn about and support WACC's work, and to exchange information about global and local questions of communication rights and the democratization of the media.

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Full details can be found on WACC's web site:
www.waccglobal.org

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The 1/2026 issue of *Media Development* will examine the nexus between WSIS+20 aspirations and the outcomes of COP30. Where does the common ground lie between communication justice and climate justice?



WACC is a member of the
actalliance

Civic space enables civil society to play a role in political, economic and social life. When civic freedoms shrink, people are deterred from expressing themselves freely, from protesting publicly, and begin to self-censor. Together these factors erode democratic accountability.

Earlier in 2025, the [Civicus Monitor Watchlist](#), which identifies countries that the global civil rights watchdog believes are currently experiencing a rapid decline in civic freedoms, added the USA. The watchlist tracks developments in civic freedoms across 198 countries. Other countries previously flagged on the watchlist in recent years include Zimbabwe, Argentina, El Salvador and the United Arab Emirates.

Europe is faring no better. The [Civic Space Report 2025](#) notes, “Europe is experiencing a dangerous rollback of civic freedoms, in a context where the promise of universal rights and democratic values, enshrined in the EU treaties, is being steadily eroded by interconnected economic, social, cultural, and political factors.”

Following the World Summit on the Information Society+20 gathering in Geneva (July 2025), communication rights activists want to take an even bolder structural approach to communication rights and digital justice that will tackle monopolies, inequities, and rights violations and embrace an inclusive, democratic, sustainable, and gender-transformative digital future.

The [Global Digital Justice Forum](#) – among others – is calling for a *public, inclusive, and justice-oriented framework* that redistributes the dividends of data and AI for the common good. Such a framework recognizes that:

- * Universal access must be coupled with affordability, public value, and safeguards against shutdowns, discrimination, and exclusion.
- * Digital divides are rooted in systemic exploitation and must be tackled through regulatory

reforms, community-driven initiatives, and gender-transformative approaches.

- * Monopolies in data and AI undermine democracy and development. Robust frameworks must protect labour rights, cultural commons, and smaller economic actors.
- * Critical thinking, education, data exchanges, and AI for SDGs require strong public investment and governance.
- * Global digital taxation and a dedicated financing mechanism are essential to support inclusive digital transformation in developing countries.
- * AI must be anchored in digital sovereignty, and its environmental footprint (water, energy, emissions) must be addressed through rigorous impact assessments.
- * Dedicated action lines, indicators, and systemic reforms are required to close gender gaps in digital ecosystems.

At the WSIS+20 High-Level Event (Geneva, Switzerland, 7-11 July 2025), WACC stated its views on the role of civil society in advancing people-centred, inclusive, development-oriented information societies. Looking back on two decades of actions aimed at creating a fairer information society, WACC noted that millions of people are still excluded – not just from digital access, but also from meaningful participation in the systems that shape information and knowledge, governance, and power.

Civil society, especially in the Global South, is being increasingly silenced – not only by the collapse of international aid and shrinking funding streams but also by political repression. Digital technologies and digital platforms dominated by the Global North are used to amplify some voices while marginalizing others.

At this critical juncture, there was great hope that WSIS+20 would formulate bold proposals to rethink understandings of development, to elevate national actors, and to increase accessibility, affordability, and accountability. WACC and its partners

welcomed these calls. But none of this transformation will be possible without also confronting the colonial, racist, and sexist legacies embedded in the control of information and knowledge, and in the deployment of digital technologies – including Artificial General Intelligence.

WACC believes that communication must be recognized not merely as a tool for bringing about social progress, but as a *right* – central to human dignity, agency, and social justice. With that in mind, WACC supports calls for:

- * *Media regulation* that genuinely serves the common good, not just market or state interests.
- * *Media ecosystems*, where community-led voices are not just supported, but prioritized.
- * *Democratic data governance* that respects people's sovereignty over their own information.
- * *New public and non-profit ownership* of digital infrastructure that upholds the public good.
- * *A fair global knowledge regime*, where truth is not dictated by power.
- * *A realignment of the global digital economy and its financial architecture* based on principles of fairness, inclusivity, and accountability.

To advance the cause of communication justice worldwide, we must listen to the voices of ordinary people and respond radically to their concerns. If the next 20 years are to deliver on the promise of just and inclusive digital societies, then communication rights must no longer be a footnote to governance – they must be foundational. ■

Independent media, the WSIS+20 review process, and Public Digital Infrastructure

Anna Oosterlinck

*Independent journalism is under attack. The Committee to Protect Journalists reports that 2024 has been the **deadliest year** for journalists in the past three decades. ARTICLE 19 reports that **27 countries experienced decline in media freedom** in the past year alone; over the past decade, 6.2 billion people living in 99 countries experienced declining media freedoms. Around the world, democracy is under siege with **72% of the world population living in autocracies** as of March 2025.*

These are stark numbers at a time when the world needs independent public interest media more than ever. Independent journalists investigate and share information on issues of public interest, so that the public is informed and able to effectively participate in political, economic, and cultural life so that democracy thrives. Accurate, reliable and relevant information is key to addressing polarisation in society, holding governments to account, countering dis- and misinformation, and ensuring transparent, safe, and inclusive public debate.

Today, most of us get our news online, often from social media platforms, traditional media companies, and others. Combined with the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies,

this digital ecosystem is rapidly and constantly evolving, increasingly flooding us with disinformation, fake news and manipulated content. It has become very difficult to know what's true and accurate, and what is manifestly false or fabricated. [Prominent journalist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa](#) said we live in “an information Armageddon”. She stated “[W]ithout facts, you can't have truth; without truth, you can't have trust. Without these three, you can have no shared reality.” This goes right to the heart of the challenges we face across the globe when navigating our information ecosystem. How can we resolve any problems, let alone see eye to eye, when we don't share the same reality?

[FACING UP TO THE CHALLENGES](#)

You might wonder how we can face those challenges head on. First, we need to acknowledge there is a web of myriad complex, multi-layered, and intersecting forces shaping the information ecosystem. Independent journalism alone cannot resolve all those. Second, media actors are themselves under threat of surveillance capitalism, opaque algorithmic governance systems, declining advertising revenues, market concentration, censorship, and erosion of trust. In other words, there is not one easy or single solution. But part of the answer may very well lie with a UN agenda called the [World Summit on Information Society](#).

Let's go back in time. Twenty years ago, UN Member States came together and decided they wanted to build a [people-centric, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society](#) where everyone can create, access, utilise and share information. This unique UN Summit, commonly referred to as the World Summit on Information Society, or WSIS, has resulted in a set of technology neutral commitments, including championing media pluralism, diversity, and independence, and access to trustworthy information.

Twenty years on, UN Member States are currently undertaking a review of all WSIS commitments. In 2025, the WSIS+20 review, is hap-

pening against the backdrop of a very different world. It is an incredibly vast and wide-ranging review process: it touches on how technologies intersect with sustainable development; and what norms and structures are needed for global Internet and digital technology governance.

The review process is likely to consider newer challenges such as governance of AI technologies; as well as how human rights - including the rights to freedom of expression and opinion, data protection and privacy - may be mainstreamed throughout the WSIS commitments, and in what ways multistakeholder governance of the Internet and digital technologies could be reinforced. These are stunningly consequential questions which need to be addressed in the next few months as the review process concludes by the end of this year.

Simply put, the future of the Internet is on the line. Will we have a free, open, global, inclusive, safe, accessible, and interoperable Internet at the end of it? Or are we staring down the barrel of an increasingly government-controlled Internet, fragmented across regions and countries, which could lead to exclusion of whole groups and communities, reinforcing of existing inequalities, censorship of lawful speech online, and disregard of privacy and data protection? To say the stakes are high, is an understatement.

[ARTICLE 19](#) has been advocating extensively to promote a WSIS anchored in universal human rights, to advance the multistakeholder approach to Internet and digital governance, and to strengthen the original WSIS vision and its institutions including the Internet Governance Forum.

The WSIS+20 review clearly matters to public interest media and journalists. The original WSIS aimed to foster diverse, independent and resilient media ecosystems, and to strengthen independent journalism and public interest media to provide access to relevant, timely, local, multilingual, and fact-based information. These original commitments need to be strengthened.

In addition, we need to think outside of the box. At the WSIS High Level Event in July

2025, Mira Milosevic, Executive Director of the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), and I did exactly that. During a session entitled “[Between Free Market and Public Digital Infrastructure: Intersections of Media Viability and Public Interest Journalism](#)”, we sought to connect distinct conversations and concepts to figure out how to reclaim the digital space for journalism, and reassert its role as a public good in the digital age.

Two reflections are needed in advance before delving deeper. First, it’s important to note that the world has not yet agreed on one comprehensive definition of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). There is currently an ongoing lively discussion as to what it means and how and for what aims it should be utilised. This will also look differently depending on the region or community you live in – and I’m not seeking to resolve those issues here.

Second, the term ‘public’ in Digital Public Infrastructure, in my interpretation, does not necessarily mean the infrastructure is wholly state or government owned or run, but rather that the infrastructure is built in the public interest, with public oversight and to advance shared public values. One could talk about Public Digital Infrastructure, stressing the ‘public’ first – where all stakeholders co-design its systems and governance so they are equitable, respect the needs and rights of all persons, and embrace diverse voices including from vulnerable and overlooked groups.

If we (re-)imagine Public Digital Infrastructure (PDI) in this way, we need to be clear on its goals. We need human rights respecting, resilient, safe, inclusive and interoperable PDI to promote inclusive connectivity and civic participation. This PDI needs to mitigate potential risks, such as multiple and intersecting challenges related to exclusion, discrimination, surveillance and privacy, and it needs to adapt to the contextual realities on the ground. We need human-centred digital solutions catering to people’s needs, in consultation with those affected. There is no ‘one size fits all’ solution: any PDI needs

to be carefully tailored to different digital markets and business models, and across different regions, countries and communities. We also need independent, democratic, transparent and public oversight.

[RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITY, THE RULE OF LAW AND ACCOUNTABILITY](#)

Finally, we will need to move away from the prevailing economic model based on value extraction through surveillance capitalism and monetisation of people’s data, that is based on centralised monopoly power, where a [handful of Big Tech control](#) key layers and markets of the current digital infrastructure. Ultimately, we need to achieve a model where respect for human rights, equality, the rule of law and accountability comes first. We need to repurpose and design data and digital infrastructure to serve the public interest – a ‘people-first digital ecosystem’. This version of PDI would reframe public interest journalism as civic infrastructure, going beyond just content, and strengthening its essential role in democratic processes.

