Report of the research validation meeting

15-17 February 2012, Bengaluru

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Gender and Citizenship in
the Information Society
Research Programme

IT for Change

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RESEARCH VALIDATION MEETING REPORT

of

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

15-17 February 2012, Bengaluru
India

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The <u>Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society</u> (CITIGEN) research programme, launched in 2010, aimed 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, Hong Kong / Taiwan, India and Bangladesh studied various aspects of the terrain. Also eminent scholars of the field from Costa Rica, Pakistan, Thailand, Germany and South Africa, wrote think pieces delving into the research subject from their perspectives to further enrich the research process. The research was further enriched by the two large meetings held at the various phases of the programme, which brought in feminist scholars and practitioners from across fields, to share and discuss the tentative outcomes of the programme.

At the end of the appointed two years of the research programme, a research validation meeting of the network was held in National Institute of Advocacy Studies, Bengaluru from the 15th to the 17th of February 2012. It was to be an occasion where the network, now a loose group of researcher-activists and activist-researchers interested in examining the relationship between gender and the information society from the vantage point of women's participation and citizenship, would take stock of the work done and reflect upon the questions and concerns framing the research endeavour that they have been a part of. The researches undertaken by network members have been accomplished in a very short and tight time span, allowing for certain questions to be problematised sharply, although explored only in somewhat reasonable, but not entirely satisfactory, depth. There was felt, a need to look back at the research findings and re-map the analytical field along with those who may be new to the network, and re-frame the field of feminist knowledge and praxis in this emerging domain.

On the 15th of February, two sessions were planned in the second half of the day. <u>Session 1</u>, titled '*What is network society all about? - Feminist analysis of contemporary times*' was designed as a freewheeling conversation with - Andrea Cornwall (Advisor, CITIGEN, and Professor, University of Sussex, UK), Graciela Selaimen (Coordinator, Instituto NUPEF, Brazil), Lam Oi Wan (Regional Editor for Northeast Asia, globalvoicesonline.org, China) and Srilatha Batliwala (Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Scholar, AWID, India). The session was anchored by Parminder Jeet Singh (Advisor, CITIGEN, and Executive Director, IT for Change, India). The panel reflected upon critical questions confronting feminist politics in relation to the rise of the global middle class, the fragmentation of the public sphere, cultures of consumerism and hyper-capitalism, and the changing nature of the state. Panelists explored how networked ways of being and doing change institutions, social practices and norms, requiring new frameworks to grapple with the feminist project of democracy and gender justice.

<u>Session 2</u> and <u>Session 3</u>, which spanned the 15th and 16th of February, covered the final research and think piece presentations by Francisco dela Tonga (Youth Coordinator, Likhaan, Philippines) and Lisa McLaughlin (Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, Miami University, USA); Desiree Lewis, (Think-piece author, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, University of the Western Cape, South Africa); and Crystal Orderson (Think-piece author, CITIGEN, and Specialist Correspondent, SABC News, South Africa); Philippa Smales, (Researcher, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, Thailand); Binitha V. Thampi (Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, India); Chandrika Sepali Kottegoda, (Director, Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka); and Sarala Emmanuel (Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka); Lam Oi Wan (Regional Editor for Northeast Asia, globalvoicesonline.org, China) and Michelle Fong,(Campaign and Advocacy, Internet Governance and Freedom Project, Inmedia, China). They covered the context, issues and outcomes of the research projects and the conclusions drawn by the think pieces.

<u>Session 4</u> - '*Can we grasp the big picture?*' was to address the ecologies shaping gender and citizenship in the network society and to take on the big questions of democratic deficit in global

governance, the complexity around free speech in relation to the national and global Internets, network capitalism, and the commodification of sexuality. Moderated by Andrea, the session included two presentations. Heike Jensen (Think-piece author, CITIGEN, and Post-doctoral researcher and lecturer, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany) presented on 'Big business and big brother: Revisiting 'old' issues around gender and citizenship in the network society' and Parminder Jeet Singh presented on 'ACTA, SOPA, IG and the rest: Making sense of the global politics shaping network society and gender justice'.

Session 5 encompassed three power speeches made by Gayatri Buragohain (Executive Director, Feminist Approach to Technology, India), Aparna Kalley (Project Coordinator, Prakriye – Centre for Community Informatics and Development, IT for Change, India) and Jan Moolman (Women's Rights Projects Coordinator, Association for Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme, South Africa) and was moderated by Geetanjali Mishra (Executive Director, CREA, India). The session was titled '*What matters in building feminist power through technologies*' and reflected upon the way power relationships are inscribed in the autonomous course of the 'digital everyday'. Question of how technology can be appropriated to serve a collective feminist consciousness and what would be the way to make this happen, were covered.

The last session on the 16th, Session 6, was dedicated to '*A synthesis of CITIGEN's thoughts and practices – What does the network society have to do with discourses of gender and citizenship*' presented by Anita Gurumurthy (Coordinator, CITIGEN, and Executive Director, IT for Change, India). The presentation attempted a tentative synthesis of the research projects and think pieces that have resulted from the CITIGEN network.

The 17th morning began with Session 7 - '*Technology, transformation and tipping points – Case studies of non-linear change*'. The session was moderated by Chandrika Sepali Kottegoda and presentations were made by Jessica Colaco (Research Lead at iHub Research, iHub, Kenya) and Meghana Rao (Manager - Communications, Breakthrough, India). The session demonstrated how progressive community based change can be effected through technologies. Presenters shared experiences and perspectives, elaborating how the nature of technology-induced change presents itself, and what could be the key 'tipping points'.

Session 8, entitled '*Money, a room and network freedoms' – My vision of democracy and gender justice*' was designed as a book-reading session where the two presenters - Disha Mullick (Project Coordinator, Nirantar, India) and Srilatha Batliwala read out quasi-fictional accounts of women's interface with technology. The moderator of the session, Graciela Selaimen, rounded the session by a discussion on the global developments around Internet rights.

Session 9 and Session 10 were called '*Pointers from CITIGEN - What do we need to take away for theory and practice*' and these sessions were meant to present a review and assessment of CITIGEN's research and conceptual contributions from scholars new to the network. Reviews were undertaken by Ranjita Mohanty (Consultant, Local Governance Initiative, Swiss Co-operation Office India & Visiting Scholar, University of Western Cape, South Africa), Shakun Daundiyakhed (Programme Coordinator, Vimochana, India), Lisa McLaughlin, Andrea Cornwall, Phet Sayo (Senior Programme Officer, IDRC, India). The sessions were moderated and tied by Desiree Lewis and Heike Jensen.

The concluding session for the meeting, Session 11, was jointly anchored by Srilatha Batliwala and Anita Gurumurthy. Entitled '*Space for musings – Reflecting about the CITIGEN network and beyond*', it was an open space to reflect upon and look at individual and organisational points of interest in the network and its future.

SESSION I: What is network society all about? - Feminist analysis of contemporary times

The panel reflected upon critical questions confronting feminist politics in relation to the rise of the global middle class, the fragmentation of the public sphere, cultures of consumerism and hyper-capitalism, and the changing nature of the state. Exchanging views, panelists explored how networked ways of being and doing change institutions, social practices and norms, requiring new frameworks to grapple with the feminist project of democracy and gender justice.

The session was designed to be a freewheeling conversation with:

Andrea Cornwall, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Professor, University of Sussex, UK
Graciela Selaimen, Coordinator, Instituto NUPEF, Brazil
Lam Oi Wan, Regional Editor for Northeast Asia, globalvoicesonline.org, China
Srilatha Batliwala, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Scholar, AWID, India

***Anchor**: Parminder Jeet Singh, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Executive Director, IT for Change, India*

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Parminder Jeet Singh, the anchor for the session, opened the session by stating that the question at the heart of the first session was to understand the entity called the network society, from a feminist perspective. Being an abstract idea, this was to be approached through an analysis of how the macro structural of the information society (IS) combines with the micro empirical of how information and communication technologies (ICTs) impact our lives.

The network society is a tentative framing of the emergent changes our society is experiencing and is yet to be well established. We do know that ICTs connect to the network logic by changing the manner in which communication takes place, making it rapid, easy, flexible and increasingly available for all to use. When this happens, there is a change in social space. Deterritorialisation takes place, enabling conversations previously not possible across the globe. Horizontalisation takes place, and people no longer have to speak in vertical organisations and can reach out horizontally. Flexibility takes place, allowing us to pick and choose relations, and no longer sticking to those in our physical proximity, or institutions that were tied to these physical spaces. These are big changes taking place currently and related to the many tectonic shifts taking place around us.

In this session, through conversations with the four panelists, where they will speak about the areas they have specialised in, the session will explore how the network society logic is or is not, a useful frame for explaining the current phenomena experienced by all.

Andrea Cornwall - Advisor, CITIGEN, and Professor, University of Sussex, UK

Having worked extensively in the area of participation, citizenship and women's empowerment, Andrea, outlined potentially interesting emergent areas which would require more engagement.

She noted how the context of CITIGEN was a very different way of thinking about engagement than working with physical spaces. In physical spaces it was possible to study and organise to create categories. The changing nature of public engagement, now no longer restricted to physical space, seems to need new categories.

Andrea Cornwall

In the ten year research on citizenship, participation and accountability that Andrea was a part of - where concepts of invited, closed, popular spaces came up – it was possible to

define those spaces and distinguish them from each other in bounded categories. Now, it was increasingly difficult to begin to think in this manner. There was now, a profusion of spaces splintering old dichotomies and reconfiguring possibilities of engagement - the kind that were impossible to imagine 20 or 30 years ago, now taking place due to technological change.

It is not only that these new kinds of virtual spaces enable people to get to know each other and to use networks and social networking, but it is actually the very different ways in which people can engage. For example, if one looks at the old ways of engagement and participation from consultations to more dialogic forms of interaction, there now exists quite a different way of engaging, a different way of thinking about what participation means through these new kinds of spaces and new kinds of modes of interaction. They are radically different and are related to different kinds of discursive practices. The old theories, the old concepts, the old tools - will not be really helpful in making sense of these new spaces.

This is interesting when considering political action what it then means to participate. Who gets noticed, who is absent - when you cannot even see who may be listening, following a conversation or tracking or re-tweeting and so on. Also the possibilities that technology has opened up for self representation and representation, that simply were not there before, are enormous. People sending and sharing images of themselves or shooting images of things they are seeing around them, or using images to re-imagine their own world, to see themselves and their world in different ways and change themselves and their own sense of themselves. The ways in which people can use technology to map their world and look at other maps and other worlds, and share those things in different kinds of ways - is astounding.

Twenty years ago thinking of using participation methods like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) was radical, never realising that there would be something that allowed people to do that on such a scale and in a very diffused effective way rather than a more organised method. What that could lead to politically is very exciting.

Andrea mentioned that through the 'Pathways for women and empowerment' programme, it had emerged that the concept of empowerment built by women in their everyday lives was heavily influenced by the imaginary – the ways in which women imagined themselves and could represent and see themselves. The emerging technologies offer an enormous amount in that process of empowerment which is simply about not limiting the vision of ourselves anymore - breaking away from stereotypes, received wisdom and opening up the possibilities of fantasising and seeing other kinds of realities. We have to then see how that gets used politically for opening up spaces for women to organise, build new kinds of relationships, and mobilise around justices, so that in these very non-linear, non organised ways - people can then begin to disrupt the status quo and reimagine themselves.

She also pointed out that when studying participation - in the past, it had been something that was purposefully organised, that could be categorised. For example – consultation was a defined process with goals and outcomes. The new forms of participation do not really have a goal or a purpose. It is happening at the same time in lots of different places, in lots of different ways. They cannot be categorised. There are a lot of splintered fragments flying around, sometimes connecting - in good ways or in ways which are not political at all. It is a very different field to look at considering participation and this kind of unruliness is very exciting because it is politically quite potent and quite disruptive yet its also very hard to get our heads around and very hard to understand.

Hannah Arendt has this image of people coming together in a public space and leaving something of themselves behind where something grows, something changes. This is what public engagement can be - people leaving a space and leaving something about themselves behind or changing or moving compared to people simply interacting. People simply spending a lot of time on Facebook or here and there in chat rooms or in

endless amounts of diversions and engagement which lift people out of the real world, maybe interesting interactions in terms of chaos and complexity but when while studying participation and empowerment, we just do not tend to think about these as much more purposive and organised interactions.

Concluding with some comments on the nature of the state, Andrea said that it was interesting how the state is refracted and is absent from these processes, which is very different from the absences of the state in traditional processes of participation. The state is almost completely outside some of these other engagements. So how we rethink about the state is a very interesting question. What kind of other borders are growing? What are the borders made by the people? Are the physical borders, the borders between countries breaking down?

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Discussion:

Parminder agreed that it was indeed fascinating how new spaces of participation not only give way to political possibilities but also cultural self expression – all mixed in one. The political potency of the whole situation was indeed huge.

In classical participation debate though, there was always an intent to influence a centre of power and therefore to influence a certain political agency which was concrete. He then asked if Andrea felt, that while participation was improving in the manner described by her, was political application meanwhile growing weaker? Is the connection between the two to be problematised at this stage?

Andrea replied saying she felt that people were using new technologies as a method of doing old activism. Each of the methods in which people have engaged with the state, has been done virtually as well as in lots of other ways. She shared that in Britain there was a profusion of e-petitioning, a lot of online protesting along with old methods of protest. What has changed, she felt, was the transnational aspect of activism. Now a whole of lot of possibilities have opened

for activism - the transnational is mixed with other forms of activism to challenge authority and to build movements.

Srilatha Batliwala shared a debate that existed in the late 90s and put forth the questions - Can there be a citizen without a state? Is there a state formation at the global level? She shared that that was when for the first time the term 'globizen' was created. Because the whole transnational civil society realm emerged as quite a concrete space, this transnational civil society was the kind of place where people were claiming global citizenship. This was a citizenship of a global kind, that was very distinct from the conventional political science definition where the nation state confers citizenship. What, she felt, had reversed since the late 90s was that no one was now conferring citizenship but people simply claim citizenship and belonging. Now a new term 'netizen' has emerged and the implications are of claiming a citizenship beyond a mere belonging to Facebook. It seems to imply that the person is locating themselves in a realm which is beyond the state, beyond leaders, and regimes. Also Srilatha alluded to the idea of the 'global' - as a region. If that is a given, then the notion of network society has a region and also, the possibility of then claiming citizenship becomes very real, she said.

Graciela Selaimen – Coordinator, Instituto NUPEF, Brazil

Graciela began her talk by sharing the similarity of the present situation with that of the industrial revolution period. In both cases there are people behind the line of production and someone owned the machines and technology and developed it. Here we have people behind screens who claim themselves to be 'netizens' but are operating on structures that are proprietary. We are operating in this new society or we are exercising our citizenship in architectures that are built to protect private property. The only privacy we have in our days is private property.

She felt that it was a major concern to imagine this global network of citizens sharing, connecting and operating politically on the

proprietary structures of the network. Even states are dependent upon this huge proprietary infrastructure. For example, something difficult to find out or understand is why Brazilians pay 17 to 18 times more for the same bandwidth that is accessed by and paid for by someone in London. Why does that happen? What is the difference? It is the issue of the ownership and the interests there are operating behind it. Not even the governments have any information on the price of the transit of the data packet of information that runs on this network. Why is this price so much more for Brazil than for the countries in the North? This is something that affects everyone in the developing regions - especially women and the poor women who are the most marginalised citizens in our society.

