Report of the review meeting

26-28 April 2011, New Delhi

Gender-IS-Citizenship.net

Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society Research Programme

IT for Change

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WORKSHOP REPORT

of

The Review of the 'Gender and Citizenship in the
Information Society' (CITIGEN) Research
Programme

26-28 April 2011, New Delhi

Organised by IT for Change

Supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

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Executive Summary

The [Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society](#) (CITIGEN) research programme, launched in 2010, aims to explore the notion of marginalised women's citizenship as a normative project or an aspiration for equitable social membership contained in the promise of an emerging techno-social order. Six research partners from Sri Lanka, Philippines, China, Thailand/Taiwan, Bangladesh and India are studying various aspects of the terrain, and four eminent scholars from Costa Rica, Pakistan, Thailand and Germany, are writing think pieces delving into the research subject from their perspectives to further enrich the research process.

On 26-28 April 2011, IT for Change, coordinator of the network, organised a three-day Review Workshop for the research programme in the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi. The objectives of the workshop were:

- Review and reflect upon the emerging insights from each research project in relation to the questions and core concepts of the programme

- Build a big picture that speaks to the theoretical imperatives of the programme as a whole

- Anchored in emergent theoretical formulations of the programme, explore the elements of a 'Southern' discourse on women's citizenship in the information society and implications of the same for practice and policy at national and global levels.

The workshop aimed at facilitating the articulation of emerging concepts and tentative theories from the ongoing work in the CITIGEN network and channel these into a debate on the larger questions of democratic structures and institutions, and their shifting meanings for marginalised women's participation in the information society, as equal citizens. In order to expand and deepen the debates and discussions, a few scholars working on feminist frameworks from a Southern perspective, and who are potential contributors to the network's research, were invited to comment and present their perspectives on the project's ongoing work.

The agenda was spread over three days to ensure an in-depth engagement with the issues addressed. On the 26th, the six research partners presented their analysis and experience of the field in the form of Stories of Change, multimedia essays capturing the story emerging from their work in relation to the conceptual framework informing CITIGEN. The second day started with a presentation by Anita Gurumurthy (IT for Change) who brought together a consolidated understanding and the theoretical take-ways from the programme so far. The rest of the conference was organised around thematic sessions about the promise of ICTs in terms of extending institutional reach and transparency for marginalised women, contestations around gender and citizenship in the information society context, and ways in which the network society redefines the public sphere providing a new architecture for community and identity building. Each session included reflections from two research partners followed by perspectives from two prominent scholars and/or practitioners. This series of sessions was closed by a session on the nature of participation in virtual reality/real virtuality, during which two scholars presented their views on the material and symbolic dimensions of the structures of the virtual environment. The second half of the 28th was dedicated to open reflections in a, more loosely structured format. Comments and thoughts were shared by the three programme advisors present – Andrea Cornwall, Lisa McLaughlin and Parminder Jeet Singh. Teams were also encouraged to sit with their advisors to clarify issues specific to their project and study the possibilities of taking forward their research through advocacy and research networks. The workshop ended with Ramata Molo Thioune (IDRC), Anita Gururmurthy and Andrea Cornwall sharing final thoughts about the programme and its last phase in the next few months.

SESSION I: Stories of Change – What is emerging from the CITIGEN research. Presentations by the CITIGEN research teams

The 6 research teams presented their multimedia essays to share:

- What is emerging through their respective research on the connections between gender, ICTs and women's citizenship.
- How the emerging insights talk to their hypotheses and theories-in-the making.

Each team had 15 minutes to present and 10 minutes for discussions with the larger group.

Chair: Kalyani Menon Sen, Researcher, writer and feminist activist, India

The workshop began with a session dedicated to the 'Stories of Change', multimedia essays capturing the story emerging from their work in relation to the conceptual framework informing CITIGEN. Each team shared the emerging threads observed with regard to the connections between gender, ICTs and women's citizenship, as well as how these insights related to their hypotheses and theories-in-the-making.

1. Bangladesh – Influence of new media in negotiating citizenship rights of marginalised women (Presented by Ananya Raihan, Executive Director, Development Research Network (D.Net), Bangladesh)

The Bangladeshi project explores new media's contribution in creating both discourses on women's rights as citizens, and possibilities for marginalised women to renegotiate these rights in their local contexts. The research aims at understanding the level and extent of marginalised women's participation in creating these discourses through new media. Two initiatives are being studied. One is the online citizen mobile journalism platform www.write3.com, launched in January 2011, where all citizens can capture and post stories through their mobile phone. It is developed as a news platform 'of the people, by the people and for the people'. Write3 is connected to the mainstream media, ATN news, through which some of the stories are broadcast. It will showcase a variety of marginalised and unheard voices, demonstrating thereby how new media influence both perspectives of citizenship, especially women's citizenship, and women's role in shaping discourses of citizenship. Secondly,

the study analyses the role of info-ladies, an initiative for the women and by the women, in the context of emerging discourses on women's citizenship. The info-ladies ICT literate rural women with a high-school education background. Cycling from village to village, they provide a range of information to rural women,

Ananya Raihan

helping farmers, as well as pregnant women, children, field workers, etc. The strength of info-ladies lies in their networking role: connected among themselves, they also connect rural women linking them to local and national power holders.

Raihan ended the presentation by giving statistics of the new media landscape in Bangladesh that show that even outside major cities and privileged areas, women are participating on online platforms.

Discussion

The discussion raised clarifications about the fees for the services, as well as about the selection process and the training of info-ladies. Info-ladies are chosen according to both their quick learning abilities and good communication skills. They are trained on a series of technical tools (basic medical equipment and data-reading, digital camera, relevant Internet browsing, etc.).

Fees vary according to the service provided. For most services, there is a nominal fee, but for the poorest who cannot afford even that cost, it is free. Some services are costly, e.g. talking to relatives abroad. Info-ladies earn around 300 US dollars a month, one half comes from the community, the other half comes from linking local producers with national level sellers.

2. China – Women's online participation and the transformation of citizenship (Presented by Haitao Huang, Research Fellow, Laboratory of Media Anthropology, Sun Yat-sen University, China)

Haitao Huang

The Chinese project compares the ways in which women from different social positions use ICTs in order to define and negotiate their citizenship rights. It focuses on Hong Kong and Guangdong (mainland China), where two distinctive political systems are in place.

The presentation started with the screening of a video clip, created on the occasion of the Chinese president's visit to the USA in 2007. The clip, an advertisement for China that was screened on Times square, shows the gender regime propagated by the government: women are represented as ethnic minorities or oriental consumption subjects or objects.

Since the UN Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), academic and social networks working on gender, sexuality and LGBT issues have flourished, along with the online citizen rights movement. A few cases are considered as milestones of the online citizen rights movement. Beyond merely presenting the victories of the movement, Huang explained how activists used patriarchal values and story-lines to mobilise people, wherein, paradoxically, using more nuanced arguments could have weakened the successes already achieved.

The China team focuses its research on three types of women agencies and their use of ICTs in defining and defending women's citizen rights.

At the individual level, they analyse the 'story of Ai Xiaoming', a locally-trained scholar and the first Chinese woman to have had a PhD since the cultural revolution. She launched a forum on gender education and created with her students a local version of the *Vagina monologues*. Her story will show how individual activists use ICTs to engage with the public on gender and sexuality issues.

At the level of social institutions, they focus on the 'story of the Gender and Media Action Group', a network of professional women media workers devoted to advocate for greater gender equality and the abolition of cultural constructions.

At the semi-governmental level, they study the 'story of the All-China Women Federation', a semi-governmental organisation whose employees are civil servants without feminist background. The Federation generally presents stereotypical images of women, often complying with the communist ideology, and refuses to get involved in contentious gender issues, such a the melamine contaminated milk incident.

Based on the stories analysed, the team wishes to build a theoretical relation between the public sphere and the civil society, considering also the concept of 'innovative social management', a set of government policies aiming at controlling massive protest and cracking down online political dissidents. Applying Johan Galtung's conceptualisation of the relation between civil society, state, capital and media to the Chinese context, they show how activists' space is between the mass, seen by the Chinese Communist Party as a source of instability to be controlled, and social institutes, media and networks, i.e. the public sphere. Deliberation will be limited to social institutes, such as universities, media and to a highly manipulated Internet.
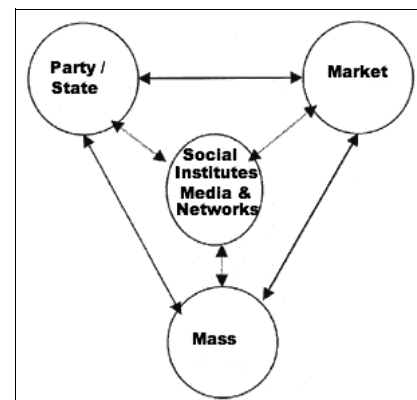
Discussion

The discussion raised questions about diverging conceptions of human rights and public sphere, usually defined according to Western standards. Lam Oi Wan explained how the Chinese government is involved in defining the rights legal framework. Rights are mostly understood as economic rights (property rights) and defending these rights therefore means defending capitalist interests rather than actual human rights.

Oi Wan also clarified that spaces for protest are extremely limited as even at the local level, the work of small groups are monitored, e.g. LGBT groups have to frame their work under the banner of HIV and AIDS prevention and their websites are still controlled.

3. India - Empowering women leaders at the local level: Translating descriptive representation to substantive representation through ICTs (Presented by Binitha V. Thampi, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, India)

Binitha V. Thampi

The Indian team is working on the empowerment of women elected representatives at the local level, exploring the role of ICTs in effecting their substantive representation in local institutions in the state of Kerala (India) where functional literacy is high and fifty percent of the seats in local governing bodies are reserved for women. The team believes that the situation of women elected representatives can be improved *inter alia* through the deployment of a knowledge network. Such a network would provide a platform to engender governance, freely articulate and share experiences, concerns and knowledge, and thereby empower the individual women members, as it is recognised that knowledge regarding governance rules and orders can be used as effective tools to resist and negotiate patriarchal power in the every day work lives. The network has been created by linking the existing support groups of outgoing women presidents of *panchayats*[1] with the next generation of elected women representatives.

In the initial stage of the project, three districts have been selected – Trivandrum, Malappuram and Kannur – from which 125 women leaders are expected to join the group. The name of the online platform is *Gramamukhya*. The technical design of the platform envisaged for the creation of this interactive communication community is inspired by design-in-progress approach in tandem with its users, their skill levels and their dynamic requirements. The main design features of *Gramamukhya* are the information sharing and support group, the discussion forum and the writer's blog.

The team collaborates with *Mahila Samakhya*[2] Kerala in both incorporating an ICT module in the ongoing training programmes of *Mahila Samakhya* and helping with the training in two districts (Trivandrum and Malappuram).

The next phase of the project will see the completion of the initial round of trainings with *Mahila Samakhya* Kerala, as well as the update of the website (discussion forum and writer's blog).

[1] *Panchayats* are village level self-governance institutions in the Indian administrative system.

[2] The *Mahila Samakhya* programme (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India) aims at translating the goals of the national policy on education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly of women from socially and economically marginalised groups.

Discussion

The discussion raised questions about the oral components of the research, as Ananya Raihan noted that South Asian societies are oral societies before being writing societies. Thampi recalled that in her previous experience, women when given notebooks were very keen to write about their experiences, which foreshadows a possibly easy adaptation to writing online.

Questions arose about the role of the technicians who are designing the modes of communication used, i.e. the website and its pedagogic approach, as well as about the high rates of computer literacy among the women trained, the actual nature of their knowledge, which often includes MS Office but not Internet tools which are seen as games for children or office equipment for men. J. Devika recalled how women elected representatives who she was interviewing for a research were keen to talk till late in the night on the mobile phones eager to express their thoughts.

