General Assembly Plenary Background Guide

PROGRESS

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Topic 1 Social Inclusion of Human Technology for Disabled Peoples Introduction

Technology and humanity has been, currently is, and will be forever intertwined. The developments of technology are the developments of the human species, even if not every member has been included. The modern era is the first one of large-scale inclusion for disabled individuals, and technology is no different. Screen readers, alt text on images, and other methods have been implemented, however unevenly, to allow disabled individuals to interact with the digital world. These technologies have been mandated in the United States per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), but different technologies have not been mandated globally.¹ However, the journey towards social inclusion of human technology for disabled people is far from complete. While advancements have been made in providing accessibility features, there is still a significant gap between the available technologies and their widespread implementation on a global scale. The modern era has brought

¹ ADA National Network, "What is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?"

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about an increased awareness and recognition of the rights of disabled individuals, resulting in the development of various assistive technologies to facilitate their full participation in society.

By bridging the gap between the digital realm and the users' abilities, these technologies have opened doors to education, employment, entertainment, and social interaction for millions of people. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the United States has played a crucial role in mandating the implementation of accessibility features in various domains, including technology. This legislation has helped create a more inclusive environment by ensuring that disabled individuals have equal opportunities and access to digital resources and services.

However, despite these advancements, the scope of global mandates and regulations regarding the accessibility of technology remains inconsistent and varies significantly from one country to another. To achieve true social inclusion of human technology for disabled people, it is imperative to address the challenges and barriers that hinder accessibility worldwide. This involves not only creating and implementing appropriate assistive technologies but also raising awareness, advocating for policies, and fostering a culture that promotes inclusivity and equal access to technology for all individuals, regardless of their abilities. By embracing universal design principles and adopting a proactive approach, technology developers and stakeholders can play a pivotal role in ensuring that the digital landscape becomes truly inclusive.

History

Predating not only Homo Sapiens—the human species as we know it—but also the entire Homo genus as a whole, stone tools and "human"-technology integration can be found over 3.5 million years ago. Stone tools, such as the Oldowan and Acheulean, represent the earliest known instances of humans using technology to enhance their capabilities and adapt to their environment² These early tools were crucial for tasks like hunting, food preparation, and shelter construction, marking a significant milestone in the integration of human and technological advancements. Over time, humans continued to innovate, developing more complex tools and technologies, such as pottery, metallurgy, and eventually, the invention of writing and the advent of the Industrial Revolution.

In the early 19th century, as the Industrial Revolution gained momentum, a social movement known as the Luddite movement emerged in England. The Luddites were a group of skilled textile workers who protested against the increasing mechanization of the textile industry, fearing that the intro

²Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, "Stone Tools"



duction of machinery would render their skills obsolete and lead to unemployment and destitution. The movement gained traction between 1811 and 1816, with textile workers engaging in acts of machine-breaking and sabotage. The Luddites' actions were driven by a deep sense of economic insecurity and a desire to protect their craftsmanship and working conditions. They saw the mechanization of industries as a threat to their skilled labor and a detriment to the quality of their products.³ The Luddite movement serves as a two reminders, one, that while technological progress can bring immense



Luddites

benefits, it is essential to address the potential social and economic impacts to avoid leaving any group, including disabled people, behind in the digital age; and the second, that despite resistance, major progression will still be nearly impossible to resist.

The rise of the computer and digital age brought both new opportunities and challenges for social inclusion of human technology for disabled people. On one hand, advancements in computer technology have led to the development of assistive technologies that significantly enhance the accessibility of digital platforms for individuals with disabilities. Screen readers, voice recognition software, adaptive input devices, and other assistive technologies have opened doors to education, employment, and social participation for disabled individuals, empowering them to interact with the digital world on equal terms. The proliferation of digital communication platforms and social media has also facilitated connections and communities for disabled individuals, providing spaces for advocacy, support, and shared experiences.

Current

According to the World Health Organization, "almost one billion children and adults with disabilities and older persons in need of assistive technology are denied access." The number of people in need of assistive products is likely to rise to 3.5 billion in the next thirty years, due to populations aging and the rise of noncommunicable diseases rising across the world.⁴ Due to this increase, there has also been a noticeable rise in the global awareness of disabilities. For example, the annual observance of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3rd showcases the promises of new technologies in the realm of disability. However, awareness can go only so far, if we want to create a noticeable impact on persons with disabilities (PWM), actions must be taken

³ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Luddite"

⁴ World Health Organization, "Almost one billion children ... report."



