Technology tools in human rights

THE ENGINE ROOM

OAK FOUNDATION

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Contents

Introduction

The content of this site was drawn from a series of 16 interviews conducted between February and April 2016, funded by the Oak Foundation, with extra information from interviews as part of another ongoing Engine Room project in partnership with Amnesty International and Benetech. We spoke to people who interact with technology in the human rights sphere in a range of different countries and contexts. They included three main groups: human rights defenders (HRDs); intermediaries who support HRDs to use technology more effectively; and tools developers who create and design technology tools for HRDs. The aim of this piece is to get a better understanding of how human rights defenders are using technology in their documentation work–not to make explicit tools recommendations, but rather to help understand realities and needs as they currently stand.

Throughout this piece, we have referred explicitly to the three target groups when quoting from interviews, as perspectives on technology tools differ considerably between the three. "Intermediaries" is used to refer to people like digital security trainers, those who provide technical support; "tools developers" is used to refer to people whose primary role is building and developing tools for HRDs; and HRDs is used for people whose primary role is grassroots human rights defence and activism.

On the basis of these interviews, technology tools don't appear to be radically changing the way that most human rights documentation work is done – yet. In most cases, HRDs are using the same methods to document and manage evidence: technology tools have simply increased the amount of information available, and offered new means of sharing and managing it. Most interviewees said that technology tools were most likely to make a sustainable improvement to their work when they fitted into existing workflows.

The HRDs we interviewed said that the main factors preventing them from using new digital tools were limited internet connectivity in the areas they worked in, and the fact that many tools are only available in English. Additionally, even when people recognised that a technology tool or database would help their work, they often felt overwhelmed by the task of distinguishing between the range of options available. We also found growing cynicism from people who had invested their limited time and resources in trying a tool, only to find that that people within their organisation were unwilling to use it, or to discover that it didn't perform as well as they had expected.

Interviewees with low levels of technical literacy described not knowing where to turn for advice, while several HRDs received conflicting (and sometimes harmful) advice from technical consultants who did not fully understand the realities of grassroots human rights work. Using digital technology tools also involves understanding and attempting to mitigate complex security threats, but many of which our interviewees from the HRD community were not fully aware of these risks.

For tools developers, there seems to be clear paths for future work, many of which centred upon effective communication rather than necessarily developing new functionalities. There seems to be a growing need for intermediaries to help contextualise the technology needs of HRDs to developers, and vice versa, communicate the limitations and functionalities of the tools, to HRDs. A lack of technical capacity among HRDs was identified by interviewees from all parties, which has multiple side-effects, such as leaving organisations reliant upon external parties for tech support, or unable to quickly troubleshoot their own problems.

Taking a longer term perspective, the most common issues and worries raised were around data storage and management of growing amounts of digital data, and of sustainability, in terms of specific tools, support, and integration into organisations, as outlined below. It was generally agreed that integrating a new tool without ongoing support was setting it up to fail, and that behaviour change in organisations–for example, in integrating and using a new tool–takes a long time.

Definition

Human rights defenders (HRDs) are using technology tools in a variety of ways:

1. **Communication**
to share their findings more broadly, such as through videos, press releases, and to connect online with groups working on similar issues.

2. **Analysis**
to identify patterns that otherwise would have been less visible – such as repeated attacks in certain areas – and presenting this data on maps, charts or interactive online features.

3. **Information management**
to catalogue, store, and manage information about incidents and events related to human rights cases, as well as sharing it with others working on similar issues.

4. **Identifying new incidents**
using digital tools and digital data to discover, verify or corroborate violations– for example, by scanning social media or online video networks, or mobile messaging platforms.

5. **Historical archiving**
to scan paper documents, classify and tag them, make them machine-readable, encrypt them and make backups in case they get lost.

Human rights defenders said that simplicity, familiarity and ease of use were by far the most important criteria when choosing tools. Many used paper forms as their primary form of information capture. Software tools like Word and Excel were mentioned more than any others, while Google Drive and Dropbox were often mentioned as tools for sharing information and managing documents online. Many HRDs knew of the potential security risks associated with using tools like Google Drive (given Google's collaboration with the US government), but chose to use it regardless.

Most interviewees emphasised that many human rights defenders are working in environments where resources are scarce and where experience with technology is limited. In those contexts, HRDs were unaware of more complex, specialist technology tools, or found them difficult or impossible to use.

