

Decolonizing Emerging Technology

An Intersectional Feminist Approach to Resisting Technology-Facilitated Oppression

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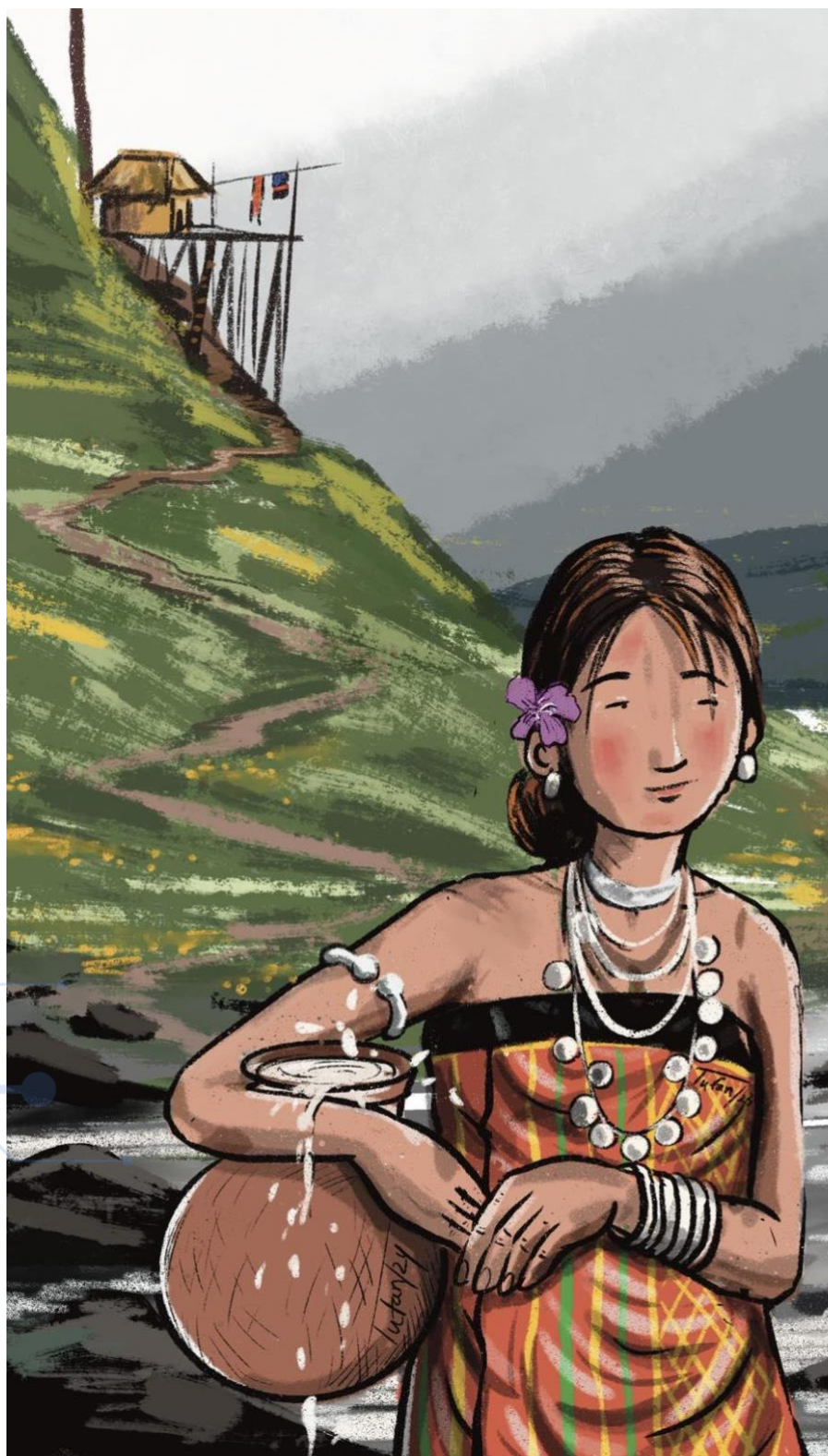