This is a tall order and not something that can happen overnight. Experts all over the world are thinking and talking about how to make this a reality in the longer term. The WSIS does not at present contain specific guidance on the concept of DPI or PDI. More recently, in 2024, the [Global Digital Compact](#) (GDC), adopted by all UN Member States by consensus, stated that “resilient, safe, inclusive and interoperable digital public infrastructure has the potential to deliver services at scale and increase social and economic opportunities for all”. It also recognised “there are multiple models of DPI, and that each society will develop and use shared digital systems according to its specific priorities and needs... with the participation of all stakeholders”. It is likely that, at this point in time, the WSIS+20 review will not go much further, if at all, then the GDC commitments, considering the extremely challenging geopolitical dynamics permeating the review process. One important step forward was recently taken by the [Freedom Online Coalition](#).

They launched the [Rights-Respecting Digital Public Infrastructure Principles](#) at the Tallinn Digital Summit in October 2025. These principles aim to advance human rights-respecting, resilient, safe, inclusive and interoperable DPI to promote inclusive connectivity and civic participation.

That said, the [WSIS+20 review](#) calls for your urgent attention today. The review process is now in its final stages. There are still various ways to engage: talk to your government so they can represent your perspectives in their national positions during the negotiations of the final Outcome Document, participate in the stakeholder consultations on 14 November to share your views on the zero draft of the Outcome Document, and join coalitions of civil society, technical community, academia, and private sector (for example, the [Global Digital Rights Coalition for WSIS](#)). You can always verify on [this website](#) what the options for engagement are and these include consultations with stakeholders and sending in written inputs.

As a starting point, consider the following minimum [suggestions](#):

- * Recommend the WSIS is anchored in international human rights law and explicitly reaffirms all fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and opinion, rights to data protection and privacy, rights to equality and non-discrimination, and gender equality.
- * Advocate for fortifying and expanding an inclusive, human rights-based and human-centric multi-stakeholder governance model of Internet and broader digital governance.
- * Push for genuine inclusion and participation of all stakeholders throughout the WSIS architecture: underrepresented regions, vulnerable and overlooked groups and communities, under siege civil society activists, and journalists and media workers.
- * Emphasise the important role of independent, diverse and pluralistic media for a healthy information ecosystem.

Above all, take a moment to pause today. Consider recent geo-political shifts. Talk to

your family, friends, colleagues, and communities. Think of Maria Ressa's words: we need facts, truth and trust, to have a shared reality. If we don't have that shared reality, we cannot solve existential problems such as climate change, gender inequality, systemic discrimination, mass migration, or economic disparities. We cannot have democracy or rule of law. So, stand up today and make your voice heard. ■

Anna Oosterlinck is currently Senior Advisor on Global Advocacy with ARTICLE 19, leading on multilateral and multistakeholder advocacy engagement at the global level. Before that, she worked as Head of UN, leading ARTICLE 19's advocacy with the UN on freedom of expression and related rights, online and offline. She served twice at the Permanent Mission of Belgium to the UN in NY during Belgium's membership of the Security Council: as Senior Political Advisor leading on the Horn of Africa in 2019-20, and as Sanctions Expert in 2007-2008. She was appointed by the UN Secretary General as the Human Rights Expert on the UN Security Council mandated Panel of Experts for South Sudan (2015-2018). She has worked on peacekeeping finance at the UN Secretariat, on sustainable development and humanitarian response at Save the Children UK, and on international trade for the Flemish government. She holds a Master of Laws and M.A in International Relations. She has worked in South Sudan, Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, DRC, Niger, Haiti, Peru, USA, and UK. [LinkedIn profile](#).

Communication, language, and the future of the Internet

Theresa Swinehart

When we think about the Internet, it's easy to focus on what it delivers: instant communication, access to knowledge, or new ways to connect to each other, conduct business, build community, and drive innovation. Despite its wide-ranging impact on our day-to-day lives, we rarely stop to consider what makes it possible. It's not simply technology that makes the Internet function – there are systems of trust, cooperation, and coordination that keep it working for everyone.

The Internet wasn't designed to serve a single culture, language, or region. It was built to connect us across the globe and continues to evolve to serve global needs. One important example of this that I discuss in this article relates to language. The Internet has evolved to provide users the ability to fully use their own language online. Not just for reading and writing content, but also the addressing mechanisms that we use to communicate online. Over the years, the Internet has expanded to accept languages and scripts online that were not possible at the time of its inception. This transformation is important for users around the globe, yet many people are unaware that this is or can be available to them.

This evolution is possible because its functioning is anchored in a shared commitment to openness, interoperability, and collaboration, rather than being controlled by a central author-

ity. The Internet's design and governance is fundamentally open to use and input from anyone, anywhere.

This openness and accessibility is not automatic. It takes effort. It requires investment, cooperation, demand, and a multistakeholder governance model that prioritizes the needs of users everywhere, regardless of location, resources, and language.

At ICANN, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, our role is to ensure the stable and secure operation of one of the Internet's core functions: the Internet's unique identifier systems, that is, the Internet's address system, including what is visible to the user, namely the Domain Name System, or DNS. Think of it like the Internet's phonebook, coordinating the Internet's naming and numbering.

ICANN's work impacts how you interact in your own language on the Internet. With the support of our global community of volunteers, we are stewards of the routing functions that every user needs to find websites, send emails, and engage in online life – ideally in their own language, using tools and technologies that reflect their identities and cultures.

The way the Internet is governed matters. It must reflect what is important to users, what is operational, what is feasible, and what enables its continued evolution and supports innovation. And at a time when we see growing digital divides – particularly along language and geographies – our collective challenge is to ensure that the Internet is truly globally interoperable, enables the same experience when online, and works for everyone.

THE MULTISTAKEHOLDER MODEL: A FRAMEWORK FOR PRESERVING ONE INTERNET

ICANN operates through what is known as the multistakeholder model. That means that no single entity – whether a government, corporation, or organization – can unilaterally control how the Internet's address book is governed. Instead, we bring together diverse stakeholders: govern-

ments, technical experts, business leaders, civil society, and users, including those from Indigenous and marginalized communities.

This model is one of the most important safeguards we have against the centralization, exclusion, and politicization of the Internet. It ensures that decisions about the Internet's future are not made behind closed doors. Decisions are made in open, transparent, and participatory ways.

In practical terms, this model has helped maintain a single, interoperable Internet for over three decades. It has enabled global expansion, supported innovation, and fostered a level of trust that is rare in complex, cross-border systems.

The Internet should not be taken for granted. Today, this model is increasingly under pressure. Some question whether it is agile enough to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving digital landscape. Others propose more centralized approaches, arguing that efficiency must take precedence over process.

The real risk, however, is not slowness – it's fragmentation and disconnect. When decisions about the Internet are made without the voices of those who build its infrastructure or those most impacted by its evolution, the gap between policy and implementation grows. That's how fragmentation happens. That's how trust erodes. And that's how we risk losing the Internet as a unified, global resource. Imagine a world where there isn't a single Internet. Imagine multiple, what we call "splinternets" – each country, territory, or even company creating its own separate Internet so you can no longer search one, single space. You would need to connect to multiple different networks in order to complete tasks, talk to friends, or look for information. Now imagine each of those networks being governed top-down by governments, companies, or other entities determining how (and if) you can use their network.

Twenty years ago, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) acted as a global roadmap to build "a people-centred, inclusive, and development-orientated Informa-

tion Society." One single, interoperable Internet is crucial for this. As we approach the WSIS+20 year review, this issue is more urgent than ever. We have a chance to reaffirm what works to keep the Internet as you know it safe: based on shared responsibility, open coordination, and inclusive governance.

INTERNATIONALIZED DOMAIN NAMES: LANGUAGE AT THE ROOT

For people to fully interact on and with the Internet, it is critical that they have the ability to use their language and script of choice online, just as they would offline. This is not just about online content. For a full experience, it must include the addressing mechanisms that support communication. Imagine you are an Arab and you write an email in Arabic language but then need to change your input in order to type in the email address using Latin characters. Or receiving a text from a friend in your local script but the links provided are in different scripts. This is why the adoption and expansion of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) are important. These are domain names that may use the different scripts – such as Arabic, Chinese, Cyrillic, or Devanagari – so that users can access websites and email services in their native languages.

IDNs are especially important in communities where digital literacy is growing and where culture is closely tied to language. By facilitating the use of IDNs, we help enable users engage with the Internet in a way that affirms their identity, respects their heritage, and promotes broader digital access, support, and trust.

On the Internet, there are top-level domains (TLDs), like .com, .org, or .net, that act as the "home" for websites, emails, and other online services. Today, hundreds of these top-level domains are available in different languages using Latin and non-Latin scripts. Unfortunately, adoption is uneven. Many platforms, social networking, and email systems do not recognize, display, and use these domains and email addresses. You may have an email address in your own native script that you are, sadly and frustratingly, not able to



use to sign up for an app that cannot “read” or accept your address. This may be due to the lack of Universal Acceptance (UA)-readiness.

That’s why ICANN is investing in outreach, technical support, and collaboration with governments and language communities around the world. We know that language is more than a tool – it’s an essential part of our lives. It must be supported in the digital sphere just as it is in every other domain of public life.

UNIVERSAL ACCEPTANCE: THE GATEWAY TO DIGITAL ACCESS

When we discuss inclusion related to the Internet, nowhere is this need for inclusion more visible than in the area of language. Today, billions of people around the world face barriers to full Internet access simply because the digital ecosystem was built with technical limitations – about language, script, and formatting – that does not reflect our global reality.

Most websites, email systems, and applications are still designed primarily for domain names and email addresses that only use letters a-z, digits 0-9, and the hyphen. That means that users whose names, languages, or scripts fall outside this framework often find themselves unable to fully participate in the Internet. This is where

Universal Acceptance comes in.

Universal Acceptance is the idea that all valid domain names and email addresses – regardless of script, language, or character length – should work seamlessly in all Internet-enabled systems. It’s a foundational requirement for a truly multilingual and accessible Internet.

At ICANN, we are working with stakeholders from across the Internet community to raise awareness of UA, develop tools, and drive adoption. We’re working directly with software developers, website owners, and digital service providers to ensure that their systems are UA-ready.

This is not a technical footnote. It is an access issue for the digital age. If people cannot use the Internet in their own language or script, their ability to learn, work, advocate, and connect is diminished. That’s not just a matter of convenience – it’s a matter of global accessibility.

Building or retrofitting systems to be UA-ready creates opportunities and benefits individual Internet users as well as the organizations that serve them. Through UA those who develop, provide, or manage online websites and applications have the opportunity to enable users globally to experience the social and economic power of the Internet. It is crucial to enabling consumer

choice online and it enables businesses, governments, and societies to connect with and better serve their customers, citizens, and communities through the use of an increasing number of new domains.