Talking about the framework of rights and specifically the right to freedom of expression, Graciela shared her experience of working in the field of ICTs policy since 2001 when people first started asking questions in preparation for the WSIS. She was invited to a meeting of civil society organisations who were gathering in London to speak on communication rights. Good work took place then which had a strong impact in Brazil. The term 'communication rights' was appropriated by civil society and is still used today, but this is not true at the global level. This concept totally disappeared from the civil society agenda globally. Now conversations seem to be more concentrated on freedom of expression and privacy and hence it becomes important to ask – where are the other rights? The right to knowledge, the right to assembly and all the other rights. Freedom of expression per se does not resolve the issue of the realisation and defense of the other rights. How do we see this difference?

In Brazil, activists have been defending and strengthening the concept of communications rights as not only to share, to impart, to have access to information - but also to have access to the means of production of communication. It makes all the difference. When we talk about communication rights in the network society, this means somehow challenging the whole structure of property in the means of communication. This also implies challenging the structures of property and the architecture of property at the logical level of the network. Who develops the software that we use? What are they aimed for? What is the world view that is behind these codes which we are incorporating in our lives without questioning? What are the values embedded in it? There is no technology which does not have a political aim behind it. It is natural and a part of human nature to embed its intentions in the things that we create and develop. Whose intentions are we incorporating in our practices, in our everyday world - as 'netizens', is an important question to raise.

Asking these questions is an important part of building a strong communication rights agenda in the network society added to which there is need to build a pedagogy of network citizenship. Speaking from the perspective of being involved in community media and community radio and especially

Graciela Selaimen

in the development, creation and management of community telecentres in Brazil, Graciela emphasised the need to work on this pedagogy from scratch, addressing questions on how people understand to whom the infrastructure belongs (why when one is talking on Skype, for example, in certain regions of Brazil one cannot speak for more than 5 minutes), why the quality of bandwidth signal gets degraded, how does it happen, etc.

She strongly felt that people needed to understand these processes. She felt that this pedagogy would also need to incorporate an understanding that when one uses a certain hardware or software, you choose ways of seeing the world and ways of thinking. This is important to include in any agenda that we plan to implement when we're thinking of empowering and strengthening the capacities and abilities of the socially excluded people to intervene realities using these tools. There is a need to perfectly understand what the choices that we make mean in our everyday lives and for possibilities of changing realities. This also applies to the level

of the content that we create, that we share, that we consume.

Lam Oi Wan - Regional Editor for Northeast Asia, globalvoicesonline.org, China

Oi Wan began her talk by describing a recent virtual fight with a right wing opinion leader. The issue of discussion was the 'locust' discourse – the word 'locust', in recent times, has been used to describe the pregnant women who come from mainland China, to give birth in Hong Kong. The Constitution says that if a child is born in Hong Kong, the offspring will get Hong Kong citizenship. Last year 60% of the offsprings in Hong Kong were from China. The image of the 'locust' is one of the imaginaries used by 'netizens' to incite fear and mobilise against the women.

Lam Oi Wan

This issue makes a good entry point to question the character of the network society. Hong Kong is the nexus of global capitalism, a point of transit for capital flows. So the question of the nature of this network society studied through its example throws up several issues. One of the points that emerges is the constant fear - everyone feels the fear of being excluded or kept out of the network of capital. The mobilisation against the 'locusts' is supporting this kind of culture of fear. We do not address that imaginary world that affects our emotion or our attitude in our interaction with others.

In Hong Kong, the second factor which perpetuates a structure of fear, apart from the neoliberal network society, is the China factor. As an example of how global capital flow injects fear – Hong Kong realty prices are highest among the world and an average apartment is 30 times the average income of the average family, which means that if you do not eat or spend a cent, you have to spend 13 years to buy an apartment. The majority is getting marginalised in such a neoliberal capital society and the civil society is very weak in responding to these situations. At most they have called for an inclusion policy.

Such exclusions are very disempowering. When the protests against the right wing took place, civil society did not even react, not even the feminists.

How the China factor instils fear, can be explained by the example of the 'locust' issue. Local people feel marginalised and are pushed to using public facilities as good doctors in private hospitals are more expensive and are used by the Chinese. The China Constitution has power over Hong Kong Constitution hence the Hong Kong people have no say in defining citizen rights. The current Constitution is quite unfair to other ethnic origins, for example, if you are working in China for 20 years and your child is born, natural citizenship is not granted. So the right wing wants to deal with this situation by removing Chinese incursions, and the left want it to be fair and ask for removing racial discrimination. Hong Kong is still dealing with this new citizenship movement for exclusion and is currently in negotiations with the state.

Discussion:

Parminder mentioned that Oi Wan's example of Hong Kong is a good one to begin to understand how flows in the network society can create imbalances and how struggles play out in times of conflict. It is then interesting to see how institutions are used by the marginalised in network systems.

Srilatha Batliwala - Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Scholar, AWID, India

Srilatha used Lisa Veneklasen's piece for Open Democracy, titled 'Citizen action and the perverse confluence of opposing agendas' to share her thoughts on the emergent transnational activism.

She began with a quote from Evelina Dagnino, a Brazilian political scientist, who introduced a concept: perverse confluence. Evelina points out that "opposing political interests – social movements, the state, and the drivers of neoliberalism – all use and promote the notion of active citizens as if united harmoniously in a

shared vision of democracy and inclusion. But, in reality, social movements claim and redefine citizenship to recognise and build inclusion across race, class, gender, sexuality and other barriers; the state uses the legalities of citizenship to control who counts, has access, and decides; and neoliberalism equates citizens with consumers and embraces the idea of active citizen engagement as a way to expand markets". Three diametrically opposed agendas snuggled into the same political terminology – an example of perverse confluence, and of the messy contradictions of the moment.

In the article, Srilatha explained, that Lisa had not gone into looking at the proprietary structures, but examines whether the network society has changed the nature of social movements, the nature of organising strategy and the nature of how movements work.

Srilatha, added that this also brought to her mind how the vocabulary of the virtual world was increasingly being used in the real world and gave the example of the phrase 'gone viral' and how it is now being used to describe the very real world spread of the Occupy street movement.

Returning to the article, Srilatha felt that one of the interesting conclusions that Lisa has arrived at was that the felt change was partly a function of age. Younger people who have been involved in the Arab spring for instance, including women, really believed that technology had changed the nature of activism from what they have seen and heard of social movements from their elders. The most cited difference experienced in the movements now is that movements are non-hierarchical and are leaderless. Srilatha said she did not agree with these contentions even though movements have an appearance of this and they are relatively less hierarchical and have less formal layers of leadership structures than before.

Srilatha Batliwala

The second conclusion made by Lisa in her article

was that while a lot has changed, yet some deep essence of the nature of organising remains the same. For example - the speed at which one can organise, mobilise around issues, how quickly you can cross all kinds of borders not just national-political or geographical ones, but even issue borders, and mobilise people from other issues movements – are examples of changed. Yet in other ways, things are the same. She explained this by agreeing with Graciela's point on the need of a critical pedagogy for the 'netizens'. She felt that there was a need to have a kind of consciousness raising – to know what kind of platform one is using, who owns it, why is there a price difference, how do private interests determine what one searches on Google etc. At the end of the day it is those forms of organising for social movements that have to take place to have impact.

Sharing the example of the online movement called 'One million strong against Operation Greenhunt' in India, which was against the government targeting indigenous populations and labelling them as 'Maoists' due to their resistance to mining interests in the forest regions. Srilatha said that one recognises that it is not purely the virtual movement which pushed the central government to undertake an enquiry. There had to be protests in situ, mobilisation in Delhi like the kind done 25 years ago against rape and domestic violence. So its like a cliché to realise that the more things change, the more they remain the same. And this is certainly true, for social movements organising in the network age.

She added to Lisa Veneklasen's analysis by concluding with some additional points. One point that she felt came naturally out of the analysis was the question of rights. We have to make a distinction that use of network spaces to raise claims of rights cannot be confused with imagining that there is a duty bearer in the network space who can be held up as responsible.

Secondly, she pointed out that some issues had remained the same for women even within the network society. These were issues of - opportunity costs; capability; permission and

policing; identity; asset ownership.

On the positive side, an important point which remains the same is that how 30 years back women's collectives in rural spaces became the non-traditional space where women were able to escape patriarchy, the network society can now be that space for a large number of women.

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Discussion:

Lisa McLaughlin pointed out Aihwa Ong's work on citizenship which spoke about how in countries like Malaysia, there were both people who were not full citizens and those who enjoyed more rights than citizens. A lot of this discourse is applicable to the Internet - we talk about diasporic networks for example, which brings into high relief the clash between the state that is less economically developed who wishes to become a knowledge economy and anyone who brings it the resources (like in countries such as Malaysia and India) – ends up often times doing so to the disadvantage of the citizens of that place and lots of times citizens who are marginalised who do not get to claim or enjoy their rights -like women. Having access to the Internet is not in itself going to solve that particular problem.

Graciela shared a recent experience of Brazil relating to surveillance and control by the state. A law was put forward, at the end of 2011, to create a database of pregnant women where participation was made compulsory. The government claimed that this was to ensure that health services – public and private – reach women. Yet of course, a state which is under the heavy influence of the church, has other motives to monitor pregnancies and women's choices. This law is still being heavily debated. The positive outcome of this situation though was that for the first time organisations which work on communication and Internet rights have been approached by the women's movement – a bridge that several people have tried building for years. Although the communication rights discourse was developed in consultation with other social movements, it has still been very difficult building this bridge and bringing different rights groups and movements together. Yet now with this very concrete case, the communication rights groups and others are beginning to dialogue in a more systematic way and hope to take this opportunity to build better relationships and awareness regarding the importance of incorporating communications as an end and not only as a means.

Andrea added that this was an interesting example of what happens between virtual and real spaces. She had heard about this Brazilian law from a Brazilian activist, who asked - Is there someone in your room who can make your government aware that this has happened, in reaction to which Andrea wrote and her email went around to people who were in the government. So there was this whole string of events set in motion – displaying how the virtual and the real constantly intersect.

Phet Sayo felt that one needed to push the notion of the transnational 'netizen' identity a bit more. Is it really true that the youth who have access or privilege think they belong to the global citizenship? Or do they belong to Google, Apple, or these other digital ecosystems? About the only mobility they have is email and webpages, so in the region we call network, mobility only happens by the standards set by these companies.

Srilatha addressed this concern by saying that one way of thinking about this question was again to fall back on some older wisdoms. One of the things learnt in the course of sectarian violence and pogroms, looking at the role of women in such violence, was that a huge number of women have been mobilised by fundamentalist movements. One had to examine how this was happening. What was that space creating which was attracting women?

One thing that was learnt through this enquiry was that when any space gives you an opportunity to be a co-architect in constructing something - you can live with some of the means used which may not appeal to you like violence for example. The other observation had been that

women who had been part of very progressive consciousness raising processes also went quietly home and tacitly supported their men taking part in such violence. This revealed that people live with and are comfortable with - multiple identities. So people can be 'netizens' and can also be fundamentalists etc. All this coexists alongside each other. Some societies have enabled this multiple identity more than others – this ability to move through multiple spaces with different values.

Parminder added that the problem was not just that people were trapped in proprietary spaces, the boundaries of which we have not even begun to grapple with. The issue was also the affluent transnational global middle class who are now a political force more stronger than the people who are on Facebook. We are now witness to a global middle class which is the single most strong political force today and they control many states which are otherwise poor. That new class segmentation which is taking place because of this phenomenon, which is a mixed phenomenon, is connected to being trapped in these proprietary spaces. The interactions between these two problems is the animal which is being created - which is the formulation we're trying to understand of a network society.

Sarala Emmanuel noted that governments are eagerly getting e-governance programmes off the ground, one of which in Sri Lanka is the citizens registration. Coming from a long war period, everyone is obviously suspicious about enrolling into such databases. She mentioned coming across the tentative declarations of the human rights of a virtual citizen - so in such cases, for what should one negotiate with the state?

Graciela replied to Sarala by stating that governments had always collected data which is often the basis of the state – statistics is the knowledge of the state. It is not a new phenomenon. What is new is the capacity of holding and managing, processing and keeping this information and the speed with which this is done. This ability of the state to control, administer and exercise its bureaucracy to a level

unimaginable. However, she added, private companies have been doing this for ages and we did not even know because they do not ask you for the data, you give it to them in exchange of goods or services. We offer information for free to private companies with no concern of accountability in exchange. These are the kinds of issues, she felt, needed to be understood.

We do not want to be surveyed by governments but at least as citizens in our local context and national states we have the right to demand from the government a certain level of accountability and transparency – through right to information, public information etc. In contrast, where other private databases are concerned (which are larger than the government's), we do not say anything. We don't even know where these are. When it is the government, you can go somewhere and knock, but when you think of a huge transnational corporation that is capturing your data by means that are completely opaque, in such a scenario you cannot see, you cannot perceive. They are embedded in our everyday practice. To whom can one talk to? To whom can one go to demand rights? Which door does one knock?

When talking of government surveillance, people use the image of the 'panopticon', but we are actually living in another piece of literature which some scholar says is like 'The Trial', by Kafka. Like the protagonist in the story who is prosecuted for a crime unknown, and goes knocking from door to door to understand why. We have to be aware of such scenarios when we think of us as citizens in relation to the government and as consumers in relation to transnationals.

Jan Moolman also pointed out the collusion between state and non-state actors. She felt that there was a lot of focus on the role of the states but the role of the non-state actors was equally problematic. For example in Brazil, the government was making an agreement with Google to remove abortion related advertisements. That kind of private sector power was becoming increasingly worrying. How, she felt, this happened was through a kind of

mobilisation of anxiety. Through that anxiety a false consensus is created or constructed, and we are told this is what we need. She said -this brought us to the point that Srilatha was making in that the same strategies have been used over and over again and hence we need to be careful about not forgetting our learning from before.

Gayatri Buragohain felt that there was need to have a clear distinction between the accountability of the state and accountability of the citizens. On one hand, the state is elected democratically and hence is accountable to the citizen and people can try to demand transparency through tools which are technology based. With the excuse of increasing the efficiency of the state, more and more information is being collected like in the case of the Unique Identification (UID) in India and in such situations no one is asking why this data is required, who holds it, how is it protected etc.

Crystal Orderson added to Jan's point, stating that these collusions were obvious in the telecommunications sector too where the state quoted efficiency and terror as reasons for registering all cell phones. How that data is used needs to be understood, she felt.

Jessica Colaco, mentioned that Kenya has launched an open data portal to increase citizen government engagement but it has not progressed. She asked the group what they thought about the open data portals across countries and contexts. Open data in the developing world is not the same as the developed world, so what was the network society in the developing world and what did it mean to the citizens?

Graciela replied by sharing an argument by Michael Gurstein once made. He asked who the data was open for and who knows what to do with the data. Having the data open does not solve the problem. Someone has to translate the data somehow to turn it into concrete facts that can lead to concrete outcomes and understandings of reality. It is a question of having access to knowledge, not only to data, she said.

Parminder added that the larger systemic problem of these initiatives was that they were becoming a smokescreen for actual activism, political engagement and agency. These initiatives were good but they needed to be pushed by greater activism.

Srilatha felt that a way to derive deeper insight would be to study the movements which have centred around information such as the right to information or the slum dwellers movements, where data has been self-created or contested. By going to these sites of activism that have used data as a key strategy we can understand what the politics has been. Additionally, she felt that considering the history of the citizen and the state, it would be instructive to see how in situations of oppression, the citizen has found methods of subversion. Feminists have always functioned through various subversions. She felt that there was a need for a larger project to then build feminist visions of a network society based on a deeper understanding of these subversions.

Oi Wan responded to Sarala's concerns. In China, she shared, activists have a motto – you can control my data but not my imagination. The imaginary world or expression is a very strong weapon. To give an example, recently in a protest which was very successful, a reporter asked a very young participant how they learnt these strategies. Is it because of the tradition of this village (as it had communist revolutionary history) or access to Hong Kong TV etc.? The youngsters said we learnt how to fight through war video games.

