BEST PRACTICES PAPER: YOUNG PEOPLE HARNESSING THE POWER OF TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PEACE

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Contents

Overview

Digital Peacebuilding has been expanding as a social practice, over the past years, especially within youth-led organizations. Nowadays, young peacebuilders are using media and technology to bridge the divides beyond the mobility, cultural, ethical, and religious barriers. They unequivocally demonstrated the potency of technology and social media in building strong communities, creating a social movement, making personal connections, and even changing the world.

Youth-led organizations demonstrated creativity and potential in leading digital peacebuilding actions and creating online platforms for youth to influence change. For instance, it has been used to spread awareness about conflict resolution among people who do not have access to traditional media outlets like newspapers or television stations. Nowadays, social networks allow individuals around the globe to connect with each other on an intimate level without having to leave their homes or travel far away from home; to dialogue on certain issues, share information, create campaigns, and run online programs in accessible ways.

About this initiative

This initiative was co-created by Justice Call, GPPAC Youth, Peace, and Security working group members, and partner organizations to contribute to GPPAC Learning month. The Leaning month is dedicated to bringing GPPAC Members around the globe to make collective peacebuilding action stronger, more visible, and accessible!

Young people harnessing the power of technology and social media for peace initiative comes with the importance of the emergence of innovative use of young people to technology and social media in advancing their efforts in peacebuilding. From creating digital networks to spreading awareness of different causes and initiatives to raising funds, technology, and social media can be incredibly powerful tools showcasing that the future of peacebuilding lies prominently in the expanding use of technology and social media.

To promote and showcase these practices, Justice Call, a member of the Youth, Peace, and Security Working group led along with other members and partners (Adeela, Building Blocks for Peace, Somos CaPAZes, Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect), the development of a platform that promotes stories of youth-led digital initiatives from the ground along with this best practices paper, which was prepared after one internal consultation and one public consultation.
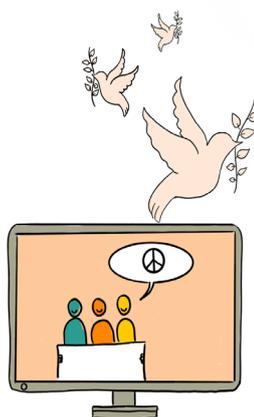
About the Organisations

Justice Call is a regional organization in the MENA region, aiming at promoting the values of peaceful coexistence and human rights. Our scope of work involves supporting civil society organizations and young people to build democratic consensus among themselves towards the establishment of peace. Justice Call has consistently worked in conflict-ridden countries such as Libya, Sudan, and Syria, and launched different communities of practice: The MENA coalition on YPS, The Women Regional Network on Prevention, and the MENA Working Group on ICC. For more information: https://justicecall.org/

Building Blocks for Peace Foundation is a network of young people working on conflict prevention, peacebuilding, preventing/countering violent extremism, accountability governance, and sustainable development in Nigeria. The organisation was established in 2016 and became incorporated in 2017 with the Corporate Affairs Commission in Nigeria. Our activities are guided by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250, 2419, 2535, African Union Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security and other national policies geared towards strengthening the capacities of youth for peace and security. We work towards the achievement of a peaceful society through innovative approaches such as advocacy, dialogue, education, training, workshops, radio programming, sport, community sensitization, arts to mention a few. Our vision is to see a world where there is peace, justice, respect for human rights and youth meaningfully engaged in the peacebuilding process. For more information, visit: https://bbforpeace.org/

Somos CaPAZes is a Colombian non profit organisation that was born in 2007 with the mission of educating and innovating for PEACE in children, youth and adults in order to create a community of peace and coexistence. Since 2007 nearly 30,000 people have benefited in more than 100 municipalities in Colombia and Latin America. Our work has been recognized by the UN, the Government of Luxembourg, the Presidency of the Republic and the Government of the United States. In recent years, we have focused on generating the necessary skills for the development of participants and the creation of contexts of PEACE, around: conflict resolution, leadership, human rights and 21st century skills necessary for the workplace context. https://somoscapazes.org/