THE INTERNET AS A PUBLIC RESOURCE

For organizations like the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and others working at the intersection of media, rights, and development, these issues are not abstract. They directly affect the ability of communities to tell their stories, advocate for themselves, and shape their futures. And to do this in their language and script of choice.

A multilingual, accessible Internet is essential for realizing the rights to information, participation, and self-expression. It is essential for amplifying voices from across the world. And it is essential for ensuring that technology serves the common good – not just economic or political interests.

At ICANN, we believe that the Internet is a public resource – something that should be accessible to all. Like all public resources, it must be protected, nurtured, and governed in ways that reflect the vibrant differences in our world.

This vision is reflected in ICANN's latest Strategic Plan for 2026-2030 and has been part of our strategic planning since 2021 and carries through to our vision for 2030 and beyond. We are committed to expanding access, improving technical reliability, and strengthening the multistakeholder model so that the Internet continues to be a tool for empowerment – not exclusion.

WHAT'S NEXT?

As we look to the future, we must ask: whose Internet are we building? Who gets to shape it? Who is left out? The answers to these questions will depend on the choices we make today.

Our investments in digital accessibility must include language. We must support local content, multilingual systems, and culturally relevant tools. We must prioritize the adoption of

Internationalized Domain Names and Universal Acceptance.

And we must defend the governance structures that make inclusion possible. While the multistakeholder model may not be perfect, it is one of the most democratic and resilient frameworks we have for protecting the global Internet.

Shared responsibility is not a slogan. It is the reason the Internet works. And we cannot take this for granted, it's important to be aware of what the Internet is and to allow for the continued fulfilment of its potential. Imagine if the Internet didn't exist.

Let's ensure the Internet remains open, interoperable, and welcoming to all – regardless of language, location, or level of privilege. Because when we do, we build a better Internet, and a more connected and accessible world.

To learn more, participate, lend your voice to the way the Internet is governed, and support our shared mission and the future of the Internet, there are many ways to do this, whether through national or regional discussions, such as the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), and national and regional IGFs (NRIs) (<https://www.internetsociety.org/events/igf>) or through our work at ICANN (<https://www.icann.org/en/beginners>). The strength of our work depends on having as many individuals, organizations, experts, companies, and governments at the table as possible and we invite you to join us. ■

Theresa Swinehart is the Senior Vice President of Global Domains and Strategy for the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). In this role, she works with the community, contracted parties, stakeholders, and policymakers to ensure broad and inclusive engagement, consensus-based policymaking through ICANN's multistakeholder model, and effective, accountable policy implementation. Her responsibilities include policy implementation, review operation, and cross-functional strategic initiatives such as ICANN's compliance with the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation. An expert in global Internet governance, Theresa also serves as co-deputy to the President and CEO. Her extensive industry experience, including nearly 20 years as a key contributor to ICANN's growth and development, gives her a valuable perspective on how ICANN organization can work efficiently and collaboratively to better serve the global Internet community.

Observations from the Internet Governance Forum 2025

Ralf Peter Reimann

Who owns the Internet? The answer is actually clear. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which manages the global internet's domain system, operates as a nonprofit public benefit corporation. No single country or company owns the internet. Instead, ICANN itself is governed by a multi-stakeholder model, which ensures its accountability to the global community – not to a single government, shareholders, or big tech interests.

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF)¹ – founded in 2006 by mandate of the United Nations Secretary-General – is a multi-stakeholder platform that brings together governments, the private sector, civil society, technical experts, academia, NGOs, and international organizations on an equal footing to foster open and inclusive dialogue on the future of the internet. IGF serves as a platform for consensus-building and agenda-setting.

Results from the IGF can be taken up by international bodies to set norms or be fed into UN reports and processes. Its recommendations only become global standards when picked up and formalized by recognized standard-setting bodies, intergovernmental processes, or industry adoption. Since all relevant stakeholders come together at the IGF, it is also a seismograph of how the internet and the technologies associated with it are developing.

IGF 2025, held in Lillestrøm (near Oslo), Norway, from June 23 to 27, took place under the banner of “Building Digital Governance Together,” and linked its discussions to the broader WSIS (World Summit on the Information Society) process.² Topics ranged from digital inclusion and cybersecurity to data governance and, unsurprisingly, artificial intelligence (AI), which has become one of the most urgent challenges for global digital policy.

At the IGF in Norway, government representatives shared the stage with executives from big tech companies and grassroots activists from the Global South. High-level forums took place in dimly lit conference halls, while more informal discussions were held on the Open Stage. The diversity of participants was visible not only in their perspectives but also in their attire – suits mingled with traditional dress, symbolizing the global scope of the forum. Delegates from Western nations engaged in conversation with voices from the Global South.

CLOSING, NOT WIDENING, THE DIGITAL GAP

Among the many questions raised was how to mitigate the biases of AI systems trained predominantly on datasets drawn from Western societies. When these systems fail to reflect the cultural, linguistic, and social realities of the Global South, they risk reinforcing inequalities rather than closing gaps.

Participants also asked how AI can serve minority and Indigenous languages when the underlying data is insufficient. If communities invest time and effort in compiling language resources and releasing them under open licenses, can they retain ownership over those resources, or at least expect compensation when large tech companies extract and commercialize their work?

Another pressing concern was the risk of a new digital divide. As AI applications require immense computing power, data centres become a strategic asset – concentrated in the hands of corporations, mostly based in the Western hemisphere – countries in the Global South risk falling even further behind. Can a rights-based

approach to AI ensure meaningful inclusion, protection, and empowerment of those currently excluded?

MULTILATERAL COOPERATION – OR AMERICA FIRST?

These questions were not asked in a vacuum. They were debated with a strong sense of purpose and cooperation, reflecting the IGF's role as a space for global dialogue grounded in mutual respect. The spirit of equality and shared responsibility is at the heart of internet governance itself. The IGF, under UN auspices, is governed by principles that apply equally to all member states – large and small.

Even if it is only a snapshot, it is significant how the current U.S. administration positions itself. A statement by the representative of the United States stood out. At the “High-Level Session on AI and the Future of Work”,³ Jennifer Bachus, Acting Head of the Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy at the U.S. Department of State, openly asserted that American technology companies should not be subject to regulation by foreign governments. Instead, she argued, U.S. AI companies should serve as the “gold standard” for others to follow.

Her remarks included criticism of the European Union's AI Act, framing it as an unwelcome restriction on innovation. Yet opposing any form of regulation in this domain risks subordinating fundamental rights – such as data protection, equality, and digital justice – to the commercial interests of U.S. corporations.

The message was clear: the “America First” approach that has shaped recent U.S. foreign and trade policy now extends to internet and AI governance as well:

“As policymakers, one of our biggest concerns relates to efforts to restrict the AI's development, which, from our point of view, could mean paralyzing one of the most promising technologies that we have seen in generations. [...] To truly harness the benefits that AI has

to offer, we need regulatory regimes around the world that foster the creation of AI technology rather than strangle it. In terms of risk, the United States is troubled by reports that some foreign governments, including here in Europe, are using policies that could tighten the screws on U.S. top companies with international footprints, and we will not accept that, and we think it's a terrible mistake. We need to focus now on the opportunities to unleash our most brilliant innovation and use AI to improve the well-being of our nations and their people. Excessive regulation on the AI sector could kill a transformative industry before it can really take root, and we need to make every effort to encourage pro-innovation, pro-growth, deregulatory AI policies. [...] So the United States is committed to making sure that our AI is the gold standard and that we are the partner of choice for the world. [...]

To conclude: what we've seen is too often regulations are really being designed to try to control AI rather than to unleash it, and that ultimately what we need to do is we need to look at AI as a tool of prosperity. We need to not clip the wings of the new companies; we need to embolden our innovators so that we can have all of the positive benefits that we talked about, and ultimately consumers and workers alike will be able to benefit. So, all of our efforts should be aimed at supporting the innovation that really will deliver real-world benefits.”

That message was not whispered. It was said openly and everyone could hear it.

THE CHOICE FOR ETHICS AND INCLUSION

Was it a coincidence that a representative of the United States' northern neighbour – a Canadian government official – explicitly called for inclusion and collaboration? During the “Workshop on a Global Alliance for AI to Bridge the Compute Divide”,⁴ Allison O'Beirne, Director

of International Communication and Internet Policy at Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, emphasized that AI development must include ethical considerations:

“The question really is about how we include Global South voices in conversations around AI, and I will continue to make it a policy not to tell the Global South how to do policy [...], how we ensure that we have a multi-stakeholder approach, and one that thinks about including a whole range of different potential partners, to talk to large and small providers and users. We have to think about talking about both public and private spaces — the big AI institutions, the accelerators, the start-ups, the governments—all coming into the conversation together. [...] I think it’s also true that if we don’t have AI tools that are designed responsibly and that respond to the needs of local communities, access is not going to be sufficient. [...] If we think of equitability of access, it has to be part of a broader conversation about equitability in the design and the use of AI systems as well.”

The question now is: how will the international internet community respond and what path will it take? Will the U.S. Administration bend internet governance to its will or will multilateralism and multistakeholderism survive? ■

Notes

1. Internet Governance Forum: <https://www.igf2025.no>.
2. World Summit on the Information: <https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/wsis20> and <https://dig.watch/processes/wsis20-process>.
3. IGF Recording “High-Level Session on AI and the Future of Work”, <https://youtu.be/t2ChjFQTWtU?si=ZOmh9etD3dv4xo-b&t=3026>.
4. IGF Recording “Workshop on a Global Alliance for AI to Bridge the Compute Divide”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBaAvk30nnY>.

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Digital justice After WSIS+20: What the Global Digital Compact means for India’s marginalised

Aniruddha Jena and Sriyanka Sahoo

The 20-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20) and the Global Digital Compact set out a simple test: the digital world should expand rights, dignity and opportunity, not narrow them. [1][2] In an eastern India state, Odisha, that test has felt painfully concrete this year.

In a report published by Down To Earth, [3] an aggressive sweep to verify public-distribution ration cards through Aadhaar, India’s nationwide biometric identification system, using e-KYC, the electronic “know-your-customer” match against the Aadhaar database, covered roughly 32.6 million cards and confirmed 27.1 million, yet left about 2.4 million pending by July. Only 98,664 verifications were recorded outside the state, so migrant workers trudged home to keep their entitlements alive. A headline claim that five million cards were “fake” was later contradicted in the Assembly record, with none detected since mid-June 2024. [3][4] When a fingerprint reader fails or a 4G signal drops, the portability promised under One Nation One Ration Card stalls, and the distance between digital aspiration and daily bread is measured in kilometres and calluses.

