The Tor Project
Evaluation of the Global South Strategy

Revised report

Firetail

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Executive summary

Firetail set out to evaluate the Tor Project's Global South Strategy that, since 2017, has been working to build a community of Tor users and roll out a user-centric development process

Background to the Global South Strategy

The Tor Project is a global human rights non-profit organisation working to protect people's online privacy and bypass censorship on the Internet. The Global South Strategy (GSS) was first conceptualised at an all-hands meeting in 2016 **to connect the Tor Project more closely with its target end users, the majority being at-risk communities in the Global South**. Following the meeting, the Tor Project applied to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for a 3-year grant of $1.85m to fund the strategy, which ran from January 2017 until January 2020. After three years, Sida agreed to fund an extension of the intervention, with an estimated $1.46m over the following three years.

The GSS targets Colombia, Kenya and Uganda, but supports organisations in several other countries across the Global South – in Asian, Latin American and African regions. It has five phases complete, with phase six underway until mid-2023. The strategy has two overarching goals:

- **To build a "community" of Tor users in regions in the Global South** in order to empower people to be more secure on the Internet
- **To build a user-centric development process** by conducting assessments with at-risk users to facilitate usability improvements of Tor technologies and products

Methodology of this evaluation

Firetail's approach centred around an evaluation framework we developed with the Tor Project during the inception phase of this evaluation. This shaped our research into four key areas of assessment:

1. **Impact on Tor** – What is the impact of the GSS on the Tor Project itself?
2. **Impact on partners** – What is the value of GSS activities to the Tor Project's partners?
3. **Coordination** – Is the GSS well-coordinated, transparent and inclusive?
4. **Sustainability** – To what extent has the GSS built momentum in the countries and regions where it operates?

We conducted desk research of the Tor Project's internal data and documents, alongside a programme of internal and external stakeholder engagement. Firetail developed an impact matrix structuring the impact outcomes in relation to tangibility and speed of emergence. This helped us to assess the overall impact and relevance of the GSS, and informed the recommendations made at the end of this report.

Our methodology is limited to qualitative and anecdotal findings. Privacy and anonymity is inherent in Tor tools with the result being no user data is collected. It is also difficult to acquire first-hand evidence of the strategy for this evaluation as the target audience is predominantly at-risk communities, who may fear repercussions and potential persecution.

The GSS has had an impact on Tor partners for practical and real-world applications. It is transparent, inclusive and has potential to scale through better formalisation and strategic partnerships

Evaluation findings

Impact on Tor

Staff further from the strategy's delivery – from non-UX and non-Community teams – feel more connected to at-risk users and are able to understand their needs better. The UX team has demonstrated that transparent and non-invasive data collection from users is possible – external stakeholders report that Tor is responsive to user feedback. There is general agreement among stakeholders that Tor tools have improved, and knowledge resources have become more accessible for Global South users since 2017.

Impact on GSS partners

Training sessions have increased awareness around digital security and built the capacity of trainers in the Global South. Tor has taken strides to translate its tools – localisation has grown the accessibility of Tor tools for partners. There is room to improve how tailored the training is to participants' needs – with opportunities to consider working in partnerships with organisations who bring proxy tools. The GSS has strengthened partners' capabilities and supported their work to further their missions. Stakeholders shared concrete examples of the impact of using Tor after the training session, including accessing blocked information, overcoming censorship and empowering minority groups. There is an ongoing need for GSS activities in the future.

Coordination and sustainability of the GSS

The Tor Project is becoming better known among users in the Global South. Stakeholders praise its transparency and openness to engagement. Tor retains strong relationships with its current partners which have been built through local 'chains' of trusted contacts. Consensus on the nature of the Tor community is low: for those with a technical background, it is welcoming and increasingly diverse. For those without, the Tor community can be hard to access. Most stakeholder characterise the Tor community in the Global South as self-selective. There is an opportunity for Tor to better coordinate partnerships within the community, maintain its presence in Global South regions and continually emphasise its human rights purpose.

Recommendations

1. The GSS has grown in an opportunistic and reactive way. The Tor Project should consider giving the programme a more formal status within the organisation. There should be more consistent language about how the organisation talks about the GSS both internally and with external partners that gives it a distinct identity. The GSS should have its own long-term objectives, yearly objectives, Theory of Change and MEL plan.
2. There are options to grow the programme:
   - New and refined target audiences: be more granular in audiences, especially human rights defenders
   - New geographies: considering level of need for internet freedom within each country
   - New training modalities: advance needs-led assessment + holistic training of all Tor-enabled tools, with partnerships

Introduction

Firetail has been commissioned by the Tor Project to conduct an evaluation of its Global South Strategy from early 2017 to mid-2022

The Tor Project's Global South Strategy (GSS) at a glance:
Objective: To implement an intervention in support of activists and others fighting for their rights under repressive and unstable regimes.

1 Funder: the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

$1.85M Original funding amount

$1.46M Estimated follow-on funding

3 Target countries (Colombia, Kenya and Uganda), but the strategy has a global remit

Background

The Tor Project (Tor) is a global human rights non-profit organisation, founded in 2006 in Seattle, to protect people's online privacy and bypass censorship on the Internet. Its mission is to "*advance human rights and freedoms by creating and deploying free and open source anonymity and privacy technologies, supporting their unrestricted availability and use, and furthering their scientific and popular understanding.*" Since January 2017, the Tor Project has been funded by Sida to advance this mission in geographies in the Global South.

Objectives

This evaluation will cover the period of January 2017 to June 2022 (5.5 years). The Global South Strategy has reached a certain level of maturity, and so the objectives of this evaluation are:
- To provide insight into the **impact** and **relevance** of Tor's Global South Strategy
- To evaluate the strategy's impact on **advancing Tor's mission** around the world

Approach

The evaluation has been guided by an **evaluation framework** (see slide overleaf) that organises the research into four key areas of assessment: **1) impact on the Tor Project itself, 2) impact on the Tor Project's partners, 3) coordination and 4) sustainability.** The evaluation framework was developed in close collaboration with Tor's project team during the project's inception phase, and was included in the Inception Report (with sign-off from Sida partners).

Firetail underwent a research methodology that consisted of the following key activities:
- **Desk research** of the Tor Project's internal documents and data
- Attendance at the Tor Project's **organisational meeting in September 2022 in Limerick, Ireland** to conduct internal interviews (+/-10 interviews) and attend sessions with the Community and UX teams
- **Interviews** with 25 external stakeholders (target = 22) including peer organisations, partner organisations and individual intermediaries / Tor users in the Global South. *Please see Appendix for full list of stakeholders consulted and additional stakeholder quotes.* This report outlines the findings and recommendations of the evaluation.

This evaluation has been guided by an evaluation framework, underpinned by key research questions

The Global South Strategy (GSS) seeks to develop integral, cyclical and repeatable interventions of training, usability assessments and usability improvements of Tor technologies used by vulnerable populations.

The GSS is comprised of two main areas of activity:

1. Outreach and training
Conduct outreach, form and build relationships with organisations and individuals, empower people to protect themselves online/ communicate securely (led by the Community team)

2. Build a user-centric development process:
Collect feedback from at-risk users and input this to the technology / tool development process (led by the user experience (UX) team)

Evaluation framework:

Impact area	Key research questions
1. Impact on Tor	• What is the impact of the GSS on the Tor Project itself? • How does the GSS help other Tor activities? How do non-GSS Tor staff understand GSS, how do they "use" it? • Is user feedback collected by the UX team leading to improvements in Tor's tools and products?
2. Impact on Partners	• What is the value of GSS activities to partners? • What impact has GSS had on their capabilities and their ability to execute their own organisations' mission? • To what extent have the skills shared during the digital security training / workshops met partners' needs?
3. Coordination	• Is the GSS well-coordinated? Transparent? Inclusive? • Does the Tor Project have good relationships with its partners? • What would make these relationships stronger?
4. Sustainability	• To what extent has the GSS built momentum in the countries / regions where it operates? • What would it take to foster self-sustaining regional communities of Tor users?

Key scope limitations:
It is important to note that this evaluation is **not a technical audit** of the Tor Project's technology or code. It seeks to provide insight into and recommendations for the **overall impact of Tor's engagement and work in the Global South (see impact matrix overleaf)** – it does not set out to measure impact per activity or goal. Evidence of impact across the evaluation framework will be qualitative and anecdotal.
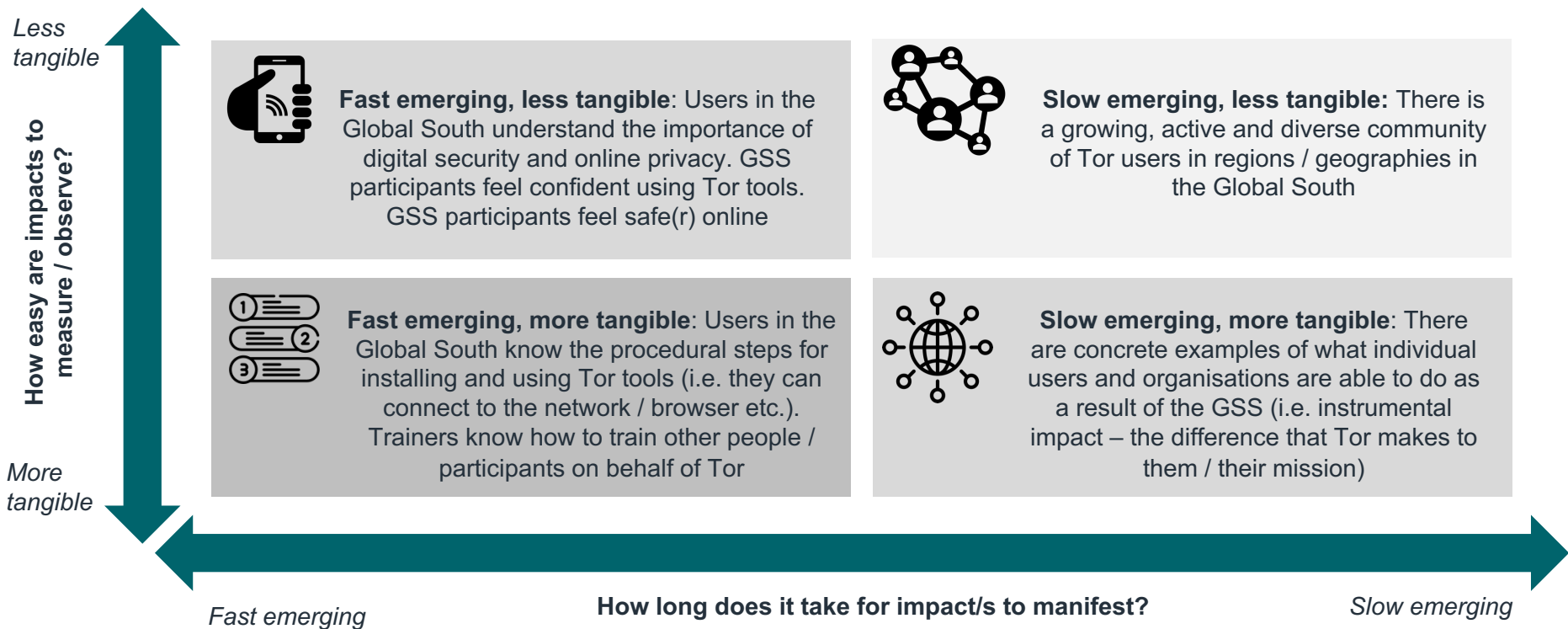
We have described areas of potential impact through a matrix, which is derived from the evaluation framework

Impact matrix for the GSS evaluation:
This evaluation explores the Tor Project's impact in the Global South on scales of the time it takes for impact to manifest (x axis) – from fast emerging to slow(er) emerging – and the visibility / tangibility of impact examples and observations (y axis) – from tangible to difficult to ascertain / less tangible. Outcomes in the top right quadrant (slow emerging and less tangible) are the most difficult / more abstract examples of impact to capture.

