

Voices from the Global South: Perspectives on International Engagements in Digital Rights

Research report from semi-structured interviews,
conducted in December 2022 and January 2023.

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Data Privacy Brasil Research Association is a non-profit civil-society organization that advocates for data protection and other fundamental rights in the context of the emergence of new technologies, social inequalities, and power asymmetries. The association's multidisciplinary team, drawn from various Brazilian regions, is developing public-interest research, technical notes, texts analyzing emerging issues, workshops with decision-making agents, and society in general. The Association believes that data protection is one of the foundations of democracy and that it should be seen from the perspective of social justice and power asymmetries. It, therefore, works to promote a data protection culture and ensure that digital rights are fundamental rights for everyone, conducting publicly available surveys, guided by a strong social commitment and with ethical funding. For more details about the organization, the impact of its projects, and how its research is supported, visit www.dataprivacybr.org.

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1 About the research

This exploratory research maps the participation of a selected group of activists from the Global South in international institutions within the field of digital rights. In addition, it also questions the interests of these organizations from 2023 onwards. It is understood that there is a complex and plural scenario of the digital agenda at the international level, fragmented into several forums, both multistakeholder and multilateral. Not only policy spaces and meetings, but processes and public consultations are also taking place in different instances.

Therefore, this report aims to be a kind of thermometer about these institutional spaces, to point out which forums and themes are most relevant for digital rights organizations from the Global South. It is expected to contribute, in this sense, to the strengthening of networks and articulations of activists from the Global South for better coordination and engagement of activities at the international level.

For analytical clarity, we understand “digital rights organizations” as civil society organizations that defend fundamental rights in the face of new technologies. In this sense, digital rights is a broad term that encompasses organizations that defend social rights to access the Internet, economic rights of net neutrality, civil rights to protect personal data and privacy, rights to freely create and share content, as well as rights to non-abusive discrimination in automated decisions. In a simplified way, we understand fundamental rights as functional equivalents of human rights. Digital rights organizations usually perform a wide range of actions and functions, such as research (legal and policy analysis), communication campaigns, production of audiovisual content (podcasts and documentaries), participation in national and international political spaces, events with political actors and technology companies, and other forms of action. These actions vary greatly depending on the strategic choices of each organization. This description is only intended to provide greater analytical clarity on the types of organizations involved in this research.

There is no static set of elements that can compose the meaning of “digital rights”, considering that the discourse on rights, in the field of communication and information technology, is plastic and variable according to political and social problems that present themselves with different saliences¹. In the past, the most salient issues were inequality of access, limitation of copyright and non-discrimination of data packets when using the Internet. Currently, the practices of

¹ In a similar approach, see Karppinen & Puukko (2020), arguing that instead of any particular definition of digital rights, it is better to approach the articulation of rights as inherently indeterminate and subject to discursive contestation. Discursive practices are formed together with discursive struggles (“rights claims often emerge from civil society, but can also be used as vehicles of power that encode and institutionalize specific normative ideals, relations of power, and structures of governance”).

digital rights organizations are focused on these old disputes, but increasingly on violence and gender and racial inequalities, contesting the unrestricted use of facial recognition and abuses in automated systems and decisions and artificial intelligence systems.

This research has a very practical orientation. Despite the great relevance of the sociology and political science literature focused on the transformations of digital rights organizations and their different ways of acting, we did not carry out an exhaustive literature review and do not intend to build a new or specific theory². Our objective is quite pragmatic in the sense of an action research aligned with the political interests of digital rights organizations. In this sense, the objective of the mapping is to strengthen the capacities of action of these organizations from the Global South.

