

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2019

Artificial intelligence: Human rights, social justice and development



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC),
ARTICLE 19, AND SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY (SIDA)

Global Information Society Watch

2019



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Artificial intelligence: Human rights, social justice and development

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We would like to extend a special note of thanks to a number of authors who have made ad honorem contributions to this edition of GISWatch.

We gratefully acknowledge the following:

Philip Dawson and Grace Abuhamad (Element AI)
Anita Gurumurthy and Nandini Chami (IT for Change)
Rasha Abdul Rahim (Amnesty International)



APC would like to thank the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and ARTICLE 19 for their support for Global Information Society Watch 2019.

Published by APC

2019

Printed in USA

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Global Information Society Watch 2019 web and e-book

ISBN 978-92-95113-13-8

APC Serial: APC-201910-CIPP-R-EN-DIGITAL-302

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Preface

Valeria Betancourt (APC) and Mallory Knodel (ARTICLE 19)

Sixty years after machines started beating humans at strategy board games, this edition of Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) focuses on the implications of artificial intelligence (AI) systems on human rights, social justice and sustainable development.

The AI future is here. AI is now finding widespread practical application: from transport to health, agriculture to waste removal; from policing to welfare, and from smart technology in the home to space exploration. Automated decision making is increasingly being used in critical service and infrastructure provision in areas such as employment, housing, access to education, commerce and access to credit, impacting people's lives in profound ways. In this sense, context matters.

Despite the application of AI in geographically diverse contexts, conversations on AI have been driven largely by Western and global North predictions and perspectives. Yet the assumptions, values, incentives and socioeconomic environments within which AI technologies function vary greatly across jurisdictions and, as a consequence, the very real effects of AI are also more diverse.

GISWatch fills this gap between perspective and impact by exploring AI in the local context, with a specific focus on countries in the global South. We have asked: What impact do AI systems have on vulnerable and marginalised populations around the world? How do they impact, positively or negatively, on human rights concerns such as privacy, security, freedom of expression and association, access to information,

access to work, to organise and join trade unions? What are the political implications of the widespread use of data in building AI systems? And what are the positive benefits of AI for enabling rights, such as the right to health or education, in making government more accessible to people, or in addressing key social challenges such as forced labour and human trafficking? How is power asymmetry embedded in the ways that AI systems are designed and deployed, and what potential threats or benefits does this have for people in the face of automated decision making? What social values are being transformed by the application of artificial intelligence?

The answers given are contained in the following eight thematic reports, 40 country reports and three regional reports.

This year's GISWatch report has been a fortunate opportunity for collaboration between ARTICLE 19 and APC around an issue of common concern. We believe the joint effort has resulted in valuable knowledge building and context-specific analysis of the impacts of AI. GISWatch is also a network collaboration among all of its contributors and this edition will undoubtedly result in research-based advocacy, influence and shaping of alternative regulatory, technical and policy responses.

AI is ultimately a social phenomenon, and, as such, it is our collective hope that this edition of GISWatch contributes to ensuring that human rights, human dignity, collective and individual agency, social justice and development are not undermined, but rather strengthened by it.

Artificial intelligence: Human rights, social justice and development

Artificial intelligence (AI) is now receiving unprecedented global attention as it finds widespread practical application in multiple spheres of activity. But what are the human rights, social justice and development implications of AI when used in areas such as health, education and social services, or in building “smart cities”? How does algorithmic decision making impact on marginalised people and the poor?

This edition of Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) provides a perspective from the global South on the application of AI to our everyday lives. It includes 40 country reports from countries as diverse as Benin, Argentina, India, Russia and Ukraine, as well as three regional reports. These are framed by eight thematic reports dealing with topics such as data governance, food sovereignty, AI in the workplace, and so-called “killer robots”.

While pointing to the positive use of AI to enable rights in ways that were not easily possible before, this edition of GISWatch highlights the real threats that we need to pay attention to if we are going to build an AI-embedded future that enables human dignity.

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2019 Report
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