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FACTOR DAILY

A Journalism Lab for Society



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Executive Summary

Emerging technologies are exacerbating gender-based violence (GBV), disinformation, and environmental dispossession, disproportionately affecting womxn¹, LGBTQ+ individuals, and Indigenous Peoples. Large technology companies, also known as Big Tech, operate without sufficient accountability, reinforcing digital colonialism and economic exploitation. This paper outlines urgent policy gaps and presents recommendations for feminist-led, inclusive technology governance. This report presents key findings from a workshop exploring these issues and provides recommendations for feminist-led, inclusive technology governance.

The Decolonizing Emerging Technology workshop at the 2024 Asia Pacific Feminist Forum brought together participants from across Asia to explore how Big Tech facilitates oppression, particularly in gendered and environmental contexts. Through an intersectional feminist approach, the session unpacked how emerging technologies exacerbate gender-based violence, disinformation, and environmental dispossession, while sidelining Indigenous and marginalized voices.

Knowledge for Development (K4D) and Factor Daily co-led this session to discuss and investigate technology and the current harms. The workshop aimed to foster coalition-building and strategize around gender-inclusive technology policies, platform accountability, and alternative technology solutions. Discussions were structured around three core themes:

1. **Following the Money** – Examining how big tech impacts land and environmental rights.
2. **Disinformation and Narrative Building** – Understanding disinformation campaigns and the silencing of feminist voices.
3. **Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV)** – Addressing online gendered violence and tech accountability.

Key recommendations emerging from these discussions include improved platform accountability, advanced feminist digital governance, enhanced survivor support, and increased womxn's participation in technology development.

This report underscores the urgent need for inclusive, feminist-centered approaches to technology governance to mitigate the harms perpetuated by Big Tech and to promote equitable digital futures.

¹ "Womxn" in this report is used as an inclusive term to acknowledge and embrace gender diversity, ensuring representation beyond the traditional understanding of "women."



Introduction

Technology-related harms are not apparent to all stakeholders. The sense of danger isn't as immediately pressing and visible as it is in physical space, making the level of threat harder to perceive and address. The rise of digital technology has created new oppressive structures that mirror colonial histories and systemic harms, disproportionately affecting womxn, children, LGBTQ+ individuals, and Indigenous communities. Essentially, technology is a multiplier of existing harms. However, these intersections remain largely unrecognized in mainstream conversations about technology governance and evolution.

Big Tech companies wield power comparable to nation-states, with access to populations, data, and resources with annual revenues exceeding the GDPs of many countries. As profit-driven entities, these often corporations justify the commodification of data, treating people as mere data points without necessary safeguards. Furthermore, Big Tech and mainstream media are interconnected and often owned by the same multinational parent companies, which allows them to control narratives, spread misinformation and drive polarization to increase use of their products. Emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), amplify these harms by relying on biased datasets that lack diverse representation and reinforce existing prejudices. The rapid development of AI without ethical oversight poses severe risks to digital rights and safety.

The workshop employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology to explore the intersections of technology-facilitated discrimination, aiming to:

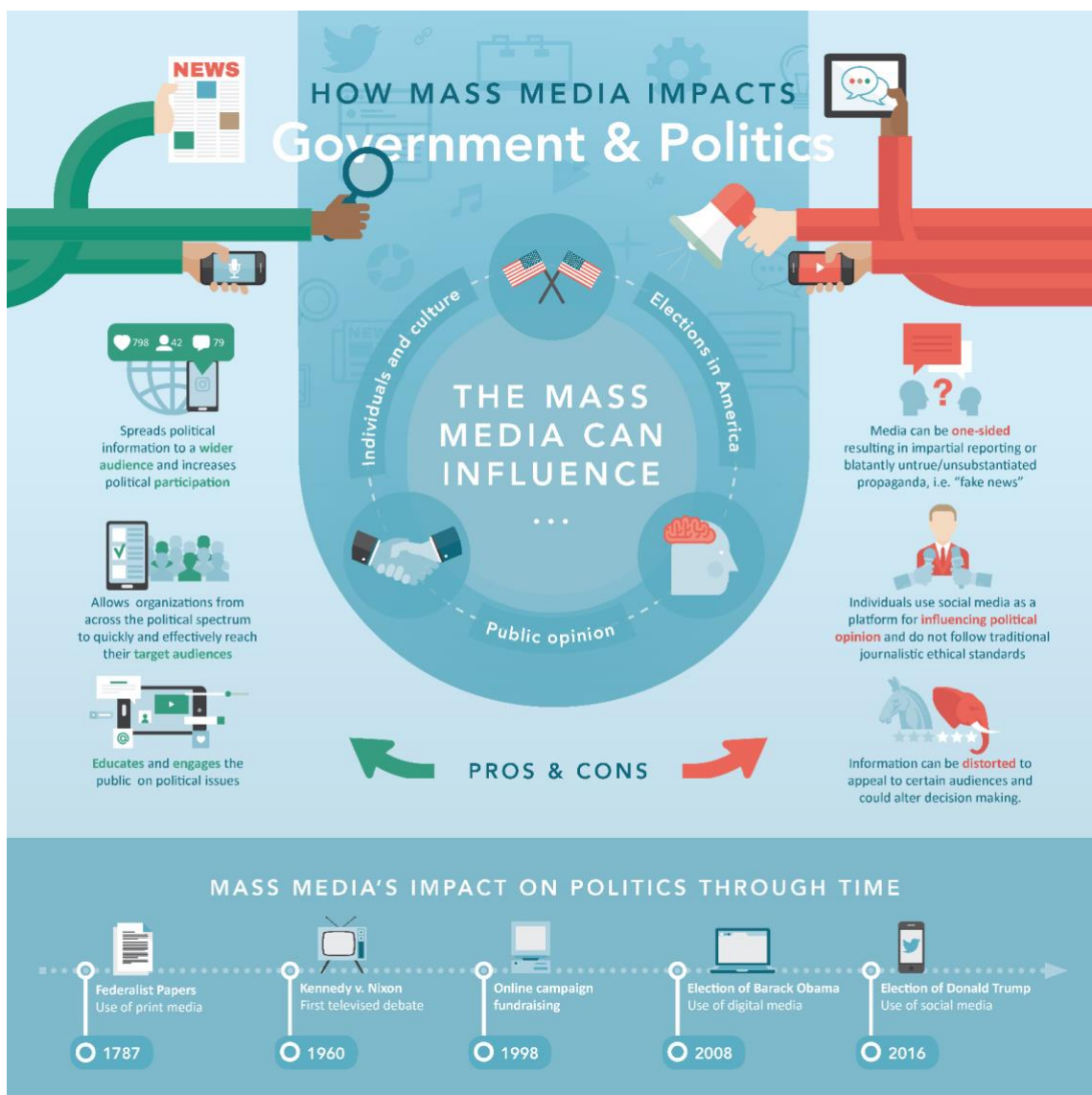
- Build coalitions integrating intersectional feminist approaches to resist tech-facilitated oppression.
- Publish an open letter directed at tech corporations, advocating for the inclusion of womxn from the Global Majority in decision-making roles.
- Document experiences of gender-based tech violence and environmental data exploitation.
- Identify solutions for more equitable, community-led technology development.

Participants represented diverse backgrounds, including journalism, digital rights, and Indigenous activism, coming from countries such as the Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, India, Hong Kong, and Northeast India.

Key Concerns Raised by Participants:

- The monetization of attention on social media platforms incentivizes misinformation and polarization.
- Big Tech is more than just the household names; it includes layers of technological infrastructure that remain largely invisible to the public.