This research was designed and conducted by the Data Privacy Brasil Research Association with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Data Privacy Brasil Research Association (DPBR hereafter) is a non-profit civil society organization that promotes data protection and other fundamental rights in the face of the emergence of new technologies, social inequalities and power asymmetries. With a multidisciplinary team of 22 researchers from different Brazilian regions, DPBR develops public interest research on emerging issues, conducts national and international advocacy and provides training for decision-making agents and society in general. DPBR is currently a member of several networks and representative bodies, such as the Brazilian *Coalizão Direitos na Rede* and the National Data Protection Board of the Brazilian Data Protection Authority. Internationally, it has been leading a Southern Alliance to influence global decision-making forums on issues related to datafication and democracy, together with partners from the Global South. For the purposes of this project, datafication means (i) a transformation of all traces of our social and civic life into personal data analyzed by computers and used for commercial and social purposes, (ii) a transformation of social relations, knowledge production relations, and power relations between citizens, companies and the State, and (iii) a deeper transformation of the welfare state that is fueled by data-driven social policies and automated decision-making (Breiter & Hepp, 2018; Mejis & Couldry, 2019; Jarke & Breiter, 2019). Datafication is not a normative concept but a descriptive one. It is a reality in most societies.

The research outlined in this report marks the second phase of an initiative that commenced in November 2022. It originated with an in-person gathering held at the DPBR headquarters in São Paulo, bringing together delegates from Asian, African, and Latin-American organizations. During this meeting, activists voiced their concerns regarding the challenges they face in engaging with multilateral forums and other international institutions. These challenges stem from both the obstacles in accessing these spaces and in capturing the attention of policy-makers once there. The prevailing lack of transparency within these forums was underscored,

² For interesting theoretical perspectives on digital rights activism, see Karppinen [2017], Karppinen & Puukko [2020], Pétin & Tréguer [2018], Tréguer & Trudel [2019], Grover [2022].

shedding light on the intricate web of discussions and pathways within the UN, which often proves arduous to navigate.

One of the participants pointed out that many of these so-called global meetings are not really global, while another commented that even with engagement, the discussion does not always take place from the perspective of fundamental rights. Participants mentioned that there is a “reactionary trap” in the participation of Global South NGOs in the sense that the organizations are invited to comment and to participate once the policy issue is already defined. Therefore, much of the work conducted by these NGOs is a reaction to pressing issues already defined by organizations and actors situated in the Global North. It is necessary to find a way to be reactive but also to be propositional.

The report presents the methodology of how we conducted the interviews, the main results of this qualitative research and some indications of important institutional spaces for organizations in the Global South that work with issues of democracy and the impact of technologies on human rights.

2 Methodology

The research followed the format of semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview form completed by the researchers based on the interviewee's answers. All questions engage with the debates that took place in the previous meeting held in São Paulo in November 2022.

Our methodology followed an “expert consultation” technique and had as a defining criterion the selection of a sample based on four criteria. First, being a representative of an organization from the Global South. Second, having practical contact with digital rights issues through research, technical notes, studies or engagement in forums. Third, take an interest in the debate about the role of technical standards and human rights. Fourth, having some close relationship, even if indirect, through participation in activism networks. According to these criteria, we do not consider as experts to be interviewed members of digital rights organizations with no indirect relationship with us (for example, organizations that have never participated in the IGF, RightsCon or conferences organized by international digital rights organizations).

The eleven interviews were carried out between December 2022 and January 2023, with representatives of NGOs from the Global South. Ten activists and one specialist consultant (from a Southern American Country) in the field of digital rights were interviewed. Of these, seven were women and four were men. Regarding the nationality of the ten activists interviewed:



All the questions were asked orally to all representatives in the same order and templates. For the specialist consultant, the results here considered are related to its answers to the questions fourth and fifth, taking into account its expertise and trajectory in this field.

We conducted interviews with eleven respondents and took notes, in real time, during the interviews. At the end of each interview, as a team, we discussed perceptions of the importance of different standards forums and common narratives of barriers to participation and involvement. As our research aims at an initial mapping of obstacles, we were not interested in the identity of the participants or specific contexts that could reveal information about an entity X or Y. For ethical reasons, we also assumed a commitment to the anonymization of personal information and the production of a research report that focused on social processes, structures and actions (rather than people, organizations and individual histories). For these reasons, the research report does not present the names of the participants and details that could lead to inferences about the identity of the people and organizations they represent.