Adeela Organization is a youth-led organization founded in 2018, with a special focus on matters of peace, social justice and human rights in Sudan, our goal is to highlight and tackle these issues along with the various difficulties and challenges that face Sudanese youth. Using a modern and artistic approach, we believe that the best method to address these issues is by uncovering them in compelling and attractive ways to encourage these youthand their local communities to view things from new and different perspectives, eventually stirring up open-minded dialogue and discussions on these matters and finding ways to pave the road towards a better tomorrow that we all look forward to and seek. https://adeela.org/

The Youth Core Group on Atrocity Prevention (YCGAP) was established at the APR2P Youth Forum in Jakarta in 2019, with the vision to strengthen grassroots youth advocacy on atrocity prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). The group work on Identifying and raising awareness of priority issues for young people in relation to atrocity prevention in the Asia Pacific as well as forging networks with emerging youth leaders. https://r2pasiapacific.org/youth-atrocity-prevention-asia-pacific

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Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict: a member-led global network of civil society organizations (CSOs) actively working to prevent violent conflict and build more peaceful societies across the world. GPPAC consists of 15 regional networks, each with its own strategic priorities that respond to their environment needs. GPPAC's primary function is strengthening members' conflict prevention and peacebuilding practice by facilitating collective action; and learning, advice, and exchange of knowledge and experience between them, both regional and cross-regional. https://www.gppac.net/

Why we use Technology and Social Media

As technology evolves and becomes more accessible, it can be used to help make peacebuilding a reality for all. As a matter of fact, technology and social media can contribute to peacebuilding in different ways including

Outreach

With 4.74 billion social media users around the world[1] , young peacebuilders can leverage this 1) in terms of reaching out to a wider range of audiences and communities, 2) in terms of segmentation by applying effective strategies to target different audiences and preparing tailored content and campaigns; this may be in the form of using local common languages, interpretations of messages through visuals and other forms of mediums that interest them to read.

Building Movements

Today, more like never, young people have the ability to build large online communities in order to advocate, showcase resistance, organize events, and raise funds, among other things in order to promote the causes they believe in. In recent years, youth have demonstrated that they are creatively dominating the digital sphere and using it to solve issues that are not usually covered by the media. This is done through varied practices such as sharing information, calling for solidarity, initiating campaigns, and engaging in conversations.

Stronger voice to Society

Technology and social media help to give a stronger voice to society. It encourages dialogue among people from different backgrounds, tribes, and religions. Through social media, information sharing becomes very inclusive and reaches people irrespective of who they are and where they are. It builds strength in numbers and gives legitimacy and power to advocate for causes through collective voices and actions.

Sharing Stories

Technology and social media are allowing people to engage and share their peacebuilding stories like never before. Digital platforms notably social media and other technologies have become instrumental platforms for spreading messages, raising awareness, and promoting narratives. For instance, young people are using social media as a digital archive to note and address cases of violations against human rights and providing platforms to victims of conflict and human rights violations as a tool for transitional justice. Many other examples of creative digital storytelling can be seen in the work of youth-led organizations through the posting of human (people-centered) stories that share their experiences and contribution towards peacebuilding.

[1] GOBAL SOCIAL MEDIA STATISTICS- Analysis from Kepios

But also there are challenges!

Different challenges emerge for young peacebuilders while adopting technology and media tools. The potential of social media and technology as tools for peacebuilding can be overshadowed by the dangers they can present to drive radicalization and violence. From the different consultations held, we can identify these major challenges:

Hate speech and misinformation: Social media can fuel hate speech, polarization, and cause division in the community. These negative messages include, but are not limited to, the use of religious and communal rivalries as a tool to gain political and/or financial mileage

Terrorist groups influence: Terrorists exploit for the purpose of recruitment, incitement, fundraising, dissemination of propaganda, and general planning and coordination of terrorist activities. Different terrorist groups use telegram channels and Twitter to project themselves as legitimate governing entity and attract fighters.

Protection: In countries where civic space and digital space are limited, young people face certain security challenges while conducting their peace education, dialogue, advocacy, and media campaigns. Government agencies are now hacking, spying, and monitoring young people because of their online activism. In repressive political contexts, technology is manipulated and youth can face risks for their work. This does not bode well for young people. There is also a lack of awareness on the part of some young people on how they can use the various social media and technological platforms and tools for their peacebuilding work in a safe and secure manner.

