Report on Sweden Visit

Description

A two-member delegation from MRDI visited Stockholm, Sweden between 29-31 May 2023 to attend Stockholm Internet Forum 2023. Hosted by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), SIF is a platform for exchanging ideas and forge partnership between different actors to ensure a free, open and accessible internet for all.

The conference brings together Sida partners, civil society, organizations, policymakers, companies, and academia under the theme "Role of the Internet and ICT during Crises, Conflicts, and Disasters" to share information, build networks, and discuss current issues.

The two-day conference featured a number of panel discussions along with cultural events. Cecilia Ruthström-Ruin, the Swedish ambassador for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, spoke during the opening session on the first day and focused on the exceptional opportunities and difficulties presented by digital technology. According to her, the international community should explore doable ways to mainstream cybersecurity capacity building into broader digital development efforts and work toward agreeing on a common set of goals and activities to that end.

Sida Director-General Carin Jämtin spoke about the need for more investment and resources and partnership by multi-sector stakeholders including civil society and media to educate the public, ensure the safety of the next generation, and defend democracy.

During a panel session on opening day, Irene Khan, United Nations Special Rapporteur for freedom of expression and opinion; Htaike Htaike Aung, Executive Director at Myanmar ICT for Development Organization (MIDO); and Philippe Stoll, Senior Techplomacy Delegate at International Committee of the Red Cross discussed about how information often wrongly legislated by states and others affects minorities, women, marginalized groups, refugees, migrants, and displaced persons.

They also spoke about disinformation, propaganda and hate speech that significantly goes up during conflict. They highlighted on the need of right and accurate information from traditional media to counter spread of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news. They also discussed the necessity of significantly raising media literacy levels to ensure the role of information as a public good.

On the first day and second day, the event hosted nine panel discussions under three main categories: Tech infrastructures, people and systems: access, agency, security and resilience; Information, data and media; and normative frameworks in times of crisis. The sessions were covered by experts from different sectors including UN bodies, global networks, humanitarian stakeholders, and development organisations.

The sessions covered issues of accessibility and connectivity; innovative technological, financial, and regulatory/governance models; spread of internet shutdowns as a tool for repression; debates on humanitarian data around displaced communities and their lived

experiences and needs; and developing multi-stakeholder, locally led responses to disinformation and surveillance.

Other issues discussed at sessions include how to best protect human rights in the digital space while ensuring safe access to the internet during times of crises and disasters; existing global frameworks for data responsibility to ensure the safe, ethical and effective use of data and technologies in humanitarian action; and identifying existing normative gaps, and help advance new human rights based approach to crisis response and engagement in conflict affect countries and regions.

Over 600 participants from several countries, including experts from academia, civil society, technology, business, grassroots organizations, policymakers, and human rights activists, attended the conference.

Key Lessons learned

- Digital technologies can be used as vehicles for positive transformation and change. If misused, they can be instrumental in fuelling division, insecurity and mistrust
- The internet must be free, secure, and open for all. Human rights apply online as well as offline – including the rights of freedom of expression, assembly and privacy.
- Digital transformation and the expansion of the digital ecosystem come with both challenges and opportunities.
- The role of a safe, secure, and rights respecting online environment is key in achieving Sustainable Development Goals.
- International community should explore practical ways to mainstream cybersecurity capacity building into broader digital development efforts and work toward agreeing on a common set of goals and activities to that end.
- Internet and ICT's can play a crucial role in connecting people and providing invaluable information and services. The role of the internet and social media platforms in different situations cannot be underestimated.
- States, civil society and companies must work together in developing the framework, content and common standards of the internet.

The program schedule is enclosed.