The promise of WSIS+20 and the Global Digital Compact (GDC) is that such gaps are neither inevitable nor acceptable. WSIS+20, the

twenty-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society, reaffirmed that digital transformation must be people centred, inclusive and development oriented. [1] The GDC, adopted at the UN's Summit of the Future in 2024, sets shared principles: universal and meaningful connectivity, protection of human rights online, trust and safety, responsible data governance, and artificial intelligence that serves human development with guardrails. [2] None of this is a treaty. All of it is an invitation to turn principles into practice through laws, budgets, institutions and remedies that work for the last user.

Scholars of the information society have long cautioned that becoming digital is as much about institutions and power as it is about networks and devices. Classic accounts chart the shift to knowledge-led economies but also warn against technological determinism and urge attention to work, inequality and governance. [14][15][16] For the global South, the early digital divide lens usefully counted access, yet it often obscured quality, affordability and voice, gaps that persist unless policy targets meaningful use, not mere connection. [17]

INDIA'S DIGITAL JUSTICE GAP

India is a fitting place to read this agenda against reality. The country has built influential digital public infrastructure (DPI): Aadhaar for identity, UPI for instant low cost payments, DigiLocker for documents, and ONDC to make e-commerce more open. These building blocks have supported new services and lowered transaction costs. They have also shown how scale and justice are not synonyms. For justice, the access must be affordable and usable every day, the spaces must be safe, participation must value every language and ability, and accountability must activate swiftly when systems fail.

Affordability is the first lever. India's data is cheap by global standards, but the entry ticket is a device you own and can trust. For low income households, an "affordable" smartphone can still swallow a daunting share of monthly income, [7] tariff hikes pinch further. In rural districts,

the signal may be unstable, the handset shared, and data rationed. That means connectivity that is not daily, fast or private. Public access points, common service centres, libraries and community networks, can bridge the gap, but funding and maintenance are uneven, as subscription data show. [5] In policy debates, a useful benchmark is "meaningful connectivity": daily access on an appropriate device, 4G like speeds, and enough data or an unlimited connection at a regular location. [8] Without all four, the online world is less a gateway than a revolving door. Put differently, many people are not excluded but incorporated on adverse terms, connected, yet in ways that reproduce existing disadvantage. [18]

Language and accessibility are the second and third levers. Much of India's internet remains English first where it matters most. The government's Bhashini initiative is building Indian language artificial intelligence as a public good, it is an important start. [9] But many essential interfaces still demand workarounds if you do not read English or Hindi easily. For persons with disabilities, accessibility compliance is inconsistent across public and private apps: screen readers fail on unlabelled buttons, video lacks captions, keyboard navigation is an afterthought. Accessibility cannot be bolted on later. It must be coded in and validated with users, with organisations of persons with disabilities leading the audit and the feedback loop.

Safety shapes who speaks and who leaves. Women, Dalit and Adivasi communities, and linguistic minorities face targeted harassment and organised pile ons, the reporting pathways often break down in the very Indian languages where abuse is rampant. Platforms still staff Indian language moderation thinly, disclosure on staffing, tooling and response times is partial at best. A predictable result follows: slower takedowns of abuse, uneven enforcement, and communities pushed to the margins of the conversation. The GDC's call for trustworthy online environments will ring hollow unless platforms invest in language wise safety capacity and independent audits, and regulators learn to measure harm where

it actually occurs. [2] Framing this through communication rights keeps the focus on access, participation, pluralism, gender equality, safety and accountability, the preconditions of digital justice, and aligns with emerging data justice approaches that ask who benefits, who is harmed and whose knowledge counts. [21][20][19]

Rights and enforcement set the floor. India enacted the Digital Personal Data Protection Act in 2023, but key provisions remain to be operationalised as of early September 2025. Draft rules were issued in January, everyday users still lack consistent, language friendly complaint routes and a visible cadence of enforcement. [12] On the network side, India continues to feature in global tallies of internet shutdowns. While totals fluctuate, each prolonged suspension functions like a collective punishment: shopkeepers lose payments, students lose classes, and clinics lose tele health. International norms are clear: restrictions must be necessary, proportionate and time bound, with public reasons and independent review. Domestic practice must match that test. [6]

Financing and design are the hinge. The Telecommunications Act 2023, renames the Universal Service Obligation Fund as Digital Bharat Nidhi and, through 2024 rules, widens its scope. That is an opening to invest in community networks, public Wi-Fi, device libraries and accessibility retrofits in the districts that markets sidestep, Adivasi belts, border blocks, low density hamlets. The money matters, but so do the modalities: open dashboards, social audits, local co-ownership, and district level targets for coverage, quality and uptake. When public funds subsidise affordability and inclusive design, private providers and platforms will follow the incentives. [11]

The benefits of DPI are real and worth defending. UPI has made tiny transactions viable at scale. In August 2025 it crossed 20.01 billion transactions in a single month, worth Rs 24.85 lakh crore, roughly Rs 24.85 trillion, up about 33% year on year from August 2024, per NPCI data reported by Moneycontrol. [13] Aadhaar

has sped up routine ID checks, DigiLocker has trimmed paper chases, ONDC holds promise for small sellers who want a fairer marketplace. [10] Yet exclusion hides in the seams. A fingerprint mismatch at the ration shop, a name format error that locks a widow out of a pension, a dead zone that blocks a benefit transfer, a grievance portal that assumes literacy and patience. The remedy is not retreat but redesign: offline alternatives at every critical step, human help that is available and accountable, and appeal routes that resolve cases within published timelines in the user's language.

Three snapshots from India show both promise and warning. First, community networks. Over the past decade, locally governed wireless networks, such as Gram Marg in Maharashtra or the Digital Empowerment Foundation's Wireless for Communities, have connected villages that commercial logic writes off. With spectrum access, affordable backhaul and local training, they support tele education, livelihoods and local media. These are not mere pilots; they are proofs of concept that public financing plus community ownership equals resilient inclusion. Second, a long shutdown's shadow. In Manipur during 2023, mobile internet was suspended for months. Shops could not accept digital payments, students missed classes, tele-medicine sputtered. The bluntness punished the many for the misdeeds of a few. [6] Third, inclusive commerce, slowly. ONDC aims to make e-commerce interoperable so smaller sellers can reach buyers without gatekeepers. Early experiences show potential, alongside usability and grievance redress gaps for first time sellers and buyers in smaller towns. [10] Inclusion is not a checkbox, it is a maintenance regime.

WHAT SHOULD CHANGE

What would it mean to align India's path with WSIS+20 and the GDC, without turning the agenda into another brochure? First, adopt meaningful connectivity as the national yardstick and publish district level targets and budgets: 4G/5G coverage, device affordability, public ac-

cess points, and quality benchmarks for speed and latency. [8] Second, operationalise the data protection law with independent oversight and easy complaints in Indian languages, including low literacy pathways by phone and in person. [12] Third, rewrite the shutdown playbook so that necessity, proportionality and public reasons are hard prerequisites, require independent review before and after the fact, and publish transparency reports that name locations, durations and rationales. [6] Fourth, mandate accessibility by default across essential public services and large platforms, let organisations of persons with disabilities lead audits, with findings linked to time bound fixes. Fifth, use Digital Bharat Nidhi to back community networks, public Wi-Fi and device libraries where gaps are widest, with open dashboards so citizens can track spending and performance. [11]

Platforms and providers have matching responsibilities. Design for low literacy and low bandwidth by default: voice prompts, local language interfaces, offline workflows, and privacy protections for shared devices. Invest in Indian language safety teams and publish language wise response times, submit to independent audits and publish risk assessments that name the harms you will fix this year, not someday. [2] Offer genuinely affordable device financing options with consumer protections. [7] Regulators can help by publishing affordability and quality metrics disaggregated by rural/urban, gender, caste, disability and language, so that policy tracks lived inequality rather than national averages. [5]

Civil society and academia are the connective tissue. Support panchayat level community networks with public interest technologists, measure costs, performance and social impact so successes scale and failures are not repeated. Run safety clinics with women's groups, Dalit and Adivasi organisations, and linguistic minorities, co-design reporting pathways that work locally and feed back into platform practice. Track DPI exclusions and insist on fixes, no one should lose food, cash or healthcare because a biometric device fails or a tower is down. Donors should fund patient capital for last mile connectivity, device

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libraries and accessibility retrofits, and put serious resources into public interest research on DPI and platform governance in non-English Indian languages. WSIS+20 and the GDC both stress multi stakeholder participation, make it real by paying for travel, translation and time so grassroots groups can show up and be heard. [1] [2]

THE AI FRONTIER

There is also the frontier question of artificial intelligence. As Indian language models proliferate, the risks of encoded bias, surveillance creep and content manipulation grow. The GDC's language on safe, human-centred AI is useful, but safeguards must be specific: public registers of high-risk deployments, impact assessments that include caste, gender and disability, and appeal rights when automated systems make or shape decisions affecting entitlements or speech. [2] Critical information society research reminds us that infrastructures stabilise arrangements of power, AI at scale will deepen those arrangements unless checks travel with systems into deployment. [15] India's experience with popu-

lation scale DPI is an asset here, but only if governance keeps pace with ambition.

None of this requires reinvention. It requires follow-through with the people who most need the system to work. If Odisha's ration card drive teaches anything, it is that a system can "work" on paper and still fail in practice if design ignores the realities of migration, language and signal strength. [3] The justice test for the next phase is straightforward: can a woman in Koraput, or Khandwa, Kiphire or Kulgam, complete a transaction in her language on a device she can afford, in a place with a reliable signal, with help when she needs it and an appeal when something breaks? If the answer is yes, WSIS+20 and the Global Digital Compact will have done more than coin phrases. They will have shifted power to the people the internet was meant to serve. ■

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Building digital resilience and rights in the Middle East

Kamal Sedra

In the early days of the Arab Spring, digital platforms lit up with the voices of citizens reclaiming their space in history. Mobile phones turned into tools of truth, livestreams outpaced official narratives, and hashtags transcended borders. It was the dawn of what many hoped would be a more open, participatory digital era in the Middle East.

A decade later, the same region finds itself navigating a far more complicated digital landscape, one where civil society actors, journalists, and rights defenders are squeezed between surveillance and censorship, cyberattacks and misinformation, shrinking budgets and shrinking spaces.

For those working on the ground, especially in civil society and independent media, digital transformation has become a double-edged sword: a potential driver of empowerment and connection, but also a gateway to new risks and fewer protections.

