



Submission to the
'Global Digital Compact' by
DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT *foundation*

India



Soochna  **preneur**
Information, Entitlements & Empowerment



About Digital Empowerment Foundation

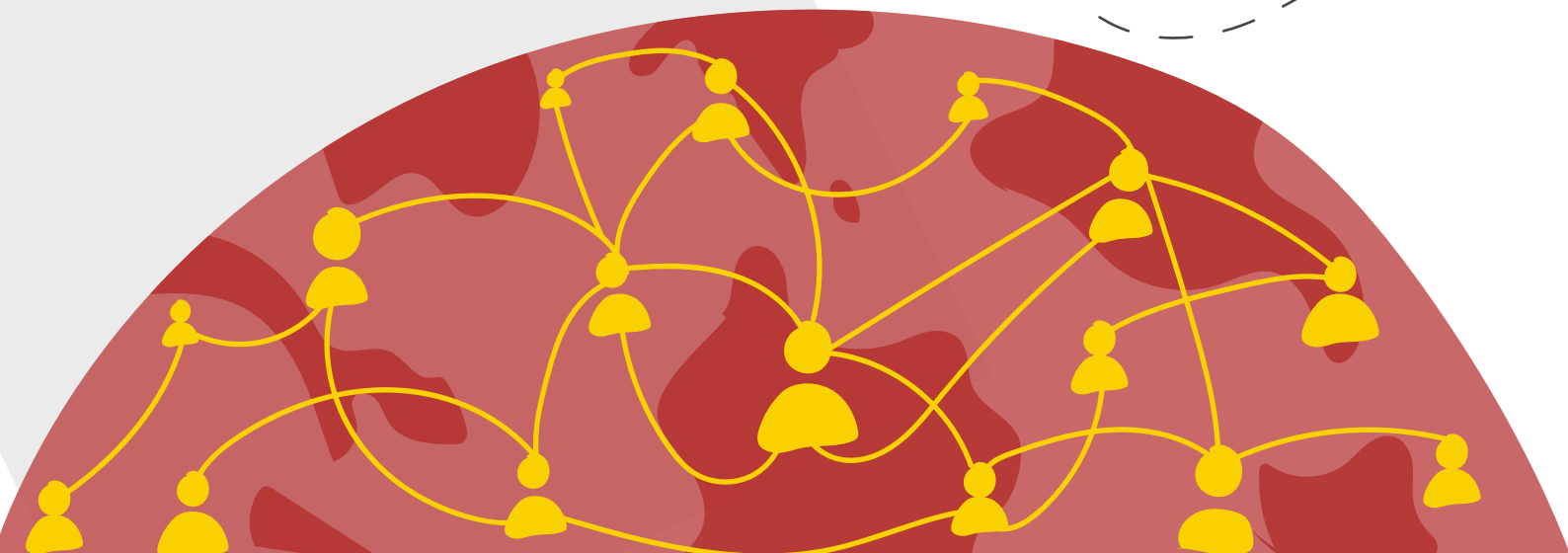
Founded in 2002, Digital Empowerment Foundation has been working to empower marginalised and unconnected communities living at the edge of information by enabling them with digital capacity, access and rights across the pillars of education and entertainment, livelihood and finance, health and agriculture, culture and heritage, with a special focus on digital rights for women and adolescents. With a 10,000 strong cadre of digital foot soldiers across India, DEF has interventions in 2,000 locations in 135 districts across 24 states in India. Additionally, DEF has a strong network in South Asia and is also an influential member of several global digital initiatives and organisations like Internet Governance Forum (IGF), Internet Society (ISOC), Association of Progressive Communications (APC), World Wide Web Foundation (WWW) and Global Network Initiatives (GNI). Going forward from 2021 to 2030, DEF is focused on working to connect the unconnected, as well as develop a healthy ecosystem wherein those who are connected can live a life free from fake news, misinformation and Internet shutdowns



1



**Connect all people
to the Internet,
including all schools**



Core Principles

a. Universal Connectivity: Universal Affordable and Accessible Connectivity for all social groups and communities based on equality and equity principles and fairness. According to the International Tele Communication Union, 2.9 billion people, more than one-third of the world population, still remain offline. This percentage is higher for developing and least developed countries.

b. Meaningful Connectivity: A level of connectivity that allows users to have a safe, satisfying, enriching and productive online experience at an affordable cost (ITU, 2022) without allowing unjust and covert practices by telecom service providers.

c. Freedom to remain unconnected: As internet is not a natural good, if people so choose, they should have the freedom to remain unconnected as well as have equal access to rights and entitlements offline.

d. Sustainability: To ensure sustainability in the context of exceeding planetary boundaries, uncontrolled growth in digital itself must be curtailed. Instead of looking at digitalization as the answer to everything, we should also explore low-technology or no-technology solutions and innovations. Looking this issue from the point of adverse climate change effects, internet outages and its unimaginable consequences.