Andrea added that the questions about resistance and disruption were interesting considering the power of the imagination. It brought up the possibilities of waking in people a sense of indignation and create dissonance through these technologies.

Graciela mentioned that there were many methods of subversion and resistance. For instance she used Facebook to flag issues regarding Facebook. She outlined the need for two things – collaborations across movements and for research (giving the example of how APC

led research ensured that women's groups were more aware of communication related issues and hence could respond with greater understanding).

Parminder closed the session by reminding the group that there seemed to be some native characteristics of the network society. For example - collaboration, a characteristic of the network society, had been best utilised by the most powerful today. The network, he felt, had the characteristic of being aggrandising, it seeks out power and it tries to remove itself from normative ethical political structures. These are characteristics, he added, normally associated with capital.

He felt that it was important to remember that the network would be capable of causing such extreme exclusions, those of irrelevance, that we would consider the old methods of exploitation as better as they were at least in proximity, in connection to a social relationship. Irrelevance, he said, takes place when powerful groups which are unconnected to you, can cut you off and act as if you do not exist. These are native tendencies of the network which need to be addressed.

He said that there was currently a big struggle going on between the market system and the democratic political systems on gender lines and many others. In this struggle, the network society has some inherent tendencies which takes it towards the market systems. There is a need to put counter networks and certain circuit breakers, literally like the Tobin Tax on the financial markets against extremes. Because networks tend to do move in problematic ways, these kind of insights help us chart our way forward.

SESSION II: Techno parables and feminist paradoxes - Narrations of the CITIGEN stories

This session followed a story telling format. Rather than talk in a linear way about 'findings' and 'conclusions', it presented readings of research contexts that highlight the complexity of the technology-gender discourse. Stories of women's embeddedness in the context, their creative and subversive adaptations of digital space, and the paradoxes that arise in the process, will be shared. This will make explicit the power structures, including digital architectures, that clash with feminist methods and conceptions of change. The moderator will synthesise the narrations and facilitate interactions with the audience.

Story-tellers:

The Philippines story – Francisco dela Tonga, Youth Coordinator, Likhaan, Philippines; and Lisa McLaughlin, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, Miami University, USA

The South African story – Desiree Lewis, Think piece author, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, University of the Western Cape, South Africa; and Crystal Orderson, Think piece author, CITIGEN, and Specialist Correspondent, SABC News, South Africa

The Taiwan and Hong Kong story – Philippa Smales, Researcher, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, Thailand

Moderator: *Phet Sayo, Senior Programme Officer, IDRC, India*

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Phet Sayo - Senior Programme Officer, IDRC, India

Phet opened the session by sharing that he had recently read an article by a famous American economist who was allayed public fears of the US economy sinking by arguing that like the automobile, telephony were major innovations that changed the economy in the past there are three major innovations which have again been created in the USA which will ensure its position in the global economy. The three innovations mentioned were - Data centres, wireless connectivity and smart manufacturing. Phet felt he must point out the first two innovations because they were very relevant to the ongoing discussions. The second point he made was that technology is not gender neutral.

Phet Sayo

Phet mentioned that he had been a part of the April 2011 workshop of CITIGEN and someone had mentioned the right to publicity. Publicity in terms of having a voice. With the new technology, of course, it is an ability to have a digital voice but having voice does not necessarily mean you have a digital voice and having a digital voice has two components. If one considers voice over Internet Protocol (IP), the technology underlying Skype, the IP identifies you and then there is intellectual property around what you say. These have huge implications. As Lawrence Lessig would say, 'architecture is policy', so in that mind frame we have to think about what defaults we are setting now and what are the implications.

Phet said he has been familiar with the ICTD discourse for 15 years and has seen the exclusions as well as the inclusions. Although we talk about empowerment potentials and democratic efforts, he said, he was a bit sceptical about that digital voice and that ability to be able to communicate instantly to everybody - because not everybody could. The right to privacy, protection of the freedom of assembly, the freedom of expression - are becoming increasingly important.

Francisco dela Tonga - Youth Coordinator, Likhaan, Philippines; and Lisa McLaughlin - Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, Miami University, USA

Francisco began his presentation by explaining that the project in Philippines was looking at the use of IT for legislative advocacy of the reproductive health bill. IT was being used to reflect on the ground realities from which the need of the bill arose.

Francisco dela Tonga

This feminist action research project attempted to provide a platform (which is the website) for an online magazine that enabled the community activists to share their experiences, needs, desires and analysis on sexual and reproductive health. The action component involved the training of the community leaders or community-based members to become community-based activists or journalists who would generate stories for the website - voices of the community. Eleven community journalists were trained initially and at the end of the project there were nine active community journalists. Francisco then shared some of the stories from this community journalism initiative.

Most of the stories shared were from Khaila, Emma and Dioshiel because they shared their insights on the aspect of citizenship in the context of a community journalist. Dioshiel Uriarte-Miras, one of the young mothers in the community, also a community journalist, said, "Having a child and a husband does not and should not stop me from being a community journalist. I need to continue my role as a journalist not just for my own development but for other people to become more aware of the women and grassroots issues." Dioshiel already had her first child during the training of community journalism and had some difficulty in attending some of the workshops but she made it finally.

Emma Alagdon-Monzaga, one of the eldest

women who was trained in community journalism, has eight children and also had difficulty in managing her time to take part in the community journalism along with her household chores. She said, "My free time usually happens after all the household chores are done, usually between 9pm to 10pm. The feeling of being fulfilled by something that you learn despite your age and gender is something that I am and will proudly say."

The journalists were picked from the community, they were youth who were looking for a job, a mother, young women, married adult women and one gay community journalist. The gay journalist actually asked - "As the research is really about the reproductive health issues of the community", he pointed out, "What about us from the LGBT community? What is in there for us?" He raised that question in the platform, the online magazine that actually generates verbal comments from the community. There are community journalists who are workers, so they had trouble managing their time writing the articles. One is a freelance cyber sex worker who grabbed the opportunity to get online during her freelance work. There was a student who writes her articles over the weekend because it is her only free time.

When Francisco went to the community and asked them what community journalism brings to you, they felt that it brought a lot to their lives. They began to understand the issue in greater depth as they heard the stories. For example, Mark (a participant) said - he had always heard this statistic of eleven deaths a day of women because of maternal complications but after he went to the community and conducted interviews, he had an in-depth understanding of why women are experiencing these maternal complications. He even had an analysis of the situation that this was due to a lack of support coming from the Philippines households – because of the delays, the poor transportation, and the lack of facilities which the women need to access.

The other community journalists shared that they had become more concerned about women, the

society and the issue. They began asking what they could do to address these issues facing the women such as family planning and abortion. Many women in the community have unwanted pregnancies and want to find out more about abortion services but due to limitations of the law because abortion in the Philippines is illegal, they cannot. So these women might actually ask questions like – How do we get it done underground? The women learnt many new things - like Emma, who started writing her articles in pen and paper. When we asked her to learn to use the computer, she had difficulty because it is very new to her as she was not exposed to this technology. One of the community journalists actually said, "I know how to use a camera but I only know how to take photos by point and shoot. But not by considering the angles, the subjects and the feelings of the photo". This was a new skill learnt from the trainings.

When asked about the relationship between gender and citizenship to IT, Dioshiel said, "Long time ago women did not have access to technology and opportunities because women were present only in households doing the 'women only' responsibilities. But nowadays women in the societies are invoking the use of information technology. Women are very competitive in the field of technology and this gives us the opportunity to participate in the development of the society. Each one of us in the society has the liberty to express our thoughts and feelings with responsibility". She was asked to expand on what made her say that women were only doing work that came within their domain and if that had been her experience. She replied saying - "Because in the community it is their orientation that women are responsible for the entire household chores and should not go out to learn something new. So that is their orientation".

The introduction to information technology helped them understand the need to be informed and educated. Khaila Marcos said, "Most of the time women's voices are not being heard and community journalism actually gives them a platform to raise their voices about the issues of reproductive health".

Emma said that - "It is very important for women to learn the use of computers because it adds value to their lives not just as women but also as a citizen". She said, because of the Internet she was able to communicate with her relatives abroad. It made her feel connected to her family and this is something very important to her now.

Francisco added that the community journalists were proud when they receive feedback, good or bad, coming from the community and the 'netizens'. The project made them feel productive because the women - like Emma and Jane - during their free time wrote stories or took interviews relating to the issues. They were excited by the experience and whenever they finish the article, the question really is – will it be published? – as they want others to read their stories and the stories of their communities. They are really happy to receive the honorarium for each published article, and Emma said, "Being paid for the article we made is very fulfilling because it gives value to our work". This is striking because these women contribute to the community, for example as health workers, and get paid 500 pesos a month for working 24 to 26 days. The freelance work gives them 1000 pesos which can provide for the family and gives value to their work.

One of the challenges faced by the community journalists, were personal interviews. Through their training they were able to talk to/interview former legislators and the women in the community who had really private stories to tell. Stories that otherwise needed to be hidden, for example - stories of abortion, where protecting the identity of the woman was important. Firstly, they had difficulty interviewing some of the women because the women were not comfortable talking about sex and sexuality issues. The second challenge was to protect the lives of the people behind the stories. Khaila shared that she had interviewed a woman who had a miscarriage and she wanted to protect her identity and hence, raised the question - How do we protect the lives of the people behind the stories? How do we protect their need for

anonymity?

Another dilemma for the journalists was how to collect information without disregarding the woman's rights or her points of view and still receive correct information along with the community's perspectives.

An important challenge was also finding a conducive environment for their writing and thinking. The Internet shops were very far from the community. For example, Jane needed to travel by one rickshaw and another jeep to get into the computer shops. When she got there, it was dark, very humid, very hot, and very noisy - she could not write her article because she needed an environment where she could think and really do an analysis of the outline of her article. As she was not able to write her article in the shop, she came up with a strategy where she wrote her articles at home on paper and then typed them at the Internet store and then uploaded the articles on to the website. Hence the women themselves found solutions to their problems.

One of the challenges for Emma, who resides in Manila where contraception was banned for more than ten years and where local governance officials are really influenced by the city mayor who is pro-life, were the repercussions that might arise due to bringing up the subject of the reproductive health bill. Additionally, as the articles were written in Filipino, (because the journalists were more comfortable with Tagalog, the local language) the outcomes could only be read by Filipino readers. The legislators for whom these articles were intended preferred to read English articles, as was the case with most net users. If these articles were translated, it implied a dependency on English translators. The challenge for community journalism was also that the awareness generation process seemed to be limited to the village, their Facebook friends and a few partner organisations. The stories were not able to move beyond this small circle of people.

Lisa, then followed up the presentation with her thoughts. She said that she wanted to focus on some of the paradoxes and contradictions in this particular study. Contradictions did not imply criticism and she meant to inform the debate with her academic background, which is mostly Marxist critical theory. Francisco's presentation she mentioned was focussed heavily on women's empowerment or citizen journalists' empowerment. The question often is, what is empowerment? If the women feel empowered does that really mean they are empowered? Not to get into Marx's false consciousness argument, but if the concept of 'eminent criticism' is taken, you take world views that people hold as seriously as they take it themselves, (keeping in mind historical social material reality as well) rather than write off people who feel empowered because they for a variety of reasons, learnt computer skills and were able to affect their own consciousness raising in addition to engaging with consciousness raising that they felt was important to affect.

The drawback is that it can create a halo effect because they know the research is supposed to empower them so they report that it empowers them. But nevertheless, with 'eminent criticism' you take what they have to say seriously. That said, there are a number of paradoxes or contradictions here. One of them is that we are dealing with one level of truth claims which are based on personal and grounded knowledge and that these are outweighed by

Lisa McLaughlin

infrastructural material realities. As the final report says - what they found in the study was that the micro level was the only successful aspect of the project. Which meant that the people felt empowered and that the magazine somehow helped people feel empowered. Yet this micro level success took IT to a broader public to some degree but actually not to a very large degree at all. There were forces that controlled the Internet, the media and the national level debate about reproductive health (such as the Catholic Church), which ultimately meant that 'big change' did not take place.
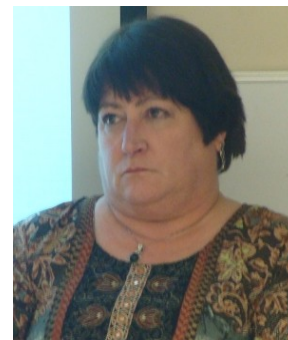
This is not surprising. For one thing, the issue with the Internet is that it is expanding and fragmenting the public sphere at the same time. So what they were probably drawing was a set of people who were interested in the subject of reproductive and sexual health which does not undermine the fact that citizen journalists felt empowered by what they were doing in the least, nonetheless, they had some formidable enemies.

What Lisa noted was that in such a scenario the Catholic Church did not need any branding. It did not need a web page. It was one of the major religions of the world and anybody who thinks that everything needs to go digital needs to remember all the major religions of the world who will go on and on, and do so without the Internet. Not to mention that there are pages that fight the Catholic Church but it is really quite difficult.

What we need to look at is a number of issues including inclusion and visibility vs exclusion and invisibility. These days it seems like that the only place one can get recognition is on the spaces of the Internet, it is almost as if you do not exist if you do not have that kind of access or the access that is leading to any major social change. We hear it all the time – that to not be on the Internet leads to exclusion and invisibility – yet it is quite as possible to be relatively invisible and digital and this is what we are seeing here.

An issue that is important to bring up is - What does one risk by achieving the goals of this study, if they have been achieved noting that the larger power structures did not pay attention to the voices of the women? The risk then is appropriation and co-optation. The risk is not that this group would be co-opted by the Catholic Church but that they would be co-opted into the terms of engagement of the mainstream media of the Catholic Church. In other words, one needs to perform differently. What it can imply is that all of sudden you are not alternative and resistant any more. Once that happens, you are pulled into the system.

Lisa felt that there was a need to look at appropriation but look at it from the point of view

of what we, who do not want to be pulled into some dominant hegemonic order, can do to the best of our ability to not be pulled into the basic information capitalism through the networks.

For this we need to really follow standard modes of appropriation of digital networks, we need to know the modes of operation of digital networks, we need to know how they can be overridden through appropriation and appropriate them somehow ourselves which leads to somewhat socially relevant change that may raise public opinion and start a discourse that would go beyond the magazine and beyond the micro level.

Sometimes the promotion of the citizen journalists seems very romantic but it is also probably relatively ineffective. There is need to reflect on the Occupy Movement, which is a digital network, that is actually becoming transnational. We should not let the local fade away in comparison but allow for the connecting of the local with the transnational and vice versa.

Another interesting aspect is that, apparently the trained citizen journalists actually never problematised their roles as citizens or problematised citizenship in any way its relevant. What they would do as citizen journalists, was not claiming citizen rights but at some times they were acting as citizens for the online magazine and avoiding making claims in the vocabulary of the term citizenship. The question then is why? Do they recognise that there is such a thing as a citizen and a non-citizen?

Desiree Lewis – Think piece author, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, University of the Western Cape, South Africa; and Crystal Orderson – Think piece author, CITIGEN, and Specialist Correspondent, SABC News, South Africa

Desiree began the presentation by sharing the reason the topic of their paper interested them. While at the moment South Africa is a very policy rich country and there is a lot of legislation which includes a Constitution that seems to be guarding against violence with the domestic violence act and so many measures, violence against women

is steadily increasing and something needs to be done. Most of the paper explains why and gives a history of the violence against women. The main point is that violence has become so deeply entrenched as a way of life, that it is present in the psyches of men and women and has therefore become central to how men and women think about themselves and negotiate their sense of gendered belonging.