- AI, as the bridge from existing technology to emerging technology, is poised to multiply existing harms, operating with little regard for human rights.
- Governments, Big Tech, and legacy media form a triad controlling narratives, often silencing dissent and marginalizing critical voices.
- Children’s digital rights remain largely unaddressed. Digital identities are being created without informed consent, raising ethical concerns about privacy, surveillance, and exploitation.
- Algorithmic biases reinforce discrimination, limiting access to alternative perspectives while amplifying hate speech and misinformation.
- Corporate and state collusion, as seen in cases like India, has led to censorship of pro-democracy voices while allowing the spread of hate speech.
- Digital infrastructures, including cloud storage and server locations, centralize control with tech monopolies, limiting sovereignty over public data.



*Credit: Student Governmental Affairs Program,
 “How Mass Media Impacts Government and Politics Infographic”*

Main Themes and Key Findings

1. Following the Money: How Big Tech is Impacting Land and Environmental Rights

The group explored how big tech companies extract and monetize planetary data, often dispossessing Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) of governance over their territories.

Key Discussion Points:

- **Big tech's role in land grabs** – Environmental datasets are collected, analyzed, and sold without Indigenous participation.
- **Resource extraction & digital colonialism** – The tech industry's resource use (e.g., rare earth minerals for hardware) fuels environmental degradation.
- **Militarization of environmental data** – Geospatial Intelligence is used for corporate and military surveillance, intensifying human rights violations.
- **Shrinking civic space** – Asia serves as a testing ground for exploitative technologies due to weak regulations and lack of legal recourse.



As we transition into an increasingly digital world, digital rights are receiving more attention. However, environmental rights remain overlooked within discussions of technology governance. How do the rights of our environment, and the rights of those living on lands and territories, get reflected within these digitized environmental and climate datasets? Are IPLCs engaged in governance structures over how this data is recorded, analyzed, and used in decision-making?

Indigenous Peoples hold deeply rooted worldviews that center on sustainable land stewardship. Their Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) has governed lands for generations. However, current climate narratives privilege Western-centric scientific methodologies that often exclude Indigenous ways of knowing. This exclusion is worsened by artificial intelligence (AI) and large language models (LLMs) that train on biased datasets, reinforcing existing extractive systems rather than integrating TEK.

The increasing reliance on satellite imagery and GIS technologies raises critical concerns. High-resolution imagery is often inaccessible due to exorbitant costs, while freely available alternatives lack quality or coverage in underdeveloped regions. This disparity reinforces inequalities in environmental decision-making, where corporations control data classification and interpretation, often without IPLC input.

The Role of Private Tech Monopolies:

The largest player in GIS technology is [ESRI](#)², a corporation whose primary clientele includes governments, military agencies, and extractive industries. ESRI's dominance is due to its strategic model of providing free GIS software to universities, creating a workforce trained exclusively in its proprietary systems. Similar monopolistic approaches are being replicated by Google and Apple in the education sector.

Donor funding for green technology initiatives often mandates the use of ESRI products under the guise of accessibility. However, when funding expires, governments and NGOs are left with maintenance costs they cannot afford, rendering these technologies unsustainable. In some cases, conservation activists have been locked out of systems they initially helped develop due to financial constraints.

If access to environmental data remains privatized, the majority of the world will be excluded from contributing to climate action, undermining equity and self-determination. IPLCs are divested of their ability to innovate solutions suitable for their communities. Moreover, they are denied governance rights over their own lands and territories, violating the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).

Challenges Identified:

- **Excessive resource extraction** – The environmental cost of technology manufacturing is rarely discussed.

² From their website: "Esri is the global market leader in geographic information system (GIS) software, location intelligence, and mapping. Since 1969, we have supported customers with geographic science and geospatial analytics, what we call The Science of Where."

- **Opaque technology supply chains** – Companies rarely disclose how they source materials.
- **Gender exclusion** – Womxn’s voices are notably absent in decision-making on digital governance.
- **Lack of opt-out mechanisms** – The public is often forced to engage with digital services that extract their data.
- **Militarization of GIS systems** – Originally developed for military defense, these technologies are increasingly used for surveillance.
- **Weak legal protections in Asia** – Many governments prioritize technological advancement over human rights protections, allowing human rights violations to go unchecked.

