STRENGTHENING intersectional approaches to DATA AND DIGITAL RIGHTS ADVOCACY during the pandemic

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Accelerating Social Change

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CONTENTS

GLOSSARY

The following definitions are for concepts commonly used in this report.

Social justice (SJ): We refer to social justice as the institutional conditions that are essential for the fair and equitable redistribution of power, resources and privileges[1], and an explicit acknowledgment that oppressive and exclusive structures have created disparities among different groups in terms of their needs, resources and access to power.

Social justice actors: Groups, individuals and networks whose primary mission is to confront injustice, power imbalances and rights abuses. For this research, we focused specifically on actors whose work advances and protects the rights of traditionally excluded, oppressed and marginalised communities. This includes organisations, activist groups, movements and collectives which focus on areas such as disability rights and justice; women's rights and gender justice; economic justice; racial justice; LGBTQIA+ rights; migrant rights; refugee protection; housing rights; sex workers' rights; prison abolition; legal empowerment; transparency; anti-corruption and climate and environmental justice.

Data and digital rights (DDR): The norms and principles that focus on issues related to how people use, access, create or mitigate potential harms stemming from digital technologies and the internet. These rights are often, but not always, enshrined in laws and other legal instruments. This includes access to digital information and knowledge, privacy and data protection, automated decision-making, digital identification, content moderation, hate speech, online misinformation, disinformation, the regulation of the tech industry and organising of gig economy labor.

DDR actors: Groups, networks and individuals i) whose primary work focuses exclusively on the issues and themes identified above, or ii) whose primary mission is to advance social justice or human rights causes with a programmatic or thematic focus on digital issues[2].

Intersectionality: Intersectionality is a term developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw[3] in 1989, referring to the idea that race, gender, class and sexuality are all factors that influence the subjectivity and lived experiences of groups and individuals. The term draws from the theoretical

1 Young, Iris M. (2011). Justice and the Politics of Difference. https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691152622/justice-and-the-politics-of-difference

2 Global Partners Digital. (2021). Digital Rights at a Crossroads | Recommendations for advancing human rights and social justice in the post-2020 era. https://www.gp-digital.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Digital-Rights-at-a-Crossroads.pdf

3 Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalising the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics, 1989 University of Chicago Legal Forum, 139.

reflections of Black feminists in the US and feminist thinkers in the Global South, recognising that people, groups and social problems are affected by different sources of oppression simultaneously. An intersectional approach to DDR refers to work around data and digital rights that is informed by organisations working toward social justice.

Cross-sector collaborations: Collaborations or partnerships made up of actors or organisations from different sectors. In this research, we refer to cross-sector collaborations as any partnership between SJ actors and DDR actors. Cross-sector collaborations may or may not generate work with an intersectional approach to DDR issues.

Global South: A broad term to refer to low- and middle-income countries, commonly known as "developing countries,"' located in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Oceania, which have shared histories of colonisation, domination, exploitation and inequality. We use it, in part, to acknowledge that political economy matters. NOTE: Some researchers acknowledge that there is an excluded "in- between" group of countries that do not necessarily have colonial histories or the same power status as "developed" countries. One proposed name for this group is "Global East."[4] However, for the purposes of this report, Global South encompasses all lower and middle-income countries[5].

Global North: A term that refers to countries mainly located in North America and Europe, often referred to as "developed countries," which carry histories as colonisers and dominant powers.

Latin America, western Europe, US, sub-Saharan Africa: In this report, we use the above terms to describe the regions we focused on, as they are the most familiar terms for these locations. However, we acknowledge that these terms can promote geographical determinism and are often inaccurate, homogenising and harmful. For example, Latin America is a generalisation that excludes pueblos originarios, whose languages — unlike Spanish and Portuguese — do not derive from Latin, while sub-Saharan Africa is a term that reflects racist geo-political ideas[6]. The stereotypes embedded in language often inform or misinform thinking and research, further entrenching misconceptions. Many terms widely used today are constructed from the perceived reality of the minority world[7], which has power and agency that informs what becomes systematically normalised. We are aware of the shortcomings of the terms in regular use today, and are actively seeking better terms. We hope to adopt more accurate terms that resonate with the referenced communities and welcome your thoughts, ideas and engagement around this.

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4 Martin Müller (2020). In Search of the Global East: Thinking between North and South, Geopolitics, 25:3, 734-755, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2018.1477757

5 We continue to reflect on and invite conversation on the terms we use for various regions.

6 Mashanda, T. C. (2016). Rethinking the Term "Sub Saharan Africa" | The African Exponent. The African Exponent. Retrieved 7 October 2021, from https://www.africanexponent.com/bpost/rethinking-the-term-sub-saharan-africa-36

7 Alam, S. (2008). Majority World: Challenging the West's Rhetoric of Democracy. Amerasia Journal, 34, 87–98. https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.34.1.l3176027k4q614v5

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a landscape of overburdened social justice organisations in a world facing acute threats, there has been growing recognition of the importance of intersectional approaches and the necessity of collaboration in advocacy. The pandemic has prompted a rapid shift to the online world, catalysing more organisations to move their work online, while restricting their ability to undertake it. Though much has been written on the growing data and digital rights (DDR) issues prompted by the pandemic, there remains little discussion on how — or even if — organisations have been collaborating around DDR issues. This is a significant missed opportunity: knowledge around the current state of advocacy is critical to reflecting, learning and strategising about future work for organisations and funders alike.

Through extensive engagement with DDR organisations, social justice organisations and funders in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, western Europe and the United States, we sought to explore and understand existing collaboration and current intersectional approaches employed by social justice and DDR organisations. To do so, we undertook research looking at themes at the intersection of technology and social justice, especially during the pandemic; held five community calls with advocates to learn more about their experiences with collaboration and DDR advocacy; and interviewed 58 social justice and digital rights advocates.

In our research, we saw how issues of inequitable funding, tech hype and power imbalances between different regions and sectors produced an uneven landscape where **collaboration was infrequent**

and often lacked a strong intersectional framework. Our report explains why there is such a pressing need for collaboration:

1 **Digital inequities have deepened during the pandemic** and the digital divide has only widened. This is especially true in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, where digital literacy and access was already a concern prior to the pandemic.

2 **Activists are facing a digital emergency.** Forced to rapidly recalibrate their work and services in online spaces, many organisations are balancing existing work with the new DDR issues created by the pandemic[8].

3 **Intersectional collaboration is critical,** given how Covid-19 has demonstrated the uneven impact of DDR on those who have already been made vulnerable.

4 **Cross-sector collaboration can yield benefits**, such as rooting DDR issues in the realities of social justice communities, strengthening the message of DDR work and making it easier for organisations to achieve their objectives. In particular, we found that making DDR more accessible to a wider, more diverse group of civil society organisations makes it more actionable for a broader set of actors.

But successful collaborations do not happen overnight. They require organisations to form strong relationships based on shared values and mutual trust. In our research, we found that many successful collaborations were initiated by interpersonal relationships and were solidified by joint projects.

Challenges to such relationships abound, and centre around three key factors: 1) lack of access to opportunities for trust-building, 2) a need for a more inclusive, interdisciplinary and diverse digital rights approach and 3) a lack of knowledge about DDR. Overcoming these issues requires changes to how civil society approaches collaboration and how DDR issues are funded.

8 Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe. (2020). Universalizar el acceso a las tecnologías digitales para enfrentar los efectos del Covid-19. CEPAL. https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/45938-universalizar-acceso-tecnologias-digitales-enfrentar-efectos-covid-19

CHALLENGE	WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	DONOR INTERVENTIONS
Lack of access to opportunities for trust-building	Exploring diverse approaches to DDR work, going beyond policy and reflecting on how DDR issues impact marginalised communities	There's a need for more flexible and sustainable funding approaches and strategies.
The need for a more inclusive, interdisciplinary and diverse digital rights approach	Reconstructing a new digital rights discourse, beyond technical jargon and buzzwords	Funders have a role in promoting partnerships, creating safe spaces for equitable collaborations and for promoting accountability in the field.
Lack of knowledge about DDR	For knowledge to be exchanged across these sectors, we need more connectors, translators and shared spaces. Connectors and translators — individuals and organisations straddling both worlds — play a critical role in creating a two-way dialogue. There is currently a lack of shared spaces for debating existing tensions and nuances.	The next phase of DDR field-building should explore ways to increase the capacity of SJ groups

Though this report offers recommendations for funders, we still aimed to provide a clear-eyed view of the current state of collaboration, and offer language and context to help organisations better identify their needs. It is our hope that this can give a clear sense of how DDR organisations, social justice organisations and funders can take the next step towards intersectional collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Context

The Covid-19 pandemic has transformed the kinds of challenges that social justice actors face, the tools and support available to them, and the partners they can collaborate with. Alongside the inherent difficulty of carrying out their work during a global health crisis that exacerbated existing inequalities, there came a rushed digital transformation and a growing dependence on digital platforms, which deeply impacted (and often hindered) the work of activist communities. Data and digital rights (DDR) issues have become increasingly important, with data-heavy interventions like contact tracing apps and vaccine passports being rolled out by governments across the world, and many state actors introducing preventive measures that often jeopardised hard-fought DDR rights through acts like introducing mainstream surveillance practices and passing laws limiting access to information.

Though social justice actors may see their focus as outside the digital rights space, recent years — and the Covid-19 pandemic — have highlighted the interconnected nature of social justice and digital rights. Simultaneously, data and digital rights activists, whose work has historically been shaped by the agendas of donors in the west and digital technology developed in Silicon Valley, have begun to see how their work can be strengthened by a greater understanding of the realities of social justice groups and the communities they work with.

About this research

In this work, The Engine Room explores **the key trends at the intersections of social justice (SJ) and data and digital rights (DDR) activism, focusing on the regions of sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, the United States and western Europe during the pandemic**. Through our research, we explore the realities of how SJ and DDR groups have worked together in the past and how collaborations were impacted by Covid-19. Given the multitude of ways that DDR and SJ issues intersect and are intensified by the pandemic, we have centred an intersectionality approach in our report.

Our primary objectives with this report are to:

→ Explore key trends at the crossroads of DDR and SJ activism in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, and identify issue areas that will benefit from further research and investment;

→ Identify concrete pathways, potential collaborations and recommendations on how to strengthen collaborations between the SJ and DDR communities;

→ Showcase best practices in facilitating collaboration and convening of diverse communities in order to ensure that these are built upon in future collaborations, along with lessons from less successful approaches

For the purposes of this research, The Engine Room hosted five community calls with participants from the aforementioned regions, and held 58 interviews with social justice and digital rights advocates. Through the combination of community calls and in-depth interviews, our team attempted to develop a holistic understanding of where these communities stood on different themes and how participants' experiences and insights related to one another. Community call participants and interviewees were members of social justice groups, representatives of organisations working on data and digital rights and activists from a variety of movements. Most had some degree of familiarity with DDR, having worked with the topic as members of a DDR organisation or through individual activism. Findings in this document were shaped by the background and expertise of research participants, and informed by The Engine Room's programmatic work and previous research projects. More details about our research methodology can be found in Annex 1.