Evidence was gathered through a combination of desk research and stakeholder engagement. Firetail spoke predominantly to **intermediary organisations or individuals in the Global South** who are members of the Tor user community or who have been trained by Tor to conduct trainings with their communities or local networks, alongside a number of peer organisations (see Appendix for full list). These conversations brought indirect / reported examples of impact. **Firetail had limited direct engagement with community members / grassroots organisations** who were recipients of training sessions themselves.

Less tangible

How easy are impacts to measure / observe?

Fast emerging, less tangible: Users in the Global South understand the importance of digital security and online privacy. GSS participants feel confident using Tor tools. GSS participants feel safe(r) online

Slow emerging, less tangible: There is a growing, active and diverse community of Tor users in regions / geographies in the Global South

Fast emerging, more tangible: Users in the Global South know the procedural steps for installing and using Tor tools (i.e. they can connect to the network / browser etc.). Trainers know how to train other people / participants on behalf of Tor

Slow emerging, more tangible: There are concrete examples of what individual users and organisations are able to do as a result of the GSS (i.e. instrumental impact – the difference that Tor makes to them / their mission)

More tangible

Fast emerging

How long does it take for impact/s to manifest?

Slow emerging

Overview of the Global South Strategy

The strategy was conceived to connect with, engage, and hear feedback from the most at-risk Tor users in the Global South

Origin of the Global South Strategy

The first concept of the GSS was born at an all-hands meeting in Seattle in 2016 – **the idea that it is vital to ensure Tor tools are known, are effective and are actively used among Tor users, activists and community partners in high-risk countries – where online privacy and security is in the most jeopardy**. These fall predominantly in the Global South (see slide 17 for the state of digital rights in the region). Following Seattle, the Tor Project conceptualised a pilot-phase strategy and applied to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for a 3-year programmatic grant to fund it. The first stage of the grant ran from January 2017 to January 2020, followed by a renewal by Sida.

In 2018, the Tor Project hosted an all-hands meeting in Mexico. This was an opportunity to hold an open call for activists outside of the technical community. The meeting was a great success – it solidified the need for the GSS and acted as a springboard for community outreach and engagement. Thereafter, Tor's Community and UX teams underwent a series of research trips to Indonesia, India, Uganda, Kenya and Colombia to meet community members in person and establish a base for the work to begin.

Objectives and target countries

The strategy has two overarching goals:
1. **To build a "community" of Tor users in regions in the Global South** in order to empower people to be more secure on the Internet
2. **To build a user-centric development process** – conducting usability assessments with at-risk users to facilitate usability improvements of Tor technologies and products

The grant from Sida targets Colombia, Kenya, and Uganda chosen on a needs basis overlayed with Sida's official partner countries (see here and here, and slide 42). Furthermore, the countries had to pass key criteria of safety for Tor to conduct GSS activities in-country and safety for participants to attend. **In practice, the strategy extends to Brazil, Indonesia, India, Mexico, Guatemala, Tanzania, among others** – in countries where digital rights are increasingly challenged. The Tor Project conducts other types of work in other countries across the Global South (e.g., China, Iran) but this was of scope for this review.

"There was a realisation among developers that a lot of people outside their technology community were using Tor – we needed to understand how they were interacting with our tools. The intent [of the strategy] was to make the Tor Browser work for people in settings where internet availability is not measured, connectivity is a spectrum, where people don't necessarily speak English."

"Mexico was one of the best meetings to build community – we connected with a less technical audience who were using Tor tools to advance a social progress agenda. They were not just users but journalists, teachers, human rights advocates."

Internal | Intermediary / trainer / recipient | Peer organisation

There are four programme components that support the overall objectives of community building and user-centric product development

As conceived in the original project proposal to Sida, the GSS consists of four, interconnected programme components – these are underpinned by a process of needs assessment, analysis and response (programmatic intervention):

	Prog. component	Objective / description	Pilot phase objectives (Years 1-3)
A user-centric development process	**1. Improving usability of Tor knowledge resources**	Addresses issues in Tor's knowledge resources and information. This helps to **prevent (potential) Tor users from abandoning Tor products** due to obstacles faced along the usability path	• Tor Project website redesign which reorganises and localises key information, offers a mobile-responsive version and creates separate topical portals for access to resources • Create the Community Outreach and Training Portal; Developer Portal; User Support Portal
	2. Capturing and communicating usability issues	Two-fold approach that aims to first **document and relay Tor usability issues** to software development teams, and then for the **resultant software development changes / updates** to be planned and shared back / among networks	• Capture real usability issues from Global South users (through the Training Partners programme that performs privacy and security workshops, Tor software training) • Community, UX and Tor Browser teams work together to triage usability-improvement requirements, translation requirements • Develop, release and share software updates – "night builds"
A Tor "community" in GS regions	**3. In-country outreach, assessment and training events**	**Mobilises local outreach coordinators** to engage civil society groups, user trainers (known as "Training Partners") and UX researchers. This helps to drive the building of local / regional Tor networks	• Build an outreach programme in key geographies • Develop training materials that can be used repeatedly, including scaling to different geographies and population groups • Establish relationships with and train Training Partners in the Global South, using relevant resources / documentation
Towards both objectives	**4. Building better software and scaling the programme**	**Build the internal / supporting infrastructure** to ensure the Global South Strategy becomes subsumed into Tor development cycles. **Future scaling** (new partners, new activities, further localisation)	• The Community team prioritises expanding Training Partners, creating mechanisms to track progress, further localisation • UX team prioritises systematising and expanding feedback collection / review process, working closely with Tor Browser team

Beyond the first three years of the programme, the progress of activities was reviewed and scaled up where relevant.

GSS activities span Asia, East Africa and Latin America

Countries / regions where GSS activities have taken place:

Region
- Asia
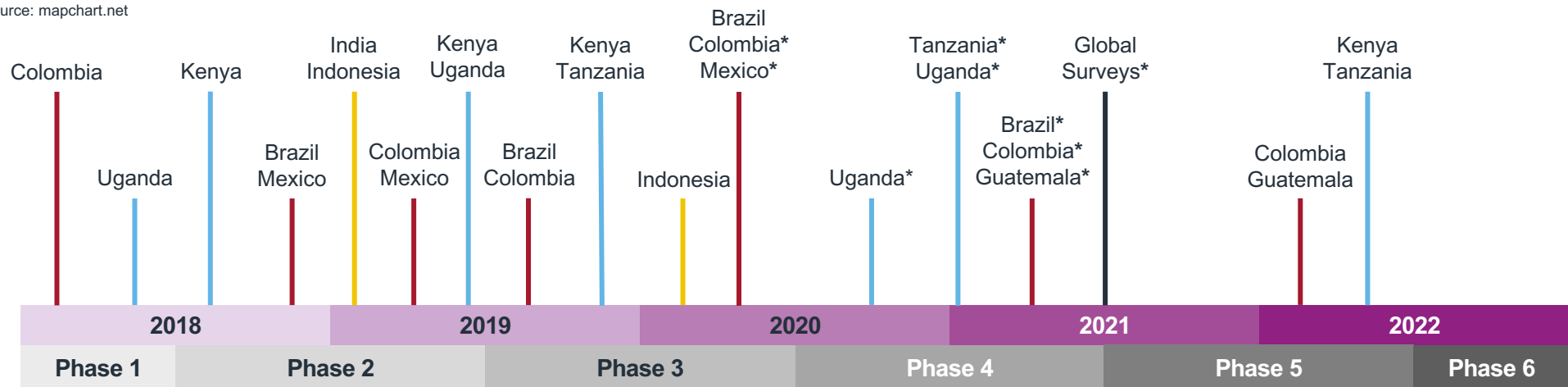- East Africa
- Latin America

Source: mapchart.net
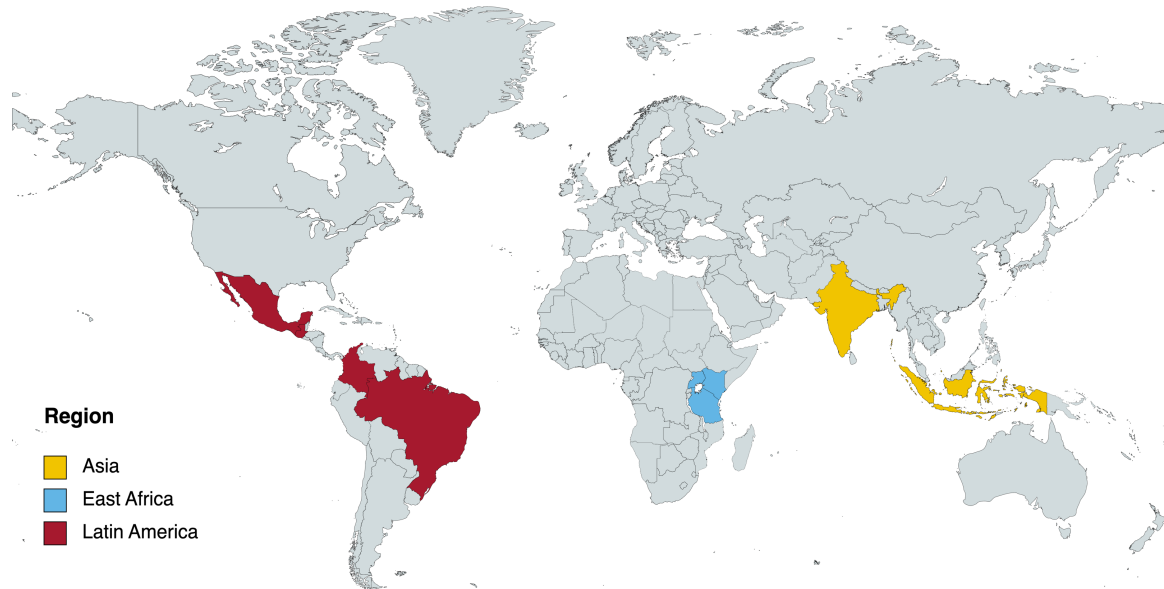
The GSS was originally conceived to target Colombia, Kenya and Uganda. These were chosen because Tor staff wanted to travel to the countries and meet with users face-to-face. They also met critical safety criteria that made it possible to hold / attend training sessions. Some trainings were conducted in private i.e. without a large public profile, in order to safeguard participants' safety.