While the HRDs we spoke to worked throughout the world (from regions including South and South-east Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East), tool developers were generally based in Europe or the US. Many tool developers described putting considerable effort and thought into building tools specifically for HRDs, including user testing and, in some cases, co-creation with partner organisations. However, the HRDs we spoke to (many of whom fitted the profile of the tools' intended users) found it hard to identify a tool that was right for them, and chose the tools that they did use in a relatively ad-hoc manner.

EXAMPLES

A brief overview of some of the most popular tools and platforms mentioned in interviews is outlined below; for more details on their functionalities and specificities, please see "Tools and platforms" on page 9.

Interestingly, there was some overlap between information management and communication tools, and some cases where tools were used for purposes other than the one for which they were designed. For example, an activist collective who supports parents whose children are missing in Mexico, used Gmail to archive information by sharing a common Gmail account.

One HRD we spoke to described her job as "thinking two steps ahead when entering data into the system"–having to think about what people's needs might be in the future, who might come and need this data, and according to that, adjusting the way in which data is put into a database system. Indeed, a running theme through many of the interviews with HRDs was that database software tools are (with a couple of exceptions) not meeting their needs–somewhat counter-intuitively, sometimes because it is too complicated, and sometimes because it is lacking features that they need.

Several intermediaries who work with human rights defenders said that from their experience, HRDs were more interested in understanding new methods, such as how to store and manage video, than in what specific tool options were available. Many mentioned a desire for training on documentation methodologies to also include more information digital technology tools within the training- for example, on ways to use a mobile phone for documentation.

Tools and platforms

CONTEXTUALISE VS ADAPT

Interviewees generally acknowledged that some tools needed to be specifically designed for a particular situation because human rights defenders are operating in such a wide range of different contexts. However, intermediaries and developers disagreed on whether it was more effective to customise existing tools, or develop new tools for a particular purpose. One HRD we spoke to said that tools which came with lots of "bells and whistles" can inspire organisations with ideas, but practically speaking can also "a challenge" to narrow it down to actual needs. Another mentioned that a tool they use, CaseBox, is "constantly changing to satisfy requirements of other users" which leaves them with lots of new features they do not need, and consequently "lowers motivation among employees" to learn how to use it. Others mentioned that building custom tools from scratch, suited to particular situations, was perhaps a better route to go down due to the big contextual differences in the field.

Where tools had been built with a general human rights documentation use case in mind, some HRDs we spoke to noted that in the effort to cater to so many different contextual differences, the tool had become too complicated for use, or became difficult to distinguish from other tools available. For example, one interviewee described Martus as being "too big and too complicated" for use, with another interviewee saying that HRDs they work with "are not sure what the differences are between database software" for documentation purposes.

DIGITAL SECURITY CONCERNS

Less than a third of organisations we spoke with were using tools which were managed or produced by for-profit entities, and the majority of those were not specifically aimed at human rights defenders, for example, Google Drive, or Dropbox. Through desk research, though, we came across one technology tool aimed at human rights organisations and non-profit entities which is built by Palantir, a company that has received major funding from the CIA, which offers database analysis and technology services through their "Philanthropy Engineering" branch.

For human rights defenders working in politically restrictive or sensitive areas, a decision here must be made on whether it is appropriate to share data with companies that have such tight links to the CIA or the US government[1], despite the seemingly attractive (and well-resourced) technology support. If an organisation chooses to work with a company like Palantir, it is reasonable to assume that US Intelligence agencies have access to whatever data is being collected–might that put the people you work (or the people they work with) with at risk, either now or at some point in the future?

1 To learn more about responsible data concerns, please see the Responsible Data Handbook https://responsibledata.io/resources/handbook/

In some contexts, using technology to document human rights violations was identified as a potential risk: Wendy Betts, director of eyeWitness to Atrocities, said: "In some places, even owning a smartphone that can film is problematic." Video was identified as especially problematic within Zimbabwe. One Zimbabwean activist said: "Zimbabwe is a country that has a higher level of paranoia and pointing your phone at a group of people like you're taking video can be seen as an aggressive act".

COMMUNICATION

When developing and choosing the tool, **effective communication** between those building the tool and those using the tool seems to make a huge difference to its success. When people with very high levels of tech capacity but low understandings of the realities of human rights defenders work are brought in to advise on their tech use, interviewees who worked with HRDs cited occasions of a "culture clash" between people with very high levels of technical literacy, and activists or HRDs with lower levels.

