



Society for International Development
Washington Chapter

FY 2021

ANNUAL REPORT

Digital Development Workgroup

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Digital Development Workgroup

The SID-Washington (SID-W) Digital Development Workgroup (formerly the Information, Communications, & Technologies for Development Workgroup) is a group of individuals actively engaged in what is new and exciting in technology in development. With events ranging from the best data for policy impact to mobile innovations, this Workgroup aims to inform and educate on any and all digital development issues that relate to conveying and presenting information.

Dear Members of the Digital Development Development Workgroup,

We are happy to report that we had another productive year, with programming that was entirely virtual! As we reflect on the past year, the Workgroup produced several great events, such as **Race, Diversity, & Technology in International Development** and **How Do You Collect Data and Why?: A Follow-up Dialogue for USAID's Digital Strategy**. We are currently working on a new and exciting slate of events for FY 2022, so stayed tuned for more information!

We would like to thank outgoing Co-Chairs **Chris Light** and **Bobby Jefferson**, who put on many fantastic events during their tenure. We wish them well in their future endeavors! We would also like to welcome new Co-Chair **Aasit Nanavati** and **Inta Plostins** who join us this year.

After 5 years with our team, **Paul Sherman**, our Director of Programs, will be stepping down from his role to pursue graduate studies. Paul is still involved with SID-Washington as a Consultant. Thank you, Paul, for your effort and commitment to the Workgroups and their programming!

Stepping into Paul's role, we would like to welcome **Malavika Randive** as our new Program Coordinator. Malavika will be working closely with our Co-Chairs in planning events for the Workgroup.

Thank you for your continued interest and support of the Workgroups. We hope to see you at future SID-Washington events! If you have any questions or suggestions, please feel free to send an email to events@sidw.org.

Best regards,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katherine Raphaelson".

Katherine Raphaelson



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Malavika Randive".

Malavika Randive



**Bobby
Jefferson**

Vice President,
Chief Technology Officer,
Global Health,
DAI

Bobby is a leader in information and communications technology for development (ICT4D) has a relentless entrepreneurial passion for using ICT4D solutions and technology innovations to address the health needs of the poor and most vulnerable in LMIC and rural areas. Bobby serves as Board Advisor for health technology startups THINKMD, ClickMedix, CodePartners, DataElevates, Covelocity.Health, and MobileODT. He performs technology reviews of early-stage companies, startup innovations, and early-stage social ventures to apply digital health solutions to address key issues in international development. He has performed technology due diligence of pre-revenue startups, early-round innovators, niche digital solutions in collaboration with incubators and accelerators in Maryland, Massachusetts, and North Carolina. He uses private-sector digital health, interoperability, and cybersecurity solutions to support international development projects for the U.S. Agency for International Development and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



**Chris
Light**

Chief Technology Officer,
Senior Vice President,
Ogimaa Inc.

Chris Light is a seasoned C-level Executive, Technologist, Program Manager, and Entrepreneur with 25 years experience featuring an emphasis on ICT for Development. He has a global reach and global result set. He handles a multi-agency Federal portfolio and specializes in the 3Ds (Defense, Development, and Diplomacy) and Foreign Affairs. He has undertaken ICT activities worldwide, in support of all USAID Bureaus, in a variety of thematic areas, including multi-donor. His work has been previously recognized by the White House Communications Agency, the Department of State, and the USAID Administrator. Chris Light has a Master's Degree from Boston University and has a double Major/double Degree from the University of Maryland.

Thursday, July 30, 2020
11:00 AM - 12:30 PM ET | Online via Zoom

Race, Diversity, & Technology in International Development

Wednesday, September 30, 2020
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM ET | Online via Zoom

How Do You Collect Data and Why?:
A Follow-up Dialogue for USAID's Digital Strategy



Race, Diversity, & Technology in International Development

Moderator: **Bobby Jefferson**, VP, Chief Technology Officer, Global Health, DAI

Speakers: **Lyndon F. Bowen Jr.**, Student, North Carolina Central University
Carolyn Florey, Technology for Development Lead, International Rice Research Institute
Darlene Irby, Director of Digital Health and Health Information, Jhpiego
Jeff Street, President, VIA Consulting Group

Event Description: This event, presented by the ICT for Development Workgroup and the Young Professionals in Development Network (YPN), addressed key international development issues facing the community, including the importance of supporting and achieving racial equity and inclusive development in technology. We explored how various policies have affected race and technology both from the perspective of the inequity in leadership positions within technology fields and how the development sector struggles to attract a pipeline of racially diverse talent. The session focused on listening to voices from the participants to explore the questions and topics below:

- Can we create digital technology that promotes racial equity and the public good?
- Is the current thinking on racial equity and diversity in the international development technology community sufficient or is more needed?
- Knowing that the future development professional will be in the tech sector according to Devex, how can we use technology as a driver of racial equity and justice?
- How the development sector can do more to amplify the growing technology movements in lower-income countries spearheaded by young people of color.
- How communities of color can be more represented in technology and international development.
- Bias in artificial intelligence, facial recognition, and predictive analytics. The historical impact of patent registrations on black inventors.