THE DIGITAL SHIFT AND WHAT'S AT STAKE

The Middle East is undergoing a rapid digitization of governance, media, and everyday life. Countries are investing in AI technologies, smart surveillance, and cybersecurity frameworks, often in the name of progress, national security, or modernization. Yet for many civic actors, this transformation has ushered in a new era of vulnerability.

Authoritarian-style cybercrime laws, vague

content regulations, and opaque algorithmic moderation have become standard tools of control. Activists in several countries have faced arrest for online speech. Journalists have had their phones infected with spyware. Entire media outlets have been deplatformed or throttled.

Take, for instance, the 2024 Citizen Lab report that revealed how Pegasus spyware was used against journalists and activists across the region. One veteran investigative journalist described discovering their phone had been infected, leading to months of self-censorship and disrupted reporting. Such incidents highlight how advanced surveillance tools are weaponized to intimidate and silence critical voices, making digital security training an existential need for independent media.

Even more alarming, Arabic remains underrepresented in global tech ecosystems, from AI to content moderation. This leaves Arab users at the mercy of tools that often fail to understand, categorize, or protect their digital speech. And in places where state-backed AI is advancing, will these tools be used to enhance engagement or entrench surveillance?

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO DIGITAL RIGHTS

Digital exclusion in the region isn't just about censorship. It's also about access, and the lack of it. Internet services remain prohibitively expensive in many countries, especially in rural areas. Bandwidth is often poor. Software subscriptions, cloud tools, and security services are priced in foreign currencies, out of reach for many freelancers and grassroots NGOs.

Language, too, creates a wall. Arabic AI tools are either lacking or controlled by regimes that don't prioritize rights and freedoms. Global platforms struggle to moderate Arabic dialects, let alone grasp their nuances, leading to over-censorship or unchecked hate.

And then there's the funding problem. After the Trump administration slashed large parts of U.S. international aid, including support for media and civil society, a chilling effect rippled across

the region. Programs that once trained journalists in digital safety or supported fact-checking initiatives disappeared almost overnight. Today, further pressure on European aid budgets, especially as defence spending rises, could make the situation worse. Civic actors are not just under threat, they're increasingly under-resourced.

CIVIL SOCIETY: RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF RISK

Despite mounting challenges, civil society across the Middle East continues to show remarkable resilience. While the digital space has become increasingly monitored and restricted, NGOs, independent journalists, and human rights defenders are adapting and finding ways to protect themselves and their communities.

Localized cybersecurity initiatives are emerging across the region. For instance, IWPR's Cyber Arabs programme organized a "Digital Security Awareness Week" in Syria, reaching over 5,500 users and training 100+ activists and journalists in secure digital practices like encrypted communication, phishing prevention, and safe messaging.

Another effort comes from Algeria, where I have been involved in developing a cybersecurity toolkit designed specifically for human rights defenders on the ground as part of a bigger effort to support civil society. The toolkit created entirely in Arabic includes practical advice on safe communication, device protection, and risk assessment. Its focus is on actionable solutions that individuals and small organizations can apply immediately in their local context.

These initiatives highlight the critical role of Arabic-language resources. Too often, global cybersecurity training and materials fail to consider local languages and cultural nuances, leaving significant gaps in accessibility. By developing content in Arabic, civil society groups are not only increasing awareness but also making digital protection tools more practical and relevant for those most at risk.

Cybersecurity events like Black Hat MEA,

while primarily corporate-driven and government-supported, also, show a growing recognition of the importance of cyber resilience across the region. However, the most impactful innovations often arise from grassroots networks, where collaboration and shared expertise bridge the gaps left by larger, international initiatives.

Yet, the ecosystem remains fragile. Without sustainable funding, access to affordable technology, or strong legal protections, many civil society actors remain vulnerable. Their resilience is inspiring, but it requires consistent support and investment to truly flourish.

AI: PROMISE AND PERIL

Artificial intelligence is changing the rules of the game in the Middle East. Some governments, especially the rich Arab gulf area, are investing heavily in AI-powered systems, from predictive policing to smart city infrastructure, while media organizations cautiously experiment with generative AI for content production and translation.

But for civil society, AI is a double-edged sword. On one hand, fact-checking initiatives like Fatabyyano and Misbar are using AI to detect deepfakes and false information, providing a critical line of defence against disinformation. On the other, AI-driven surveillance and data collection pose serious threats to privacy, especially in places where human rights safeguards are weak or absent.

Arabic is a particular challenge. Most global AI models are designed with English or other widely used languages in mind. As a result, Arabic-language content often gets misclassified, flagged, or overlooked, a problem that directly impacts the freedom of expression for millions of users. Meanwhile, regional AI projects that cater to Arabic often lack transparency or independent oversight, raising concerns about whether they are being designed to empower or to monitor.

THE GOVERNANCE GAP

Policies on digital rights and AI across the Middle East remain fragmented and inconsistent.

While global frameworks like the UN Global Digital Compact emphasize inclusive governance, ethical AI, and universal connectivity, these commitments often remain abstract at the national level.

At the WSIS+20 High-Level Event in Geneva (July 2025), attended by over 11,000 participants from more than 160 countries, global leaders reaffirmed the importance of the multistakeholder model. The event called for greater civil society inclusion, especially voices from the Global South, in shaping post2025 digital governance and ensuring WSIS action lines continue to guide diverse stakeholder participation and ethical AI debates. Similarly, the Internet Governance Forum (IGF 2025) highlighted citizen trust, information integrity, and closing the digital divide as core priorities, even as debates emerged over potential future venues posing risks to open participation.

Despite these global dialogues, implementation at the country level lags. In Tunisia, efforts to align data protection laws with international standards continue, and while promising, remain vulnerable to political shifts. In Morocco, early steps toward open data initiatives show potential for transparency but still lack stronger public accountability mechanisms. At the regional level, the Arab Digital Agenda (2023-2027) offers a cooperation framework; yet its agenda is tilted more toward economic and cybersecurity priorities, paying limited attention to communication rights.

Regional civil society groups are pushing back. They've used WSIS+20 processes and IGF input mechanisms to advocate for ethical AI frameworks, open-internet policies, and inclusive governance, yet without stable donor funding or institutional buy-in, their influence remains marginal.

These global deadlines and dialogues matter, but unless civil society gains real influence in national policy spaces, the governance gap will persist. The challenge is not only to talk about rights, but also to embed them.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NOW

The challenges are complex, but they are not insurmountable. Based on my work with NGOs, journalists, and digital rights groups, here are some practical steps that could make a real difference.

For example, a coalition of North African NGOs recently developed a low-bandwidth security toolkit in Arabic, tailored for activists with limited internet access. Such initiatives demonstrate how localized solutions can make a tangible difference. Similarly, cross-border training networks, inspired by WSIS+20's emphasis on collaboration, are starting to emerge to help journalists and human rights defenders tackle AI-driven disinformation and online harassment.

Investing in digital literacy and local capacity: Civil society and media workers need ongoing training to stay ahead of emerging threats, from phishing scams to AI-generated misinformation.

Supporting open-source and Arabic-friendly tools: Affordable, accessible technologies built with privacy and security in mind are vital for those who cannot afford expensive, foreign-currency-priced subscriptions.

Building cross-regional solidarity networks: Shared knowledge, joint advocacy, and pooled resources can help counter both repression and technical challenges.

Prioritizing low-bandwidth, low-cost solutions: Tools that work even on slow or costly internet connections can dramatically reduce digital exclusion.

Re-engaging international donors: Funding cuts must be addressed by demonstrating the critical link between free, secure digital spaces and broader democratic stability. Development partners should be encouraged to prioritize digital rights as part of peacebuilding and governance programs.

RECLAIMING DIGITAL SPACE

The Middle East's digital future is being shaped right now by governments, tech giants, and a growing AI industry. But the people who depend

most on open and secure online spaces; activists, journalists, marginalized communities are often the ones left without a voice or resources.

Civil society actors have proven their resilience. They have adapted, innovated, and found ways to keep the digital space alive despite surveillance, disinformation, and financial pressure. But resilience alone is not enough. What they need now is solidarity from international organizations, tech developers, and policymakers who believe that communication rights are human rights.

As WACC has long reminded us, communication is not just about technology; it is about power, participation, and dignity. The challenge for the Middle East is to ensure that this digital era does not leave its most critical voices behind. ■

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El reto permanente por la pluralidad e inclusión de voces

José Luis Aguirre Alvis

De la realidad del Sur a los debates globales del WSIS: el caso del Proyecto “Escuchar las Voces de la Amazonia: Comunicación Integral para Comunicadores Amazónicos” en Bolivia.

La WACC en su Convocatoria a Proyectos (2024-2025) incluyó en sus líneas de apoyo el Programa de Cambio Climático y Derechos a la Comunicación. Los proyectos debieron orientarse entre otros a “Apoyar el desarrollo de redes de periodistas ciudadanos medioambientales y/o reporteros de base dedicados al periodismo local constructivo, en particular los que trabajan para concienciar más sobre cuestiones medioambientales, conocimientos locales y tradicionales y adaptación/mitigación climática”.¹

La Convocatoria fundamentaba su llamado en documentos como un informe de 2018 del Grupo Intergubernamental de Expertos sobre el Cambio Climático (IPCC) de la ONU que expone los impactos del calentamiento global y sus riesgos que podrían devenir en una catástrofe medioambiental a mediano plazo, a menos que las sociedades de todo el mundo cambien radicalmente sus modos de vida. El informe, por otro lado, asocia a los riesgos como las sequías, el aumento del nivel del mar y la pérdida de biodiversidad la profundización de las desigualdades ya existentes dentro de las comunidades, especialmente sobre las comunidades marginadas y aisladas, en particular en aquellas cuyo estilo de vida está directamente relacionado con la natur-

aleza.²

Se considera que un elemento estratégico a activar y potenciar en las zonas de mayor riesgo, como será, por ejemplo, el amplio espacio de la selva amazónica de América del Sur, el recurso del conocimiento tradicional e indígena, ya que el mismo históricamente ha acumulado saberes y experiencias que supieron proteger y preservar generacionalmente su entorno natural manteniendo la estabilidad del medio ambiente. En esta línea, según la Convocatoria de la WACC, el Quinto Informe de Evaluación del Grupo Intergubernamental de Expertos sobre el Cambio Climático (IPCC) y el Acuerdo de París también reconocen la importancia de los conocimientos tradicionales e indígenas en el contexto de la creación de resiliencia al cambio climático.³

La WACC misma cree que existe un fuerte vínculo entre la comunicación y los temas ambientales, incluyendo así el cambio climático. De tal manera y desde su campo de fortaleza señala que es necesario actuar sobre el cambio climático y los medios de comunicación, hecho que a su vez puede desarrollar un efecto en cadena en términos de movilización pública, preparación de las audiencias, además de producir cambio en las políticas públicas.