Poor technological infrastructure: This concerns the limited access to electricity and internet connectivity in rural areas which also translates to costly data usage and issues relating to youth mobilization for online activities.
Skills and capacities: This concerns first the digital media skills: a huge lack in the fields of content creators and people with enough proficiency to lead social media campaigns that address the concerns of local communities. Also, this concerns technical skills of facilitation and mediation: how to navigate online space to create meaningful conversations and dialogues.

Language barriers: Different educational and training opportunities, as well as high-level events, are available only in the English Language which excludes many young people to take part in. This also includes the amount of available content online in languages different than the few major languages (English, Russian, and German)
Limited Impact: It is important to look for a change in behavior beyond raising awareness. Peacebuilders should evaluate their online work and look for ways to change attitudes and influence taking actions. These are outcomes very hard to see and harvest to look beyond the likes and comments from the online posts to actually meaningful engagement translated to offline actions in the communities.

What young people builders are using social media and technology for?

Lost of youth peacebuilding organizations do incorporate digital components in their work and they are adopting technology in different ways. This use ranges from

Solidarity and movement building - Getting the support of other organizations, networks, communities, and even governments. This helps to find partners to collaborate with and also ways in which we can support and complement the work towards peacebuilding that other organizations and networks carry out.

Awareness and civic education - Raising the awareness on impacts of social issues that threaten our peaceful society like the anti-corruption campaign among others. This can be done in the form of text posting, images including visual arts, short videos, and documentaries. It can also be done in the local languages that are easily understood by the targeted audience.

Leverage the voices of ordinary citizens - Sharing experiences and stories of ordinary citizens help to influence policies and regional commitments toward a more people-centered approach. This has been effective as they share their lived experiences compared to organizations trying to be their voice. This is easily done on social media as it is a free platform and can be shared and leveraged by civil society organizations.

Consultation and engagement - This is mainly through reaching the remote communities - since social media has no international or geographical boundaries, advocacy reaches members of the communities from the remote communities given that they have the relevant infrastructure. These allow activists, mediators, and researchers to gain input from citizens to inform their future interventions in the communities

Trainings - As an alternative to in-person training, youth-led CSOs have been using non-costly digital tools like zoom, WhatsApp, and google meet to conduct trainings , and workshops, and offer online certificates and diplomas on themes related to peacebuilding. They succeeded in making knowledge more widely accessible for everyone and in sharing expertise beyond all borders.

Dialogue and exchange - Creation of online spaces to encourage meaningful dialogue with relevant stakeholders from governments, INGOs, UN, donors, etc..to foster dialogue and discuss themes that matter for young people such as peace agendas, actors' commitments, and areas of collaboration.

Stories from the Ground

PEPNET in collaboration with Building Blocks for Peace Foundation did a step-down project for YPS to commemorate the International Day of Peace.
PEPNET also organized a peace walk program and it was well shared via the social media platform. We also got a lot of success stories from the Peace Zone project we did recently using various social media platforms. Through our use of technology and social media, we are partnering more with other people and reaching a wider audience. For instance, for the peace walk project we did to mark the International day of peace, we had participants in states like Oyo, Lagos, and the FCT, and even outsideNigeria (Liberia). All of these partnerships and collaborations are made possible through the use of social media.
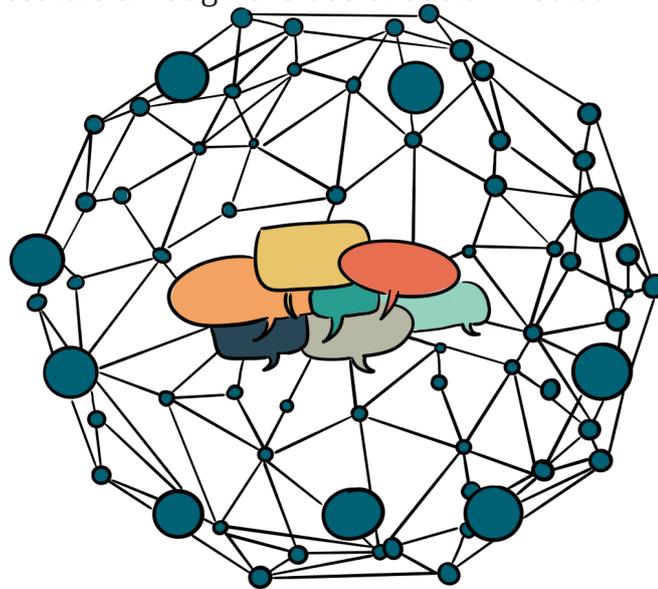
Building Blocks for Peace organization led different online initiatives to promote the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda via the use of social media including driving peace advocacy and reaching out to multi-stakeholders using hashtags like #Youth4Peace, #NigeriaYouth4Peace #Yes4YPS, etc. For instance, they launched the Nigerian Youth for Peace Initiative (NYFPI), which is a network of young people working on advancing the YPS agenda. They have representatives of the NYFPI cut across the 36 states in Nigeria as well as in the FCT. This network is run largely through the help of social media as they have a WhatsApp platform which is used in coordinating the activities of the group as well as in monitoring their peacebuilding interventions. Almost all their interactions are done online, which goes to show the effectiveness of social media in peacebuilding coordination.