This has been of concern while considering how ICT activism can work to create new identities and new stories about women's lives - the stories

Desiree Lewis

that empower them in a deep, emotional and psychological sense, beyond an existential sense. Desiree explained that one reason why they spent time talking about the media and the mass media coverage of violence, was that those were the sources people turned to, to learnt the truth about violence. And those were the sources that reproduce very damaging stories and images of women. Hence their project was concerned with critiquing the media that exists and are responsible for reproducing the stereotypes.

Desiree shared that while exploring ICTs, they were very encouraged by the people who were talking about imaginativeness and cooperation. She mentioned that the presentation would be focussing mainly on the local level, as smaller organisations seem to be the organisations that are pushing the boundaries. There are many heavily funded organisations in South Africa and the tendency seems to be that money is thrown at the organisations. The emphasis is really on training, giving access and there is very little respect for people's own knowledges and the stories that they want to tell and their agendas of change. It is really the kind of agendas of change people have for themselves and their ideas of transformation – that the paper looks at.

Crystal added that the paper ultimately tried to look at how the local activists actually engaged with ICTs. One shocking story which reflects the reality of post apartheid South Africa was of Lisa

Conyana, a black lesbian, residing in a township on the outskirts of Cape Town who was open about her sexuality and her family accepted her. Although she was open about her sexuality, a constitutional right in South Africa, it was seen as something very unusual in the township. Conyana's freedom and confidence about her sexuality and being black lesbian in a township, cost her life. She was stabbed to death and beaten several times about six years ago. Her only crime was that she was a lesbian and she was proud of it. Conyana's case is not isolated, several black lesbians in South Africa have come out and face being attacked, raped and ultimately death.

Conyana's case, six years ago, saw the formation of Free Gender, a black lesbian organisation working on the outskirts of one of the poorest townships in South Africa with massive unemployment, high alcohol rates and the sort of statistics that accompany it. It spurned a group of black lesbians to say – we have a voice, this is our township and we are taking ownership of it and we are not going to allow any person to actually intimidate us. Yet it took six years of activism, six years of mobilisation to actually

Crystal Orderson

bring this case to justice. Two weeks ago, the murderers of Conyana were sentenced to 18 years of prison. For the past two years, Free Gender had to mobilise. Free Gender is a group of black lesbians, some of them work, the others do not. They do not have access to Internet, and Facebook, Twitter etc. are a mere luxury for those who can afford it. Yet what they do have, are cellphones.

South Africa, like many other developing countries, has seen the sales explosion of cellphones and has a 'pay as you go' system where you buy an inexpensive basic plan and you can make phone calls and send SMS. Because there exists this large group of people who have access to cellphones, there was an emergence of a group of young people at the Cape Town university who created a platform called 'MXIT'

which is instant messaging for free. Free Gender was able to use MXIT as a free platform to mobilise.

Hundreds of young women, old women, men, came out to support Free Gender and they were able to mobilise through MXIT by sending out one liners. One of the key organisers of Free Gender pointed out that – "our members are not necessarily interested in reading a long newspaper, Facebook is a luxury, their concentration is limited and they do not speak and read English in some places but instant messaging, one liners, 'We are organising at the court. 9 o clock. Come.' - work". Through that mobilisation one saw the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Police taking it seriously. Last year, the women's month was dedicated to black lesbians and the plight of black lesbians and finally they had justice for her when her murderers were sentenced two weeks ago. In this case study, of course not everybody has access to resources, but how you can use the really limited platforms you have to mobilise in a broader perspective, is seen.

Desiree added that the case study she focussed on was a feminist play, 'Vagina Monologues' by Eve Ensler, and the kind of activity that took place around the play. This play was performed by students at the University of Western Cape and it was successful not only at the campus, but in Cape Town, nationally and to some extent internationally – derived from the fact that it was advertised and spoken about through various forms of new media. Information was shared through SMS, it was copied onto DVD and the DVD was circulated. It really developed a life of its own by being circulated in such a manner. Viewing this phenomena one realises how important it is to think about raising consciousness and developing forms of activism that do not necessarily rely on the conventional understandings of political activism, that actually tap into the creative work that people do – the work that people do in relation to entertainment, for leisure.

The play, for example, is a really strong and powerful form of activism. There were certain things that she felt needed to be flagged in relation to the findings from this work and ICTs. One, was that the power of the play seemed to be derived from the blending of the traditional and new media. On one level the play was a traditional form of communication, but it became so much more rich and exciting because it was fleshed out, it was spoken about through Facebook, SMSes. Certain organisations even bought the DVD and used it as a teaching tool. It made one realise, that so often when people talk about ICT activism there is this assumption that you abandon the traditional forms of communication and just embrace the new. That rarely ever happens, especially among women who really value, certain forms of communication. So that was an important lesson to learn.

Another important point was regarding the way in which we use the visual and how important the visual is in ICT. The visual is not only seen as capturing something or representing something but something that shapes our sense of the world. Those most affected are women who are severely brutalised, traumatised and seen merely as statistics and as victims and so on. Very rarely do they imagine themselves in positive terms. The young women in the play were extremely assertive, very feisty and inching towards womanhood – such images were very inspiring for women. One of the women who was a part of the play said that what she liked about the play was not just the message and the basic content but the kind of inspirational feel one got through images such as these.

Another point Desiree made, was of branding. What the play also tried to do was use forms of dress like hoodies and t-shirts and so on. This is also interesting because it is an example of the way in which so many young people in order to develop an assertive, positive image, somehow buy into global capitalism. There is a sense in which they are also using that capitalist world, for example clothing in order to define a positive radical, political identity for themselves in the same way of that they appropriate cell phones. She found that the use of clothing was very connected.

Crystal, in conclusion, said that she would like to come back to Desiree's earlier point about the paper dealing extensively with legislation in South Africa, constitution etc. South Africa is the largest economy on the Sub-Saharan continent. With its infrastructure development and events such as the world cup etc., there is a euphoria and, of course, the post 1994 apartheid dismantling put the spotlight on South Africa. On a daily basis though, South African women are faced with the past, present and future, intersections of race, class and gender in their daily lives and violence against women is a daily reality. This is a challenge not only for South Africa but for Brazil and other developing countries because you can not just erase the past. The past is part of the present and the present we try to define and work with.

Philippa Smales - Researcher, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, Thailand

Philippa said that she would be sharing the story of two women she interviewed during her research. The first one she spoke about was an Indonesian woman in Taiwan. This woman went to Taiwan for the money, to work as a domestic worker. She found that it was a lot different from what she was expecting. She arrived and the agent asked her if she had a cellphone and she said she did. The agent took it off her and he also took her phone numbers and any contacts she had on her and then she was taken to the house where she would be working. She realised that she would be sleeping on the floor, next to the door with no private space at all. She also had to look after an old lady who was with the family and she was alone with this old lady all day while the other householders were at work. So this was her existence. While the old lady was sleeping, she was able to slip out and go buy some food and was able to go and shop and be outside.

After working for quite a long period of time, she managed to save up and buy a new cellphone which she hid. She was able to slip out and buy phone credit and in this way she was eventually able to reconnect with her family. She was interviewed while she was out buying credit for her phone during one of her very brief breaks and so the interview was very quick. She said that the connection to home was so important to her because it was her only connection outside of that little small world which was not private for her and it was shared with her family and with the elderly lady. Her private life was on that phone, texting her family.

The second story Philippa shared, was about a Filipino woman in Hong Kong. The Filipino woman was extremely educated, she had a Master's degree. She went to Hong Kong to earn more money too. When she arrived, it was different from what she expected but in Hong Kong they have a lot more rights and they are recognised as workers. Yet she was there for about two months before she got her first Sunday off. But she actually got a Sunday off.

On that day, she was lucky because she had her cellphone and she had a contact from the Philippines. Her aunty had given her the number of a lady who was already over in Hong Kong. So the first thing she did was she called this aunty and said - "I am in Hong Kong, I would like to meet with you and I have a Sunday off". The lady told her to meet her at the train station and they could spend their Sunday off, together. She turned up at the train station where she met with this other lady and the lady took her to the park and there she saw all these women from Philippines in the park – everywhere, very visible. She could see them in their little groups, having their picnics in the park on their blankets, speaking and talking and sharing food.

Philippa Smales

There was a community in the park! Straight away she was a part of this new community and this was an amazing thing for her. The other point was that it was not only a community of women, it was also a community of activists. Domestic workers have the right in Hong Kong to organise and they do organise. So that afternoon she met with another group who was just sitting at the park, on the footpath and they were talking about their rights, about having a protest and they were talking about walking the streets in protest of

legislation that was being passed. She did not have another Sunday off for a little while but through her cellphone she was able to keep in contact with the group. Hence she knew when they were going to organise and when they were going to protest. She was able to have that Sunday off and was able to march the streets and be a part of that protest.

In both these stories and in these countries, in Taiwan and Hong Kong, all the women interviewed – had cellphones. Almost 99 percentage of them had cellphones and those who did not said they were saving up for one. They all had lots of SIM cards as well. They all knew what the deals were, what companies were having a deal this weekend, which ones were cheaper for text messages, which ones were cheaper for calls. They were all very knowledgeable about these things. They had the knowledge and the technology. What they did not often have, were the extra skills. They thought of cellphones as just a way to communicate with family and with friends, they did not really see them as tools and did not really have the capabilities to reach all these people or ways to organise in a different way.

After talking to these women and the organisations and groups, it was felt that they had these technologies, they knew how to use it, this just needed to be furthered. They just needed a few extra conversations to think about how they could use this tool in a better way. Right now they receive a message saying "We are going to protest this Sunday" and then circulate it. Yet maybe there is a better system, maybe there could be a database to send out a bulk text message or a bulk text message system through the Internet which was much cheaper and they could reach everybody.

In the end, a publication titled 'Mobilise' was created and it has a cartoon look and feel about it. It also has different visual aspects of women, different looking women – Thai women, Indonesian women, Indian women, Filipino women – in the pages and it was kept very simple so that anybody would be able to understand. Yet it was not too simple and a balance was struck to make sure that it would be useful for everybody.

A lot of time was spent with the women and there were several discussions around the first draft in Taiwan. The second draft was thrashed out with women in Thailand and the third draft with organisations and it eventually got to a point where everyone was quite happy with the content.

It is very interesting that these women do not have privacy. They do not have a home and are living with employers in both Taiwan and Hong Kong. So their private lives, their time was always on Sundays when they have their Sunday communities. For those in Taiwan who do not have that day off, how do you connect to them and how do you involve them? Through their cellphones, it seemed. So even if they are not outside a lot and their only time outside of their employers household is those few minutes when they go shopping, if you manage to get their number or get a number to them, there is a connection there. There is a way to get to them. There is a way to get their opinion and there is a way to communicate with them and for them to communicate back. This is something that will take a long time but hopefully it will get somewhere.

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Discussion:

Phet made a few observations during the presentations. For the first presentation, he said that back in the days of early ICTs for development, there was this notion of the global information which will benefit the local if only they had access to the dearth of information out there. Yet the challenge resides in local content for the local. One wonders what the readership is if you have to go so far out there to the Internet shops to type? So who is doing the reading? And if the legislators do not follow it in Tagalog but only in English, one wonders what are the chances. He responded to Lisa's comments by saying that it was interesting that she spoke about co-opting and the movements. If we talk about the open source movement, it is inherently

nurtured and fostered by the Internet and now its been co-opted by big organisations where 'open and free' is big business. All the companies we have named already are 'open and free' advertisements. So one wonders how much co-opting we can do, other than anonymous or supporting the open and free standards and software.

To Desiree and Crystal's presentation of their paper he responded by saying the idea of fashion as networked technologies was intriguing and that we should not necessarily think that network society is all over the screen, there are always things interlinked, fashion and the whole side of globalisation.

Jan referred to Desiree and Crystal's presentation and said that she wanted to offer two stories about the digital storytelling work at APC. 'Digital Storytelling' was a methodology used primarily with the survivors of violence and to tell their own stories digitally. The first story was of a young woman in Petrus Steyn, from when APC had gone there to do trainings on how to implement this project. The situation turned into something else altogether where it was about activists who work on violence against women and their stories. This particular young woman then told her own story that she had never shared with anyone before. After the workshop, she showed it to her parents. She was 28 years old and was divorced and has a son. She showed it to her parents and it was very emotional. She then went with a clear conscience and shared her story publicly with many women. She showed the story very proudly because it is evidence of her overcoming the situation that she was in.

The second story was of a woman who also made a digital story and for many months gave APC permission to use this story publicly because she felt exactly like the other lady, empowered in ways and by telling the story she felt really great about herself. Eighteen months after the story was made, she called us to say, "Stop showing it. That is not me any more. I am not that person and I do not want people to know who that is." All the while the story-teller was never named.

It was always anonymous. No one knew who she was. She used techniques that disguised her identity. Yett for her, it was her in the story. When thinking about self representation, when thinking about methodologies, particularly about women to use the process for different kinds of work, this becomes very important. This whole notion of withdrawal of consent at any given moment of time is something that we have to emphasise. Especially now, everyone wants to know about a story. Everyone wants something to connect to. But if you, as the storyteller, do not connect to it any more, you should have the right to not share it. As a feminist, that really complicates work. It is a powerful story, and one sees how people respond to it. But if she does not want to use it any more, we cannot.

Srilatha added that there was a very powerful similar story where Amnesty International, got sued by this woman. The woman was a survivor of ethnic violence in Bosnia. She found that ten years after they had filmed her reciting her experience of how the Serbs had used the rape of Bosnian Muslim women as part of the ethnic violence, her story was still on the website for fund raising and she asked them to withdraw the story and they did not. They said that it was a very effective story and she responded by saying – I am trying to get on with my life and you have trapped me in that victimhood for the rest of my life because it suits your purpose. This is a huge issue. The way in which once of these videos get online and take on a life of their own, makes withdrawing consent a very difficult thing to do.

Phet responded by saying that the digital shadows are cast everywhere and dispersed everywhere. You do not own it. It is not even concentrated anywhere. So how do you manage anything?

Lisa replied that the discussion reminded her of a piece she wrote on the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) a few years ago. It was about the degree to which being on the Internet involves a performance and what these various agencies were doing was having women perform a role of victim. In the piece, she wrote about RAWA and it was about

co-implication of RAWA and a number of US feminist groups. RAWA had to stand in for the real victims of Taliban. A question then is – Can you possibly end up being too visible? Too visible for comfort. But is it possible to not perform on the Internet as well?

Additionally, she said, that one of the things that was very noticeable about the Filipino project was that the women who could not produce the number of stories or those who dropped out were entirely due to women's traditional obligations. It pointed out what we all know but need to be reminded of – this issue of gender, IT and citizenship has a much larger context which has to do with unequal and unjust gender relations in general as well.

SESSION III: Making network society deliver for gender justice - Some answers and questions from the CITIGEN researches

Presentations in this session drew upon situated research in different contexts, addressing the following points:

➢ *The context and issues*
➢ *What the research explored*
➢ *What the research found – a thesis on technology, networks, gender and citizenship*
➢ *Open questions – for theory and practice*

Presenters:

India: Binitha V. Thampi, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, India

Sri Lanka: Chandrika Sepali Kottegoda, Director, Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka; and Sarala Emmanuel, Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka

China: Lam Oi Wan, Regional Editor for Northeast Asia, globalvoicesonline.org, China

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

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Binitha V. Thampi - Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, India

The project 'Empowering Women Leaders at the Local Level: Translating Descriptive Representation to Substantive Representation through ICTs', primarily explores the possibilities of the creation of a new technologically mediated 'invented space' for empowering women and also, more importantly, revitalising 'invited spaces' of governance and to enable their active civic and political engagement at the local level in Kerala.

The digital platform created for this purpose was named – *Gramamukhya,* which in Malayalam means 'head of the local government'. Building a 'communication community' within the emerging transnational public sphere, it also explores the possibility of building solidarity across differences. It employs Andrea Cornwall's and Miraftab's formulation of 'invited spaces' as state provided legitimate spaces for the participation and practice of citizenship.