4.   Philippines - Bringing the local and intimate to the national and institutional: Using IT for legislative advocacy for reproductive health, gender, citizenship and IT research project in the Philippines (Presented by Francisco dela Tonga, Youth Coordinator, Likhaan, Philippines)

The Filipino project aims at bringing gender and reproductive health issues from the local to the national and institutional level, through a citizen journalism action research project.

Even though it has been actively supported by family planning organisations, women and health NGOs and community-based groups, the passing of the reproductive health bill has been pending for ten years. The bill supports policy frames based on human rights, gender equality, promotion of child rights and welfare, access to reproductive health information and services and eradication of discrimination in the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights. It includes provisions with regard to maternal health, family planning and reproductive health education, which are essential in a country with high rates of unintended pregnancies, maternal mortality and HIV infection. In spite of this reality, the Catholic Church is actively preventing the passing of the bill, spreading misinformation in the Sunday preaches and threatening the bill's supporters of excommunication.

The community journalism project creates a space for women and young people to freely express their feelings and thoughts on the reproductive health bill. It also provides an alternative to the Church's vision on reproductive health issues. So far, eleven community journalists, coming from urban poor communities, have been trained. They have written seventeen articles, five of which have

Francisco dela Tonga

been translated in English, about the bill's hearings, stories and perspectives of women, gays and young people about the bill, gender and reproductive health issues, etc. The challenges faced by the community journalists are many: combining activism and family responsibilities, learning to use a computer, physically accessing computers in Internet cafés, etc. In order to move forward, the team is planning to train a second batch of community journalists, organise more computer and Internet tutorials, recruit an English translator and try audio-video articles.

Discussion

Answering questions about the potential of the debates around the bill to generate broader discussions around the connections between gender, sexuality and violence, Sylvia Estrada-Claudio stressed the complexity of the situation.

The community journalism project is organically linked to the bill, which is organically linked to the reproductive health and rights activism. Advocacy for the bill is multiple, and most of it focuses on the maternal mortality situation,

which is the least objectionable argument for conservative groups, even though it does not address the larger agenda of human, sexual and reproductive rights. Community journalists attempt to provide the missing perspectives about the issue even though the struggle for the bill remains very much linked to the wider women's health movement.

Estrada-Claudio also provided clarifications about the publication process, explaining how the online version of the articles is the new format of a printed newspaper, which means that the process still follows a cycle of preparatory meeting, deadlines, editing, as well as feedback on the articles published.

5. Sri Lanka – Women and the new media in the margin of the Sri Lankan state (Presented by Sachini Perrera, Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka)

The aim of the research is to study how new media transform citizenship practices of women who are currently in the margins of the political and civic life in Sri Lanka. It explores the potential of new media to provide a transformative platform for women to both renegotiate and exercise their citizenship, and contribute to discourses on formal citizenship at the local and national levels. Through this process, the team also wishes to assess the way new and mainstream media engage with and feed into each other in terms of discourses on women and formal citizenship.

At the local level, the team launched a pilot project, *Minmini News*, a SMS-based news network for rural women in Batticaloa district. As a result of thirty years of civil war, social structures have been highly disrupted, resulting *inter alia* in many women becoming household heads. The platform enables women to create news items and subsequently send them to whoever relevant. Analysing the network will provide insights on the potential of new media to enable marginalised women to access services and information, inform discourses on governance and citizenship and active engagement with local level decision-making bodies. The news items created so far are mostly

about the floods, women's livelihoods, gender-based violence and child abuse, local and international women's activism, public services and women's political participation. The pilot looks at creating avenues for women through SMS. It raises interesting questions about the meaning of

Sachini Perrera

being an active citizen journalist, power relations in deciding what constitute news items and ways to interact actively with news receivers.

At the national level, in the context of the local government elections of March 2011, the project launched a awareness-raising campaign about the importance of women's political participation and representation in mainstream politics. The Women and Media Collective created a blog providing information about potential candidates. Through this medium, they analysed women's access to information about the elections as well as their response to high awareness raising.

Simultaneously, the team is conducting two case studies. One about women using IT in selected telecentres; the other one about a newsletter developed by the community using unicode.

Discussion

Chandrika Sepali Kottegoda provided explanations about the choice of the medium, stating that mobile phones were used because they had a very high penetration in Sri Lanka. However, there is an issue in studying the relation between sending news items by SMS and

exercising citizenship rights because such a straightforward correlation cannot be surveyed.

Answering a question about the methodological connection between the two levels of the study, Kottegoda clarified that the overarching theme of the study is women accessing IT, which is

explored through the two different ways described.

6. Hong Kong/Taiwan – The power to organise and engage: The use of ICTs by women migrant domestic workers' organisations (Presented by Philippa Smales, Researcher, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, Thailand)

The project looks at women migrant domestic workers from Philippines and Indonesia working in Hong Kong and Taiwan, two locations which are good examples in terms of commonalities and differences with regard to labour policies. Hong Kong's labour laws protect migrant domestic workers and entitle them to have Sundays off. This enables them to organise themselves and be vocal and visible in the city. On the contrary, Taiwan's legal framework for migrant domestic workers is non-existent. They are not visible and lack coordination, as they do not have a weekly day off and a space to meet.

In both countries, the mobile phones is the first tool used to organise migrant domestic workers, as a great majority of domestic workers have mobile phones and make intensive use out of it. They use it mostly to get information (information from friends and other domestic workers), to connect to organisations through friends (and friends of friends), and to share regular meeting places. There is a strong connection between having Sundays off, and effective organising and participation in society/politics, simply through their presence in the public sphere. ICT connection is most crucial when it is not possible

Philippa Smales

to have a regular meeting place and day. Primary contact with organisations is through mobiles, however most organisations only text or call in response and do not have systems in place. Organisation and information dissemination could be more efficient and effective by informing organisations on cheap simple ICT systems (such as a basic bulk text system).

Discussion

Answering queries about the influence of the politics of migrants' country of origin on their organising, Smales noted that the regulations of the sending country have a lot less impact than the ones of the receiving country. She also clarified the methodology used in surveying migrant domestic workers. The basic survey asked multiple choice questions, another version enabled more detailed answers but the conditions of the field did not systematically allow this, especially for the women who did not have any day off.

Oi Wan pointed that taking into account IT policies could provide interesting insights on the capacity of migrant domestic workers to organise as for instance, community radios are allowed in Taiwan but not in Hong Kong.

SESSION II: Women's citizenship in the information society – Mapping the contemporary context

This session aimed to capture the big picture – the democratic transition characterising the information society, and key elements that shape marginalised women's citizenship in this regard. It explored the emergent norms and practices of social and political citizenship in the 'network society', exploring their gendered articulations.

Chair: John Borgoyary, UNIFEM South Asia, India

1. Emerging insights from the work of the CITIGEN programme – Anita Gurumurthy, IT for Change and Coordinator, CITIGEN programme, India

The presentation was a synthesis of the Stories of Change and the think pieces generated by the CITIGEN research programme. Gurumurthy began by noting that the researches seemed to suggest the emergence of the building blocks of a new social architecture that could possibly disrupt traditional gender roles.

She continued to say that noted shifts were taking place in terms of three realignments to power. First, in the form of informational power, as evidenced by the example of the Bangladeshi info-ladies, who have access to the symbolic power associated with digital tools. There is also a realignment taking place in terms of associational power – as in the case of the Thai migrant domestic workers or the elected women representatives of the Indian project. The information society has enabled negotiation of constraints of space and time; this is leading to a constitutive associational power. Women are able to come together to explore what it means to be a political entity. Finally, there is also the communicative power afforded by the information society – this was evident in the interviews from China and Taiwan. Margarita Salas' think piece also serves as an example of this communicative power – it indicates the way in which the Internet enabled a coming together of NGOs and civil society players to oppose the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

Focussing on the big picture in terms of insights from the programme, Gurumurthy noted that the programme seems to be 'building a field'. The research projects are pushing boundaries of

theory, suggesting new pathways for practice, as well as generating questions for policy. Based on the Stories of Change presented in the first session, Gurumurthy observed that even though the new notions of the 'digital' do reconfigure ideas of gender, this does not necessarily always link to a shift in ideas of citizenship. The new digital spaces created by the information society may take us closer to emancipation, but the nature of this emancipation must be examined.

In this light, four distinct elements from the CITIGEN programme were brought up. First, Farida Shaheed's think piece makes the point that

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Even though the new notions of the 'digital' do reconfigure ideas of gender, this does not necessarily always link to a shift in ideas of citizenship.

Anita Gurumurthy

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unless meso-level institutions, like policing of cultural norms by the gatekeepers in the community is dealt with, citizenship as promised by the information society will not be effectively accessible. Second, questions of the nature and ethics of feminist research as exemplified by the Philippines project have to be discussed: the contexts of historical time and trajectory created by previous feminist scholars must be engaged with. The CITIGEN projects – e.g. in a gay person blogging about his right to parenting - seem to embody specific localities that are not normally heard of in the grander scheme of ICTD, amidst statements such as 'ICTs empower'. Thirdly, the

migrant domestic worker project exemplifies the legitimacy of an aspiration to citizenship; however, the access to the information society depends heavily on state policy. Finally, women activists also seem to put up with patriarchal bargains: this suggests a resurgence of older methods in feminist activism – dissent, campaigns, subversion – which are recast in the light of the information society.

Borrowing from mathematical theory, Gurumurthy explained that small networks, as opposed to big networks, are networks with several interconnected nodes, in a way that if one node is disturbed, the entire network does not collapse. The CITIGEN projects seem to embody the first steps towards these heterarchical or non-hierarchical networks that defy the big network logic of the information society. Further, Gurumurthy used the game theory to describe the mass discontent in dictatorial regimes. As everyone knows that everyone knows that something is wrong, there is a hope for a historical shift and ICTs seem to be poised delicately in enabling that space.

In terms of implications for practice, Gurumurthy suggested that researchers question the idea and

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A gendered perspective of the commons is essential, as what is free and open is not necessarily inclusive and participatory.

Anita Gurumurthy

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meaning of feminist digital literacy. Given that the fundamental premise of citizenship is that one knows 'how' to be political (i.e. one has the tools and vocabulary required), it is important to ask whether feminist digital literacy involves merely imbibing the tools that the market determines we should have. Another issue to be

negotiated is that of intermediarity and the changing role of women's organisations in the information society. Using older methods to deal with these relationships bears the risk of activities, such as blogging, becoming centralised and elitist. At the same time, there is still a need to broker feminist practice. Gurumurthy said that the next step was to stitch together the fragments of the information society; move from being mobs to movements, transforming collectivities to networks. For example, communities on Facebook may seem like an empowering tool, but a closer examination reveals that the subjectivities constructed there are neo-liberal and capitalist.

Going on to contextualise findings for policy, Gurumurthy asserted that the dialogue on the feminist intergenerational divide is an important one to have. Margarita Salas' think piece throws up the extent of the divide between digital immigrants and natives in Central America in terms of perceiving and interrogating issues.

Invariably, questions of the market will remain eternal for feminists. Social networking sites may serve as platforms for communication and association but the link to the market is embedded in that question, as e.g. the Facebook terms include a clause that states the accessibility of our private information to the market. The mobiles we use in our projects often come locked-in with certain applications. We need to examine whether we are providing a front door entry for neo-liberal globalisation.

Gurumurthy ended by saying how essential a gendered perspective of the commons is, as indeed, what is free and open is not necessarily inclusive and participatory. The challenges ahead is to go beyond current institutional regimes to create innovative institutions that can address challenges and dilemmas in the information society.