Key Commitments

a. Governments: Ensuring equity in connectivity with respect to geography, caste, gender, (dis)ability (both hidden and visible), age, language (with special focus on local languages and indigenous languages) and religion. Legislate internet access as a basic right. Connect all government run / public funded schools at all levels (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and secondary), all households, and community centers. Target: ITU 2030 targets.

b. Private Sector: Provide technical support to community networks in unconnected areas. Provide support to connecting all government run / public funded schools. To ensure sustainability, private sector must also commit to discarding practices of planned obsolescence and must incorporate repairability. Transfer surplus and unused data for public purpose and usage in schools and community centers.

c. Civil Society: Highlight the plight of internet dark areas and ensure that they are not excluded from availing benefits and services. Civil society must take initiatives to monitor digital supply chains for environmental and labor violations.

d. International community: digital economy has environmental impacts in the form of energy use due to increased use of devices and increased bit rate that is not offset due to gains in energy efficiency, e-waste and mining/ extraction, uncontrolled growth in digital would not be feasible. As such, users, especially in the global north must be encouraged to limit their uses.

2

Avoid Internet fragmentation



Core Principles

- a. Free and open Internet
- b. Decentralized but interconnected internet

Key Commitments

a. Governments: Internet content takedowns must only be done in a transparent manner in accordance with the procedure set by the law. The emergency powers can't be extended perpetually.

b. Private sector: Private sector must respect inter-operability and backward compatibility in technical standards. To make the internet more inclusive, they must also support Internationalized Domain Names (IDN) using local language scripts. Encourage open hardware and open software.

c. International community: International community and UN must urge the governments against misusing emergency powers and national safety concerns to limit access to content critical of the government..

3

Protect data



Core Principles

- a. Democratic formulation of data protection legislations
- b. Accountability
- c. Purpose limitation

Key Commitments

a. Governments: Legislations on data must be formulated on the basis of extensive and democratic consultation. They must be thoroughly debated in the legislature. Definitions of important concepts and deriving principles must not be left for executive discretion but formed through extensive democratic deliberation. The local governments in each country and its agencies must have greater say, role and accountability to manage data governance of the local communities. Formulation of digital / data charters must be transparent and accountable.

b. Private sector: Terms and conditions for obtaining consent for data collection must be stated in simple language. They must also be available in local languages as well as easy-to-understand formats (e.g., Video). User data cooperatives must be set up to oversee the use of customer/ consumer data.

c. Civil Society: Civil society must proactively take steps to educate customers/ users on data literacy and data rights.

4

**Apply human
rights online**



Core Principles

- a. Freedom of expression
- b. Freedom of democratic participation
- c. Freedom to engage in business/ livelihood activities online

Key Commitments

a. Governments: Protect freedom of expression online by employing strict action against cyberbullying, trolling and online hate speech, especially against women, gender and sexual minorities and persons from other marginalized social locations.

b. Private Sector: Strong and immediate actions to restrict access to social media platforms for individuals / that engage in hate speech, hate content and violent content.

c. International community: As held by the Supreme Court of India in *Anuradha Bhasin vs Union of India*, (2020) 3 SCC 637, internet shutdowns are drastic measures and must be imposed only when lawful, necessary, proportionate and only after publishing orders. The international community and the UN must urge countries to respect the right to connectivity and minimize internet shutdowns.

5

**Introduce accountability
criteria for discrimination
and misleading content**



Core Principles

- a. Prevention of online polarization
- b. Nurturing critical digital literacy
- c. 'Right to Right Content' as against rising false and wrong content

