Beyond Symbolic Participation: Deliberative Technology for Youth-Inclusive Policy Development and Governance

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[This paper is a contribution to the Second Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security and the Secretary-General's fourth biennial report on Youth, Peace and Security]

1. Introduction

For young people navigating fragile or polarized sociopolitical landscapes, the digital-social divide is no longer only about hardware access[1]. Rather, it is also about young people's 'digital agency', which is their ability and autonomy to act independently in digital environments, shifting from passive consumption to conscious and value-aligned choices, and resisting manipulation.[2] In the context of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda, digital agency is a prerequisite for the 'Participation' pillar of UNSCR 2250[3].[4] However, even when young people get digital access and possess high levels of digital agency, they face a participation paradox. While they have the power to speak online, they lack formal and meaningful digital channels to influence high-level peacebuilding decision-making and national policy-making.

Without deliberate interventions, digital/technological transformations often neither result in meaningful inclusion of stakeholders nor give them a feeling of being heard. This paper argues that most of the current models of digital youth engagement (i.e., polls, surveys, comment sections, campaigns, petitions, hashtag activism, etc) are largely symbolic and operate as 'black-box' systems where the internal logic of how youth input is processed remains invisible and inaccessible to the contributors.

In many peacebuilding and governance contexts, institutional responsiveness results in performative inclusion. Youth input is collected to satisfy a youth-led or youth-inclusion checkbox, but it rarely impacts the final strategic decisions.[5] When policy-making is a black box, it effectively strips young people of their agency, subjecting them to life-altering decisions regarding security and governance without the ability to see, challenge, or shape the underlying reasoning. This lack of transparency creates an accountability and trust gap between young citizens and the state.[6] It is a systemic challenge that contributes to a democratic deficit and can exacerbate the grievances that drive conflict. It also results in digital engagement fatigue, leading to disinterest in participating further in digital civic spaces. Despite the best intentions, these digital interventions often lack the necessary conflict-sensitivity, leading to unintended risks or the reinforcement of existing power imbalances.

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[1] Refers to the physical possession of devices (smartphones, laptops) and access to infrastructure (internet, electricity).
[2] Passey, Don, Shonfeld, Miri, Appleby, Lon, Judge, Miriam, Saito, Toshinori, and Smits, Anneke. 2018. *Digital Agency: Empowering Equity in and through Education. Technology, Knowledge and Learning* https://doi.org/10.1007/s10758-018-9384-x
[3] United Nations Security Council. 2015. *Resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security.* S/RES/2250
[4] While this paper primarily examines use of deliberative technology through the lens of the Participation pillar, the author acknowledges its linkages to the Protection and Prevention pillars of the YPS agenda as well.
[5] United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY). 2021. *Checklist for Meaningful Youth Engagement.* https://unoy.org/downloads/mye-checklist/
[6] Leclerc, Katrina, and Shayne Wong. 2024. *Beyond Tokenism: A Toolkit for Genuine Youth Participation in Civic Spaces.* Canadian Coalition for Youth, Peace and Security. https://www.canadayps.org/beyond-tokenism

While such opacity is more than a technical limitation, this paper explores uses of digital/technological transformations to reduce this opacity. To combat the symbolic participation and marginalization caused by these opaque systems, "Deliberative Technology" (Delib-Tech)[7] can be treated as a core component of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)[8] for peace. Deliberative technologies offer an alternative by ensuring that the pathways from grassroots conversation to policy development are visible, participatory, and consensus-driven.[9] By replacing black-box logic with transparent youth deliberation, we can transition from symbolic engagement toward substantive participation. Using the Ekota platform[10] as a case study, this paper demonstrates how deliberative technology provides a scalable model for integrating youth-led data into national frameworks such as YPS National Action Plans and other related policies.

2. Methodology

This thematic paper involved desk research to evaluate the transition from traditional ICT tools to deliberative technology in peacebuilding, inclusive governance, and the YPS fields. The research process involved a systematic review of foundational YPS documents and a comparative analysis of contemporary delib-tech platforms' uses. This helped identify symbolic digital inclusion as one of the structural barriers to meaningful youth participation in peacebuilding and governance. The conceptual framing was further refined through targeted written consultation with the experts, practitioners, academicians, and policy advisors in the global YPS, inclusive governance, and digital peacebuilding fields.

One of the Deliberative Technology platforms that has profoundly influenced the framework of this paper, and whose operational experiences serve as primary empirical evidence, is called 'Ekota' (https://ekotaspace.com/). Co-developed by the Cognition Company (CogCo) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Asia Pacific, Ekota was designed as a digital engagement platform to modernize how marginalized demographics, specifically the youth, interact with policy frameworks.