2. Responses and Perspectives – Hania Sholkamy, Associate Professor, American University in Cairo, Egypt

Speaking conceptually from what she had heard on the first day, Sholkamy organised her

observations into three sections: what she had gleaned from the conversation so far, Internet

Hania Sholkamy

activism and the recent Egyptian revolution, and finally, the challenges and insecurities thrown up in terms of what is happening for feminist subjectivities and knowledge production.

Looking back at the discussions taking place, she felt she had sensed three sets of dualities and tensions: between information understood as commons and information understood as commodity; between continuity and change, as technological innovations can reproduce inequalities, and therefore have to be critically examined; and between representation and participation, as being present in a network is different from creating or changing it. She listed the characteristics of ICTs that are seen as empowering: their utility, their affordability, throwing up possibilities for creativity, and finally, an un-gendered equality offered by the technologies. In these ways, these particular technologies are an affront to segregation, isolation, etc. Projects are utilising enabling technologies for women to access rights and benefits.

Moving on to observations on the Egyptian revolution earlier this year, Sholkamy pointed out that the revolution does throw up worries and concerns with hope. While acknowledging that the electronic hinterland of Tahrir Square was densely populated with photos, tweets, quotes, etc., Sholkamy shared that the people's

The practical uses of ICTs are democratising, but the political uses can often mirror existing socio-political inequalities and relations.

Hania Sholkamy

movement only came to maturity in the hinterland; it was not created there. It was because the regime had cut off mobiles and Internet access that people went to the street as

there were no other modes of communication. The synergy between the virtual and the real, between electronic and face-to-face communication, created the revolution. Reflecting on the role of gender in the revolution, she noted that female bloggers, who were among the first ones to call for demonstrations, provoked men to follow them by demanding their protection in the streets, thereby using their femininity to make them behave more manly.

Summing up the role of technology in the revolution, Sholkamy said that technology enabled collectives and possibilities of alliance; it

Female bloggers, who were among the first ones to call for demonstrations, provoked men to follow them by demanding their protection in the streets, thereby using their femininity to make them behave more manly.

Hania Sholkamy

enabled people to know that something was wrong, enabled them to feel angry; and it enabled them to demand change. As such, ICTs played an important facilitating role. It helped creating a moment in Tahrir Square where differences were momentarily suspended and everyone was equal. However, post that moment, that spirit dissipated. Sholkamy, as a member of the group 'Women for Democratic Change in Egypt', shared that even though the group played an active part in the revolution, it has since then been unable to influence the political process taking place.

Sholkamy summed up by noting that the practical uses of ICTs are democratising, but the political uses can ofte8n mirror existing socio-political inequalities and relations. The CITIGEN researches must retain a balancing act between the virtual and the real in negotiating their projects. Addressing the issue of the intergenerational divide, Sholkamy said that we should think of the politics of development not only in terms of activism and protest, but in terms of viewing citizenship as public goods. She

concluded by saying that feminist practice and possibilities are enhanced by ICTs, but there are glass ceilings that must be examined carefully.

3. Responses and Perspectives – Mary John, Director, Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, India

Mary John began by asking what the new era of technology, as ICTs were being hailed, would bring to the politics of people who are interested in movements as harbingers of change. She picked two examples from the history of feminism and women's struggle which were prominent in bringing about a new phase of politics. She first mentioned the 19th century suffragettes, who in a period of imperialism where women were not seen fit to be citizens, started organising through signature campaigns and demonstrations and became inspirations for us all. The second example she took was from the long march in China (1934-1935), when the red army went to rural areas and politicised the women there. Among other methods, they put in place 'speak bitterness' groups where women would come together and speak about their daily oppressions, helping supposed mundane suffering to find expression and language. These two initiatives are examples of two political frames, one of large public action and the other, of smaller secluded space, both needed by women.

Nowadays, the feminist movement is getting increasingly institutionalised with greater involvement with the state. Politics has shifted to organisational spaces of NGOs, there has been a professionalisation and an academemisation of feminist politics. In such a scenario, she asked, how ICTs could be transformative.

Mary John

Living in a neo-liberal capitalist world which is enabled through media technology, we must take cognisance of both the mesmerising value of these technologies, and the risk they bear in taking some of us away from the political. She mentioned that in that sense, it is important to think through the politics of the present. She also added that, even though feminists have usually seen technologies as disadvantageous for women (e.g. when better technology enables child sex determination, and therefore, female foeticide), ICTs do not adhere to this presumption, but the ways in which they can be good for feminism still needs to be clarified.

SESSION III: Democracy and women's participation – ICT-mediated processes for making institutions work for women

This session aimed to explore the promise of institutional reach and transparency through ICTs, and thus of the emerging pathways for accountable governance on the one hand, and of active citizen engagement by women with local governance and political processes, on the other. What kind of trends may be discerned in the shifting practices and discourse of local democracy? What are the tensions that may arise with regard to 'boundary' issues in state-civil society relationships as ICTs shape governance? These were some of the questions addressed.

Chair: Sumona Dasgupta, Senior Research Consultant, PRIA, India

1. Bangladeshi team presentation – Ananya Raihan, Executive Director, Development Research Network (D.Net), Bangladesh

The Bangladeshi team began its response to the topic of the session by referring to the tension of representation versus participation mentioned by Sholkamy in the morning session. Raihan cited an example of the programme of the Bangladeshi government targeting marginalised women through the distribution of allowances. The women identified by political representatives were often not the ones who needed it the most. In order to address this issue, a pilot project was undertaken in a village where women came together to determine the appropriate beneficiaries, which they did, reflecting that political representatives did not always represent the peoples views.

Taking the participants through the democratic and political scenario and women's representation in Bangladesh, the presentation observed that the Right to Information act, in place since 2009, has allowed women to get information about their entitlements. There are thirty seats reserved for women in the assembly. However, these are selected by elected representatives, not through direct reservation. At the current time, many major portfolios in the government are held by women, which is an encouraging sign, even though male counterparts often respond negatively to this fact.

The major issues currently affecting women at the level of policy and governance were discussed. The Women's Development Policy has become a major point of contention, especially since it implies an equal distribution of inherited property between male and female heirs. While activists interpret this as a positive right, religious activists claim that it contradicts Sharia law.

There is also a marked intolerance from the State towards differing views, especially if these come from women. Simultaneously, the influence of the religious clergy has been increasing. A confusion about the role of civil society and NGOs exists as well, as many people see NGOs as corrupt institutions which use foreign aid for personal interests. Raihan said that there was in this sense an increasing intolerance from the State to take anything that contradicted its own ideology or belief. As an example he quoted the experience of Transparency International whose report brought out that the people felt the country's judiciary was the most corrupt of all institutions. The Supreme Court rubbished this statement by critiquing the study for its small sample size.

In terms of state control over new media, the presentation noted that Facebook had been banned in the country in 2010 due to supposedly inflammatory images of the current prime minister, as well as caricatures of Prophet Mohammed. Although barriers were removed later, there is a gradual strengthening of the surveillance mechanism. He shared that an interim government had made a law enabling the State to tape phone conversations for security purposes, which was not scrapped by the later elected government.

Finally, Raihan spoke about a few new media initiatives of institutions in creating participation for women. A few NGOs are identifying deserving beneficiaries of state schemes through text messages informing about the distribution of funds. This ensures that women are aware of their rights and can claim the amount they are due. Another initiative involves holding hospitals accountable to ensure free medicine delivery provided by the state. Finally, there is also a general mobilisation of interest groups using online platforms and text messages.

2. Responses and Perspectives – Zohra Chatterji, Member Secretary, National Commission for Women, India

Representing perspectives from her experiences in the government and from the field, Chatterji noted that women have always been visible in the Indian democracy. Today, the President, leader of opposition, speaker, etc. are all women. While acknowledging that representation at the local level in *panchayats* is often dominated by 'proxy' women who are guided by male interests, she also put forth inspiring examples of women who fought for their right to hold positions in local governance bodies. These women should be made role models, she said.

Zohra Chatterji

Moving on to the potential of ICTs to overcome social inequalities, she spoke of the National e-Governance Programme instituted by the Government of India. While noting that the programme set itself lofty goals, she also asserted that it would be hugely empowering once successfully implemented. The aim would be to provide all government services in an integrated manner at affordable cost through the three pillars – wide area network to provide broadband access throughout the country, data centre and Common Service Centre's (100 000 of them to be set up of which seventy five thousand are already operational) through public-private partnership models. These services provide points that can be used by women to access ICT services. They could be further developed for women to register grievances, and obtain redressal.

She mentioned that the history of India's interaction with ICTs dated back to 1987 when the first computers were set up in district offices and later in 1990 when the National Informatics centre was set up. Yet the potential of this technology, she admitted, had not been harnessed adequately and there was need for capacity and administrative building. She also brought up the need to explore other media such as community radio, a powerful tool for participation of democracy, particularly because it bridges the divide of literacy. The mobile phone has become widespread in India, and has also become instrumental in women getting connected to each other (e.g. the SEWA initiative in Gujarat).

Finally, Chatterji spoke about the potential of ICTs to serve as vehicles for delivery of justice. As lodging an incident of domestic violence is a tedious and stressful process, the Common Service Centres can help simplifying the process. ICTs could help women's access to institutions, which is a fundamental step in negotiating one's citizenship.

3. Philippines team presentation – Sylvia Estrada-Claudio, Director, Centre for Women's Studies, University of the Philippines, Philippines

The Filipino team presented a few insights based on both theory and their research. Following the feminist literature on gender and technology which has always highlighted the double-edged nature of ICTs, Estrada-Claudio recalled the fact that ICTs can potentially be liberating while also possibly reproducing social inequalities in digital form. She noted the generally gloomy view of technology by feminist analyses of the relationship between gender and technology,

which comes with a reproduction of the "master-slave relationship" between men and women.

She shared how the Philippines have quickly become a business process outsourcing hot bed, which has proven to be both a boon and a bane for working women who earn a lot, but come under bio-political use of corporations for their capitalist profit. There is also a heavy note of class differentiation in ICT usage in country which she exemplified with the 'Jejemon' phenomenon where young people from the historically affluent classes are often upset to receive messages or Facebook friend requests or incursions in such spaces from lower class individuals. The openness of the web allows these lower class citizens to enter the bedrooms and libraries of the upper class.

Proceeding from a critical analysis of liberal democracy, the presentation spoke of a nexus between the 'spontaneous creativity' of the masses and the fascist rigid bureaucratic processes of democracy. Estrada-Claudio shared that it would seem that it is that in-between that is made more obvious by the openness and spontaneity of the new systems of communication. Here again, the ability of new technologies to subvert landscapes that encapsulate these identities holds out interesting opportunities.

There is a nexus between the 'spontaneous creativity' of the masses and the fascist rigid bureaucratic processes of democracy.

Sylvia Estrada-Claudio

The Filipino project challenges the liberal democracy and confronts issues of the digital divide by working with poor women and men. Their processes rely on gender-empowering

methods of organising (e.g. transport is facilitated; time management allows for plenty of informality; flexibility enables them to perform their ever-increasing reproductive roles). All articles written for the online platform are paid for, which sends out a signal that women's work — traditionally underpaid and considered voluntary — is valued.

Sylvia Estrada-Claudio

Through the writing of news articles, the project insists on making community realities heard in the form of online news articles and reporting. There is an immediate need for this kind of space in Philippines, because the mainstream media pays very little attention to social issues — instead focusing on "hard news" about e.g. political leaders. The news articles are written to influence leaders into passing the bill. This process itself is potentially empowering. In writing articles, the activists seem to be gaining a sharper, clearer understanding, thus enabling the empowerment of the participants.

The presentation ended on the note that ICTs can and do have deleterious effects. For all its attempts at engendering equity, providing better access to a small group inevitably threatens solidarity among marginalised populations. Estrada-Claudio felt the research project must take a discursive view of the lines of agency and victimisation, resistances and take-overs, predictable and unpredictable results. However, she said, that it is the research hypothesis that confrontation will open up considerations of the discursive inter-penetration of gender, ICTs and citizenship. The challenge will allow researchers and participants alike to interrogate the congruences and perhaps find the incongruences that can be an opening for destabilisations and resistances.