In practice, the GSS extended well beyond the three target countries to other countries where users face threats and risks on the Internet (see map left). The Tor Project does other work in other parts of the Global South (e.g., China, Iran) but this was of scope for this review.

The strategy has six phases of work spanning 5.5 years – see slide 14 for detailed activities. Activities post-2020 were disrupted due to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) and were forced to shift online.

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6

Timeline activities:
- Colombia
- Uganda
- Kenya
- Brazil / Mexico
- India / Indonesia
- Colombia / Mexico
- Kenya / Uganda
- Brazil / Colombia
- Kenya / Tanzania
- Indonesia
- Brazil / Colombia* / Mexico*
- Uganda*
- Tanzania* / Uganda*
- Brazil* / Colombia* / Guatemala*
- Global Surveys*
- Colombia / Guatemala
- Kenya / Tanzania

*activity conducted virtually due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tor's approach in-country was to run immersive digital security trainings and conduct non-invasive user research

Pilot stage – Practical approach and process

Stakeholders shared that Tor followed a general approach in-country to meet the four programme components:

1. **Conduct outreach**, connect with local non-profit organisations and community groups either through direct outreach (via existing Tor networks) or through introductions by a local partner or Tor user on the ground.

2. **Plan and run a digital security training** with local organisations or community groups at-risk online. Training sessions were run by one digital safety trainer (Community team) and one UX researcher. In one country, they typically took 10 days to deliver (over several cities) and involved 5-25 participants per session. Participants were diverse, ranging from human rights defenders, journalists, LGBTQIA+ participants, feminists and social activists. During the first three phases of work (pre-2020), these training sessions happened in-person through Tor's "immersion trips".

Training sessions were generally structured as follows:

   a) **Introduction** – the need for digital security and online privacy

   b) **Threat model exercise** – identifying potential adversaries or attacks online, protection requirements

   c) **How to protect yourself online** – introduction to the Tor Project, the Tor Network and tools, using Tor resources and supporting documentation. This section was often tailored based on the audience, type of work / risk and level of technical acumen. Most stakeholders shared that Tor started with the Tor Browser as the entry point to Tor tools – for places with internet censorship, the training explained how to use bridges in the Tor Browser to bypass it. For journalists, the training session included sharing sensitive information on OnionShare.

From 2020, activities conducted by Tor staff underwent a permanent shift away from face-to-face, in-country delivery to more virtual activities delivered remotely. In-person training sessions were run by trainers on behalf of Tor (see right).

Next stage – UX research and training the trainers

Tor's user experience (UX) research method is **underpinned by respect for the user and the safeguarding of user privacy,** see the code of conduct here. This means UX data collection is non-invasive and driven by user consensus – Tor collects data in-person with users by observing their use of Tor tools and running short interviews (direct feedback). Stakeholders confirm these UX sessions are held at the end of digital security trainings, giving participants the opportunity to opt in.

From the first round of UX research sessions, **the UX team developed five personas that map users' journey to using Tor tools**. The personas each contain insight into types of users, varying risk levels, technical proficiencies and bandwidth levels, alongside key pain points the user faces in-country (ISP, censorship, connectivity).

The next phase of training was to establish a **Training of Trainers programme** to allow community members to conduct trainings in their local settings / among their networks without Tor staff being present. This required onboarding of trainers and localised training documentation (relevant languages, context, threat models). The trainers were also taught how to collect user feedback on behalf of Tor.

There were a number of activities during each phase of work. Phase six is underway until mid-2023

Phase 1: December 2017 – June 2018

- Established relationships with human rights, civil society, activists, and digital rights organisations in Colombia, Kenya, and Uganda
- Hosted 10 workshops that reached 100+ people
- Identified improving Tor's usability on mobile phones as a priority area

Phase 2: July 2018 – June 2019

- Established relationships with human rights, civil society, activists, and digital rights organisations in Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, India, Thailand and Indonesia
- 68 GSS activities reached 1000+ people
- Launched new website localised in seven languages, with another five languages added later
- Improved training resources and localised to Bahasa Indonesia, Portuguese and Spanish
- Diversified range of printed materials to match more use-cases

Phase 3: July 2019 – June 2020

- Supported partners to transition them to conduct trainings independently (i.e. without the Tor Project)
- Established first partnership in Tanzania
- Set up an email-based feedback system (reviewed then later scrapped) Increased the number of supported languages on the Tor Browser to 32
- Amended the usability issues related to the Tor Browser
- Many in-person activities were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic – forced to shift online in next phase

Phase 4: July 2020 – June 2021

- Pivoted to online training to adapt to the pandemic context
- Ensured partners have the access and resources to conduct virtual trainings
- Established first partnership in Guatemala
- Worked with partners to continue conducting usability tests

Phase 5: June 2021 – July 2022

- Automated localisation process
- Started monthly localisation hangouts with community members
- Opened up the Community Portal to include training resources from partners as well
- Conducted a global user survey with 50,225 responses
- Continued to run training sessions with new partners in new regions, including Guatemala and Tanzania

"Tor works a lot on how everyone can contribute on this project – there is not one type of task, not one type of person, we work in many ways. You can organise trainings and you don't need to be an expert – they help you to organise a space, help with questions. It is so easy to open channels and they have a lot of materials."

| Internal | Intermediary / trainer / recipient | Peer organisation |

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Evaluation findings

The findings of this evaluation will be structured according to the categories of the evaluation framework

Evaluation framework:

Impact area	Key research questions
1. Impact on Tor	• What is the impact of the GSS on the Tor Project itself? • How does the GSS help other Tor activities? How do non-GSS Tor staff understand GSS, how do they "use" it? • Is user feedback collected by the UX team leading to improvements in Tor's tools and products?
2. Impact on Partners	• What is the value of GSS activities to partners? • What impact has GSS had on their capabilities and their ability to execute their own organisations' mission? • To what extent have the skills shared during the digital security training / workshops met partners' needs?
3. Coordination	• Is the GSS well-coordinated? Transparent? Inclusive? • Does the Tor Project have good relationships with its partners? • What would make these relationships stronger?
4. Sustainability	• To what extent has the GSS built momentum in the countries / regions where it operates? • What would it take to foster self-sustaining regional communities of Tor users?

Commentary on the evaluation findings

The findings are qualitative – they bring reported stories of the impact of the Global South Strategy for Tor itself, for partners of Tor / the GSS, and on Tor's ability to coordinate, build and sustain a community. By working with Tor's project team, we sought a sample of interviewees with a broad range of experience of the GSS and its activities. These interviews were conducted on an anonymous basis to encourage frank and honest feedback.

Firetail interviewed both stakeholders who were **intermediaries** (i.e. conduct trainings on behalf of Tor, conduct outreach on behalf of Tor) and some stakeholders who were **recipients** of Tor trainings themselves. As a result, some impact stories are reported and some are shared on a first-hand basis. Please refer to the Appendix for additional / supporting quotes.

It is important to distinguish that Firetail is not conducting a technical audit of Tor tools and technology – this evaluation looks to capture impact of Tor's strategy since 2017. This means differentiating between Tor tools (and subsequent changes in Tor tools) and outputs of the GSS itself, which may include changes to Tor tools or other "softer" outputs (e.g. deeper understanding, community growth, momentum of the strategy). Where Firetail discusses technical changes to Tor tools, it is important to bear in mind it is through a non-technical lens.

The GSS is built on the hypothesis that civic space in the Global South is shrinking and that protection of digital rights and online privacy is becoming increasingly important

Overview of the state of digital security

This hypothesis was confirmed through the stakeholder engagement programme. It is supported by evidence from the most recent *Freedom of the Net Report* – internationally, freedom online has declined for the twelfth consecutive year. The worst deteriorations took place in Russia, Myanmar, Sudan and Libya.

The Global South – and most notably East Africa and Latin America – faces the following key issues:

Censorship
- Authorities blocking access to international websites, including social media and news
- Partial or full internet shutdowns during times of high political tension, such as election periods or during protests.

Surveillance and online privacy
- Surveillance by government or other stakeholders of journalists, activists, human rights defenders and other at-risk communities
- Prosecution of individuals for online content relating to politics, religion or other social issues

The state of digital rights in the three target countries of the GSS are ranked as follows:

Colombia: score of 64 (partly free)
- Fairs poorly in violation of user rights on the Internet
- Regressed since 2018, when it was one of ten countries globally with no controls

Kenya: score of 68 (partly free)
- Second most free Internet access in Africa, but still ranked poorly in obstacles to access users face
- Maintained similar score since 2018 (68) – not improving

Uganda: score of 50 (partly free)
- Repressive, in the bottom half globally and in Africa
- Limits to content ranking has regressed substantially since 2017 (from 26/35 to 19/35)

Source: Freedom House, *Freedom of the Net* report (2022).

"The Chinese state's model of monitoring internet usage is being adopted by governments in countries such as Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo."

"In Mexico, in the first two or three months of 2022, there were around 10 journalists who were killed."

"Global South users are working in high stress environments – they experience internet blockages, it is difficult to obtain information around what is a trustworthy VPN, they are churning through data, bandwidth is expensive, often they are unable to connect."

For the GSS, the Tor Project chose to focus on Colombia, Kenya and Uganda. Whilst these countries do subject citizens to censorship and surveillance, they are not the most repressive for digital rights globally. They were decided through criteria of **safety for Tor to conduct training sessions and safety for participants to attend. The presence of local partners was also considered.** It was necessary for the Tor Project's choice of target countries to meet Sida's official development assistance (ODA) criteria – see slide 42 in the Appendix.

Internal | Intermediary / trainer / recipient | Peer organisation | Firetail ©

Impact on Tor

Staff further from the strategy's delivery – from outside the UX and Community teams – report being more connected to at-risk users and are better able to understand their needs as a result of the GSS

The GSS has helped Tor to shift internally from an academic / hacker organisation to one that is more community focused. Internal stakeholders have called it "the engine room of the Tor Project". The strategy was conceptualised to bring the Tor Project closer to the users who need it most – those living and working in countries where their online privacy and security might be at risk, largely located in the Global South.

The Tor Project, however, is historically US-based and sits at the cutting edge of technological development and design. Internal stakeholders shared that before the GSS existed, Tor developers were mostly white, male and English speaking, coming from top universities in the Global North and facing relatively low risks on the Internet. This differs greatly from typical Tor users in the Global South. **Internal stakeholders report that the strategy is the connective tissue between developers and users on the ground.** This change has been felt in the developer and anti-censorship teams in particular. Bridging the gap between developer and user is important for expanding the Tor Project to appeal to a more diverse and non-technical audience.

