

Task 'Collaborative Learning Discussion 1' Unit 1

'Initial Post'

How could the use of data and technology introduce or aggravate risks to fairness and accountability within human rights investigations, as suggested by Hancock et al. (2024)?

The author claims that data and digital technologies hold much potential to improve transparency and efficiency in human rights investigations, especially in remote locations where it is difficult to witness human rights laws violations, for instance at sea. At the same time these can also introduce or deepen risks to fairness and accountability. One concern is bias. Such bias can originate from unethical or unverified dataset sources which can lead to discriminatory outcomes. For instance, algorithmic monitoring systems might disproportionately misidentify activities in certain regions and communities due to decisions in regards of priorities and unequal data representation, resulting in unfair oversight or targeting of vulnerable groups. In addition, such algorithms commonly lack transparency about the origin of the data, and these can obscure accountability. This makes it difficult to verify evidence or challenge automated conclusions. This is especially true in sensitive human rights contexts.

(Hancock 2024)

What specific risks arise when technological solutions are developed without direct input from the communities they aim to protect, and how can these risks be mitigated in the design phase?

Another concern raised by the author is when technological solutions are developed with focus on development of solutions that prioritize technology cannot provide good accountability and transparency, particularly when datasets are collected without direct input and consent from affected communities what can lead to contextual misconception, which occurs when technology fails to account for local social, cultural, or political nuances, as well as techno-colonialism, which occurs when externally imposed technological rules that prioritize outside assumptions or objectives over local needs and rights. This exclusion has the potential to marginalize vulnerable populations further and erode trust in human rights mechanisms. To mitigate such risks, such practices should be embedded early in the development process. Engaging local communities, activists and human rights defenders would ensure that technologies align with lived realities and ethical priorities. Furthermore, implementing transparent mechanisms to reduce bias, misinterpretation and improve accountability such as working directly with communities, can help maintain fairness and legitimacy. In essence, technology for human rights must be co-created with the communities it seeks to serve.

(Ugarte, Khan, 2023)

References

Hancock, J., Lee, S. and Martín, P. (2024) 'Trouble at Sea: Data and digital technology challenges for maritime human rights concerns', *Proceedings of the 2024 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*, pp. 988–1001. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3630106.3658950> [Accessed 28 October 2025].

Ugarte, R, and Khan, H,. (2023) Police Surveillance in Los Angeles: *A Conversation with Hamid Khan. Just Tech. Social Science Research Council*. Available at: DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.35650/JT.3058.d.2023>. [Accessed 28 October 2025].

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