Proposed Solutions & Recommendations:

- **Create safe spaces** for cross-sector peer strategizing between digital rights advocates and environmental justice groups.
- **Increase transparency** in how environmental data is collected, used, and sold.
- **Promote decentralized tech governance** that includes IPLCs in decision-making.
- **Raise awareness** about the privatization of environmental datasets and its impact on land rights.
- **Invest in feminist-led digital infrastructures** to challenge the monopoly of private corporations.
- **Establish Indigenous-led AI ethics frameworks** to prevent the reinforcement of colonial data biases.
- **Expand public education campaigns** on digital colonialism, extraction, and surveillance.
- **Build feminist and Indigenous tech leadership networks** to advocate for policy changes.

2. Disinformation and Narrative Building

This discussion focused on how disinformation disproportionately targets womxn, activists, and Indigenous leaders, amplifying existing gender and racial biases. In many countries, digital spaces are being weaponized to silence womxn, Indigenous activists, and marginalized communities.

Key discussion Points and Challenges:

- **Womxn, activists, Indigenous leaders and journalists** are disproportionately targeted with **doxxing, cyber-harassment, and state-backed disinformation campaigns** labeling them as “anti-national” or “terrorists” to silence dissent.
- **State-backed disinformation campaigns** – Government-aligned content farms weaponize fake news against womxn and minorities. These campaigns aim to silence womxn in public life, affecting political participation.
- **Non-English disinformation moderation is inadequate**, making marginalized voices even more vulnerable. Tech platforms fail at content moderation – Non-English languages lack adequate monitoring, leading to unchecked disinformation.

- **Online harassment leads to offline harm** – Doxxing and threats escalate into real-world violence.
- **Lack of platform accountability** enables the proliferation of gendered disinformation.

Recommendations:

- **Womxn in public roles must be protected by professional networks** (e.g., Editors' guilds issuing statements of solidarity).
- **Expand feminist principles of the internet** as a benchmark for equitable digital rights. Develop feminist AI governance to prevent algorithmic bias.
- **Build coalition networks among tech feminists and policymakers** to ensure and develop gender-inclusive AI governance and platform policies.
- **Strengthen disinformation training to equip activists and journalists** with skills to counter fake news. Lead media literacy and counter-narrative campaigns using platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.



3. Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV)

The discussion exposed the failure of tech platforms to prevent online gender-based violence, despite the escalating risks in an election-heavy year.

Key discussion points:

- **Tech platforms are unaccountable** – Companies have downsized Trust & Safety teams, leaving gendered disinformation and abuse unchecked.
- **Non-consensual intimate imagery (NCII) is rampant** – This includes deepfake pornography, sextortion, and doxxing.
- **Survivors lack legal protections** – Governments provide limited post-incident support, with most assistance coming from civil society.
- **LGBTQ+ individuals face heightened risks**, with little to no recourse under existing laws.

TFGBV is exacerbated by the monetization of explicit content and the absence of strict regulations on AI-generated deep fakes and other videos taken and shared without consent. Participants shared case studies from multiple countries where sexually explicit images were weaponized for political and social coercion. Telegram and other encrypted platforms facilitate the sale of non-consensual content, often with impunity.

Cultural biases further compound these issues, as gendered disinformation often intersects with state propaganda. Womxn activists, human rights leaders and journalists are disproportionately targeted, facing doxxing and harassment campaigns designed to discredit their work. Of additional concern, partner stalking is made worse with tech-facilitated software helping violent individuals locate victims. In some countries, government-aligned networks orchestrate digital smear campaigns, highlighting the intersection of state control and gendered violence.

Recommendations:

- **Mandatory platform accountability** – Stronger policies and enforcement mechanisms.
- **Survivor-centric legislation** – Laws that prioritize victim protection and digital security.
- **Public education campaigns** against sextortion and online abuse.
- **Increased government intervention** – Preventive measures, not just post-incident responses.
- **Stronger AI governance frameworks** to curb the proliferation of deepfake pornography and gendered disinformation.
- **Partnerships with feminist tech initiatives** to develop safer digital platforms.



