RAWABET

استخدام التكنولوجيــا
من أجل مواطنــة فاعلــة

**Technological Bridges
For Citizen Engagement**

USING TECHNOLOGY FOR DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

Good Practices from the RAWABET Initiative

equitas

educate. empower. change.

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Table of Contents

A note of caution!

The present document does not address good practices or tips related to digital security. Here are some resources to learn more about issues related to digital security.

- Security-in-a-Box – Digital-Security Tools &Tactics, jointly developed by Front Line Defenders and Tactical Tech
- The Digital First Aid Kit, a collaborative effort of the Rapid Response Network and CiviCERT
- Digital Protection Programme by Front Line Defenders
- Digital Safety Helpdesk by SMEX
- Digital Security Helpline by Access Now

INTRODUCTION

Recent history has demonstrated that political transformations require more than regime change. They require engaged individuals and groups equipped with tools to organize, participate, contribute, and hold their governments accountable. Given the constraints on the spaces available for public debate, mobilizing the power of technology in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region is a vital strategy for opening new non-partisan representative spaces, sustaining engagement, and reinforcing public sector accountability.

The RAWABET Initiative aimed at empowering women and men, girls and boys, as well as marginalized groups in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. The initiative reinforced the involvement of young women, youth living with disabilities, and other marginalized youth to leverage the power of technology to tackle political, social, and economic issues within their communities. Through a human rights-based approach, RAWABET focused on enhancing participation in participatory decision-making for the realization of economic and social rights, in particular the right to work, right to education, right to health, and the protection of young women affected by early marriage, as these were the top priorities for the youth in each of the countries involved. This tip sheet reflects the practical tips and good practices developed by and with RAWABET participants on the use of technology for democratic participation and human rights.

INTEGRATING A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the equal and undeniable rights of all human beings provide the foundation for freedom, justice, and peace. A human rights-based approach proposes a methodology to obtain equality and dignity for all. It is based on international human rights standards, which aim to achieve respect, protection, promotion, and fulfilment of human rights.

A human rights-based approach is underpinned by five key principles: participation and inclusion; accountability; non-discrimination and equality; empowerment; and link to human rights' norms, standards, and principles. The good practices and tips within this document are organised by the principles of a human rights-based approach. They were gathered through a series of focus groups and individual interviews involving RAWABET participants and the tip sheet was co-written by RAWABET contributors. The tips included do not pretend to be an exhaustive list, but rather a summary of the suggestions derived from the collective experience of youth, women, and persons living with disability who participated in RAWABET.

Participation, Inclusion, and the role of technology

The principle of participation and inclusion asserts that everyone has the right to take part in decision-making processes that affect the enjoyment of their rights. Participation must be **affordable and accessible**. For participation to flourish, information must be provided through **functioning and user-friendly technological means** and in the languages that are understandable to the users.

The use of accessible technologies allows **more people to participate** as one can communicate with others, take a course, or attend a meeting without having to travel. This helps **break barriers** for those who live with disabilities or have constraints because of their family responsibilities or other work or study commitments.

Some technologies allow for livestreaming and recording. This means that people can access the content later at one's own convenience, providing more freedom to choose the best time to connect. The ability to leave comments also allows participation after the event has taken place – comments are recorded, and the organisers can consider them in programming, planning, and collective decision-making.

Tips from Rawabet

❖ **Are you considering connecting with your team or audience online but don't have a big budget?**
Many free and locally available platforms enable holding meetings via the internet. You can try Google Meet, Microsoft teams, SMS, WhatsApp and Zoom to organize your meetings.

❖ **How can you guarantee people can come to your event?**
Make sure you consult everyone before deciding on the time of the meeting, hence ensuring the participation of a wide diversity of people. Consider online survey tools such as Doodle, to find a time that is convenient for everyone.

❖ **How do you reach the people who couldn't participate?**
You can always record the meeting to allow others who could not attend to catch up with what was discussed and agreed. This way, the online session is still useful after the end of the meeting.

❖ **Did you get everyone's permission to record? Do not skip this step!**
Make sure you obtain informed consent from everyone before you start recording as you must respect their privacy and their safety. Before you ask for consent, inform participants that you would like to record the session and let them know why. Make sure to tell them how you plan to use their contributions and where. Will you use any parts for a report or an article for example? This way, you are guaranteeing informed participation throughout the process.