3. Contextualisation and Conceptual Framing

Prior to and in the immediate aftermath of the formal adoption of UNSCR 2250 in 2015, the digital tools were primarily seen as information and communication technology (ICT) and used by international organizations and youth to map digital harm data and reach youth directly, but primarily through one-way communication.[11] Then, YPS field recognized digital technology as a transformative opportunity for youth to bypass traditional gatekeepers and mobilize for peace, while simultaneously raising warnings that these digital spaces face significant risks due to their susceptibility to state surveillance, polarizing misinformation, and the potential to exacerbate the very conflicts they seek to resolve.[12] Concurrently, Tech4Good and Tech4Peace initiatives were emerging globally as a transformative force. The

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[7] It is a specialized class of digital and algorithmic systems, often leveraging AI, as well, for data analysis, specifically designed to facilitate constructive, large-scale collective discussion, decision-making, and public consultations.
[8] United Nations Development Programme. (n.d.). Digital Public Infrastructure. https://www.undp.org/digital/digital-public-infrastructure
[9] Schirch, Lisa. (2024). *Policy Brief. Defending Democracy with Deliberative Technology (Version 1)*. University of Notre Dame. https://doi.org/10.7274/25338103.v1
[10] Cognition Company. 2022. *Ekota* [Deliberative Technology Platform]. https://ekotaspace.com/
[11] United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. 2019. *Digital Technologies and Mediation in Armed Conflict.* https://peacemaker.un.org/en/documents/digital-technologies-and-mediation-armed-conflict-0
[12] Simpson, Graeme. 2018. *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security.* United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO).

UN Secretary-General's 2020 Roadmap for Digital Cooperation further catalyzed these transformations by focusing on meaningful access, establishing Digital Public Goods, and protecting human rights as the essential infrastructure for inclusive governance.[13] In 2021, the "*If I Disappear"* report brought the focus to the interconnectedness of digital and physical safety, arguing that a threat in the digital space is a direct threat to the physical life of a peacebuilder.[14]

To understand the widths of rapidly growing digital/technological transformations, it is necessary to distinguish between key technological frameworks currently contributing to public administration, digital public infrastructure, and social change. The following are some of these technological frameworks:

- **Government Technology (GovTech)**: GovTech refers to the use of technology, such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence (AI), and data analytics, etc., by government agencies to improve the efficiency of public service delivery and internal operations.[15] It is the whole-of-government approach to public sector modernization and has culminated in the concept of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), such as digital payment, digital IDs, and data exchange layers. However, most DPI models focus on transactional inclusion (identity and payments) rather than deliberative inclusion (policy-making). Scholars argue that Gov-tech is predominantly top-down, prioritizing administrative efficiency over citizen-centric democratic engagement. Thus, without a participatory layer, GovTech risks creating black-box systems where data-driven decisions lack public transparency.

- **Civic Technology (CivicTech)**: In contrast, CivicTech is the technology that enables citizens to engage with the government or organize themselves.[16] It includes platforms for reporting local issues (potholes, water, waste, etc.), crowdsourcing data, or monitoring government spending. CivicTech is citizen-centric. For youth with digital access and aiming for digital policy advocacy, CivicTech often facilitates 'crowdsourcing of their voices'. It might be useful for data collection to some extent, but it does not necessarily lead to inclusion in decision-making or prioritisation of policy ideas. For example, UNICEF's U-Report was launched in 2012 as an SMS-based platform to enable young people to speak out on community issues, influence local policies, and provide real-time data.[17] While groundbreaking for reaching the last mile via SMS, this tool was consultative, which provided a voice but no mechanism for the youth to debate each other or influence the final policy output.

- **Deliberative Technology (Delib-Tech)**: Deliberative Technology represents a specialized subset of CivicTech and refers to a class of digital participation tools and processes designed to support structured engagement around public questions. Lena Slachmuijlder, Co-Chair of the Council on Tech and Social Cohesion, presents these as "*digital platforms that enable participants to contribute in their own words, respond to*

[13] UN Secretary-General. 2020. *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation.* https://www.un.org/en/content/digital-cooperation-roadmap/
[14] United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY). 2022. *If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space.* https://unoy.org/downloads/if-i-disappear-global-report-on-protecting-young-people-in-civic-space/
[15] World Bank. 2020. *GovTech: The new frontier in public sector reforms.*
[16] Upadhyay, Mridul. 2025. *A stocktake and review of CivicTech and GovTech initiatives in the Asia-Pacific: Mapping report*. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). https://www.youthapac.org/publications/civic%2Fgovtech-mapping-report
[17] UNICEF Ukraine. (n.d.). *Become a U-Reporter*. https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/en/become-u-reporter

others' perspectives, and generate visible patterns of convergence, divergence, and priority across the participating group". She adds, "*their value lies not in automatically producing consensus or legitimacy, but in making collective sensemaking more transparent and usable at scale. Whether they lead to meaningful inclusion or policy influence depends on how they are designed, facilitated, and connected to institutional decision-making processes.*"

4. Evaluating the Deliberative Gaps in Existing Digital Public Infrastructure

When analysed through the lens of 'digital agency' and 'inclusive policy development', a critical architectural gap emerges. Most existing national civic engagement platforms operate on a model of 'crowdsourcing and aggregation', but lack the deeper features of deliberation, found in delib-techs. For example, the Government of India's MyGov.in platform stands as one of the world's largest experiments in participatory governance, successfully moving millions of citizens from passive observers to active contributors through its "Do-Discuss-Disseminate" model. It includes several tools for public interaction:

- **Discuss Section:** Acts as a curated forum where citizens can comment on policy drafts or themes.
- **Polls and Surveys:** Quick opinion gathering to gauge public sentiment on specific options (e.g., naming a scheme or choosing a logo).
- **Crowdscoring:** Users can upvote or downvote comments in the discussion forums to highlight popular ideas.
- **Open Innovation Challenges:** Platforms like *Innovate India* host contests for creative solutions, which are a form of collaborative problem-solving.