4. Responses and Perspectives – Jahnvi Andharia, Senior Programme Officer, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, India

Andharia began by saying that the use of ICTs for development presupposes a level of literacy, electricity, as well as a basic technology

structure. An ICTD scheme probably would not work or be relevant for a tribal hinterland located 50 kilometres away from any kind of road

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Jahnvi Andharia

communication who is struggling for food entitlement, health and education access.

Speaking from the perspective of a funder organisation, Andharia's response also questioned the idea of what is marginal, to whom and how these 'dominant' ideas are defined (according to geography/caste/income criteria?). Along the same lines, she noted that it is important to examine the kind of institutions that were being mediated by ICTs, listing possible examples like the local *panchayats*, police stations or the Public Distribution System.

She concluded by asking whether the feminist movement itself was seen as an institution and if so how it was being enabled by ICTs. She wondered if there were spaces being created for making the movement more amenable and accessible, or if ICTs were creating one more division of women and technology.

Session Discussion

The Bangladesh presentation seemed to throw up several dichotomies, e.g. between the state and religious extremists. The team was asked if new media enabled the emergence of more nuanced responses to issues, and Raihan clarified that debates about certain issues – such as fatwas – were in fact discussed in nuanced and vibrant ways online.

The issue of language within the localising versus globalising debate was brought up and the pros and cons of a *lingua franca* were questioned. Estrada-Claudio explained that given the the Philippines' colonial history, English has become the language of the elite and ruling classes. Both the civil system and scholars use English exclusively which is unintelligible to the masses. The language of the Internet should be reflective of the passions and spontaneity of the peoples of the world. On another question about the role of regulation in such a scenario, Estrada-Claudio responded that ideally, a regulation of the Internet would enable architectures that allow abundance and sharing, with nothing proprietary.

The chair, Sumona Dasgupta, wrapped the discussion by noting that the group was beginning to problematise the idea of ICTs. Across the board, it was recognised that ICTs cannot in themselves overcome social rigidities, which means that the architecture of the questions asked has to be rethought to a certain extent. Also obvious is the difference between the technocratic alienating side of the ICTs as against the social impact of the technology. She ended by saying that it is this conversation we must begin to privilege.

SESSION IV: Feminist spaces in the network society – Engendering resistance

This session looked at the contestations around gender and citizenship as they emerge in the information society context. It examined practices at the margins that inform feminist conceptions of citizenship, critiquing mainstream network society ideologies while also capitalising on emerging opportunities.

Chair: Maitrayee Chaudhury, Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

1. **India team presentation – Aarti Kawlra, Associate Faculty and Project Consultant, Department of Humanities and Social Science, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, India and J. Devika, Associate Professor, Centre for Development Studies, India**

Aarti Kawlra

Aarti Kawlra drew from the Indian project to elaborate the impact of the design of ICTs on their implementation and inclusive potential, arguing thereby for a design that would enable feminist appropriation. This technical premise takes into account the differential usage of the computer, as well as the need for socio-technical networks of communication that are not only open and context specific but also self-directed, self-reflective, and self-representative, offering genuine opportunities for socio-political change. In order to support community interaction and enable meaningful sociability, the actual procedure for the development and design of digital media needs to be examined. The approach taken by the Indian team in designing their online platform *Gramamukhya* is one of design-in-progress in constant interaction with the users, towards a real co-creation of ICTs. It is an approach that privileges what women say and in what context they are saying it over what women 'need'.

J. Devika

Devika shared insights from the larger research on which the Indian project is based. Even though women elected representatives at the local level have gained self-esteem *inter alia* through the acquisition of knowledge, the political arena remains extremely gendered. Women are restrained to the bottom of the hierarchy, which is a common characteristic of both the political and the economic neo-liberal orders. Despite the work to empower local leaders, the researchers have noticed that women local leaders are not seen as important actors by local women, which shows a perpetuation of this gendered division between high politics and local governance. There seems to be a need therefore to re-theorise local governance and the engagement of feminists with local governance. In that sense, ICTs can provide new avenues. First, it is possible to exploit the de-territorialised nature of communication in the information society. Second, the Internet allows for a multiplicity of actors to come together and interact in less hierarchical ways, where centres of a network are multiple and shifting according to the flow of the different nodes. Third, through the digital space, the possibilities of the self can be re-

> **Women are restrained to the bottom of the hierarchy, which is a common characteristic of both the political and the economic neo-liberal orders.**
>
> J. Devika

deployed strategically, as e.g. everybody can write and be published on the Internet which can strengthen people's sense of their own individuation. Furthermore, processes of co-creation, with constant engagement between the online and offline context, can create active and self-reflective connections among individuals.

2. Chinese team presentation – Lam Oi Wan, Global Voices Online and Hong Kong In-Media, China

Oi Wan started her presentation by screening a [clip](#) that shows the relationship between the people and the state in China. Because of this strong dichotomy around which all discourses are built, feminists' position in China is very marginalised and therefore, building a feminist counter-perspective has proved difficult.

Different feminist spaces have to be considered. Online spaces, such as blogs and social media, are potential spheres for grassroots women to 'speak bitterness', but not always in progressive ways. Incidents, such as the contaminated milk

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Feminists have to actively engage with other public discourses and bring feminist perspectives on political and cultural phenomena that may not be directly related to women.

Lam Oi Wan

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incident, or the overpopulation of Hong Kong hospitals with Chinese mothers trying to avoid the one child policy, have led to a right turn in the

citizen rights movement in Hong Kong. However, ICTs provide a more accessible space for networking, as well as community and solidarity building, than direct engagement in public discussions. Building a feminist counter-public is difficult also because the notion

Lam Oi Wan

of citizenship is broadly understood as gender neutral – women issues being often confined to the private domain. The technological determinism in developing online publics only further complicates the formation of a feminist counter-public.

Feminist strategies to influence and politicise the offline and online publics have to go beyond putting forward a feminist agenda: they have to actively engage with other public discourses and bring feminist perspectives on political and cultural phenomena that may not be directly related to women. Alliance building can enable women from very different backgrounds to make their voice heard. What is crucial as well is to build a sustainable model, which is something Chinese feminists have been struggling with.

3. Presentation by Supinya Klangnarong, Think piece author, CITIGEN and vice-chair of the Campaign for Popular Media Reform, Thailand

Supinya Klangnarong

Klangnarong spoke about gender perspectives on uses of ICTs in the context of the political transformation in Thailand, an aspect which has gained less attention than issues of civil and political rights. She began by sharing data on Internet access in Thailand which does not show significant difference between men and women. The prevalent Internet user is a female student, aged 20-29, living in the Bangkok metropolitan area. However, and even though the number of Internet users has been increasing considerably, the digital divide between urban centres and rural periphery is still very high.

Access to the Internet exposes both men and women to discourses and opinions which question hegemonic patriarchal models, in a broader way than their immediate environment or state-controlled and commercial traditional media previously have. In the midst of political crisis, Thailand has to face what the Internet brought to the fore with regard to gender and sexuality, having to deal with its image of sex industry. The conservative traditional Thai gender regime is challenged by people's exposure to discourses on liberated sexuality on the Internet, without having experienced a moderated transition from sexuality being taboo in the family realm and in the mainstream media to being exposed to very crude images on the Internet.

Within this context, the Internet is a space where online heated debates about gender and sexuality issues can take place, which is impossible in mainstream media. However, because of the political crisis, there has been a rise in censored political websites, compared to pornographic websites, leading Thailand to be classified as 'not free' in the 2011 Freedom on the Net report. In the context of the political transformation, the Internet is mostly being considered as a space for political activism at the expense of gender justice issues which tend to be sidelined. Even though it is a moment of confusion and chaos, Klangnarong said ICTs can create spaces for

> **The conservative traditional Thai gender regime is challenged by people's exposure to discourses on liberated sexuality on the Internet.**
>
> Supinya Klangnarong

dialogue and communication referring to uses of the Internet. However, resistance is difficult as the Internet challenges all types of establishment, including both progressive and conservative ideas.

4. Responses and Perspectives – Kalyani Menon Sen, Researcher, writer and feminist activist, India

Menon Sen reflected on the multiple uses of ICTs in relation to citizenship, and on ways in which power relationships are being shaped through this process. As activists explore ways to use ICTs to claim citizenship, states simultaneously use ICTs as ways of defining and validating citizenship, as well as to shape how citizenship is being dealt with. The very concept of citizenship is at a turning point, which is why it needs to be engaged with.

She took the example of the UID (Unique Identification) initiative of the Government of India. The way in which the project has been

> **As activists explore ways to use ICTs to claim citizenship, states simultaneously use ICTs as ways of defining, validating citizenship, and shaping how citizenship is being dealt with.**
>
> Kalyani Menon Sen

implemented, as well as the way it is turned into an application for other areas of governance, shows that the UID define citizenship, while excluding those who claim citizenship in defiance of the state and being a tool for surveillance and social control. To use the Chinese terminology,

she said, it is a good example of 'innovative social management'. In practice, the UID system leads people to have to reassert their citizenship via the constant control of their biometric data which overrides proofs of citizenship via residence,

Kalyani Menon Sen

property, employment, etc. The UID takes citizenship debates outside of the rights-based discourse on civil and political rights as it is primarily linked to basic social welfare (food ration, school registration, etc.), which is what citizenship is about for ordinary people. The danger lies in this constant reassertion of citizenship which is required by the UID system and is controlled by a remote 'neutral' database. Ironically, the UID is advertised as an initiative that will enable marginalised people to claim citizenship. The UID asks questions about gender relationships, and other power relationships, in the new ecology, showing how power imbalances are likely to remain unchanged. New technologies are a continuum of old technologies. Analyses about the control of information and knowledge, as well as the mechanisms of knowledge creation, still apply to new technologies. These issues have to be analysed in the context of debates on governance and citizenship.

5.   Responses and Perspectives – Manjima Bhattacharya, Member, Jagori, India

Bhattacharya shared her thoughts on the session. One of the points emerging from the discussion, she felt, was a sense that there is a feminisation of the web, similarly to a feminisation of labour. This needed to be interrogated further in terms of its resultant meanings. In terms of the innovative models that use intermediaries, she questioned the nature of impact and the vulnerability of these intermediaries at the structural level.

She also felt that it was important to look at the changing relationship between gender and technology, but also between class and technology, including the fear that technologies and the Internet generate on the ground as brought up by the Indian team. Mulling on the concept of silence, she said that in the age of digital natives, self-censorship was a central impediment to both the establishment of a

feminist consciousness and the politicisation of digital spaces. Even though the Internet is an open space, it is not yet a free space. From a feminist perspective, observing women representing themselves along patriarchal ideals was disturbing.

Manjima Bhattacharya

To the question of what can ICTs do for feminism, she recalled Cynthia Enloe's concept of a curious feminist. She noted how young women familiarised themselves with feminism through odd influences online which enabled them to discover that strain of feminist in them and articulate a feminist opinion.

Session Discussions

Discussions brought up reflections around intergenerational issues with regard to the use of ICTs for resistance and transformation, and feminist engagement with news ways to work for social change. Oi Wan shared that in China, there are two levels of citizen-state relationships: the 'dinosaur' type which is actualised through very ancient forms of resistance with no mediation by the civil society (e.g. people hurting their own body as a sign of resistance) and the liberal type which takes place in the digital spaces. However, the two are intertwined as the latter diffuses images of the former, which means that ICTs provide a space for transforming the politics in a politically dinosaur country. Devika pointed out the intergenerational challenge faced by feminists in Kerala, where the feminist movement has not been able so far to respond in creative ways to movements about non heterosexual identities. In her opinion, the problem lies in the hierarchical characteristic of the dominant communication methodology which does not allow a multi-centric model where interaction is made easier.