The structure of this report

The first section of this report provides an overview of the main data and digital rights challenges that emerged during the pandemic, as highlighted by advocates from Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, western Europe and the United States who participated in community calls and interviews. In this section, we also explore the main challenges DDR and SJ groups faced during the pandemic due to their increasing reliance on digital technologies.

Next, in section two, we investigate existing collaborations between DDR and SJ groups. We analyse some of the main barriers to collaboration and map the characteristics of strong collaborations. This section includes reflections on how the pandemic has accelerated the need for the DDR field to become more inclusive, accessible, interdisciplinary, diverse and intersectional.

In the third section, we highlight the need for more connectors, translators and shared spaces in the DDR field.We also dive into how funders' priorities and strategies have greatly shaped and influenced the DDR field and share our recommendations for fostering more collaborations.

Key Findings

For many communities throughout Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, western Europe and the United States, digital inequities have deepened during the pandemic. This research shows that digital equity should become a key priority for a DDR agenda focused on social justice after the pandemic, especially in regions where the digital divide was already a major cause for concern.

Our research also found that many activists are facing a digital emergency. Transitioning to remote work while dealing with digital inequities and resource constraints has affected the workflow of civil society practitioners, challenging their ability to reach the communities they serve and, at times, hindering their ability to select justice-based, context-relevant tech tools. Furthermore, we found an overall lack of support for transitioning advocacy work to a remote setting, as well as a lack of resources available to implement responsible data practices and digital security protocols or address staff burnout — particularly at social justice organisations.

We consistently found that the standard approach to DDR issues — and the DDR field itself — must evolve. It is no longer a niche area, but one that is increasingly touching every facet of life. This need was made even more clear by the pandemic, which has had unequal effects across communities, exposing

structural inequalities. It also highlighted the disconnect between the DDR field and the broader SJ ecosystem, as both attempt to coordinate responses to the multitude of DDR-related issues that are now urgent across the entire ecosystem. In that sense, an emerging priority for DDR has been collaborating with communities disproportionately affected by data and technology issues and approaching the work from a social justice perspective.

While investigating the benefits of collaborations between DDR and SJ actors, our research has found that **an intersectional approach to DDR, more rooted in the realities of social justice communities, can strengthen the message of DDR campaigns, help the sector move beyond technical jargon or buzzwords and make DDR more accessible** to a wider, more diverse set of civil society organisations. Furthermore, given that DDR threats disproportionately harm marginalised communities served by SJ organisations, **an intersectional approach recognises that the most pressing DDR issues are social justice issues.** We also found that successful collaborations take time to cultivate and develop, and are stronger when DDR actors make an effort to contextualise DDR issues according to the realities of social justice agendas.

Right now, **collaborations between DDR actors and SJ actors have been limited; however, there seems to be a shared appetite for more cross-sector engagement.** Some of the current obstacles to collaborations include a lack of access to trust-building opportunities across movements and sectors and a scarcity of knowledge — which is both accessible and relevant — about DDR themes. This ultimately points to the need for a more inclusive, interdisciplinary and diverse digital rights approach.

Some of the steps identified to cultivate stronger and more frequent collaborations include: exploring diverse approaches to DDR work; engaging in meaningful reflections on how DDR issues impact marginalised communities; constructing a new digital rights discourse beyond technical jargon and buzzwords; incentivising more meaningful translation of DDR issues to fit into national and local contexts; fostering shared spaces between DDR and SJ groups; increasing the technical capacity of SJ groups; adopting more flexible and sustainable funding approaches and strategies; and creating safe spaces in the field for equitable collaborations and mutual accountability.

1

INTERSECTIONS OF DATA, DIGITAL RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES DURING THE PANDEMIC: REGIONAL TRENDS

This section provides an overview of the key data and digital rights (DDR) challenges for social justice (SJ) organisations since the beginning of the pandemic. What follows is by no means an exhaustive list of all the relevant trends that emerged in this period, rather a summary of the key issues and concerns raised in our research by social justice actors in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, western Europe and the United States. The main themes listed here encompass key areas relevant to the field, including: **digital equity, access to information, privacy and surveillance, freedom of expression and digital transformation.**
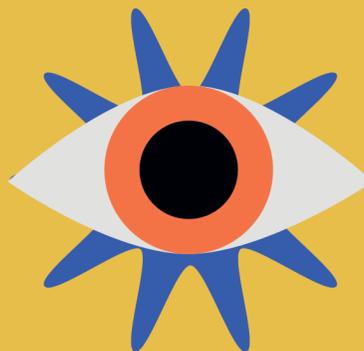
1.1. Digital inequities have deepened during the pandemic

As the Mozilla Foundation notes, access to reliable internet has allowed billions of people during the pandemic to "connect safely with family, work remotely from home, order deliveries and attend school."[9] In the meantime, half of the world's population still lacks basic access to digital technologies, making it impossible for the internet to be a suitable and equitable access point during the health crisis.[10] In fact, research has shown that the pandemic has only deepened the digital divide between privileged and less privileged communities, entrenching already existing structural injustices.[11]

Consequently, most of the advocates we interviewed for this research agreed that **digital equity should be a key priority for a DDR agenda focused on justice post-pandemic**, especially in Latin America and sub–Saharan Africa,[12] where the digital divide was already a major cause for concern before the pandemic.[13] In these regions, a large part of the population depend on limited and expensive data plans,[14] making it very difficult for less connected communities to access the basic services that became even more important during the pandemic.[15] The situation is not exclusive to the developing world; even in the United States,

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9 Mozilla Foundation. Internet Health Report 2020—A healthier internet is possible. Retrieved 31 August 2021, from https://2020.internethealthreport.org/

10 Ibid.

11 Beaunoyer, E., Dupéré, S., & Guitton, M. J. (2020). Covid-19 and digital inequalities: Reciprocal impacts and mitigation strategies. Computers in Human Behavior, 111, 106424. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106424

12 Interview with a former DDR donor in Latin America.

13 Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe. (2020). Universalizar el acceso a las tecnologías digitales para enfrentar los efectos del Covid-19. CEPAL. https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/45938-universalizar-acceso-tecnologias-digitales-enfrentar-efectos-covid-19

14 The most and least expensive countries in the world for 1GB of mobile data. (n.d.). Cable.Co.Uk. Retrieved 2 September 2021, from https://www.cable.co.uk/mobiles/worldwide-data-pricing/

15 Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe. (2017). Estado de la banda ancha en América Latina y el Caribe. https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/43365/1/S1800083_es.pdf

23% of households do not have broadband access at home, as of February 2021.[16]

In Latin America, women, children and adolescents, Black and indigenous communities, have suffered the disproportionate impacts of digital inequities during the pandemic.[17] Advocates from Latin America noted such inequities became more pronounced in this period, especially for isolated, rural and mountainous communities most notably indigenous groups[18] or the quilombola communities of Brazil.[19]

The lack of digital literacy in the region continues to be a key challenge as well, especially for Black and indigenous community leaders and organisers who face significant hurdles when running online campaigns, mobilising against misinformation or protecting themselves against digital security threats.

> *"Last year, with Covid-19 and everything changing to online spaces (...), we've been seeing the difficulty of reaching certain populations, such as leaders of riverside communities, who struggle with accessing the internet." - Community call participant (Latin America)*

In sub-Saharan Africa, inequities in internet access have also presented a key challenge for social justice organising. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the lack of electricity and internet access meant that fundamental internet services were not accessible for the most marginalised communities, bringing issues around access to the forefront. Activists noted that digital inequities most frequently affected rural communities, persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ people and women.

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16 Internet/Broadband Fact Sheet. (2021, April 7). Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/

17 OAS. (2009). States of the Region must Accelerate Universal Internet Access Policies during the Covid-19 Pandemic and Adopt Differentiated Measures to Incorporate Groups in Vulnerable Situations. http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/expression/showarticle.asp?artID=1182&lID=1

18 OCHA. (2020). Pueblos indígenas y Covid-19 en América Latina https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PUEBLOS%20INDIGENAS%20Y%20COVID-19.pdf

19 Como quilombolas estão atravessando a pandemia no Brasil? (n.d.). Nexo Jornal. Retrieved 2 September 2021, from https://www.nexojornal.com.br/ensaio/debate/2020/Como-quilombolas-est%C3%A3o-atravessando-a-pandemia-no-Brasil

1.2. Limited access to information on the disproportionate impact of Covid-19

Since the spread of the pandemic in early 2020, **there has been limited access to information about crucial services and Covid-19's impact on marginalised communities, causing great concern for SJ organisations in each region.** In many countries, freedom of information laws have provided a crucial platform to investigate how state actors treat their citizens. The rapid shift to remote work, however, has caused significant hurdles for government agencies across the world, many of whom responded by restricting their transparency regimes at the beginning of the pandemic.[20] As a result, state actors in multiple countries have been denying or delaying access to information requests, or otherwise limiting the public's access to crucial data.[21]

Advocates from Latin America noted major problems in the region because of restricted access to information about vaccination sites or essential healthcare services and inconsistent data about the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable communities. For instance, not much is known about the presumably disproportionate effect of the virus on indigenous groups,[22] an alarming fact given that these communities have limited access to information about Covid-19. Instead, information is often disseminated on social media and television stations that do not translate their information to indigenous languages.[23] The lack of access to information has the

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20 Governments Delaying Access to Information Because of Pandemic · Eye on Global Transparency. (2020, March 25). Eye on Global Transparency. https://eyeonglobaltransparency.net/2020/03/25/governments-delaying-access-to-information-because-of-pandemic/

21 ARTICLE 19. (2020). Ensuring the Public's Right to Know in the Covid-19 Pandemic. https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Ensuring-the-Publics-Right-to-Know-in-the-Covid-19-Pandemic_Final_05.05.20-PgBrk.pdf

22 UNICEF. (2021, August). Comunidades indígenas y el derecho a la educación en tiempos del Covid-19. https://www.unicef.org/peru/comunicados-prensa/comunidades-indigenas-y-el-derecho-la-educacion-en-tiempos-del-covid-19

OHCHR. (2020, August). ACNUDH | Indigenous Peoples still face severe challenges due to Covid-19. https://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27365&LangID=E

23 OCHA. (2020). Pueblos indígenas y Covid-19 en América Latina https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PUEBLOS%20INDIGENAS%20Y%20COVID-19.pdf

potential to exacerbate pre-existing inequalities[24] for indigenous women, who in many countries already struggle with exercising their rights to land, resources and healthcare, particularly sexual and reproductive healthcare.