Hardware and Prosthetics

One way technology could improve the livelihoods of PWDs would be to ameliorate the negative effects of the disabilities by directly helping PWDs. An example of this approach would be 3d-printed prosthetics. Conventionalizing the production of custom 3d-parts, the relatively new technology of 3d-printing has disrupted the prosthetics field. While typical prosthetics can go



"Raptor" hand by Enable, an example of a 3d-printed prosthetics

easily in five figures, a rudimentary 3d-printed prosthetics can be produced on a basic commercial 3d-printer and can go as low as \$50.⁵ It is not to say that rudimentary prosthetics printed by volunteers around the country are the same quality as medical grade prosthetics, but for those without the funds or resources to afford a higher-grade conventional prosthetics, to have one to begin with would be a lifesaver. There are also more in the field than general hobbyists and volunteer groups; ranging from non-profit organizations formed from volunteers stationed around the country to large scale professional specialists dealing with fully custom and tailored prosthetics close in quality to standard non-3d printed prosthetics, the versatility and accessibility of this technology has incredible potential that has only yet to be discovered.⁶ With WHO's estimates of only less than 20% of the estimated 30 million people around the world who would require prosthetic limbs, braces, and other mobility devices, the accessibility in both production and price could really be a major contributor in alleviating the issue. Even though it is definitely more dominated by wealthier and technologically advanced nations like the United States—as such a new technology like 3d-printers aren't always common—, both nonprofits and companies are popping up around the world from Uruguay, Guatemala, and Ukraine to list a few.⁷⁸ While prosthetics is an enticing field, it is only one of the many ways technologies have been progressed to alleviate the struggles of those with disabilities.

Work and Disabilities

On the other hand, instead of helping PWMs through finding solutions to make up for their disadvantages, one can strive to improve the lives of PWMs through creating an environment that is more accommodating. One example can be seen with the post-COVID reality of online work. With a crucial element of our society is work, without an ability to work, many PWMs are isolated from the rest of society, not only unable to contribute to the economy but also neglected by society with

⁵Enable, "Raptor Hand"

⁶ Dally et al. "Characteristics of a 3D-printed prosthetic hand for use in developing countries."

⁷ Palomeque, "Foundation prints 3D prosthetics, gives them free in Uruguay"



Employed workers with a disability



much less means to support themselves. However, recently with the unprecedented COVID pandemic, remote work has shot from a niche concept into an accepted alternative to the in-office norm of working. locational Removing many restrictions, remote work not only increases the wide range of options for a regular worker, it especially benefits those with existing disabilities that could bar them from traditional in-person jobs. In the pandem-

ic, after the initial wave, employment amongst disabled population in the United States was actually higher than pre-pandemic; in contrast, the overall employment amongst both disabled and abled population dropped. Additionally, the percentage of employment among the disabled population is at an all-time high level of 22.4%.⁹ Some people have been taking bold actions to create more work accessible for PWMS through cutting-edge technology, such as the Japanese company Ory, who creates robots that some companies have been using to allow PWMs to control the robots and operate in service jobs.¹⁰ Not all solutions are required to be as technologically advanced though, even technology as simple as ramps could have created significant benefit for PWMs.

⁹Tsipursky, "Disabled people have ... possible"

¹⁰ BBC, "Japanese cafe uses robots controlled by paralysed people"



Directives

Stated in the first part of the United Nations Charter, one of the principal purposes of the United Nations is "to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character." With nearly one in eight people suffering from something preventable, we must strive to create more than just awareness but work together to pass actionable plans to create impactful results and alleviate the struggles of millions of people.

Some conceptual guiding questions that may induce valuable insight about the topic:

- At what level should the accessibility of technology be a human right?
- How could we ensure a more equitable access with technology especially in the field of disabilities?
- Regulations and innovations often clash with regulations that can often hinder the room to innovate; too much of either may not be ideal, where should the line be drawn?
- Technology can definitely be used for good, but often even good actions could have some negative consequences, how must we implement technology responsibly to both help those who need to be helped while reducing unintentional harms.
- Can there be an overreliance on technology and if so, how should we preserve humanity?

