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## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND PEACEMAKING – the case of digital dialogues in Sudan

*Artificial intelligence (AI)-powered tools have been effective in collecting and analysing large quantities of data, potentially increasing the inclusivity of peace processes. This Insight paper highlights the experiences and lessons learned from the AI-supported digital dialogues conducted by CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation in Sudan in July 2023. The digital dialogues aimed to assess new priorities and views on representation ahead of the future resumption of an inclusive political process in Sudan.*

Technology has become an ingrained part of our daily lives. As a result, conflicts are increasingly shaped by digital technologies employed in areas such as disinformation and cyberwarfare. With relation to conflict resolution, artificial intelligence (AI) has shown great potential in analysing large amounts of complex data collected from populations experiencing conflict, as well as in broadening the inclusivity of peace processes. Research is underway to explore how AI could serve as an integral part of early warning systems, predicting political unrest and mass atrocities by analysing openly accessible online content.

In Sudan, the eruption of the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on April 15, 2023, stalled efforts to resume a democratic transition. In this new context, the need arose to understand new priorities and the views and perspectives of the population to achieve an inclusive political process. Technology and AI-powered tools proved to be useful in this regard, especially considering the heightened difficulty of accessing various regions in the country following the outbreak of conflict.

As a concept, digital dialogues refers to the use of digital platforms to engage and involve citizens in discussions, decision-making processes, or

consultations on various issues. Digital dialogues offer several advantages, including increased accessibility, scalability, and the ability to reach broad and diverse audiences. They can foster transparency and inclusivity as well as facilitate convenient and flexible participation, which encourages broader civic engagement and feedback gathering. However, it is crucial to ensure accessibility and address digital literacy barriers in these processes.

Examples of digital dialogue processes and AI-supported tools vary widely, from the early adoption of the open-source platform Pol.is in Taiwan, used to facilitate large-scale

conversations and consensus building on governance issues, to the global use of CitizenLab for participatory decision-making and budgeting, and the development of the city of Paris's own open-source platform, Lutece, aimed at improving accessibility to digital services and citizen engagement.

For the dialogues in Sudan, CMI employed Remesh, a software product developed for real-time written dialogue with up to 1,000 participants at a time. The product has previously been used by the United Nations in various peace processes, such as in Yemen and Libya. Remesh features integrated AI-powered analyt-

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- AI has proven to have great potential in analysing large amounts of complex data collected from populations experiencing conflict, as well as in broadening the inclusivity of peace processes.
- Platforms enabling digital dialogues provide virtual spaces for participation, opinion sharing, and idea contribution. They can hence increase the accessibility, transparency, and scalability of dialogue processes.
- Successful digital dialogues require careful planning, active engagement with targeted groups, and proper assessment of potential limitations.

ics functions capable of processing large amounts of textual data. These functions provide insights into both response similarities and semantics. It is also possible to use the platform in various languages including Arabic, which was a necessity in this context. Connectivity proved to be even more challenging than anticipated: despite the low requirement of a 2G network connection, several participants had difficulties connecting to the platform. The consultations nevertheless succeeded in reaching a diverse range of representatives from women's groups and networks, resistance committees and youth, both within and outside Sudan, ensuring geographic diversity.

In July 2023, two digital dialogues were conducted in Sudan, with the first targeting women's groups, networks, and alliances, and the second focusing on youth and Resistance Committees. Both dialogues aimed to gain a better understanding of stakeholder's priorities following the war and perspectives concerning representation in a political process. The sessions were first run synchronously, meaning they were conducted real-time with direct facilitation in Arabic. These were followed by a week-long asynchronous session without facilitation, taking more the form of a survey.

In advance of the digital dialogue, active women's groups and networks were identified and approached to ensure their participation. Most of the participants were from Khartoum, while others joined from North Kordofan, Northern State, North and South Darfur, as well as River Nile State. 72 percent were located outside of Sudan, while 28 percent were still inside the country. 40 percent were over 55 years old, and none were under the age of 25. The general feedback was overwhelmingly positive, particularly for usability and the session's ability to efficiently discuss difficult topics.

One key conclusion was the necessity of forming a broad civilian coal-

ition to launch negotiations for re-establishing a civilian government in Sudan and advancing its democratic transition. Seventy percent of female participants, using a multiple-choice format, endorsed the recommendation for a 40 percent gender quota across all delegations and parties, as well as the establishment of a Gender Commission to review all political process documents for gender-sensitive language and provisions. There was also a clear call for further coordination among women's groups to enforce their joint actions to end the war and resume an inclusive political process, as well as for support related to mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS).

The Resistance Committees (RCs) highlighted their current priority of restoring essential services and civilian life in Sudan, while creating platforms for political engagement for local communities across the country. They also emphasised the need for international support to the Emergency Rooms, both for delivering aid and serving as a monitoring mechanism for a possible ceasefire agreement. Some mentioned that RCs could be directly represented in a political process, through state-level nominations based on clear selection criteria. The findings from the digital

dialogues were shared with the participants through the same channels as the invitations, in a feedback loop aimed at ensuring that the participants were aware of the findings and the outcomes. The findings directly informed CMI's efforts and were also shared broadly among key international actors.

Overall, the digital dialogues in Sudan proved to be a valuable complementary tool at a time when access was difficult. The conclusions directly informed CMI's initiatives in Sudan. They enabled the broad-based identification of a wide range of opinions and allowed participants to connect with each other across geographic divisions. As highlighted, AI-powered digital dialogues can be immensely beneficial where there is access to online networks. For the dialogue to be successful, it is essential to ensure sufficient advance planning and build trust in the tool and the convening entity. Connecting the dialogues to the official peace process could improve understanding of the objectives and purpose of the digital dialogue process.

*i) Neighbourhood committees among Sudanese residents that organised civil disobedience campaigns and played a major role during the Sudanese revolution 2018-2019.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Clarify the overall objective of the digital dialogue to build trust and ensure broad participation.
- Ensure sufficient planning and preparations to counter any limitations.
- Select a suitable tool based on objective, limitations, and target audience.
- Combine human and artificial intelligence for deeper analysis and a more comprehensive process.
- Consider linking the efforts to a broader political and peace process for greater impact and overall reach.