There is not a consistent internal nomenclature to understand the GSS – it is mostly associated with its donor. This limits how effectively the strategy as a broader concept (outside of the Sida grant) is consumed and adopted by teams. Stakeholders report that there is no single document or briefing note with the purpose and intended outcomes of the GSS – this is only contained in the original project proposal to Sida. Teams understand the strategy colloquially as "what the Community and UX teams are doing", but some internal stakeholders confuse the work with other initiatives in parts of the Global South (e.g., anti-censorship work in China). The GSS has low visibility at Board level. There is an opportunity to communicate the GSS more coherently and consistently to internal teams.

> "For me, there is a big achievement in the shift of perspective – we are a bunch of hackers who care about privacy and about the perfect code. We now have an understanding that we need to care about the community and the contact with others in other regions."

> "Prior to the Global South project starting, it definitely felt more like a bunch of developers in the US and Western Europe making something and hoping people will use it. It felt like there was more of a disconnect between end-users and the Project, but now […] you can definitely see that they've made community outreach and communications a priority."

> "Not everyone is familiar with the Global South Strategy as a concept. We don't really have this documented, it is "quasi-documented" and formulated when specifically applying for Sponsor 9."

| Internal | Intermediary / trainer / recipient | Peer organisation |

The UX team has demonstrated that transparent and non-invasive data collection from users is possible. External stakeholders report that Tor is responsive to user feedback

External stakeholders commend the ethical, transparent and non-invasive approach of Tor's UX data collection and feedback process. This is mostly through observational, task-oriented sessions that are run at the end of digital security training sessions (see slide 13). The user's identity is always kept anonymous in the process. The UX team comes away with an audio recording that is then transcribed and analysed to produce a user report – reports are then shared internally among relevant teams. Only one peer organisation criticised this approach; they felt that training and UX sessions should be conducted separately.

Internal stakeholders report that over the 5.5 years since the GSS began, the **UX approach has shifted**: for the first few years, UX sessions were generalised and broad **to gain an understanding into the fundamental barriers** faced in the Global South regions (broadly in Kenya, Hong Kong and India (particularly on bridges), Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Uganda). This helped to develop the user personas. However, the UX team found they began to hear too general information that they already knew – **the sessions were not pointing them to any specific feedback for concrete product improvements**. Since mid-2021, the UX has shifted their approach to running much more specific, iterative testing on figma prototypes in the process of being designed.

External stakeholders report that through the GSS and the UX sessions, Tor proves it is responsive to user feedback. Notwithstanding the platform to hear feedback from users in the Global South, Tor demonstrates that it has acted on this feedback by making changes to Tor tools and documentation (see slide overleaf). **Internal stakeholders note some frustration that donor cycles and development cycles can be out of sync.** The consequence is that some user feedback is missed. There is an opportunity for Tor to create more reader-friendly user research reports and consider the cadence for product development – especially as the UX research programme looks to scale in the future.

"We are talking to users all the time – when you don't have a user process and a research process, the whole development process is based on assumptions. But now we have real life examples. […] This is a way to measure products analytically and see if the changes are making sense or not."

"Recent trainings have been a mixture of security training and user research…. You should be clear about what you're doing, and not thinking you're training when you're doing a UX session. It's a different kind of relationship."

"Tor has been so open to user feedback since the beginning, they are happy to hear from users including those who are not very technologically savvy."

"We are thinking about areas for improvement a lot. I have found it tricky that the grant funding model means you don't have normal development cycles. […] Sometimes it feels a bit messy to try to get user products to fit into existing grants.The pipeline from getting the feedback and processing it into product improvements could be better – I worry that some feedback might fall through the cracks."

| Internal | Intermediary / trainer / recipient | Peer organisation |

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There is general agreement among stakeholders that Tor tools have improved, and knowledge resources have become more accessible for Global South users since 2017

Stakeholders discussed Tor tools in the narrow sense – Tor products (Tor Browser, Orbot, OnionShare etc.) – and tools in the broader sense to include Tor knowledge resources, supporting documentation and user feedback functions. External stakeholders note that Tor has listened to feedback around high data costs, poor connectivity and issues with the Browser interface. Although this evaluation is not a technical audit, it is worth noting **stakeholders noted several key improvements that have enhanced the user experience:**

Tor tools	Changes / implications for the user experience
Website redesign (Torproject.org)	• The new style guide (2017) was the first step to a consistent and visually accessible website • The redesign includes +4 leading portals – like the Support Portal, +60 pages and 7 new locales – only one (Spanish) reflects GSS target countries. There is interest in more locales • The simplified homepage helps to direct the user to download the Tor Browser more easily
Launch of the Community Portal	• Forms part of the website redesign to better organise Tor content into portals for the community • Contains six sections – Training, Outreach, Onion Services, Localisation, User Research and Relay Operations – each with resources like Tor annual events calendar or supporting content • Digital security trainers in the Global South can find materials in the Training section, including supporting slides, risk assessment templates and materials
Tor Browser version 10.5	• Although the latest version of the Tor Browser is 11.0.14, version 10.5 made significant strides for the user journey and experience such as the Tor Launcher • These include a better flow for detecting censorship and suggesting / providing a bridge to connect to the Tor network, and embedding a better UI in the main screen for visual feedback • The Browser has now been translated into 24 languages
Use of Tor on mobile devices	• Mobile devices are the main Internet access point for Global South users – in the latest user survey, Tor Browser for Android was used by 78.4% of the 50,225 respondents. Stakeholders report that the GSS has helped Tor to become more open to the importance of 'mobile-first' users, and given more deliberate thought to the way tools are designed to suit their needs • This has led to better Tor Browser for Mobile and supporting mobile apps like Orbot
Localisation	• Tor has embarked on a big effort to localise tools and documentation for better access and relevance for Global South users – using volunteer translators from the community (see here)

"The appearance and the speed has improved, but the slowness still comes sometimes. Navigating their site is a bit simpler, every resource is in one place."

"Doing Tor on mobile was something most of the Tor Project was not interested in [...] There was big disconnect from the rest of the world […] where mobile phones were taking off in everyday life as the primary computer. The Global South contingent has really changed the culture of Tor and an understanding of a mobile-first society and how important that is to support."

[on translation] "It is very important to listen and understand the user's needs. We are learning a lot, the interface – not just the letters – needs to be adapted to the different languages."

Internal	Intermediary / trainer / recipient	Peer organisation

Firetail ©

Impact on GSS partners

Training sessions have increased awareness around digital security and built the capacity of trainers in the Global South

Stakeholders describe the immediate impact in two ways: building procedural understanding of Tor tools and building confidence and understanding of digital rights issues.

1. **UNDERSTANDING OF DIGITAL RIGHTS ISSUES**: Stakeholders universally strongly agree that Tor's GSS training sessions have **increased participants' awareness of digital security and online privacy issues**. Many participants, particularly as the majority came from non-technical backgrounds, arrive at the trainings with limited knowledge of threats and their exposure whilst operating online. After the training sessions, stakeholders report a better understanding of the importance of online security and their potential vulnerabilities.

2. **HOW TO USE TOR TOOLS**: A more tangible impact of the training sessions has been teaching participants how Tor works, the procedural steps of how to use Tor in the context of online privacy and circumvention of censorship. Most stakeholders agree that the sessions succeeded in **enabling participants to download and use Tor tools after the session**, as evidenced by the impact stories on 26 and 27. Some concerns were raised over the complexity of certain aspects of the training, notably bridges (see next slide). Stakeholders also reported some cases of participants misunderstanding that Tor tools require anonymity even when logging into Gmail accounts or social media.

Stakeholders who were training partners felt empowered by Tor's resources and the onboarding they received from Tor. Tor uses its new Community Portal to offer resources to trainers which enable them to conduct training sessions independently. Trainers praise the simplicity of the resources, lowering the bar of technical expertise necessary to organise and conduct a training session. Trainers remarked they were able to customise the resources to their audience / community group. Trainers also praised the support from Tor staff, notably the Community Team Lead, and their availability and willingness to answer questions and provide additional clarifications where needed. Other structures like the monthly localisation hangouts were appreciated as an opportunity to feedback and ask questions.

"What I've seen in Latin America, is that the level of awareness of digital security matters is very low."

"We were taught why it is important to create layers and layers of protection online, and then we went through the nitty gritty of installing Tor and using it. […] But the main takeaway for us was the purpose of digital security – why it is important, what kind of risks we face when we go online."

"Tor builds my capacity. When the tool is changed and there are updates, they build my skills and knowledge before I go and deliver it. They keep empowering me to deliver content. "

"Tor is not the gatekeeper with all this knowledge, but instead they're sharing this knowledge to help people around the world to take ownership over those materials […] and this in itself, empowers local community leaders around the world."

Internal | Intermediary / trainer / recipient | Peer organisation | Firetail ©

Localisation has grown the accessibility of Tor tools for partners; there is room to improve how tailored the training is to participants' needs

Localisation: The Tor Project has embarked on a process, and made progress, to localise its tools and documentation (see slide 21). Stakeholders almost unanimously acknowledged these improvements, but **many cite language translation as a key barrier to potential Tor users**. East African stakeholders noted that resources not being available in Swahili is a missed opportunity that may exclude many of the region's populations. Stakeholders across Latin America mentioned there could be more expansion beyond Spanish into indigenous languages, which could expand Tor's use among relevant rural communities.

Contextualisation: Stakeholders gave mixed responses around how well adapted and contextually relevant the training sessions were to meet participants' needs. This was particularly the case among audiences facing lack of data or storage issues. For several stakeholders, the training sessions were too focused on the Tor Browser as a a one-size-fits-all tool, leaving very little time for other Tor-enabled tools such as Orbot, OnionShare or SecureDrop. **While some of these fall out of the Tor product universe, there is an opportunity for Tor to work in partnership with peer organisations to promote other types of tools that are applicable and support online privacy and security.** Many participants agree that the Tor personas are a useful starting point to teach different types of user, but they questioned whether they are being used to drive training design and implementation. Stakeholders agree that digital security training should be driven by the needs of the user where time and format permits (i.e. trainings longer than 90 minutes, in-person where possible).

Technical barriers: Stakeholders widely praised the accessibility of most of Tor's resources. An exception to this was the **difficulty for participants to understand how and when to use bridges**. The complexity of this feature was often compounded by limited time left during the training session to explain bridges, as it is typically the last item on the agenda. There is a need for clarity around what the sessions should focus on, which is the right tool to use and why. A brief introduction to bridges at the end of shorter training sessions can confuse the participants and put them off using Tor tools all together.

"Localisation in terms of languages, which currently prevents people from using the tools. I don't expect Tor to translate their tools into every language, but there are some key languages that are important: for example Swahili and French."

"It felt there was a bit of a hurry. […] It felt weird to not start with a needs assessment. With the people, it was a little randomly chosen because of the time pressure. It didn't start with an organisation or journalist collective who were interested in learning more about digital security. It felt like it could have been done by someone in Colombia, but then the prestige of Tor makes the training motivating."

"If it's journalists, teach them how to use SecureDrop. If there's a focus on app-blocking in Brazil, it's got to be Orbot. Finding the interests of different groups and connecting to their motivations, and the specific Tor solution will have a longer lasting effect."