Conclusion and Recommendations

Emerging technologies, while promising innovation and progress, are deepening existing inequalities, exacerbating gender-based violence, disinformation, and environmental dispossession, particularly impacting womxn, LGBTQ+ individuals, and Indigenous communities. The unchecked power of Big Tech exacerbates digital colonialism and reinforces economic exploitation, necessitating immediate action for systemic change.

The workshop highlighted the need for a paradigm shift in technology governance, urging the inclusion of marginalized communities in decision-making processes, the creation of equitable and feminist-led technology policies, and the dismantling of corporate monopolies over digital data and environmental resources.

Collective action is needed to address Big Tech's unchecked influence, including policy advocacy, coalition-building, and alternative digital infrastructures.

Through the collective efforts of feminist, Indigenous, and marginalized communities, it is possible to challenge the current technological landscape and co-create a digital world rooted in equity, justice, and accountability. The time to act is now—to ensure that emerging technologies become a force for good, fostering a safer, more just world for all.

To resist tech-facilitated oppression and to decolonize technology, the following actions are urgently recommended.

Key Recommendations

1. Establish Intersectional, Feminist-Led Tech Governance

- Ensure the inclusion of womxn from the Global Majority, Indigenous Peoples, and marginalized communities in tech policy-making, ensuring that technological developments align with social justice principles.
- Develop cross-sector coalitions that integrate feminist, Indigenous, and community-led approaches in digital rights and governance discussions.

2. Promote Corporate Accountability and Ethical Tech Development

- Push for transparency in data collection, ownership, and use, with an emphasis on the protection of Indigenous territories and cultural knowledge.
- Hold corporations accountable for the militarization and exploitation of environmental data, advocating for open-source alternatives that prioritize community ownership and control.

3. Combat Gendered Disinformation and Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

- Demand stronger regulations for platform accountability, particularly for non-consensual content, doxxing, and online abuse, ensuring survivor-centered legislation and support.
- Implement comprehensive disinformation training programs and establish global networks of tech feminists to advocate for inclusive AI systems and digital rights.

4. Support Tech-Facilitated Environmental Justice

- Invest in and support decentralized, open-source technologies that empower local communities, prioritize traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), and provide tools for effective, community-led environmental monitoring and advocacy.

5. Foster Digital Sovereignty

- Work towards creating digital infrastructures that uphold privacy, security, and sovereignty, ensuring that technology serves the public good and is not used as a tool for surveillance or oppression.

Priority Areas for Action

1. Policy & Governance

- Push for stronger legal frameworks addressing disinformation, online GBV, and digital land rights violations.
- Advocate for Indigenous data sovereignty and AI governance frameworks led by feminist and IPLC voices.

2. Digital Platform Accountability

- Enforce transparency in content moderation policies.
- Mandate corporate responsibility for the safety of marginalized groups online.

3. Grassroots & Public Awareness Initiatives

- Expand media literacy campaigns to combat fake news.
- Support feminist AI and alternative digital infrastructures that center Indigenous and Global Majority voices.
- Strengthen digital security training for activists and journalists.

4. Coalition-Building & Feminist Tech Leadership

- Create intentional spaces for cross-sector strategy-sharing.
- Increase womxn's participation in tech governance.
- Invest in feminist tech festivals to amplify alternative digital futures.