Here is a comparison of what platforms like MyGov.in currently offer versus the deliberative technology frameworks:

A. **The Aggregation Model vs. The Deliberative Model:** The government poses a question (e.g., suggestions for a new youth policy or feedback on the draft of the youth policy), and citizens provide individual responses. The success of these inputs is often measured by volume or sentiment analysis, calculating how many people liked a post or the general mood of the comments. While this is effective for gauging public sentiment, it lacks a horizontal deliberation mechanism. In a black-box decision-making environment, these individual comments are often processed as isolated data points. Conversely, delib-tech platforms not just collect opinions but allow participants to interact with, debate, and refine each other's ideas to reach a reasoned consensus.

B. **Deliberative Gaps:** The above-mentioned aggregation model creates four specific areas where traditional crowdsourcing falls short of meaningful youth engagement:
    a. **The Consensus Deficit:** In traditional portals, if 1000 youth provide 1000 different suggestions, the policymakers are left to pick the final few arbitrarily. Deliberative tech uses interactive voting and debate modules to help the youth themselves identify which priorities are shared across divides. While traditional digital tools focus on aggregation (counting votes or likes), Delib-Tech focuses on deliberation for collective sensemaking. The goal is to let people exercise their digital agency to generate collective signals.
    b. **Bring Light to Divergence**: In contrast to traditional aggregation models that often marginalize minority perspectives through a winner-take-all approach,

deliberative technology can surface broad-based consensus and distinctive points of divergence (fault lines).

c. **Lack of Reflexivity:** True digital agency requires the ability to change one's mind after hearing a better argument digitally. Standard comment sections often encourage echo chambers or polarized shouting. Deliberative tools are designed to reward constructive compromise.
d. **The Signal-to-Noise Problem:** Policymakers often struggle with information overload on large portals. By the time a youth's suggestion reaches a decision-maker, it has often been stripped of its context. A deliberative framework ensures that the output is not just a pile of comments, but structured and consensus-backed policy signals.

5. Deliberative Technology Features and Ecosystem

Deliberative technologies represent a fundamental departure from conventional digital consultation tools in their treatment of participant voice and disagreement. Rather than confining users to fixed, top-down survey options, these platforms enable participants to generate statements in their own words and respond to others' ideas, often through structured and semi-anonymous or anonymous interactions. This shift from passive respondent to active contributor allows for a more encouraging environment for youth to engage in the discourse.

At its core, the function of delib-tech is to bridge the gap between qualitative policy ideation and quantitative responses at a massive scale, engaging thousands of participants simultaneously. Crucially, these tools utilize analytic clustering to move beyond simple data aggregation, producing a visual and statistical map of how views converge and diverge across a population. It enables generating consensus-based signals that reflect deeper resonance and collective prioritization among those engaged. Key technical features include:

- The Dual-Function Architecture: Delib-tech integrates crowdsourcing with consensus-building, allowing participants to submit original policy ideas while simultaneously voting to identify collective resonance.
- Bridging Algorithms: These incentivize and identify common ground by surfacing statements that find support across traditionally polarized groups by breaking down stereotypes through data.
- Multi-Dimensional Mapping: By identifying fault lines and minority perspectives, these tools ensure that divergence is not erased by majority rule. In the YPS context, understanding where groups fundamentally disagree is often as vital for conflict sensitivity as identifying shared priorities.

These features position Delib-tech as a key tool to advance meaningful youth participation. By synthesizing public input into structured data, these platforms generate more nuanced policy outcomes that can significantly strengthen democratic resilience. At the same time, beyond a mere tool, delib-tech functions as a socio-technical process where the quality of outcomes depends on high-quality prompt design, platform selection[18], and conflict-sensitive moderation. Thus, deliberation design is a core part of the work, not a technical add-on. And beyond technology, the success of the process is rooted in human-led and trusted outreach, synthesis, and policy advocacy.

[18] Search for Common Ground, Build Up, ConnexUs. (n.d.). *Digital Peacebuilders Guide*. https://howtobuildup.stonly.com/kb/guide/en/digital-peacebuilders-guide-X49wcx4IFi/Steps/1469015

There has been a rapidly maturing global ecosystem of deliberative tools (such as Pol.is, Remesh, Decidim, Ekota) since 2012. The growing significance of this field is evidenced by the 'Digital Participation Tool Ratings' for over 30 platforms.[19] While these delib-tech tools are still in the early adopter phase within the peacebuilding sector, several prominent organizations, including Build Up[20], Kroc Institute (University of Notre Dame), Search for Common Ground[21], and Toda Peace Institute, have begun integrating them for 'actively listening at scale'.[22]

Government agencies in multiple countries, including Taiwan, the UK, Austria, and Finland, have used Pol.is to gather public input and generate innovative policy options.[23] In 2025, Search for Common Ground utilized Talk to the City during a strategic workshop in Kenya to synthesize youth perspectives into an impact-focused National Action Plan (NAP)[24] and use Pol.is for global YPS consultation. Search for Common Ground used Remesh to facilitate a Participatory Protection and Inclusion Risk Analysis (PPIRA) with youth across Africa and Europe. These diverse applications underscore the vast potential and versatile scope of deliberative tools to support youth-led evidence generation within the YPS field.