In sub-Saharan Africa, access to information has further been inhibited by the limited capacity of state actors to collect and publish data about the spread of the virus.[25] Activists from the region noted that accessing vital information has been particularly challenging for people with disabilities and for those living in rural areas where connectivity is scarce or nonexistent.[26] Similar concerns have been brought up by western European advocates as well, who noted that the lack of access to accurate information has hindered analysis on Covid-19's impact on marginalised communities like refugees and migrants.[27]

Relatedly, the fight against the rapid spread of mis- and disinformation[28] continues to be a priority for most of our interviewees, especially since the **"infodemic"[29] generated by Covid-19 has proven a major challenge in each region, holding disparate effects on vulnerable communities.** Advocates across all regions reported that government officials and the general public were caught off-guard by the rapid spread of Covid-19 — and vaccine-related — misinformation, intensifying calls for more platform accountability and stricter regulations. As Access Now noted in a 2020 paper, "disinformation and misinformation have helped to foment hate speech against vulnerable groups, reinforcing stereotypes and social stigmas against those perceived to be in close contact with the virus".[30]

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24 El Foro Internacional de Mujeres Indígenas. (2020). Llamado Colectivo de las Mujeres Indígenas ante el COVID-19. http://www.filac.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/5mujer.pdf

25 Stefania Milan, Emiliano Treré, Silvia Masiero (2021). Covid-19 from the Margins | Pandemic Invisibilities, Policies and Resistance in the Datafied Society. https://networkcultures.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Covid19FromTheMargins.pdf

26 Interview with community network activist in sub-Saharan Africa.

27 Milan, S., Pelizza, A., & Lausberg, Y. (2020, April). Making migrants visible to Covid-19 counting: The dilemma. OpenDemocracy. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/making-migrants-visible-covid-19-counting-dilemma/

28 Misinformation refers to misleading information created or shared without the intent to manipulate people and disinformation refers to content that was deliberately created or shared to confuse or manipulate people with false information.

29 According to WHO, an infodemic is defined as "too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak".

30 Access Now. (2020). Fighting misinformation and defending free expression during Covid-19: Recommendations for states. https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2020/04/Fighting-misinformation-and-defending-free-expression-during-COVID-19-recommendations-for-states-1.pdf

1.3. The mass collection of health data enables privacy invasions, abuse and stigmatisation

The pandemic has renewed concerns about data protection, privacy and mass surveillance. From contact tracing apps to vaccine passports, governments and state actors around the world have rushed to roll out new measures and technologies to curb the impact of the pandemic, often without the proper safeguards in place. The rapid introduction of Covid-19 technologies have required a mass collection of personal data, sometimes revealing sensitive information about people's "social, sexual, religious, and political associations."[31] **Mass data collection during the pandemic has further enabled invasions of privacy, abuse and stigmatisation, particularly for vulnerable and marginalised communities.**

These concerns have been echoed in our research. In sub-Saharan Africa, activists have been most concerned about the mass data collection that has been happening through contact tracing apps, and the use of automated decision-making processes with little or no oversight.[32] Activists from the region expressed specific concern about how stigmatised groups like LGBTQIA+ people are exposed by contact tracing apps. It was also noted that increased surveillance and mass data collection can pave the way for greater political persecution. An activist from Nigeria, for instance, mentioned that participants in recent protests often faced what was perceived as a "dual risk" – the health risk of attending mass gatherings combined with the risk of government surveillance of protesters.

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31 Stanley, J., & Granick, J. S. (2020). The Limits of Location Tracking in an Epidemic (p. 9). ACLU. https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/limits_of_location_tracking_in_an_epidemic.pdf

32 Manyame, A. (n.d.). Data protection in the age of technology-based disease surveillance. African Internet Rights. Retrieved 31 August 2021, from https://africaninternetrights.org/sites/default/files/Amanda_Manyame-1_1.pdf

"Our organisation has reported on 10 cases where health surveillance violated privacy rights and interfered with personal information. I don't think governments had a well-thought-out plan about how they would conduct health surveillance [during the pandemic]. (...) We've seen violations of privacy across the continent as a whole." - DDR activist working in sub-Saharan Africa

In Latin America, our interviewees noted that the rapid deployment of Covid-19 technologies has been happening without proper public consultation, posing significant challenges to social justice actors and their work. Recent research has also underscored that many governmental and non-governmental actors in the region used the pandemic "as an excuse to relax their responsibilities in delivering timely public information" and to collect personal and sensitive data "without due guarantees, generating additional risks to the population."[33] In some countries like Paraguay, there has also been a rise in surveillance related to protests.[34]

Activists in each region expressed deep concern around the relaxing of data protection regimes, and the increased potential of Covid-19 technologies to abuse and stigmatise already vulnerable communities. In the United States, key challenges for social justice activism included the introduction of mass surveillance practices to identify infected people, ranging from contact tracing apps tracking down Black Lives Matters protesters, Covid-19 public health data potentially being shared with security forces and unchecked surveillance in workplaces and schools.[35] In western Europe, advocates noted that Covid-19 technologies and policies may affect groups on the move the most, such as migrants and refugees.

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33 Along with more than 100 organisations, Al Sur has globally demanded that the governments use digital technologies with the use of sensitive and location information in this context respecting human rights and warned about possible irreversibility in the future. https://www.alsur.lat/en/report/regional-trends-deployment-technologies-during-pandemic-latin-america-initial-reflections-al

34 Castro, P. L. (2021, January 4). Mass Surveillance in the Context of a State of Emergency. TEDIC. https://www.tedic.org/en/mass-surveillance-in-the-context-of-a-state-of-emergency-2021/

35 EFF. (n.d.). Covid-19 and Digital Rights. Electronic Frontier Foundation. Retrieved 31 August 2021, from https://www.eff.org/issues/covid-19

To further complicate matters, privacy and data protection is often perceived to stand in conflict with the need to access timely, accurate and granular information. For instance, in the context of Covid-19, many social justice activists have advocated for publishing granular data about how the pandemic has affected specific communities, such as indigenous groups in Brazil[36] or the Black population in the US.[37]

36 Instituto Socioambiental. (2020). Covid-19 e os Povos Indígenas. https://covid19.socioambiental.org/

37 Data 4 Black Lives. (2020). The Impact of Covid-19 on Black Communities. Tableau Software. https://d4bl.org/covid19-data.html

1.4. Growing restrictions on free expression in the name of pandemic mitigation

Restrictions around freedom of expression have posed a major challenge for activists, especially in regions where governments changed regulations or curtailed rights during the pandemic.[38] According to the international nonprofit CIVICUS, at least 37 countries introduced new laws or changed existing legislation by May 2021 to curb the spread of disinformation, emphasising that in most analysed countries, the legislation was "passed or amended as a direct result of the pandemic."[39] Access Now notes that this kind of broad criminalisation of speech and other "short-sighted solutions to disinformation and misinformation" can deeply endanger human rights[40] and pose great challenges to social justice activism.

In sub-Saharan Africa, **internet shutdowns, censorship and social media bans have been frequently used to curb dissent, including among those working on social justice issues.** Restrictions on online freedom of expression have been a key concern in Latin America as well. According to privacy activists, cyber-patrolling (ciberpatrullaje, a cyber-policing technique used by law enforcement agencies to detect and prevent crime by using search engines, browsing and other online tools) has intensified in Argentina[41] and Colombia,[42] imposing significant risks to the privacy and free expression of internet users, especially vulnerable communities.[43]

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38 Bizberge, A., Segura, M. S., (2020). Los derechos digitales durante la pandemia Covid-19 en Argentina, Brasil y México. Revista de Comunicación, 19(2), 61–85. https://doi.org/10.26441/rc19.2-2020-a4

39 CIVICUS. (2021, May). Freedom of expression and the Covid-19 pandemic: A snapshot of restrictions and attacks. https://monitor.civicus.org/COVID19May2021/

40 Access Now. (2020). Fighting misinformation and defending free expression during Covid-19: Recommendations for states. https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2020/04/Fighting-misinformation-and-defending-free-expression-during-COVID-19-recommendations-for-states-1.pdf

41 Bizberge, A., Segura, M. S., (2020). Los derechos digitales durante la pandemia Covid-19 en Argentina, Brasil y México. Revista de Comunicación, 19(2), 61–85. https://doi.org/10.26441/rc19.2-2020-a4

42 Fundación para La Libertad de Prensa. (2021, May). "El ciberpatrullaje" estatal es una estrategia de control que restringe libertades individuales y la expresión en línea. https://flip.org.co/index.php/es/informacion/pronunciamientos/item/2726-el-ciberpatrullaje-estatal-es-una-estrategia-de-control-que-restringe-libertades-individuales-y-la-expresion-en-linea

43 Pisanu, G. (2020, May 12). Ciberpatrullaje en Argentina: Los riesgos del monitoreo de redes sociales para los derechos humanos. Access Now. https://www.accessnow.org/ciberpatrullaje-en-argentina-los-riesgos-del-monitoreo-de-redes-sociales-para-los-derechos-humanos/

1.5. Activists are facing a digital emergency

During the pandemic, activists forced to operate nearly exclusively online have faced fresh challenges, and have had to develop new ways of working and had to reshape programmes, support staff and communities and protect themselves against digital attacks. In all regions, our research found that the **transition to remote work has affected the workflow of civil society practitioners' and influenced their ability — or inability — to reach the communities they serve.**

In western Europe, activists noted that while funders have supported their transition to remote work, the digital divide has become much more apparent among their communities. It has been harder to engage with the communities they serve, especially migrants, refugees and the elderly from marginalised communities. Advocates from the US shared similar concerns, saying that "with the increasing reliance on tech, groups already experiencing marginalisation are further being marginalised."

In sub-Saharan Africa, our research found that activists have been facing increased difficulties working remotely during lockdowns, due to low electricity, smartphone and internet penetration rates in some countries. Activists working towards greater accessibility for people with disabilities, especially those with visual impairments, have expressed concern around the lack of web accessibility standards, while legal empowerment organisations noted the lack of inclusion at courts, some of which have yet to digitise documents in many places, such as Uganda.[44]

In Latin America, our interviewees shared similar connectivity and accessibility challenges in remote areas. **The quick transition to remote work in a resource-constrained environment also acted as an obstacle to the selection of context-relevant, justice-based tech tools,** in addition to making it harder for organisations to reach people. Latin American social justice practitioners discussed

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44 NAMATI. (2020, June). Covid-19 Justice Challenge. https://namati.org/network/sprint-challenge-covid-19-en/

having to resort to tools that they didn't feel were safe, because key populations commonly relied on them. In Bolivia and Brazil, WhatsApp was a common tool to reach rural communities and domestic worker coalitions, despite the fact that some organisations expressed doubt about the app's privacy features. In western Europe, social justice communities also resorted to using technology solutions that raised privacy concerns — such as using WhatsApp to communicate with sex workers or mutual aid groups using WhatAspp. Advocates from SJ organisations in the US also expressed increasing worry about the lack of data security and insecure communications with vulnerable members of the communities they served. New data security protocols and workflows were often necessary because workers were forced to move to insecure and unpredictable home networks and personal laptops during the shift to remote work.