"The information about bridges is too technical for non-technical audiences."

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Impact stories – the GSS has strengthened partners' capabilities and supported their work to further their missions 1/2

Almost all stakeholders reported anecdotal or second-hand accounts of participants at Tor's digital training sessions going on to apply their learnings in their work / lives. Firetail heard numerous accounts from journalists, activists and members of at-risk communities that demonstrate the widespread impact the GSS activities are having – from creating a feeling of being safer online to protecting environmental activists currently living in exile. These include:

Accessing blocked information

Impact story: "Another example is a student was trying to access a certain website for educational purposes. They were trying to research something, but then they realised it was restricted in Kenya. So they used the Tor browser and used a circuit that lands in New York and they were able to access the resource that was blocked."

Impact story: "The topic of abortion in Brazil, it is still illegal – there are some groups that are self-organising. The Brazilian government is blocking some websites around abortion, the Tor Browser is helping these people to access information around what type of medication to take, what are the side effects, also supporting them to self-organise, to connect with other communities."

Overcoming censorship during elections / politically contentious periods

Impact story:
"[during Colombian election] there was some state body that blocked the internet – from there, the anti-censorship capabilities of Tor became apparent and really important."

Feeling safer online after training sessions

Impact story: "When I have conversations with the people I know, who are actually using Tor, what they say is, the feeling they are doing something that cannot be tracked is important in an environment when you know there is violence around that can put you in danger."

Impact story: "We believe digital safety and security is the basis of our welfare, because at least 80% of what we are doing is based digitally. So we believe the Tor project is crucial for the safety of the documents, activists and the movement."

Impact stories – the GSS has strengthened partners' capabilities and supported their work to further their missions 2/2

Protecting journalists

Impact story: "Tor is very important in Mexico because there have been a lot of journalists killed. I know anonymity is a way to help your physical security [...] it can help some journalists in hiding – I have seen them use the Tor Project."

Impact story: "Right now the computer misuse act was passed and signed into law. This has meant journalists are finding it difficult to engage online, most of them do not know what tools to use to engage their audience or convey their stories. Tor is like a jackpot for them. Because no one gave them this information, they've never been through these trainings. When they have such opportunities, it really really works for them."

Impact story: "Organisations we have talked to about OnionShare have adopted it to be able to receive anonymous stories and protect the privacy of their sources."
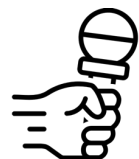
Empowering LGBTQ+ rights organisations

Impact story: "I've worked with groups in Indonesia from LGBTQ+ communities who use Tor browser to look into information around LGBTQ issues and events."

Impact story: "Tor enables us to keep all our files private, even if the offices are raided, the organisation and its data are safe."

"We use Tor for online meetings, research for proposal writing, for all organisational activities that are for the LGBTQ and IGNC communities."

Protecting activists

Impact story: "These activists are in exile and some of them are on wanted lists, the government write all the time that they should be deported back home. So they use Tor to erase their digital footprint, even when the government know they are living in Amsterdam or the DRC, but by analysing what they are posting on the internet it is difficult to tell where they are."

Impact story: "We work with marginalised women. Most of our communication is looked into by the government. Our privacy and digital security is crucial – most of our members need skills to enhance their community. […] The Tor Project helped us to reach or rather empower our women in our circles with skills they need to use on a daily basis."
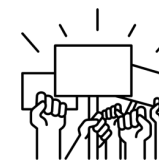
Coordination and sustainability of the GSS

The Tor Project is becoming better known among users in the Global South. Stakeholders praise its transparency and openness to engagement

It is public knowledge that the onion routing technologies were initially developed by the Naval Research Laboratory (NRL, US Navy) and today, the United States government is one of the project's biggest funders. In the past, the Tor Project has been associated with people conducting illegal activity online (see here for example). The organisation has been working hard to break down its historical reputation to better reflect its real work that promotes Internet freedom and democracy (see here).

External stakeholders confirm that the Tor Project has made strides to improve its reputation among users in the Global South. However, there is still a risk that this reputational legacy may deter new users, for example in regions where there is low trust in the armed forces and where corruption / illegal trade activity occurs. **Stakeholders warn there is an ongoing need to remind the public that Tor is a human rights organisation first and foremost.** Some stakeholders report that the introduction of Tor staff, members of the senior executive team and the Board from parts of the Global South has helped to demonstrate that the organisation is reflective of the communities it serves to support. Stakeholders appreciate being able to engage with Tor staff from their region (particularly in Latin America).

Many stakeholders commend the Tor Project's commitment to transparency and openness in sharing resources and seeking feedback. This reflects the true open-source nature of the Tor Project / the GSS. Stakeholders argue it helps to promote a good feedback loop – they feel their needs are being heard by Tor. It also supports trust building between Tor and its community members in the Global South.

"There are a lot of misconceptions about Tor and what Tor is that still need to be addressed. People will think of Tor as 'the dark web' and a tool that you only use for illegal things like drugs. So users may feel that they're targeting themselves more by using it."

"Tor can have a lot of impact if people here know that a lot of Latin American people are working on the Project. That is important and it is not happening in some other digital rights projects."

"That's important. Tor is not this North American organisation, they have worked with organisations in LatAm. Gus is in Brazil… He's in South America. Tor is not something that is far away, we can reach them."

"Transparency is very important and a USP for Tor, which encourages contributors around the world to participate."

"I think it's amazing that they actively encourage and seek community feedback and participation in the development of materials, and that's why they help to ensure that those materials are relevant for their local context."

| Internal | Intermediary / trainer / recipient | Peer organisation |

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Tor retains strong relationships with its current partners – these are built through local 'chains' of trusted contacts

Stakeholders describe Tor's approach to setting up, establishing and scaling partnerships in local regions in the Global South as collaborative, participative, with an ethic of equal partnership. Outreach is conducted organically in locations where Tor has existing partners – this was done in-person by the Community and UX teams during the strategy's inception phase (2017-2018). Since then, outreach has been done through building 'chains' of trusted contacts by leveraging the networks of one or several local partners in the region. Internal stakeholders shared that forming good, trusted partnerships in East African countries was particularly challenging at the start. This was easier in the Latin American context.

To engage new or less known countries in the Global South, stakeholders emphasise that it is vital for Tor to retain an on-the-ground presence. This could be through Tor staff or Tor "ambassadors" that are able to advocate for the Project locally. New partners in the Global South, particularly those from non-technical backgrounds, respond well to in-person engagements. It also helps to institute a more representative and sincere picture of Tor's commitment to human rights.

Since the GSS has scaled post-2018/2019, Tor has shifted its approach to training local trainers to conduct activities on Tor's behalf among their networks / local community groups (see slide 13 for background). **Stakeholders report these training sessions have largely been limited to major cities or urban areas – meaning Tor has only reached a certain demographic of at-risk user for urban dwellers** with increased access to information, better connectivity, and who are relatively technically savvy. Several stakeholders recommend that the next step would be to reach users in rural areas because they are less likely to be exposed to training previously and would have lower access to information. This is subject to rural communities being able to access the Internet and having a need for Tor.

This scale-up period was hampered by GSS activities having to transition online due to the global coronavirus pandemic and national lockdowns. **Stakeholders report they felt the feeling of "community" dwindle during this time due to Tor's lack of physical presence in the region**. Firetail recognises this was out of Tor's control.

"It's important to find people who can replicate the work and then we can support them. […] Being on the ground to establish connections is really important, to understand the user's context and their needs and proving that they can really count on you."

"It's very important to build these nodes of trust with different community leaders across the world. Because they can then spearhead community engagement in their country and region and then it just grows from there."

"I see the way to build the community is something that is needed from the bottom up. People are struggling to understand what Tor is for example, so they won't want to join the community."

"Kampala is an information hub – you can get information easily in the central area but in the rural areas it is more difficult, you have to take the information to them."

"Given that for 3 years at least, nobody from the Tor Project has been around [in Mexico], there may be some organisations that feel disconnected or not so close to the Project."

Internal

Intermediary / trainer / recipient

Peer organisation

Consensus on the nature of the Tor community is low: for those with a tech background, it is welcoming and increasingly diverse. For those without a tech lens, it can be hard to access

Through the GSS, the Tor Project has sought to attract a wider audience of journalists, activists, HRDs, women and LGBTQI+ people, and other minority groups. This is achieved through activities like running local trainings and hosting meet-ups, localising materials and offering other community support structures – such as the Tor Forum. **Stakeholders held mixed views on the nature of the Tor community in the Global South**: some feel it is still very technical and may exclude some groups. Others feel it is inclusive, bolstered by inclusive Tor documentation and Tor's proactive engagement:

Reports of a more fragmented Tor community that is relatively difficult to access

Reports of a diverse and inclusive Tor community

"Especially because we work with women – the tech "bro space" is still strong with the Tor Forum, it is a very masculine space and not particularly a space where women or LGBTQI women feel safe."

"We do very much appreciate the difference Tor has made to reach out to the minority communities in Tanzania, and really acknowledge the support and the trainings is very useful."

"It is not easy to know who is in the community. Maybe there are more people but we don't know, we don't know how to contact them – I know people in the big cities, but that's it."

"A great thing Tor does is its monthly localisation hangouts. […] There's this ongoing communication interaction, to ensure they're building tools in a way that supports the community and also meet their needs."

"It is an open community, but it is not very easy to get into. It does not seem like there are clear pathways, especially if you are not technically savvy – if you are not within the tech circle."

"It was very difficult to meet physically over the last few years […] to be able to develop a closer rapport. It is not so easy to join and meet the people from Tor, they are kind of "superheroes" or dark knights."

"I think they are very inclusive, because when we approach Tor for support, they never think twice. They have inclusive documentation – the language they use is not specifically tied to one gender, it is an all-round language."

Most stakeholders characterise the Tor community in the Global South as self-selective. There is an opportunity for Tor to better coordinate intra-community engagement

There are pockets where the Tor community is very active in the Global South – this is growing, but remains relatively small to date. Many stakeholders speculate that community participation is mostly fuelled by personal interest in the Internet freedom cause (mostly technology enthusiasts or "techies") or on a needs-basis (HRDs, activists, journalists with online privacy needs). These two parts of the community do not overlap frequently.

Outside recruitment for training, the GSS does little to encourage non-technical people to join the Tor community. Some stakeholders report that Tor training sessions are siloed and organisations participating in separate training do not have opportunities to connect to other organisations in the same region / similar sector. **There are areas for Tor to reach a wider audience and facilitate a more coordinated "Tor community" in the Global South:**

1. Ensuring engagement is through a needs basis and the Tor Project does not treat non-technical users / HRDs as a homogenous group

"It is easy to talk about the Global South as a monolith, to make broad brush strokes about it. Censorship circumvention research in East Africa is very different to that in China, the pressures that individuals face are different."