Speaking of the, 'invited and invented spaces', Binitha expanded by defining 'invited spaces' as –

the ones occupied by those grassroots and their allied non-governmental organisations that are legitimised by donors and government interventions. 'Invented spaces' are those occupied by the grassroots and claimed by their collective action, but directly confronting the authorities and the status quo. Miraftab points out that the invitation to participate becomes a site for 'citizenship participation' only "when citizens gain meaningful opportunities to exercise voice and hold to account those who invite them to participate". It is in the interaction and movement between these spaces of invitation and invention, that the practice of citizenship becomes politically effective.

Coming to the Kerala context of women in local government, the state has devolved around 35 to 40 percent of the state budget to local governments. It is a massive decentralisation process that started with the 9th plan period of India. Also 33 percent reservation for women, and in some states upto 50 percent, in the local level political bodies was included

Binitha Thampi

through the constitutional amendment. Quotas for women have been seen as 'affirmative action' instituted in the spirit of gender equality in

political representation.

Studies of women in local governance from Kerala show how provisions of quotas in local bodies are an insufficient condition for women's political participation and effective empowerment. They also point out that a large numbers of women in local governance in Kerala has not resulted in their substantive representation. It is therefore relevant to examine the underlying assumptions and practices associated with the 'invited spaces' of participation and the process of gendering governance in Kerala on the ground. Gender mainstreaming efforts of the state are ongoing. It started with a mass campaign during the 9th plan period and by instituting the Women Component Plan (which sets apart 10 percent of the Plan funds for women) and moved forward by incorporating the women into the local level decision making bodies and by having a large number of training programmes exclusively for women, and ensuring their participation and representation in the local level decision making bodies.

In 2005, Kerala legislated 50 percent reservation for women in local government. Such gender mainstreaming policies have tended to assume automatic transformation on the ground and have not taken cognisance of how the intervention interacts with existing power structures and relations. Moreover, evaluation of the participation of women in local governance has revealed that while they are competent in their role as managers of development programmes, they are far removed from local political institutions and associated power. Therefore, an interrogation of the state-led gender mainstreaming effort was required.

The underlying assumption of these efforts has been that transformation to a gender-just society is possible in a non-confrontational manner through gender training and the development of certain individual skills as the principal tool for transformation. The focus of gender-training on individual transformation precludes the coming together of women as a group to build a politics of solidarity based on shared experiences. Such a framework is not conducive to mutual exchange and learning, as well as, horizontal networking among women from diverse backgrounds and dispersed geographies that is very vital for any process of collective empowerment. A cursory glance at the gender training manuals of both – those prepared by the state and those of experts from women's organisations – reveals a top-down pedagogy, however participatory it may be.

Coming to the 'invented space', and why digital space was used as an 'invented space', Binithat stated that – 'invited spaces' are state defined, geographically demarcated administrative spaces within whose boundaries women must limit their sphere of action. But bounded action within a bureaucratic, vertical structure was rarely empowering. An 'invented space', which was a digital space could overcome this limitation. Such an ICT mediated space of interaction had the potential to enable its users to cut across geographical barriers to communication by taking place in cyberspace. There were many examples, during the last two or three terms, of women leaders who had resisted prevailing patriarchal structures from within the 'invited spaces' of local governance, and had even come out to stand on their own. Yet, there was no mechanism for sharing their experience with others who were still serving in order to build solidarity without having to deal with issues of geographical separation. Indeed, women's own political aspirations could be developed from this fertile ground in the 'invented space' while remaining within the 'invited space' of governance.

The broad research questions addressed in the action research were:

1. How does one build political solidarity among women across differences at different levels?
2. To what extent can women in local governance employ ICTs to transform their participation substantively in the public domain in Kerala?
3. What are the strategies for their effective politicisation as against efforts at gender mainstreaming by the state?
4. What does the feminist appropriation of technology involve in the context of creating Gramamukhya digital platform?

Coming to the methodology, Binitha said that the 'invented space' outlined in the project involved a process of consciousness building and creation of new political subjectivities and agency among women in governance through a self-initiated, shared deliberation, in a language that they

collectively articulate. There were significant differences among women leaders in terms of affiliation to party politics, which some observers from Kerala see as a major hindrance to their collectivisation. Hence, building solidarity, both, across horizontal and vertical networks had to be a process of working across differences. Here, the 'horizontal' referred to the networking among women presidents of local governments in the state and also with ex-presidents. 'Vertical' referred to their networking with women's organisations, feminist scholars, activists, women writers, migrant women workers etc. Such an approach, it was felt, would hopefully result in collectively rebuilding the gender lens that was shadowed within the mainstreaming discourse and through which new meanings of empowerment and politicisation could be created, and strategies to bargain with patriarchy devised in specific contexts. Primarily due to the brief time frame of the project, ten months, three districts in Kerala were selected – Trivandrum, Malappuram and Kannur.

These districts represented not only the south, central and north Kerala but also covered its political party variation. The project also created a support group of women party presidents who have struggled and emerged successful against the exercise of power within their spheres of action in their previous two to three terms in office. They played a mediating role between serving presidents and the project research team in facilitating the creation of the digital forum. It was hoped that their presence in the project (and it turned out to be true later), would provide serving presidents as well as new entrants, an opportunity for horizontal learning from their past experiences.

Another methodological issue was that of feminist appropriation of technology – the question of how technology could be appropriated for feminist goals. The rights based approach to ICTs has viewed the potential of digital technologies as being able to give voice to women in the Third world, often in transgressive spaces but feminist scholars writing on the effective use of ICTs in the South caution that unless women are empowered to define the conditions under which they interact online and to form meaningful trans-local alliances towards transforming their personal and political contexts, the mere access to and use of ICTs will not amount to a feminist appropriation of technology. Therefore, an important part of this project was to enable women leaders to creatively use them as tools for furthering their personal and political empowerment. However, ensuring basic technical literacy and ease of use of computers and the Internet was inevitable.

The wider goal in conducting workshops (around 20 to 24 workshops were conducted) was to stress the need to collectively reflect on the politics behind the use of technology by women for their collectivisation and to facilitate discussions among them. The workshops conducted were, therefore, free flowing and discussed the question of women's access to existing ICT facilities, both, at home and their offices and to deliberate upon the kind of challenges faced by women in using the same. Several examples were for the women to overcome techno-phobia.

Binitha then explained the features of the digital forum. *Gramamukhya* has one hundred and twenty six serving and nine former women presidents who are registered members. It was developed in the local language (Malayalam) with no English text. The team has been working hard to remove English. The platform has three main sections – one deals with access to information; second, exclusively with group discussions and third, is for self expression. The first called 'Knowledge Creation and Information Sharing' *(Arividam)* primarily deals with questions on governance. There the effort is to build an archive of good material for the women to read. A consultant has been hired, who exclusively deals with this from Centre of Development Studies, Trivandrum. The 'Discussion Forum' *(Charchavedi)* and 'Writer's Blog' *(Ezhuthidam)* are related to the wider notion of public life and are mutually reinforcing. The writer's blog is to familiarise the members with women's writing in the state. In contrast to the many limitations of women's effective participation, in what may be called 'the invited spaces of governance', *Gramamukhya,* represents an 'invented space' for an alternative gender politics.

Gramamukhya has been designed and built through a participatory, 'design-in-use' perspective, dynamically engaging with its initiators, users and developers in a continuous dialogue. It was important to understand the interaction between both the original design intention of the project and its interpretation by users in varying contexts. These changes were

incorporated in different versions of the portal in order to enhance the effective use of the technology.

Binitha then went on to describing the findings of the project. She shared that there were quite a few challenges and risks in building a politics of solidarity. It was not an easy task undertaken in a one year project period. The difficulty was the party divide across the state and the team's decision to not use party connections to organise. Also the team did not use existing contacts and connections with the state reigning institutions as it would fail the whole purpose of the project. Hence it was quite difficult. Also the local *panchayat* presidents were very busy and were travelling all the time. So, finding them was very difficult.

The team also had to deal with the differences, particularly with the political differences known to exist in the state of Kerala - the left politics is very militant. Each time they were approached, the women would consult their party bosses as to whether they should attend or not. Despite the general access and acceptance of ICTs in Kerala, the particularities of localities, the differences within, primarily of age and levels of income and education etc. do in fact lead to differential levels of ICT acceptance and use. The team realised that the effort to bring together all members was not required. Instead, the team thought of developing a critical mass who would actually make use of this digital forum and they could later link with other women in the offline context.

The website design, and its eventual appropriation by women leaders, rested largely on its content which in turn has been facilitated through the project's association with feminist scholars and writers. The team, she said, is still in the process of developing more content. Women leaders were encouraged to read these articles and biographies of successful women in public domain and were introduced to the new version which was very user friendly. Apart from building awareness and encouraging discussions on issues of local governance and politics in Kerala, the project has been able to generate interest in feminist literature among women leaders and some have even expressed an interest in writing themselves. So, in the second version a feature was added for them to start their own blogs. Here, it must be noted that while many were happy to share their identity online, others preferred to remain anonymous while they make politically sensitive comments/responses. The team is currently working on the user-interface of the digital platform to enable this requirement as well.

Looking ahead, she said, there were two aspects to note – one was regarding the future of the digital platform and the second was the research. It was not the teams intention to transfer a finished product within the duration of the project, she said. The question of who owns and maintains the site is very important and the team expected to hand the project over, in the coming year. Yet at the same time, the team would remain within the vertical network as researchers in this area. It was important to continue the project for a longer period of time.

The project, she said, as it unfolds over the coming few months, will provide insights into the politics of solidarity building across differences within the trans-local digital space. It remained to be seen how ICT mediated communities-in-the-making could politicise women in governance and enable them to claim their citizenship rights and position themselves in the public domain. Perhaps certain new communication practices and modes would emerge. More importantly, focusing on transactions between online and offline contexts would provide insights and indeed – even generate questions on cyber activism.

Chandrika Sepali Kottegoda - Director, Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka; and Sarala Emmanuel - Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka

Sepali began the presentation of the project by sharing that the Sri Lankan programme looked at ICTs access for women in the margins. Sri Lanka presents itself as a country in South Asia that has high 'social development' indicators, but to cut the long story short, there is a significant gap between men and women – in their access to resources and avenues of decision making. One is more critical of Sri Lanka's achievements, when we look at the women's participation and representation in the political arena and the high levels of structural and social violence against women. Women continue to face challenges in relation to ensuring state compliance with international treaties. Sri Lanka is a signatory to

every UN convention on women but this is simultaneous with the war, which lasted thirty years. The war ended in 2009 and the conflict continues. As a result of the war, not only the ethnic conflict but also the conflict that took place in the South in the late 1980s, has resulted in a large number of female headed households. These critical conversations of women and gender relations do not get reflected in the mainstream media and certainly not in the state run media over the last seven years. IT, in such a scenario, is opening up unexplored avenues.

Sepali Kottegoda

Sepali shared that when the team was invited by IT for Change to participate, initially there was reluctance as they felt they did not know anything about IT. But the younger people in the team, who were interested, engaged very happily. The team looked at the women located at the margins of the nation-state. 'Margins' referred to the margins of political processes, in terms of knowledge creation, access to ICTs, languages and discourse and mainstream development processes. By knowledge creation, one does not mean that women are in the margins of knowledge creation but imply that women are marginalised in their expression of knowledge. So knowledge is created but the knowledge of women tends to be sidelined. There are two main local languages in Sri Lanka, Sinhala and Tamil, and women's use of the local languages and what they want to say remains marginalised in the representation in the mainstream media. Also explored, was the engagement of women through the state *Nenasala* (community telecentres) programmes for improving access to ICTs in rural areas. The team, additionally, looked at the experiences of local women's groups using SMS technologies to run a local women's news network. They also studied women's experiences in campaigning for local elections across five districts and the experiences of Sinhala and Tamil language women bloggers in their engagement with new media.

The state began many telecentres across the country, most of it in the south. In 2002, the first comprehensive plan for the development of ICTs as a key tool with which to promote economic growth and national integration, was initiated. It enabled the liberalisation of the telecommunication sector and service provisioning. It also provided an enabling environment for the Telecentre Family Project of which was run by Sarvodaya, an organisation which reaches all parts of the country. It encouraged community participation – specifically targeting youth, children and farmers. The telecentres were to focus on telemedicine, e-commerce, e-governance. Mediums used to create awareness included provincial forums and brainstorm sessions, use of a social networking and blogging. However, the programme did not specifically target women or consciously include women in their ICT skills development programmes. WMC's research revealed that though the *Nenasalas* had opened up some new work opportunities for women and enabled the emergence of a social space for women's learning to come out in some communities, it was still a difficult struggle for women to negotiate their social roles and effectively participate in such spaces. Women's access issues were not a part of the conscious design of the *Nenasalas.* This is not surprising when we analyse the e-Sri Lanka programme and other national level ICT policies through a gender lens. We find that there has not been much conversation on the strategic use of ICTs for the empowerment of women by national policies and bodies that have targeted women. Thus, the mere availability of ICTs does not mean that access was ensured to women and girls.

Although in Sri Lanka over the past few years one finds that a lot of young people are 'doing computers' and there is knowledge that you need computer literacy yet the understanding stops there. Agencies such as the Ministry for Women's Empowerment have a vital role to play in mobilising women to access, control and create content in relation to ICTs but unfortunately, they do not engage with ICTs in any manner. Even their website is not updated.

Sarala then took over the presentation and shared the work relating to *Minmini Seithihal* (Firefly News), the local level SMS news network which was run in the east of Sri Lanka. This project was an experimental first initiative for the organisation. The team had the idea, and after extensive discussion it was set up and the approval of the research project helped the project to take off. 'Margins', here implied working with women who are in the margins of socio-political processes, because the country

was recovering from a conflict and Batticaloa is one of the poorest districts in Sri Lanka and also on the margins of discourse, of knowledge and has Tamil speaking women. So, a lot of issues regarding the importance of women controlling and creating knowledge, apply here.

In the beginning, interviews with the women involved and focus group discussions were undertaken. Midway, a review of everyone who was receiving the SMS news was undertaken and at the end, workshops and focus group discussions to understand the process, judge impact and assimilate the experiences of women involved was undertaken.

As one of the *Minmini* news readers said, "I do not take news from the Internet, I go to do field work and I give the news to *Minmini* as soon as I get it from the field. My friends also share news with me through the telephone. Last week, I received information that due to lightning and flooding, 13 cows were dead. As part my work, I found out that 17 cows were dead. For some matters, I go directly and find out the truth. During the flood period, I got to know through some colleagues that there were two suicides by farmers who had lost their crops which I reported to *Minmini*. For the follow up reports, I talked with the police and the *grama sevaka* through the telephone and found the accurate details regarding these incidents".

This was an example of how women who are involved in the network link up, because they work within the rural villages and within the communities. This constant interaction with the communities is how they recognise relevant news, convey it, the team verifies and then sends it out. Some of the interesting learnings were that phones are usually shared a lot. It is not an individually used asset but it is shared in the homes, shared among friends. There are different SIM cards, so many people use the same phone. The news is also not received by only one person and is shared with at least a minimum of three other people – mother or family, or work colleagues. So it was realised that the reach is defined not just by the number of mobile phones the news was sent to but far more.

Sarala pointed out that the mobility of the mobile phone allowed women to receive news on the move, anywhere. Also an SMS was more definite, than hearing something over the phone where

you do not remember all the details. A message is saved and can be retrieved. The need for access to information was driven home by one of the readers who said, "It is difficult for me and the others to go out and get information in our environment. Everyone is busy. We all have mobile phones in our hands so it is good to get news from where we are located. Without any expenses I am getting news from what has happened around me."