Practitioners across all geographies pointed to the insufficient resources for developing financial and tech infrastructure. In particular, they **highlighted a lack of resources for moving their work to a remote setting or implementing responsible data practices or digital security protocols, not to mention addressing staff burnout.**

As an example of the lack of resources around staff burnout, advocates in western Europe shared that during the pandemic organisations had to "go back to survival mode," which often means bypassing their core work to focus on Covid-19-related issues. Similarly, participants from the US shared that this period had taken a toll on the mental health of social justice and DDR activists.

Across all four regions, but especially in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, many examples were shared about how the lack of resources for transitioning to remote work or adopting safer digital practices negatively affected SJ organisations and their ability to respond to crises. These crises included both geopolitical ones (e.g. military occupation and government repression) and increasing digital and physical attacks on activists.
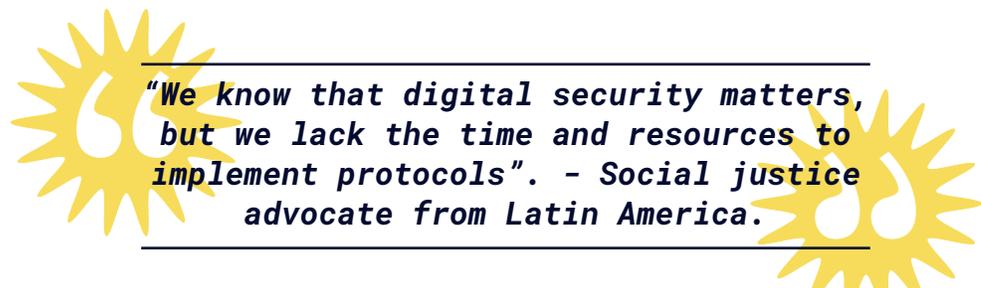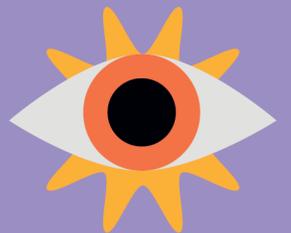
"We know that digital security matters, but we lack the time and resources to implement protocols". - Social justice advocate from Latin America.

2

THE CURRENT STATE AND FUTURE POTENTIAL OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN DDR AND SJ COMMUNITIES

2.1. A growing need for intersectional collaborations in light of Covid-19

As the pandemic has reinforced structural inequalities, it has also highlighted the disconnect between the DDR field and the SJ ecosystem. Organisations from both the DDR and SJ spaces have stepped in to respond to the urgency of DDR issues, creating a need for greater coordination and collaboration. **Recently, the DDR field has given priority to the communities disproportionately impacted by data and technology issues, and SJ actors have increasingly felt a need to more deeply understand DDR work.**

In the US, digital rights activists highlighted that few groups actively worked at the intersections of DDR and immigrant rights, criminal justice and racial justice issues before the pandemic.[45] However, the urgency and complexity of DDR issues have only increased as the "pandemic created more opportunities for technology companies to entrench themselves into government and public life."[46] At the same time, while the struggle to curb the power of technology companies has been gaining traction in the US, American DDR advocates report that there is also "burnout, depression, lack of work-life balance and the limited ability of advocates to do anything additional beyond what they had already been doing."[47]

In sub-Saharan Africa, advocates noted that SJ organisations have taken an active role in advocating for digital inclusion and digital access to health services. For example, advocates in Botswana reported that as digital rights violations increased during the pandemic, social justice organisations have been key actors in pushing back on the digital rights violations. Advocates also noted that this "has highlighted that there is a need for a collective approach by [civil society organisations] to help governments to realise that some of the laws are still wrong and are hampering people's rights."[48]

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45 In part due to initiatives that have been convening DDR and SJ groups together, such as FordTechnology and Civil Rights Roundtable.

46 Interview with a social justice advocate based in the US.

47 Interview with social justice and DDR advocate based in the US.

48 Interview with an DDR advocate based in sub-Saharan Africa

Some advocates in Latin America reported increased attention to their work on digital rights issues, while others found that the pandemic accelerated SJ and DDR issues.[49] For example, in Brazil, DDR advocates mentioned that there was a rapid acceleration of the growing public awareness of digital rights due to the pandemic and current legal and political environment. Some also noted that recent leaks about companies who had been illegally collecting customers' biometric data also contributed to greater public outrage and awareness. There was a growing public consciousness in Brazil that technology was "not a lawless land, but a broad field that needs to be debated."[50]

Our research has also identified that, for some DDR groups, prioritising SJ issues or adopting a social justice lens provides legitimacy to their work. In recent years, issues such as racial injustice have come to the fore in many countries due to groups like the Black Lives Matter movement. However, as we've seen throughout this research, there is a perception that DDR groups still haven't shifted their strategies to address these issues. Especially in the US and in Latin America, members of DDR organisations expressed concern that their work might be seen as less legitimate if it does not engage with social justice issues. In those regions, DDR groups working on digital rights issues without a social justice lens have described being "called out" (formally and informally) by anti-racism groups. In other words, social justice activists are demanding accountability and inclusion from DDR groups, leading some to think critically about past and present oversights on key social justice issues.

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49 Interview with a digital rights and transparency advocate in Latin America

50 Interview with DDR organiser in Latin America.

2.1.1. SJ groups are interested in DDR, as well as proactive uses of data and technology in their work

Another disconnect between DDR and SJ groups is SJ groups' interest in finding proactive uses for technology instead of only exploring the negative socioecomic implications of tech. The need to explore more data-driven interventions in the field has multiplied because of the increased reliance on digital organising during the pandemic, as well as the need to 1) develop more community-owned alternatives to Big Tech platforms and tools. 2) address the gaps in data on vulnerable communities to better inform policy,[51] and 3) the need for data-driven journalism to combat misinformation and corruption. Yet while the need for this expertise is increasing, most groups struggle to find it.

> *"There are groups like journalists that face a lot of challenges around issues of data security, anti-corruption work and digital security, but [who] have a hard time attracting the attention of talented technologists." - DDR advocate in western Europe*

In particular, advocates from racial justice and labor organisations noted the need to explore more proactive uses of tech and data. For example, a racial justice advocate who convened top national civil rights and racial justice organisations in the US discussed how the pandemic highlighted the US's poor data infrastructure. Specifically, they discussed the need to sharpen their data analysis and expertise due to the fact that their work focuses on combating bias, racial equity in the federal workforce and data privacy in rural communities. In the labor space, groups talked about wanting to develop data-driven interventions and provide information to workers by collecting qualitative data from large groups of workers, which could then be aggregated and analysed.

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51 Interview with SJ organiser in the United States

For advocates, the challenge with finding talent in the tech and data fields was tied to a lack of financial resources. While this work falls outside the scope of DDR work, it does highlight the need for greater interaction between the fields of DDR, public interest technology and SJ. Funders have also created additional challenges due to their piecemeal and fragmented approach. For example, an advocate for a global organisations that builds technology to uphold and protect human rights noted that:

> *"Funders still don't understand design and what it takes for tech to be built. [Organisations] don't know what they signed up for, ask for insufficient money and then take on the tech maintenance burden. Funders don't fund maintenance, only the beginning of projects — and even then, they don't fund enough. Organisations still don't have the infrastructure they need to run their own internal tech and meanwhile they're building apps and databases for people more at risk than they are." - DDR advocate in the US.*

2.2. Low levels of collaboration, driven by historical factors

Generally speaking, our research has not identified a large number of collaborations taking place between social justice organisations and DDR organisations, before or during the pandemic. While many DDR advocates recognise that the urgency and intersectionality of DDR issues has accelerated due to the pandemic, their strategic priorities inside their organisations have not shifted. Some groups have made an effort to communicate more broadly about how DDR issues are related to social justice, but programmatic work hasn't followed. Relatedly, SJ actors have made efforts to enter DDR spaces, but are often held back by a need for greater technical knowledge, or a lack of personal connections to facilitate entry into spaces perceived to be mostly for DDR experts.

This reality is echoed throughout the field. A recent report by the London-based NGO Global Partners Digital demonstrates a limited engagement between DDR and civil society organisations not focused on the internet.[52] In Europe, Digital Freedom Fund and its partner European Digital Rights identified a similar need to connect the aims of SJ and DDR organisations. Since 2019, they've been working together to decolonise the digital rights field and ensure it is firmly situated in broader social justice fights and working with other movements, in addition to improving representation in the field.[53]

> *"Social justice organisations are much more radical. I see a tension there. DDR organisations do not want to create tension by pressing on social justice issues." - Consumer rights advocate in Latin America*

52 Global Partners Digital. (2021). Digital Rights at a Crossroads | Recommendations for advancing human rights and social justice in the post-2020 era. https://www.gp-digital.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Digital-Rights-at-a-Crossroads.pdf

53 Digital Freedom Fund and EDRi. (2021, April). Creating Conditions for a Decolonised Digital Rights Field. https://edri.org/our-work/creating-conditions-for-a-decoloniseddigital-rights-field/

The reasons for the lack of cross-sector collaborations are numerous and diverse. In Latin America, the DDR field emerged about 20 years later than it did in the Global North.[54] While collaborations between DDR organisations across different countries is happening more frequently than before,[55] strong connections between the DDR ecosystem and SJ organisations are exceptions. Practitioners from DDR organisations and SJ groups from Latin America have confirmed that while there is an appetite for more cross-sector partnerships, this type of collaboration is still very rare. When collaborations do happen, they emerge out of an actor's personal initiative rather than from institutional strategies.

> *"There are ties based on interpersonal relationships, because many activists who work in digital rights have already worked in other movements. But these bonds lack more institutionality, they happen on a personal level."* - DDR advocate from Latin America

According to our interviews, a few countries in Latin America, like Brazil and Mexico, have received more funding for DDR than others in the region and thus have relatively stronger DDR ecosystems. Countries like Bolivia, where funding for DDR is more limited, have a more fragile and emerging ecosystem. Our research found that in countries where DDR funding is more available, actors have greater access to resources, resulting in more collaborations.

