# Jennifer Strickland March 19, 2024PAI 730: Data-driven Government Policy Memo Assignment #3

## BLUF

To ensure that the long-term growth of the Web works for everyone, it is time that the Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C) actively engage all of humanity in the development of protocols and guidelines.

## Problem Statement

While the W3C invites input through public calls for input and Github issue tickets, we lack participation from anywhere but the academia and industry of the Global North (the United States, European Union, the United Kingdom, Japan, China, and South Korea) and occasionally Australia. Clearly, we are not connecting to all of humanity as we aim to and we fail at global co-production. These methods clearly prioritize the communication avenues of these communities, but not all of the world. We in the W3C tend to be a privileged community with access to the latest technology, scientific advancements, and infrastructure.

The most frequent participants are from industry and academia. Managing timezones to encourage global participation is a challenge the W3C struggles with. To be inclusive and invite participation, groups change meeting schedules to different times in an effort to be more accessible for everyone around the world. Getting the word out about the schedule is difficult, as people need time to get used to schedules. We work to include parts of the world that communicate using ready access to technology. Changes are hard to communicate in a world that is connected — and downright impossible in the parts of the globe that are not.

For example, in Africa, according to data from The World Bank, although “84% of people on average across countries in Sub-Saharan Africa live in areas where 3G service is available, and 54% have some 4G mobile internet service, only 22% were using mobile internet services as of the end of 2021.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The use of digital technologies is limited by a “lack of ability to pay for them and willingness to use them. For example, 1.5 GB of data over 30 days, a package that covers about a few hours of daily use, amounts to about one third of the income for the 40% of Africans who fall below the extreme poverty line.”1

What about access to digital technologies in other areas of the world, such as non-industrialized parts of Asia and South America or even non-academic or non-technology industry parts of the U.S., U.K., E.U., or East Asia? Unless we take steps to meet people where they are we risk further entrenching systemic inequities, repression of civil liberties to serve capitalist and autocratic priorities, and offenses to environmental justice. How dare we at the W3C make decisions that impact the future of humanity, without input of people around the world? While it may be slower, it is necessary the W3C use coproduction practices to uphold our core values:

* The web is for all humanity.
* The web is designed for the good of its users.
* The web must be safe for its users.
* There is one interoperable world-wide web.

## Recommendation

The Equity community group recommends the W3C partner with The United Nations, The World Bank, and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to hear from the global community and recommend the development of a survey to continuously elicit input from the global community. Much like the U.S. Census and American Community Surveys seek to understand how to best co-design public services, the W3C may use similar methods to codesign the collective future of the Web. The W3C must source input, collaboration, and participation from the global community to understand needs, purpose, constraints, impacts, priorities, and capabilities. By engaging with these NGOs, the W3C can crowdsource ideation and input from other technologically-savvy individuals that the NGO staff encounter and also elicit input from the people they serve that lack access to technology. Crowdsourcing provides an effective avenue for input and collaboration. We must learn from the communities we expect to engage, not try to force our methods on them. The parts of the world that are currently not participating in the W3C face problems more critical than the future of the Web, while we must also ensure they are considered.

In the summer of 2016, the United Nations declared the Internet to be a human right. An addition to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) stated, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” Section 32 added, “The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet” and another fifteen recommendations covering the rights of those who work in and rely on Internet access, and also applies to women, girls, and those heavily impacted by the digital divide.[[2]](#footnote-2) While Article 19 is referred to as a “soft law” that opposes the blocking of internet access in retaliation to political unrest, it coincided with a shutdown of Syria’s internet connection, an action frequently taken to control the population in times of political challenges around the globe. As the UN agreed that the Internet is a human right, the W3C has a responsibility to consider all humans in our efforts to keep the web free, as technology evolves and barriers to entry hopefully lessen.

By partnering with these international organizations, the W3C can illicit input on the future of the Web. Akin to how KAZNET[[3]](#footnote-3) uses the Open Data Kit (ODK)[[4]](#footnote-4) to “allow for offline data collection in micro-tasking by activating in-situ data collectors,” the W3C can avoid many of the expenses related to conventional field survey processes by crowdsourcing input through collaboration with these international organizations. Providing an offline-capable method of asking people around the globe what they need from the Web and digital technologies, the W3C can more equitably serve humanity’s needs. These global organizations can collect information during their work around the globe while they are offline, as connectivity is challenging in the field, and sync data when reconnected. In addition to the offline-first data collection method, the W3C may seek to provide portable tablets from partner organizations to provide to the international organizations to first use in this data collection, and then keep for their ongoing use. These organizations will gain from the W3C not only a device but also a web that better serves their needs, such as prioritizing low-bandwidth and offline-first protocols from the crowdsourcing efforts.

## Conclusion

To engage all of humanity in the development of protocols and guidelines, the W3C must use novel methods of input as much of the world lacks access to the Internet and digital technologies. As governments work to address the digital divide, the Web must be accessible to these new communities. As societies seek to liberate themselves from oppressive regimes, the Web must be available to facilitate open communication, knowledge sharing, and exposure of human rights violations. While our day-to-day W3C efforts focus on the details of digital identity, spatial data, semantics, styling, privacy, and security, the greater vision of the W3C is “an open forum where diverse voices from around the world and industries come together, incubate and build consensus for global standards for web technologies. We are socially responsible and committed to ensure that the web is for everyone; we greatly emphasize accessibility, internationalization, privacy, and security. We are committed to developing open and royalty-free standards with high focus on interoperability and collective empowerment.”[[5]](#footnote-5) If we do not take action to include the global community, entrenched power systems will continue to oppress and limit human potential, including the Web, the antithesis of the W3C’s mission.

1. Pakabomba, R. March 13, 2023. *Digital Africa: Technological Transformation for Jobs*. Office of the Chief Economist, The World Bank. https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/publication/digital-africa#:~:text=While%2084%25%20of%20people%20on,of%20the%20end%20of%202021. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. United Nations General Assembly. 27 June 2016 and Oral Revisions of June 30. *Article 19, The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet*. https://www.article19.org/data/files/Internet\_Statement\_Adopted.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Chelanga, Philemon; Fava, Francesco; Alulu, Vincent; Banerjee, Rupsha; Naibei, Oscar; Taye, Masresha; Berg, Matt; Galgallo, Diba; Gobu, Wako; Lepariyo, Watson; Muendo, Kavoi; Jensen, Nathaniel. 25 March 2022. *KAZNET: An Open-Source, Micro-Tasking Platform for Remote Locations*. Technology and Code, Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems. https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsufs.2022.730836/full [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Getting Started with ODK. https://docs.getodk.org/getting-started/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Our mission. The W3C. https://www.w3.org/mission/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)