One interviewee who works between technologists and HRDs mentioned that people coming from hackerspaces who are very dedicated to security tools often recommend switching to open source tools which often less user-friendly than proprietary equivalents. This approach can backfire, as outlined below in the Digital Security section.

To help address this issue, both intermediaries and developers we spoke to emphasised the need to prioritise understanding the issues involved on a human level prior to tech development. Understanding the sensitivity of the issue at hand can seen in everything from the tools implementation, training styles, and the design choices made in the tool itself. For example, Mourad Dhina, Executive Director of Swiss organisation Alkarama, stated that his organisation had changed the language initially used to register a violation in a database from "**create** victim" to the more appropriate "**register** victim".

Pros and Cons

PROS

Opinions varied as to the usefulness of technology tools in facilitating documentation of human rights violations. Interviewees identified many more problems than success stories. Overall, there was consensus that in theory, technology could facilitate documentation work – especially in situations where paper documentation was simply getting overwhelming in quantity, a problem which will only increase with time.

RECOGNISING PATTERNS

Organisations who invested time and effort into setting up well-structured information management systems noted that the ability to pull up cases quickly and efficiently benefited their work. For example, for the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, rather than manually going through 60 case files with lots of documents – which involved requesting copies of case documents from different offices – they anticipate that having the system digitised will make analysing the cases much easier. They hope that being able to see similar cases at a glance will help them to push for law and policy change, supporting their longer-term goal of not just prosecuting individual cases, but identifying and lobbying for a change in laws and policies to address the problem systemically.

PARTNERSHIPS

The most successful examples of technology tool uptake involved partnerships between organisations from different sectors, such as Umbrella. The way these collaborations were framed were particular in that they weren't explicitly described as "capacity building" partnerships, but rather just as partnerships to make sure that the tools development was anchored within different organisations' needs, and that tools users had opportunities to help shape the development from the very beginning. Though these partnerships started focused on a technology tool or problem, they made collaborating on other issues easier, too.

One HRD we spoke to who works on women's rights, mentioned that using technology to document violations has really strengthened their work because it has enabled organisations within their network to collaborate and pool their resources in a much easier way than previously.

SHARING INFORMATION

Digitising documents is helping human rights defenders share information with other stakeholders, too. In Bangladesh, engaging with digital case management is a relatively recent decision, and Ishita Dutta from the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust says this will make sharing data with researchers easier to do, theoretically allowing for more coordinated advocacy efforts among different stakeholders. In Burma, the data gathered through the National Documentation Network's

Martus database is shared with international advocacy groups and individual researchers so that they can help spread word of the human rights situation in Burma. On the other side, though, one intermediary we spoke to mentioned that HRDs he supports often want to share "subsets" of information with others, and find this difficult to do in terms of technical permissions.

MANAGING LARGE AMOUNTS OF DATA

For organisations who had previously been using paper-based documentation or database systems, having well-structured digital databases enabled them to actually use that information in a much more efficient way. For example, the Alkarama Foundation, based in Geneva, entered data they held about victims and violations in the Arab World into a modified open-source Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, which allowed them to pull out long lists of violations in a particular country, and enabled them to provide better evidence proving that there were serious, repeated issues, and keep track of how the cases were moving forward.

CONS

Despite an initial attraction to technology tools as potential solutions to problems faced by human rights defenders, the outcomes that we heard definitely aren't all rosy: almost of all the intermediaries we spoke to had numerous examples of serious problems that HRDs they worked with had faced due to their choice, or use, of technology tools in their human rights documentation work.

It is also worth noting that the majority of tools mentioned are primarily available in English, with limited functionality in other language scripts, even major world languages like the Arabic script, or Cyrillic. Naturally, this limits their usefulness for those who do not work primarily in the Latin script.

Overall, there seemed to be a growing cynicism around tools, especially by people who had tried using a certain tool and found it to be unsuitable, and by those who were working in very different contexts to the one in which the tool was developed. Reconciling those very different realities will be crucial to providing useful tools in the future. Below is a non-exhaustive selection of the most commonly mentioned problems.

DIGITAL SECURITY

Valeria Umaña, who works with groups in Nicaragua, said that for the people she works with, "the more technology they have, the more danger they can be in". She gave the example of one member of their community wanting to share a video documenting a violation, who had heard that he could send the video through Facebook; but instead of sending it to the intended recipient, he found another page with a similar name, and sent it to them instead by mistake.