Reflections also emerged regarding the contribution of Menon Sen, raising points

regarding the nature of the state itself that needs to be questioned and how the UID system is a globalisation from above with state collusion.

Singh and Gurumurthy shared reflections about the premises of the programme. The hypothesis is that there is a common essence of principles and tendencies which, if captured, will enable to understand better the new ecology. Different layers have to be addressed simultaneously: the hype about ICTs, new models of practice and architecture and policies. ICTs have to be seen as the ingredients that constitute our social reality, not as tools that are outside of us. The starting question was: if technologies are reconstituting our world, what is the dialectic between the social institutional and technological affordances? When women's citizenship is analysed in the information society, new issues emerge, such as women representing themselves as sexual subjects, that require feminists to engage with.

The session ended with comments from the chair, Maitrayee Chaudhuri, who reasserted the need to recognise that ICTs do open up new possibilities. Even though some of the issues

pertaining to ICTs are also relevant for traditional forms of media, the feminist take has to be redefined, as well as the relation of feminist politics with other forms of radical politics. Furthermore, what ICTs enable, such as the interaction of a multiplicity of voices, needs to be problematised with regard to the true democratic potential offered.

SESSION V: What we seem to be hearing since yesterday

Chair: Andrea Cornwall, Advisor, CITIGEN and Professor, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK

This session was chaired by Andrea Cornwall who opened the floor for reflections about the discussions that had happened so far. Evangelia Berdou began by suggesting a reflection on the missing perspectives in the discussions that had taken place so far, one of which was the political economy approach.

Singh stressed the healthy tension that was taking place in the conference with regard to the technology discourse. Even though, there is sometimes an instinctive resistance to the hegemonic discourse on technology, everybody seems really interested by the emerging practices.

Ramata Molo Thioune shared her concern in face of the artificial dichotomy between the information society and the other society. This tension needs to be addressed as even though not everybody may be working on the information society, everybody is part of it.

Lisa McLaughlin stressed the need to break down the complex situation where people are over-enthusiast or over-critical about the potential of ICTs. Rather than creating polarities, empirical work and reflections can help bring out contradictions.

Idealistic visions of the public sphere need to be troubled.

Andrea Cornwall

Cornwall shared her reflections about the public/private tension that she saw emerging in the information society. She wished to trouble idealistic visions of the public sphere, which follow Habermasian notions of the public sphere understood as a communicative consensus shaped by people meeting and exchanging, and Hannah Arendt's vision of the public sphere as a space where people come, listen and leave something behind them. The Internet is being idealised in a similar way whereas the Internet provides a series of platforms that are not all deliberative spaces, but sometimes merely spaces where people express an opinion without generating any debate around it (e.g. Youtube). The nature of such views is problematic as there are not easily ascribable to the private or the public realm. Such dichotomies need to be unsettled and re-theorised, especially when most projects look at the theme from contexts that trouble some of the Western theoretical assumptions around citizenship and communication.

Estrada-Claudio shared her thoughts about the way in which poor and marginalised women's participation is often idealised in researches and organising efforts. No matter how empowering the work at the micro-level may be, those women are asked to engage with large structures that are disempowering. Furthermore, becoming computer literate can also lead do a de-solidarisation. Similarly, best practice models tend to be idealised and romanticised. Anita Gurumurthy responded to Sylvia Estrada-Claudio by asking about the alternative to best practices, and ways to structurally respond with a feminist idealism, tactic and imagination to what is essentially a structural phenomenon. Bhattacharya echoed Gurumurthy's reflection by warning against excessive suspicion of technology. Considering oneself as a dinosaur cannot be an excuse for feminists not to engage with the new ecology because it will leave them unprepared to respond to certain violations that are taking place in the information society. Whether they accept it or not, feminists are also part of the information society.

Upendranadh Choragudi shared his reflections about the need to link up the potential of ICTs for both resistance and innovations in order to advance developmental goals. He recalled the need to bring about the broader developmental

paradigm and consider issues of resources such as food, water or energy.

McLaughlin pointed out that in ICTs, it is the information and communication elements that fascinate people but it is technology that is fetishised.

Raihan observed the presence of two tendencies. Some people are trying to break a social and political status quo through ICTs, others, he felt, were trying to save the status quo via market interventions or via development interventions through ICTs. Interventions linking gender and ICTs have to consider this paradox as well.

SESSION VI: Forging community and creating identity – New articulations of citizenship in the information society

This session looked at how the network society redefines the public sphere, providing a new architecture for building community and defining identity, thus allowing for new gender orders to emerge. How do boundaries of given notions like citizenship get pushed with respect to the new possibilities for associational democracy and assertion of women's collective rights? What may be specific concerns for a Southern discourse on women's citizenship in relation to new community formations and identities?

Chair : Urvashi Butalia, Director, Kali for Women, India

The chair began the session by putting forward a few thoughts on the broad topic of the session. In context of the mention of markets in the previous discussion, she shared her experience as a feminist publisher entering the world of new technology. Although it opens new worlds in interesting ways, she felt that it did not necessarily change the structures of power, at least not in the initial stages. As an example she mentioned how large American publishing houses have entered the e-world by having a hold over academics and not allowing them to sign their e-publishing rights to other publishers. As a feminist publisher in the South, one has to figure new approaches on such issues. Even though social media can begin a sense of solidarity for a specific cause, she also wondered to what extent social movements based on social media can be effective in actually bringing about lasting change.

1. Sri Lanka team presentation – Chandrika Sepali Kottegoda, Director, Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka

Chandrika Sepali Kottegoda

Kottegoda began by sharing some questions that she felt had come through the previous sessions. These included questions on how ICTs could be instrumental in bringing a shift in the nature of the public sphere, how women are to reassert their rights in these spaces and the new identities and relations thus forming from the specific position of the Southern feminists.

She said that ICTs by themselves as a means of communication were 'constructed' precisely through and for social interaction between persons but the larger question emerged from the clear indication that access to economic resources, political power and military control are also very much part of the baggage of ICTs – defining the arena of who actually will have access or not and what it will be used for. In the context of Sri Lanka, with its high developmental indicators, (re)defining women's citizenship through new media, should result in an increased visibility of women in the public sphere, in decision-making structures, but is not significantly so. A gendered lens on decision-making structures shows the disparate access to political power for women and men. The representation of women in media, as reporters, editors, sub-editors, as those recognised as 'making' news is similarly significantly low. Within the debates on citizenship, these factors illustrate almost an acceptance, albeit uncomfortably, of differential and discriminatory practices in power politics that leave women 'in the margins' of 'enjoying' their rights as citizens.

Kottegoda talked about the *nenasalas*, the telecentre project of the Sri Lankan government which over the last decade has aimed at providing digital access to the citizens. The facilities offered are 'gender-neutral' in their approach so far. There is no clearly articulated vision that recognises socio-economic or cultural factors that may underlie differential access and use of ICTs by women and by men. Despite this, emerging patterns indicate that changes are taking place at the community level; women,

especially young women, are engaging with ICTs as individuals through using the facilities of *nenasalas*, through creating their own blogs. These *nenasalas* have become nodal in providing access to ICTs and it is notable that they are creating a space for women, however constrained by class or ethnic or regional locations of the individuals. The post-conflict scenario has also demonstrated, in parallel, the government's discomfort with social media, such as Facebook, which it has tried to ban on the pretext that anti-government or non-patriotic sentiments were expressed on the online platform.

The focus of the Sri Lankan project, she shared, was informed by the experience of living through ethnic conflict, a devastating tsunami and the ensuing humanitarian and development efforts that revealed the call for exploring women and their exercise of citizenship. The two interventions of the research – the media campaign for women's representation in the local government and the SMS news network – are exercises to assert the rights for women's citizenship. She brought up questions of new media also require to deal with issues of being left behind. She ended by leaving questions about its possibilities of gender equality, to empower IT literate community and to broaden the public sphere.

2. Hong Kong/Taiwan team presentation – Kate Lappin, Regional Coordinator, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, Thailand

Lappin began by sharing the purpose of the project undertaken: to explore the possibilities of ICTs to build solidarity and power amongst migrant domestic workers, while challenging the exclusionary practices of citizenship narratives. She said that several participants spoke about the potential of ICTs to disrupt the hegemony of the liberal or neo-liberal masculine subject as the citizen. The exclusion of migrant domestic workers from citizenry can then be seen as the ultimate expression of the liberal, public, rational subject. If the subject can only be known through its attenuation, its other, then the primacy of the

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The binary between real and virtual/imagined communities has proved unhelpful when working with migrant domestic workers.

Kate Lappin

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citizen of liberal discourse is premised on the exclusion of women migrant domestic workers as its other.

As migrants, she said, they are aliens of the nation-state, as women they are the irrational, anti-politic and, most importantly, as domestic workers they are outside of the assumed public sphere and re-scribe the sexual division of labour

that obliterates the value of women's work. This last category, she said, is particularly magnified in the neo-liberal capitalist narratives of citizenship, which indicate that privileges of citizenship should only be afforded to economically profitable subjects. The abysmal treatment of many migrant domestic workers is only possible through this process of 'othering' – the other of the nation state, the other of the productive worker, the other of the citizen.

Kate Lappin

She acknowledged Gurumurthy's point that desired changes are contingent on practices of the state. Claiming something akin to citizenship rights as we know them is a long road for migrant domestic workers. But she hoped that the project could make some small inroads.

To the question of whether ICTs promised enhanced rights, she stated that citizenship begins with the awareness of the possibilities of being a rights claimant. ICTs can facilitate access to information about rights and may enable migrant domestic workers to envision citizenry as a possibility, but it is the building of collectivity that moves rights from a fiction or a

narrative for the privileged to a possibility, albeit a small one. She argued that the imperative to create synergy between technological and physical organising was enormously compelling. The binary between real and virtual/imagined communities has proved unhelpful in their work. Even though having a day off is an advantage for organising, that option is not always present which requires investigating into work without the physical. However, the very idea of a 'public' sphere either virtual or physical is inaccessible to many migrant domestic workers, particularly those who do not have a day off. Moreover, poor women have rarely been allowed into the public and the virtual 'public sphere', which are equally governed by neo-liberal markets where poor women are the fuel but not the citizens of a globalised, neo-liberal world.

Traditional organising models used in the labour movement are based on the assumption of physical access. Those models, and the laws of many countries, only recognise the right to freedom of association when workers are found in a single workplace. Organising, she said, is about building solidarity, building collective power – the question is whether ICTs can assist migrant women workers to gain solidarity and power and reduce isolation. Assumptions that ICTs is free and open do not easily apply to many domestic workers. Accessing ICTs is dangerous, any traces of defiance or resistance they leave could have serious consequences.

She addressed a question put forth earlier about whether the project would seek to organise women based on the nationalities or to instead build solidarity across boundaries of nation state and ethnicity. Even though she acknowledge it should be the target, there is need to grapple with one's own ICT limitations to build an online community of solidarity. With this she ended by welcoming ideas and contributions from others in this community about innovative uses of ICTs to advance the collective rights of migrant domestic workers.

3. Responses and Perspectives – Desiree Lewis, Associate Professor, University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Lewis directed her response to the two presentations made in this session, intertwining them with her experiences in Africa. She began by sharing her thoughts on the Thailand/Taiwan paper. Despite the optimism about globalisation and the borderlessness of a virtual world, the paper shows that national boundaries continue to play a major role in regulating divisions between centres and peripheries and centres within peripheries. With the control of resources and exploitation of labour that this generates, migrant women are especially vulnerable, often unable to access rights and under constant surveillance. She added that xenophobic attacks starkly raised what this paper makes clear: struggles of migrants for rights must be explored in gendered terms, and the effective use of media to support their rights must address their gendered locations.