2.1 Interview form

Multiple-choice questions (with the possibility of choosing more than one option)

The first three questions presented options for the interviewee based on the conversations had at the November meeting and on a mapping of international spaces that address technology governance and regulation, building direct relationships with human rights issues in the digital age. The proposed questions were:

QUESTION 1 What kind of work does your organization do?

- Research
- Advocacy
- Campaign
- Litigation
- Coalition-building
- Awareness raising
- Public education
- Local Collaborations
- Archiving

QUESTION 2 Which of these elements are (most) important for you?

- Lack of enforcement once the law is created
- Datafication issues on public services
- The independence of data protection authorities
- Technical standards
- Digital economy regulation (Digital trade)
- Lack of awareness about Digital Rights

QUESTION 3 Which of these elements are (most) important for you?

- UNHRC** - United Nations Human Rights Council
- WTO** - World Trade Organization
- IGF** - Internet Governance Forum
- OECD** - Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
- ITU** - International Telecommunications Union
- UNCTAD** - United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
- ICANN** - Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers
- Others (please specify)

Open-ended questions

The last two questions were aimed at openly capturing elements of planning for the upcoming years, in order to identify new issues that could go unnoticed, as well as to put on the radar possibilities for joint work among NGOs in the Global South.

QUESTION 4 What contributions and public calls are on your agenda for 2023?

QUESTION 5 Are there other priorities of your entity on the international agenda?

As our research objective was to carry out an initial mapping of the concerns of the most relevant institutional spaces and the most important public calls, the format of the script of questions proved to be quite adequate. During the interviews, we asked some questions to deepen issues raised by some respondents. In this sense, the semi-structured interview format allowed a certain degree of dynamism and enabled checking and deepening questions that were asked during the interviews, for better use of the collected data.

3 Results

What kind of work the interviewed organizations do?

This first question aimed to capture the profile of organizations, taking into account the activities they are proposed to carry out.

Table 1 - Answers to the first question

ACTIVITIES	TOTAL OF ORGANIZATIONS
Research	10
Local Collaborations	9
Awareness raising	8
Advocacy	8
Public education	8
Coalition-building	7
Campaign	6
Archiving	2
Litigation	1

Considering these nine activities, within the sample, it is found that each NGO carries out an average of six activities within its scope. One of the NGOs performs eight of the nine activities (in this case, not involved in litigation). Four other NGOs operate in seven out of the nine proposed activities. Two NGOs perform six activities. One performs five activities among those proposed. Finally, two NGOs are focused on three of the nine activities. It is observed that on average, NGOs of the sample work in a broad range of endeavors, as 8 out of the 10 operate in five or more areas of action, thus demonstrating a diversified scope of operations.

Moving forward, a topic that a representative of an NGO from Latin America placed a lot of emphasis on is the promotion of digital rights in small municipalities, where the awareness of digital rights tends to be even lower in relation to more populous municipalities. The interviewer spoke about actions that have been taken to support privacy by design for the municipalities that are taking their first steps in transitioning to the digital ecosystem, which arose as a really interesting element in terms of advocacy at all government levels.

Which were the most important themes?

Within the six proposed themes for the second question, we can identify trends in relation to the most prioritized issues, as well as raise questions about the less prioritized ones. These less prioritized activities may express the greatest challenges faced by organizations and provide insights into the strategies of action of these NGOs within the context of the Global South.