❖ **Would you like to amplify the effect of your online interactions?**
You can reach a larger audience via the use of social media such as Instagram and Facebook. Google Forms is another tool you can use to carry out needs assessments and gather opinions with a wider audience.

Examples from Rawabet:

- Before RAWABET participants could determine the time of their meetings, they made sure to use Facebook Polls. Each member of the group could clearly indicate their times of availability. Everyone had the chance to attend and not miss out on the opportunity to contribute. **Hence, even the logistics of the initiative were conducted democratically.**

- The women who were active within RAWABET were also caring for their families at the same time. For example, the women from the agricultural sector in Tunisia were working during the day and maintaining their homes in the evening. Facebook Live allowed women who could not attend in person to view and contribute to proceedings. Their p**articipation was guaranteed and enhanced thanks to the use of technology.**

Non-discrimination and equality and the role of technology

The non-discrimination and equality principle requires the equal treatment of an individual or group irrespective of any specific characteristic. Thus, the right to equality requires that all persons be treated equally, without discrimination. All individuals are entitled to their rights without discrimination of any kind.

Most technologies support more equitable access and participation for diverse individuals. In this respect, it is important to secure availability to the necessary technology and resources (secure and functioning Internet, connection to the electricity grid, training to develop the necessary know-how to use the technology, etc.).

This principle should not rely on generalized checklists for inclusion. Working closely with marginalised groups enables a better understanding of various forms of discrimination they face and grants a better chance of addressing barriers in a meaningful and respectful way. In many cases, exclusion and discrimination is unintentionally. Therefore, the respect of this principle requires us to carefully study the situation, observe the interactions with each participant and most importantly listen directly to the people concerned. A person impacted by inequality has so much to say about how to promote non-discrimination and equality.

Tips from Rawabet

❖ **Are you sure the content you are creating is accessible to everyone?**
Make sure to consult accessibility guidelines and integrate them for every new piece of content you create. You can ensure that the content is accessible to people with a wide range of abilities. This step is essential for people with disabilities including: blindness and low vision, deafness and hearing loss, learning disabilities, and limited movement, among others. It is also useful for all individuals accessing your web site. For more information about strategies, standards and resources related to digital accessibility, visit: https://www.w3.org/

❖ **Think about what your priorities are in terms of online accessibility!**
If you cannot cover all accessibility guidelines from the first day, try to achieve it gradually. You can start with your target audience. Consult widely and in depth your public and your fellow team members to establish which access modes are most suitable for them. They will indicate the type of consultations you need to hold. Talk to experts in the field and ask them what technologies best suit your needs and what technical setup they require to function properly.

❖ **Do not assume that everyone has access to the technology!**
Before drawing your plan, assess what technology is already in place. Before designing a website, make sure your target audience has decent internet coverage. Before thinking of the user interface, map what kinds of devices are available to the people concerned. Before reflecting on the technology to adopt, double-check that your correspondents

have access to electricity. Cover your plan gradually. Make available the equipment when needed (smartphone, laptop, etc.) and provide the services necessary (internet access, subscriptions, etc.).

❖ **How can you make sure your plan is error proof?**
Always pilot test and the technology and equipment you will be using and have a plan B ready to be implemented. Consider developing a checklist to help you keep track of what needs to be in place and needs testing.

❖ **Are there any extra measures to avoid exclusion?**
Remember that while new technology has so much to offer to increase inclusion and promoted equity, sometimes low-tech strategies, like radio and telephone, are the best ways to support equitable access to information. It is important to consider using more traditional technological platforms and tools in certain contexts so that you don't unintentionally exclude people who do not use more contemporary technological tools.

Examples from Rawabet:

- The use of Moodle, a free and open-source learning management system (LMS), allowed individuals regardless of their background to access knowledge about human rights through learning opportunities such as the asynchronous online course 'Put the World to Rights', an introductory course about human rights. In Jordan, RAWABET members integrated this online course while designing an activity of their initiative in the most inclusive manner. In that activity, they did not just offer the online course to the adolescents they worked with. They invited them to attend it at the computer lab of the partner community organization so that they can provide them with internet access and any needed technical support and guidance. The activity was a great success and the attendees reported great satisfaction.