Desiree Lewis

While the use of mobiles for organising was interesting, she noted it was also fraught with problems. One was the targeting by telecoms of women as markets, where making high levels of cell phone use and purchase simply reinforces power relations where migrants are exploited as consumers. In other words, the economic gains for consumer capitalism may far exceed the political gains of migrants. This raises the need to avoid over-estimating localised evidence of marginalised groups' appropriation of ICTs when the promotion of this technology is central to consumer capitalism.

Another central issue, she said, was how the nation state (and in turn, national capital and global capitalism) is consolidated and reconfigured by modern information and communications systems. The surveillance of domestic workers by their employers mirrors the broader policing of borders – of boundaries between citizens and aliens, nationals and

outsiders – orchestrated by the formidable apparatus of the network society. So overall, it is important to contextualise the political potential of the use of technology like cell phones by exploring the broader structural context in which ICTs both economically exploit and politically control migrants in extreme ways. Lewis then shared some avenues for further interrogation for example learning about not so public tactical alliances that women might make and the researcher's dilemmas therein.

On the Sri Lankan paper, Lewis said she was struck by the attention to how discourses of culture can constrain women's citizenship, even when legal rights may seem to guarantee gender equality and that the country might have 'high social level indicators'. Very often, liberal states grant women impressive formal rights (rights to abortion, rights protecting them from domestic violence, etc.), yet, they are always ready to regulate their citizenship in terms of their gendered contribution. As a backlash, authoritarian patriarchal nationalism castigates women's disobedience. In the face of this, crafting an effective feminist media is difficult. But this crafting, she said, also seems to be a vital radical step in fully challenging the patriarchal nation state, rather than only petitioning it for rights. She ended by saying that the fact that the investigation of this media will be undertaken through action research suggests that the nuances of following women's difficult struggles with developing independent voices, and empowering themselves as autonomous subjects in order to make powerful claims about their rights as full subjects will be fully explored.

Discussion

The floor being opened for discussion, Devika mentioned that she felt the group should not allow itself to fall into the overly mechanistic understanding of the utility of interventions. She felt that the presence of feminist interventions are meaningful irrespective of whether they bring about immediate change: one should not be caught by the idea of immediate results. Sepali Kottegoda agreed by stressing the common issue faced by organisations working on ideological issues of being tied by time-based project cycles which require filling in immediate results.

Estrada-Claudio suggested that addressing issues of global citizenship could be relevant, especially in the case of migrant workers. At a time where xenophobic nationalism is used to limit their rights, the research has the possibility of posing itself as a spring board for questions on global citizenship and its definitions. Kate Lappin responded by saying that the claim to rights was at the heart of their organising work and that the organisation was engaging with regional and international debates on women's rights in this regard.

Gurumurthy said that perchance, the panel came at a time when the core of intersections between discourses on gender, democracy, new technology and citizenship were swirling in our heads. She felt the panel brought forth some essential questions. She spoke in particular of the need for a legal policy framework, asking about the nature of the regulations required to fairly challenge the existing power structures. This has to consider the co-optation of the rights discourse by libertarian frameworks to serve global capital and the collusion of the state with capital to disenfranchise poor women's citizenship. In the face of this reality, the dialogue that the network needs to take forth is what then provides the enabling framework within nation states in terms of allowing poor women to access technology and stopping capitalism from running amok; where in a post-national existence we can be global citizens in a way that information society and its structures do not take away our citizenship.

Susanna George brought up the issue of the interaction between offline and online spaces. In the context of migrant domestic workers, she felt that the old methods of organising, such as leaflets and pamphlets at grocery stores, radio programmes in their language, should also be explored as they might have greater reach. Kate Lappin responded by saying that the study on

mobiles was part of the larger project on organising women migrant domestic workers through various mediums where community radio, among others, were being explored.

Lewis also added as an observation that one should be cognizant of how one engages. There is a tendency to exhaust oneself on government projects before coming to the conclusion that it does not work. One should all the more be wary in times where the current liberal state often flirts with NGOs on issues keeping them aside.

The chair, Urvashi Butalia, ended the session with two thoughts. First, she observed that the business of virtual activism was very convenient for the state. It was more difficult for the state to deal with physical presence. We romanticise Tahrir Square and what the Internet did there, but would it have happened it people did not actually occupy that space? In a way, she felt that the public was getting leached off and sanitised whereas we actually need to take it into account. She also shared an observation of the migrant domestic workers in Delhi who increasingly possess mobile phones. One of the luxuries afforded by it is listening to music which brings a strong sense of entitlement to have what was previously availed only by the middle class.

SESSION VII: Issues at stake – The nature of participation in virtual reality / real virtuality

The term 'real virtuality' was coined by Manuel Castells to emphasise how the Internet has completely infiltrated our social fabric. In the network society, reality itself (that is, people's material/symbolic existence) is embedded in the structures of the virtual environment. The nature of this new social environment requires to be unpacked and grasped. How do the material and ideological basis of the virtual environment create specific conditions for participation and freedoms? Who controls freedoms and who mediates participation online? These issues of the technological DNA of the emerging social order are critical to theoretical formulations of women's citizenship in the network society.

Chair: Lisa McLaughlin, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, Miami University, USA

1. Presentation by Evangelia Berdou, Research Fellow, University of Sussex, UK

Berdou began by outlining the two dynamics that shape technological possibilities for collective action. The first one concerns the forces, actors that control information flows largely but not exclusively for profit. The second dynamic concerns social movements that are working towards establishing an information commons, a collection of shared information resources that are, in principle, freely available to all. She argued that both these dynamics invite us to rethink the connections between citizenship and collective action, advocacy and technological literacy by showing us that technologies are not mere tools. They are processes that express specific values and agendas that structure participation in very concrete and specific ways.

She first emphasised the role of the new gatekeepers, that have a critical role in regulating the online environment and controlling access to global public goods. She shared that although debates on these issues are becoming more and more prominent in certain circles, the concerns that they reflect have yet to inform development practice. She used the example of the mobile phone industry to explain further. Sharing her colleague Claire Milne's work, she pointed out some of the key factors that render mobile service providers an important force. The importance of this role largely derives from the character of the mobile spectrum, which is a naturally limited resource. There are only so many operators that a country can have and most countries are stuck with a mobile network oligopoly which has implications on affordability.

Furthermore, the fact that most people in the global South access the Internet through mobiles allows operators to exercise an inordinate degree of control over what parts of the web people have access to. Groups have been working to promote awareness of issues around security and

Evangelia Berdou

privacy and equip activists with tools and solutions for advocacy enabled by mobile phones. A look at the information provided at the Tactical Tech website reveals that, for example, the level of technical proficiency required in order to set up a secure network and bypass censorship is far from trivial. Even such groups do not necessarily work at larger level policy issues.

She took up the case of Facebook. Facebook is a corporate entity that has been made through its success, the steward of a global public good, social networking, and a default choice for many activists and social movements but it was not designed for human rights advocacy, collective action and political engagement. Its purpose is and has always been to generate revenue through advertising, through manufacturing audiences. These two factors, combined with its lack of accountability to the users, makes it a potentially problematic solution for social movements. She argued for the need to move beyond an opportunistic use of ICTs that sees them only as tools and start thinking about their adoption more strategically: what are the long-term implications of choosing one platform over

another, what risks are there for a movement to become locked in a technology beyond its control, what do we lose and what do we gain by adopting different solutions including the barriers to access that we might be creating for others.

ICTs are processes that express specific values and agendas that structure participation in very concrete and specific ways.

Evangelia Berdou

She then shifted to the second dynamic: social movements and communities that are fighting against these forces by promoting the idea that some forms of information are important public goods, whose production cannot be entrusted to private actors, but need to be managed collectively. The main advocate of this idea in Internet politics has been the open source software movement which has also provided us with innovations such as Wikipedia and Creative Commons. She said this alliance was increasingly relevant as open software technologists are increasingly taking an interest in development. She shared her experience of Map Kibera, a pilot project in Kibera, one of Africa's largest slums in Nairobi (Kenya) where inhabitants of the community mapped themselves using open software. The question that emerged was how much can we learn, how much can we become fluent in the language of technology or in the politics of action without loosing what is important to us. The answer that she suggested was that we do not need to do this in isolation. There is enough common ground between certain technological communities, like those coalescing around open source and development practitioners and researchers, to start learning from each other. In her experience, the main way to do this was by finding new ways of working together that weaves new connections between theory, methodology and practice. She ended by saying that there was a need for intermediaries, for people and organisations, who can move between these two communities, who can help unpack the vocabularies of different communities and spell out the implications of different technological and policy choices.

2. Presentation by Heike Jensen, Think piece author, CITIGEN, and Independent gender researcher and consultant, Germany

Jensen titled her presentation 'Women and Virtual Citizenship? Gendered experiences of censorship and surveillance with regard to sexuality'. She began by quoting two definitions of the Internet, one privileging the male citizen subject and the state while the other spoke of attempts of censorship through misogyny, intimidation and sexual harassment. She then studied the question of who censors women and through a pyramid representation brought out censorship effected by state or non-state actors through law, violence, market, administration, social norms and architectures. She said the pyramid was also demonstrative of the continuity of censorship online and offline. She also added that these censorship debates either miss gender

Heike Jensen

concerns or are constructed in their own gender universe.

She then spoke on sexuality, a central issue as the reproduction of social groups and boundaries is based on the reproduction and negotiation of gender and (hetero)sexuality. She mentioned that feminist interventions in the debate of gender and sexuality are a double-edged sword. They may be liberating by exposing and critiquing gender hierarchies, misogyny, gender-based violence, heteronormativity, ideologies of race, class and the nation, as well as by allowing individuals to find their own voices and define themselves. Alternatively, feminist interventions also run the risk of reinforcing the status quo or of being co-opted by third parties for purposes such as: reinforce the association of women with sexuality, they can easily be twisted to cater to

the voyeurism of third parties, they are compatible with the increasing sexualisation of everyday life that is spearheaded by the advertising industries to constantly create sexualised desires, etc.

Coming to the issue of privacy, Jensen said that it was a layered concept which indicated an individuals right to control boundaries aiming for solitude, intimacy, anonymity and reserve. As with censorship, social agents rather than state agents may play a paramount role in invading women's privacy. Digital privacy is not a well-studied field which makes it even more disturbing when digital natives celebrate aspects such as lateral surveillance, peer to peer monitoring and participatory surveillance. Furthermore, there is a lack of a gendered understanding of the digital realm. In the face of these realities, Jensen looked at implications for women's virtual citizenship. She asked the question that if surveillance/data mining was at the root of the business of Web 2.0, can Facebook really further women's citizenship, which is understood as resisting neo-liberal market power. She also mentioned the presentations of Berdou and Lewis to further point out the need to carefully examine which aspects of ICTs are useful and how they might be reconfigured to put more power to shape society in the hands of women and thus to also overcome more censorship blocks and regimes.

3. Responses and Perspectives – Lisa McLaughlin, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, Miami University, USA

McLaughlin began by responding to the session description which incorporated Manuel Castells definition. Looking at the two papers, she said, we began to see why Castells might not be the best frame to view this conversation about gender, citizenship and democracy. He has written about the current economy focussing on informational modes of development where the source of productivity lies in the technology of knowledge generation, information processing and communication through symbols. He links the

Lisa McLaughlin

where informational labour is defined as well as educated and integrated in the knowledge economy and the generic labour is seen as disposable and exchangeable. He recognises that there exists a structural divide and social exclusion but assumes that generic labour then has to assume the flexibility required in the global context of informational capitalism. This relates to women in particular, as he talks of feminisation of paid labour and the creation of the 'flexible' woman who replaces the organisation man as the harbinger of the new type of worker. And this is a kind of professional person who is highly skilled in ICT and in turn challenges patriarchy which falls into crisis as women gain power through workforce, and ultimately leads to more inclusion to women. According to McLaughlin, Castells seems to forget that the flexible woman not only refers to the woman in the North but also to the woman in the South who puts together parts in assembly factories and is numerically flexible. She felt that this was missing from the discussion so far.