Activists in the US echoed the overall sentiment that there was a strategic and tactical gap between DDR and SJ organisations. DDR advocacy would be better rooted in social justice struggles and the lived experiences of marginalised communities, activists shared. One important example is the need for DDR advocacy around surveillance and racial injustice. As seen in University of Texas' sociologist Simone Browne's work, the links between surveillance technologies and racism are indisputably harmful to the lives of Black

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54 Segura, M. S. (2019). Activismo por los derechos digitales en América Latina Pensar globalmente, actuar localmente. Persona y Sociedad, 33(2), 198–228. https://personaysociedad.uahurtado.cl/index.php/ps

55 Bizberge, A., Segura, M. S. (2020). Los derechos digitales durante la pandemia Covid-19 en Argentina, Brasil y México. Revista de Comunicación, 19(2), 61–85. https://doi.org/10.26441/rc19.2-2020-a4

people.[56] The importance of connecting anti-surveillance advocacy with racial justice efforts was also highlighted during our interviews:

> *"Historically [in the digital rights field], the debate has been around the idea that 'everyone is watched.' But we need to work to question that narrative, because some communities, such as people of colour and migrants, are severely more watched than others."- DDR advocate in the US.*

In sub-Saharan Africa there are also few examples of cross-sector collaborations. **Our research found that the international framing of DDR issues impacted how regional DDR organisations frame issues.** This dynamic has not always been congruent with the local context, leading to divergent approaches and a disconnect between social justice actors.

During our research in the US, advocates highlighted that the demographics of tech-focused organisations mirrored that of the technology industry as a whole: predominantly white, privileged and middle or upper class. A similar scenario was identified in many places in Latin America and western Europe. The lack of diversity and inclusion within these organisations was seen to have an impact on what issues were — or were not — given attention and resources.

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56 Browne, S. (2015). Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness. Duke University Press. ht-tps://www.dukeupress.edu/dark-matters

2.2.1. Intersectional SJ groups that work on DDR issues are often poorly understood by funders and are therefore, under-resourced.

In interviews with SJ groups that work on DDR intersectionally, there was a sense that they were poorly understood by funders because their work tended to exist outside of a single issue area. For example, groups that worked on local DDR issues noted not being able to obtain funding from local funders because of this poor understanding. Meanwhile, groups that worked intersectionally on DDR and labor issues mentioned that their work was not understood by either tech or labor funders. Therefore, there was a sense that trying to bridge the SJ and DDR fields involved staying under-resourced, having to rely on personal relationships or simply going at it alone.

> *"The labor funders didn't get it or didn't think it was worthwhile. The digital funders didn't get it. This fell in a hole between labor and digital funders. On the labor side, a general skepticism about the importance of digital work. Not understanding the centrality of data and digital rights. Not understanding the centrality of data and digital rights to people's ability to have power." - SJ advocate in the US*

To this end, the strategies of some DDR global funders in the past five years has been to be proactive and intentional about funding SJ groups equitably. For example, a global program officer at a major foundation noted that a few years ago they decided to support organisations taking a feminist perspective and particularly looked for ways to give visibility to the work of locally-led groups. So, if not through funding, they sought to find opportunities in the field to bring feminist and DDR groups together to lift up the work of grassroots feminist groups in Latin America. They went on to add that there was still much more to figure out about how to spur greater collaboration and relationship-building:

> "So, [one question we're thinking about is how to] bridge areas of common concern rather than [thinking about] how to bring people into your own agenda. Over the years, [reflecting about this] has created opportunities for [various groups] to come together and collaborate. [Other questions include how to] take advantage of global processes like the UN processes, or take advantage of the fact that many of the conversations happening in society? And how [could we] create space to convene at the local level? How do we bring these other perspectives in? A lot of them don't have the resources to engage with [large international mechanisms] — they don't have this capacity. How do we support them to engage in a meaningful way without expecting them to [previously] have all this knowledge [about engaging in these processes]?" - DDR donor in Latin America

Additionally, another global DDR funder made the case for more local groups to receive long-term core funding instead of project-based funding in order to devote time to the longer and slower work of building the infrastructure to grow and support a movement. This was preferable to "a lot of the funding going to new and shiny topics."

2.3. The benefits of cross-sector collaborations

Collaborations between DDR organisations and SJ organisations do seem to be rare, but our research reported multiple advantages when they do happen.

An intersectional approach to DDR, more rooted in social justice, can strengthen the message of DDR campaigns and help the sector move beyond technical jargon or buzzwords. In doing so, DDR would be more accessible to a wider, more diverse group of civil society organisations. This is due to the fact that SJ actors tend to focus on the tangible, societal impacts of issues when communicating or campaigning. Therefore, engaging cross-sector collaborations around DDR could lead to DDR issues being framed around what SJ actors are witnessing and experiencing in their communities, as opposed to focusing mainly on a policy or legal agenda.

We also found that **adopting intersectional approaches in cross-sector collaborations of DDR challenges can make DDR issues more actionable for a broader set of actors, including SJ organisations.** In the US, a group of 40 privacy, civil rights, civil liberties, human rights and immigrants' rights organisations gathered in a multi-stakeholder, cross-sector campaign against the Department of Homeland Security's social media monitoring of immigrants.[57] Adopting an intersectional approach to advocacy around a digital rights issue made it possible for this large coalition to work towards a shared agenda. The resulting impact of their collaboration generated a positive result for immigrants, who are frequently the target of digital rights violations.

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57 HRW. (2019, November 19). Rights Groups Warn Against DHS's Use of Social Media Monitoring of Immigrants. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/11/19/rights-groups-warn-against-dhss-use-social-media-monitoring-immigrants

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"From this sort of collaborative work, I have really seen the value of experience-sharing. No single actor or institution can credibly think they know it all. There is a lot of relevance having shared experiences and lessons. For example, engaging policy makers, it's always challenging, but there are some in the collaborative who have that experience and give advice and tips. These simple strategies are very important and I found them very valuable. The richness of experiences and perspectives is very important." - DDR advocate based in Uganda[58]

Overall, advocates from both SJ and DDR communities saw a great deal of potential for new, exciting work to emerge from cross-sector collaborations. Advocates in the US and Latin America seem to be particularly interested in undertaking this type of collaboration.

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58 Interview with a women's rights advocate based in sub-Saharan Africa

2.4. Characteristics of successful collaborations – time and strong relationships

Many activists in Latin America, Europe and the US, spoke highly of the value of building long-term relationships. However, they also noted that **it takes time to cultivate and develop long-lasting partnerships. As one DDR advocate in Latin America put it, "lots of interpersonal relationships are at the heart of successful networks."[59]**

A US-based DDR advocate who led successful intersectional DDR campaigns highlighted the basic human element at the heart of cross-sectoral relationships:

> *"We don't have a formula, but the thing most important to us is helping. Being a good ally. Helping when people ask for help. Helping when they don't ask. Being a good friend. Offer to connect these organisations to funders. Way less, 'I want you to be in a coalition' and more day-to-day being helpful and supportive."- US-based DDR advocate*

Advocates shared a variety of actions that were fruitful for outreach efforts and sustaining relationships. These included:
» Organising small and welcoming gatherings,
» Providing financial assistance for participants,
» Inviting lower-level staff from an organisation, not just the Executive Directors,
» Engaging SJ groups and target communities in co-thinking, co-designing and co-building gatherings or shared spaces from the beginning,[60]

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59 Interview with a consumer rights advocate in Latin America.

60 An SJ advocate in Brazil noted that it always felt like they were invited to the "end of the party" and that this kept happening at DDR meetings.

Working with SJ organisations and target communities to develop shared discussion spaces.

Despite the keen interest in centring relationship-building, the pandemic has created stark challenges for SJ and DDR groups. One global DDR donor shared that connections are harder to build if advocates cannot see each other in person and have to rely on digital tools. None of the groups or actors we spoke with had yet formulated a concrete set of best practices for how to focus on relationship and trust-building in purely digital spaces.

Interviewees also noted that **collaborations are most successful when DDR actors contextualise issues according to a social justice agenda.** In Latin America, a digital care practitioner who often works with grassroots SJ organisations said "if technology organisations want to work with human rights groups, they have to work with their realities."After noticing that trainings organised by local privacy and surveillance-focused DDR organisations largely relied on examples from Western organisations, this practitioner started creating materials and learning methods for local SJ organisations rooted in the local context.

Some advocates also found that **launching joint projects helped solidify relationships, if groups had time to develop relations organically and equitably – based on shared values.** A former DDR donor in Latin America described two projects that she was able to support, where DDR and SJ groups spent a year building their relationship and partnership before beginning any of the outward-facing work. Having the space, time, and resources to lay this foundation was seen as key.

2.5. Challenges to SJ-DDR collaborations

2.5.1 Lack of access to opportunities for trust-building

Trust is a major element for successful collaborations. However, a significant barrier we identified was that social justice organisations struggled to find DDR partners they trusted and shared values with. In many instances, there was a **perception that the DDR community was too closed, and DDR work felt unfamiliar to many social justice organisations.** In places such as Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, the emergence of the local DDR ecosystem was relatively recent compared to other civil society ecosystems, such as organisations working on traditional human rights issues and broader social justice issues. As such, groups lacked opportunities to develop relationships and build mutual trust.

When these connections did exist, they frequently emerged as a result of individual relationships instead of strategic decisions made by leaders from DDR organisations.

An additional complication is that many social justice communities operate in sensitive contexts and deal with constraints that aren't familiar to DDR organisations. For example, for the safety of their communities, some SJ organisations are accustomed to keeping some of their work private, but this may be less common among DDR groups, presenting an obstacle for meaningful collaboration.

> *"DDR organisations are more deterritorialised: they work remotely, their work comes from international contexts. Social justice organisations are more about territory, they work with people in territory. Successful experiences of [cross-sector] collaboration must have a connection to the territory… DDR organisations have to understand the interests, the histories, and the needs of SJ organisations." - Digital rights scholar from Latin America*

2.5.2. The need for a more inclusive, interdisciplinary and diverse digital rights approach

One of the most consistent themes from interviews is a perception that the DDR field increasingly touches every facet of life. As a consequence, advocates from various sectors noted that the DDR field needs to become more accessible for the general public. It must also **reconsider how it interacts and partners with communities and SJ groups, along with social movements, issue areas and other disciplines like law, policy, academia and technology.** This theme was strongest in Latin America, followed by western Europe and sub-Saharan Africa.

While the US seems to have more advocates working at the intersections of DDR, racial justice, immigrant rights and criminal justice, advocates we spoke to in the US also made this observation. For example, a DDR advocate discussed having to "nudge tech policy people working on surveillance to also focus on immigration, as so many people still don't realise why you need to think about immigration. I can't tell you how many conversations I've had with digital rights organisations who don't know — and don't get — why it's important to think about immigration."

