Digital Media and Children's Rights: Safeguarding Human Rights Online

Submitted to the Child Rights Commission of the UNHCHR

Towards the September 12 day discussions

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Background

We believe that the Internet is a public good and should be used, managed and governed as such. It is important that the architecture remains open to encourage creativity and innovation. Sir Tim Berners-Lee, founder of the "World Wide Web" had a vision in mind: that the web be free and open to all. All peoples have a right to development and the Internet has a vital role to play in helping to achieve the full realization of internationally agreed sustainable development goals. It is a vital tool for giving everyone the means to participate in development processes. For children, the Internet is a means, a tool, a crosscutting mechanism to the realization of all other rights.

This submission is in two parts:

A. Fundamental principles
B. Empowering practices

Principles

States and non-state actors should respect the right of all people to use the Internet as part of their right to dignity, to participate in social and cultural life, and to respect their human rights. Special attention should be paid to the needs of children as the Internet is fast becoming their key information, socialization and participation channel. Policies must factor in disabilities, age, rural constituencies, and gender discrepancies.

The Internet should be envisioned as a global enabler of other rights. Access to the Internet is a gateway to health information, education, learning, assembly, play and expression. In our part of the world (Africa) mobile technology is the platform on which many get access to the Internet. It is therefore important to encourage child-friendly mobile platforms, content, and tools.

Every child should be protected against all forms of crimes and harms committed on or using the Internet including harassment, people trafficking and misuse of one's digital identity and data. Increasing criminal activities are targeting children online. However, the protection of rights should never be used as an excuse to deploy systems of censorship and filtering. The best way to ensure that children rights are preserved is by enabling and unlocking the creative potential of the Internet, not by restricting and filtering.

Children behave as children online and need to be educated on ethical, responsible, and good practices as it is the custom offline. Online delinquency, undesirable and harmful behavior should also be handled in the same manner as it would offline. In cases where children are guilty of offenses or problematic behavior for which corrective measures are legally allowed, such will need to be measured. The justice system should first seek to protect and educate before any punitive measures, and should adopt a restorative justice approach through which children can learn.

It is important that children be empowered to make positive choices by themselves. In an era of easy and unsupervised Internet access, children's agency needs to be empowered, so as to be able to deal with potential risks and threats to their safety by themselves. It is also important   that in our policy drives, we recognize that children in themselves are not a homogenous group, so our responses and interventions should seek to incorporate diversity.

Empowering Practices

The creation and promotion of use of online content that reflects children's voices and needs, that promotes and supports children's rights - in order to address existing inequalities and encourage active participation and empowerment of children via online spaces should be encouraged

Direct support to facilitate Internet access, such as by establishing necessary infrastructure and infrastructure facilities, including access to openly licensed or unlicensed spectrum, electricity supply, community based ICT centers and tele-centers, libraries, community centers, clinics and schools, are crucial to making the Internet accessible to and affordable for all.

Everyone has the right to privacy online including the right to chose and control how their personal data is collected, used, disclosed, retained and disposed of. Children may make   mistakes online. There should be allowance for such mistakes to be

corrected. Social media and other online platform companies should make this possible and easy.

Empowering and equipping children with the skills to safely deal with risks online is also important in ensuring that their rights are protected. This should build on a recognition of the agency that children already have in their online interactions.

The education opportunity is perhaps the most significant of all the benefits of the Internet. Where practical school children, and other learners, should have access to Internet enabled devices. Accordingly, media, social media and information literacy programs should be instituted in schools and in other public institutions. These are also important environments in which responsible online or digital citizenship can be fostered.

Gender-segregated public access points for the Internet has been requested in many Web We Want fora. This follows the male dominance experience in areas where access to the Internet is via public centers. Female only Internet access centers encourage young girls, ensure their privacy, protect from bullying and also cater to religious and traditional taboos.

Parental oversight of children's online activities should not stifle the innovative spirits. Online oversight tools like TwoTen helps parents tailor the content of their children's Internet. Such tools can be deployed at home for children aged 2 to 10 and are preferable to state surveillance. Open and supportive communication channels between caregivers and parents, and children, need to be encouraged, and the space allowed for children to safely talk about their online experiences without fear of judgement.

Going forward, two-thirds of the world's population are still not connected to the Internet. Initiatives that support broadband access, like the Alliance for Affordable Internet – A4AI, should be encouraged to do more so children all over the world can enjoy the benefits of the Internet. The Sustainable Development Goals should aim to:

 • by 2030, achieve universal broadband access (i.e., 100% penetration) in every country; and
• by 2025, reduce the cost of basic broadband below 2% of average monthly income.

Children in Africa stand to gain a lot from the Internet. As an enabler for other rights, Internet access should be a priority of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The schools are a key entry channel for this, as well as public access points. Efforts should continue until Internet access get to all children, in all countries, at a very affordable rate.

Submitting organizations:

The Web We Want Campaign: The Web We Want Campaign, hosted by the World Wide Web Foundation, is a global action for the protection, promotion and provision of Human Rights on the Internet. Alongside the other programs at the World Wide Web Foundation it seeks to create a world where everyone, everywhere is online and able to participate in a free flow of knowledge, ideas, collaboration and creativity over the open Web.

http://www.webwewant.org
#webwewant

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The Association for Progressive Communications (APC)'s mission is to empower and support organisations, social movements and individuals in and through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to build strategic communities and initiatives for the purpose of making meaningful contributions to equitable human development, social justice, participatory political processes and environmental sustainability.

http://www.apc.org

@apc_news

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The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) is a non-governmental organization working in the field of online and offline violence prevention, child protection, and safety, in South Africa and the region.

www.cjcp.org.za

@cjcp_ed