These diverse applications are not merely isolated pilot stories; they serve as proof of concept for a fundamental shift in the YPS digital-social contract. Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate that deliberative technology bridges the gap between high-level policy and grassroots reality in three transformative ways. First, they widen the scope of institutional listening far beyond by utilizing anonymity, interactive interfaces, and a more engaging online listening approach to lower the barrier for engagement. Second, they facilitate more candid and safer participation in sensitive contexts where traditional surveys or comment-based consultations might pose security risks or trigger self-censorship. Finally, these cases prove that delib-tech can provide accelerated sensemaking, allowing practitioners to map both common ground and critical fault lines for policy signals.

6. Case Study: 'South Asia Youth Climate Conversation' on Ekota

The 'South Asia Youth Climate Conversation' (*Appendix A*) serves as an example of using deliberative technology to bridge the gap between youth advocacy and formal climate governance. Launched in late 2025 on Ekota through a strategic partnership between UNDP Asia Pacific, the Youth Empowerment in Climate Action Platform (YECAP), and No Border Consultancy, the initiative sought to feed youth voices into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC 3.0) across South Asian nations.[25]

The process was entirely youth-led. Young leaders set the main question as "*What should your national government do to make youth participation in climate action inclusive and more*

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[19] People Powered. 2025. *Digital participation tool ratings*. https://www.peoplepowered.org/platform-ratings
[20] Build Up. https://howtobuildup.org/about-build-up/
[21] Search for Common Ground. *Data Analytics for Peacebuilders*. https://sites.google.com/sfcg.org/analyticsforpeacebuilders/deliberative-technology?authuser=0
[22] Toda Peace Institute. 2024. *Deliberative Technology: Designing AI and Computational Democracy for Peacebuilding in Highly-Polarized Contexts*. https://toda.org/policy-briefs-and-resources/policy-briefs/report-201-full-text.html
[23] Carr, Harry and Smith, Josh. 2020. *Polis and the Political Process*. Demos. https://demos.co.uk/research/polis-and-the-political-process/
[24] Talk to the City. (n.d.). *YPS NAP Report*. https://talktothecity.org/report/ypsnapmarch19custom
[25] UNDP. 2025. *Empowering Youth and Shaping Climate Policy Through Technology in Asia-Pacific*. Youth Empowerment in Climate Action Platform (YECAP). https://www.yecap-ap.org/post/empowering-youth-and-shaping-climate-policy-through-technology-in-asia-pacific

impactful?" They curated the initial 'seed statements'[26] to catalyze the discussion. To ensure quality and conflict sensitivity, youth moderators also managed the flow of the conversation, filtering duplicate and reframed ideas. At the same time, youth leaders ensured diverse perspectives were captured for the final policy briefs.

Before entering the main dialogue, participants navigated a quick transition page designed to help them practice the 'Agree,' 'Disagree,' and 'Pass' functions. This rapid learning layer reduced the technical barrier to entry, ensuring that the 5,043 active participants (a 44.3% actualization rate from over 11,000 visitors) felt confident to engage. The platform's multilingual capabilities and self-translation features also enabled participants from diverse linguistic backgrounds to engage in a single unified discussion, which also enabled instant, combined data analysis.

Participation was made meaningful through a dual-response mechanism that balanced thoughtful expression with structured prioritization. Users could submit their own short-form ideas (approximately 200 characters) and/or vote on others' proposals, creating a sense of active contribution rather than passive survey-taking. This resulted in 46 unique participant-submitted ideas and a total of 4,828 votes cast. These proposals reached an overwhelming 97.5% consensus, representing collective prioritization, shared priorities, and critical divergence. The findings served as the evidentiary foundation for policy briefs presented to national governments.

7. Strategic Alignment of Delib-Tech with YPS Pillars

The first YPS Progress Study describes that the systemic marginalization of young people is not just a side effect of conflict, but a primary driver of it.[27] The integration of delib-tech provides a structural response to this 'violence of exclusion'. By transitioning from extractive data collection to a collective prioritization-driven Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), it directly operationalizes the 'Participation' pillar of UNSCR 2250. It marks a shift from youth as 'subjects of data extraction' to youth as 'owners of consensus.' While traditional digital engagement often leaves the final analysis to an opaque administrative black box, delib-tech utilizes transparency for prioritisation. By allowing young people to collectively validate and rank their own priorities, the technology creates a sort of binding evidence base that is difficult for policymakers to ignore. This transitions youth participation from a discretionary administrative favor into a form of digital sovereignty, where the policy signals produced by the platform act as a democratic mandate that compels institutional accountability.