Other than learning from SJ movements, there is also an appetite for DDR advocacy to **centre the experiences and expertise of grassroots communities and SJ groups on the frontlines leading powerful and urgent work and directly serving vulnerable communities.** This includes shifting strategic priorities to align with the issue areas most urgent to these communities. Making DDR issues relevant to the needs of local communities is seen as essential to shift power-building to grassroots and not just global communities and audiences.[61]

At the same time, our research has shown that **learning about social justice issues and connecting with SJ groups can be a challenge for many DDR organisations.** DDR advocates spoke about the difficulty of trying to do more intersectional work and building bridges with the SJ field and communities. Many DDR actors are aware of the complexities and urgency of social justice-related work and recognise existing power imbalances that exist in civil society. In order to responsibly and effectively engage with SJ groups, DDR actors need time to establish meaningful relationships with SJ leaders, undergo capacity-building to develop internal knowledge of SJ topics, and gain access to adequate funding and resources to ensure that potential cross-sector partnerships are mutually beneficial instead of extractive. Relatedly, DDR advocates described this work as being difficult, resource-intensive and even traumatic. For example, a DDR

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61 Interview with advocate for education rights in sub-Saharan Africa.

advocate in Bolivia[62] spoke about trying to engage with feminists movements, women's rights groups, and journalists, but finding that the extra work took an emotional toll:

> *"It takes an extra toll, and you're exposed to more violence. You see femicides. Sometimes there's trauma involved when working at intersections. I've seen digital violence, but then you see the real-life impact of that and it takes a toll, and you have to be there and listen to them, build with them. You have to occupy those spaces. Seeing the real-life implications of tech is extra emotional baggage." - DDR Advocate from Latin America.*
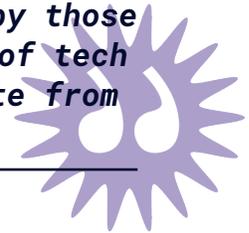
2.5.3. Top-down agenda-setting in DDR in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa

In our analysis,[63] advocates pointed to the lack of trust in the DDR field. One of the main objections was a perceived reliance on top-down agenda-setting and the field's use of technical and policy jargon that makes it hard for SJ groups to engage. The latter was noted as an especially big barrier for smaller SJ organisations that lacked any background on technology policy, making it harder for them to engage. In some contexts (such as Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa), there was a perception that **the DDR ecosystem could be heavily tied to international actors and their agendas, rather than to local actors and social justice struggles.**

Advocates attribute this disconnect to the fact that many domestic DDR groups (especially in western Europe, Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa) were born from sections of global organisations or international coalitions, often adopting practices and focus areas that spoke more to a global audience than to local communities.

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62 Interview with DDR and women's rights advocates in Latin America.

63 For our analysis of all the interviews, we coded the interviews to identify both differences between regions as well as cross-cutting themes among all stakeholders interviewed.

For example, in Latin America, much of the mainstream DDR work has its origins in international campaigns or organisations.[64] Advocates interviewed for this project shared that when they see large DDR campaigns in the region, they are connected to agendas set by international organisations rather than locally identified needs. In sub-Saharan Africa, regional and local DDR actors have strong relationships to Global North-based DDR organisations, and the evolving socio-legal landscape around DDR work remains relatively new. The potential impact of technology on marginalised communities is often predicted by international experiences instead of local. **In both regions, the result of these dynamics is that the framing of DDR issues often does not resonate with grassroots, resource-constrained social justice actors and the needs of their communities.**

2.5.4. Lack of knowledge about DDR which is accessible

The data and digital rights ecosystem is a dynamic, fast-paced environment — a reality that makes it challenging for members of civil society to engage. This is especially true for organisations lacking a traditional DDR background, who feel they must build foundational knowledge of the sector and stay abreast of the latest developments. Research by Global Partners Digital shows that in order for civil society at large to engage with DDR they need to have an understanding of what DDR issues are relevant from a social justice perspective.[65] Recent research by Team CommUNITY echoes this sentiment: when asked about what factors affect people's ability or willingness to participate in the Internet Freedom Festival (IFF) community,[66] respondents named their level of knowledge and expertise as one potential barrier to engagement, especially of actors who are new to the space.[67]

During our research, we found that there was a lack of learning opportunities for SJ activists and organisers, despite the need for education around DDR issues. Even when SJ advocates are knowledgeable about DDR issues and have experience working on them, their knowledge isn't typically

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64 Segura, M. S. (2019). Activismo por los derechos digitales en América Latina Pensar globalmente, actuar lo-calmente. Persona y Sociedad, 33(2), 198–228. https://personaysociedad.uahurtado.cl/index.php/ps/article/view/279/253

65 Global Partners Digital. (2021). Digital Rights at a Crossroads | Recommendations for advancing human rights and social justice in the post-2020 era (p. 40). https://www.gp-digital.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Digital-Rights-at-a-Crossroads.pdf

66 The Internet Freedom Festival (IFF) community is a gathering of activists, journalists, human rights defenders, open source technologists, privacy and security advocates and researchers from over 130 countries working on Internet freedom, privacy and security, and freedom of expression.

67 ARTICLE 19. (2021). Building Stronger Communities | Community Health Report 2020: The case for mental health support for digital rights defenders. https://www.digitalrights.community/chr2020

shared with their SJ institution on an organisational level.

> *"Many social justice organisations do not even know the possibilities they would have to address the issues they work with. Not only when we talk about social media campaigns, but [on issues of] data, access to information, internal infrastructure… There is no visibility [of data and tech issues]. How to have more visibility? DDR organisations have to approach [SJ groups], they have to offer more. There are things that do not reap great costs and visibility, that is a job that has to be done, [it is necessary] to make more connections."- DDR researcher in Latin America*

This lack of access to information was seen by many in the SJ community as an expression of the underlying power imbalances, where DDR actors are perceived as holding greater power than SJ actors. This is particularly felt in terms of access to funding, international audiences and donor relations. These power imbalances influence whose voices are represented, giving rise to the perception that the DDR field's priorities are dictated by "experts." Section 3 of this report takes a closer look at capacity-building and outlines strategies and approaches that can help recalibrate this power imbalance from a funder perspective.

3

WAYS FORWARD

For stronger collaboration between SJ and DDR groups, advocates from across the SJ and DDR ecosystems noted a need for connectors, translators and shared spaces to support relationship-building, as well as an evolution towards more accessible and inclusive spaces for collaboration. In general, there was a need for creative approaches to bridge gaps between the two groups. Our research showed that concerted efforts are needed across both communities.

Some of the needs that surfaced in our research are explored in detail below, along with suggestions that came up around addressing these needs.

3.1. Extending DDR work beyond policy

Among the organisational practices noted in our research, there was an emphasis on the need for DDR groups to extend their approaches beyond a strong policy orientation, noting that many – but not all – DDR groups focus on policy.

Some SJ advocates felt that DDR groups could benefit from learning how groups building social movements employ a wide array of strategic tools and use multiple cultural and narrative frames to bring about societal change.

3.2. Centering the needs, approaches and lived experiences of local and at-risk communities

SJ advocates across regions suggested that **there is a need for DDR approaches to centre the needs of local and at-risk communities.** As one advocate pointed out, it's difficult for communities who have suffered many violations of many other rights to prioritise digital rights.[68]

It was also suggested that reflection on how DDR issues impact lived experiences might enable DDR actors to more directly challenge gender and racial inequalities and centre those most impacted by DDR issues.

One advocate we spoke to suggested adapting DDR concerns to local political contexts could involve engaging groups not only around specific tech policy issues like content moderation, surveillance and

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68 Interview with a community network advocate based in sub-Saharan Africa.

misinformation, but also around broader issues like economics and privatisation.

Relatedly, some interviewees felt that the DDR field could benefit by better understanding the ways that grassroots communities and SJ groups hope to use technology and data and also the issues that they see as most crucial to their communities. One SJ funder based in sub-Saharan Africa noted that there was a lack of conversation in the field about how the introduction of technology and data has the potential to bring about transformative economic change and opportunity in the region, and that this was a big problem.[69] In our research it was also suggested that DDR groups based in western Europe could **explore how to bridge international or national rights-based frameworks with different local visions of liberation and approaches to solidarity.** One activist shared how they expect the DDR field to be able to expand beyond limitations that exist because of a "strict rights-based framework" and incorporate diverse perspectives from a variety of social justice movements.

It's important that the process of centering the needs, approaches and lived experiences of local and at-risk communities happens in ways that do not increase the burdens faced by SJ actors. We believe this issue can be mitigated if collaboration is grounded in trust and thoughtful relationship building, rather than extractive partnerships.

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69 Interview with a donor based in sub-Saharan Africa.

3.3. Fostering equitable, context-respecting collaborations

Many of those we spoke to emphasised **a need for collaborations to be approached with cultural and local context sensitivity,** and for DDR groups to address power imbalances and resource disparities.[70] To do this, it was suggested that DDR groups engage SJ groups substantively from the start, and centre a community's voices, ideas and experiences in order to create equitable and mutually relevant information exchanges.

Advocates also noted that it was important to avoid tokenising[71] or stigmatising certain groups when conducting DDR work. For example, an SJ advocate in Uganda spoke about encountering hesitancy among some members of the LGBTQIA+ community to engage in online security work due to fear of being exposed or stigmatised.[72]

Relatedly, if DDR issues are to be addressed in a way that meets the needs of the groups they impact, **working on DDR issues must become part of the mission of groups outside of the core DDR community.** This would mean DDR being integrated into the mission and strategy of more organisations, enabling them to receive funding and prioritise DDR when it is important to them and their communities.

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70 For example, some advocates in Latin America noted that some DDR groups often do not like to share information and expertise in an accessible way because it could increase competition for funding. Therefore, they opt to not teach or build broader capacity in the SJ field.

71 Interviews with advocates from western Europe (January-March 2021).

72 Interview with advocates from sub-Saharan Africa

3.4. Constructing a digital rights discourse beyond jargon and buzzwords

A concern that came up consistently across regions was a need for more **translations of complex DDR terminology into plain language.** Advocates in all regions highlighted the need to avoid technical jargon, decrease the reliance on the English language, and rethink how DDR is talked about when communicating with broader audiences.

This could start with advocates **better understanding how grassroots communities talk about and understand technology,** and adapting both DDR and SJ language accordingly.

