



TERMS of REFERENCE (TOR)

WACC Position Paper on Digital Justice and Cultural Integrity/ Sovereignty

Summary: In the context of its Communication for All program (CAP), which provides technical and financial support to civil society organizations in DAC-list countries working at the intersection of communication rights and sustainable development, WACC is inviting proposals to assist us in the development of a position paper on the link between digital justice and cultural integrity that WACC can use to better communicate its work at key events like the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) forums, RightsCon, Global Digital Compact (GDC) follow-up, and similar.

WACC would like this position paper to develop a case for the importance of a communication rights approach to digital justice in which local communities, especially those in the South, are central actors in shaping the digital, data, and AI systems that increasingly mediate their lives, including deciding whose languages, knowledge, and cultural forms are encoded into digital systems. The position paper should emphasize that communication rights approaches go beyond creating safeguards against digital harms. Rather, they are enablers of political and cultural agency and allow communities to build and govern their own communication infrastructures, validate their own knowledge, and sustain their communities' cultural integrity in digital and AI-mediated spaces.

Context: Due to information, media, and digital deficits, local communities, especially in the South, have very few avenues to shape the design of the platforms, data systems, and AI models that increasingly govern public life. These deficits include lack of access to and ownership of communication infrastructure, underrepresentation in media and online spaces, the exclusion of local languages and knowledge systems from digital and AI systems, restricted access to accurate information, exclusion from policy decision-making, and the marginalization of local knowledge in the data used to train emerging technologies. This results in a generalized absence of these communities' voices, languages, and ways of knowing from the digital public sphere, at both local and international levels.

From WACC's perspective, digital injustice is reproduced through cultural and epistemic exclusion: the communities who tend to face systemic forms of exclusion, like Indigenous people, the urban poor, and marginalized women, also excluded from designing infrastructures, governing data, and validating the knowledge encoded into digital and AI systems, due to structural inequalities in access, representation, and voice. In this sense, digital justice is not only an issue of unequal access to technology but also of unequal participation in deciding whose cultures, languages, and forms of knowledge are sustained, or erased, as societies digitize.

We understand cultural integrity as the central principle of democratic digitalization. This entails the capacity of communities to remain the authors of their own communication, on their own terms, as they enter digital and AI-mediated environments. It is not a matter of preserving culture for its own sake, but



of communities acting as builders and decision-makers of the systems that increasingly carry their voices and permeate their lives rather than remaining passive recipients of technologies designed elsewhere.

These issues are especially visible where communities are already building their own alternatives, like community internet networks that connect remote areas, indigenous-owned mobile operators, community radio adapting to the AI era, and community data initiatives that keep governance in local hands. Many of these communities bear the costs of digital exclusion while pioneering some of the most advanced models of communication sovereignty anywhere in the world.

WACC is responding to these issues through a specific stream entitled Digital Justice and Cultural Integrity under its Communication for All programme (CAP). The stream equips communities most affected by digital transformation, particularly in the Global South, with the resources to own and govern their communication infrastructures, to have their languages and knowledge represented in emerging technologies, and to participate in the decisions that shape the digital environment. By building their own networks, sustaining their languages online, and pressing for a say in data and AI governance, these communities are creating democratic communication ecosystems in which local and non-dominant voices, languages, and epistemologies have a place. Through collaboration with community media, technical community networks, digital rights organizations, and international civil society coalitions, the stream connects local digital action with global advocacy, aiming to ensure that the digital future is built with historically marginalized communities.

In addition to work supported under its CAP programme, WACC also recently convened a symposium entitled [“Our Common Future: Advocating for Digital Rights and AI Accountability”](#) that brought together digital rights advocates from the ecumenical movement to explore advocacy opportunities around AI and digital justice.

WACC's approach privileges public interest over private profit, promotes dialogue over polarization, and tackles inequality by centering historically marginalized communities in digital and AI conversations. Our work operates at both grassroots and global levels. We believe that digital justice cannot be achieved without communication justice, because without it communities simply cannot influence, shape, or contest the digital, data, and AI systems that increasingly affect their lives.