We also heard that conflicting or confusing advice between those who are deep into the digital security world, and perhaps removed from the realities of human rights defenders work, has sometimes put people and their information in danger. For instance, one interviewee highlighted a case of an NGO they work with who was encouraged to change to a free software operating system, which then wasn't interoperable with their printer–so in order to print documents they started to put documents on USB sticks and print them out at local internet cafes. Before too long, they realised that the USB sticks had been misplaced, which resulted in a worse security breach than was initially anticipated.

Being realistic about the overall security situation of the people using the tools is key to coming up with an actionable plan for dealing with threats and risk, and this requires a solid knowledge of context in addition to understanding of digital security.

DATA STORAGE

Storing data can be expensive, especially in the case of high-resolution images, or video, as Friedhelm Weinberg of HURIDOCS identified: storing lots of data, cataloguing it and making it searchable over a long (perhaps indefinite) period of time, is an ongoing problem. Though a number of tech tools make it easier for video to be captured or found, a few interviewees identified that the issue of storage was still a growing problem for them, both in terms of prohibitively high costs, but also a technical solution that can be easily accessible by anyone within the organisation–and ideally, with offline access, too.

One human rights defender we spoke to also mentioned that many of the photos she receives are large in size: 4 to 9MB per photo. To store and work with them, she or members of her team, have to compress the photos and compile them into one document, which can be a time-consuming process.

Keeping track of where external data storage sources are kept was also mentioned as a problem. Multiple people mentioned that they kept encrypted backups of sensitive data on external hard drives in places outside of their office, for security reasons. Though having multiple copies seems like a good idea, knowing at any one time where all of those copies are is important–in particular as it was mentioned that sometimes those copies can go astray, especially as the number of external data sources increases.

UPTAKE

Multiple intermediaries and HRDs highlighted the challenges associated with getting a new tool to be used; as Kody Leonard of The ISC Project mentioned, "people like to stick with what they know". Without clear incentives for engaging with a new tool, people identified that it can be difficult to get a new tool to be used. Mourad Dhina admitted that a "good amount of lobbying had to be done internally" to convince people within the organisation that they needed better tools, and Janvier Hakizimana mentioned that it can often be hard to get buy-in from management to spend time and resources on getting used to a new tool. One strategy for combatting this, cited by Indira Cornelio was focusing reasoning for the new tool to be protecting the safety of the people they are trying to help, rather than defenders' own safety.

Planning

One of the hardest parts of planning was for organisations to properly assess and understand their own needs – as identified already, there are a huge number of tools out there, and interviewees mentioned that the choice can be overwhelming.

FINDING INFORMATION

WHERE TO START

Knowing where to start when an organisation or an individual has decided they need a technology tool to perform a certain function for them, was raised multiple times as the very first barrier. For those who don't speak English, this becomes even harder, as very little documentation or description is available in, for example, Arabic. Key issues that were raised along these lines here centred around not knowing who to ask, or what standards are already in place; for example, what categories to use when digitising information, or building a database of violations.

Others mentioned using Google searches to find out what has already been done in the field they were looking into; but in some cases, this has proven to be unreliable, with people often unsure how up to date or reliable the information was. In some cases, documentation stops getting updated but without any visual 'flags' to the untrained eye. Others identified that talking to some technology providers yielded biased information.

Mike Romig, who supports human rights organisations working in Egypt, said: "when you speak to one provider, they will generally recommend that you use their solution, and not necessarily what the organisation needs."

CHOOSING A TOOL

Though this isn't specific to human rights defenders, choosing tools seems to happen in a relatively ad hoc way[2]. Indira Cornelio, from Mexico, said that sometimes a tool will get adopted simply because a director hears about it and pushes for it within the organisation, rather than because it is necessarily the best-suited tool, and others mentioned a tendency within organisations or communities to use the most popular tool rather than the most appropriate one.

For newcomers to the field, there seem to be few visible differences between tools with similar aims; for example, Martus was compared to OpenEvsys and Casebox, with non-expert interviewees unable to distinguish what differentiated the various tools. Some organisations are also looking outside of tools labelled explicitly as being "for" human rights purposes, to find tools that they can repurpose for their needs, such as IMB's I2 or Sentinel Visualizer.