In alignment with the 'Protection' pillar, delib-tech addresses the urgent need for safe digital civic spaces. Standard social media platforms often expose young peacebuilders to state surveillance, doxxing, online harassment, and hate speech, etc. In contrast, deliberative platforms are designed as pro-social environments that utilise pseudonymity/anonymity, digital privacy, and moderation to shield activists/advocates/minorities from retaliation. By creating a protected ecosystem where youth from all diversities can debate sensitive policy issues, delib-tech better fulfills the institutional responsibility to protect young people in the

[26] Refers to initial opinions or prompts developed by the organizing team and presented at the start of a deliberative conversation. These pre-authored statements provide a baseline for participants to vote on immediately, establishing the necessary data structure for the platform's consensus-building algorithms to function before real-time engagement begins.

[27] Simpson, Graeme. 2018. *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security.* United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO).

digital arena, ensuring their digital agency does not come at the cost of their physical or psychological safety.

Furthermore, delib-tech serves as a powerful instrument for the 'Prevention' pillar as well by institutionalizing the mechanics of dialogue and mediation within the digital sphere.[28] The history of youth peacebuilding engagements has shown that digital spaces are frequently weaponized to spread misinformation and exacerbate historical grievances. Delib-tech brings an alternate approach. It can identify hidden grievances and minority perspectives from an outrage, de-personalize content, use moderation and structured architecture to filter out toxicity, and highlight areas of mutual concern. Delib-tech incentivises users to find consensus across polarized divides rather than rewarding inflammatory content. By visualizing areas of agreement across diverse youth cohorts, these tools can also act as a preventive mechanism that de-escalates online tension and fosters social cohesion. Thus, the role of technology shifts from a mere communication and engagement tool to a systemic peacebuilding intervention.

8. Current Limitations of the Delib-Tech

While delib-tech offers a transformative shift for meaningful youth participation, it has its own challenges and limitations.[29] For participation to be truly meaningful, the pathway from expression to influence must navigate multiple stages: expression, deliberation, sensemaking, and policy impact. Delib-tech significantly strengthens the middle two stages (deliberation and sensemaking). Even in these two stages, the black-box dynamics can persist even within advanced platforms.

There are a few specific components of delib-tech that can contain inherent risks of bias or opacity, such as the internal logic of algorithmic clustering, uses of AI[30], the subjective nature of moderation decisions, and the final interpretation of signals by organizers. Some of these, the delib-tech is trying to address through iterative designs. Meanwhile, rather than fully replacing the black-box dynamics, delib-tech should be viewed as a tool to reduce opacity by making patterns of consensus and divergence more visible. When implemented correctly, these tools enhance transparency and accountability, but rigorous oversight is required to ensure that the digital signals accurately reflect youth voices. Beyond these, the policy impact remains dependent on whether institutions choose to respond and close the feedback loop.

There are also several practical and political constraints that the deliberative tools face in their uptake among YPS stakeholders:

- While failing to invest in prompt design can compromise the output quality, the complexity of crafting effective prompts often acts as a barrier to their adoption.
- Ensuring anonymity is vital for safety in sensitive contexts, yet it introduces the risk of data duplication (e.g., where one user submits multiple entries).
- There is a constant risk that the generated policy signals may fail to reach the decision-makers or translate into tangible action. Delib-tech requires the same level of human effort in finding pre-negotiated policy-making avenues.
- The persistent challenges of uneven digital access and language barriers can inadvertently exclude the most marginalized voices.

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[28] Council on Tech and Social Cohesion. (n.d.). https://www.techandsocialcohesion.org/
[29] Conciliation Resources. 2024. *Digital Inclusion in Peacemaking.* https://www.c-r.org/accord/still-time-talk/digital-inclusion-peacemaking-practice-promise-and-perils
[30] Slachmuijlder, Lena. 2026. "When AI Never Says No: How Frictionless AI Erodes Our Ability to Navigate Conflict." *Peace Policy: Solutions to Violent Conflict. No. 62,* https://doi.org/10.7274/31347952

- The persistent threat of state co-optation through tokenistic action, algorithmic or narrative management, or adopting participatory tools not to share power, but to neutralize dissent and manufacture an appearance of public consent.

Deliberative technology is not a substitute for relational and political processes but more as a complement. While these platforms can widen the listening scope and provide structured sensemaking, they cannot replace the foundational work of in-person dialogue, grassroots trust-building, and face-to-face diplomacy. These tools provide the evidence and the map, but the hard work of peacebuilding and meaningful youth inclusion remains a human endeavor.

9. Recommendations

To bridge the black box of governance and fulfill the participation mandates of the YPS agenda, the following framework proposes structural integration of the deliberative technology to generate youth-led evidence for policy/decision-making. These recommendations provide a roadmap for UN entities, governments, and peacebuilding actors to transform digital agency into a collective power for inclusion and social cohesion.

- **Recommendation 1: Moving forward from the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), establish 'Deliberative' Public Infrastructure for Peace.** National governments and UN agencies should transition from extractive digital consultations to deliberative mechanisms. The UN should adopt deliberative standards for all digital youth peacebuilding consultations and ensure they move beyond one-way data collection (surveys/polls) that creates a participation black box. Governments should invest in a deliberative layer for all relevant public-facing digital portals and also use these delib-tech for the development and participatory evaluation of the YPS national action plans. It will enable collaborative policy-development, where youth can collectively debate, refine, and validate shared peace and security priorities at scale.