- The Rawabet website design integrated Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0. The guidelines ensure users can see and hear digital content, use input devices other than a keyboard, and helps make text become more readable and understandable, among other accessibility features.

- In Tunisia, a call centre was organized in order to contact people and raise awareness about agricultural labour laws. The members found the tool very accessible and managed to transmit the initiative's goal, via telephone calls, regarding the need to improve access to social security services to women working in the agricultural sector.

Accountability and the role of technology

The principle of accountability reaffirms that duty bearers (public officials, local authorities, and service providers) are accountable to rights holders (individuals and the community). Accountability is aimed at holding State actors to account – to answer for their actions and obligations and to improve their practices to ensure rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled.

Social accountability approaches can target a range of governance issues and processes including policymaking and planning; the analysis and tracking of public budgets, expenditures, and procurement processes; the monitoring and evaluation of public service delivery, as well as broader oversight roles, anti-corruption measures and complaints handling mechanisms. The use of social media services allows for individuals and the community to make their voices heard and to put pressure on local and national authorities to fulfill human rights. Moreover, electronic appeals developed through community petition platforms are effective in creating pressure on the authorities as well as informing and involving the media.

Tips from RAWABET:

❖ **Do you think collecting signatures of support can reinforce your actions?**
  You can promote an appeal online and easily gather supporters' signatures. You can consider using one of the following technical tools: Avaaz, Facebook, and mass mailing (using MailChimp).

❖ **Visual identity is important for online appeals!**
  An appeal is usually a tactic within a broader project. However, it always has its own design and outreach. Remember to create a new fresh page or account solely dedicated to each new initiative or campaign. Give it its own visual identity and make sure to add relevant information about your campaign and your organization or group. Include your logo and describe well who you are and what you work for. Avoid using old pages as they will confuse your audience and your image will look sloppy. Craft each new appeal in a way that attracts the reader and earns their respect and support.

❖ **How can you maximise the reach of an ongoing appeal?**
  In parallel to the online appeal, you can always use multiple platforms and tools to maximise your outreach. Before selecting which ones to employ, carry out some research to ensure that the tools you are using are compatible with the target groups you want to involve or influence.

❖ **Think of your target audience when designing your appeal**
  When you want to reach out to local authorities, religious leaders, or other duty bearers, try to always have a visual component in your document such as a detailed presentation. That can take the form of a leaflet when you are prospecting in person or a short video for online communication. Reach out to people involved in the sector you

are addressing to review your materials. Ask for their help in checking the content, the graphics, the language, the length, and overall presentation and that it is appropriate for the target audience. Consider using concrete examples and never exaggerate. Always present accurate and precise data and information.

❖ **How can you increase your odds of success?**
In certain contexts, reaching out to duty bearers the traditional way can be very challenging. In such contexts, consider holding an online forum, inviting public figures, human rights activists, and social media influencers who can help put pressure on duty bearers to attend. Your supporters can amplify your voice and reinforce your demands.

Examples from Rawabet:
- In **Tunisia**, a successful campaign "24 hour to take action" was launched on Facebook to require that the Tunisian government, especially in presidential speeches, used sign language interpretation. Using Facebook helped raise awareness and engaged discussion around accessibility for deaf and hard of hearing people who otherwise would not have access to government announcements on TV. Within 24 hours, the presidential briefing included live sign language interpretation – this was particularly important during the president's COVID-19 pandemic briefs.

- In **Morocco**, a group of national newspapers (paper based and electronic) decided to publish the content of the appeal aiming to abolish Article 20 of the Moroccan Family Code – the Moudawana - which allows a judge to authorize the marriage of girls under 18 years of age. The appeal was called *'I am a child and not a bride'*. The appeal reached greater audiences and as a result, many more Moroccan associations joined forces in the same campaign.