La convocatoria insta a respaldar el Objetivo 13 de los ODS: fortalecer la resiliencia y la capacidad de adaptación a los peligros relacionados con el clima y los desastres naturales; y mejorar la educación, la sensibilización y la capacidad humana e institucional en materia de mitigación del cambio climático, adaptación, reducción del impacto y alerta temprana. Pero, por otro lado, también se alcanza al ODS 15, ya que el mismo busca gestionar la sostenibilidad de los bosques (en este caso el área amazónica de Bolivia), luchar contra la desertificación, detener e invertir la degradación de las tierras y detener la pérdida de la biodiversidad (condiciones a las que está expuesto el bioma amazónico de Bolivia a raíz de la creciente ampliación de las fronteras agrícolas).

La Convocatoria de la WACC declara además su interés de apoyar el establecimiento de redes de periodistas ciudadanos, locales, inter-

esados en promover enfoques de desarrollo centrados en la comunidad, ecológicamente equilibrados y culturalmente sensibles, tanto con sus comunidades locales como fuera de ellas.

La oportunidad que ofrece la práctica e involucramiento activo de los periodistas ciudadanos, que también se podrán denominar, siguiendo la tradición latinoamericana, como comunicadores populares, comunicadores indígenas y en el caso de la Amazonía, hasta etnocomunicadores, es la de aprovechar su credibilidad y capacidad de convocatoria para empoderar a las comunidades marginadas ya que estos conocen y están insertos en sus marcos sociales y culturales. Este hecho les permite conocer sus prácticas y códigos culturales, recurren al uso de lenguas nativas, ya que ellos mismos en gran parte provienen de estos contextos o son parte de estas familias, además que son capaces de comprender y recuperar historias y relatos del conocimiento tradicional con mejor cercanía y capacidad empática que cualquier otro que razona desde otros referentes culturales. Las mismas capacidades fortalecidas de estos comunicadores locales además hoy los enfrenta a la necesidad de ponerse en conocimiento y diálogo con los recursos tecnológicos que hacen a la circulación de contenidos vinculados a la Internet, así como del paulatino uso de las redes sociales y de la inteligencia artificial (IA).

EL PROYECTO

El Servicio de Capacitación en Radio y Televisión para el Desarrollo (SECRAD) de la Universidad Católica Boliviana “San Pablo”, miembro asociado de la WACC, y espacio reconocido por su trabajo en el campo de la comunicación para el desarrollo y el cambio social,⁴ postuló el Proyecto “Escuchar las Voces de la Amazonía: Comunicación Integral para Comunicadores Amazónicos”, el mismo que fue favorecido como único proyecto elegible en Bolivia.

El Proyecto señaló como su propósito: promover a partir de un proceso de capacitación y articulación de trabajo colaborativo entre comunicadores amazónicos (red de comunicadores) la ejecución de acciones comunicacionales e in-

formativas que posibiliten la expresión de narrativas de conocimiento local e indígena sobre el cuidado y protección del bioma amazónico.

EL DESARROLLO DEL PROYECTO

Para la más efectiva, colaborativa, y legítima presencia del Proyecto el SECRAD articuló su planificación, así como su desarrollo con la Red Eclesial Panamazónica (REPAM-Bolivia), espacio que desde la Iglesia católica conduce e implementa las directivas dejadas por la visita del Papa Francisco a Sudamérica (2015). Así, se respalda su visión sobre “amazonizar” el globo según proponen los documentos: Carta Encíclica *Laudato Si*, sobre el cuidado de la casa común (2015) y la Exhortación Apostólica *Querida Amazonía* (2020). La REPAM-Bolivia, ya había iniciado la articulación de la Red de Comunicadores por el Cuidado de la Casa Común Amazónicas en 2022 buscando dirigir hacia ellos oportunidades de respaldo a su trabajo en comunicación social.

Por tanto, bajo esta coordinación, y apoyándose en diagnósticos previos levantados por la REPAM-Bolivia, los objetivos de la capacitación a ofrecer fueron: a) Fortalecer el conocimiento del marco informativo bajo estándares periodísticos, éticos y de compromiso con el contexto y realidad amazónica; b) Generar contenidos informativos para espacios y redes con el apoyo de la Inteligencia Artificial; c) Producir material informativo relevante sobre situaciones de amenaza al contexto humano, cultural, económico y de subsistencia en la Amazonía, y recuperar historias desde la narrativa de resiliencia de los actores que habitan el espacio amazónico. El contenido transversal a las sesiones fue el de ir desde una “ecología integral”⁵ hacia un enfoque y abordaje de una “comunicación integral”.

Este enfoque no se limita a una comprensión de la realidad amazónica solo enfocada en su variedad y riqueza tanto natural, de sus especies animales, la potencialidad de sus bosques y productos naturales o la producción de oxígeno para el planeta, sino que vincula bajo una lectura holística la observación de la presencia de las culturas originarias, hace visible sus cualidades

lingüísticas, observa sus condiciones sociales e históricas, las que han recluso a la mayoría de estas poblaciones desde tiempos coloniales e inicio de la república, a formas de explotación, dependencia, e incluso a relaciones de esclavitud en las llamadas barracas, o centros de acopio de productos extractivos como la castaña.

LA BÚSQUEDA DE ALIADOS

El espacio amazónico de Bolivia representa el 60% de su territorio y en este se concentra el mayor número de pueblos indígenas de este país. Así, para optimizar resultados el Proyecto se vinculó a otras instituciones no gubernamentales con presencia en la zona amazónica. Al proyecto se sumaron: Conservación Internacional – Bolivia, y Practical Action. Con esto se optimizaron contactos con actores locales además de apoyarse el traslado de algunos comunicadores indígenas. Las tres localidades identificadas como estratégicas para la presencia del proyecto tanto por su ubicación como por ser espacios de afectación medio ambiental fueron: Cobija y Riberalta (en la frontera norte con el Brasil) y Rurrenabaque (ingreso a la Amazonía en el Norte de La Paz).

LA METODOLOGÍA DE TRABAJO

La metodología inicialmente adoptada fue de realizar una etapa de sesiones virtuales seguidas por encuentros presenciales -Curso Taller- en los puntos definidos. Esta modalidad se pudo dar en Cobija y Riberalta, y no pudo ejecutarse en la modalidad virtual en Rurrenabaque dado que los participantes siendo en su mayoría de comunidades no cuentan en sus lugares con condiciones adecuadas de conectividad a redes de internet, y en su caso deben hacer inversiones personales para su acceso hecho que incide en su escasa economía. Otro factor que impidió ejecutar las sesiones virtuales en Rurrenabaque es el hecho de que los participantes en parte tienen limitaciones de experiencia en formas de aprendizaje a distancia y hasta de alfabetización digital.

Las sesiones de fortalecimiento de capacidades comunicativas se realizaron en noviembre

de 2024 (Cobija); abril de 2025 (Riberalta), y, julio de 2025 (Rurrenabaque). El número promedio de participantes en cada lugar fue de veinte personas entre hombres y mujeres combinándose entre comunicadores ya con experiencia de trabajo en medios locales o en la elaboración de noticias mediante páginas virtuales, líderes de comunicación indígena, y agentes de pastoral comprometidos con la comunicación social más otros interesados.

Los encuentros presenciales de tres días continuos posibilitaron evaluar las condiciones de preparación y conocimiento de los participantes, conocer sus experiencias ligadas a medios de difusión, determinar su interés sobre la comunicación y el periodismo además de poder adaptar contenidos a las circunstancias encontradas, por ejemplo, en el conocimiento del proceso de la comunicación humana, la práctica del periodismo sujeto a normas éticas esenciales, la construcción de noticias, el trabajo y uso de medios como el celular y plataformas web para la edición de productos noticiosos así como la noción del derecho a la comunicación y los mecanismos de autorregulación periodística vigentes en Bolivia.

El producto observable y evaluable después de las sesiones presenciales fue la entrega de producciones audiovisuales las que permitieron conocer temáticas propias del contexto amazónico. Entre ellas la denuncia de la explotación ilegal de oro en la mayoría de los ríos contribuyentes al Amazonas, y el uso de mercurio en la explotación minera con sus consecuencias sobre la salud y medio ambiente. También se trataron las condiciones de inundación y subida de ríos con sus consecuencias en el desplazamiento forzado de poblaciones pobres, la presencia de lideresas de organizaciones indígenas y su lucha por transmitir sus conocimientos y hacer escuchar su voz.

LAS CONDICIONES REALES DE TRABAJO DE LOS COMUNICADORES AMAZÓNICOS

La práctica de la comunicación y el periodismo en los puntos de intervención del Proyecto dejan evidencias como las siguientes: existe una ausencia de centros de formación académica

permanente en comunicación en las principales poblaciones de la Amazonía, se detectaron, sin embargo, algunos esfuerzos esporádicos de instituciones no gubernamentales que ingresaron con estos temas así como algún caso de educación virtual de carácter universitario; los que tienen ya experiencia de trabajo en medios de difusión en su mayoría lo hacen más por un interés personal y han aprendido a desempeñarse de modo empírico; los medios de difusión de la zona en su mayoría son radiofónicos, y estos alternan con la presencia de páginas web que son construidas y alimentadas por iniciativas personales igualmente respaldadas por la autoformación; los comunicadores alternan su trabajo con otras actividades, ya que los medios no son espacios de ingresos significativos, y en muchos casos estos tienen que producir información buscando algún tipo de auspicio; la gran mayoría de los comunicadores en práctica desconocen los marcos regulatorios que hacen a la ética y desempeño periodístico (Ley de Imprenta, y los mecanismos de autorregulación que en Bolivia están reconocidos constitucionalmente). Peor se desconoce el alcance constitucional, histórico y casi único en el mundo, del derecho a la comunicación e información de las bolivianas y bolivianos (Art. 106 de la Constitución 2009) y tampoco se sabe de debates globales que hacen a la comunicación e información.

Los comunicadores indígenas, por otro lado, se encuentran sobre todo cumpliendo tareas de información desde sus organizaciones naturales indígenas, y su labor es transitoria debido a que ocupan papeles de dirigencia los que rotan periódicamente ocasionando la necesidad de permanente formación de nuevos líderes. Un reto que se plantea como necesidad es que ellos inicien tareas de recuperación de las formas tradicionales de comunicación y de concepción de la misma comunicación a partir de sus cosmovisiones y lógicas culturales indígenas, las que seguramente distan muchísimo de las lógicas comunicacionales y mediáticas de occidente.