Table 2 - Answers to the second question

THEMES	TOTAL OF ANSWERS
Datafication issues on public services	8
Lack of awareness about Digital Rights	8
Technical standards	6
Digital economy regulation (Digital trade)	6
Lack of enforcement once the law is created	5
The independence of data protection authorities	5

The empirical result, in our small sample of digital rights organizations from the Global South, reinforces the argument made by Aarushi Gupta and Aman Nair, from Digital Future Labs, that policy spaces are dominated by the theme of Digital Public Infrastructures, which has a traction effect for organizations working with digital rights. This is because many problems of equity, inequalities, access and enjoyment of rights are mediated by decisions to implement new technologies and infrastructures that generate new “affordances”. In addition, there is the fact that large nations such as India and Brazil have increasing investments in digital transformation and public infrastructure. As explained by Gupta and Nair (2023):

Digital technologies have proliferated over the last two decades, fundamentally changing how society works. Their use has been ubiquitous, having been deployed for a wide range of functions central to our socioeconomic lives. Within this paradigm of digitalisation, a distinct conversation pertaining to the “infrastructural”, a quality of digital technologies has emerged. The focus has been on the potential of emergent population-scale digital technologies that can be leveraged for a variety of use cases, spanning both public and private spheres of service/product delivery. Such technologies have been clubbed under the term ‘digital public infrastructure’ (DPI) which, in turn, has been defined using a variety of approaches. Loosely defined as “digital solutions that enable basic functions essential for public and private service delivery,” DPIs have come to dominate policy parlance within the international development community-and are frequently referred to as one of the key levers for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

One of the NGOs mentioned that they are starting to pay attention to technical standards, and they have the desire to focus more on this topic, but there are still many barriers to be overcome.

Furthermore, the same interviewee commented that concerning the datafication process there is a particular concern focused on their national civil identity project³.

In the Standards theme, a South American representative said that there were collaborations with the IEEE on AI, and there was also significant participation in the ITU, working on Data Protection. They acted in the ITU-D and the ITU-T, both in 2019 and 2020, after which the participation was interrupted, but it may be resumed depending on future strategic planning.

In March 2023, there was an open call for inputs alongside the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), following the Resolution 47/23 of the UN Human Rights Council on “New and emerging digital technologies and human rights.” The resolution urges the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights “to convene an expert consultation to discuss the relationship between human rights and technical standard-setting processes”, and requires a report to be submitted “reflecting the discussions held in an inclusive and comprehensive manner”.

In July 2023, an event on the OHCHR Report summarized the need to break the silos between human rights and standards settings. The report demands the promotion of transparency and inclusivity in standard-setting processes, especially paying attention to the big gender gap in this area and the underrepresentation of the Global South and small enterprises. The existing processes are opaque and costly, and there’s a barrier to the English language. Implications mentioned include encryption in data transfers and bias in algorithmic decisions. The proposals of the report highlight the need for human rights risk assessments, monitoring of real-life impacts of the standards once implemented, and accountability.

The concern about the independence of data protection authorities also resonates with the findings of Pawel Popiel and Laura Schwartz-Henderson in the recent paper *Understanding the Challenges Data Protection Regulators Face: a global struggle towards implementation, independence & enforcement*, published by the Internews ADAPT project⁴. They identified that, since 2018, over sixty countries around the world have enacted or proposed new data protection laws, with those numbers steadily increasing each year. Data protection regulatory bodies and agencies are entrusted with massive responsibilities to enforce these newly passed laws across all sectors of society, often while significantly under-resourced with small budgets and skeleton staff. Many countries continue to grapple with the issue of independence, as these bodies are frequently housed within, funded by, or connected to ministries and executive offices while also tasked to ensure government entities and political parties comply with the law. As they claim, “although DPAs implement and enforce

³ Response from a representative of an NGO from the African region.

⁴ The paper was published in 2022. It won the Privacy Papers for Policymakers by the Future of Privacy Forum. See https://adapt.internews.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/DataProtectionRegulators_July2022_ADAPT.pdf

data protection frameworks, data protection is ultimately a collaborative effort that requires strong networks and healthy civic spaces. Civil society can help cultivate civic opportunities and spaces to build such networks where various policy stakeholders can engage in open discussion about data protection issues” (Popiel & Schwartz-Henderson, 2022, p. 38).