"Tor is a really good tool for research-based activism and journalism. They could really help the security for those kinds of activists. With environmental activists, or land occupations, there are a lot of threats where Tor is not relevant. [...] It's good to separate these groups a bit, distinguish the needs of different groups."

2. Reaching young people or people at the intersection of technology, self-expression and activism

"In the national strikes [Colombia], young people were the protagonists protesting against the situation, they realised if you are using the Internet to express yourself, you are at risk. Young people will be more open to these kinds of conversations […] you can attract more users in the future."

"There are a lot of new organisations, feminist, intersectional, younger people, rising up that don't know about the Tor Project."

3. Ways to link up like-minded organisations who have participated in trainings – at regional meetups, for example

"One of the most important tools beyond technology is finding a way to create a trusted network of people that can help each other when it is needed. Travelling and doing workshops can be very useful, but more than that it is about links shared between organisations."

4. More localisation of Tor tools – better local relevance and to attract local users

"When it comes to language, English is not our first language. People will not use it if the language is not simple. There are no materials in our local language. […] We have Swahili but not any others."

| Internal | Intermediary / trainer / recipient | Peer organisation |

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In order to build self-sustaining communities, stakeholders recommend fostering partnerships within the community, maintaining a local presence and consistently communicating the end goal

For Tor to foster self-sustaining regional communities of users in the Global South, stakeholders recommend it build its work in three, interrelated areas:

1. **Connecting Tor's partners to one another, which fosters new partnerships in the region:** Tor's community remains relatively siloed in technical and non-technical categories, and according to activities / events they have participated in. Stakeholders believe Tor could be more proactive to connect its partners to one another to create a multiplier effect of engagement.

2. **Building and maintaining a strong presence in Global South regions**: this could be through regional meetings, scaling up its training or workshop activities or even being more regularly responsive to political or social developments that impact the regional state of digital security. Stakeholders emphasise that training should be part of an ongoing process rather than an end in itself.

3. **Emphasising purpose:** Tor is first and foremost a human rights organisation. Stakeholders argue that this is a powerful rallying cry for community members and organisations with adjacent agendas.

"It might be interesting to do regional meetings, and we could meet in LatAm or Africa… It's valuable to know the people in the organisations. You can have interesting relationships online but in-person meetings can improve the online relationship after."

"Tor would become self-sustaining at a point where people feel ownership of the Project. This comes after Tor has built a strong presence in the region."

"People do care about privacy when scandals are going on, but then people will forget. Tor could be closer to those issues, to be present when those things happen. I follow them on Twitter, but having the Tor Project mention what is going on in the country, that might give people the feeling that the Project is something they can reach. I've seen them doing that in Iran recently, but maybe we don't have to wait for those extreme cases. There are smaller cases."

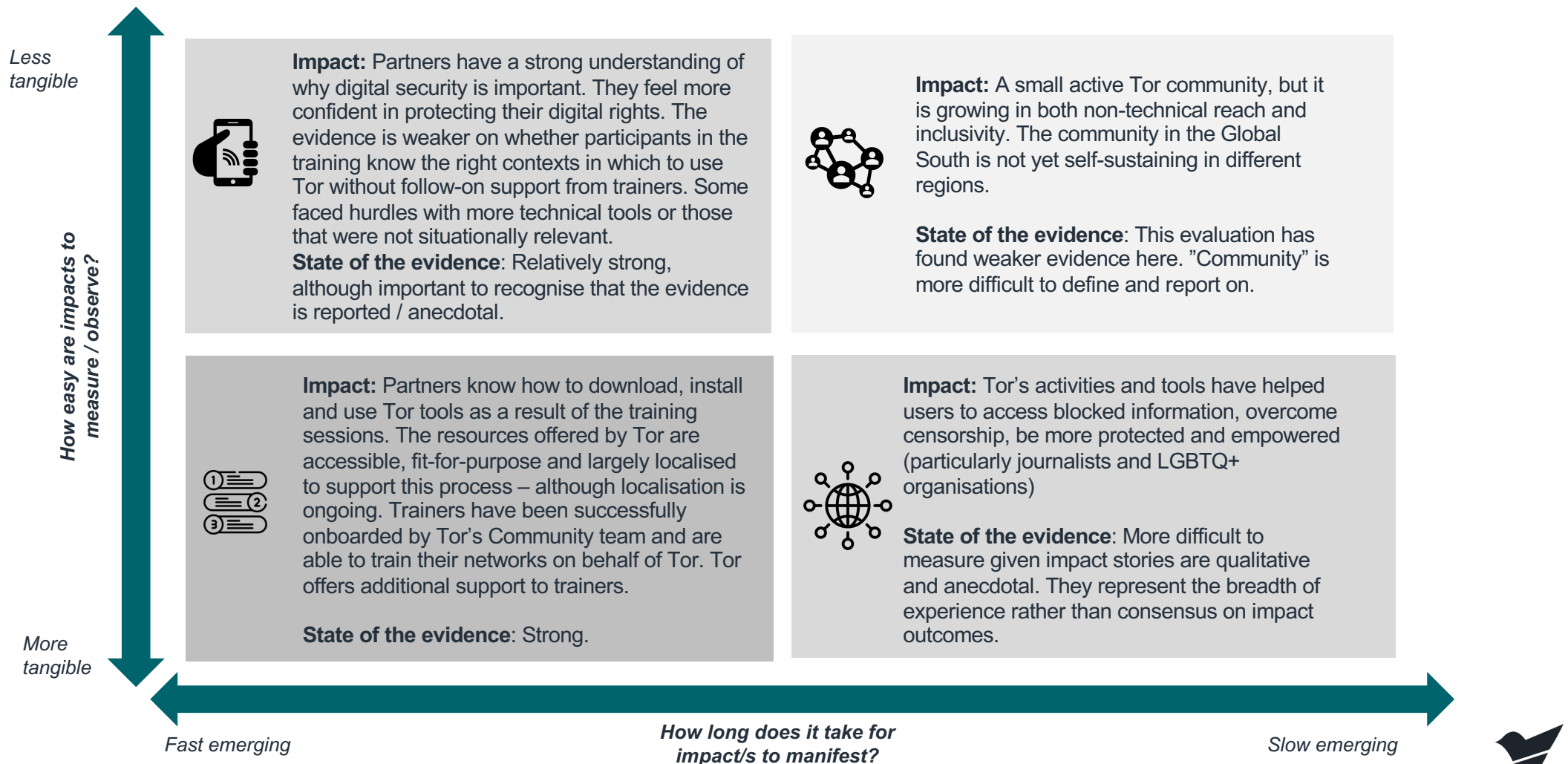"It is about understanding more what is the fit for the tool and the product – not only for people who are exposed from their political activities but also through the lens of privacy and strong democracies for all. We could join other initiatives that think encryption and privacy are critical for society."

| Internal | Intermediary / trainer / recipient | Peer organisation |

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Overall impact of the GSS

The GSS has been impactful and relevant across all four categories – the strength of the evidence for this evaluation varies; it is less strong for Tor's community

Less tangible

How easy are impacts to measure / observe?

More tangible

Impact: Partners have a strong understanding of why digital security is important. They feel more confident in protecting their digital rights. The evidence is weaker on whether participants in the training know the right contexts in which to use Tor without follow-on support from trainers. Some faced hurdles with more technical tools or those that were not situationally relevant.
State of the evidence: Relatively strong, although important to recognise that the evidence is reported / anecdotal.

Impact: A small active Tor community, but it is growing in both non-technical reach and inclusivity. The community in the Global South is not yet self-sustaining in different regions.

State of the evidence: This evaluation has found weaker evidence here. "Community" is more difficult to define and report on.

Impact: Partners know how to download, install and use Tor tools as a result of the training sessions. The resources offered by Tor are accessible, fit-for-purpose and largely localised to support this process – although localisation is ongoing. Trainers have been successfully onboarded by Tor's Community team and are able to train their networks on behalf of Tor. Tor offers additional support to trainers.

State of the evidence: Strong.

Impact: Tor's activities and tools have helped users to access blocked information, overcome censorship, be more protected and empowered (particularly journalists and LGBTQ+ organisations)

State of the evidence: More difficult to measure given impact stories are qualitative and anecdotal. They represent the breadth of experience rather than consensus on impact outcomes.

Fast emerging

How long does it take for impact/s to manifest?

Slow emerging

Conclusions and recommendations for the future of the GSS

The GSS has brought Tor staff closer to the end-user in the Global South, and supported marked improvements in Tor tools

Impact on Tor

What is the impact of the GSS on the Tor Project itself?

Conclusions

- The GSS has helped to bring Tor staff and internal teams closer to grassroots users and the user experience in the Global South. As a result of the strategy, Tor developers report having a better understanding of the barriers to access people on the ground face
- Through the GSS, Tor has undergone an internal shift from being an academic / hacker organisation to one that is becoming more community focused
- The GSS is understood to mean different things by different internal teams – it is often colloquially characterised as "what the Community and UX teams are doing"

"Now we think about the product from the user perspective, this makes the process different. It takes into account challenges like connectivity – which is not a problem in the Global North."

Is user feedback collected by the UX team leading to improvements in Tor's tools and products?

Conclusions

- The GSS's UX data collection and feedback process is non-invasive and puts the user first
- The UX team has gained insight into the fundamental barriers facing Global South users – these are more general, but they have supported the creation of user personas
- Tor is responsive to user feedback. Tor has become more sensitive to mobile-first users and has thought about high data costs and connectivity issues that Global South users face
- Since 2017, Tor tools have become more accessible to Global South users (e.g. website redesign, Tor Browser updates, Community and Support portals)
- Efforts to localise the tools are universally welcomed and thought of as a step in the right direction – while recognising that this is an ongoing task
- Systematic feedback from the UX team to the developers / other relevant teams could be improved to support the cadence for product development

"Graphic design and user-friendliness has improved a lot, [Tor] have also successfully dealt with problems of slowness and an inability to load websites such as YouTube. They've worked a lot on their documentation for the common user, not just tech experts."

| Internal | Intermediary / trainer / recipient | Peer organisation |

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Conclusions

Partners understand the importance of digital security and are better able to use Tor tools and conduct trainings. There are concrete examples that capture the GSS impact on the ground

Impact on GSS partners

To what extent have the skills shared during the digital security training / workshops met partners' needs?

Conclusions

- Tor's strides towards localisation are highly appreciated and have made tools more accessible. Despite this progress, there are still language barriers that limit the widespread use of tools – most notably in the East African context, among indigenous communities in Latin America and in rural settings. The latter is subject to rural areas having sufficient Internet connectivity
- Tor's ability to tailor the training sessions for different audience groups was mixed. Some see GSS training sessions as a "one-size-fits-all" approach, with too much focus on Tor Browser rather than the suite of Tor-enabled tools. Stakeholders recommend using the user personas to drive the structure and focus areas of the training sessions, with opportunities for partnering with peer organisations
- Tor's resources are easy to understand and apply. There is an opportunity to consider better tailoring and teaching of more technical tools to non-technical audiences (especially bridges)

What is the value of GSS activities to partners? What impact has GSS had on their capabilities and their ability to execute their own organisations' mission?

