

# **Disability + children: new challenges to human rights & digital policy**

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*Children and Young People's Rights in the Digital Age*

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THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2013

# Children with Disabilities



# introduction

- Children with disabilities, especially those from global north, often figure into public discourse as beneficiaries of the “digital revolution” (robots, 3D printers, wearable tech).
- ~93-150 million disabled children globally, nearly 80 percent live in the global south
- If children’s voices and experiences are minimally considered in policy and rights debates in the digital age, even less attention paid when it comes to children with disabilities and their use of media for cultural citizenship.
- *Children* and *individuals with disabilities* as overlapping categories in terms of rights in the digital age
- Their rights conceptualized in both UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) and UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006)
- This presentation looks at the global rights of children with disabilities in the digital age, and the stakes of maintaining the status quo.

# Lego arm for disabled kids wins digital innovation prize

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🕒 Last Updated On 11 February,2016 About 5 months ago



The winner was chosen from entries from around the world.



# Logging on for a digital revolution – but can web reboot Africa?

Pressure grows on basic infrastructure as smartphone use and web penetration soar

Mark Rice-Oxley Kigali  
Zoe Flood Nairobi

You can conduct an eye test on someone 100 miles away, and attend a church service on your iPad; there are apps for investing in cows and for mapping unrest. And soon you'll be able to deliver blood and medicines by drone.

Such are the giddy promises of Africa's "fourth industrial revolution", which is likely to see more than 700m smartphone connections in Africa by 2020 – more than twice the projected number in North America and not far from the total in Europe, according to GSMA, an association of mobile phone operators. In Nigeria alone, 95 smart-phones are sold every minute, while mobile data traffic across Africa is set to increase 15-fold by 2020.

Twenty per cent of the continent already has access to a mobile broadband connection, a figure predicted to triple in the next five years, with the mobile industry expected to account for about 8% of GDP by 2020 – twice what it will be in the rest of the world. And internet penetration is rising faster than anywhere else as costs of data and

of people in sub-Saharan Africa have access to grid electricity, for example.

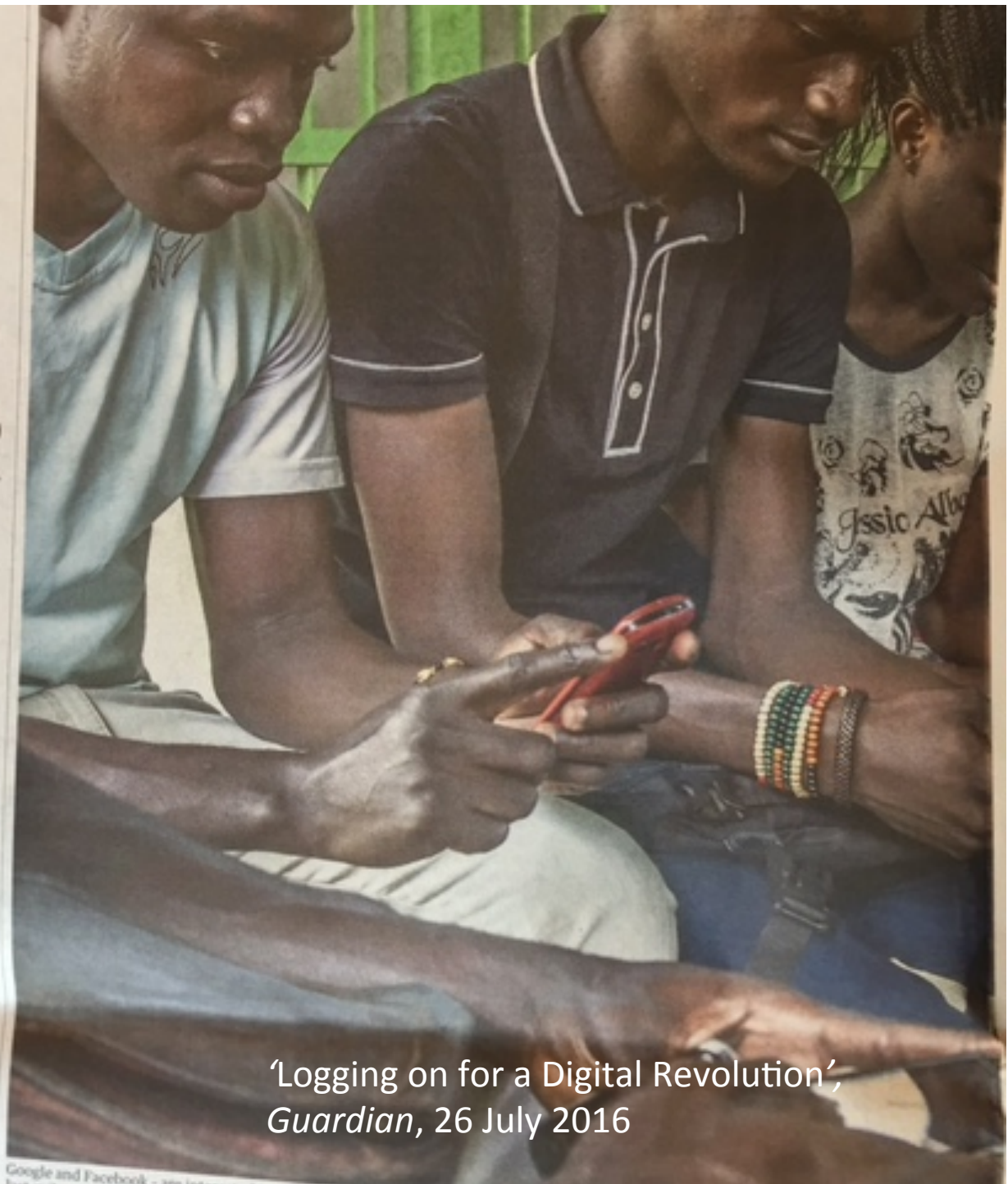
"If you can't have electricity, you can't drive any industrial development," said Akinwumi Adesina, president of the African Development Bank. "Electricity drives everything, so until we fix that problem, Africa faces huge challenges." The bank is trying to leverage \$150bn (£114bn) over the next 10 years to connect another 130 million people.