With the approval of personal data laws in Nigeria and India, and with a greater articulation of the G20 and the countries of the Global South around spaces such as BRICS, digital rights organizations are showing great interest in understanding what the new international arenas will be. In general, data protection authorities are articulated around European conferences of regulators and forums such as the Global Privacy Assembly, but there is a growing concern about how new cooperation arrangements in the Global South can strengthen the independence agenda of personal data protection authorities and how these new international spaces can influence national budget prioritization choices to strengthen digital rights enforcement.

Research produced by researchers from the Global South, or with interviews with people from the Global South, find similarity with our research findings. Even being a small sample and a very limited research, the gradation of interests in issues of Digital Public Infrastructures and lack of awareness about digital rights is parallel with some recent publications. We cannot draw large generalizing conclusions but this allows us to get a picture of the intensity of concerns, within a pre-defined and limited list, of digital rights organizations.

Which international spaces had shown to be the more prioritized ones?

With this question, we aim to capture the perceptions of the interviewees regarding their actions in international institutions. Here, we examined the perceptions of the sample, taking into account the responses which considered strategies, mainly focusing on their capacities and the challenges placed to participate in each of these spaces.

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is a space derived from the Tunis Agenda, from the World Summit for the Information Society, aimed at debating public policies related to the Internet, without taking binding decisions. Under the mandate of a UN secretariat, the IGF takes place annually on a multistakeholder basis, with the host country paying for the event. Thus, the IGF is seen as a safe space for discussions, which can initiate debates that, in more traditional forums, would be difficult to accept. In addition, there is participation of representatives from other institutional spaces and organizations, which makes the IGF a catalyst for the different instances of Internet governance, allowing an approximation and a better dialogue between the layers of the Internet.

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is a vital international forum for the protection and promotion of human rights, including digital rights. The Council has increasingly recognized the importance of digital technologies for the exercise of human rights, and has adopted a number of resolutions on the topic, including the right to privacy in the digital age, the impact of artificial intelligence on human rights, and the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of the Internet. The UNHRC has also appointed a special rapporteur on the right to privacy, who is tasked with investigating and reporting on violations of the right to privacy, including those related to digital technologies.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is an actor of interest in the development of telecommunications and Internet infrastructure, in addition to being the oldest international organization in the UN system, therefore, with high multilateral legitimacy. The scope of the ITU covers the transmission, emission, and reception of information without touching its content. This institution is divided into three sectors: ITU-T, for telecommunications standardization; ITU-R, for radio communication; and ITU-D, for development. Since its creation in 1865, the ITU is the only organization in the UN system to have a kind of public-private partnership between state and non-state actors, referring to the private telecommunications sector. There is the possibility of civil society participation, however, also numerous difficulties such as participation through paid membership, face-to-face meetings in expensive locations in the Global North, and domain of a private sector agenda.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has shown to be an arena of growing importance in the themes of the so-called “Digital Economy”. Several committees of research and policy-making groups have been mobilized to the construction of international governance standards. There is the Digital Economy Policy Committee (CDEP) within the organization, subdivided into working groups and advisory committees such as the Civil Society Advisory Committee, or CSISAC. CSISAC was formally recognized at the 2008 OECD Ministerial Meeting in Seoul for Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) topics. Since then, the Committee’s work has been limited to adopting non-binding recommendations, based on consensus and research shared among its members. Among CSISAC’s thematic interests are freedom of expression; privacy and transparency; consumer protection; Internet governance; digital inclusion; cultural diversity; among others.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) has been actively involved in promoting digital trade and governance, including through the Joint Statement Initiative (JSI) on e-commerce. The JSI is a plurilateral initiative launched in 2019, which aims to develop a comprehensive framework for