- In **Siliana Tunisia**, an online petition was used as part of the online campaign organized during the community action #TheirCause (#قضية_هنّ). Its dissemination on Avaaz allowed for a wider reach and gathered 222 signatures of individuals outside of the affected community. Its dissemination also allowed the mobilization of other civil society organizations who co-signed the petition. The signatures collected and the action that was visible online contributed to the advocacy campaign. Women members of the parliament took notice and invited the group to present their case at the parliament. Hence, the women from Siliana, reached new horizons in terms of citizen representation and expression of human rights.

Empowerment and the role of technology

All human beings should know their rights and how to demand them as well as being fully supported by duty bearers to claim and exercise them. Individuals and communities should participate in the development of policy and practices that affect their lives and should be able to claim their rights where necessary.

Empowerment requires that the community knows how to access and interpret the information in question in order to be able to effectively influence and if necessary, alter the decisions made by the duty bearers.

Having access to technology increases the capacity of the community to share information, raise awareness and influence decision makers. It also enhances the number of possibilities to deliver and benefit from training programmes. These can take different shapes – live courses via Zoom or Facebook Live, webinars or open-source courses, or simple audio or print materials accessible on websites, Facebook pages or WhatsApp groups. Using technology also allows communities to produce their own learning materials, which are tailor-made for their specific needs, their fellow rights-holders, and duty-bearers.

Tips from Rawabet:

❖ **How can you build on the technical skills people already have?**
It is important to consider how ready your potential participants are for the kind of content you are preparing. Find out what skills they already have and what new skills they need to develop to be able to use the technologies you propose to apply. For example, if they have limited experience using a computer, start your project with a special course to refresh everyone's computer knowledge.

❖ Plan for technical skills building before you start your project!
You need to be ready to conduct any needed workshops to transmit the necessary skills on how to use new technologies. You also need to foresee the provision of technical support. This means you need to consider this in your initial project proposal and funding application.

Transparency in the process supports empowerment!
Consider using Google Docs to track and follow up on tasks (e.g., tracking sheets). Being transparent with everyone regarding what is happening, who is doing what and what still needs to be done promotes empowerment of all team members.

❖ **Include free and asynchronous online courses to build knowledge and skills!**
With technology, one can easily access many existing courses that range from introduction to human rights to courses that are more specific, such as how to lobby your local authority or government. YouTube or other platforms include innumerable

tutorials on various subject matters related to protection, promotion, and fulfillment of human rights.

Examples from Rawabet:

- In **Morocco**, different teams working on abolishing child marriage were united using WhatsApp groups. Each group was created as per a specific function. One of them involved the follow up team: a WhatsApp chat group dedicated to listening directly to children being affected by the phenomenon. The use of this technology in this context sensitive manner empowered many young girls to speak up. When they mentioned that they were being asked to consider marriage, they reached out and RAWABET members got in touch to help and communicate with their parents in a friendly manner.

- In **Egypt**, activists found that using technology helped reinforce teamwork. They kept in touch more and shared information more regularly with all team members. Not only was there more participation among the group, but individuals were empowered to take responsibility for their tasks.

- The use of Moodle, a free and open-source learning management system (LMS), allowed individuals regardless of their background, to access knowledge about human rights through learning opportunities such as the asynchronous online course 'Put the World to Rights', and introductory course about human rights.

We encourage you to visit the following link for more useful resources about using technology for social action: https://techtribes.org/resources/

Link to human rights standards and the role of technology

To make sure everyone has uncompromised access to human rights, it is indispensable to link international human rights norms, standards, and principles to the actions undertaken and the values being highlighted in each project. Linking programming and actions to international human rights instruments provides a legally binding framework that serves as an entry point to engage with duty bearers at all levels. In addition, human rights standards help to focus program objectives by defining the minimum obligations against which duty bearers can be held accountable. It is also important to consult human rights recommendations from various sources (international, regional, and national), as they help identify common concerns in any given country. This allows prioritisation of actions and can be a powerful tool for advocacy.

Tips from Rawabet:
❖ **How can you learn more about the human rights issues in your country?**
You can check the online platforms of international Human Rights bodies such as the Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Review and the OHCHR to find recent updates and reports regarding human rights status and human rights violations in your country/region. This helps you get up to date with the efforts made internationally towards promoting human rights in your country. It also helps you get a good baseline for mapping human rights violations in the community you are working with.