The discussion aimed to propose solutions, actions, and policies that can positively impact race and diversity in technology for international development (ICT4D) field. This session was a conversation for international development professionals to discuss race and diversity in the tech industry.

Key Takeaways

1) Who is at the table?

The panelists discussed inclusion and representation of people of color, especially Black people, in high-level positions in tech and international development. **Darlene Irby** (Jhpiego) shared her experience as an African American woman in technology and in economics. Frequently the only woman of color in the room, she has faced others' biased assumptions about her experience and leadership capabilities. She noted that people are often more comfortable talking about gender in technology, while race can pose a more uncomfortable conversation.

Throughout the event, **Chizi Igwe** (Dalberg Advisors) and **Jami-la White** (Mercy Corps) highlighted statistics demonstrating the lack of internal diversity in development organizations. For example, out of the 10 African-based

startups that received the highest amount of venture capital in Africa this past year, only two were led by Black Africans. Ms. White emphasized that we cannot do the external work of equity and justice if our organizations do not reflect that same mission.

Both Ms. Irby and **Jeff Street** (VIA Consulting Group) shared their experiences of working in Africa and facing bias as Black Americans. When engaging with colleagues and in-country teams, they found that development partners were more inclined to have their white counterparts lead discussions because they were perceived as more powerful. Thus, the racial inequities shaped on US soil have ramifications in development work all over the world.

All speakers touched on including women and people of color on panels and at conferences as a way to increase diversity and amplify voices from marginalized groups. Carolyn Florey (International Rice Research Institute) noted an "increased sensitization" to the issue.

Often the first question she asks when approached about an event is if there are other women or people of color on the panel. White people and men can leverage their privilege by insisting on diverse representation and advocating for their peers. Ms. White also discussed leveraging your network as a step towards equity and justice in this sector instead of taking certain consulting jobs, for example, US-based organizations can recommend firms in Africa that may be underfunded and better suited for the work.

2) Inclusive Technology

The panelists additionally discussed race and diversity when creating and implementing technology. On the topic of creating technology, Ms. Florey emphasized the importance of including and elevating local experts. Instead of coming up with solutions and helicoptering them in, development experts should co-create with local leaders and consider the historical, social, political, and colonial contexts, as well as the needs of a community. Ms. Irby cited governance within a country as a factor in a project or technology's relative success. Development organizations must be cognizant of in-country leadership and implementation protocols, because failing to do the appropriate research may make employing and scaling a project much more difficult.

Lyndon F. Bowen Jr. (North Carolina Central University) framed the former approach as a white-savior or paternalist mentality, as it is more effective, sustainable, and culturally aware to partner with and empower local decision-makers. Ms. Florey warned against technology that exacerbates existing inequalities. While technology can serve as an equalizer, it may also further marginalize groups that are already at a disadvantage. The shift to virtual events and education, for example, may make access easier for people who would have otherwise faced the barrier of travel; at the same time, inequalities in access to the internet or devices may compound with limited access to other important resources. As Mr. Bowen noted, technology itself is not equally accessible, nor is it a single cure-all. Rather, technology is a tool, and what matters is how it is used.

3) Built-in Biases in Our Systems and Models

Although machine learning, artificial intelligence (AI), and big data may be presented as neutral tools, they can carry the same unconscious racial and gender biases as the people who create them. Mr. Street likened machine learning and AI to raising a child; a machine is neutral when first created, then learns through its environment and the people who nurture it. Bias may come from those who write the code or algorithms, or it may come from the data fed into the AI. Facial recognition software, for example, may not recognize a person of color if it only has white faces in its database. Therefore, biases in technology directly correspond to the level of inclusive data access during the manufacturing stages.

