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Why should privacy matter in humanitarian emergencies?



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Digital technologies have penetrated our daily lives, and many are growing troubled about what this means for our privacy. But do these considerations change in conflict and disaster settings? This was an important question raised during the “Humanitarian Technology and Innovation: Critical Questions and Implications for Southeast Asia” roundtable held on 11th June by the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) programme here at RSIS.

More data can certainly help improve protection of people’s lives and dignity: the core of humanitarian work. This has created a reflex among humanitarians to collect as much data as possible in order to maximise the chance of identifying operationally relevant details or patterns. This mirrors practices in ordinary circumstances too, with both governments and private sector entities demonstrating the same data-gathering instincts to improve the products and services they offer. There is a crucial difference, however, between the importance of privacy in these two contexts. That distinction comes from

differing relationships between privacy and security.

In ordinary circumstances, privacy and security exist in tension with each other. If state surveillance is limited in the name of privacy, then the ability to identify “bad actors” falls, reducing security. This is true both if one adopts a traditional security framework, in which it is the state’s security that is of paramount concern, or a human security one, in which it is individual security that matters.

Conversely, in humanitarian settings privacy can equal security, meaning that reducing the former actually reduces the latter. Ethnicity, religion, political views, sexuality and gender can be acutely sensitive issues during humanitarian emergencies. These cleavages can underlie the unrest or marginalisation that either produces or exacerbates humanitarian needs in both conflict and disaster settings. Consider the situation of Rohingya people fleeing from Rakhine state to Bangladesh due to racially-driven persecution, or stud-

ies showing the correlation of race and class with suffering following Hurricane Katrina in the US. In such situations of bias or persecution, collecting data from which sensitive characteristics can be deduced risks reducing the security of people needing assistance further.

Addressing this is complicated by two further issues. The first is that people defined by those sensitive characteristics often have the most serious needs. As such, aid agencies need to be able to identify them in order to help. In both Hurricane Katrina and Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, lower socio-economic echelons – a category that often overlaps with ethnicity, gender and even political affiliation – are documented to have suffered more. This underscores the double-edged nature of this data: it can facilitate both helping and harming the group identified. Second, marginalised groups or those

fleeing danger are routinely cast as threats to wider society and therefore require greater surveillance. Consider the media conflation of refugees seeking asylum in Europe with threats of terrorism, and the intensive scrutiny they undergo during the asylum process. As a result, their privacy is all the more likely to be curtailed to the perceived benefit of others' security and to the detriment of their own.

This highlights the complexity of collecting data in humanitarian settings, and a neglected role for aid groups developing and testing new data technologies. People fleeing conflict, caught in disaster, or otherwise marginalised simultaneously have a lot to gain and much to lose from greater data collection. However, they have little influence over decisions taken to balance these advantages and disadvantages.

From our roundtable discussion, it is clear governments and aid agencies must adapt their decision-making around collecting, sharing and deploying data to take account of this particular relationship between privacy and security. The default of maximising data collection may often simply not be justified. In determining what is warranted, people's perceptions of their own best interests must be included.

Suggested Readings

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CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY AND NATURAL DISASTERS

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Property crisis looms due to sea level rise, experts warn

Agence France-Presse, The Straits Times
18 June 2018

Climate change a 'man-made problem with a feminist solution' says

Zoe Tabary, Thomson Reuters Foundation
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United Nations charts course in global challenge of marine litter and micro-plastics

Geoff Craggs, Future Directions International
20 June 2018

Climate change will lead to dangerous effects: Study

Justin Worland, The Economic Times
27 June 2018

Climate change has turned Peru's glacial lake into a deadly flood timebomb

Dan Collyns, The Guardians
29 June 2018

A warming world ceases desperate people

Lauren Markham, The New York Times
29 June 2018

Forget Trump: Europe plans to push for more ambition on climate

Ewa Krukowska, Bloomberg
8 July 2018

Singapore to help ASEAN better tackle climate change with new programme

Junn Loh, Channel News Asia
10 July 2018

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The case for a dedicated regional mechanism for climate change: A comparative assessment