- **Recommendation 2: Co-design every layer of the digital architecture with youth:** UN entities and governments must involve youth in the active co-design of the deliberative infrastructure, including prompt development, UX design, deliberation, and sense-making. In practice, youth should not just participate in deliberative dialogues but should be the ones setting the seed statements on national priorities, moderating multilingual debates, and synthesizing signals into recommendations.

- **Recommendation 3: Close the 'Accountability Loop' in decision-making processes.** To ensure substantive impact, there must be a formal mandate to treat consensus-driven youth data as verified evidence in high-level decision-making, such as Parliamentary Committees, NAP/policy development or UN Mission briefings. Furthermore, the decision makers must conclude with a mandatory 'Transparency Feedback Loop' within a set timeframe. This report should detail exactly which consensus points are being adopted and which are being deferred, along with specific reasoning behind those decisions. This replaces symbolic inclusion with a transparent mechanism, recognising youth as active architects of governance rather than its passive subjects.

- **Recommendation 4: Fund research and evidence generation:** To move delib-tech from small ad-hoc pilot initiatives to Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), there must be a dedicated investment in implementation and research. We must build a robust evidence base that measures the impact of digital deliberation on intergenerational

trust and social cohesion. Funding could also prioritize tracking how delib-tech-generated signals actually shift the behavior of policymakers.

- **Recommendation 5: Invest in the digital mediation skills of youth**. Technology alone cannot build trust. To counter the weaponization of digital spaces, the UN and Member States must invest in digital mediation capacity by training youth leaders as 'Digital Moderators' and in using growing deliberative tools. These moderators should be equipped with deliberative facilitation skills to guide online consensus-building in volatile or polarized regions. This approach transforms youth from passive users into digital peacebuilders who can identify early warning signals of conflict, de-escalate online tensions, and pivot fragmented debates toward collective common ground.

10. Conclusion

The transition from the first wave of information and communication technology (ICT) to a third wave of deliberative co-governance is a critical instrument for meaningful youth participation in governance. With emerging evidence and global pilots, delib-tech offers a robust instrument for inclusive design, monitoring, and participatory evaluation of YPS coalitions, NAPs, policies, programmes, and services. Where the introduction identified the black box of policy-making as a driver of systemic mistrust, delib-tech offers a technical antidote by offering YPS stakeholders better tools to listen to youth at scale. With collective sensemaking and transparency in generating policy signals, these tools give youth a better sense of engagement in decision-making. By treating these tools as core components of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), decision makers can move beyond mere access to a redistribution of decision-making power.

The evidence from emerging deliberative technology platforms demonstrates that when provided with a deliberative layer, young people are a bit more willing to share their opinions and can navigate fragmented positions to generate high-consensus signals. This verified mandate provides policymakers with a legitimate basis for action. It is something that traditional extractive surveys cannot replicate. However, the success of these tools depends on a shift from institutional listening to institutional responding through transparent feedback and accountability loops.

Furthermore, the evolving field of delib-tech also requires more innovation, research, and evidence generation for enabling meaningful participation. As we use these tools more to implement the participation, protection, and prevention pillars of the YPS agenda, we must acknowledge that delib-tech is meant to augment, not replace, the irreplaceable elements of trust-building and face-to-face diplomacy. The digital-first approach must remain a human-centric one. As we pilot these frameworks, we must maintain a do no harm approach and be vigilant so that our pursuit of digital inclusion does not inadvertently create new forms of exclusion.

Ultimately, the Second Progress Study on YPS and SG's biennial report must advocate for a future where young people are no longer viewed as passive subjects of digital transformation, but as the active architects and mediators of the platforms they inhabit. By training a new generation of digital moderators and closing the accountability loop between online consensus and offline policy-making, we can transform the digital landscapes into a vibrant arena of substantive youth agency and position youth as indispensable partners of today's global peace and security frameworks.

Appendix

Appendix - A (Ekota Case Study: South Asia Youth Climate Conversation)

Ekota enables capturing people's opinions in their own words and also lets them vote (Agree/Pass/Disagree) on each other's opinions. Thus, it enables ideas to be crowdsourced and supports consensus-building on priorities. Other than these, there is functionality for multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions as well. The online responses are aggregated and analysed using machine learning, and can be done manually as well. Here's a basic breakdown of some terms used to explain the working of Ekota:

- Conversation: The discussions organised on Ekota have been called 'Conversation' or 'Youth Conversation'.
- Participants: These are the people who participated in the conversation by voting and writing statements.
- Statements: These are the opinions that participants vote on or submit in writing. There are two kinds of statements:
    - Seed statements: These are the opinions against the conversation question developed by the organising team and are to be provided to the participants to vote on. These are initial statements already shared at the start of the conversation and don't include the opinions posted by other participants. For the Ekota conversation to begin to function as intended, several 'seed responses' must exist before real participant engagement.
    - Additional statement: Participants may submit additional statements for other participants to vote on. These statements are moderated before being visible to other participants.

The main conversation question for this youth conversation was: "*What should your national government do to make youth participation in climate action inclusive and more impactful?"* This youth conversation had nine seed statements against the conversation question, such as:

- Include youth representatives in official climate bodies and councils.
- Ensure and report back on how youth voices lead to real changes in policy and budgets.
- Establish youth-led monitoring mechanisms for climate policies and budget implementation in local communities.
- Collect and utilise data on how climate change affects youth differently, particularly marginalised groups.
- Support youth green entrepreneurship (solar, waste, biodiversity) with training and grants.
- Support youth organisations with funding to lead local projects that protect the environment and build climate resilience in rural and urban areas.

