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# A Declaration For The Rights of People of African Descent to Thrive in the Digital Age

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U.N. WGEPAD 32nd Session

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# DIGITAL EQUITY

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***Providing equal access to digital content, tools,  
and resources to enable full participation in  
economic systems, governance, and society.***

## ***Digital Equity Must Include:***

- Connectivity (Access)
- Full Ownership of One's Own Data
- Equal Protection & Pathways for Accountability
- The Right to Thrive

## *The Goal of Digital Equity for PAD*

TDI believes that the goal of digital equity must be to move People of African Descent from connectivity to digital tools to the ability to thrive in the Digital Age.

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An inextricable link exists  
between digital equity and  
economic equity.

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# CONNECTIVITY / ACCESS

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The global digital divide has left billions of low-income and rural citizens around the world without access to the internet. High costs associated with developing the necessary internet infrastructure as well as purchasing the devices needed to actually use the internet have prevented numerous people from participating in the 21st century.

Despite the growing importance of broadband access for economic competitiveness and civic engagement, and participation in governance, nearly 3 billion people globally are disconnected from the internet.



Developing countries have faced the brunt of this divide with only 35% of the population in these nations having access to the internet.

In Africa, 67% of the Continent's population are disconnected from the internet.

Such a stark, widespread digital divide creates a substantial economic drag that impacts both the local and international markets.

## **What is the impact of digital inequities on economic equity aims?**

Those without access to the internet cannot fully participate in the global economy exacerbating economic inequities, particularly for People of African Descent. Each individual that lacks access to the internet can neither acquire skills online to make themselves more competitive in the job market or contribute to international trade.

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**Digital inequities acutely affect  
young people globally, and thus  
impact current and future global  
markets.**

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Young people disproportionately face a lack of access to the internet at a critical time in their personal and career development.

Globally, [2.2 billion children and young people 25 or below](#) lack access to the internet at home leaving them without the type of connectivity integral to remote work and learning.

Lack of access on this scale also comes at a financial cost with the World Bank estimating that the learning loss associated with the pandemic and inability to support remote learning could cost up to [\\$10 trillion in lost earnings.](#)

Access to the Internet must be viewed as a basic human right that is (1) rights based; (2) user-centered; and (3) includes the realities of ALL people, including People of African Descent.



In 2016 the U.N. declared Internet Access a human right through Resolution [A/HRC/32/L.20](#) by indicating the importance of *"applying a comprehensive human rights-based approach when providing and expanding access to the internet and for the internet to be open, accessible and nurtured"*

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# **CURRENT U.N. WORK ON CONNECTIVITY**

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In 2021, Secretary General Antonio Guterres released a plan called [Our Common Agenda](#). This plan initiated the development of a Global Digital Compact that will be finalized in September 2023.

This Global Digital Compact under “Our Common Agenda” stands to be developed and implemented in a very common way that ignores and undermines the full reality of People of African Descent existing in the Digital Age.

TDI believes that tech equity must include ensuring that People of African Descent (PAD) are not harmed, preyed upon, or exploited by technological advancements. The right to privacy and the ability to access and opportunity through digital means must be viewed as a basic fundamental human right that must include People of African Descent. For us, tech equity also means ensuring that access to broadband is a reality for multi-marginalized communities including PAD. *Finally, and most importantly, tech equity is about ensuring that PAD who do have access to broadband are protected and have the ability to live and thrive.*

While access to broadband is an important part of Digital Equity, exclusively focusing on it is shortsighted and inadequate. The scope must be expanded to include protections for those who do have access to broadband, and the ability to thrive in digital ecosystems.

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# THE PRESENT REALITY

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Systemic, institutionalized, and structural racism pervades every system and aspect of life. Social, political, and economic violence are consistently employed in tandem against Black bodies, creating a trifecta of violence. Anti-Black ideologies enshrined in laws embed racism in every structure and institution on the planet.



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# THE VIOLENCE TRIFECTA



1

## Social Violence

Lynching (to include hanging) and other violent acts meant not only to murder and intimidate, but also to accumulate land.

2

## Political Violence

Barriers to representation in government, including obstruction of access to the ballot box (voting rights).

3

## Economic Violence

Destroying centers of economic prosperity, for example burning down Greenwood, also known as "Black Wall Street."

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# THE VIOLENCE TRIFECTA IN MODERN TIMES



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## Social Violence

Police brutality, **Surveillance**,  
**Digital Deserts**,  
**Misinformation &  
Disinformation** (PAD  
globally), deepfakes

②

## Political Violence

Voter suppression, partisan  
gerrymandering, sentencing  
disparities, Misinformation,  
Disinformation election  
campaigns, Mis-Disinfo  
targeted against PAD  
candidates & elected officials

③

## Economic Violence

Discriminatory lending  
practices, unjust tax  
structures, pay inequities,  
algorithmic bias, implicit and  
explicit biases that ban VC  
resources.

- The advancement of technology has compounded the harms of this violence trifecta in intersectional ways.
- COVID-19 was the *Great Exposer* and *Excaberator* of existing social inequities.
- Technology has served as the *Great Amplifier* of existing and intersectional social inequities.