The content of the news was developed along four thematic areas. One was regarding natural disasters because when this project started Batticaloa was seriously flooded. Additionally, the issue of war and post war accountability was handled. In terms of the floods, the women's network that was involved in the *Minmini*, did consistent monitoring of what was going on in terms of the impact and responses and tried to intervene as much as possible to provide a gender perspective and the need for a gender analysis in the disaster response. This was enabled by *Minmini* news. The network was a voice for women and also a mode through which information could be shared.

The issue of war was very sensitive because even though active warfare was over, the control, surveillance, militarisation continued. Talking about rights issues and about what happened during the phases of the war, was not possible. The network created a space to do that and this was done through the circulation of non-controversial information (for example, "government is issuing death certificates for those who have gone missing

Sarala Emmanuel

due to the war and disaster; a 27-year-old woman whose husband has disappeared in 2009 says if she accepts it, she can't search for him and can't ask anyone to search for him. So, she doesn't want to register"). The approach was to problematise some of the government responses and try to create an awareness and discussion around them.

Another strategy used was to discuss the deep impact of conflict on women by creating a serial – nine episodes of a woman's story with her permission. So everyday Jyoti episodes would be sent. That helped women speak in greater detail

about the impact of war and challenges being facing. It was also fun to try and serialise because SMS is short, so you have to generate interest for people to read the next one.

The lesson for us was this worked because of the relationship of trust among the women. This was very important during the war and even now, when there is such silence on human rights violations. There is a lot of media control, people are just silenced and there is self censorship as well. So *Minmini* worked because the women who were sharing the news, trusted each other and knew that the news that is sent out is sent out with care and it is politically sensitive. If it can have an impact on the reporter, the news is not sent or is worded in a different way. For example, the team receives regular updates on issues of violence against women instead of sending these out as is, the team studies trends and then reports the analysis. The approach is analytical and not fashioned like 'breaking news'.

One of the constant challenges is the language because the team is forced to use the English font. However, saying that, over the year women have become very competent in using the English font, reading the news and understanding. Once people replace mobile phones in a year or two, the Tamil font can be sent and it would make reading much easier as the target audience is mostly Tamil speaking local women.

Sepali took over from her and added that the project also looked at the question of the representation of women in the national media. In the case of Sri Lanka, the reality was that many women, whether in politics or outside of it, have limited engagement with ICTs. A website which profiled women in politics from the five districts who wanted to contest the local government elections and had been through different political parties, was put up. A lot of visits were made, photographs, interviews etc. taken and all of it was posted. The analysis of the campaign did influence discourses in the mainstream media regarding the importance of women in decision making forums. The campaign succeeded in mainstreaming the idea that women should be involved in local government as well as national government. However, in the 2011 local government elections, there was no significant increase in nominations from women candidates. This was because structurally the system is against women even being offered nominations by political parties and by the fact that the voter base still does not take to the idea of voting for women very easily because of the entrenched belief that it is the men who make decisions and are seen as decision makers. New media certainly provides essential tools, spaces and voice for collective action as the WMC campaign demonstrates.

This experience clearly demonstrates the need to move towards a policy framework that is cognisant of the structures of the information society within which ICTs are embedded, rather than one which sees ICTs as mere tools for growth and development. The way the Sri Lankan state has responded is the latter.

Additionally, a gender audit of the latest 100 posts in two different Sinhala language blog aggregators was undertaken. Working with the female bloggers it was realised that the writing was more oriented towards personal diary entries and creative writing. Some of the bloggers were journalist who were working for mainstream media or had media and for them, the blog was a release – a space where they could say what they wanted, whether they wanted to make a political comment or share a personal experience. WMC is now planning to work with women bloggers specifically and it was the first time they made a foray into this work. The team had to do a search and bring together the women bloggers and when they came together, the discussion was mostly regarding diaries and personal writing. The bloggers were asked if there was a possibility for more critical thinking and engagement with each other and share blogs with each other. It seemed that they were more interested in putting their work online than in linking up with each other. This initiative is still in that initial stage of space for expression, Sepali said.

Lam Oi Wan - Regional Editor for Northeast Asia, globalvoicesonline.org, China

Oi Wan began by saying that she wished to focus more on the process of her research. Her topic was 'Women's online participation and transformation of citizenship' and it covered two cities: Hong Kong and Guangzhou.

The two cities although under one country, have

very different political systems and society. Hong Kong is a post-colonial city and was under the British colonial rule for over a century and became a part of China only in 1997. The city has a more well-established civil society especially after the twin massacre in 1989. This was because after the massacre the local society decided to politicise themselves by merging with the international discourse of human rights and citizen's rights. Hence, there is a very strong citizen's movement since the early 90's and the civil society has grown out of that. After the handover to the China government, the civil society went through a change because the government was giving more funding to NGOs for social service rather than political action. So, now Hong Kong has a very big social service sector but the political society is shrinking.

Lam Oi Wan

Guangzhou, which is under the Chinese communist rule, is politically quite repressive but economically it is very liberal. Even the media has some space to play around with commercial news. They like to report about corrupt officials or problems in the society and are quite outspoken. They make use of the economic liberal environment to report 'breaking news' and sometimes undertake critical reporting.

The research was about women's participation. As women are in different social positions, the framework of the research is with the more established organisations. The second level was with network organisation and the third level with individual women activists.

For the first level of analysis in Guangzhou, the All-China Women Federation, which is a semi-governmental organisation and is closely connected to the parties and under the leadership of a party, was studied. Getting an interview with them was very difficult. Oi Wan had to link with with a local university and get their name card as a researcher and then approach the organisation. Still, in the field most of the interviews were done informally. Some people even said, "do not ever quote my name, if you quote something I said, I will deny that I said it". One of the interviewees, was newly recruited and quite outspoken. He was an active netizen who took

note of what was happening in the society and also participated online actively. He went into the organisation with his own belief about human rights and also his belief in public engagement online. He tried introducing new ways of dealing with online public opinion and wrote a proposal and eventually got a part of what he wanted which was a micro blogging account for the federation. Yet getting this account was very difficult. All other publications are pre-censored but it is difficult to pre-censor micro blogging. This story tells, how things operate in semi-governmental NGO. There is a some feasibility but also a lot of constraint.

As for the network organisation, they studied Gender Action Network, which was formed by a number of women's scholars and professional media workers. Many of them had attended gender training in the programme organised by the Michigan University and a local university in Shanghai. Many of their members were very conscious about the discussions of gender equity but because of the legal constraint they could not register as a formal organisation which meant that they could not publicly engage in fund-raising or receive funds from organisations. They had to make use of their personal network to pool together resources for their meetings and also their seminars. The network regularly hosts seminars and sometimes organises online petitions through their personal network. They have an email list to coordinate the online petition to discuss issues related to women's rights and gender equity. For example, if there was a domestic violence case in Guangzhou, they would get together saying – we need to take action and help the public understand what is going on with this case and how it affects all of us. Then they would try to engage in advocacy through online tools.

The individual activists group were very diverse. An interview with a woman in her 60s, who was a retired engineer revealed that she only knew how to get online after a protest because she felt she needed to get the information out so she started learning micro blogging from her friend at the protest site. Later, she became an expert online, for example, she would do research regarding regulations on the property development agents. She then organised the community to fight against the property agents.

There were also very young activists who were

born in the online environment. For them the Internet was a part of their culture and they did everything online. They shared, they spoke about issues. Because of the censorship in China, they were very well aware that if the information was sensitive, they had to distribute it very quickly. They saw themselves as agents who are countering the government's censorship.

In Hong Kong, the situation was quite different. From the well established organisations, a feminist group called Association for the Advancement of Feminism, was chosen. It was established in the 80s, first as a women's organisation and politicised in the 90s. They tried to advocate legal reform in Hong Kong against discrimination by introducing the UN law into Hong Kong. After the 2000s, when the equal opportunity commission was established in Hong Kong and another women's commission was established in Hong Kong, they were absorbed into the government institutions as consultation bodies. Their role in the civil society has since changed. They have their own channel to deliver their ideas so to some extent they are walking away from public engagement. Internally too they see problems with the mainstreaming strategy within the organisation but somehow they do not have the resources or the momentum to engage with the public. In the 80s, the organisation was a hub for local feminists to access resources to discuss, but because of the development of gender studies in the university, their library has become less influential. Most of the discussion has moved from the civil society to the academic which is very de-politicised.

In Hong Kong, there is a lot of research undertaken on gender and feminism – but in the university, which does not address the everyday life problems or the social problems of the society. In the civic chapter, it is assaulted by the existing government channel and public engagement has become very weak.

For the network organisation, a lesbian group was studied. They run their video project and they train a group of volunteers to produce their own programme and have a very strong sense of awareness to build their own community and engage with public and negotiate with the government through new media. Although they are not in a position to put forward their recommendation to the government directly, there is some interaction between this small group and the more well established group.

The individual activists in Hong Kong, have come from grassroot mobilisations, like mobilisation against demolitions or to preserve old buildings, against development projects etc. Many individuals stay connected to an NGO as well or a political organisation. They wish to act individually as any organisational attachment will have some implications, for example organisations do not allow individuals to use their names. Hence, they come out in their own capacity and work through their own links and resources. They are also not very conscious about discussions on feminism. Some of them are quite critical of the local feminists because they think women's organisations are getting a lot of resources from the government but they are not radical or they do not actively participate in social mobilisation. Hence, there is a kind of hostility between individual activists and women's organisations in Hong Kong.

Discussion:

Lisa mentioned that when it comes to information technology and gender and its implications for citizenship – gender mainstreaming has a constant presence. People do not appropriately criticise gender mainstreaming or go deeply enough into the issues.

Crystal directed a question at Sepali and Sarala. Post conflict situations created a culture of silence because women did not want to speak. Being a journalist and knowing the nature of news, she felt, that it was all about power - who has access and the power of words. She felt that the Sri Lanka project was very innovative. In terms of moving ahead with the project, she asked if they see a locally based technology being created for instance, like MXIT in South Africa, where one could actually use the platform for free to transmit news.

Shakun said she found the idea of *Minmini* absolutely fascinating. She wanted to know how the network got feedback.

Sarala responded by saying that they were using Frontline SMS which goes through the computer. Still, it is a cost and needs to be kept as low as possible. An idea was that maybe in 5 years,

advertising to get sponsors can be considered, but the network was experimental at the moment. The team was right now still exploring how to build the network while it still was not registered. Twitter was also being used to send out the SMSes for free.

In terms of feedback, what was important was the human element. To encourage women to send news, to recognise news, required constant engagement and discussion. So the team calls and keeps in touch with its members. Interaction was further increased by adding coversational elements, for example in the serial, at the end of the SMS it is added that "if you want to comment on it, or if you want to share something with that woman or about that issue, SMS us back".

Desiree responded to Lisa's comment and said that gender mainstreaming has become more about assimilating, absorbing and watering down which could be disruptive. Additionally, she wondered – with so much debate about how one needs to question knowledge and the form that it has taken and because the speakers have been talking about things like 'breaking news' and so on, to what extent are these new spaces opening up alternative knowledges.

Disha added to Desiree's question. One is aware of the language that the knowledge is being produced in and language hierarchies in the network society especially in the context of Binitha's presentation and Sepali and Sarala's about new media and sort of community based media at the local level and hierarchies between local language content and the mainstream language in that area. Like Hindi or Tamil, and English which is an even more powerful language. So how do grassroot media producers when they are engaging in new media productions, navigate these different hierarchies and those could be in terms of the writing and the content that is produced, in terms of the technology and the kinds of fonts and scripts that are easier. Nirantar has done trainings for local journalists and it is easier to teach to use English fonts and scripts than the local language fonts. Working with a local language newspaper, this gap becomes even more pronounced.

Also when you want to upscale, then how does that work with the local language content. Building solidarities across networks of grassroot women or rural women that might be doing content production at the local level but also wanting to share their experiences with other local women in other regions in other areas. So how is that possible with these language hierarchies and barriers?

Binitha replied by saying that that they found that it is not simply the question of regional language and English and that even within the regional language there are hierarchies. For example, for a new entrant, it was realised that the official language is very difficult even though it is in the regional language. What has been done is, since it is about governance and one needs to understand the *Panchayati Raj Act*, we have translated it into the same regional language but in a way that women understand and reflect. Also the idea of content generation comes up especially when you contextualise it in the gender mainstreaming.

Binitha shared how she was also a part of the effort of gender mainstreaming by the state. The state planning board decided what women on the ground really need and developed programmes. There was no consultation. The development of methodology was also undertaken in the same manner. This resulted in a distance between the trainer and the trainees. The message that went to trainees is that the gender trainer is insulated from all these hierarchies and exercises of power. This method was not actually producing any forms of collectivities outside the training hall. The second point, Binitha made was that while designing the *Gramamukhya* website, the group began developing its own language. So the expectation is that over a period of time, material that has been generated within the platform can inform the policy formation, particularly in the language in which it can be written and sent to women.

Oi Wan replied that the alternative, is very contextual. In the case of China, it was an alternative to political propaganda. Some of the women activists used their camera to record what was happening in the grassroots, showed the reality of the earthquake and also provided alternatives to the censorship. The use of imagination, she felt, was very important and this was evident in that fact that story telling was becoming a popular form. For example, an imagined dialogue between two people and three lines of satire reflecting on the situation in China. The stories are exciting and are highly circulated. There are also satire videos that circulate on the

web. Oi Wan said her organisation was also exploring alternative forms in order to create a diverse public sphere.

Binitha responded to Disha's question of upscaling and solidarity building across different women who do not understand or speak the regional language by sharing that currently they were focussing only on women who speak the regional language and women on the ground. Their priority was that those women should learn to deal with women in universities and women in power.

Sepali added that gender mainstreaming was limited, where in the case of the state policy on introducing *Nenasalas* and making it available was mainstreaming, it did not take into account women's access to technology.

Sarala added that the questions regarding language hierarchies and news were interesting for their own understanding of news. Earlier they had very few people sending news because women thought it had to be 'breaking news' or something related to violence against women. Those were the only two categories they knew as news. It took a lot of discussion to break that mindset and assure them that just women's lives are interesting and important to be shared. Several workshops were held around that issue in addition to skill building classes where elements of news were discussed. Workshops were also held to discuss what is valid knowledge and the importance of sharing some aspects of your life.

Srilatha added that she felt a key goal in terms of gender justice movement is when women's 'invented spaces' slowly overtime become 'invited spaces' for others. For the state, for the other civil society actors and sometimes even private sector actors. We tend to talk about those two spaces as always women going in as invitees to other people's spaces and the 'invented spaces' somehow being their own, which of course they have to be, but an indicator, an interesting way of measuring the progress towards gender justice is to see when others start wanting to be invited into your space. Thisimplies you have become politically significant enough for others to seek that engagement.

Lisa ended the session by saying that she felt that was an interesting comment but that women might be risking a safe place by inviting others.

SESSION IV: What matters in building feminist power through technologies

The session reflected upon the way power relationships are inscribed in the autonomous course of the 'digital everyday'. It then engaged with the question of how technology can be appropriated to serve a collective feminist consciousness and what would be the way to make this happen.

Power speeches delivered by:

Gayatri Buragohain, Executive Director, Feminist Approach to Technology, India

Jan Moolman, Women's Rights Projects Coordinator, Association for Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme, South Africa

Aparna Kalley, Project Coordinator, Prakriye – Centre for Community Informatics and Development, IT for Change, India

Anchor: *Geetanjali Misra , Executive Director, CREA, India*

ΨΨΨ

Geetanjali Misra began the session with a mention of the book 'Feminism confronts technology' by Judy Wajcman. The writer argued that Western society casts technological competence as a masculine culture. Yet as we know, Geetanjali added, most people do not pay attention to the workings of power in our everyday lives. So, from the very moment we say 'Women weave, men till' to the questions of ICT access, we experience gender divisions every single day.