2 See the Engine Room's Tools Selection research, published in 2016.

SUSTAINABILITY

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

A problem that a number of interviewees identified was ongoing support for the application or tool that they chose. For example, for one land rights organisation who invested a lot in using a tool to help them document land rights violations, finding out that the tool is now going unsupported due to a lack of funds essentially means that they've wasted time and resources. Another interviewee told us about a three day training which took place in April 2016, organised by the UN Office of High Commission of Human Rights (OHCHR) in Uganda on the database which was developed for Ugandan Human Rights organisations. During the training, participants realised there were some technical hitches in the database. But instead of addressing these, OHCHR told them that there was no plan for continuity or updating the software as user needs and technologies evolve, thus seriously undermining the long-term usability of the database.

Planning for ongoing support seems to pay off, too: Ludmila Polshikova, who works with the Russian Justice Initiative, mentioned that having an ongoing support contract with HURIDOCS has been very valuable, and means that whenever they have a problem with CaseBox, they can contact HURIDOCS directly for support.

Implementation

Once a tool has been identified, a number of more human and technical concerns come into play. In many ways, finding the right tool is just the very beginning of the work that needs to be put in in order to ensure successful uptake.

PEOPLE

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

For human rights defenders who are engaging with a new tool, managing their expectations was identified as an area of particular concern. Groups who decide to develop their own tool often underestimate the timescale – for example, Rick Bahague from the Computer Professionals' Union (CPU) based in the Philippines recalled a case when in 2004 CPU was approached by a human rights organisation to help them create a system for their fact sheet. Developing that tool took nearly three years.

Relatedly, knowing what the data that is collected through the tool can (and can't) be used for is important; for example, SafeCity, a crowdsourced data initiative from India, are aware that the data that they collect can't be used in legal cases because of the fact it is crowdsourced. Patrick Ball identified the importance of knowing what your data can be used for in terms of drawing conclusions or statistical analyses, and when that data is unsuitable for the kind of analyses that would be more useful.

PRIORITIES

Many tools developers we spoke to recognised a lack of uptake in their tools among human rights defenders, with some realising that this was a clash of priorities. For example, though Patrick Ball spent a long time trying to encourage uptake of Martus, he realised that ultimately many of his efforts were unsuccessful because at the time, "people wanted to get their data together, rather than it necessarily being secure."

When it came to using tools, priorities identified by potential users focused around the usability and accessibility of the tool. Having tools in local languages made a big difference to this, and being able to ask for and receive help in languages other than English helped people to feel comfortable with new tools.

SUSTAINABILITY

TECHNICAL REALITIES

In Zimbabwe, a lack of regular internet access in remote areas means that using tools like Martus, which would ideally synchronise with a main server, is difficult. After piloting Martus, one organisation ended up reverting back to their usual setup of using Excel and then manipulating the data in other software programs. In this case and others, the need to be conscious of connectivity in areas where the tool will be used was highlighted multiple times. In Nicaragua, Valeria Umaña said: "for people in the countryside, the more apps they have, the more problems they can have because

they often don't know how to use them"—so, they try to focus on the minimum technology necessary, rather than training on more complex tools or applications, sometimes relying on non-internet technologies, such as community radio.

Rory Byrne mentioned that the fact that digital technologies might not have worked in the past for human rights organisations can negatively affect their willingness to try a new tool in the future. Strategies like one-off trainings, or tools that are difficult to use, have left people feeling "burned" by the waste of resources and time that was put into them, and Rory identified that among trainers + tools developers he knows, the attitude of one-off trainings was beginning to be challenged in favour of more long-term, sustained support.

HUMAN CAPACITY

Understanding the technical or data skills of the team and members involved can affect how implementation of a tool actually plays out. For example, for the team at the Migrant Forum in Asia, which coordinates an online database that its partners contribute to, their ideal scenario is that eventually their members would enter data directly into their online reporting database themselves; but in reality, not all of them have the time or the necessary technical expertise.

Or, understanding that your community might use new technologies without being wholly aware of the consequences; one interviewee raised the example of people sharing videos on social media in solidarity, without realising that people in the video might not want their image to be so widely shared.

Veronica Vidal highlighted the issue of staff turnover: if a database is built by one person and then they leave without completing good documentation on what they've done, it might then become very difficult to update the structure or add new features without a lot of time investment. One intermediary we spoke to who works in the MENA region, mentioned that many of the human rights organisations that he works with "do not have a local ICT champion who can orchestrate their systems and processes and be at the same time well-versed with the field".