Meshkat Community (مجتمع مِشكاة) is an initiative launched by PeaceGeeks in Jordan in 2017 to prevent the continued escalation of social divisions and online violence and community cohesion and constructive dialogue in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region. The initiative supports the effective development and visibility of locally-produced content that strengthens constructive dialogue and creative responses to intolerance and hatred. This is done through youtube series production, social media, visual arts creation, use of virtual reality and other creative methods to meaningfully engage in digital contributions to peace in safe, positive, and responsible ways.

Matmoora(t) Adeela was a project aimed to document violations that occurred in various regions of Sudan, focusing on four main issues: transitional justice, extrajudicial killings, freedom of religion and belief, and political participation. And because these issues are related to one another in terms of impact and influence, it was necessary to attempt to document the violations that occurred in them from the beginning of the Inqaz Regime all the way to the post-revolution era and try to advocate through this documentation process for these causes and bring attention to them. The project built an online platform through which we try to present the aforementioned issues and open them for dialogue in different forms of art: such as short stories, short films, and illustrations. And because Adeela believes in the great role artivism can play in enforcing change and simplifying complex issues such as those discussed in this project, part of the stories and testimonies collected from these victims were transformed into art forms that are easy to understand and interact with

Advocating, Networking and Reaching

One of the stories that Matmoora covered was the Story of the struggle of Maban's women, through video, we interviewed a number of these women and they spoke to us about their ongoing suffering from the state's discrimination against them as members of tribes displaced from south Sudan and who have been living in the Blue Nile state from even before the succession. They are deprived from the right of owning land or have identification papers or earn Sudanese citizens.

مطمورة عديلة - قبائل المابان - معضلة الهوية والمواطنة

When published on our platform and on Facebook, we received plenty of comments and contact from advocates across Sudan who showed interest in supporting these tribes and especially the women in the videos. We consider this a success as it has always been one of the project's goals and aspiration is to give platforms to the oppressed and highlight their struggles so direct action could be taken towards these issues.

You can learn more about Matmoora(t) Adeela and look at its outcomes on the website Matmoora.adeela.org.

Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

organised an online campaign around an atrocity incident. There was a massive atrocity that people from the majority religious group caused for the Buddhist people and burnt temples, and houses in 2012. In May 2022, We organised a rally with the support of local youth followed by a round table dialogue with local government officers, members of parliament, and activists. The youth from the Buddhist community raised their issues and discussed them very positively for the first time before the majority. And the representatives from the majority of people promised to ensure proper rights for every person in the discussion. As of today, there are no more conflicts in the area.
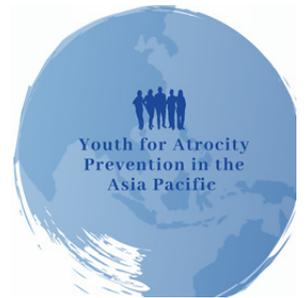
Week for Peace at Somos CaPAZes

In 2022 Somos CaPAZes decided not only to commemorate International Peace Day (Sept. 21st), but also to devote the entire week to share messages of peace with its digital community. Drawings, videos and stories were gathered from our communities in different cities of Colombia. The resources were shared through our Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIN, where followers were asked to write their own definition of peace and to leave a thank you note to our volunteers.