Our Digital Justice and Cultural Integrity stream focuses on five strategic areas:

- **Supporting community-centred communication infrastructures** – Strengthening community internet networks, indigenous mobile operators, and community data initiatives that keep the ownership and governance of communication and digital ecosystems in local hands.
- **Advancing epistemic and linguistic justice in AI** – Working so that local languages, knowledge systems, and locally generated data are represented in the datasets and models that shape the digital future, in line with the Global Digital Compact's call for AI that fosters diverse cultures and languages.



- **Sustaining cultural and linguistic diversity in media and digital spaces** – Supporting community media (which is increasingly embracing digital tools), to ensure that local culture and languages remain alive despite the homogenizing tendencies of digital technologies, especially AI, as well as to sustain local public spheres in contexts where digital technologies have made public interest media viability a challenge
- **Civil Society Participation in Digital Policy-making Processes** – Enabling local communities to have a voice in digital governance processes at the national, regional, and international level

Proposed Structure:

Topic	Pages
Executive summary	1
Communication, information, and digital issues affecting the cultural integrity of marginalized communities	2
How a communication rights approach advances digital justice and cultural integrity	1
Community-centred communication infrastructures as essential digital public infrastructure	1
Epistemic and linguistic justice: whose knowledge and languages shape data and AI	1
Case Study 1 (profile of a WACC partner working on this issue) one in Latam—maybe the work of Lanceros Digitales and CONFENIAIE in Ecuador, which gets at the issue of Indigenous culture and so on	1
Case Study 2 (profile of a WACC partner working on this issue)- CPU in the Philippines—digital governance	1
Case Study 3 (profile of a WACC partner working on this issue)- one that focuses on local media and is in Africa. Need to think about it some more. Maybe the Ghana project now.	1
Conclusion	1

Approach: The main features of the document are:

- **Target audiences:** organizations involved in digital rights, internet governance, and AI policy that may not have previously considered a cultural integrity approach; potential donors interested in digital and AI issues that may not have previously engaged with cultural integrity perspectives; and communication rights and media development organizations that are not connecting the dots between media issues and the digital and AI transformation.



- The document will bring to life how communication, media, digital, data, and AI issues, policies, and innovations shape the cultural integrity and communication justice of marginalized communities.

Timeline: August 10 – October 31, 2026

Application deadline: August 6, 2026

Budget: 3,500 EUR (including research, consultation with WACC project partners, and drafting/editing of the document)

Payments:

- 50% upon signature of the agreement
- 50% upon receipt of the final version of the document

Language: Straightforward so that it can be readily understood outside UN and advocacy circles and – crucially – be easily translated.

About WACC: WACC (www.waccglobal.org) is an international organization that promotes communication as a basic human right, essential to people's dignity and community. WACC works with all those denied the right to communicate because of status, identity, or gender. It advocates full access to information and communication and promotes open and diverse media. WACC strengthens networks of communicators to advance peace, understanding and justice.

WACC currently has about 200 personal and institutional members, as well as partners in some 60 countries. Its offices are in Toronto and London. It is a registered charity in both Canada and the UK.

About WACC's Communication for All Programme (CAP): Co-funded by Brot für die Welt (Germany), the Communication for All Programme (CAP) constitutes the core programme work of WACC. The CAP's rationale stems from an understanding of communication rights as essential to sustainable development.

The CAP provides eligible selected civil society organizations in DAC-list countries with financial and technical support to address communication and information-related development issues. WACC has historically tended to direct its support towards grassroots-level civil society organizations carrying out high-impact initiatives and whose work is unlikely to receive funding and support from larger donors.

Application Instructions: please send your CV and cover letter outlining your experience and proposed outline for the document to Lorenzo Vargas, WACC Director of International Programmes, at LV@waccglobal.org by August 6, 2026.