Gender Critique of UN AI Advisory Body's Report: Governing AI for Humanity

IT for Change

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Governing AI for Humanity

Section on Opportunities and Enablers

- While the section recognizes the infrastructural and artificial intelligence (AI) divide between the Global South and the Global North countries, it does not acknowledge the gender divide in the AI ecosystem across regions that hinders the equitable distribution of opportunities created by AI. Multi-country studies indicate that digital automation contributes to the polarization of labor markets and the [hollowing out of middle-skilled jobs](), with [women-dominated jobs]() at the greatest risk of being lost to such technology-led job displacement.

Risks and Challenges

- While the report provides an early categorization of AI-based risks from the perspective of vulnerable communities and the commons, the language is vague and leaves room for interpretation. We suggest that the final draft of the report map risks and challenges in a systematic, nested, and comprehensive manner. An explicit rights-centric language must form the basis of the proposed risk assessment framework. Within this, rights should be considered non-negotiable, i.e., they must be maintained regardless of the risk associated with external factors. This schema must be attentive to gendered dimensions of risks and challenges, including in the crisis for digital democracy owing to privatized platform infrastructures and their inscrutable algorithmic apparatus that drive women out of the online public sphere.

- Addressing risks of discrimination and exclusion is not only about addressing the technical aspects endogenous to the AI system. Rather, we need transformative AI policies to redress structural gender disadvantages and historical indignities. In respect of gender equality, AI systems must begin with the acknowledgment of oppression—unfair exclusion (from resources, decision-making, and institutional access and benefits) of women (in their diverse marginal locations) and sustained exploitation—the unfair privilege that men derive from the exclusion of women in social, economic, and political realms. AI models must be built and implemented with assumptions originating in the historical social stratification and uneven distribution of power and privilege among the genders.

AI Governance Principles

- Inclusivity is not sufficient; it is important to ensure substantive equality for all genders and minority communities in the AI ecosystem. There is a mention in the report about "affirmative and corrective steps to address the historical and structural exclusion of certain communities like women and gender diverse actors." This is an important aspect and the goal of substantive equality and gender transformation must be underlined clearly.

- The report must also build toward a framework that addresses historical and contextual injustices. This would involve a cross-cutting/cross-sectoral effort to redefine AI-related rights regimes in areas such as social communications, health, welfare delivery, work/employment, etc., pertinent to gender justice and delivery of public services.

- Data governance for AI will benefit from drawing from the data feminism principles: Examine Power, Challenge Power, Elevate Emotion & Embodiment, Rethink Binaries & Hierarchies, Embrace Pluralism, Consider Context, and Make Labor Visible.

- Self-determination should also be recognized as an important principle for AI governance. Those implicated in the AI ecosystem and representative organizations of women and marginalized groups must be empowered through access to knowledge, resources, and other measures that ensure meaningful participation to have a meaningful say in the design, deployment, and purpose of AI technologies, including to reject certain use cases. Autonomy is key to gender justice.