At the end of the week, Somos CaPAZes visited Colombia's National University, one of the biggest in Bogotá, to teach peace building to its students in a dynamic way. Passersby enjoyed the activities and some decided to apply to become a volunteer in the organisation.

Somos CaPAZes: From a peacebuilder's perspective.

This is Liceth Alejandra Cuetia Arcila. She participated in our Youth People Transforming Territories Program, where she learned about conflict resolution, peacebuilding and leadership skills.

She is a 20-year-old youth leader from Corinto, Colombia. She founded and represents Corinto's youth communication collective COCOJUCO. The collective seeks to give their territory a new meaning through digital communications, as they connect their efforts to mitigate stigmatisation of Corinto's people, who have struggled with armed conflict. They make a transformation process through photography, video and mass media starting from a psychological and social facilitation. They are focused on formative leadership work with the youth to generate protective environments and to give direction to their life projects.

Reach out to Liseth by email
lisethcuetia@gmail.com

Keep up to date with our newest projects in Somos CaPAZes!
Visit our website and follow us on Instagram,
Facebook or LinkedIN.

Towards creative Engagement and Impact

Despite the challenges mentioned, social media and technology remain incredible tools to create positive change. If used properly, it can open new opportunities for participation, inclusion, and positive engagement. The following are recommendations and best practices for young peacebuilders can adhere to in order to make their work more efficient:

Proper Planning: As a user of technology and social media, you are also a strategist and a project manager! the work doesn't only involve sharing messages across platforms and directly jumping into implementation, but it involves different other layers that shouldn't be missed such as: creating a content calendar, developing different messages, preparing designs, communicating with different team members, being consistent, exploring different channels, evaluating results... It is important to develop good plans for long-term effective strategies and for better impact

Participatory design: Participatory approach in designing interventions through technology and social media also shape the ability of peacebuilders to meaningfully employ these digital tools as a tool to promote peace. A powerful way to do this is by empowering community members with knowledge and skills to create visuals, designs, audio, and other forms of arts and media as well as the capacity to use technology that is relevant to their work. This enables local ownership and leadership as well as stimulates grassroots actions.

Know your audience: In order to foster creative engagement and impact through social media, it is important for peacebuilders to reach young people in the social media platforms where they reside and in language that they find attractive and that speaks to them. For instance, most young people spend time on video platforms like Instagram and Tiktok. How can we begin to create peace-related content on these platforms that they will keep coming back to?

Seize the opportunities: Whether getting online courses that will enhance your digital skills or knowledge around digital peacebuilding or getting an advantage from the multiple free resources online that can support your work such as google and LinkedIn for nonprofits, or Canva for design, there are different opportunities that young peacebuilders can grasp to engage creatively in peacebuilding work.

Collaboration and Partnerships: Much of the current digital peacebuilding work requires ongoing collaboration between organizations, the public sector, and the private sector as it leads to reduced costs and breeds innovation. Additiationaly, There is a need for more partnership and collaboration among CSOs and Media partners and to begin to engage content creators, social media influences, and comedians alike in peace messaging as they can help to reach a wider audience.

Use of Safe and secure technology: Young peacebuilders should be aware of the threats that technologies can pose to their work as well as they should learn about the foundations of digital security. Youth-led organizations can run training programs for their staff members and volunteers and offer secured digital tools like VPN and end-to-end encrypted email services so that young peacebuilders can be equipped with the right knowledge and tools to be resilient if this increasingly digitized context.

Measure results: Evaluating the results of interventions done on social media or tech platforms help us find out if our efforts are really working. Some of the metrics we can consider are the reach, interactions, engagement, subscribers, and feedback received. This informs future actions and what keeps the movement alive. Evaluation also helps to test new ideas and learn from the outcomes.

Be entrepreneurial: It is important to experiment with different approaches, ideas, and tactics and try out new ways of doing things. Have an entrepreneurial mindset, and constantly improve your efforts and test new practices. The technological and media landscapes are moving fast and it has become vital to have the ability to quickly adapt and react to new trends and opportunities.