Los líderes de organizaciones locales, y otros interesados demostraron alto interés en pro-

fundizar conocimientos sobre las dinámicas de comunicación y práctica de periodismo con enfoque medioambiental. Se detectó especialmente el interés en población joven de conocer más sobre la comunicación humana y los medios. En este sentido, en Riberalta y en Rurrenabaque la capacitación tuvo que desdoblarse en una oferta paralela dirigida a estudiantes de colegio los que fueron atendidos con temas que pudieran estar en su alcance e interés como la propuesta de prensa escolar y la introducción de los medios alternativos como recursos de expresión propia.

Las condiciones técnicas de conectividad en las comunidades rurales de la Amazonía no son favorables todavía, esto impide ofertas sólidas de educación a distancia así como el simple contacto a medios de difusión (la penetración de internet en Bolivia se calcula en un 70%). Y, por otro lado, los adultos mayores de origen indígena no se encuentran habilitados en el manejo de recursos como el celular y peor aún de ser consumidores de redes sociales y aplicaciones de la Internet. Este aspecto es necesario observarse cuando en muchos lugares emisoras de radio que anteriormente operaban en frecuencia de amplitud modulada (AM), llegando a distantes poblaciones indígenas ahora por razones de costos y mantenimiento de equipos han migrado a ofertas de radio en línea ocasionando que aparezcan nuevos sectores poblacionales que viven en situación de incomunicación y desinformación.

LA REALIDAD ANTE LOS DEBATES DE WSIS Y DE LAS ESFERAS GLOBALES

Siendo que La Coalición Global de Derechos Digitales para la CMSI (GDRC-CMSI) promueve un enfoque basado en los derechos humanos, centrado en las personas resulta necesario que este tipo de planteos corresponda de modo efectivo y real a la globalidad asumiendo que, en el mundo, especialmente en el Sur global, las condiciones de desarrollo y oportunidad para el uso y acceso a los recursos tecnológicos de la comunicación e información como en la Amazonía son desiguales.

Condiciones socio históricas, así como de

recursos e infraestructuras han afectado la existencia de oportunidades de igualdad, equilibrio, así como de democratización de las comunicaciones y, por tanto, de la circulación misma de la palabra diversa. Existe una necesidad, de decolonizar los mismos debates sobre la igualdad natural de los derechos humanos, para matizar estas percepciones hacia nociones de comunicación más plurales e inclusivas, donde la diversidad humana, sea una constante de vigilancia constante.

Por otro lado, si se entiende que la UIT es un como actor principal de la CMSI, buscando el avance del desarrollo sostenible a través de la tecnología, el esfuerzo que se realiza, y ya desde sus versiones previas se podrá optimizar si se toma en cuenta las demandas que expone la sociedad civil entendiendo que este actor canaliza las necesidades locales y además tiene como operadores locales a los organismos estatales de la materia, los que igualmente deberán estar preparados para la comprensión amplia de lo que supone la democratización de las comunicaciones y el mismo derecho a la comunicación e información en relación a la democracia. Pues no se puede hablar de sociedades de la información sin reconocer que persisten contextos humanos donde se viven en condiciones de desinformación e incomunicación como es el caso de gran parte de las poblaciones de la Amazonía.

CONCLUSIÓN

El derecho a la comunicación busca superar la invisibilidad en la esfera pública del marginado, del excluido de su opinión y de la expresión de sus preocupaciones e intereses. Así, también comprende el reconocer, recuperar y fortalecer formas tradicionales y locales de comunicación, así procura contraponerse al silencio y a aquellas representaciones que los medios hacen de sectores sociales los que a pesar de ser mayoritarios son minimizados o excluidos. Un derecho de todas y de todos a la comunicación plantea desde la participación de las mismas comunidades que se aliente su auto expresión, esta tarea supone una construcción colectiva pero altamente sensible para no dejar de ver las desigualdades y los

desequilibrios, así como ya se proyectaban en los años ochenta los debates de la UNESCO y que dieron origen a la noción del derecho a la comunicación. Las constantes que deben mantenerse en todo tiempo o presencia tecnológica son las de la equidad, la inclusión y el igual acceso a todas las oportunidades de una comunicación e información efectivamente humanas. ■

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El derecho a la no desinformación: Una propuesta desde Bolivia

Erick R. Torrico Villanueva

*La desinformación representa un problema real en la vida diaria actual y un obstáculo creciente para el desempeño del régimen democrático. Contrarrestar ese fenómeno es urgente y necesario; hacerlo desde el enfoque de los derechos humanos es plenamente factible. La propuesta para el establecimiento de un nuevo derecho, el **derecho a la no desinformación**, así lo demuestra. Planteado a partir del análisis del “nuevo marco normativo nacional informativo-comunicacional” de Bolivia, este derecho emerge como una estrategia inédita para enfrentar la manipulación informativa deliberada.*

¿Es posible imaginar un derecho que sea útil para contrarrestar la desinformación sin que al mismo tiempo implique la vulneración de otros derechos? La propuesta del *derecho a la no desinformación* responde afirmativamente a esta interrogante porque se orienta a sortear ese dilema, así como a ofrecer una vía alternativa para enfrentar el creciente problema de la distorsión informativa intencional.

La definición que se plantea al respecto es la siguiente: Es el derecho de toda persona a no ser objeto de engaño informativo deliberado y sistemático que condicione, limite o impida su ejercicio de otros derechos y que, por tanto, atente contra el desenvolvimiento de la sociedad en democracia (Torrico, 2025, p. 134).

Se trata, pues, de una nueva prerrogativa destinada a potenciar la protección de las personas usuarias de información, al igual que la de la convivencia ciudadana pacífica, y que debiera ser considerada para su incorporación en las estructuras normativas existentes en materia de derechos humanos.

En la base axiológica de estos derechos se encuentran la dignidad y la justicia, que solamente pueden ser alcanzables –así sea de modo parcial o por etapas– en el seno de una sociedad fundada en los valores de la libertad, la igualdad, el pluralismo, la participación y la legalidad, es decir, de una sociedad democrática que, como es bien sabido, no puede existir ni desenvolverse al margen de los procesos de información.

El fenómeno de la desinformación, en ese sentido, atenta no solamente contra el derecho a la información de todas las personas, sino asimismo contra la legitimidad y el funcionamiento del régimen democrático.

Este doble riesgo necesita ser previsto y enfrentado por el Estado, que es el encargado de reconocer, respetar, proteger, garantizar y promover los derechos, marco de obligaciones en el cual la progresiva expansión de las facultades ciudadanas legalmente instituidas es determinante.

COMPLEMENTAR EL DERECHO A LA INFORMACIÓN

El derecho a la no desinformación aborda un ángulo que los alcances del derecho a la información no incluyen: el de la calidad de la información que se difunde o se recibe.

No resulta suficiente, como se comprenderá, que las personas tengan la posibilidad concreta de emitir informaciones (libertad de expresión) o de acceder a ellas (libertad de información), pues los contenidos implicados en esos procesos podrían ser engañosos. En otras palabras, lo que además se requiere es fortalecer las bases de la confiabilidad informativa.

La desinformación prolifera y prospera en ámbitos autoritarios signados por una conflictividad intensa en que operan fuentes malinten-

cionadas, por lo general anónimas, cuyo interés primordial es alimentar las pugnas, avivándolas o aun generándolas con semiverdades o falsedades, para obtener el mayor rédito posible, sea político, económico o ambos.

En consecuencia, la confianza en la información está relacionada con la vigencia de un entorno en que imperen los derechos y las libertades, se cuente con medios informativos legalmente establecidos, las fuentes sean responsables y la información sea manejada con profesionalidad, esto es, con sujeción a las reglas técnicas y a los principios éticos correspondientes.

No obstante, es claro que el mayor volumen de información que se pone en circulación en las sociedades actuales proviene de espacios distintos a los convencionales, a los que no siempre es dable exigir ni aplicar los criterios de seriedad y competencia antes señalados.

Por ello es que se hace necesario complementar las previsiones del derecho a la información, lo cual puede ser logrado mediante la adopción de un nuevo derecho que afronte la desinformación en conjunción con otras estrategias afines y que cuide los elementos concernientes a la calidad y confiabilidad de las informaciones.

Como ya fue dicho, si bien en términos abstractos el derecho a la información es la primera víctima de la desinformación, en un plano concreto pero más amplio lo es la democracia, porque aquel fenómeno lesiona severamente las capacidades y posibilidades del conocimiento ciudadano sobre los asuntos de afectación pública, lo mismo que las de su participación en los respectivos procesos de toma de decisiones. El deterioro general de la cualidad democrática deviene, entonces, una de las consecuencias del accionar desinformador.

Para la Organización de las Naciones Unidas (2022, p. 2), la desinformación consiste en “información inexacta, que tiene intención de engañar y que se comparte con el fin de causar un daño grave”, caracterización a la que cabe añadir los tres “ingredientes esenciales” de los mensajes desinformadores que anota Ángel Badillo: “(1)

una intención, preferiblemente política; (2) una falsedad, y (3) una presentación formal con apariencia de verdad” (Badillo, 2019, p. 12).

La desinformación no es un hecho nuevo; tiene precedentes en los primeros grandes conflictos de la humanidad. En la historia contemporánea quedó registrado especialmente el proceder que en esta materia desplegaron las dos potencias victoriosas de la segunda conflagración mundial, los Estados Unidos de América y la Unión de Repúblicas Socialistas Soviéticas, que entre 1945 y 1989 se disputaron el control del orden internacional, enfrentándose en la llamada “Guerra Fría” y acusándose de ataques recíprocos de *disinformation* o *desinformatziya*. Fue en ese contexto que diferentes Estados terminaron involucrándose, cada vez más evidentemente, en la planificación, financiación y ejecución de acciones de desinformación vinculadas con frecuencia a la noción militar de “guerra psicológica”.

En la última década, la propia política interna de las naciones empezó a verse comprometida con los procesos desinformadores, ante todo en etapas electorales. La utilización intensiva de recursos tecnológicos de información aceleró, simplificó y abarató esas intervenciones manipuladoras en la esfera pública, que cada vez más es construida en el espacio de lo digital y consigue amplia reproducción y repercusión entre los miembros de la sociedad civil.

Las elecciones estadounidenses de 2016, cuando fue denunciada una presunta intromisión rusa que habría favorecido al candidato republicano Donald Trump en desmedro del prestigio de su contendiente demócrata Hillary Clinton, aparte de la utilización no autorizada de millones de perfiles de usuarios para el envío de mensajes personalizados de la campaña de Trump, se consideran hoy como el momento oficial del ingreso de la desinformación en la escena política y social internacional.