The Castellsian framework does not serve feminists, especially if one is interested in the category of people who might be called informational labour but are still excluded over issues of gendered harassment, have their privacy invaded in specific gendered and sexual ways.

Lisa McLaughlin

category of informational labour to citizenship and social movements. He further discusses informational labour versus generic labour,

Additionally, McLaughlin mentioned that in the context of the two papers which bring out many issues, we can see how the Castellsian framework does not serve feminists, especially if one is interested in the category of people who might be called informational labour but are still excluded over issues of gendered harassment, have their privacy invaded in specific gendered and sexual ways. As Berdou pointed out, people have not only gained something by accessing information society membership: they have also lost something because their increased incorporation in the information society requires them to deal with issues of citizenship, privacy, sexuality, etc. Besides, the analysis needs to include those who are excluded, because they are not a part of the network society and will never make it to the category of informational labour. She concluded by pointing out that even though the right to privacy has to be considered, the right to publicity defined as the right to voice, is as much a central issue when discussing ICTs.

Discussion

Bhattacharya reacted to Berdou's presentation by bringing out four aspects. First, she wondered why common spaces such as Wikipedia although seen as neutral did not reflect information on movements. In reference to the Map Kibera project, she wondered about the mapping process and its potential uses by real estate brokers. She felt that a cultural dimension of the idea privacy also needed to be incorporated in the discussion as it has an impact in mobilising and creating critical mass on an idea. She added that 'consent' as a concept needed to be studied more in terms of this discussion. Berdou responded by saying that information commons certainly were far from being free of biases but that one was glad for a space of participation. In the case of creating community maps, she said the risk was not much as the State already had detailed maps of these regions. Jensen also responded to the comment on cultural dimensions of privacy and said that it had several layers including one based on age. She also said that the concept of consent while being useful was often relegated to only content. It would be interesting, she felt, if it could be used to make operations such as Facebook share the worth of our information to the advertiser for instance.

Devika felt that while it was useful to have conversations on structure, a more contextual analysis was required to take decisions on such dilemmas. She felt that we needed to grant more agency to people who use the Internet, even if it poses them as consumers. Gurumurthy responded by saying that the question posed to feminists was: what is our feminist responsibility to embrace the tenets of collaboration, reciprocity and the rest that are espoused by other progressive movements, such as the open source and what would be our structural response in embedding within our feminist analysis the principles of that movement. Berdou added that from the perspective of functioning online as an activist, one makes others vulnerable if one is not aware of the issues regarding the platform being used.

Cornwall was intrigued by the questions on identity and how one could practice multiplicity and splits on the Internet, which is deeply related to how we think of the public and private.

Berdou also addressed the issue brought up by Gurumurthy K. on the alternatives to the Google search engine which is increasingly becoming the gateway to knowledge for people online. She shared that it is astonishing to see the resources spent on the search engine, which makes creating a parallel equivalent platform difficult.

SESSION VIII – What can we make of what we have heard for practice and policy - Going back to CITIGEN's research questions

Chairs: Parminder Jeet Singh, IT for Change and Advisor, CITIGEN, India and Lisa McLaughlin, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, Miami University, USA

The idea behind the session was to bring together the discussions taking place and the original research questions of the CITIGEN programme. As the project is a field building activity, revisiting the basic questions is essential. McLaughlin began the session by noting how the six projects had engaged with the terms and come up with their individual meanings, a process which had not occurred at the previous workshop in July 2010. She found it heartening considering that conceptualisation involved re-thinking meaning. She challenged the groups to apply and relate to notions of translocalism and transnationalism, as talking about policies requires to grapple at all levels of analysis. The number of action projects is a sign of the interest in creating bottom-up policy. She said that the projects should go forward in terms of creating energy and ripple effect with increasing numbers of people included in the network. She encouraged the group to work with international policy processes such as the UN, positioning oneself as 'an outsider within'. This was important to ensure the presence of alternative voices in such forums. Singh then opened the floor for comments based on both the research questions of the project and the discussions of the past days.

Sholkamy brought up two suggestions. She felt it was important to develop synergies between projects about ICTs, to look at how people are speaking to issues of technology as a political construct, meaning of affordability and access, speaking to global from the local. Furthermore, the projects need to problematise questions of epistemology and methodology, especially as field experiences are challenging methodological premises. Devika added that citizenship is used not as a frame but as an object to be investigated. She also welcomed the similarities between the Indian and Bangladeshi researches which forecasts closer conversations.

Oi Wan responded to McLaughlin's problematisation of the public sphere idea by mulling over the extent to which Western theory is relevant for the Chinese context. It is important to note that, in this case, the activists being interviewed were trained in Western concepts and hence, held those as their ideal. Lisa McLaughlin shared that she had come across alternative public sphere notions from the South, even though the expression was most of the time connected to Habermas.

Molo Thioune shared that she felt the project was building a field. From this perspective, she felt a level of theorisation would be required and hence suggested a think piece on the theoretical and methodological frameworks. She also said that IDRC was keen on supporting research which pushed for policy influence and added that she would be eager to see more of that element in the project.

Lewis felt that while an introductional framework was required, trying to squeeze all projects into one framework might not be realistic. Andrea Cornwall agreed and added that forcing might end up making the process more exclusionary. She did feel that there was a need to bring the method issues together though, with the thought of reflecting, learning and borrowing lessons from each other.

McLaughlin and Devika pointed out that the space of the project was necessary as it provided a supportive environment for meaningful research and interactive learning.

Singh wrapped the session by saying that there was a need to frame feminist policy through these debates as there are increasing numbers of practices that combine cheap Internet access to locked in proprietary mediums, which makes the public Internet less accessible at low costs.

SESSION IX - Group work – Tying together emerging reflections and insights

Teams sat together with advisors and planned according to the following:
1. What are the next steps for individual research projects?
2. What can be done for national level policy advocacy?
3. What can CITIGEN do globally to influence the feminist agenda and global policy processes? Are there any opportunities we need to map?

Session IX was meant to provide the research partners a window period to sit with the advisors and share the specific issues and outcomes relating to their research. After the discussion each team presented, in short, its action points.

Mokhlesur Rahman (Bangladesh) shared that their discussion had helped bring out the need for two steps. First, they will revisit some aspects of their research by evolving working definitions, engaging more actively with feminist groups in Bangladesh and re-looking at their methodology in terms of interview methodology, as well as assumptions and hypotheses informing the project. The steps ahead will include the organisation of a workshop in December, as well as a possible conversations with the Indian and Sri Lankan teams on the commonalities and differences among the researches.

Oi Wan (China) reported that her team will interview more grassroots women about their use of ICTs in order to provide alternative views to the liberal Western politics. The team will also explore dimensions of translocal citizenship e.g. by analysing the contaminated milk incident. They are planning to have a workshop in June with feminists from Beijing and Guangzhou in order to build greater local connections.

Devika (India) shared insights from their discussion. Regarding policy issues, policy makers should be approached at this stage of the project, as a model is being created which should not be seized. The policy document should mirror various related social concerns and not look like an ICT project. From the methodology perspective, it would be important to create a network of resource sharing which would be neither corporatist nor statist, linking meso-institutions which would hopefully make it sustainable. Another aspect to take forward would be having yearly interns who could study the discussions forum of the website and/or give technical inputs to the website.

dela Tonga (Philippines) began by stating the wish of the team to continue tutorials for computer and Internet training in order to train more community journalists. They would thereby work on sustaining community participation by generating community perspective account stories related to gender, citizenship and reproductive health. The team will hold workshops at the end of the project cycle to ensure dissemination of outcomes to activists, academics and policy makers.

Cornwall spoke on behalf of the Sri Lankan team, to say that they had found interesting parallels with the Bangladeshi team and would in specific work towards foregrounding methodology and refining their comparative analysis.

Lappin (Thailand/Taiwan) said they will start with a reflective session with the team on the project. They are planning a series of activities to familiarise the members with organising tools for advocacy. One of the main interest for APWLD, she mentioned, would be to build moments and look at effective actions of women's organisations/movements engaging with ICTs.

SESSION X: Next steps, issues and closing remarks

Panel discussion with

- Andrea Cornwall, Advisor, CITIGEN and Professor, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK
- Anita Gurumurthy, IT for Change and Coordinator, CITIGEN programme, India
- Ramata Molo Thioune, Programme Officer, IDRC, Senegal

Gurumurthy began the session by stating that questions on the intersections between gender, citizenship, new technologies and democracy are linked to a wide range of topics, which means that policy recommendations can span several forums. Furthermore, she stated that the workshop and the CITIGEN network have brought together a community of committed people and the necessary institutional connections essential to take the programme forward. Moreover, the projects had shown that there was plenty of material for relevant policy influence. From the practical perspective, Gurumurthy said that an immediate task would be to synthesise the findings in order to put out an outline of an analytical framework. At the end of the programme, another useful commitment would be to peer review the draft papers of other teams.

Andrea Cornwall

Cornwall shared practical and provocative ideas. She felt that it would be good to incorporate and facilitate more real exchanges among the network partners, e.g. by meeting more often and/or by visiting each other's project. She approved the idea of peer reviewing as it brought forth the advantages of being part of a community, i.e. sparking interesting thoughts. She shared her concern on drawing policy outcomes too early in the project and asked to strategically reflect on the work done at the end of the project. She also saw huge value in the methodological synthesis where even reflecting on what did not work could provide learning.

Her theoretical reflections began by a question on how the way in which issues are framed with regard to ideas of the local, trans-local and global. As the Internet creates a sense of virtual proximity, the local needs to be re-thought. Reflecting on the discourse on participation, she questioned assumptions about people's engagement online and noted how non-participation/exclusion could also be the result of a free choice. Furthermore, she wondered to what extent the time spent online included practises of citizenship. She also addressed questions of empowerment, warning the group about preconceived ideas of women's empowerment which can happen through self actualisation by consuming the Internet, as well as by exercising one's citizenship. She then pointed the need to look at the types of citizenship which are shaped by global efforts to turn women into good liberal subjects, which speaks to questions of contexualisation and of ways of engaging with new media.

McLaughlin did not add to her previous comments, said she looked forward to the results of the research studies and was happy to note that while the researches might be time-bound, the projects themselves would continue beyond.

Molo Thioune began by thanking IT for Change and the participants for a great learning experience. She said she would go back to her colleagues to share especially the idea of social time being incorporated within the project cycle. She was happy to note the passionate engagement people brought forth and said it reflected the appropriation of the project. With regard to the programme, as it is a field building initiative, she felt it would leave behind its legacy in terms of knowledge building and in complementary ways.

Ramata Molo Thioune

From the perspective of IDRC, Molo Thioune shared that research for policy creation was central, and the programme could contribute greatly to this sphere. She said that the beginning lies in identifying and framing an issue or development problem which the programme has already done. To take it forward she recommended that the network ensure that policy makers take into account new knowledge to modify their priorities and agendas, acknowledge new issues brought up and then find ways of addressing and engaging with them. Policy process should not be considered outside the programme but built within it.

She also shared how IDRC went through a period of re-engineering their programmes. There is no longer an ICTD programme but the good news was that ICT was now being main-streamed into all discussion be it health, education, etc. She said that this is to share that there are changes but they also bring with them opportunities. She also said that she would consider exploring a supplementary grant for the programme.

With these comments, Gurumurthy thanked all for participating and and hoped the work of CITIGEN could be taken forward.