**The global pandemic exacerbated existing digital inequities and further excluded multi-marginalized communities by increasing technological dependence while simultaneously neglecting to provide adequate resources.**

VIOLENCE  
TRIFECTA  
AMPLIFIED  
AGAINST PAD  
THROUGH DIGITAL  
ECOSYSTEMS:

- **Algorithmic Bias**
- **Student Threat Assessments**
- **General Threat Assessments**
- **Incomplete Data Sets**
- **Surveillance of Black Bodies**
- **Exclusionary and Discriminatory Hiring Practices**
- **Cyberbullying**
- **Misinformation**
- **Disinformation**
- **Anti-Black racist narratives that mitigate VC funding.**

**Disinformation and misinformation predate technology. However, we recognize that technology and social media serve to amplify its harms against PAD across the globe.**

**Disinformation and misinformation targeted at People of African Descent globally is on the rise and must be addressed at the same scale and scope in which it is happening.**

**Whether it is on the continent of Africa (Ethiopia), Europe (Ukraine/Poland), or both North and South America (US elections/Brazil elections), targeted campaigns against PAD have taken a multitude of shapes and forms.**



**The lack of access to digital opportunities, whether in education or business, or the lack of consistent funding towards programs and policies that advance the interests of Black people, neither helps close the digital divide nor does it help combat disinformation and misinformation.**

**Technology that is either untapped in our communities, is biased against People of African Descent, or even weaponized against PAD hurts the Global economy.**

**The future of the world is one where it is more interconnected, not less, and technologies that keep all people in mind and allow equal access from technological development to market employment, regardless of skin color, ethnicity, or nation of origin must be the technologies that are the most adopted and utilized.**

**Keeping in mind that the world is going to see an increase in black people moving forward, particularly from Sub-Saharan Africa, building technologies that work for PAD is critical to our collective global success.**

**The future is going to be digital, whether it is fighting environmental injustices, addressing global health disparities, educational equity, or providing People of African Descent with more access to economic opportunities and services, making sure that technologies work for People of African Descent is critical to the future success of both the technology sector but also of the global economy.**

**Disinformation and misinformation play a critical role in access to these digital technologies. Nation States, tech companies, and other private sector entities need to review their devastating impacts on PAD globally.**

**Black people globally are not well represented in data sets. These willfully incomplete data sets skew machine learning and impact how algorithmic decision-making systems are trained and calibrated. This results in technological systems that disproportionately harm and discriminate against Black people globally.**

**At a time where the technology sector needs more innovation, disinformation and misinformation has pushed people away from broad adoption and innovation. Disinformation and misinformation create environments where Black people and nation states are increasingly unlikely to adopt certain technologies and lose interest in technology issues. This only exacerbates the problem of both representation in the workforce and data sets, fostering a self-perpetuating cycle of harm.**



**Tech companies and nation states leading on technological issues must address representation in both who they hire and their policies. There has been a heavy pivot towards engaging countries in Asia on technology issues. This same pivot has not been afforded in the same manner to the Global South. Whether it has been investment, workforce, or bilateral or multilateral cooperation, we have not seen this prioritization with the Global South, particularly nations with large Black representation.**

## **Recommendation 1**

It is our recommendation that the WGEPAD push for an expansion of the Decade for People of African Descent to further derive community-oriented data and solutions on issues related to People of African Descent, to include Tech equity.

## **Recommendation 2**

We recommend that the WGEPAD prioritizes Tech and Digital Equity in its work. This can be done by drafting white papers, reports and other resources that contextualize the status of PAD in an increasingly digital world. Other efforts could include hosting panels and discussions on digital equity at each Session and incorporating digital equity in the Declaration of People of African Descent.

## **Recommendation 3**

We are calling on the WGEPAD to expand the U.N.'s digital equity conversations to address the needs of People of African Descent who can access broadband, yet remain unsafe and face systemic, institutionalized, structural and anti-Black racist barriers to living and thriving.

This can be done by developing a relationship with the Internet Governance Forum to bring to bear a more holistic view of technological advancements and their impact on every aspect of the lives of People of African Descent.

## **Recommendation 4**

We recommend that the WGEPAD work with civil society to develop a “*Document on The Declaration of Digital Rights of People of African Descent*” that outlines standard protections for PAD that private sector entities and governmental institutions must provide.

## **Recommendation 5**

TDI recommends that the WGEPAD view tech equity from an intersectional lens, contemplating its connection to all other social justice and human rights issues which impact People of African Descent.

## **Recommendation 6**

We recommend that the WGEPAD work with similarly situated UN mechanisms (PFPAD, CERD, EMLAR), the Internet Governance Forum, and civil society to incentivize Member states to draft and support resolutions on digital equity that are affirming of PAD's ability to live and thrive in the Digital Age. We believe that the Global Digital Bill of Rights for People of African Descent should serve as the overarching template in these efforts.

## **Recommendation 7**

We recommend that the WGEPAD use every lever to push the UN to consider the implications of technological development and its impacts on PAD from the fullest context possible.



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THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

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***TDI stands ready to partner with the WGEPAD to  
further the cause of digital equity for People of  
African Descent.***