Margareth Sembiing, NTS Insight No. IN18-04, Singapore: RSIS
2018

Climate adaptation in fragmented governance settings: The consequences of reform in public administration

Roos M. Den Uyl and Duncan J. Russel, Environmental Politics, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp.341-361
2018

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

East Asia Air Quality Forum

4–5 September 2018
Seoul, South Korea

2018 Climate Alliance International Conference

1–3 October 2018
Barcelona, Spain



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ENERGY SECURITY

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

Nuclear power beyond electricity: Towards greater efficiency in energy production and water management

Shant Krikorian, International Atomic Energy Agency
28 June 2018

Prospects for nuclear power in ASEAN

Nur Azha Putra and Phillip Andrews-Speed, The Diplomat
28 June 2018

Utilities reaffirm faith in nuclear power despite safety concerns

The Asahi Shimbun,
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3M launches 14,000 sq m solar farm in Tuas

Jose Hong, The Straits Times
28 June 2018

Mongolia's place in Northeast Asia's renewable power grid

Alicia Campi, Eurasia Daily Monitor
28 June 2018

India to take all steps to ensure its energy security

Press Trust of India, India Today
29 June 2018



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EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

6th International Conference on Nuclear and Renewable Energy Resources

30 September- 3 October 2018
Jeju, South Korea

Innovative Energy Solutions for Military Applications

14-16 November 2018
Vilnius, Lithuania

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Lifting the lid on nuclear liability

Lovely Umayam, Kathryn Rauhut, and Jacqueline Kempfer, Stimson Center, World Institute for Nuclear Security, and 39 Essex 2018

Pre-feasibility study on the establishment of nuclear power plant in ASEAN

ASEAN Centre for Energy, Jakarta: ASEAN Centre for Energy 2018

FOOD SECURITY



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OECD-FAO agricultural outlook 2018-2027

OECD and FAO, Paris: OECD Publishing, Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2018

Is it time to take vertical indoor farming seriously?

Per Pinstrup-Andersen, Global Food Security, Vol.17, pp. 233-235 2018

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Locally grown strawberries a first for Singapore's farming industry

Wendy Wong, Channel News Asia 20 June 2018

Berry fresh prospects for vertical farming

Low De Wei, The Straits Times 21 June 2018

Poorer countries set to be 'increasingly dependent' on food imports, says UN food agency report

United Nations News 3 July 2018

Singapore company turns to blockchain to improve food security

Kimberly Chua, ComputerWeekly.Com 4 July 2018

Dubai is getting the world's largest vertical farm — and it will grow produce for the world's largest international airport

Leanna Garfield, Business Insider US 5 July 2018

Belgian store tries out 'farm to table' growing on its own roof

Reuters, The Straits Times 5 July 2018

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

3rd International Conference on Agricultural Engineering and Food Security

12-13 November 2018
Frankfurt, Germany

3rd Agriculture and Climate Change Conference

24-26 March 2019
Budapest, Hungary



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HEALTH SECURITY



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World Health Statistics 2018
World Health Organisation, Geneva: World Health Organisation 2018

2018 Cigna 360° well-being survey: Future assured
Cigna 2018

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Who profits when private providers take over health services?

Paul Dinsdale, The Guardian
4 July 2018

Stillbirths: Australia's health policies 'failing these babies and their families'

Amy Remeikis, The Guardian
8 July 2018

A frightening new reason to worry about air pollution

Olga Khazan, The Atlantic
6 July 2018

A year on from battle: Mosul's healthcare system is still in ruins

Medecins Sans Frontieres
9 July 2018

How millennials' choices are reshaping private health insurance for everyone

Catherine Hanrahan, ABC News
7 July 2018

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

International Healthy Cities Conference
1-4 October 2018
Belfast, United Kingdom

Global Public Health Congress
18-19 October 2018
Paris, France



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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

Adhering to Paris Agreement climate goal could significantly decrease heat-related summer deaths

University of Bristol, PreventionWeb.Net
26 June 2018

ICRC to increase food aid in Rakhine State

Mizzima News
28 June 2018

Better risk management can reduce disaster displacement

Mami Mizutori, Thomson Reuters Foundation News
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Courtesy of Flickr account of US Army and used under a creative commons license.

