Feminist Principles of the Internet
An Evolving Document

Training Module
As feminists, what kind of internet do we want, and what will it take for us to achieve it?

At a Global Meeting in April 2014, 50 activists from across the world came together to discuss the intersections of gender, sexuality, and the internet as a new public space.
What is a feminist approach to the internet?

There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.

Audre Lorde
**Intersectionality**

- Human rights are indivisible, inalienable, interconnected and interrelated.

- In practice, who has access to rights is impacted by intersecting social systems that give rise to particular forms of power and privilege, based on certain identities.

*Image: VAW Learning Network*
“From falling in love to demanding accountability from our government, [the internet] is becoming part of the texture of our everyday social, political, economic, and cultural life.

It’s not just an inert tool that we wield when we have access to it, but a space where things happen, where identities are constructed, norms reified or disrupted, action and activities undertaken.

As such, it cannot help but be a space of intersectionality where many things collide and connect”.

Jac Sm Kee
In March 2015, #DalitWomenFight organized a ‘Wikipedia Hackathon’ to bring their campaign for rights and awareness to the internet as a transformative sphere for the realization of rights.

#DalitWomenFight are seeking to dismantle the centuries old caste system that excuses high rates of sexual violence, discrimination, and the social, economic and cultural exclusion of Dalit women daily.

During the hackathon, participants were met with abusive comments and attempts to delete the wikipedia entries from Hindu nationalists trolls.

Such trolling is a recognition of the transformative power of the internet as a space to demand rights.
Activism

- The Kenyan campaign #MyDressMyChoice, was launched in response to two women being stripped and beaten by a group of men in Nairobi. The men claimed they were justified in their violence because the women were “dressed indecently”.

- Women in Nairobi held a protest on 17 November 2014, many of whom came out in miniskirts, to raise awareness, demand justice, and call for an end to violence against women.

The online Twitter campaign saw people from all over tweeting their support for the women’s protest, demanding justice, denouncing the idea that dress codes are ever an excuse for violence against women.
The **Gender Report Card** at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) found:

- **1 out of 71 rated sessions made gender the main theme** in 2012 (1% vs. 6% in 2013).

- **Gender was seen as not relevant or not related for 50 sessions** (70% of the total, as against 49% for 2013).

There was also **a clear majority of male panellists, moderators and remote-moderators**, from 2011 – 2013, and the majority of women in these roles were civil society representatives, rather than government or private sector roles.
ACCESS: Participation & Employment

Image: The Guardian
ACCESS: Participation & Usage

- According to International Telecommunications Union (ITU) statistics, the disparity between women and men’s access to internet is decreasing, with more countries near parity, and only a few countries where there is a significant difference (i.e. a 20-point difference) between men and women.

- Gender-disaggregated US data on popular social media platforms (2013) showed near parity between women and men, and significantly more women users on Facebook, Pinterest in Instagram.

Image: Pew Research Centre statistics on US internet users (N=1802)
**ACCESS: Rights Violations & Governance**

- Holding companies and governments accountable to their responsibilities to uphold human rights online.

- Bringing marginalized voices of women and LGBTIQ people in all their diversities to the decision-making tables on internet and tech governance.

The Intersections:

- **Access & Diversity**: Whatever group of people, for whatever reason (economic, political, or social), experience challenges accessing the internet, it’s double those challenges for women. Factor gender in.

- **Openness**: Women’s rights are human rights. The internet is a vital space for women’s organizing and self-expression across the globe. That’s why feminist activists are fighting for a free and open internet.

- **Security**: Violence targeting women happens online too; sexual violence, demeaning content, stalking, threats, and many other forms. Feminist techies are working to promote agency, capacity, privacy, and security for women online.

- **Cooperation & Governance**: Women bring important voices and experiences to the discussions on internet governance. We need to pro-actively support their participation in civil society networks, technical committees, and decision-making spaces.
In March 2015, QQ, WhatsApp, Skype, Google+, Instagram, and Twitter all had active monthly user populations in the hundreds of millions of people.

Facebook had over one billion.

These companies’ USD billions in annual revenue and profit relies on how, and how often, their users are interacting with the internet.

As their user populations grow, their Terms of Service and company policies increasingly dictate what forms of expression, access to information, privacy and other rights are accessible to a global population online.
ECONOMY: Access and Net Neutrality
ECONOMY: Marketing Vs. Effects

• Problems with ‘humanitarian’, ‘charitable’, ‘non-profit’ endeavour Internet.org:
  – Marketed falsely as providing access to the internet, when it only provides limited access to the websites of Internet.org partners
  – Disrupts net neutrality; users have no choice in which sites and content are offered in their country
  – Bans basic encryption, such as SSL or TLS, making users more vulnerable online
  – Marketed as ‘non-profit’, while companies involved in the service stand to gain billions of dollars in revenue from user data.
ECONOMY: Privacy, Profits, Collective Ownership

- Companies directly benefit from the increased flow of personal and private information into the public realm online (e.g. storing user habits, creating targeted advertising profiles, buying/selling user data to marketers, tracking user locations to send them nearby offers, etc.)
Open source software tends to buck high costs that come with proprietary software development. Many open-source platforms place a deeper focus on online privacy, anonymity, collective access and ownership.
PRIVACY

The right to privacy and to exercise full control over our own data is a critical principle for a safer, open internet for all.

Privacy is intimately connected to the issue of online security; the two are distinct, but their relationship reciprocal.

In a basic sense, online security aims to stop unauthorized access to information, while making a choice about what information we do want to make public, to whom, and through what channels. What helps us differentiate between these forms of access is a consideration of privacy.
AGENCY: Context, Consent, Voices

• Sifting through the moral panics that govern the internet—especially around sexuality online.

• Replacing protectionist & moralist ‘catch-all’ approaches to ‘harmful content’ online, with rights-affirming, nuanced policy making.

• Agency is also about centring the voices and experiences of the intended beneficiaries of policies that seek to prevent harm and provide redress—especially for young people.
Digital Security as a Feminist Practice

Image: Take Back the Tech!

Image: Me and My Shadow

Image: Tactical Technology Collective