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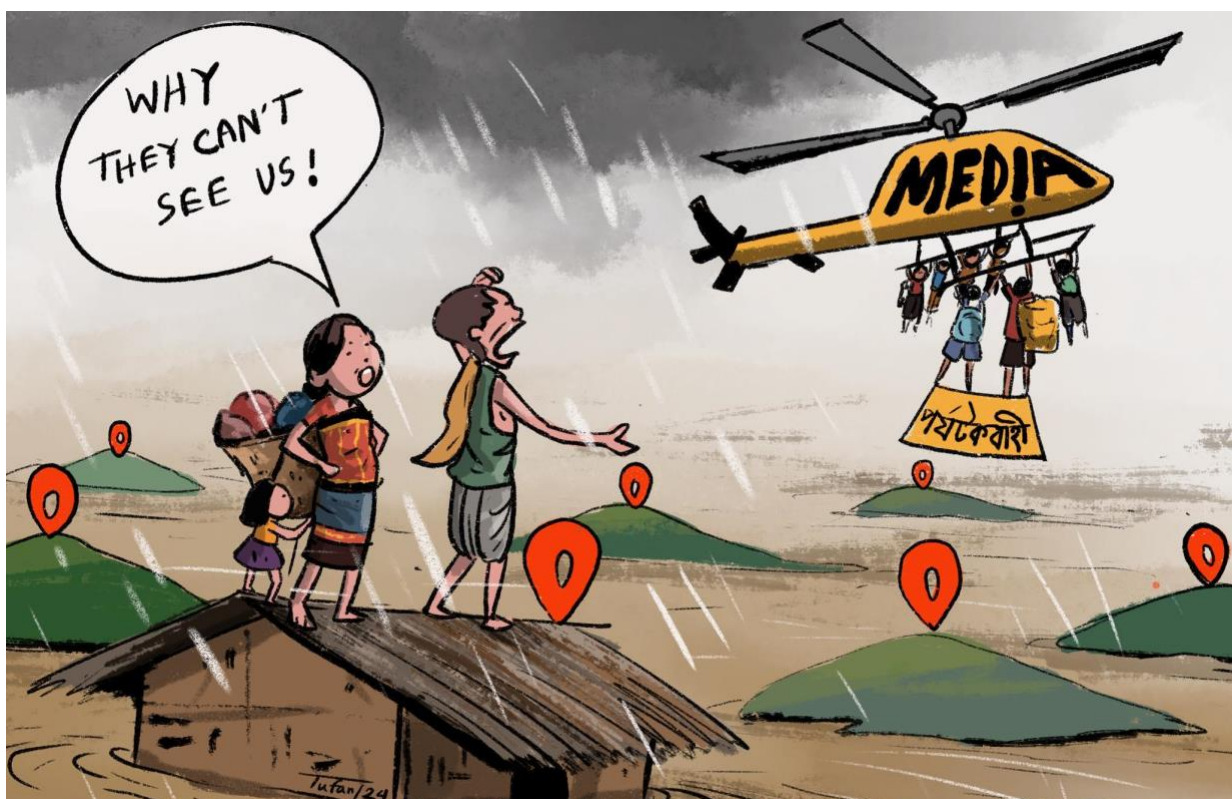
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The K4D Foundation, locally registered in Thailand, is dedicated to empowering underrepresented and marginalized communities with necessary skills and knowledge to enable an active participatory environment, gender and social inclusion, and sustainable data ecosystem. The K4D Foundation has a vision to embrace a wealth of knowledge and practices using data-driven approaches to build community capacities, enhance access to information, and advance digital skills and environmental justice to achieve a collaborative indigenous data ecosystem.

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Factor Daily is a nonprofit journalism lab that combines learning with doing. We are a tiny, slow, and human-centric journalism lab which focuses on a few topics as multi-year projects, staying away from news cycles. With our Fellowship Program, we help journalists and non-journalists tell stories that matter in society. Our formats of storytelling include physical spaces, audio, animation and text. We tell stories that travel from, or to, the communities.

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Nina Sangma is an Indigenous rights advocate belonging to the Garo indigenous community from Northeast India. She promotes and defends Indigenous Peoples' rights and human rights through the articulation of Indigenous Peoples issues through public interest media. She has over 17 years of experience as a copywriter, broadcast journalist, editor, award winning brand strategist and campaign manager in radio, television, and digital media. Her current focus is to create strategic space for Indigenous Peoples in global and regional digital rights coalitions where they can extend their advocacy and media campaigns through decolonial narratives, thereby attempting to narrow the digital divide that has excluded Indigenous Peoples from meaningful representation and participation.