Moderator **Bobby Jefferson** (DAI) posed a question about the Silicon Valley model of investment, and whether young people in development should follow that corporate path. That model of entrepreneurship works for some, as Mr. Street pointed out, but does not always make sense from the perspective of social impact. Shareholder values, focused on profit, do not always align with the development goals of access and inclusion. Mr. Bowen hopes to overcome these system biases by designing new ecosystems, where entrepreneurs have control over their own enterprises, by pairing inclusive technology with social impact theory.

4) Looking Forward

During the closing remarks, the panelists offered optimistic comments and recommendations. Ms. Irby discussed mentoring young people who are interested in the field, especially other women of color, as a way to encourage the growth of the sector. Mr. Bowen and Ms. Florey both emphasized the need to move conversations around race and technology into tangible policy changes. Ultimately, following dialogue, it is crucial to take the necessary action steps to make international development a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable industry, steps which will be spurred by innovators in technology and by young people everywhere.

How Do You Collect Data and Why?: A Follow-up Dialogue for USAID's Digital Strategy

Speakers: **Michael Asiyo**, Global Technology for Development (T4D) Specialist, Save the Children
Krista Baptista, Senior Director, Center for Digital Acceleration (CDA), DAI
Taylor Braun-Dorrell, Digital Technology Program Specialist, USAID Global Development Lab
Kristy Crabtree, Senior Advisor for Information Management & Technology, International Rescue

Event Description: USAID's new Digital Strategy makes clear the Agency's interest in elevating the use of digital data collection methods, with an aim to maximize the potential of development and humanitarian data for better decision-making, program adaptation, and strategic planning. But to move in this direction, we must first take stock of where the sector stands today. Join InterAction and SID-W for a feedback dialogue with USAID and implementing partners, exploring:

1. How prevalent is digital data collection vs. paper?
2. How do organizations and project teams decide when to use paper or digital tools for data collection?
3. Which procedures and systems does your organization have in place to support efficient, ethical, and effective data collection?

Key Takeaways

1) Digital Versus Paper

Taylor Braun-Dorrell (USAID) began the conversation with an introduction to USAID's Digital Strategy, which aims to help the agency improve development and humanitarian assistance outcomes through the responsible use of digital technology. The strategy calls on USAID to be more deliberate in surfacing and addressing the risks of digitization while harnessing the opportunities it presents. She emphasized that a key part of this strategy is the shift to digital spaces by default. Ultimately, USAID's goal is to analyze their collected data for better decision-making, adaptive programming, and strategic planning while protecting data subjects from harm and empowering end users with actionable information. USAID is working to understand the challenges and barriers its partners face, the exceptions that should be made to its strategy, and the support that it should provide to shift to digital.

2) How Data is Collected and Typical Use Cases

Michael Asiyo (Save the Children) discussed the three categories of user with which Save the Children interacts:

- Monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) staff: They use digital platforms to collect data about program activities.

- Partners, including government, civil society organizations, etc.: They use digital platforms to submit data on various activities being implemented in Save the Children.
- Program beneficiaries: Save the Children takes advantage of digital platforms to disseminate and obtain information from their beneficiaries about specific topics affecting their communities or project implementation in the field.

Krista Baptista (DAI) discussed two of the tools that DAI uses to collect data:

- The Frontier Insights tool: A mix of both quantitative and qualitative data collection. It looks at particular groups in a population to get a quick scan of information (i.e. what are the perceptions, what are the opportunities, how are people using digital tools, who do they trust for digital information, etc.) and captures it for data analysis purposes.
- The Collect tool: An open source platform used in a broad spectrum and national level data collection.

Baptista emphasized that a key piece to both tools is that they present an opportunity to funnel information into data analytics platforms effectively.

Kristy Crabtree (International Rescue Committee or IRC) discussed the continuous sustainable stream of data that IRC has across funding projects regardless of the donor. She said that data collection does not stop after a project is over, it keeps going for the life of the project. IRC has this process to act as a memory aid for case workers, facilitate continuity of

of care, follow individual progress, assess quality of care, analyze trends, and more.

3) Data Security and Data Equity

Baptista talked about how DAI data collection tools ensure responsible use and protection of information. In terms of equity, DAI focuses on self-reliance so that communities can access and best use data. In terms of data security, Crabtree discussed that IRC has organization-wide policies, but they also have more specific practical guidance in their different sectors, units, and departments. In terms of data equity, IRC focuses on power dynamics in data and how it can be more objective in presenting or interpreting the information. She said that IRC recognizes the responsibility of what it owes to the people who disclose information to them when collecting data.



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FY 2021 Co-Chairs

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Photo Credit

Screenshots from various SID-W events

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