Key Commitments

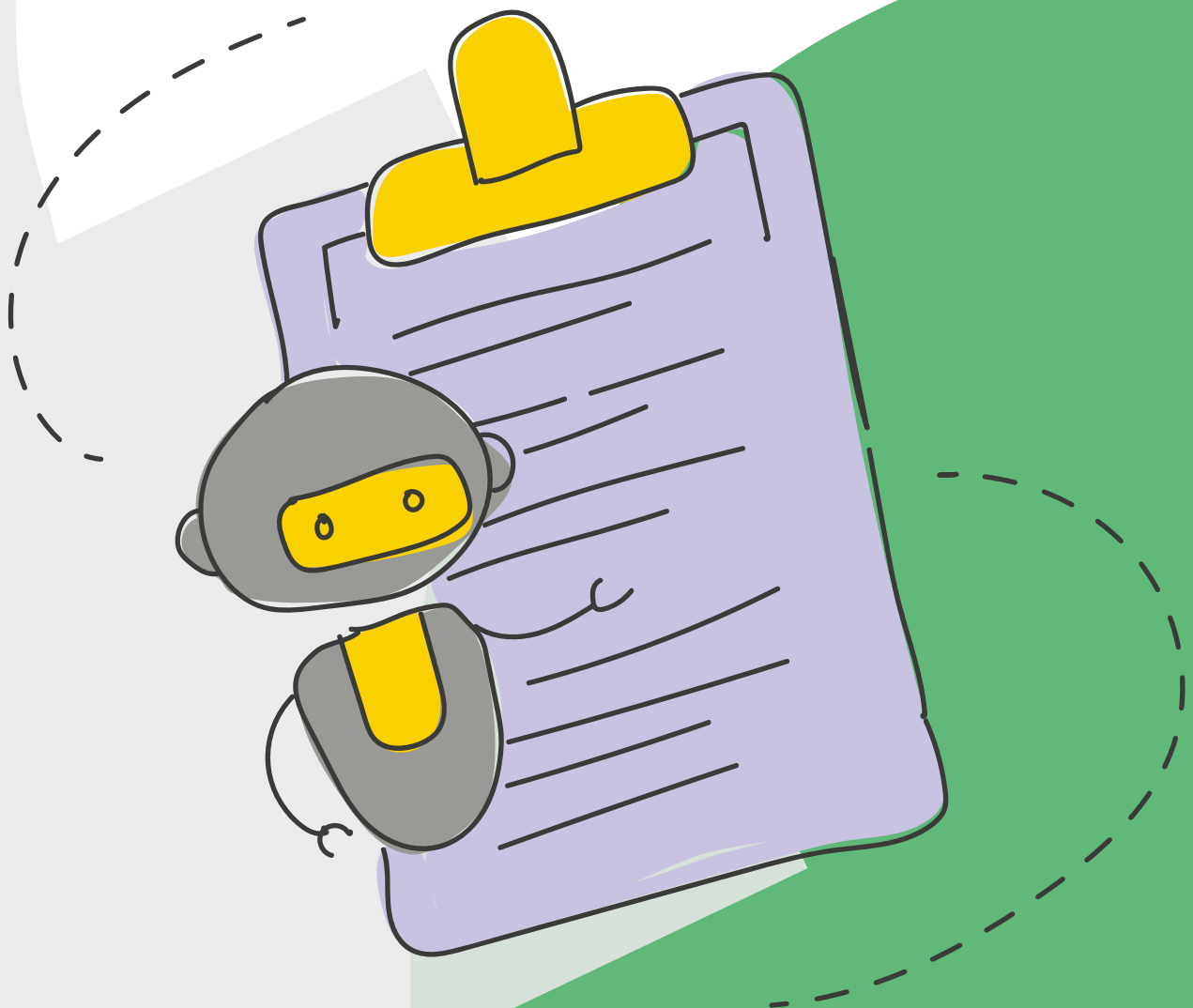
a. Governments: Accurate official information must be released in a timely and accessible manner to the public so that misinformation / disinformation can be countered. Public's right to information must be respected. There must be regulations on advertisement-based revenue models that foster filter bubbles and online polarization.

b. Private Sector: Nonpartisan and fair fact-checking and labelling must be employed. Considering the mental health cost of fact checking and hate speech moderation, these 'digital janitors' must be well compensated and supported.

c. Civil Society & Academia: Civil Society and academia must encourage initiatives to cultivate critical digital literacy – the ability to consume, produce and disseminate digital content critically.

6

Promote regulation of Artificial Intelligence



Core Principles

- a. Democratic overview over algorithmic decision making
- b. AI for social good
- c. Fair and consensual collection of training data

Key Commitments

- a. Private sector:** AI models can't be trained on publicly available data without the consent of the data generators. An ethics committee should be in place within IT companies to ensure inclusion, prevent biased data collection, ensure representation.
- b. Governments:** In governance related decisions, AI decision logic must be made transparent and under democratic review
- c. Academia:** Syllabuses of AI courses must include data and algorithmic justice.

7

Digital Commons as a global public good



Core Principles

- a. Public/ user participation in governance:
- b. Conceptual clarity:
- c. Non exclusionary

Key Commitments

a. Private sector: Private sector must commit to respecting the labor rights of the workers. Platform users (e.g., Unions of Delivery executives, drivers and customers) must be part of the governance decisions in platforms to regulate centralization of power, misuse of data and labor exploitation

b. Governments: Governments should regulate on platforms so that labor exploitation and monopolistic behavior is addressed. Non digital options for public digital infrastructure should be made available so that those who lack access to devices, connectivity or digital literacy are not excluded from accessing citizen benefits and services. Decision making regarding digital public infrastructure must be participatory and democratic.

c. Civil Society: since common and public indicate different property regimes, civil society must take the initiative to bring clarity to the concept of 'digital commons as public good'. Civil society must also lead the discussions on digital commons so that it is not captured by private sector to the detriment of the public.