Protecting Online Rights of Changemakers (PORCH)

Background and Context

Digital transformation is steadily progressing across South Asia, wherein citizens are actively embracing new digital services and technologies. Increased mobile subscriptions, widespread wireless broadband networks and internet access to millions have enabled the use of digital services like digital payments, digital IDs, e-commerce, e-education, e-health services, etc. This shift is significantly shaping the lives of citizens, affecting both their social and economic well-being.

The South Asian governments are actively promoting new laws, policies, and strategies to harness & develop digital technologies. These policy frameworks are important for economic growth and inclusive development of the region. One of the key objectives within these policy frameworks is to bridge the digital divide and ensure that the benefits of these technological advancements reach all segments of society, particularly those in underserved and marginalised communities.

However, there are concerns that some of the proposed regulations and policies are stringent and may negatively impact digital rights. Some of these include online censorship and even internet shutdowns in a disproportionate manner, without complying with due process or rule of law principles, which deprive people of internet access.

Additionally, these unreasonable proposals may be considered as adversely impacting women and youth. One of the reasons for the same has been their exclusion from participating in policy discussions related to digital and cyber security matters, which affects their social and economic well-being.

To promote technologies that align with democratic values and inclusive development, it is essential for women and youth-led organisations to actively participate in shaping digital and internet governance policies.

In this regard, CUTS in partnership with Internews and other partners- Digital Turtles (Sri Lanka), Youth Innovation Lab (Nepal), Digitally Right (Bangladesh), and Tattle (India) is implementing this project to empower women and youths' voices by enhancing their knowledge, engagement, and advocacy capacity on matters of internet governance through awareness generation, capacity building, and fostering networks. By doing so, the project aims to address the disparities arising from their limited involvement in policy formulation.

Project Objectives

- To empower youth and women through increased awareness of digital rights and foster a secure and collaborative space to advocate for inclusive digital policies and frameworks.

- To enhance the ability of youth and women-led organisations to engage with key stakeholders and influence inclusive internet governance and digital rights policy development and implementation.

- To strengthen women and youth's capacity and understanding of digital safety and security to protect themselves and their organisations online.

Approach and Methodology

The partners will adopt an approach of research, interviews, discussions, and training as the project methodology. CUTS, while implementing the project will undertake the following approach:

- **Secondary Research**

  Gather information for evaluating the awareness and perspectives of women and youth regarding technology policies and to understand how differing levels of awareness influence online safety, freedom, and behaviours.

- **Training Module preparation**

  CUTS will contribute towards developing capacity-building module creation and e-learning courses for training delivery. CUTS will also help in the translation and localisation of content.

- **Training**

  The training phase will be carried out in two phases:

  1. At the national level, in-person Training of Trainers (ToTs) course delivery in each target country. Number of people receiving e-learning course: 40

  2. Capacity building training for women and youth-led organisations on digital rights and cyber safety. Number of people trained in digital rights advocacy: 160

- **Interviews and Discussions**

  The team will undertake key informant interviews (KIIs) with digital rights experts and focus group discussions (FGDs) with youth and women-led Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in each target country. The KIIs and FGDs will seek to fill gaps identified in the desk research and expand on their thoughts and opinions from survey findings.

A total of 12 KIIs and 16 FGDs have to be conducted under this project. CUTS will be responsible for undertaking a total of 9 KIIs (3 each) and 12 FGDs (4 each) in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

- **Reporting**

  CUTS will prepare a report based on the findings of KIIs and FGDs and will also work with Digitally Right to integrate the findings into the final report.

The final report will provide an overview of key findings and data, highlighting similarities and differences as well as opportunities (case studies) and challenges across the four countries.

Envisaged Outcomes for the Project

- Improved understanding of digital rights and policies for women and youth.

- Youth and women-led CSOs have the opportunity to connect, share information, and collaborate to advocate for inclusive digital policies and frameworks.

- Youth and women-led CSOs become better equipped with knowledge, skills, and resources to conduct advocacy campaigns concerning digital policies and frameworks.

- Strengthening digital safety, cyber security capacity, and literacy of CSOs led by youth and women.