Democracy Unplugged: Navigating the Digital Frontier for Youth Political Participation Event Report

This year's third Summit for Democracy under the theme "Democracy for Future Generations" was set to make a profound impact on the future of youth inclusion. Hosted by the Republic of Korea, expectations were high that the intergenerational gap would finally be addressed. The three-day Summit will feature a range of activities, including a Cohorts, Civil Society and Youth Day that is taking place on 19 March 2024 in the COEX Center, Seoul.

Restless Development was privileged to host a side-event on the **future of democracy in the digital world and its impact on youth political participation** during the Cohorts, Civil Society and Youth Day. The Cohorts, Civil Society and Youth Day activities were a central part of the Summit during which S4D cohorts, civil society and youth organizations highlighted their work in shaping democracy fit for future generations in diverse sessions and exhibition booths.
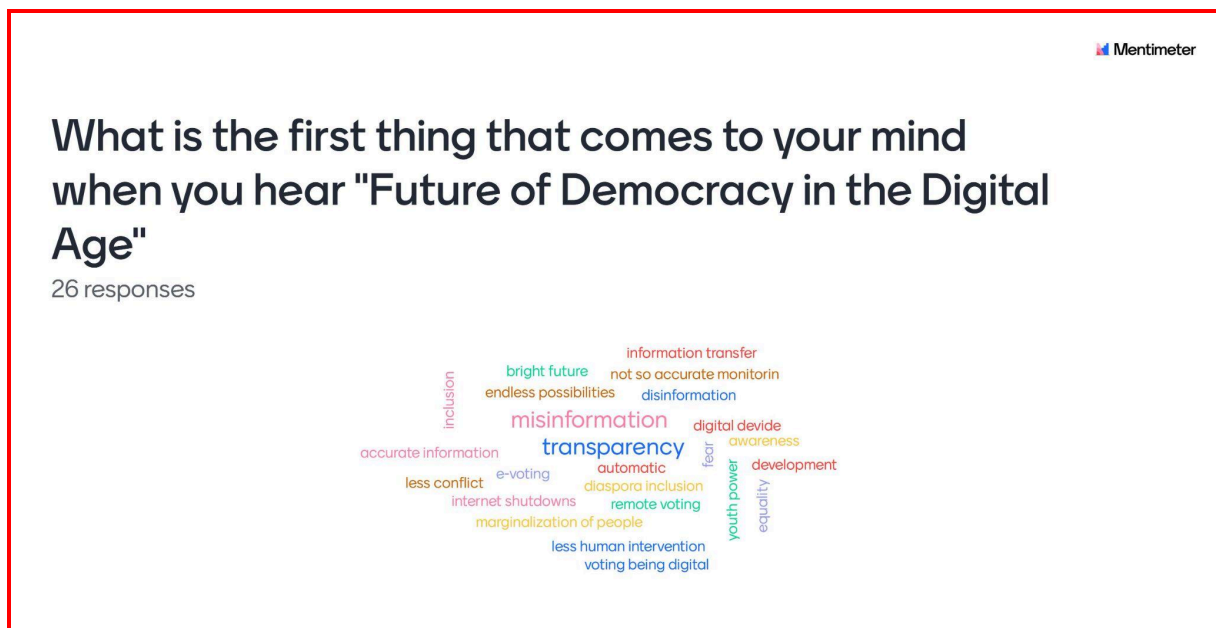
The event titled "Democracy Unplugged: Navigating the Digital Frontier for Youth Political Participation" brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to discuss the intersection of digital technologies and democracy, with a focus on empowering young people. During the session conversations explored the challenges and opportunities presented by digital advancements for youth political engagement.

The introductory remarks delivered by Restless Development's [Caleb Masusu](#) emphasised the critical importance of addressing the intersection of democracy and digital technology in shaping contemporary societies. The speaker highlighted the imperative of placing human rights at the core of tech governance, stressing the need to harness digital advancements while mitigating associated risks. Restless Development's commitment to amplifying the voices of young people, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, was underscored,

with examples provided of the organisation's advocacy efforts and upcoming youth-led research initiatives. The call to action urged participants to actively engage in discussions, challenge assumptions, and collectively envision a future where democracy thrives in the digital age.

Session Overview

The session started with an interactive poll on the theme of youth digital rights and access. The poll revealed various insights and facts, providing context for the ensuing panel discussion.

[Bartosz Kubiak](), Chairman of the Academy of Civic Knowledge, introduced the session and the panellists, Setting the scene for an informal interactive discussion, emphasising the importance of digital governance in shaping the future of democracy.

The panellists, including [Tlamelo Cindy Melemo](), [Željko Vukša-Fejzić](), and [Mwila Chriseddy Bwanga](), shared their experiences and insights on leveraging digital technologies for youth political participation. They discussed topics such as data privacy, accountability, and the transformative potential of civic tech.

Attendees circulated among dedicated discussion areas, each focused on a panel question. This format facilitated interactive exchanges and allowed participants to delve deeper into specific topics of interest. Both Civil society and youth engaged in a captivating discussion about how technology and the digital landscape can shape the democratic process. From social media platforms to online activism, participants delved into the power of these tools and their potential for driving positive change.

Session Highlights !!