Some practical guiding questions that may help with your approach in committee:

- What is your country's social, political, and/or economic position on technology?
- How can you preserve your country's interest in the realm of international competition and cooperation?
- Some national interests are based in cooperation while others are based in competition. How do you push for resolutions that benefit your global partnerships or harm your global competitors?
- Technology, unlike some fields, is driven mostly by private enterprises and businesses. How should you best represent your national interests while also recognizing and taking their interests and contributions into account?
- As a committee of the United Nations, the power over domestic policies and regulations are quite limited. How can the committee best address such technological concerns through achievable and actionable resolutions while respecting national sovereignty?



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Simon Kofe, Tuvalu's Foreign Minister, speaks to COP26 in 2021

Topic 2

Discussing Interests in the Pacific in Regards to Climate Change

Introduction

Despite contributing less than 0.03% to the world's total carbon emissions, small Pacific islands will be one of the first to witness the full impact firsthand.¹¹ Climate change comes with global warming, rising sea levels, changing weather patterns, and much more which in particular targets the vulnerable low-elevation islands first. The first domino to fall and with the future of the islands at stake in the face of a crisis it did not create, the countries affected very possibly will not be able to get through it without outside help. The international community must work together to find not only a solution to the immediate localized crisis in the Pacific, but also a long term global crisis before it is too late.

¹¹ Parsons, "The Pacific Islands: The front line in the battle against climate change"

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Although climate change at a fundamental level is natural and the world has continuously been changing in its long lifespan, the current rate of human-driven climate change is neither natural nor sustainable. Caused by a combination of human-induced factors such as the widespread consumption of fossil fuels—mainly coal, oil, and gas—in every aspect of our modern lives, from energy production to manufacturing, or other factors such as deforestation and general food production, the drastic rise in greenhouse gas emission create traps heat in our atmosphere leading to global warming and climate change.¹² While attempts have been made to reduce our harmful emissions, it has not been enough and measures—from the individual level to the international level—must be undertaken to stop any further damage to our precious home, currently already full of scars that will take centuries to heal.

One of the largest and obvious issues facing the Pacific Islands is the rising sea levels. With increases in not only sea levels but also the rate of increase, many Pacific islands are at extreme risk for major land loss. Tiny islands with low elevation, many Pacific islands are under existential threat from rising sea level as each year the water reclaims more and more land until one day there may be no more. Outside of large scale damages to infrastructure, rising sea levels also threatens the homes of its populace, pushing them to go further and further upshore instigating a migration crisis.¹³ With sea level rising at an accelerated rate, it is not just possible but probable that some nations could be entirely submerged before the end of this century, creating a massive refugee crisis that will have lasting impacts.

History

Climate Change Implications

Apart from the aforementioned effect of climate change with erosion and inundation, there are four other main areas of climate change implications for the island nations: reduced quantity or quality of water resources, coral reef degradation, reduced agricultural productivity, and human health impacts. These factors in particular affect these nations due to the background and demographics of the population. With over half the nations in the United Nations Least Developed Countries category and impoverished with an economy dependent on agriculture and the waters around them, climate change poses a deadly threat, ravaging their already economy, main food source of food, as well as their general health.¹⁴ Additionally, their resource limitations really reduce the range of

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¹³Connell, "Vulnerable Islands: Climate Change, ... Western Pacific"
¹⁴UNCTAD, "UN list of least developed countries"



actions they could take to deal with the crisis. Furthermore, the effects of climate change could also be classified as affecting "land security" (physical presence of land), "lifestyle security" (productivity and sustenance of land) and "habitat security" (other factors that affect community wellbeing) and any solutions should have to properly address all of them.¹⁵

Virtual Life? Cultural Death?

"Tuvalu uploads itself to the Metaverse," the headlines plastered news sites internationally last year as curious people worldwide learned about the plight of the tiny island nation—with only 12,000 people and 26km², half the size of Manhattan—as they sank lower and lower into the sea.¹⁶ Although more of a stunt than a long term practical solution, the proposal brought awareness to a crucial side of the climate crisis, one often ignored not of intention, but out of ignorance: the potential death of a culture.