Geetanjali Misra

It is increasingly becoming evident that there are gender differences in the sphere of technology. Stereotypes of women's technical incompetency persist. It is also becoming clear that men's monopoly over technology is an important source of their power. This lack of technological power is a major cause of women's dependence on men. It also causes women to be denied learning opportunities in the technological sphere.

But the news is not all that bad. For, as we have heard at this meeting, women and women's organisations are indeed campaigning for technologies in their struggles for sexual and reproductive rights, health and so on. For example, women's campaign around sexual rights involves the question of their access to reproductive technologies. Moreover, even within these struggles, women are exploring the opportunities technology has opened up.

This session, would look at the opportunities technology has opened up for women.

Gayatri Buragohain - Executive Director, Feminist Approach to Technology, India

Gayatri began by outlining three aspects relating to feminist power and technology:

1. The need to explore the new opportunities ICTs open up for feminist activism.
2. The need to explore the opportunities that technologies offer for the economic and social empowerment of women (recognising that feminist visions of empowerment are different from that of state and capitalist actors).
3. We, as women and as feminist actors, need to be present actively in the spaces where technological structures of governance get shaped.

Gayatri Buragohain

She elaborated on points one and two based on her own engagement in the ICTs space. Very often, state led and state-NGO led programmes for using ICTs for empowerment of women, focus on ICT skills training for education and livelihoods. But as feminists, we know that education and livelihood cannot be the goal of an empowerment process. In this case, ICTs for empowerment programmes, to fulfil their mandate, would need to enable women to critically question the structures which shape

women's technological access and their position in the techno-social.

Of course, some feminist organisations are attempting to do this. Even FAT has attempted it. Yet one of the biggest obstacles encountered is women's fear. This fear does not arise from their literacy status, caste or class backgrounds. It is a gendered fear. Whether it is grassroots women or those of us who are implementing programmes, there is a fear of technology. The question we need to ask is how can we analyse this fear?

Consciously helping women overcome this fear of technology needs to be a part of ICTs training. Community radio and community video are very suited to enable grassroots women to overcome their fears of technology. This also helps overcome the illiteracy and language barriers argument put up by those who are unconvinced about ICTs for grassroots empowerment.

One must simultaneously though, caution against an over-optimism in social media in hastening community empowerment processes. We need to recognise that these processes are not simple.

Gayatri ended with a few points on feminist power and technology:

1. As feminist technologists and as feminist academics, we need to be conscious that our language does not alienate, and disempower women unfamiliar with the vocabulary we use.
2. We need to be active in the arenas where discourses around the new spaces technology has created are being shaped, and also be conscious of the technologies we are building.

Jan Moolman - Women's Rights Projects Coordinator, Association for Progressive Communications, Women's Networking Support Programme, South Africa

Jan began by saying that when we raise the issue of what matters in feminist power and technology, she felt, it was everything. We need to be cognisant of the challenges women face in accessing technological spaces.

Over the last few years, especially in Africa, violence against women, even in technological spaces is a major concern. We find many women withdrawing from the spaces technology has opened up because of the threat of violence. She then brought out some examples of this threat of violence.

Everyone is aware of the threat of manipulation of images and cyberstalking. A peculiar case in Africa is, where communities have access to mobile phones in a widespread manner, and most of these phones have Internet enabled on them. In South Africa, a website was launched recently where communities had specific platforms where they could 'out' the gays and lesbians in their midst, and freely name them. For instance, this website would enable discussions such as "I saw my neighbour S.. kiss a girl. What kind of woman is she?" In communities where sexual minorities are isolated and have no help, you can imagine the oppression such a website would end up causing.

Secondly, she stressed upon how digital spaces continue to be dominated by the same old interests that control women's bodies. Thirdly, she stressed upon how in the digital spaces, even the technical structures need feminist attention. For example, ICANN is proposing a domain name .fam which Opus Dei is interested in. One can

Jan Moolman

imagine the power of the Catholic groups who possess a 'family' domain name. We, as feminists, need to be conscious of this.

She also stressed upon the fact that feminist struggles to appropriate technology have to be locally embedded. Work that is cognisant of local politics and power structures need to be supported. This is what APC does. For instance, APC has a project in Cambodia that supports a feminist group using walkie talkies. Or in another case it supports sex workers in Uganda using SMSes to warn each other of abusive clients. So the choice of technology is itself dependent on local contexts.

To end with she focussed on some issues for feminist ICT activism. One important thing we need to focus on is whether we are perpetuating violence on digital platforms every time we forward a video of a woman being abused, or
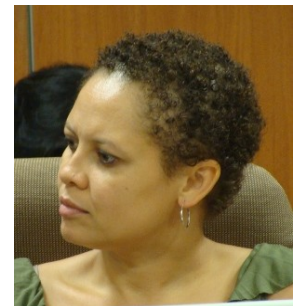
assaulted. Of course, the intentions are good, but does that justify what we are doing?

The other thing to watch out for is our own safety. For instance, we need to be aware of the geo-locational tags on cellphones which makes it easy for the state to spot cyberactivists.

Finally, she said that there was a need to confront the tensions within our own feminism. As one colleagues at APC put it, "The sexed body in a networked context is at the same time a body that is material, discursive and digitised. If my partner takes a clip of me in an act of sexual intimacy and puts it online, it shifts both the context and the encounter that had taken place. So it is not only a violation of my privacy, but also of my bodily integrity". These are the conversations we need to encourage.

Aparna Kalley - Project Coordinator, Prakriye — Centre for Community Informatics and Development, IT for Change, India

Aparna spoke about the *Prakriye* ICT initiatives in Mysore, over the past six years. As is evident, communities tend to appropriate technology in a

Aparna Kalley

manner that suits existing patriarchal power structures. Market forces and power structures tend to collude with each other in re-enforcing ways. Within this broader context, how can women appropriate technologies? That is what the project has attempted to explore.

For over four and a half years, *Prakriye* has engaged in local radio, local video in the community, with women's collectives. From their experience, it was found that these initiatives have slowly shifted the information architectures in the communities, giving women a greater role in them.

We know that access to technology is an issue, but access itself cannot solve the issue of ensuring a democratisation of technology ownership and use. At IT for Change, she said, we are cognisant of this as well as the many dimensions of ownership. We recognise that ownership also includes a component of women's emotional and intellectual participation in

actively shaping the medium, and not only technical training. The *Prakriye* initiative, has tried to help women use video and audio to express themselves, and to address issues at the familial and community level.

When women shared their videos with the men in the community, initially it was difficult to find acceptance for their work. This was built over time. Similarly, women used the radio space to talk about issues such as domestic violence in the community. Thus, video and radio were used by women in their struggles against localised patriarchies. Radio and video give the women a new legitimacy in their struggles.

Aparna outlined how the approaches in *Prakriye*'s ICT initiatives enabled local power shifts to happen:

1. Firstly, we need to trust in existing community processes and work in tandem with on-going development interventions. ICTs by themselves have no transformatory power, it is the processes of democratisation they adopt that are significant.
2. In the new democratic communication processes we have initiated, new spaces for communication have opened up for women. There are also new collectivities emerging, where older women feel the need to support the younger women and girls in their villages to shape their lives.

Discussion:

Srilatha made some observations. We always talk about women's empowerment as a slow process but we should remember that patriarchy is thousands of years old, and in the light of that, what we do is rapid. Secondly, in terms of the possibilities technology opens up for women, in *Mahila Samakhya*, the real impediment to literacy is writing, not reading and technology can help in these areas. Thirdly, drawing a parallel with the struggle of feminists in the 1980s to redefine rape, we need to bring back the question of defining what constitutes a violation in the technology space, and not just consent.

Geetanjali Mishra added by asking - who would define the violation? That question is important

too. Some people might feel violated by seeing a woman in sleeveless clothing. Who decides there has been a violation? We need to complicate this debate.

Shakun mentioned an incident from Vimochana's work where a 12 year old girl's photo was put up on the net by her neighbour, along with her brothers' phone number. People started calling up. The family could not even figure out what was happening, and it was only after they approached a group like Vimochana that they knew the number was on the Internet. In such a context, where is the question of consent?

Graciela made an observation relating to women's absence in the technological spaces. She drew attention to the fields of archaeology and history which reveal that women did play a role in creating new technologies at all points of time but these stories have been obscured by mainstream history.

Oi Wan noted that as feminists we should actively dialogue to create safe online spaces for women, even if this means fist fighting with the powerful.

Desiree Lewis observed that often we notice that women from the South are portrayed as suffering victims by media as it suits their interests and this fits into the developmentalism discourse. How are organisations dealing with this?

Gayatri replied by saying this was indeed a challenge. In activism we have to decide when we are merely forwarding violence against women stories in a non-useful manner and take a call.

Jan added that in APCs 'Take back the tech' campaign they tried to dissuade partners from posting actual evidence of online violence, but it was difficult to convince them.

Anita Gurumurthy added that we must remember that privacy is not just a concern related to the fear of surveillance. It is a precondition of the development of a political subjectivity and the access to safe spaces. The question of censorship is really a question of 'norm setting'. Who sets the norms today? Should it be the online corporations? How can states deal with this today?

SESSION V: Can we grasp the big picture? - A panel discussion

This session addressed the ecologies shaping gender and citizenship in the network society. It took on the big questions of democratic deficit in global governance, the complexity around free speech in relation to the national and global Internets, network capitalism, and the commodification of sexuality.

Presenters:

Heike Jensen, Think-piece author, CITIGEN, and Post-doctoral researcher and lecturer, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany
Parminder Jeet Singh, Advisor, CITIGEN , and Executive Director, IT for Change, India

Moderator: *Andrea Cornwall, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Professor, University of Sussex, UK*

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Heike Jensen - Think-piece author, CITIGEN, and Post-doctoral researcher and lecturer, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany

Heike began her presentation by mentioning that her involvement with the concept of citizenship has been to look at it with regard to censorship and surveillance. The rationale behind the concept of exercising citizenship has hinged on the existence of a public sphere, which would not be possible without the freedom of expression and the right to privacy. Hence, in the CITIGEN paper she authored, the questions that emerged by looking at the gendering of citizenship and the public sphere, were - What structures of opportunity are created for women in the emerging digital society? Who gets heard? Who gets silenced? Who gets placed under surveillance? Also it was important to understand the relationship between the offline and the online world.

Heike Jensen

As baseline, she took the offline public sphere. Historically, when one examines how the public sphere has been created in Western societies, one realises that there have always been two blind spots – patriarchy and property relations. They were considered as matters of the 'private sphere' which were not to be discussed by citizens in the public sphere. We know, of course, that the term 'private companies' comes from this. It is still useful to recall that these are matters that are excluded from discussions by those citizens who have the power to speak in the public sphere.

We all come from different places, and we know that public spheres have been created very differently, by mass media, by news media, and by very different set-ups. We have privately owned media, we have publicly owned media, we have state controlled media and we have society controlled media - however that works. But the bottom-line that emerges after looking at all the documents coming out of the UN World Conference on Women and also taking into account initiatives like the Global Media Monitoring project, there is a problem that is basically a part of all public spheres we are used to – women are not really represented as they want to be. They are either completely ignored, or their concerns are twisted, or they perpetuate stereotypes, such as depicting underprivileged women as victims. These are problems that are a part of the public spheres, even before the emergence of the information society.

Coming to points on censorship and surveillance - Usually censorship and surveillance discussions centre around state actors but we must remember that there are a whole range of actors involved here. For instance, in addition to the state that exercises censorship through laws and violence, media administrations and media business heads engage in censorship practices. Of course, ever since Lawrence Lessig published his seminal book, we can no longer ignore the power of digital architecture and technical code in creating censorship effects. And we have censorship by social norms as well.

Heike said her approach to investigating censorship was as a gendered phenomenon, and this she depicted through an asymmetrical pyramid.

The left depicts possibly how women get censored in their societies and on the right it depicts how men get censored. The point is that while there is a cause of recognition that all public spheres are idiosyncratic in terms of their actual set up of the media, there are certain underlying factors which make women relate to each other all around the world. One of the things we then realise is that the harshest kind of censorship women confront is not exercised by the state, but by society, especially by very close social actors. The closest one is yourself – self-censorship. Family members also engage in censorship. We must realise that women not only get censored by men, but also by other women. So women are victims, as well as perpetrators of censorship. Also keeping in mind that women all over the world are disproportionately poorer than the men, economic censorship blocks affect them.

Hence at the top of the pyramid, when you look at who can freely articulate in the public sphere, you see that men are in the majority. Not all men of course - because other types of social stratification intersect along with gender - and poor men also have a hard time being heard in the public sphere. But there are proportionately more number of men. Censorship debates in the mainstream usually do not take into account these multiple censorship agents and multiple levels. Usually they are articulated from a very privileged position, which is always a class position. That is really important to realise. This also applies to surveillance issues.

The upshot of all this is that public spheres have marginalised women as political actors in general, especially when they have attempted to forward feminist claims. And public spheres by and large have been largely created by men, whether media business operators, or owners or administrators, or decision makers. We have also heard about how the construction of use-value has been male centred, and how women need to take this on, to make their use of reality note-worthy. While women have been silenced, they have not been really absent. We have heard about gender stereotypes, but women have also often been promoted as symbols of the nation within
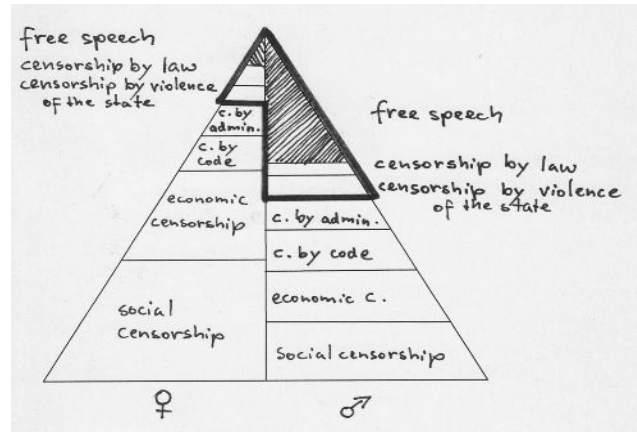
public spheres. This creates a unique censorship context for women because even as they are held as symbols to exemplify the nation, they can be silenced by claims that they betray the nation. Of course, within each nation, there are different kinds of factional issues that get mediated through these kind of debates. The bottom-line is that it is possible to try to take away women's claims to freedom of expression, by saying they besmirch the nation. Often times this has happened when women have tried to discuss feminine ideals and moral order, and very crucially, sexuality. The public sphere as it was originally thought up excludes any mention of patriarchy and of course, sexuality was one of the prime areas where women's self determination of their pleasures without patriarchy was possible.

Coming to the information society, Heike mentioned, that indeed Web 2.0 has made it possible for women to access spaces for self-determination, self-expression and creation of communities – especially in the area of sexuality. Some of the CITIGEN researches has pointed this out as well. In doing so, they have challenged the relegation of sexuality to the private sphere, the ideals of femininity that are propagated in different nations and the ideas of morality that are propagated. Yet the question remains whether these encounters have been able to create more counter public spheres, or whether they constitute fringe arguments. That is open to debate and dependent on what evidence is coming from various locale.

We have to be conscious of information society's flip side, especially the threat of ICT based violence against women.

Parminder Jeet Singh - Advisor, CITIGEN , and Executive Director, IT for Change, India

Parminder began by saying that the big question was – How do we invent spaces that are not limited, but are for the whole world. Continuing from earlier discussions, we recognise that there are continuities between woman's online and offline body - where does one inhabitation end and the other begin? This is a question of social structures around technology, one of the many that are getting constructed. How are these paradigms around technology getting constructed? These were the questions, Parminder said, he meant to address in his talk.