> *"What does your mom think? How does she talk about it with peers? We need to think about communications and narrative more creatively, and connect to popular cultures, influencers, artists and producers of culture and narrative." – Social justice advocate in sub-Saharan Africa.*

Some interviewees noted that the **DDR organisations tended to be more abstract instead of providing clear explanations of issues.** One example was the right to privacy; groups rarely defined its significance or discussed how the privacy of different groups was impacted differently by the same technology.

Some of those we spoke with also felt that, while their work was connected to digital rights, those in the DDR field didn't necessarily perceive it as relevant if they weren't using the "correct" language.

"There's a challenge there because of profile and background, in terms of who's more likely to sit at different sides of the table. (...) People who operate in the digital space, these people haven't necessarily done the humanities training..." - SJ advocate in sub-Saharan Africa

The format of communication also came up as crucial. As one former DDR donor in Brazil noted, "No one is going to read a tipsheet if WhatsApp is where they're getting most of their information. Nobody will download your pdf. DDR has to be more creative and less professorial."

We found some evidence of translation and adaptation work being done, particularly in Brazil and Latin America, where there is significant thinking and experimentation around popular culture strategies to make DDR more accessible to mainstream audiences. One instructive example here is Criptofunk in Brazil, where crypto raves — events that convene activities on security, encryption, hacking, anonymity, privacy and freedom — in favelas help people understand how social networks are subject to surveillance. In doing so, the events allow citizens to explore ways to talk about surveillance without a language of fear and militarisation, effectively reframing the conversation to be around digital care, enjoyment and curiosity.

An advocate in Mexico spoke about trying to help SJ organisations overcome a lack of understanding around issues with a high degree of technical complexity.[73] An SJ advocate in Ghana described walking government departments through the process of how data is collected and the importance of data security.[74]

All of this existing work could potentially contribute to fruitful learning exchanges.

In general, our research showed that **moving beyond technical jargon and buzzwords was unlikely to happen without a concerted and coordinated effort across SJ and DDR communities.** Though we found efforts across both communities, a number of the

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73 Interview with DDR organiser in Latin America

74 Interview with advocate for education rights in sub-Saharan Africa.

SJ actors we talked to felt that there was a disconnect between their efforts at learning more about DDR and the efforts of the DDR field to make digital rights more accessible.

DDR advocates in Latin America and the US with experience developing DDR–SJ collaborations noted that it was **essential for DDR groups to continue increasing their capacity around equity and strategic communications.** For example, this could occur by hiring communications agencies or creative popular culture strategists to co-create messaging that resonates in spaces outside of the DDR silo.

Relatedly, it was also suggested that **DDR organisations work with at least one person whose focus is on exploring how data and digital rights impact diverse, marginalised communities and organisations**. Some of the DDR actors we spoke with expressed congruent desires for the future of the DDR field, but pointed to their own limited capacity and funding as major challenges.

3.5. Engaging connectors and translators

We found that **connectors and translators — individuals and organisations able to move between both worlds — can play a critical role in creating a two-way dialogue.**

A theme across most regions was the need for more translators and connectors across different issue areas and locations.

The tendency of DDR work to emphasise technological concerns can be hard to connect to social justice issues. Translators and connectors working on explaining social justice perspectives to DDR organisations could help promote mutual understanding and better connect them with SJ organisations.

Specifically, advocates spoke about the importance of translating and adapting global or national research and policy work to local contexts, as well as identifying mechanisms for centering stories from directly impacted communities on both a national and local level.

In the US, important work has been happening at the intersections of DDR and racial justice, immigrant rights, civil rights, and labor rights in recent years. Despite this, however, our research in the US shows that the DDR work produced by major digital rights organisations in

large cities was not applicable to smaller cities or local efforts to organise. This emphasises the need for connectors and translators to help bridge conflicting agendas and translate what is happening at the global and international levels to the local context.

"As someone who's been in national and international spaces, it seems like… Houston and places like Houston need more people who have connections to the big picture. Maybe have a fellowship. I might understand what Houston needs, but it's a real cultural-changing mind challenge. Just the basic influence of someone flying in from New York would make an impact. There's no opportunity to evaluate." - Advocate working with SJ in Texas, US
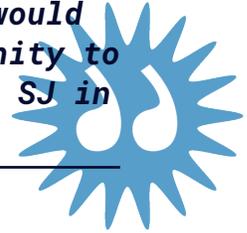
3.6. Creating more shared spaces for dialogue

The need for more shared spaces to build cross-sector, intersectional relationships and help SJ and DDR actors expand their understanding came up frequently in our research.

While global tech conferences like RightsCon, Internet Freedom Festival and Mozilla Festival have been useful for networking and learning, interviewees reported feeling that these conferences attracted groups who were already embedded in DDR spaces and discussing these issues. Instead, interviewees were seeking more targeted and inclusive spaces to foster conversations and relationships with a broader and more diverse set of actors.

> *"We need more platforms where we deliberately bring social justice movements on board. (...) For me coming to DDR, you have tech-savvy people on one side, and if you don't know anything about tech... We need a more enabling environment for [people from] SJ movements to come in, [we need to] find room for them and [have] more interactions, [more] conferences and workshops… DDR peers are sort of exclusive, there aren't that many shared spaces." - DDR advocate in sub-Saharan Africa*

In particular, we found a high interest in Global South-to-Global South connections, and spaces for a greater variety of actors (e.g. artists, journalists and others) to collaborate.

Ideas for fostering more organic shared spaces from advocates in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa included local or regional "labs," community exchanges, community calls and local conferences. These would provide ways for people to be in community and conversation with each other, as well as allow people to "let their creativity go free."[75] Advocates in Cameroon also spoke about the utility of the digital academies that they conducted, which provided participants with financial and logistical support, as well as a certificate upon graduation.[76]

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75 Interview with a funder in sub-Saharan Africa.

76 Interview with a DDR advocate in sub-Saharan Africa.

To help bridge a gap in understanding, groups working on DDR and labor rights are in need of more connectors and translators

Due to increasing concerns about surveillance for white-collar and frontline workers, advocates in the US highlighted a growing need for collaboration between those working on labor issues and DDR. However, while the analysis around the potential harm of surveillance technology built on the work of predictive policing and mass incarceration, there is a perception that there is little appetite in the DDR space to think beyond policy solutions to focus on the important role that "regular people" or organising can play.

"When you are building an organised constituency of people who have a depth of knowledge of why [...]. I don't think policy is the end point of organising, but for people who do, I would tell them that they need a constituency to put pressure on to keep that policy in place".

- SJ advocate in the US

In the labor context, advocates in the US have spoken about needing to serve as a bridge between DDR and labor groups, who often adopt conflicting perspectives around issues such as surveillance. Some advocates mentioned that it's difficult for labor groups to engage with the DDR field, because DDR organisations tend to focus on consumer data rights instead of on workers rights, which can be in conflict. These advocates described how they spend a considerable amount of time educating major national DDR groups to help them think more broadly.

"I have worked with organisations where in theory the issue they're trying to address is the same — surveillance — but the object of that surveillance is not the same. In data rights, so much is talked about consumer data rights, and it's so hard to push those people to think about workers rights. The location of power is totally different. It's a challenge to push those in the consumer rights space to think of workers."

- DDR advocate in the US

While advocates working at the intersections of DDR and labor mentioned that DDR groups in the US are starting to see the importance of protecting the rights of workers to organise and avoid surveillance, there is still much more co-learning that needs to be done.

4

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS IN THE DDR ECOSYSTEM

Across all of the regions studied, it was clear that **funders have played a significant and critical role in shaping the emergence and growth of the DDR field.** It is likely that they will continue to play a big role in how the DDR field continues to evolve, adapt and change.

Our research found that funders have an opportunity to address systemic digital inequity and the issues of inclusion that exist in many countries, particularly in the Global South. Without proactively focusing on these inequities, marginalised groups are unable to adapt to rapidly-changing digital spaces and are left without resources to dedicate to addressing DDR issues from their perspective. Dedicated resources are essential for them to hold state and private tech companies accountable for abuse, corruption and surveillance.

With this in mind, advocates across SJ and DDR spaces both wanted funders to be mindful of the power they held and their role in potentially exacerbating inequities in the field. Advocates believed this went on to affect collaborations and partnerships. To note, though: almost none of these power dynamics, nor this general dynamic, are unique to the DDR space.

In general, it was noted that **funders should aim for a more holistic and multi-stakeholder strategy integrating the needs and experiences of grantees and non-grantees in the DDR ecosystem.**

In recent years, funders have launched a number of initiatives that engage a broader set of communities in DDR work. Some of these include the Technology and Civil Rights Roundtable by the Ford Foundation; the Public Interest Tech Fellowships funded by the Mozilla Foundation, Ford Foundation; and the Media Democracy Fund (MDF); and the newer Ford-Mozilla Tech and Society Fellowships, which try to increase the capacity of civil society groups to work on emerging tech issues.

Smaller regional funders, such as the European AI Fund, have also supported initiatives — for example, to bring together DDR advocates with SJ groups focused on AI regulation.

In interviews, however, advocates said that spaces play an important role in building cross-sector bridges, but more groups "who are not at the table need to be brought to the table."[77]

For example, one Latin American DDR advocate said that funding for DDR in the region is currently dominated by a small set of organisations who are familiar with the language of funders and have strong personal connections with program officers; there is a perception that this limits the ability of other actors in the region to successfully receive funding.

In sub-Saharan Africa, advocates highlighted how the struggle to be noticed by funders leads organisations to prioritise their own individual interests or those of funders, rather than engaging in the collective action necessary to move a shared agenda forward.

A number of recommendations for funders came up in the course of our research; the recommendations covered below are intended for funders operating in the DDR ecosystem who are interested in investing in more intersectional DDR field-building.

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77 Interview with social justice and DDR advocate in the US.

4.1. Explore new, more flexible funding strategies and approaches

Across the DDR and SJ spaces, there is an overall sense that many organisations are under-resourced and overstretched. In interviews with DDR and SJ advocates in western Europe, where DDR organisations have faced pressure to lobby both the EU and member states, one European DDR funder noted that, "there are entire countries that only have one NGO with a small 10,000 euros."[78] In Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, SJ advocates also struggled with a lack of capacity to fundraise more broadly, and often lacked basic information technology infrastructure. [79]

Some specific funding suggestions that came up in our research included:

Assess equity, diversity and inclusion in funder portfolios and grantees

Across all the regions covered by this research, there was a need to diversify the leadership in DDR spaces in order to accelerate the change to DDR's work, culture, priorities and practices. It's important for funders to assess the dynamics of funding distribution. To this end, funders could map out the amount of funding given to mostly white-led groups, and map out how much funding is allocated in different regions. Relatedly, advocates noted that certain DDR groups continued to get the majority of the available funding available because they have been around a long time and have large budgets, while smaller and newer groups have a hard time getting access to resources, networks and funding. Funders could also prioritise communications that make clear what they are looking to fund (and when), why, and what a successful application looks like – noting the often opaque processes that go into getting funding.[80]

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78 Interview with a funder from western Europe.