Many island nations, like Tuvalu, risk not only the physical loss of a nation, but also the cultural loss associated with it. One of the main focuses of the United Nations, culture is a priority for the United Nation and for the health of nations. Nations are not just defined legally through international recognition, but often are created through groups united through culture; culture is crucial in recognizing the identity of a nation. Culture has larger impacts than just social. Even outside of obvious economic connections between culture and tourism which many island nations depend on, culture



Languages of New Ireland, one of Papau New Guinea's Islands

also has strong connections to development. According to the United Nations, "development is inseparable from culture," and incorporating culture into developmental policy also provides clear benefits in areas such as "education, science, communication, health, environment", and overall economic benefits.¹⁷

One of the most diverse regions in the world including a subregion within it — Melanesia — containing over 8.5 million people speaking 15% of all known languages, a loss to the Pacific islands would also be a loss for humanity.¹⁸ However, we must also not

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¹⁵ Campbell, "Climate-Change Migration in the Pacific"

¹⁶Cramer, "Tuvalu turns to the metaverse as rising seas threaten existence"

¹⁷ United Nations, "World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, 21 May"

¹⁸Thomas, "Protecting cultural rights in the ... for climate change"

miss the forest for the trees. While actions should be taken to protect the cultural diversity of the world, more importantly, actions should be taken because they are people and if we do not bond together to address the issue together, none of us will be spared.

Current

Current State of the World

The cause of the ever-present peril facing the numerous Pacific islands are well known: climate change, and specifically global warming. But how bad is it? To put it in numbers, the rate of average sea level has risen from 2.5mm to over 3.4mm per year just over the last 30 years.¹⁹ With many islands having the majority of their population live close to sea level with some islands having very low maximum elevation, the rising sea levels pose a larger threat year by year.



Migration

If all fails, many inhabitants on the Pacific islands are forced into their last resort: migration. Unlike many other forms of migration, the residents fleeing the inundated islands are considered "climate-change migrants" and have one main difference, they do not have a choice and the future of returning is bleak. Additionally, migration to the level of community relocation could occur, encountering even more problems than the already-destabilizing general type of refugees. While most refugees are individuals choosing to flee somewhere due to the current temporary situation independently, the scale which climate change could induce migration in the pacific creates a migration that is not only forced but permanent. Especially with the scale of the islands and the systematic forced migration, this could cause massive problems not just with resources but also integration and cultural differences. With very few precedents for permanent planned community relocation in modern history (namely Banaba in the 1970s) let alone one induced by climate change, unseen before at this scale, the migratory wave that could occur due to global warming could be

¹⁹ NASA, "Is the rate of sea-level rise increasing?"



extremely destabilizing globally—and without proper preparation in every step along the way—the consequences could prove disastrous for not just the islanders but every party involved.²⁰

Current Initiatives

It has been clear that individual nations cannot do it alone and international cooperation must be taken in order to even begin addressing the issue. From international cooperation with presence in the UN—including COPs, ESCAP, RIO+20 and many other environmentally oriented conferences or through programs funded by UNDP, regional bodies such as the Pacific Island Forum, to individual partnerships nations such as United States, China, and Australia, large scale international initiatives have been gaining traction over the past decade. Though there has been much discussion and some actions done, there is still an urgent need for major investment into addressing the crisis. Without an universally accepted solution—the best long term solution would be"just" to fix climate change, there are many solutions that are discussed ranging from short term solutions with seawalls and dredging to long term migrational logistics. There has also been a recent push to involve the ICJ to hold other nations legally accountable.





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Directives

Stated at the in the first part of the United Nations Charter, one of the principal purposes of the United Nations is "to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character," and the urgent future facing islands represents everything what the United Nations originally set out to do.

Some conceptual guiding questions that may induce valuable insight about the topic:

- What are long term solutions to address climate change?
- What are short term solutions that can shield the island from the brunt of the dangers?
- What developments or policies can be enacted to ameliorate the situation whether its physically, economically, socially, or culturally?
- Does the proposed solution address land security, lifestyle security, and habitat security?
- What policies should we propose to prepare for the worst case when some islands fully sink underneath the waves?
- What is the role of the international community in addressing the situation of a specific region?
- How can national sovereignty remain respected in this perilous situation?

Some practical guiding questions that may help with your strategy in committee:

- What is your country's social, political, and/or economic position on climate change?
- What resources does your country have that can aid in resolving the conflicts?
- How can you preserve your country's interests economically but also diplomatically?
- As tiny nations fall deeper into their crisis, how can major powers utilize the situation to further their global aspirations or how should at-risk nations assert control and avoid being a pawn?
- As a committee of the United Nations, the power over domestic policies and regulations are quite limited. How can the committee best address such technological concerns through achievable and actionable resolutions while respecting national sovereignty?

Some guiding resources that may be helpful:

• "Climate Change and Migration Issues in the Pacific" from ILO

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