Africa's great leap forward began at the turn of the decade when half a dozen deep-sea cables were draped along the continent's eastern and western seaboard.

"For 40 years, Africa had wanted to link to the rest of the world," said Dr Bitange Ndiritu, former permanent secretary for information and communication in Kenya. "It kept on failing

**'We need to get our homegrown investors to understand what is right under our noses'**

until 2009, when we first got the under-sea cables, which lowered the cost of broadband."



'Logging on for a Digital Revolution',  
Guardian, 26 July 2016





Source: <http://allchildrenreading.org/>

# talk outline

- Theoretical underpinnings in how we understand children with disabilities. In what ways do *normative frameworks* and assumptions about ability shape legal and policy agendas on children's rights regarding the Internet, mobile media, and associated technologies?
- State of *digital inclusion and exclusion* when it comes to children with various disabilities, particularly in the global south. What are the actual prospects for disabled children to use emerging media to their advantage?
- Intersection between *children's rights* and *disability rights*, in the CRC and CRPD, and their relevance to rights in the digital age
- Elements of a *global agenda* for the rights of children living with disability in the digital age

# normative framework

- No universality to three areas:
  - “Average” child (Childhood)
  - “Normal” person (Disability)
  - “Ordinary” uses of new technologies (Digital Technology)



# Normative frameworks: childhood

- Childhood a repository for attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies of disability
- For example, children's growth often conceptualized in Piagetian stages of development, whereby children with disabilities, as "atypically developing," do not necessarily follow the same linear trajectories as those who are "typically developing"
- Dominant developmental frameworks potentially limiting, infantilizing, and patronizing towards children with disabilities as they become older

# Normative Frameworks: Disability

- In CRPD, children with disabilities defined as those up to the age of 18 who have “long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”
- Children with disabilities disempowered not by the biological fact of their disability (medical model of disability), but by interactions between their daily existence and a world largely hostile and inaccessible to them

# Normative Frameworks: Digital Technology

- Disability has potential to reorient normative emphases in children's rights discourse to be more child-centric for all, not just those with disabilities
- Rethinking taken-for-granted concepts of normalcy and ability which govern discussions of:
  - Balancing risk and opportunity online (i.e., the “competent and responsible ‘user’”)
  - Opportunities to develop resiliency (i.e. grit, failure)



# Key insight

- Beliefs and conceptions vary globally about childhood, disability, and digital media
- Significant obstacle to broad implementation of policy and legal frameworks

# Digital Inclusion and Exclusion

- Requires taking a genuinely global perspective; disability supported colonialism (i.e., extreme poverty, violence, labor conditions)
- Global media policy has sought to resolve inequalities and injustices related to communication, but no evidence base on digital inclusion and exclusion among children with disabilities
- Key areas: Social practices and mobility

# Children's Rights & Disability Rights

- Building on the work of Sonia Livingstone and Brian O'Neill (2014) who structure their analysis of children's rights online around the "three Ps of protection, provision, and participation," we identify four key overlaps between the CRC and CPRC with particular relevance to the digital rights of children with disabilities: mediated sexual health; online safety, security, and privacy; education and technology; and decision making in digital rights policy.



## Comparison of CRC and CRPD - digital age rights for Children with Disabilities

(Adapted from Livingstone and Bulger, 2014; see also Livingstone and O'Neill, 2014)

Theme	Articles of the CRC	Articles of the CRPD	Relevance to Digital Rights of Children with Disabilities
Protection	Protection against all forms of abuse and neglect (Article 19, CRC), including sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Article 34, CRC), and other forms of exploitation prejudicial to child's welfare (Article 36, CRC).	Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse within and outside the home (Article 16, CRPD); Right to age-appropriate reproductive and family planning education (Article 23, CRPD).	Mediated Sexual Health: Efforts to prevent online sexual abuse and exploitation of disabled youth, and to provide accessible digital media on sex and sexuality.
	Protection from material injury to well-being (Article 17e, CRC), including interference or attacks on privacy and reputation (Article 16, CRC) and right to identity preservation (Article 8, CRC).	Protection of the privacy of people with disabilities on an equal basis with others (Article 22, CRPD).	Online Safety, Security, and Privacy: Efforts to prevent, manage, and raise awareness of reputational risks, privacy intrusions, cyberbullying, pornography, and personal data misuse of disabled youth.

