MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF DENMARK

Tech for Democracy

DIIS · DANISH INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

TECH FOR DEMOCRACY:

Learnings from the Year of Action

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In 2021, Denmark's Tech for Democracy initiative kickstarted a multi-stakeholder push for protecting and promoting democracy and human rights in an era of rapid technological development, bringing together representatives from governments, multilateral organizations, tech industry, and civil society. The report 'Tech for Democracy: Learnings from the Year of Action' has taken stock of the multistakeholder efforts made under the auspices of the initiative. Here, you will find the report's key learnings and future pathways in condensed form.

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Tech for Democracy

Digital technologies and tools can inspire new forms of political and social action or provide novel forms of participatory mechanisms that enable access to existing democratic processes. Yet the distance between imagined potential and the reality of observed impact of digital technologies is widening today. In response, we are seeing growing calls for a shared commitment to accountable, democratic, and safe technological development.

The Tech for Democracy initiative embodies an ambitious multistakeholder push on this key challenge of our time – protecting and promoting democracy and human rights in an era of rapid technological development. Through high-level conferences and diplomatic efforts, the Copenhagen Pledge and numerous streams of work organized around ten multistakeholder Action Coalitions through a Year of Action, Tech for Democracy has established novel and fortified existing collaborations, produced knowledge and evidence, built principles of democratic technological development and use, and provided inputs to important international and national political, regulatory, and normative processes. Ensuring that digital technologies further enhance democratic institutions, processes, and practice through principles of protection, non-discrimination or privacy is a joint responsibility of tech companies and governments – digital governance requires strong international cooperation and multilateralism to ensure accountability and social responsibility.

IMPACT CASE

Engaging the tech sector – International Media Support

International Media Support facilitated critical engagement with the tech sector by conducting a series of closed-door virtual roundtables between representatives from the Ukrainian government, civil society, and leading tech companies to address the issue of war and disinformation. The meetings provided an opportunity for knowledge sharing on local circumstances that improved coordination between Ukrainian participants and the tech industry to bolster monitoring, counter disinformation, and discuss concrete needs and solutions.

IMPACT CASE

Expanding collaboration – the Digital Rights Alliance

Under the auspices of the Tech for Democracy Initiative, the Digital Rights Alliance, led by The Danish Institute for Human Rights, brought together National Human Rights Institutes (NHRI) interested in technology. In providing opportunity for national actors to work strategically with human rights impacts of digitalization, the Alliance cemented the mandate of the NHRIs in the context of digitalization.

Findings and learnings

Providing a platform for knowledge production, dialogue, visibility, and action

The scope and sheer expanse of work streams underline the importance of not just continuous dialogue and dissemination within the initiative, but also a systematizing of knowledge to amplify its impact.

Forward thinking and cutting-edge on a new and difficult agenda

The initiative is applauded for seeking to foster political attention to the challenges emerging from tech, addressing what is a difficult agenda in a fast-moving and complex space.

Pros and cons of working from a value-based foundation

Tech for Democracy forms a significant value framework of how we speak to the nexus between technology, democracy, and human rights. However, there is a continued need to act from a pragmatic and nuanced foundation.

Importance of facilitating critical engagement with the tech sector and amplifying the right voices

The initiative has had to balance a difficult ambition to simultaneously cooperate and remain critical of the tech sector.

Utilizing Danish positions, competencies, and networks

Denmark effectively navigated lobbying of interests and augmented its position in both transatlantic and wider international relations in the field of tech, democracy, and human rights.

Significance of strategic planning in executing a multistakeholder initiative

The crucial challenge from timing stresses the importance of maintaining a dual vision on both the greater strategic objectives and the everyday planning to achieve those objectives.

Maintaining momentum to sustain impact

Tech for Democracy catalysed and empowered global efforts on a key challenge for societies across the world. All stakeholders engaged agreed that they joined a promising and credible process with the Danish government in the lead that must not end as it is about to take flight.

Future pathways

1

Continued need for knowledge production, systematizing, and dissemination

Tech for Democracy has cemented the need for continued efforts in procuring, producing, systematizing, and disseminating knowledge.

2

Sustaining collaborations to enable impact

As the initiative expands beyond the coalitions to wider work on democracy and human rights, it will be important to mobilize, publicize, and hold accountable signatories to the Copenhagen Pledge.

3 Ensuring coherence with other international initiatives as well as continued regulatory and normative progress on tech

Working from the assumption that this is a crowded space of engagement, the initiative should continuously focus on mapping out, following, and collaborating with existing likeminded initiatives.

4 Continued critical engagement with the tech sector

Maintaining a critical engagement requires a firm hand more than pats on the back, and Tech for Democracy should continue to be mindful of how it balances events, dialogues, and demands towards the different actors involved.

5 Amplifying the right voices

There is a constant need to be mindful of unintended (and of course intended) biases shaping which voices are amplified through the platform provided by Tech for Democracy.

6

Establishing tech for democracy as a future strategic priority

Denmark will need to reinforce and reiterate Tech for Democracy and human rights as a key strategic priority for the years to come. Explicit prioritization is a prerequisite for establishing strategic objectives on tech, democracy and human rights for the short, medium, and long term.

7

Inspiring political action

Denmark has a unique opportunity to re-energize momentum by reiterating a shared commitment to responsible, democratic, and safe technological development.

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Establishing tech for democracy as a future strategic priority

Inspiring political action

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