trade-related aspects of electronic commerce. While the WTO has been actively engaged on the topic of digital trade, there are concerns about the impact of global trade rules on digital sovereignty, data privacy, and cybersecurity. The WTO's focus on promoting free trade and investment may not be aligned with the need for robust and multistakeholder governance frameworks to protect everyone and address the negative impacts of digital technologies on society. Moreover, the JSI on e-commerce has been criticized by some for being a plurilateral initiative that excludes many developing countries, limiting their ability to shape global rules on digital trade.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is the global, multistakeholder entity responsible for managing the names and numbers of the Internet – basically, the protocols that keep networks working. It derives from the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) in the United States, which was privatized by the Clinton administration in the 1990s, and later in 2016, had its effective transition from the US government to a global and multistakeholder body. ICANN was then formed based on the idea that Internet providers and their users should make the decisions, with governments having only an advisory role. Its functions are limited to the handling of domain names and DNS management, thus characterizing itself as a more technical entity.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) is a specialized agency of the United Nations system that is focused on promoting sustainable development through trade and investment. UNCTAD has been actively engaged on the topic of digital trade and governance, recognizing the transformative potential of digital technologies for economic growth and development. The organization has been working to promote an enabling environment for digital trade, including through the development of policy recommendations on issues such as e-commerce, digital connectivity, and data governance. UNCTAD's engagement in digital trade reflects the organization's historic role in promoting inclusive and equitable economic development, particularly for developing countries. Launched in 1964, UNCTAD was created to address the challenges faced by developing countries in participating in the global trading system.

Table 3 - Distribution of NGOs in relation to international spaces

NGOs	IGF	UNHRC	ITU	OECD	WTO	ICANN	UNCTAD
Asian representative I	✓						
Asian representative II	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
African representative I	✓	✓					
African representative II	✓	✓	✓				
Latin American representative I	✓				✓		
Latin American representative II	✓			✓		✓	
Latin American representative III	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Latin American representative IV	✓						
Latin American representative V	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Latin American representative VI	✓	✓	✓	✓			

It can be observed that the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was highlighted by all representatives as a key space, still to be prioritized in their work. The interviews also demonstrated that the IGF is the most familiar space for these NGOs, and where they see it as an already accommodated space when they think about including it in their planning for international actions.

Regarding this question, a representative from a Latin American NGO commented:

“In reality, there is no structured and organized presence in these forums. What exists are approaches to these spaces with the submission of proposals for panels and contributions.”

Considering this aspect, although it is not an absolute truth, it may be that many of these actions in these spaces have been sporadic and not necessarily structured, continuous or effective in a deeper perspective. This does not, however, affect the importance given to the IGF for its power to build and maintain contact networks.

A representative of a Latin American NGO said that she works on human rights issues at the OECD, “but the priority should be in more open spaces that offer more speech in decisions”. In this sense, emphasized that has been working on partnerships with other NGOs from the Global South, as well as a regional alliance. The representative also said that in recent years she has worked with Mercosur and will continue to do so, even participating in events such as the High Authorities of Human Rights in Mercosur, saying that “it’s a space that you have to be there”

In addition to these spaces, an interviewee from the African region highlighted the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa as an important regional space and considered it as equally important as the African Chapter on Human and People’s Rights.

UNCTAD is not perceived as a key institutional arena or space for advocacy. UNCTAD focuses on greater economic integration and development issues. We have not explored the reasons why one institutional space is less focused than another. Our picture just reveals what are the most important forums right now for some digital rights organizations in the Global South.

What were the priorities that were brought up and what are the contributions and public calls for 2023?

The consultant specialist provided comments on its observed trends in the direction that countries are looking towards. The expert highlighted the G20 and G7 as key spaces and provided an example of the G7’s approach to the ITU in a data sandbox for Latin America. Another

interesting example mentioned refers to the possibility of working groups emerging from the Global Digital Compact, which would be an extremely important space for civil society to enter. Another aspect mentioned pertains to the UNHRC, which the expert evaluated as being important for civil society to have ammunition to advocate in other places, as well as to provide a legitimizing space for the work of these NGOs in different contexts. In general, therefore, there was an emphasis on the G7 and G20 alongside the UN.