Youth Conversation Moderation: A moderator from the organising team was assigned to moderate the opinions of the participants on the live conversation space by accepting and rejecting them. The moderation guidelines included rejecting answers that:

a. Are hateful or abusive
b. Are discriminatory against particular groups or individuals

c. Are incomprehensible (not clear)
d. Do not actively respond to the conversation question (spam, irrelevant)
e. Repeat statements that have already been submitted, as a part of the seed statement or otherwise
f. Put forward several ideas at once (rather than a single idea)
g. Contains identifiable personal information

This Youth Conversation had the following customised features:

A. **Welcome Page:** It displayed the main conversation question, 'About this space' read more space, and some guideline text to help participants understand the purpose of the conversation. Participants could select their preferred language to respond using the dropdown menu at the top right corner: Hindi, Nepali, Urdu, Bangla, Sinhala, Tamil, or English.

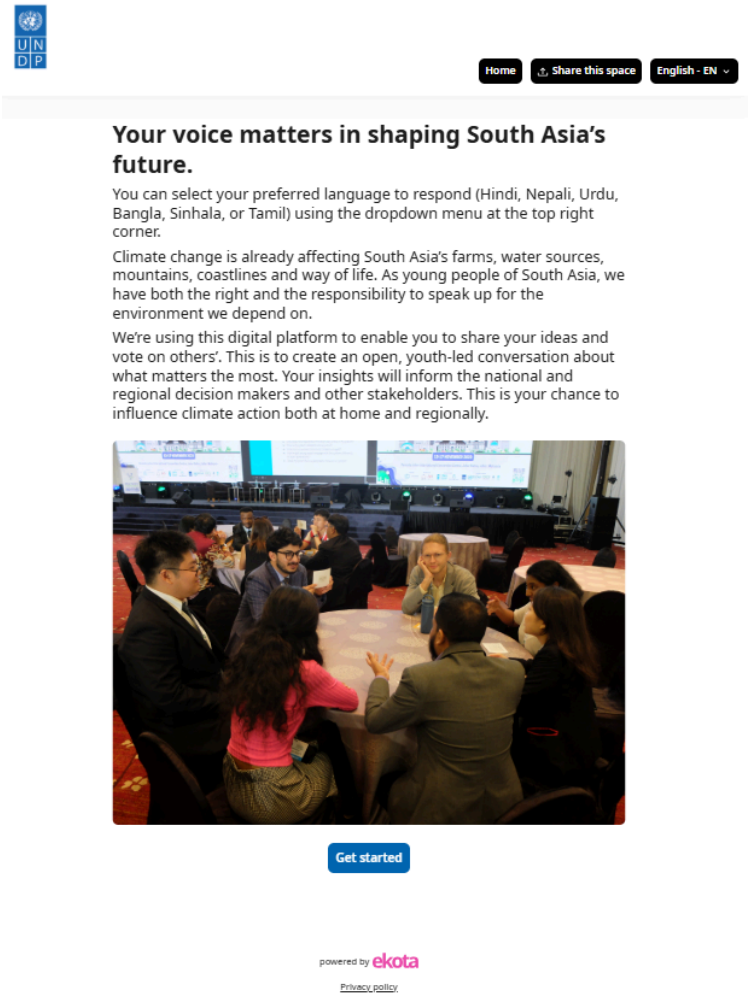

Figure: *Welcome Page of South Asia Youth Conversation on Ekota*

B. **Profile/Demographic Question Page**: It displayed basic information to be filled in by the participants. The purpose is to gather data regarding participants' demographics. The demographic questions can be customised to the nature of the conversation. For this Youth Conversation, the following demographic questions were displayed on this page for the participants to respond:

- Your Gender? (multiple choice)
- Your Age? (multiple choice)
- Your Country?
- Which of the following groups/communities do you belong to? (multiple choice)

C. **Other Questions**: For this Youth Conversation, some other multiple-choice questions and text-response questions were also displayed, along with demographic questions, for the participants to respond:

   - Have you ever participated in any group environmental or climate-related activity? (e.g., clean-up events, awareness campaigns, advocacy, research, etc.)
   - Which type of climate risk concerns you the most in your region? (multiple choice)
   - In your view, which level of government currently has the greatest responsibility for making your region climate resilient?
   - Do you believe that your MP/MLA or local government takes youth input when framing climate policy currently?
   - What medium do you trust the most for receiving climate information (warnings, guidance, event details, etc)?
   - If your MP/MLA asks you for ONE thing that they should do more for youth on climate action, what would you tell them?
   - What one change do you want the government to make your community climate-resilient in the next 10 years? (text response)
   - What one thing are you, as a young person, willing to do to help your community become climate-resilient in the next 10 years? (text response)

D. **Conversation Space:** The participants were then led to the conversation space, where the conversation question was posted. Participants could see all the statements to vote on and also a space to post their opinions (to be moderated to make them visible to the next responder).