Artificial intelligence accurately predicts distribution of radioactive fallout

T. Yoshikane and K. Yoshimura,
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3 July 2018

Bangladesh cities join U.N. drive to build defences against disasters

Michael Taylor,
Thisisplace.org (Thomson Reuters Foundation)
3 July 2018

UAE forces deliver vital food aid while fighting Iran-backed rebels

American Media Institute
9 July 2018

Sahel: European Commission announces a €191.3 million humanitarian aid package

The North Africa Post
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All 12 boys and coach successfully rescued from Thai cave – as it happened

Matthew Weaver and Helen Davidson,
The Guardian
10 July 2018

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Older people in displacement: Falling through the cracks of emergency response

Veronique Barbelet,
London: Overseas Development Institute
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Complex humanitarian emergencies and disaster management in Bangladesh: The 2017 Rohingya Exodus

Alistair D.B. Cook and Foo Yen Ne,
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Singapore: RSIS
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EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

IHSA Humanitarian Studies Conference

27-29 August 2018
The Hague, Netherlands

Humanitarian Congress Berlin

4-5 October 2018
Berlin, Germany

TRANSNATIONAL CRIME



Courtesy of Flickr account of USASOC News Service and used under a creative commons license.

Robots will lead to more human trafficking, slavery, report says

Sean Keane,
Cnet
12 July 2018

How and where organized crime preys on migrants in Mexico

Parker Asmann,
InSight Crime
17 July 2018

Thai police unravel Myanmar-Malaysia human trafficking routes

Malay Mail
15 July 2018

Libyan coast guard accused of abandoning survivors

The Maritime Executive
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NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Malaysia commits to combating human trafficking after US report

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Mexico: 40% of country is paralyzed by violence, says new chief of staff

Tom Phillips,
The Guardian
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Outcry as Trump restricts funding for sex-trafficking survivors

Annie Kelly and Mei-Ling McNamara,
The Guardian
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What 'Abolish ICE' actually means

Elaine Godfrey,
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Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report

U.S. Department of State,
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Combatting human trafficking in East Asia: Mind the gaps

Julius Cesar Trajano,
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Singapore: RSIS
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EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

15th International Human Trafficking and Social Justice Conference

20-21 September 2018
Ohio, United States

39th Annual Crime Stoppers International Conference

29-31 October 2018
The Hague, Netherlands

WATER SECURITY



Courtesy of Flickr account of Philippe Floch and used under a creative commons license.

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Climate resilient water resources management

Robert C. Brears (Ed.),
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Large-scale uranium contamination of groundwater resources in India

Rachel M. Coyl, et al.,
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India faces worst long term water crisis in its history -government think tank

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Uranium 'widespread' in India's groundwater

M. Sreelata,
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Mahathir revives Singapore water issue, takes swipe at Trump

Anuradha Raghu,
Bloomberg News
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A 'new normal' for water security

Danielle Petterson,
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What do private companies look for in a performance-based non-revenue water project?

Jemima Sy,
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Water still an existential issue, despite advances

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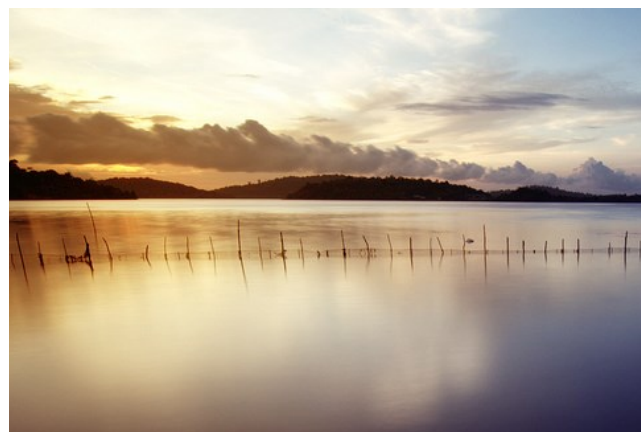
EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Water Security and Climate Change Conference 2018

3-7 December 2018
Nairobi, Kenya

InterFlood Asia: Asia's flood and disaster event

27-29 March 2019
Singapore



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