ONGOING TRAININGS

Many of the people we spoke to were involved in some way in training human rights defenders to use technology tools. In some of these cases, this training included work-arounds to ensure the safety of people involved: for example, in Nicaragua, they actively train people on taking photos of situations without even including the faces of people involved to avoid any unwanted or accidental information disclosure.

People who had experienced cases of "one-off" trainings unanimously said that they were an unsuccessful way to ensure uptake and use of technology tools, and many had anecdotes of organisations who had received a training on a tool, then realised just after that they still needed assistance, but didn't know where to turn once the trainer had left. Moving away from that strategy, Rick Bahague mentioned that they stay in constant contact with people using the tool after any trainings, and maintained open communication channels in case anything is needed.

UPDATES

Providing updates to technology tools—specifically, mobile applications and software — can be a double-edged sword. On one side, they're necessary to respond to security changes, and to provide new features as per request. But on the other, pushing out updates to users with low bandwidth can be problematic; so, staggering the updates and/or making them as small in size as possible is preferable.

LONG-TERM CONTROL

Though a tool might initially seem to suit all of the identified needs, it's worth thinking about long-term control over the platform, or the data that is made available through it; especially when it comes to commercial social network platforms. For example, as Natasha Msonza highlighted: using Whatsapp as a communication tool to share incidences of violations works well, but doesn't allow any measure of control. Anybody in the group can see other people's numbers, and can add a user groups without consent—and there's no way to delete messages from someone else's phone. In the case of sensitive information shared in Zimbabwe, this lack of control has had serious consequences for human rights defenders.

Similarly, those who use commercial tools or social media platforms to gather information on violations from their network, like the Bangladesh Centre for Human Rights, are largely reliant on Facebook's Newsfeed algorithms showing them relevant information from their community.

Changes in those algorithms could have huge effects on the spread of information around human rights violations, and not only is there basically no way of knowing if and how those changes are happening, but the human rights community has effectively zero control in reversing them.

With this in mind, the many cases that were mentioned of organisations using proprietary tools becomes ever more worrying. Though there may well be usable open source alternatives, the fact remains that many proprietary tools are often more well-known, or have higher levels of usability, and as a result, more and more organisations are becoming reliant upon them.

Conclusion

This study is intended as a scoping study rather than to provide concrete recommendations. That said, several common threads came up throughout our interviews and desk research:

FOR TOOLS DEVELOPERS

Communicate clearly about your tool
A range of different database and information management tools are aimed at HRDs. However, few people we spoke to could identify the major differences between them (unless they had explicitly worked on one of the tools themselves).

Work with partner organisations from the beginning
though "co-creation" is becoming somewhat of a buzzword in these spaces, the principle behind it remains. Find and work with groups who are the "target user" for the tool, and value their contribution not just as an opportunity for feedback, but as equal partners on the tool.

Reality check your assumptions often
this might be through contributions from others (see 'work with partner organisations', above), but could also happen by testing out iterations with target users, or by sending developers working on the tool to see the reality of the tool being used.

Be humble and collaborative
sometimes the tool you work on might not suit the needs of the people you are speaking to. Rather than trying to adapt your tool and convince them that they can use it, be prepared to recommend tools from "competitors"–and try to see it as contributing to the greater field.

FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS:

Stay critical, and be responsible
the opportunities granted by digital technology tools are great, but so are the risks. Try to keep aware of those risks–join communities like the Responsible Data Forum[3] to keep up to date with current responsible data news and trends, and think about the holistic security impact[4] of using certain tools.

Get second opinions
before committing to a certain tool, or to working with a certain set of developers–try to speak to others with expert knowledge of the field. The investment in time beforehand is worth it, if only to be sure that you're making the right decision.

Be realistic
no technology tool is going to "solve" social issues or problems, and getting people to change their behaviour is difficult. Be clear on why you're using a certain tool, and what the incentives are for the people around you.

Think long term
though a certain tool might seem like the easiest option now, what about in 2 years or 5 years time? What will you want to do with the data, and who owns it? Ask up front about the sustainability issues raised above.

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3 http://lists.theengineroom.org/lists/info/responsible_data

4 See Tactical Technology Collective's work on holistic security: https://tacticaltech.org/holistic-security

Notes

THE ENGINE ROOM

The Engine Room is an international organisation that helps activists, advocates and social change initiatives increase their impact by making the most of data and technology.


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