❖ **How can you make sure the information about human rights standards is understood by community members?**
Many online platforms today provide translated copies of the local, regional, and international treaties and conventions. Such documents can help you design your human rights educational content for trainings and workshops. This can also assist you in finding the human rights terminology in your language. For content in Arabic, check out this library of resources: http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/arabic/

❖ **How can you build your campaign off international recommendations?**
Use the recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) when planning your advocacy campaigns and more especially when you reach out to decision makers. This site has more information about the UPR in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish: https://www.upr-info.org/

❖ **What is the difference between local and international resources?**
Many human rights issues can be locally analyzed with respect to the community culture. In such cases, the available content may be biased and not aligned with the international human rights standards. Always check various resources online and compare findings.

Examples from Rawabet:

- In **Egypt**, the Tactical Mapping Tool (TMT) was used in the planning stages to expand the understanding of the context and the relationships amongst key stakeholders and their roles in directly or indirectly perpetrating human rights violations. The TMT helped participants diagram the relationships that surround human rights abuses and make links to human rights law and local legislation. The TMT was a helpful tool to identify pathways towards changes for the human rights issues that were identified.

- In **Tunisia**, social media platforms were helpful tools to inform community members about the rights of women working in the agricultural sector. Social media posts and public posters helped make the link between the daily reality of farming women, human rights, and the obligations of duty-bearers.

Types of Technology Used

Rawabet - Technical Bridges for Citizen Engagement: Types of technology used
RAWABET (روابط - which means *connections* in Arabic) strived to address issues of social exclusion through participatory activities, the use of technology, and community actions. The technologies used by participants included:

Media Production & Design	Online collaborative tools & document sharing services
Adobe products (Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Premiere Pro)	Google Docs
Canva	Google Drive
iMovie App	We transfer
FILMORAGO App	MS One Drive
Xrecorder App	Dropbox
Social Media Platforms (photo/video sharing and social networking service)	What's App
	Trello
Facebook	**Remote Meeting (**audio and web conferencing platform)
Instagram	
Twitter	Zoom
YouTube	MS Teams
Learning management system	Google meet
Moodle	Facebook Messenger
CANVAS	Skype
Cross platform messaging, voice messaging	Jitsi
WhatsApp	**Online Survey**
Mobile call	MS forms
Short Messaging Services (SMS)	Google forms
E-mail	SurveyMonkey
Online petitions platforms & Mass mailing	Doodle
Avaaz	Facebook Polls
MailChimp	

Rawabet Technical Tools:
- Rawabet-equitas.org
  Rawabet Platform, launched in May 2019, is an open online educational platform for learning about Human Rights, Citizen Engagement & Democratic Participation. It includes an inventory of human rights education and community engagement resources, tactics, documentations, and tools. It is also a space to showcase RAWABET's 14 Community Actions activities, blogs, videos, campaigns.
- 'Put the World to Rights' & 'Planning and Tracking Advocacy Campaigns'
  Online courses open to the public and available in Arabic, French, and English.
- Tactical Mapping Tool (TMT)

Conclusions

The RAWABET Initiative has empowered individuals across Jordan, Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco to become active change makers in their communities. During the journey of the initiative, multiple sets of technological platforms, tools, and services were used. In our experience, technology was really useful and played a key role in the success of the implementation of the RAWABET Initiative.

Accessible technological platforms and services provide a greater opportunity, especially for marginalized groups, to participate and engage in democratic decision-making and exercise their social and economic rights and human rights. The number of resources concerning the local and international human rights experiences available online can help better design and develop activities of community actions, educational content, human rights trainings and more.
Social media is a power tool to reach out to a larger group of rights-holders and can help disseminate educational human rights tools and materials in a wider manner. It also provides a space for human rights advocates to interact and collaborate, unifying their efforts and amplifying their voices.

Technology provided us with solutions for many of the challenges that we face in our communities and through our work. However, due to the diversity of contexts and different levels of digital access and various degrees of digital literacy of individuals, there is not a single specific technological solution that works for everyone and fits every situation. Therefore, every situation is unique and must be studied and analyzed carefully so that we can ensure to be inclusive and non-discriminating when implementing technology in our work. We have to be flexible and ready to adapt to make sure we are leaving no one behind.