Conclusions

- There is a shrinking space for civil society. At-risk users and groups in the Global South face increasing threats online – specifically around censorship and surveillance / online privacy issues. This validates that the GSS is relevant and still needs to happen (and scale) in the future
- Participants in training sessions report knowing the procedural steps of how to download and use Tor tools. Trainers report having good onboarding sessions with the Community Team Lead, helpful resources and support structures to feel confident and able to run trainings on Tor's behalf
- Stakeholders commonly report that the most valuable aspect of the training session is learning there is a need for online security and safety
- Stakeholders shared powerful impact stories: Tor has helped users to access blocked information, overcome censorship during politically contentious periods, protect journalists and activists online, and empower LGBTQ+ organisations looking for information or trying to mobilise support online

"There are gaps in the way materials are interpreted. I've seen people see the Tor Browser as bullet proof – this is a misconception, maybe they are trying to do some anonymous research or investigations but then they log into their Gmail or Facebook accounts. Tor may need more clarity around what the Tor Browser is supposed to do versus how and when you should use it."

"There is increased awareness of privacy on the internet as a result of Tor, an increase in knowledge around how to circumvent the blockages we are facing. Before, people would not think about the repercussions."

| Internal | Intermediary / trainer / recipient | Peer organisation |

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Partnerships are built organically, and the community is small, but strong. Fostering self-sustaining regional communities is about scaling up through purpose

Coordination and sustainability

Is the GSS well-coordinated? Transparent? Inclusive?

Does the Tor Project have good relationships with its partners? What would make these relationships stronger?

Conclusions

- The Tor community has expanded its reach beyond a technical audience. New and existing users in the Global South appreciate Tor's transparent and open approach – this helps to build trust between partners and establish a strong feedback loop
- The Tor Project is a trusted partner and retains strong relationships in the Global South. Tor staff is increasingly representative of Global South regions – particularly from Latin America. There are some lingering legacy issues (dark web, US scepticism) that may deter new users to the Project
- The GSS has grown organically and opportunistically rather than being planned and formalised. The Community team has effectively leveraged their networks and contacts in Global South regions, which means that reach is a function of networks rather than need ('chains' of contacts)
- Stakeholders held mixed reviews on the diversity of the community. Stakeholders appreciate Tor's efforts to offer and scale up community support structures (hosting meet-ups, localised resources organised into portals)
- GSS activities have been largely concentrated in urban areas. There is room for for GSS activities to reach a wider audience (less urban, less technically savvy)

To what extent has the GSS built momentum in the countries / regions where it operates?

What would it take to foster self-sustaining regional communities of Tor users?

Conclusions

- The Tor community in the Global South is strong and active in certain pockets, but it is still small. The sense of community dwindled during the coronavirus pandemic when Tor had less physical presence in the regions
- Stakeholders report their becoming community members is largely self-selected by personal interest in the subject matter (Internet freedom) or on a needs-basis (e.g. working as a journalist and experiencing online surveillance). "Techies" and activists within the community do not overlap frequently
- There are opportunities for Tor to facilitate better coordination within the community, and between like-minded organisations / its existing partners. Stakeholders believe the community will be sustained if it is has a powerful connection back to Tor's mission as a human rights organisation

"Tor are trying to provide a really strong, hard ecosystem around privacy and security. In recent years, they've put a lot of effort in engaging non-technical communities. They are doing a really good balancing job – they remain respected in the hacker, technical community as well as in other spaces."

Internal | Intermediary / trainer / recipient | Peer organisation | Firetail ©

Recommendations

1. Give the GSS a more formal status and be strategic and explicit about its aims and objectives

The GSS has grown organically and has been reactive to opportunities as they have arisen. It has reached a stage of maturity where it needs a more formal stream of the Tor Project's work.

Actions

Formalising the GSS will help you to be more strategic about how you communicate and scale the programme. This means:

– The Tor Project should have consistent and explicit language on what the GSS is: what it does, who it's for, the impact you expect it to have

– You should consider consolidation with other activities in the Global South that have other sponsors into a single programme to encompass all activity to protect at-risk actors. These should not be in funder-based silos (i.e. these activities should be funder fed rather than funder led)

– The GSS should have a formal planning and review cycle: an annual plan that sets out the objectives and activities for different countries and regions

– You should consider developing a Theory of Change for this programme – and / or it should have an explicit role in the organisation's overall strategy and Theory of Change

– It should have its own monitoring, evaluation and learning framework

– It should have a clear internal and external identity as a programme

– It should have a name that is evocative of its ambition rather than the geography that it covers

– Key relationships should be held and managed at an organisational level as much as possible

– You should consider developing a formal process for entering new geographies / countries (i.e. Review level of need > Identify potential local partners / intermediaries who can identify and convene at-risk users > Conduct safety assessment for trainers / participants)

Benefits

This will help you to:

– Make deliberate choices about on where to focus the programme next (in terms of geographies and target audiences)

– Understand your progress, and know when course-correction may be necessary

– Ensure that it is more sustainable (in the event that key staff leave, for example)

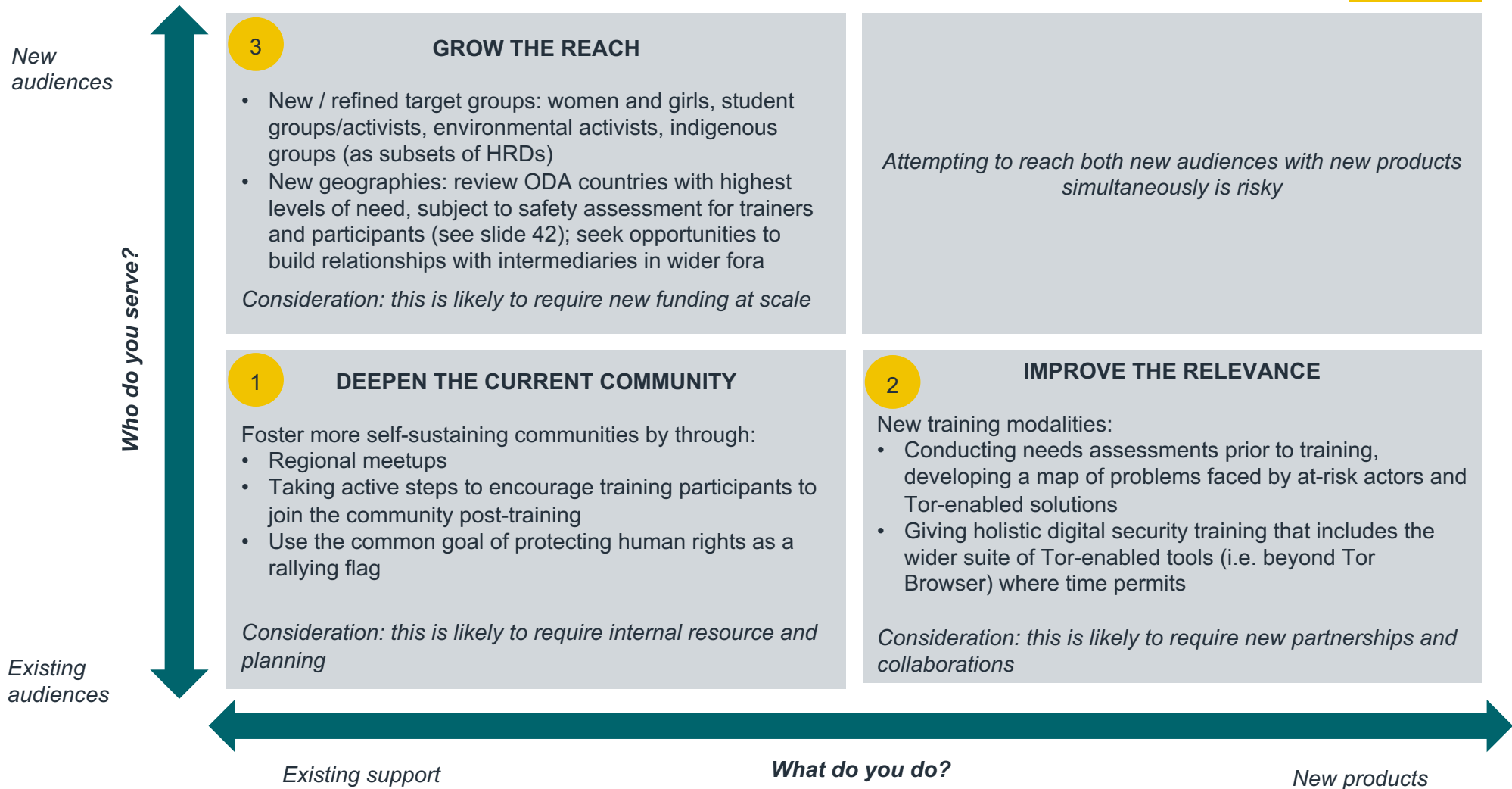– Leverage new funds in the medium term

2. Consider options for growth in terms of reach and relevance

There are opportunities to grow the GSS. *An Ansoff matrix is a useful tool to think about growth options:*

Who do you serve?

New audiences

3   **GROW THE REACH**

- New / refined target groups: women and girls, student groups/activists, environmental activists, indigenous groups (as subsets of HRDs)
- New geographies: review ODA countries with highest levels of need, subject to safety assessment for trainers and participants (see slide 42); seek opportunities to build relationships with intermediaries in wider fora

Consideration: this is likely to require new funding at scale

Attempting to reach both new audiences with new products simultaneously is risky

1   **DEEPEN THE CURRENT COMMUNITY**

Foster more self-sustaining communities by through:
- Regional meetups
- Taking active steps to encourage training participants to join the community post-training
- Use the common goal of protecting human rights as a rallying flag

Consideration: this is likely to require internal resource and planning

2   **IMPROVE THE RELEVANCE**

New training modalities:
- Conducting needs assessments prior to training, developing a map of problems faced by at-risk actors and Tor-enabled solutions
- Giving holistic digital security training that includes the wider suite of Tor-enabled tools (i.e. beyond Tor Browser) where time permits

Consideration: this is likely to require new partnerships and collaborations

Existing audiences

Existing support

What do you do?