Appendix I – Workshop Background Note

The Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society (www.gender-IS-citizenship.net) research programme (CITIGEN), was set up by IT for Change (www.ITforChange.net) in 2010, and brings together researchers, scholars, activists and NGOs, to study the gendered context of the emerging techno-social paradigm. Its specific objective has been to understand how the social paradigm shaped by information and communication technologies (ICTs) recasts the citizenship of women, in particular, marginalised women, by examining the interaction of technological affordances with the social and institutional environment.

Focussing on five major thematic areas: local resistance and global solidarities; emancipation and the neo-liberal feminine subject; gender and public discourse in the emerging public spheres; new paradigms of local governance and participatory development; and technology governance and gender politics, the CITIGEN programme seeks to inform policy and practice through conceptual and theoretical contributions.

Some key questions that the programme applies itself to are as follows:

- How does the trans-local nature of the public sphere, being shaped by new information and communications technologies, change meanings of citizenship for marginalised women?

- How do we unpack the discourse on inclusion and participation on the Internet? How do we understand the empowered female subject?

- How do women renegotiate gender and challenge local power structures by creating and shaping local publics using digital media?

- Within national and sub-national contexts, how do new technologies mediate women's substantive citizenship? How do new technologies enhance institutional accountability as well as the participation of marginalised women in local governance?

- How do current regimes governing online spaces - content on the Internet, social networking sites, search engines etc. influence gender related outcomes?

- What kind of technology models maybe more aligned to feminist philosophy? How do national policy frameworks shape technology appropriation by women for their social and political empowerment?

The Review Workshop

Currently, the CITIGEN programme has a community of six research partners and three think piece writers from various countries who are covering a range of thematic areas. Four out of the six are action research projects. Teams are using different methodologies – structured interviews, case studies, narrative analysis – to understand the gendered contexts of citizenship.

- The Thailand/Taiwan team is exploring the use of mobile phones as tools of empowerment by women NGOs working with migrant domestic workers in the region.

- The China team is studying women's organisations and activists, their use of new media and online platforms, and their implications for citizenship in Hong Kong and mainland China.

- The Filipino project has created an online platform that will serve as a space for aggregating and visibilising the experiences and aspirations of marginalised women, men and youth in order to influence reproductive health legislation.

- The Sri Lanka team is researching the wider telecentre context in Sri Lanka and also exploring through action research the appropriation of new media for women's voice and feminist campaigns at the local and national level.

- The India team is working on the issue of the empowerment of women political leaders at the local level, exploring the role of ICTs in effecting their substantive representation in local institutions and creating a knowledge network by interlinking the past and present elected women representatives.

- The Bangladesh team, the youngest addition to the CITIGEN community, has just begun to study the influence of new media on women's political participation in Bangladesh through a citizen journalism platform. They will also explore the role of ICTs in enabling marginalised women to renegotiate their rights in their local contexts.

CITIGEN also has a think piece component to which scholars from Asia and also other regions of the global south will contribute. Think pieces will look at intersections between the micro-context of community information ecologies and macro socio-political developments. It is hoped that these will complement the research projects and galvanise a dialogue on a southern gender and information society discourse.

Ongoing researches are at various stages of completion. In order to begin the process of reflection and a movement towards conceptualisation of emerging insights from the CITIGEN community's work as a whole, IT for Change seeks to organise a workshop between 26th to 28th April 2011 at New Delhi. The meeting will bring together all the research teams, a few think piece writers and the advisors of the network along with a few other scholars and researchers who can help the CITIGEN community in the reflective exercise.

The objectives of this workshop are to

- Review and reflect upon the emerging insights from each research project in relation to the questions and core concepts of the programme

- Build a big picture that speaks to the theoretical imperatives of the programme as a whole, and

- Anchored in emergent theoretical formulations of the programme, explore the elements of a 'southern' discourse on women's citizenship in the information society and implications of the same for practice and policy at national and global levels.

The format will facilitate the articulation of emerging concepts and tentative theories from the ongoing work in CITIGEN, and channel these into a debate on the larger questions of democratic structures and institutions, and their shifting meanings for marginalised women's participation in the information society, as equal citizens. In order to expand and deepen the debates and discussions, a few scholars working on southern feminist frameworks and who are potential contributors to network's research will also be invited to comment on CITIGEN's ongoing work and present their perspectives.

Appendix II – Workshop Agenda

DAY 1: 26th April 2011

02:45 pm	Tea/Coffee and Registration
03:15 to 03:30 pm	Welcome, Sharing of Agenda and Introductions
03:30 to 06:30 pm	**SESSION I: Stories of Change – What is emerging from the CITIGEN research programme - Presentations by the teams** The 6 research teams will present their work to share: 1. What is emerging through their respective research on the connections between gender, ICTs and women's citizenship. 2. How the emerging insights talk to their hypotheses and theories-in-the-making. Each team will have 15 minutes to present and 10 minutes for discussions with the larger group. *Chair* – *Kalyani Menon Sen, Researcher, writer and feminist activist, India*
07:00 pm	Leave for dinner at a local restaurant

DAY 2: 27th April 2011

09:00 to 10:40 am	**SESSION II: Women's citizenship in the information society – Mapping the contemporary context** *This session will aim to capture the big picture – the democratic transition characterising the information society, and the key elements that shape marginalised women's citizenship in this regard. It will explore the emergent norms and practices of social and political citizenship in the 'network society', exploring their gendered articulations.* **Presentation** Emerging insights from the work of the CITIGEN programme *Anita Gurumurthy, Executive Director, IT for Change, and Coordinator, CITIGEN programme, India* **Responses and Perspectives** *Hania Sholkamy, Associate Professor, American University in Cairo, Egypt* *Mary John, Director, Centre for Women's Development Studies, India* *Chair* – *John Borgoyary, Governance Programme Analyst, UNIFEM South Asia, India*
10:40 to 11:10 am	Tea/ Coffee break

11:10 am to 12:45 pm	**SESSION III: Democracy and women's participation - ICT-mediated processes for making institutions work for women** *This session will aim to explore the promise of institutional reach and transparency through ICTs, and thus of the emerging pathways for accountable governance on the one hand, and of active citizen engagement by women with local governance and political processes, on the other. What kind of trends may be discerned in the shifting practices and discourse of local democracy? What are the tensions that may arise with regard to 'boundary' issues in state-civil society relationships as ICTs shape governance? These are some questions that will be addressed.* <u>Presentations</u> *Bangladesh and Philippines CITIGEN teams* – reflections on the topic of the session, building also on the emerging insights from the CITIGEN projects. <u>Responses and Perspectives</u> *Zohra Chatterji, Member Secretary, National Commission for Women, India* *Jahnvi Andharia, Senior Programme Officer, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, India* ***Chair** – Sumona Dasgupta, Senior Research Consultant, PRIA, India*
12:45 to 01:45 pm	Lunch
01:45 to 03:30 pm	**SESSION IV: Feminist spaces in the network society – Engendering resistance** *This session will look at the contestations around gender and citizenship as they emerge in the information society context. It will examine practices at the margins that inform feminist conceptions of citizenship, critiquing mainstream network society ideologies while also capitalising on emerging opportunities.* <u>Presentations</u> *India and China CITIGEN teams* - reflections on the topic of the session, building also on the emerging insights from the CITIGEN projects. *Supinya Klangnarong, Think piece author, CITIGEN, and vice-chair of the Campaign for Popular Media Reform, Thailand* <u>Responses and Perspectives</u> *Kalyani Menon Sen, Researcher, writer and feminist activist, India* *Manjima Bhattacharya, Member, Jagori, India* ***Chair** – Maitrayee Chaudhuri, Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India*
03:30 to 04:00 pm	Tea/Coffee Break

04:00 to 05:00 pm	**SESSION V: What we seem to be hearing – end of day reflections** **Opening Observations** *Andrea Cornwall, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Professor, University of Sussex, UK* **Group Work** Synthesising the discussion threads for the day, bringing back to the individual research projects in the CITIGEN community new layers of inquiry and analysis and also to the global, 'big picture' of CITIGEN, possible conceptual pegs.

DAY 3: 28ᵗʰ April 2011

09:00 to 10:45 am	**SESSION VI: Forging community and creating identity – New articulations of citizenship in the information society** *This session will look at how the network society redefines the public sphere, providing a new architecture for building community and defining identity, thus allowing for new gender orders to emerge. How do boundaries of given notions like citizenship get pushed with respect to the new possibilities for associational democracy and assertion of women's collective rights? What may be the specific concerns for a Southern discourse on women's citizenship in relation to new community formations and identities?* **Presentations** *Sri Lanka and Thailand/Taiwan CITIGEN teams* - reflections on the topic of the session, building also on the emerging insights from the CITIGEN projects. **Responses and Perspectives** *Desiree Lewis, Associate Professor, University of the Western Cape, South Africa* *Chair – Urvashi Butalia, Director, Zubaan, India*
10:45 to 11:10 am	Tea/Coffee break
11:10 am to 12:10 pm	**SESSION VII: Issues at stake – The nature of participation in virtual reality / real virtuality** *The term 'real virtuality' was coined by Manuel Castells to emphasise how the Internet has completely infiltrated our social fabric. In the network society, reality itself (that is, people's material/symbolic existence) is embedded in the structures of the virtual environment. The nature of this new social environment requires to be unpacked and grasped. How do the material and ideological bases of the virtual environment create specific conditions for participation and freedoms? Who controls freedoms, and who mediates participation, online? These issues of the technological DNA of the emerging social order are critical to theoretical formulations of women's citizenship in the network society.*

	<u>Presentations</u> *Evangelia Berdou, Research Fellow, University of Sussex, UK* *Heike Jensen, Think piece author, CITIGEN, and Independent gender researcher and consultant, Germany* <u>Responses and Perspectives</u> *Lisa McLaughlin, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, Miami University, USA (will also chair the session)*
12:10 to 01:10 pm	**SESSION VIII – What can we make of what we have heard for practice and policy - Going back to CITIGEN's research questions** *Opening comments by Lisa McLaughlin, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, Miami University, USA* *Open house / plenary* *Closing comments by Parminder Jeet Singh, Executive Director, IT for Change, and Advisor, CITIGEN, India (will also chair the session)*
01:10 to 02:00 pm	Lunch
02:00 to 03:00 pm	**SESSION IX - Group work – Tying together emerging reflections and insights** Teams to sit together with advisors and plan the following: 1. What are the next steps for individual research projects? 2. What can be done for national level policy advocacy? 3. What can CITIGEN do globally to influence the feminist agenda and global policy processes? Are there any opportunities we need to map?
03:00 to 03:30 pm	Presentations by groups
03:30 to 04:00 pm	Tea/ Coffee break
04:00 to 04:45 pm	**SESSION X: Next steps, issues and closing remarks** *Andrea Cornwall, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Professor, University of Sussex, UK* *Anita Gurumurthy, Executive Director, IT for Change, and Coordinator, CITIGEN programme, India* *Ramata Molo Thioune, Programme Officer, IDRC, Senegal*

Appendix III – Participants list

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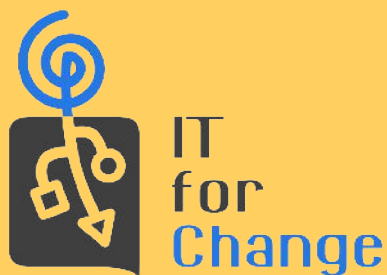
IT for Change is an India-based NGO working on information society theory and practice from the standpoint of equity and social justice. Through our research, advocacy and field projects, we seek to challenge approaches that fail to address the structural exclusions in the emerging information society. We also propose alternative models that are participatory and equitable. Our work spans a range of development arenas – gender, education, community media and governance.

www.ITforChange.net

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Design: Chloé Zollman