Let's Explore Further

The Digital Peacebuilders Guide

The Digitial Peacebuilders Guide is a comprehensive online toolkit outlining different digital tools. It includes step-by-step advice for setting up peace tech projects and programs, and best practices for using technology to maximize the impact of peacebuilding initiatives. This includes: addressing digital harms, building social cohesion, networking, conflict analysis, and monitoring using different digital tools such as Ads, chatbots, games, virtual reality, social media, etc.. It also features case studies from a range of organizations around the world that have successfully used digital tools for peacebuilding. This Digital Peacebuilders Guide was developed by Search for Common Ground & Build Up.

YPS Pillars: Protection & Partnerships

The Digital Peacebuilding Toolkit

The Digital Peacebuilding Toolkit is a resource developed by swisspeace to strengthen peacebuilders understanding to implement digital peacebuilding projects and to map different examples around the globe for inspiration. It is an interactive English guide on the Miro collaborative platform that provides a comprehensive overview on different items such as the digital peace challenges and key messages, project examples, resources, and research on using digital technologies for peacebuilding, as well as online courses to increase peacebuilding digital literacy.

YPS Pillars: Participation

United Nations Peacemaker digital toolkit

United Nations Peacemaker digital toolkit is a new tool developed to help mediators recognize and mitigate the risks posed by digital technologies in mediation contexts. With the goal of promoting just and sustainable peace through the pacific settlement of disputes, the toolkit seeks to build awareness, support mediators, and equip them with the necessary skills to utilize digital technologies in conflict resolution and mediation. They also published a report showcasing Practical Applications of Digital Technologies in Mediation.

YPS Pillars: Prevention

New Tactics for Human Rights

New Tactics for Human Rights is a website by the Center for Victims of Torture is an invaluable resource for human rights activists, providing them with the tools and practices they need to effectively do human rights advocacy. In the website , you can also access the Tactical Mapping Tool. The Tactical Mapping Tool (TMT) is a new web application from New Tactics in Human Rights at the Center for Victims of Torture designed to equip human rights activists with the tools and resources needed to take strategic action through assembling and mapping a database of key actors; assessing where those actors sit on a spectrum from ally to opponent; analyze effective intervention and collaboration; and strategize actions and tactics.

YPS Pillars: Participation

PeaceTech Lab

It is an organization that partners with experts in the field to develop innovative solutions to the challenges of conflict resolution. The Lab works with youth in conflict-affected regions to create digital tools that help build peace. The Lab has created projects that focus on topics such as countering violent extremism, facilitating dialogue, and promoting reconciliation.

YPS Pillars: Participation & Prevention

Build Up organization

It offers a range of courses, programs, and tailored trainings that can help individuals and organizations strengthen their digital peacebuilding work . Their free courses cover topics such as introducing technology for peacebuilding, remote capacity building, and Human-centered design. They also published different resources and publications including A Social Media Analysis Toolkit for Mediators and Peacebuilders.

YPS Pillars: Participation

The Justice Accelerator

The Justice Accelerator is the flagship programme of HiiL organisation dedicated to realize people-centered justice programming through innovative and disruptive solutions. The accelerator provides an opportunity for justice innovators to develop, test, and scale their solutions to tackle the most pressing justice challenges in their respective countries by providing funding, guidance, resources, networks, and international exposure.

YPS Pillars: Participation and Prevention

Mission Zhobia game: Winning for peace

It is a unique and exciting game to foster understanding and collaboration of practicing peacebuilding on the ground. The game's mission is to strengthen justice and security in Zhobia land where conflicts and dangers prevail. Mission Zhobia is designed to be an inspiring game that aims to teach competencies in conflict analysis, building trust, and adaptation to the local context's unseen challenges. Good luck with your mission in Zhobia!

YPS Pillars: Participation & Partnerships

Horizontal, Tech for Rights and Justice

It is Founded in 2018, Horizontal empowers communities around the world through capacity-building and technology. Horizontal develops tools for freedom of expression, privacy protection, and access to information, specifically geared towards at-risk users. Horizontal also provides digital security training to activists and journalists and has trained individuals from over 40 countries.

YPS Pillars: Participation & Protection

Access Now

is an international NGO that defends and extends the digital rights of users at risk around the world. Access now combining direct technical support, comprehensive policy engagement, global advocacy, grassroots grantmaking, legal interventions, and convenings such as RightsCon. Access Now also provides technology solutions and real-time advice for users at risk in circumstances where communications are not open, free, or safe, through 24/7 Digital Security Helpline

YPS Pillars: Participation & Protection