New products

Appendices

Level of freedom online for Sida's countries with long-term development cooperation or humanitarian aid
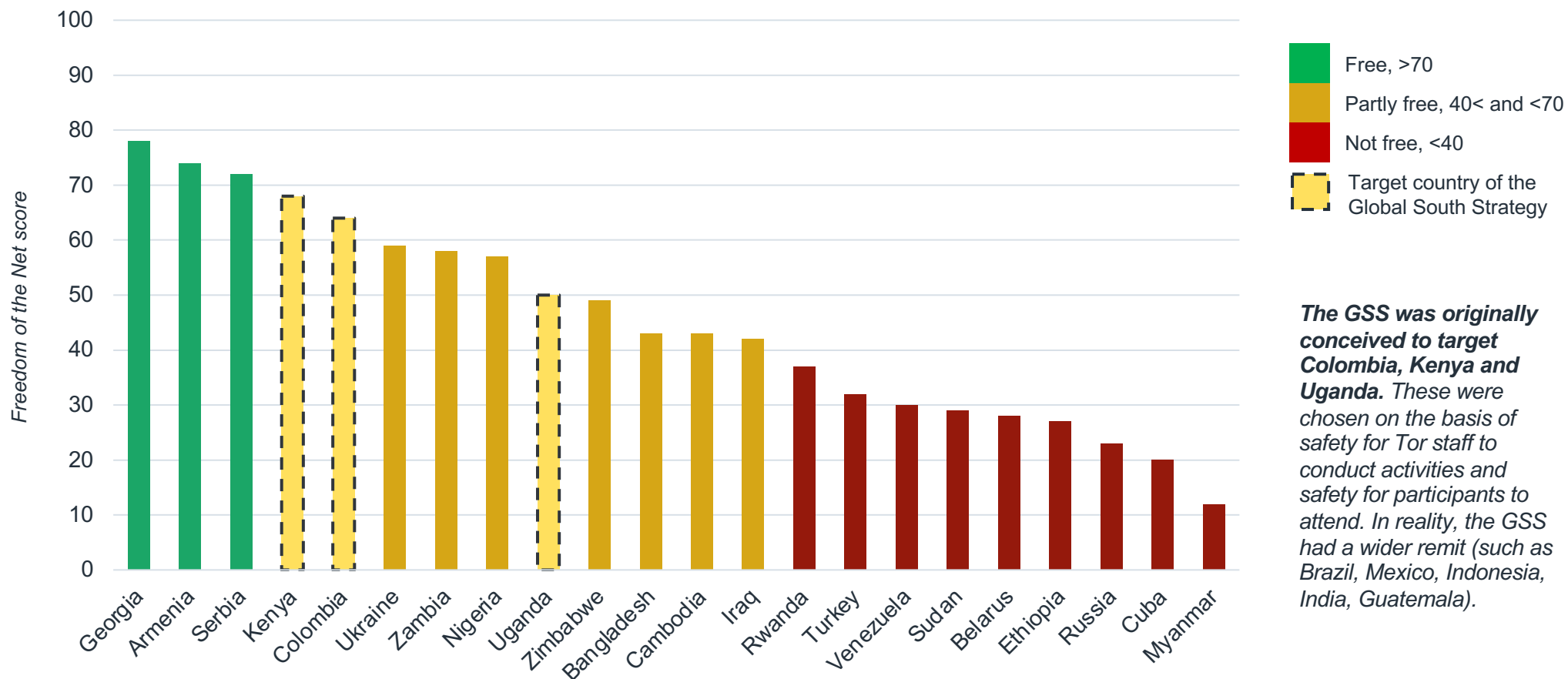
Source: Freedom House, *Freedom of the Net* report (2022) and DAC List of OECD recipient countries (available here).

Note: No FOTN 2022 data for the following countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, DR Congo, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Afghanistan, Bolivia, Guatemala, Palestine, Syria and Yemen

List of internal documents reviewed 1/2

Localisation effort

- Help Us Translate Our New Support Portal (Tor Project blog post)
- Join the Tor Localization Hackathon November 6-9 (Tor Project blog post)
- Localization (Tor Project website)
- Monthly Localization Hangouts (Tor Project website)
- Translation teams accords to translate Tor materials

Meetups, agendas and reports

- Secure Communication is Gaining Momentum in India (Tor Project blog post)
- Tor Meetup Porto Alegre (Brasil) (Tor Project blog post)

Operational documents

- The Tor Project Organogram June 2022

Outreach, education and community building

- Digital Rights are Human Rights (Tor Project blog post)
- Highlights from our Southeast Asia Regional AMA with Tor Project (Localization Lab blog post)
- Reaching People Where They Are (Tor Project blog post)
- Tor Forum: a new discussion platform for the Tor Community (Tor Project blog post)

Supporting other organisations

- Censored continent: understanding the use of tools during information controls in Africa: Nigeria, Cameroon, Uganda, and Zimbabwe as case studies (Tor Project blog post)
- Defend Dissent with Tor (Tor Project blog post)

Sida reports

Original Tor Project proposal for Sida funding:

- Application from The Tor Project for a Usability and Community Intervention in Support of Democracy and Human Rights in Kenya, Uganda, and Colombia

Progress reports:

- Tor Project Phase 1 Progress Report: Usability and Community Intervention in Support of Democracy and Human Rights
- Phase 2 Progress Report: Usability and Community Intervention in Support of Democracy and Human Rights
- Phase 3 Progress Report: Usability and Community Intervention in Support of Democracy and Human Rights
- Phase 4 Report: Usability and Community Intervention in Support of Democracy and Human Rights

Workplans:

- Tor Project Workplan Dec 1 2017 - June 30 2018
- Tor Project Workplan July 1 2017 - June 30 2019
- Tor Project Work Plan Description - Phase 2 July 1st, 2018 - June 30th, 2019
- Tor Project Phase 3 Work Plan July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020
- Tor Project Work Plan Description - Phase 3 July 1st, 2019 - June 30th, 2020
- Tor Project Work Plan for Phase IV
- Tor Project Work Plan Description - January 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022
- Tor Project Timeline for Work Plan January 1 2021 June 30 s2022

List of internal documents reviewed 2/2

User research and usability improvements

- How Tor improves usability without compromising user privacy (Free Software Foundation)
- Reaching People Where They Are (Tor Project blog post)
- Strength in Numbers: Usable Tools Don't Need To Be Invasive (Tor Project blog post)
- Tor + Tails UX - Identifying User Needs at CryptoRave 2018 (Tor Project blog post)

User personas

- Aleisha, the privacy seeker
- Alex, the fearless journalist
- Fatima, the censored user
- Fernanda, the feminist activist
- Jelani, the human rights defender

Outreach, education and community building

- Digital Rights are Human Rights (Tor Project blog post)
- Highlights from our Southeast Asia Regional AMA with Tor Project (Localization Lab blog post)
- Reaching People Where They Are (Tor Project blog post)

User research summaries

- 2018 User Research Colombia
- 2018 User Research India
- 2018 User Research Kenya
- 2019 User Research Colombia
- 2019 User Research India
- 2019 User Research Indonesia
- 2019 User Research Kenya
- 2019 User Research Mexico
- 2019 User Research Uganda
- 2021 Public Snowflake Survey Report
- 2021 Tor Browser User Survey
- 2022 User Research Interviews Colombia, Guatemala, Kenya and Tanzania

Website remake

- Meet The New TorProject.org (Tor Project blog post)
- Tor Styleguide
- Unveiling the new Tor Community portal (Tor Project blog post)
- We Launched a Live Brand Styleguide (Tor Project blog post)

Additional quotes

State of internet freedom and online security

"Digital rights organisations in Colombia and Mexico have a lot of similarities in how the drug cartels and military in the government are key threat actors. Also in Honduras and Guatemala."

"Five years ago, journalists and HRDs didn't need to worry about digital security. Then in 2019 we had the national strikes in Colombia – this was clear that the government was trying to interfere with citizens' conversations. Digital security became really important – that moment was a surprise to people."

"The state of digital security in Sub-Saharan Africa is deteriorating very quickly."

Impact on Tor

"We made a strong link with people who then came to Tor meetings, this was not an extractive relationship. We proved that if you give out free stuff and tell the community everything, for example, this is less powerful than if you are building something on common ground with the community – you are part of the improvements and you are able to see that."

"The biggest improvement is there is just so much more documentation [through] the launch of the support portal and then the community portal. The user interface has improved a lot, it's cleaner looking and a lot clearer. It's easier to figure out what each feature actually does just through the design."

"I always think of the Tor Project as very responsive, at least very welcoming of feedback and I usually trust that they will look into it and address it, which I don't necessarily see with other projects."

"I have to recognise the amount of effort they've made in localisation, the nice graphic design, the improvements in the Tor Browser."

Internal | Intermediary / recipient | Peer organisation | Firetail ©

Additional quotes

Impact on GSS partners

"I find the new Tor Forum was a really great improvement. For Tor users, you used to need some technical abilities to report something but now with the Forum, you can report something without technical knowledge. I like the "in your language" section where you can ask questions in Spanish."

"I consider [Tor] as one of the central tools for communities to do things safely. They are trying to get information in a safe way, Tor is something that people consider secure even if they don't know how it works."

"In Uganda, there are quite a number of repressive laws that have shrunk civic space and engagement. Freedom of expression is not there, use of spyware, drones is on the rise, they can track everything that you are doing – that's where Tor comes in handy. Tor has played a crucial role to bridge these things, to help activists and those in need."

"I know the participants want to use the Tor tools in their research and their jobs. Impact is hard, but they have clear information on how to download the tools and processes onto their own computers and cellphones."

Coordination and sustainability

"In Colombia, when you mention the Tor Network, people often say "this is for arms dealers, this is for drugs, this is for illegal activity." This was one of my first lessons – you have to explain to people that Tor is for activists, for human rights defenders, you have to break down these stigmas."

"Tor has not been expanded or fully adopted by social movements and grassroots communities because there is a reputation that it was developed by people in the US army – social movements in Latin America do not want to see anything related to the USA."

"Tor still remains free to use, open-source and transparent around data."

"It is difficult to say how to grow the community – there are some privacy concerns. We are working with really frontline people, this is really important to keep in mind."

"There are a lot of opportunities, but access to internet and knowledge is really unequal across the country [Colombia]. In big cities, it is easier but outside of these, it is more difficult."

| Internal | Intermediary / recipient | Peer organisation | Firetail © |

Additional quotes

Recommendations from stakeholders for the GSS / Tor

"It would be useful to include specific case studies in the training – the Tor Browser is useful for this specific situation, this is what happened for this journalist, or something. Contexts and videos with case studies to highlight what tool to use when."

"I find they are focused only on what is Tor – of course they have a lot of things to talk about, the Tor Project, Tor Network, software, tools, network of relay. There are a lot of things but this makes it difficult to raise awareness around why it is important in people's lives, what makes it contextually relevant ."

"It is important for Tor to be more engaged on the promotion of the tools – languages and resources around this, sharing localised videos, inviting people to events, sharing articles, radio, social networks, an aggressive campaign to break down the stigma around the network."

"They should make the trainings a bit longer and go through the whole process to explain all the basic non-Tor components of digital security. Secondly, it could be really good to do masterclass for people who work on digital security and work on how to do digital security trainings on how we spread the word in an understandable way. Both exercises are valuable but different."

"We need a platform or some kind of mechanism for keeping in touch with the Tor community, because they could then deliver the ever-changing context, and what to do other than just waiting for training sessions."

"If you only get the training of the tool, there is the possibility that people will use it in the wrong way or have the training and never implement it. […] The most important part is how to do you the follow up after the trainings and provide support to problems recipients are facing daily. They [recipients] might have a problem using the tool, if it is not fixed – they won't be able to do it and then they will abandon the tools."

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