# **Protection: Mediated Sexual Health**

- Efforts to prevent online sexual abuse and exploitation of disabled youth, and to provide accessible digital media on sex and sexuality.
- Relevant Articles: CRC (19, 34, 36), CRDP (16, 23)

# Silent Tears

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## Silent Tears

'Without stories ,  
there is silence.

Without stories told,  
we are voiceless.

Without our stories heard,  
we are invisible.

It is even harder,  
when the stories are  
hard to hear  
and impossible to imagine.'

- Belinda Mason



# **Protection: Online Safety, Security, and Privacy**

- Efforts to prevent, manage, and raise awareness of reputational risks, privacy intrusions, cyberbullying, pornography, and personal data misuse of disabled youth.
- Relevant Articles: CRC (8, 16, 17e), CRDP (22)

# **Provision: Education and Technology**

- Efforts to provide educational technology, online information and creative resources, and to promote digital skills among disabled youth in an equitable way.
- Relevant Articles: CRC (28, 29, 31), CRDP (24, 30)



Students learning mathematics use Braille in West Bengal, India. © UNICEF/IND

Source: UNICEF, THE STATE OF  
THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2013:  
Children with Disabilities

## PERSPECTIVE

# End the 'book famine' with better technology, attitudes and copyright law

By Kartik Sawhney



*Kartik Sawhney is a national-award-winning high school student in New Delhi, India. He is active in advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities and is a member of the Leonard Cheshire Disability Young Voices network.*

Visually impaired people face what at least one writer has called a 'book famine'. This is not news to us: The visually challenged and print-impaired have been struggling for accessibility for a long time. 'Accessibility' is an all-encompassing term that includes access to the physical environment, transportation, information and communication technology, education and other facilities. In my view, it is crucial that accessible material be readily available. The urgency is even greater when we consider the situation in developing nations.

When I conducted an informal survey of nearly 60 visually challenged students in primary and secondary grades in

sible is monumental. Thanks to advances in optical character recognition (OCR) – a technology that converts printed, handwritten or typewritten text into machine-encoded text, making it possible for computerized voices to read the text aloud – there has been some improvement. However, technical content remains inaccessible. I spend around two hours a day typing out the printed material from my science and math classes, for example, because OCR software cannot read diagrams and special symbols with sufficient accuracy. The plight of rural students is even worse: They depend on humans to read volumes of information aloud to them. For instance, my friends in a small village have no option but to

# **Participation: Decision Making in Digital Rights Policy**

- Efforts to include all disabled children in diverse societal processes in a manner that meets their requirements for such participation.
- Relevant Articles: CRC (3, 12), CRDP (Clause o., Preamble)

# Key insight

- Disability rights have much to add to discussions and activation of children's rights, and vice-versa



# Agenda for Rights of Children w. Disability

- **Baseline data and research inclusion**
  - Greater need for **baseline data** on the digital media uses and practices of children with disabilities, and **inclusion in studies** on digital media use among children.
- **In/accessibility**
  - Acknowledgement that digital media can make life easier, more pleasurable, and more accessible, but can also introduce new **inaccessible** spaces for children with disabilities.
- **Norms**
  - Potential risks that a focus on rights in the digital domain reinforces the able-bodied child as the **norm**, and the importance of creating spaces and opportunities where children with disabilities can be heard.
- **Agency**
  - Need to balance rights to protection with rights of children with disabilities to exercise appropriate levels of **agency, autonomy, and control**.

# Agenda for Rights of Children w. Disability

- **Methods**

- Ensuring that **research methods** (such as online surveys and face-to-face interviews) are designed for accessibility and participation, allow for multiple communication methods.

- **Policy and design partners**

- Guarantees that consultation, governance, and participation in **policy and design** are “friendly” to children with disabilities, and adopts best practice from both children’s media policy and from the disability field.

- **Public programs**

- Expand **public programs** addressing the digital and social rights of children with disabilities (including digital citizenship and information literacy initiatives), and promote their systematic evaluation and discussion of effectiveness.

# conclusion

- children with disabilities have found it difficult to realize their rights in the digital age, as have their societies
- growing sense of the need to balance real issues of vulnerability, support, and safety against the long overdue rights of children that might flourish with digital cultures and technologies - greatly contested, but needs to be extended to include children with disabilities
- Children rights efforts should be grounded in the social worlds of people with disabilities, allies, communities, and publics

## **Further reading**

Meryl Alper and Gerard Goggin. 'Digital Technology, Rights, and Freedoms in the Lives of Children with Disabilities', forthcoming