

IT for Change's Input at UNESCO's Global Forum on the Ethics of AI 2024

IT for Change

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UNESCO's Global Forum on the Ethics of AI 2024

Session 7 | All Hands on Deck: Shaping an Inclusive Future of AI

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Highlights from IT for Change's Anita Gurumurthy's input

Round 1

Please discuss innovative approaches and examples that aim to enhance the participation of civil societal organizations, different publics, and other stakeholders in the global debate, co-design, and governance of AI? Which tactics and methods could be deployed to strengthen the involvement of diverse stakeholders in different global regions?

Immense contributions have been made by a range of social actors – from scholars to civil society organizations, standards bodies, etc. – in framing the debate and continuously unearthing inaccuracies and blind spots.

We also have deep work on AI in welfare systems – where UN agencies, special rapporteurs, and several researchers bring vital insights that sharpen the ethical considerations in relation to welfare.

What is really important though is the contributions that challenge the AI status quo. Since much of AI is about the unknown, the AI paradigm needs us to be vigilant about injustice, and unearth what is going wrong and for whom.

Workers' movements have exposed the perils of algorithmic management, enabling courts and lawmakers to move the needle and recognize what needs to be done.

Social justice movements have shown the cascading exclusions arising from the mutually reinforcing biases of the labor market and job ads.

Feminists have shown how gendered misinformation is powered by profitable provocations: AI that is geared to find and amplify misogyny.

Organizations like mine have repeatedly pointed to the wicked problem of AI and global economic injustice, drawing attention to connections between equity in data governance and justice in AI governance.

So, how do we strengthen the engagement of those who typically challenge the democratic deficit in AI governance?

A key aspect of what we need to do is to look critically at what is actually meant in the whole buzz around decolonizing AI. We can't decolonize AI solely by a politics of diversity in data or representativity

in datasets. AI is not just mirroring the world, but rearranging the world. So, decolonizing means we need to do three things:

1. Broad base and democratize the resource regimes underpinning AI – the data and digital infrastructural resources that create new architectures of inequity in the world.
2. We need to challenge the given narratives that have driven the AI epoch as we know it.
3. We need rights regimes shaping AI. Without that all the ethics will be notional. Therefore, as citizens, as workers, and as indigenous people, we need the right to information, the right to scrutinize, the right to explanation, the right to be consulted, the right to challenge impunity, and so on. This will ensure that AI ethics and rights can go hand in hand.

Round 2

Please provide recommendations and forward-looking insight on how civil societies, academia, policymakers, and industry leaders can collaborate to ensure more inclusive and participatory AI governance, at national, regional, and global levels.

Yes, collaboration is vital, but it must come out of rules-based systems, where trust is a consequence of democracy, equity, and a certain baseline of fairness. (Many times we talk about trust as if it is like plug and play.)

We need big changes to international economic law, especially the IP regime, and bring in the public interest as a missing piece in inclusive AI governance.

All the talk about open-source generative AI models has ultimately enriched the ecosystem of large private players because everyone is dependent on Big Tech's funding, their compute power (cloud infrastructure/hardware), or their training data to achieve scale.

Innovation ecosystems are under siege and not able to evolve independently and for applications in public AI ecosystems.

Big Tech dominance also gives rise to maximalist regulatory approaches that penalize smaller players. All along, Big Tech has used and abused trade secrets protection, appropriating huge amounts of data: public data, data of cities, data of communities, etc. Even as we talk of data for good, big platforms are making their data non-scrappable.

Trade agreements are weaponized against people and democratic systems in developing countries through non-disclosure clauses that prevent them from scrutinizing AI.

So, clearly, current IP and trade regimes make AI governance inherently non-inclusive.

Smaller firms, women-run startups, and cooperatives are unable to participate in innovation as larger firms hoard data and acquire training rights for everything they contract for.

IP allocation is not a neutral choice, but rather, a distributive equity matter, not just about balancing rights against one another, but also considering the interests of the non-owners as the lodestar of the balancing activity.

It is important to note that the AIA explicitly refers to exceptions to trade secrets that are available. Article 70(1)(a) of the AIA requires that trade secrets be protected except in the cases referred to in Article 5 of the TSD. Two examples of such exceptions are exercising the right to freedom of expression and information, and whistleblowing activities.

Inclusive and participatory AI governance needs us to reverse the appropriation of the knowledge commons and the creative work of human civilization.

We need a commons approach to the management of public datasets used by AI models, with strong institutional safeguards, especially in sectors such as health, education, and welfare.

We need innovation ecosystems that look different – that cater to different imaginations, different aspirations, different worldviews – we must look at alternatives in public-community AI partnerships.