Results of South Asia Youth Conversation

The Youth Conversation got a wide range of responses. On the closure of the Youth Conversation, several stages of data matching, automatic and manual statistical analysis were performed to reveal results. The following are the key statistical highlights:

- A total of 11387 people visited the platform. A total of 5043 people (actual participants) decided to engage in this conversation and voted. So, the actualised participation rate was 44.3%. This high engagement reflects strong interest among youth to shape climate policy and action.
- 46 statements/ideas were submitted by the participants.
- A total of 25 statements were made available for voting after moderation (including seed statements and those submitted by the participants)

The demographic analysis reveals diversity in age, gender, geography, and identity groups. The demography of the 5043 participants is as follows:

- Men constituted 71%, women 25%, and non-binary or prefer-not-to-say 4%.

- Most participants were aged 18–24 (42%), followed by 25–29 (30%). Under 18 participants were 7%, 30–34 years old were 14%, and 35+years old were 7%. So, 72% participants were youth, in the age group of 18-29 years.
- Country representation was led by India (59%), followed by Sri Lanka (15%), Bangladesh and Nepal (7% each), Pakistan (7%), Afghanistan and Bhutan (2% each), and the Maldives (1%).
- Identity groups included Dalit (13%), religious minorities (13%), OBC (9%), indigenous/tribal communities (5%), LGBTQI+ (4%), persons with disabilities (3%), stateless/refugee (3%), and 52% who identified with none of these categories. This was a multiple-answer question.

Participation Insights

- Climate Risks of Greatest Concern: Heatwaves and extreme temperatures dominate youth concerns (38%), reflecting the region's vulnerability to rising heat stress. Water scarcity and drought (22%) and erratic rainfall/flooding (20%) follow closely, signalling dual risks of scarcity and excess. Air quality and pollution (21%) remain a persistent urban challenge, while agricultural productivity loss (14%) and localised hazards like landslides (6%) and coastal erosion (6%) highlight diverse geographic vulnerabilities.
- Participation in Climate Action: Youth engagement in climate-related activities shows promising interest but uneven intensity. While 21% report participating often and 35% occasionally, a significant 24% are interested but have not yet engaged, indicating a latent potential for mobilisation. However, 21% express no interest, underscoring the need for targeted awareness campaigns and inclusive entry points.
- Governance Responsibility: Youth attribute climate resilience responsibility primarily to local governments (32%), emphasising proximity and responsiveness. National governments rank second (26%), followed by state/provincial (22%) and district administrations (16%).
- Perceptions of Youth Inclusion in Policy: Alarmingly, 40% believe youth input is not sought in climate policy, and 23% feel that even when consulted, it does not lead to action. Only 18% perceive meaningful engagement resulting in action. This gap calls for institutionalised feedback loops and accountability mechanisms.
- Trusted Information Channels: Official government social media leads (22%), followed by youth/NGO organisations (20%) and community notices (18%). Friends and family (19%) and mobile alerts (13%) also play key roles, while radio (9%) remains relevant for regional outreach.
- Youth Priorities for MPs/MLAs: When asked for one priority action, youth emphasise training in climate resilience (27%) and job creation in climate sectors (25%), alongside support for youth-led initiatives (21%) and meaningful inclusion of marginalised voices (19%).

Open-Ended Insights: There were over 3,600 open-text entries across two questions that were normalized and tagged into themes.

A. **Government Priorities:** Responses to "What one change do you want the government to make your community climate-resilient in the next 10 years?" highlight diverse urgent needs. Youth across South Asia overwhelmingly asked governments to fix water and sanitation basics, enforce clean air, support climate-smart agriculture, and institutionalise inclusive governance and heat-cooling measures.
B. **Youth Commitment:** Youth commitments concentrate on reducing plastic and waste, conserving water, shifting mobility habits, teaching peers, and supporting sustainable food systems.

Voting Results: Main Space Question

For the main space question, "What should your national government do to make youth participation in climate action inclusive and more impactful?", a total of 4,828 votes were cast across 25 proposals, with overwhelming agreement (97.5%). The top proposals by agreement were as follows:

ID	Statement	Total Votes	Agree %	Pass %	Disagree %
1	Establish youth-led monitoring mechanisms for climate policies and budget implementation in local communities.	285	98.9	0.4	0.7
5	Collect & utilise data on how climate change affects youth differently, particularly marginalised groups.	272	98.9	0.0	1.1
3	Implement the climate policies you make; laws must be exemplary with practical action.	330	98.8	0.3	0.9
4	Provide training & opportunities by involving youth in government institutions.	309	98.7	0.3	1.0
2	Trust youth as equal partners (not tokens or one-day workshop participants).	262	98.5	0.8	0.8
6	Build platforms where climate-affected youth can regularly advise leaders.	254	98.4	0.4	1.2
8	Form a dedicated, inclusive team to empower and serve the nation.	243	97.9	0.4	1.6
7	Create a special platform for youth leaders to generate insight for the future.	234	97.9	0.9	1.3
9	Prevent stubble burning via Gram/District Panchayats.	279	97.8	0.0	2.2
10	Support youth green entrepreneurship (solar, waste, biodiversity) with training & grants.	358	97.5	0.3	2.2

Table: *South Asia Youth Conversation: Top Proposals by Agreement*