1. Technology's Impact on Democracy - The discussion highlighted how technology, particularly social media, has transformed political engagement by providing a platform for mobilizing people and enhancing transparency and accountability. Examples were shared from various countries, including Zambia and Bosnia Herzegovina, where social media played a significant role in political discourse and mobilization.

2. Challenges and Opportunities - While technology offers opportunities for enhancing democratic processes, it also presents challenges such as misinformation, disinformation, and the digital divide. The need to address issues like data protection, privacy, and digital literacy was emphasized to create a safe and inclusive digital environment.

3. Youth Engagement - The role of technology in engaging young people in politics was highlighted, with examples showing how social media has facilitated political discourse and increased youth participation. It was noted that technology enables easier access to information, promotes transparency, and holds leaders accountable.

4. Education and Technology - The discussion emphasized the historical context of education and how it has evolved alongside technological advancements. Education, once controlled by institutions like the Catholic Church, has now opened up due to technological innovations, providing greater access to learning opportunities.

5. Data Privacy and Protection - There was a consensus on the need for unified data privacy protection laws, similar to the standards set by the European Union. Protecting personal data and privacy rights is essential, as enshrined in the Charter of Human Rights.

6. Role of Young Leaders and Technology - The role of digital technologies in shaping the future of young leaders and governance models in Africa was discussed. There's a growing recognition of young people's potential to lead, facilitated by technology. Grassroots campaigns and digital platforms empower young leaders to influence political discourse and decision-making.

7. Digital Divide and Inclusivity: The issue of the digital divide was raised, highlighting the importance of making digital spaces more inclusive. Efforts should be made to engage young people with intersecting identities, including those with disabilities, and address the accessibility challenges they face in participating in digital spaces.

8. Intergenerational Leadership - Emphasis was placed on the need for intergenerational leadership, combining the energy and creativity of young people with the wisdom and experience of the elderly. Collaboration between generations can create a formidable force for driving positive change in democracy and governance.

Recommendations

1. Integrating digital literacy education into school curricula to empower individuals to use technology responsibly. Additionally, calls were made for global policies and regulations to safeguard personal data and ensure a unified standard for data protection globally.
2. There were calls for more regulation and accountability, especially concerning hate speech and cyberbullying on online platforms. It was acknowledged that while freedom of speech is important, there should also be measures to prevent the spread of dangerous ideologies and threats.

ACTION BEYOND THE SUMMIT

Participants were encouraged to make personal commitments to take action in fostering a better digital future for young people. This could involve initiatives within their work or external efforts aimed at improving digital literacy, accessibility, and inclusivity.

What actions will you take personally or in your work to improve the digital future for young people?

Integrate more inter generational leadership	Educate younger generations about the responsibility and technology skills	As a singer-songwriter engaged in advocacy through music, I will engage youths more through my art on my social media platforms

Panellists/Speakers
Moderator

Bartosz Kubiak 🇵🇱 is the Chairman of the Academy of Civic Knowledge (AWO) and the Head of Warsaw office at Aspen Institute Central Europe. Bartosz is currently leading an NGO focused on reforming civil service in Poland and building strong state institutions. He is also a member of the European Democracy Youth Network – an initiative for young public sector leaders. Bartosz is a former public affairs consultant who has worked for over 40 international companies advising them on domestic and EU regulatory issues. Bartosz completed a Transatlantic Future Leaders Forum scholarship at the US Congress in 2018. He interned with Rep. Peter Roskam (R-IL). Bartosz is a graduate of Law with American Law at the University of East Anglia.

Speaker 1

Tlamelo Cindy Melemo (Botswana): Cindy has worked as a Technology for Development officer for UNICEF Rwanda. She is the CEO of SoftBerry Solutions which is a company that specializes in technology solutions. She is also a CEO of a start-up called Sebaga Africa which exports African products to international markets. She is also certified in SAP Terp10. She is the founder and president of WoTech Botswana (women in technology.)

Speaker 2

Željko Vukša-Fejzić (Bosnia): Željko, a Sarajevo native with legal expertise and significant political experience, has held leadership roles in organizations like the European Law Students Association, the FBiH Youth Council and the Youth of the Party of democratic action (SDA). He is a Robert Schuman Institute and NDI alumnus. He currently holds delegate positions in the Council of Europe; the FBiH Parliament's Youth Commission where he provides guidance, advice, and recommendations for the development of youth policy in the Federation; and serves as Chief of Staff to the Vice President of the largest political party in BiH. As Chief of Staff, he influences decisions on all topics, including those related to digital governance and digital security.

Speaker 4

Mwila Chriseddy Bwanga (Zambia): Mwila has eight years' worth of experience in the leadership and governance development space across Africa. He is a social entrepreneur, an award-winning governance expert, and Executive Director at BeRelevant Africa. Mwila has been listed as one of Zambia's Best Governance Minds below the age of 35 and was awarded a Governance Accomplishment Award during the 2020 National Youth Awards by the Government of the Republic of Zambia. Mwila was the youngest contesting Member of Parliament for Nchanga Constituency in Chingola and on the Copperbelt during Zambia's 2021 General Elections and came out third in a race with five candidates.

For more information on this session, please contact;
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