Se presume también que otros hechos relevantes ocurridos ese mismo año, como el referendo sobre la salida del Reino Unido de la Unión Europea o el plebiscito que buscaba ratificar el frustrado acuerdo de paz con las denominadas

Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, al igual que las elecciones presidenciales que entre 2017 y 2022 se desarrollaron en Brasil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, México y Perú, fueron objeto de diferentes operaciones desinformadoras.

En el caso boliviano, el antecedente más cercano de estos problemas es el del referendo constitucional del 21 de febrero de 2016 con el que el gobierno de entonces pretendía obtener la autorización para la reelección presidencial continua. El rechazo que recibió ese planteamiento (51,3% del electorado dijo “No”) fue atribuido por los derrotados a una “guerra sucia” en la órbita digital tras conocerse la denuncia de que la empresa china de ingeniería y construcción CAMC Engineering Co. Ltd., gerenciada comercialmente por una exnovia del gobernante, se había adjudicado contratos públicos por 500 millones de dólares de manera irregular.

Así, de modo global, la democracia está hoy atravesada por distintas manifestaciones de desinformación que ante todo es canalizada por las tecnologías informativo-comunicacionales, se ha hecho parte de la dinámica política y, en general, parece haberse instalado como un factor cotidianamente presente incluso en el nivel de algunas relaciones de pequeño grupo.

SOLUCIÓN EQUIVOCADA

A partir de la experiencia boliviana, condicionada con fuerza por la urgencia de ciertos actores políticos para responder a lo que calificaron de “ataques” desinformadores, surgió en el plano legislativo un conjunto de iniciativas dirigidas a regular el uso de las redes sociales digitales.

Entre mayo de 2016 y marzo de 2023, en ese sentido, fueron presentados a consideración de las Cámaras de Senadores y Diputados ocho proyectos de ley, siete por el oficialismo y uno por la oposición, que coincidieron en su propósito de penalizar la difusión de mensajes que tuviesen contenidos señalables como falsos o denigratorios.

El repertorio de hechos sancionables (tipos

de delitos) contemplado en esos proyectos iba desde la calumnia y la difamación o expresiones de tono racista hasta simplemente “la mentira”. En general, tales planteamientos pretendían acallar a los medios que incurrieran en alguna figura de esa tipificación. Se trataba, por tanto, de instaurar un mecanismo restrictivo de la libertad de expresión que algunos pensaron que podía haber tenido un carácter ejemplarizador, mientras otros eran conscientes de que más bien podía alimentar la censura y la autocensura.

Lo positivo de la situación fue que ninguna de esas propuestas llegó a ser tratada de manera efectiva por la Asamblea Legislativa, lo cual evitó que cualquiera de esas posibles normas vulnerara los derechos ciudadanos y violentara los preceptos constitucionales y los principales estándares internacionales relacionados con la materia. Esa vía, la judicialización, era a todas luces una ruta equivocada.

UN NUEVO ORDEN NORMATIVO DE LA INFORMACIÓN Y LA COMUNICACIÓN EN BOLIVIA

La Constitución Política del Estado aprobada en Bolivia en febrero de 2009 reconoció en su artículo 106 el derecho a la información y la comunicación (DIC), mismo que comprende un conjunto de subderechos, entre ellos los relativos a la libertad de expresión, de opinión y de información; a la rectificación y la réplica; a la libre emisión de ideas sin censura previa; al acceso a la información, a la libertad de pensamiento y al control social de la gestión pública. En esta perspectiva, el DIC es un derecho complejo integrado por otros, cada uno de los cuales, en su momento, puede convertirse en el núcleo que articule a los demás en torno suyo.

Con esa constitucionalización quedó configurado en el país un sistema legal específico para el área, en los hechos un “nuevo orden normativo de la información y la comunicación”, ya que previamente, desde la primera disposición de 1826, la carta fundamental solo consignaba el derecho a la libertad de expresión.

El renovado escenario que implica el cita-

do cambio constitucional en materia de estipulaciones referidas a la información y la comunicación comprende la ampliación del espectro de derechos reconocido, así como la extensión de su aplicabilidad desde el plano individual hasta el colectivo, pero más centralmente conlleva la asunción de valores y principios concernientes a la libertad, la democracia y la inclusión.

Es en ese cuadro que se hace posible y pertinente la proposición de una nueva prerrogativa, pues el campo de los derechos humanos es abierto y permite tanto la aplicación de un determinado parámetro legal a un ámbito o un caso no previstos en la norma positiva (por extensión), como la incorporación en el cuerpo normativo de una solución novedosa para suplir esa falta de cobertura protectora (por integración). El derecho a la no desinformación se inscribe en una combinación de tales opciones, así como adopta el espíritu de las recomendaciones del Consejo de Derechos Humanos de las Naciones Unidas respecto a extender al espacio digital todos los derechos reconocidos en la Declaración Universal de 1948.

UNA ESTRATEGIA INÉDITA Y COMPLEMENTARIA

Hasta el momento, en el plano internacional, han sido sugeridas o puestas en práctica cinco estrategias principales no intervencionistas para contrarrestar la desinformación: la moderación de contenidos; la verificación de noticias (*fact-checking*); la cualificación del periodismo; la alfabetización mediática e informacional y la transparencia activa. La única que implica responsabilidad para el Estado es la última, en el nivel de la gestión de la información pública; el peso de las otras cuatro más bien recae en las empresas tecnológicas o en las instituciones y organizaciones de la sociedad civil.

El derecho a la no desinformación constituye, entonces, una estrategia distinta, inédita y capaz de establecer sinergia con las otras ya disponibles. Su formulación y adopción pueden contribuir a frenar los mensajes desinformadores y a apuntalar la convivencia democrática. ■

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ON THE SCREEN

Karlovy Vary (Czech Republic) 2025

At the 59th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (July 4-12, 2025), the Ecumenical Jury, appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS, awarded its Prize to *Rebuilding* directed by Max Walker-Silverman (USA, 2025).

Motivation: A quiet, divorced Colorado rancher who lost everything in a wildfire is re-located to an emergency relief camp with other displaced survivors. As these strangers come to know one another, each rediscovers hope through the creation of friendships and family bonds. With a delicate touch, the director explores themes of community, the blended family, profound human generosity, selflessness, and cooperation. This austere and visually striking film is a beautiful, life-affirming story that offers hope in the face of hardship, both personal and environmental.

In addition, the jury awarded a Commendation to *Cinema Jazireh* directed by Gözde Kural (Turkey, Iran, Bulgaria, Romania, 2024).

Motivation: A mother, having survived her family's massacre under Taliban rule in Afghanistan, disguises herself as a man to locate her missing son. The film, with its gritty cinematography and nuanced editing, deftly places contemporary global issues within the context of Leila's journey, such as war, oppression of women and the marginalized, gender, sex trafficking, and child abuse. The film is a testament to hope, resistance to tyranny, and the power of profoundly human networks working together. *Cinema Jazireh* has the exceptional potential to make the audience care about what is happening in the world.

Members of the 2025 Jury: Achim Forst (Germany, Jury President); Rose Pacatte (USA); Ida Tenglerová (Czech Republic).



Locarno (Switzerland) 2025

The Ecumenical Jury at Locarno 2025 awarded its Prize to the film *Solomamma* (still above) directed by Janicke Askevold (Norway, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, 2025).

The film raises important ethical questions about origin, identity and belonging: Who is the author of life? What is the miracle of conception and birth when we think about life in medical-technical paradigms? What is the source and responsibility of a new life and the uncontrollable consequences of such a choice? Can a “Solomamma” take responsibility for her decisions and respect freedom, her own, her child’s and the donor’s? This film questions us about the conditions for living independently while remaining connected to others.

In addition, the jury awarded a Commendation to the film *Le Lac* directed by Fabrice Aragno (Switzerland, 2025).

Le Lac shows us a couple who do not shy away from mourning, but struggle with it. Grief has left them speechless, but even without words

they experience a deep understanding of each other because they consciously confront their pain. With their sailing boat, they battle the elements and literally face the storm by sailing right into it. Wind and weather bring them to the boundary between life and death.

Members of the 2025 Jury: Ileana Bîrsan, Romania; Philippe Cabrol, France; Roland Kauffmann, France; Melanie Pollmeier, Switzerland (President of the Jury).

Venice (Italy) 2025

The 14th INTERFILM Award for Promoting Interreligious Dialogue at Venice 2025 for a film of high aesthetic and artistic quality went to *Silent Friend* directed by Ildikó Enyedi (Germany, France, Hungary, 2025).

The film reawakens our wonder of the world by opening the doors of perception and giving us back a sense of childlike curiosity. A triptych unfolds onto the interconnections and ramifications of life. *Silent Friend* is a poetic rendition of the union of science and spirituality.

Members of the 2025 Jury: Dirk von Jutrczenka, Germany (President of the Jury); Leonardo Noam Ribet Griot, Italy; SB Rodriguez Plate, USA; Edna Rodriguez Plate, USA; Anita Uzulniece, Latvia.

Warsaw (Poland) 2025

At the 41st Film Festival (10-19 October 2025) the 16th Ecumenical Jury appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS, awarded its Prize to the film *Brother* (Brat) directed by Maciej Sobieszczanski (Poland, Czech Republic, 2025).

Motivation: Fourteen-year-old Dawid lives with his nine-year-old brother and mother in a run-down apartment building. Their father is in prison for burglary and theft, but the younger brother doesn't want to know anything about that. He idealizes his father and can't stand his mother's new companion. Torn between his father's rigid instructions and his love for his mother and brother, Dawid tries to find his own way in life. With many close-ups and a moving handheld camera, the film lets us participate in

David's struggle for a place in life, with the likeable lead actor giving a thoroughly convincing performance. A moving film about family cohesion, brotherly love, and the value of forgiveness, which shows to a young generation perspectives for the future.

In addition, the Jury awarded a Commendation to the film *Nino* (still below) directed by Pauline Loquès (France, 2025).

Motivation: Nino, who has just turned 29, learns rather by chance during an examination that he has cancer and needs urgent treatment. He has three days over the weekend to prepare himself and find someone to accompany him to his first chemotherapy session. The director's debut feature film captivates viewers with its Canadian lead actor Théodore Pellerin and its observational style of filmmaking. On his three-day journey through the anonymous cityscapes of Paris, oscillating between silent despair and stoic composure, Nino encounters many people who have their own destinies to bear and, like Nino, are hardly able to communicate. A film carried by compassion and great humanity, it shows that there are also true friends, tenderness, and mutual understanding.