79 Interview with an environmental justice advocate in Latin America.

80 As outlined in our previous work, Tipping The Scales – What It Takes To Fund An Equitable Tech & Human Rights Ecosystem: https://www.theengineroom.org/tipping-the-scales-what-it-takes-to-fund-an-equitable-tech-human-rights-ecosystem/

Fund and promote partnerships and collaborations, making sure that timelines are long enough for work to be effective

When organisations did have access to funding, many found that traditional grantmaking strategies were not conducive to creating and sustaining additional DDR-SJ partnerships. Some suggested a need for explicit funding for partnerships. It was also noted that funders' timelines are often too short for partnerships to be conducted effectively, as finding partners, building relationships and carrying out projects together require more time. Similarly, it can feel artificial and place unnecessary pressure on organisations to put a timeline on "trust-building" and establishing partnerships.

Fund collaborations equitably and transparently

Advocates from all the regions noted that collaborations are often not funded equitably, as some participants get more and some get less. To both SJ and DDR advocates, this dynamic often creates a competitive individualistic environment that does not foster collaboration. Where funders are supporting DDR groups working on issues that could be enriched through collaboration with SJ actors, the collaboration should involve SJ groups from the very beginning — as partners who have an equal say in decision-making, not as recipients of sub-grants who aren't asked to shape strategy or major decisions.

Fund existing projects and longer-term maintenance

Our research found that many groups struggled to locate funding for maintenance of their existing projects. There is a perception that funding can be unpredictable and fickle, and that it often jumps from one "shiny new tech issue to another." rather than supporting existing projects. One advocate in Latin America, for example, feared presenting the same project for funding because in their perception, funders have a bias toward new things.

Other longer-term needs that came up included more funding of infrastructure,[81] internal technology expertise, communication strategies, paid administrative roles, expanded rapid response, and more unrestricted funding.

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81 As outlined in our previous work, Tipping The Scales – What It Takes To Fund An Equitable Tech & Human Rights Ecosystem: https://www.theengineroom.org/tipping-the-scales-what-it-takes-to-fund-an-equitable-tech-human-rights-ecosystem/

Provide seed funding for early, younger, smaller, emerging and grassroots groups; and for inclusive collaborations

In our research, this came up as a critical need, and we came across multiple instances where this kind of funding was used to foster DDR-SJ collaboration. For example, a DDR organisation in Latin America talked about using seed money from the Ford Foundation to develop more inclusive collaboration strategies with racial justice groups.

Relatedly, there remains a strong need for greater funding — particularly more flexible, long-term funding — for DDR groups led by historically marginalised groups working closely with grassroots communities, or lifting up groups in underfunded regions.

Pursue context-specific approaches instead of standardised DDR solutions imported from the Global North

This means ensuring that investment in certain issue areas reflects the broader reality of social justice organising across various regions. This work could include reframing the deepening digital divide in internet access as an issue of 'digital inequity,' and prioritising it as an area where funder investment will be key.

Foster more equitable collaboration with grantees

Interviewees suggested increased use of participatory grant-making, greater transparency and more transparent, ideally faster communications. More recommendations along this vein are included in our report, Tipping the Scales.[82]

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82 The Engine Room (2020) Tipping The Scales — What It Takes To Fund An Equitable Tech & Human Rights Ecosystem: https://www.theengineroom.org/tipping-the-scales-what-it-takes-to-fund-an-equitable-tech-human-rights-ecosystem/

4.2. Create more spaces for equitable collaboration, and explore ways to increase both the DDR and technological capacities of social justice groups

Among both DDR and SJ advocates, there is a sense that **funders have a role to play in creating an ecosystem built on dialogue. They can serve as connectors, support partnerships and foster accountability.**

As noted earlier, foundations such as the Ford Foundation, Mozilla, and Media Democracy Fund have been supporting a variety of fellowships and gatherings that bring together technologists and civil society actors. However, there is a sense that these interventions are limited and piecemeal, and there's a need for **broader education across more diverse communities who have been previously excluded from the "online world."**

As these groups, which are not always formal civil society organisations, grow, **so does the need for more engagement with digital rights topics.** Examples that came up in our research include the quilombolas — communities of former enslaved people in Brazil — the hundreds of indigenous groups throughout Latin America and rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa.

For some of the DDR actors we spoke with, there was a sense of frustration that SJ groups saw technology as a one-time tool and some were not interested in adopting a future-focused view of technology as evolving and political. One former DDR donor noted that:

> *"I get the impression that SJ organisations focus on things like digital protection "to never think about it again." They want someone from outside to come, change some technical elements, create some security protocols and never bring it up again. But they need to understand that the problem is not just digital security, technology is a political issue."*[83]

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83 Interview with a former donor based in Latin America.

Advocates in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa report, however, that the main barrier for SJ organisations is not a lack of interest or lack of will, but a lack of internal capacity, combined with limited resources.

Some funders we spoke to noted that they, in turn, were struggling to figure out how to support multi-issue gatherings and coalition-building, exposing a **shared lack of knowledge around best practices.**

With these challenges in mind, the following suggestions for funders emerged from our research:

When supporting a cross-sector convening, involve SJ communities from the start, and make sure to follow up.

Across all of the potential collaborations and spaces, the advocates we spoke with emphasised that SJ organisations should be part of the design and launch of cross-sector spaces from the beginning.Interviewees expressed a desire for funders to follow up on the spaces they create, in order to ensure that their investments are addressing the real needs of the involved communities.

Provide incentives for social justice groups to strengthen their understandings on how DDR issues affect their mission and values.

These could include, for example, dedicated funding calls for work at the intersection of SJ and DDR; connections to DDR groups who can provide resources or networks; or the creation of mentorship programs that match SJ groups with intersectional DDR experts.

Identify and build the capacity of key systems-change and field-building actors, such as global-to-local, national-to-local and intersectional or multi-issue translators and connectors.

Advocates we spoke to emphasised the importance of translating and adapting global or national research and policy work to local contexts and identifying mechanisms for centering the stories and experiences of directly-impacted communities. Relatedly, a growing set of intersectional DDR organisers, advocates and organisations are emerging that are already working across a variety of issues such as racial justice, housing, labor, gender rights, health and education. More

attention has to be given to building up the individual capacity of these translators and connectors at the individual and regional level, and ensuring that these actors are based in the contexts they are seeking to work on.

Invest in efforts designed to enable SJ actors to shift to digital, remote work in a justice-oriented way.

As far as possible, this support should be designed to help SJ actors move to remote work without compromising safety and enable them to make value-driven choices around tech solutions. Efforts could include further research on SJ actors' priorities, direct support and dedicated funding.

Reach out to other funding organisations to support greater coordination between funders of key issue areas and community-based foundations.

As DDR work continues to become more intersectional and expands to more areas, funder education and outreach will be needed to ensure other funders can step in and support a new generation of advocates, activists and technologists whose work is still largely misunderstood DDR funders could also continue to strengthen relationships with SJ funders and establish ways to support them in funding their grantees to work on DDR issues.

Promote greater cross-sector learning between DDR and fields looking at affirmative uses of tech and data for social change (eg public interest, responsible data, data justice, and civic tech).

There is space for more proactive work to be done to help promote learning between fields looking at the implications of tech and data, and those looking at affirmative uses of technology to address social challenges. From our interviews, it was clear that SJ actors' interests and needs are focused both on how they can use tech and data interventions to increase their capacity and impact as well as on the negative implications of tech on society and marginalised communities.

Explore ways in which they can create spaces for relationship-building and idea exchange, both by funding events, but also ensuring DDR and SJ groups have the resources and space to be able to meaningfully attend and dedicate time.

A key theme was SJ groups' concerns that they are never brought in as equal partners to the early planning stages of DDR collaborations. Therefore, in order to make DDR gatherings and events more inclusive, SJ leaders should be compensated for providing their expertise in co-designing the content, feel, and execution of major DDR gatherings and conferences.

ANNEX 1: METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this research project, The Engine Room conducted desk research, hosted five community calls with participants from Latin America, western Europe, United States and sub-Saharan Africa, and held 58 interviews with social justice and digital rights advocates from those regions. Findings described in this document were shaped by the background and expertise of research participants and informed by The Engine Room's previous work.

Community calls

The Engine Room hosted five regional community calls with participants from Latin America, western Europe, the United States and sub-Saharan Africa. For our purposes, a community call is a virtual gathering of a pre-existing community or budding community of individuals. During the event, participants were able to actively participate in discussions and learn about their peers' practices, questions and work. Community calls help us develop a holistic understanding of where the community stands on different themes and how participants' experiences and insights relate to each other.

The community calls were held from February 10 to March 24, 2021. The goal was to map out the impacts that Covid-19-related data and technology practices have had on social justice communities and gather lessons from collaborations between diverse social justice communities. Participants who joined community calls were members of social justice groups, representatives of organisations working on data and digital rights and activists from a variety of movements. Most participants had some degree of familiarity with DDR, having worked with the topic as members of a DDR organisation or through individual activism.

REGION	COMMUNITY CALL PARTICIPANTS
Latin America	Community call participants represented both DDR and SJ groups, with a majority of participants linked to DDR organisations. Many participants were also gender justice advocates.
Western Europe	Community call participants represented both DDR and SJ groups, with a majority of participants linked to DDR organisations.
United States	Community call participants represented both DDR and SJ groups, with an equal number of participants from each group.
Sub-Saharan Africa	Community call participants represented both DDR and SJ groups, with a majority of participants linked to DDR organisations.

Interviews

In total, our research team interviewed 58 people for this project. For this draft report, 58 unique formal and informal interview transcripts were coded and analysed from June 10 - August 22, 2021. Below is a breakdown of the interviews which have been coded and analysed:

REGION	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS	TYPE OF INTERVIEWS
Latin America	15	There was an equal number of DDR and SJ interviews. Some interviews were conducted with free radicals and one former donor.
Sub-Saharan Africa	12	The majority of interviews were with SJ groups, then DDR groups and one donor.
Western Europe	10	Most interviews were with DDR groups, but interviews also included donors, free radicals and SJ groups.
United States	15	We have also coded interviews from actors that worked globally (in all regions): three DDR donors, DDR group and two social justice groups.

From these 58 interviews, 896 excerpts were coded according to the following themes: emerging DDR issues intersecting with the pandemic; collaborations and engagements between DDR and SJ groups (pre-pandemic and now); and historical factors shaping DDR and SJ collaborations on DDR issues. For this research project, we have decided to anonymise all quotes from interviewees.

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