Processes within the UN system were well cited by the activists - cases such as the Universal Periodic Review and recurrent calls from the Human Rights Council. The progress of the IGF and the processes derived from it is also constantly cited. Other processes within the UN, although more multilateral, were mentioned in the field of cybersecurity, such as the Open-Ended Working Group and the Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes. Additionally, the recent UNESCO process on platform regulation was also cited as a point of interest. In Latin America, more than one interviewee commented on the Inter-American Human Rights System of the OAS, and its calls and reports on freedom of expression and privacy, making it another space of importance for civil society in the region. And globally, RightsCon continues to be a space of great participation from civil society, mainly because it is very open and without major participation barriers.

Several interviewees also commented that they are very focused on actions at the national level. These are more organic and happen as demands arise - showing that in this area, events and proposals can arise without much planning. Adding this agenda to the international level, the expert consultant emphasized the importance of staying attentive to the implementations of the G7 and G20 - as the debates held there are subsequently applied at the domestic level.

4 Final remarks and open questions

This exploratory research showed which international institutional spaces, within the field of digital rights, are on the agenda of civil society entities in the Global South, between the years 2022 and 2023. Through semi-structured interviews, it was observed that there is a certain priority to multilateral spaces, highlighting a significant shift towards the field of Internet governance, traditionally multistakeholder.

This solidifies the perception that digital policy issues are increasingly moving from niche spaces to more traditional high politics spaces. However, this moment brings a series of challenges to multistakeholder participation, especially when it comes to civil society entities in the Global South, which do not have as many resources to follow these activities.

As shown in processes such as the OECD's CSISAC, the Ad Hoc Committee on Cybercrime, and the ITU, these are demanding activities in terms of time, face-to-face meetings, document analysis, and political articulations. In this sense, the importance of greater coordination among global civil society is emphasized. Moreover, many activists are frustrated with the slowness of these processes - but it is inherent to the multistakeholder nature.

In addition, limited action and expertise of these NGOs were observed regarding the WTO and UNCTAD, spaces more related to the digital trade agenda. Regarding the WTO, only two activists expressed concerns about the binding decisions that may be taken in the ongoing negotiations, which could reinforce the complaints about how the WTO is still a non-transparent and very closed space for NGOs, specifically those here interviewed, focused on digital rights from Global South perspective. Additionally, an alert can be raised about UNCTAD, questioning to what extent it has been perceived as a known and relevant space to create capacities in the digital rights niche, especially in Global South countries, such as the territories of the NGOs considered in this research.

Finally, special attention should be given to movements in the UN system, such as the Summit for the Future and the Global Digital Compact agreement (both scheduled for 2024), where the participation of civil society is still unclear. Besides, the review of the WSIS+20 also happens in 2025. The multistakeholder consolidation of digital rights and Internet governance fields is undergoing a significant transformation, as the digital agenda has become a matter of high politics due to its cross-cutting nature and impacts on societies. How this new configuration of global governance will unfold, involving traditional political institutions like the UN system and traditional technical governance institutions like ICANN and IETF, is the major question for the years ahead.

Our research is not exhaustive but it may encourage further investigation into the reasons for reorganizing the work of digital rights non-governmental organizations at the international level. Evidently, our analysis does not intend to have a degree of generalization to all digital rights entities, but our qualitative investigation allows us to formulate some open questions that can be explored in depth, such as:

- 1 How can the Digital Public Infrastructure debate unite issues of equity and efficiency in public policies with digital rights, insofar as there are new technological intermediations powered by data?
- 2 How will redefinitions of technical standards, increasingly intensive in automation and automated data analysis, require a human rights repertoire (such as “Human Rights Due Diligence”) and what role will organizations from the Global South play in these spaces?
- 3 How can a more multipolar global order, with the expansion of the G20 and the BRICS, imply the creation of new institutional spaces that can play a significant role in defining policies involving datafication and democracy?

We hope this photograph will be useful in helping civil society organizations from the Global South to reflect on new engagement opportunities in relevant institutional spaces. We also hope that new research can be produced to advance some preliminary diagnoses presented in this report.

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