Parminder Jeet Singh

Even those involved in Internet governance tend to give an impression that it is about technical governance. But that is just a minor part of it. There is also a very crucial element of political governance within this – about conflict of interest, trade-offs and so on.

IT for Change is one of the few organisations which focusses on the political economy questions related to the Internet. What does this mean? This means we understand the ongoing game of transnational capital's struggle to control intellectual property and its rent seeking behaviour linked to the export of cultures from the North to the South – and in this game Internet is central. While the big players are engaged in this game, it is in their interest to pretend that Internet governance is about struggles against state censorship, but it is actually about their struggle to control the Internet resources.

How do they do this? They establish rent-seeking of Internet resources through physical controls, but mostly through techno-social controls. Seeking monetary payments for intellectual property, is an example of a physical control. Techno-social controls are much larger – they involve the advantages players gain by controlling some key nodes in the network. Taking Google as an example – Google ostensibly supports open source philosophy and is for liberal IP regimes, but that's because they stand to gain when IP regimes are weaker. Also, what are the alternatives you have if you are unhappy with Google?

He stressed that the new developments of Anti-counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) etc. are essentially a part of this larger move to govern the Internet, for a few players to profit. One can imagine how initiatives such as Wikileaks would get badly affected in this move, and what this means for the Internet.

He also brought to light the other side of the smokescreen – the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). The IGF has become a space where the civil society can be happy feeling that they are being included in decisions of the Internet, and they can think that there is a spirit of participation around it. However, this space has no links to policy making arenas.

So what is the larger point? Within this larger techno-social architecture, what are the 'invited' and 'invented spaces' we can claim? Our subversive actions do not make a difference unless we realise the larger political ecology we are dealing with. So, the space for our actions depends upon our ability to deal with the 'Googles' of this world.

Discussion:

Lisa reflected on her own experience on how/when does our participation in forums such as IGF, where we have such strange bedfellows, compromise us. She mentioned that IGF did not have many women participants and the argument of which was that not enough women have the technical expertise to talk about Internet governance. She said it was reminiscent of Heike's point about women being marginalised from the public sphere.

Srilatha mentioned that historically, women have always been 'surveilled', but they also have ways of escaping this surveillance. All women have stories of 'how grandmother evaded grandfather's surveillance'. Those strategies need to be reapplied to governance contexts.

Graciela had a question for the presenters.

Where is the civil society in the IGF today? Not to criticise multi-stakeholder perspectives here, but she felt that the civil society has lost its space in the IGF.

Anita commented that if we say global politics works by keeping certain spaces opaque, this segmentation points to an important lesson for the civil society. Before the Arab spring, through the consecutive failure of the Seattle round of the Third Ministerial Conference of WTO and the Doha Ministerial round, the global powers had realised that it is not by international governance but by multiple coalitions with select partners at different forums that the power game can be played. This is why Google can sit with you in IGF and work against you elsewhere and we cannot challenge this, as it is multi-stakeholder politics. That is what Lisa Veneklasen is talking about. The totalitarian powers operate at a global level, the aspirational works at a local level. The local is essentialised as feminine, and the global as masculine.

Ranjita added that there are huge differences between offline and online public spheres. In the real world, public sphere is not a given, there are huge contestations around defining its boundary. Yet in the online world, it is not like that. You can log in and access. The online gives you the safety of anonymity but then is it not like being in your private sphere? Where is the actual struggle in the online public sphere? Looking at the same issue from a citizenship angle - What kind of democratic abilities get honed in the online public sphere? Are cyber spaces really sites of resistance?

Heike mentioned that she was in disagreement with the point Anita made in the morning about privacy being key to the formation of subjectivity. She stressed that older techniques of resistance may not help so much using a Foucauldian argument. Power is generative, and it creates its subjects accordingly. Her argument regarding surveillance would be - What if our subjectivities are too tied down to Web 2.0? What if we do not realise what is happening here? In the older regimes, such as authoritarian Germany, people knew what the problem was. What if we do not know it here? We need to take a close look on our online behaviour and see how we are implicated. For instance, one uses Google everyday.

Coming back to the issue of self-censorship, this idea brings together the ideas of censorship and surveillance. But what if the political issue in the digital society is that you are not asked to be quiet, but asked to express yourself in multiple ways without threatening the political and the economic powers?

Going back to WSIS here, and the dwindling of civil society at the IGF, she felt, had begun here. At the IGF you may burn your resources, but you will never get to the centres of power. We need a more powerful analysis of that.

Lisa added that in the first phase, Gender Strategy Working group was marginalised and in the second phase of IGF, there was only the Gender Caucus which was co-opted.

Phet pointed out that he had been a part of a lot of these processes that were termed 'evil' but the battle, he felt, was to keep everyone to the principles of 'open and free', but even this has been taken to the extreme.

Oi Wan felt that the IGF was not a useful process. In Hong Kong, she said, people are encountering Hollywood lobbyists who are pushing for a strong censorship regime and the activists have to ally with Google in that struggle, who are also interested in a weak censorship regime. This is how the spaces of Internet governance work.

Desiree added that we are just bombarded by images and information, and there are spaces for voice but not enough spaces for agency.

Parminder asked why we hate Google? Not because of its product, but its political power. So we do not have to boycott its product.

Lisa asked if then at this point do we get compromised. This is a important question. From her experience with the IGF, she felt this requires constant self-reflection and governance of civil society.

Srilatha wondered if whether we should continue with old strategies of politics and felt that the answer was yes - for new strategies have to emerge from old strategies. But for that, people dealing with old strategies have to recognise that this is the new context where the online and off-line are not two different worlds, but they mix. So old strategies are relevant. There is no

discontinuity in political action in the new network age. We have to deal with the fact that we are dealing with big systems. Internet is a big system, globalisation is a big system. So our resistance has to be big and small. Quoting Anita, she said, the big system needs to be feminised. Our subversions have to be small as well.

The other issue, Parminder added, was - would transparency work? Transparency is being given a new meaning in the present context. When you have no option other than Google, how can we accept the self-governance of Google? Actors like Google are playing a role of their own. We must remember that the digital revolution was enabled by two regulations:

1. IBM was forced to separate software from hardware by regulation.
2. Telecom companies were broken up by a simple competition law in the US.

So, it is time to regulate this new digital space, to enable other developments. We have been fighting for a space in the UN for normative discussions on the Internet. In WSIS, we had communication rights - why did we move to 'freedom of expression' in IGF? This is a problem which Graciela also has pointed out.

SESSION VI: Towards a synthesis of CITIGEN's thoughts and practices – what does the network society have to do with discourses of gender and citizenship

This presentation attempted a tentative synthesis of the research projects undertaken by the CITIGEN research programme.

Presenter: *Anita Gurumurthy, Coordinator, CITIGEN, and Executive Director, IT for Change, India*

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Anita Gurumurthy began with a summary of the CITIGEN research work which constitutes six research projects and five think pieces. Four teams undertook action research while two undertook empirical research. Three of these researches were located in South Asian countries – India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh; and three were in South East Asia – Philippines, APWLD based in Thailand, China. The associated think piece authors were Supinya Klangnarong, Farida Shaheed, Margarita Salas, Heike Jensen, Desiree Lewis and Crystal Orderson.

Anita opened her presentation by admitting that it was a tentative theory and analysis because reports were coming in and reviews were still taking place and hence these concepts and theories were still in the making. Moving to the presentation, she said, that the questions covered by the programme were:

1. How does social discontinuity effected by digital technologies recast participation and political membership of marginalised women?
2. How does it shape 'older' questions of social and gender justice?
3. How does the political female subject emerge in the contemporary moment?

CITIGEN adopted its analysis - not just a critical feminist approach - but also went back to some traditions of political philosophy to look at the study of the normative and what ought to be. It is very important to acknowledge that many of the standpoints in the analysis proceed from the body of work that has been done on the subject especially by Southern feminists whose work we have been following for a very long time and this has been on a range of issues - studies on local governance, how local actors influence local governance, how agencies are framed in the local

context to the whole question of global politics and global justice and how feminists of the South have engaged with it. These are the lenses that have influenced the analysis.

Going back to some of the discussions that happened previously in the first session in order to just crystallise the backdrop of the analysis - Castells is undoubtedly the father of the theory of the network society. For Castells the shift was from a world which is a 'space of places', to a world which is now a 'space of flows'. So everything is in fluidity, and therefore, the space of some places has been elevated to the hubs that make modern capitalism and the rest of the places have been rendered irrelevant. So, that is, in crux what the network is doing to us. That is not a fact but a theorisation of the contemporary.
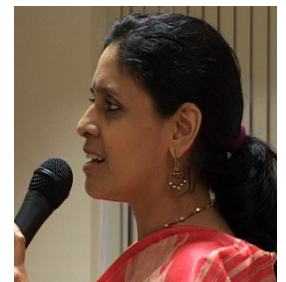
Anita Gurumurthy

In post industrial society, the architecture of production and social relationships is governed by technology. There is pervasive change that dislocates the subjective-ontological (the way we frame ourselves and with each other) as also the social/interpersonal. One often reads about the time space compression - an essential facet of contemporary modern life.

So why did CITIGEN investigate the question of citizenship? Citizenship allows one a way to look at the promise of technology without getting dystopic and depressed. It allows to look at the tension between the formal and the aspirational/normative . It is also important that in a mapping of the current situation, you can see how a proliferation of non-state actors and associated changes in the scope, exclusivity and state authority over its territory, is making it very

difficult to understand who is governed, who are citizens, what is government and in this global existence is there a possibility of a global state.

Norm making and the default sense of norm making has actually assumed very great proportions on it being influenced by segmented and privatised systems of justice. One of the examples Sassen gives is the case of the international commercial arbitration that happens. So people do not seek courts of law but arbitration actually happens outside the legal system and this is attributed to the fragmentation of society itself.

There are other reasons, and this is very important to make explicit although this has been implicit in our conversation, that while global capital is beautifully controlled even as it is decentralised, global civil society as much as it is decentralised today is really lacking in a unified sense of purpose and coherence that can contribute to a progressive agenda of social justice or global justice. So we have a situation where we should be very clear where the power is. There is a growing tension between openness and control in the flow of culture and information and these are manifest as was seen in the previous session, in the high stakes battle over IP policy and digital rights management technologies.

Cultural industries seek to control the traffic of their content over peer to peer (P2P) networks. Hence there is a big battle regarding IP and control over culture and content. Commercial content providers are beginning to explore alliances with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to filter network traffic in order to prioritise commercial content delivery of P2P traffic. The Internet that you know that delivers content to all at the same speed may not be the same in the years to come. Imminent changes are that - those who can pay more (which is the commercial private sector) will be able to benefit from the bandwidth which is super fast.

So, is there a crisis of categories for feminism? And how can the imbrication of the digital and the non-digital as a condition of being sited materiality and having global span, be examined? (Sassen). Which means that we are today sited in the physical material corporeal, we have a body, but at the same time we have a global span. This is a question that is very intriguing. This condition

arises in account of the fact that the digital is interlaced with the real such that the real is also digital. The dichotomy between the virtual and the real is quite intriguing. The dichotomy will not take us far and we will understand why, from the empirical evidence of the CITIGEN researchers. From several readings and the outcomes of the CITIGEN network, two things came out. One is space and the second is hybridity.

Space very evidently as what we are talking about is - the complete dislocation of the conventional categories that allowed us to imagine space and hybridity which includes the point that Srilatha made about anonymity that there is at stake. This is not the first time this has been imagined, Donna Haraway spoke long ago of the cyborg - the human machine condition where the machine is an extension of yourself. Our phone is an extension of ourselves even though it may be in our pocket or bag or whatever. We have enormous separation anxiety if its away from us.

To that extent this hybridity is very important to feminism because it allows women to subvert because we have been using space so creatively. Within this we need to talk about why space and why hybridity and here the work of political geographers is useful.

What political geographers have said is that it is really important to understand that there is an attention to spatial scale (Erik Swyngedouw) that is very important to the contemporary moment. Who is local, who is global, who is in the household, who is in the public – asking questions of scale, scalar politics as they call it, politics of scale and space - this is at the heart of power. Sassen also talks about the important political task of examining the in-between spaces, what she calls frontier zones – between the local and the national, the national and the sub-national, the local and the global – these frontier zones allow us both opening for productive engagement as well as theorisation.

Why hybridity? This has been an important concept in anthropology as well. People who have done anthropology may be familiar with the notion of liminality. Liminal is that state of flux which is in-between and generates a particular crisis. Out of that crisis emerges the possibility of a regeneration. This liminality becomes very important because when women, for instance who are confined to their homes are unable to

have anything to do with public space are introduced to a chat room, then something happens. For the very first time when someone is able to connect to the world like that, there is a certain subjectivity that arises that is the condition of liminality, that is the condition between which opens up enormous possibilities. It is our responsibility as Southern feminists researchers to actually ground it beyond this post modern conception of nothingness and to engage with questions of materiality and identity/ multiple subject positionings so that we do not become fundametalists in what we are talking about.

Three vectors were then introduced which were three ways to make sense of what all the researches at the macro level are actually saying. Those three vectors were – place-making; political subjectivity/claims-making; semiotics and sense-making.

Place-making implies how we, as feminists, make place - what do the research projects tell us about how places are made in the space of flows; how are claims made; how does political subjectivity take birth. In the meeting more than once people have spoken about semantics, about how grammar is changing, and what that means - it actually means that certain old meanings are going away and making way for us to create new meanings so in the realm of politics and feminist politics, semiotics become important and it is important to then understand the semiotics that are at play.

Before proceeding Anita added some caveats. One was that to understand the gender politics of scale and hybridity – we must transcend the dualities of public-private and local-global. It is also important that the politics of exploring place-making, requires us to look at the intersections of the scaling effects of the network and the strategies of emergent identities. What are women in Manila in those slums, doing? We have to look at how the intersections of network, scale and identities are actually coming together. And in this ask the question how do connectivity, mobility, and interaction cohere in generating political subjectivities and positionalities in the network?

Place-making is the first vector. Place-making as a study of the dynamic and radical complexity of place-politics, has been introduced to us by feminist political geographers again. As a concept it connects agency and place. It is a counter to dystopic interpretations of capitalist hegemonies in the network society. It is important to examine how place-making happens and this 'defense' of place and place-based practices is seen as a very creative engagement with transnationalism (Escobar's work). Therefore, place in the CITIGEN project becomes for us a rhetorical device, a conceptual aid, of choice to make sense of other social categories – race, gender, class – suggesting the 'scalar turn' in social theory. Political geographers use the term to explain how scale has become very important in our lives and the 'scalar turn' has become very important to social and feminist theory.

So, following Massey, who in 1991, wrote thoughtfully looking into the future, - the global space of place – she said there are three things about places we should remember: Places do not have single but multiple identities; Places are not frozen in time but they are processes; Places are not enclosures with a clear inside and outside but they are very porous.

What we need to understand and why this interpretation is very useful can be understood through a small story told by Sallie Marston – when you look at the start of the 20th century a lot of things happened which radicalised space for women and women were actually at the lead of many scalar turns in the 20th century. How did they do it? This is coming from the European context - one was that they said they wanted birth control; second, they said we are against the first world war; and the third was that they wanted a place in their municipal councils and counties. This lead to the suffrage movement in many countries. This rescaled society in many ways. First of all it brought the household into the public, household became a space to contend with. The second is that it gave citizenship to women. In many ways this understanding of geographical politics of scale is really important to the questions of citizenship.

The second vector, is political subjectivity and claims-making. How does a citizen happen? We are unhinging the question of citizenship from national territory. Because people talk about being a 'netizen' or a 'global citizen', at some level the normative understanding of citizenship

is already unhinged from the notion of nation state. So how do you understand a citizen.

One of the works to read is Samaddar. He theorises that unlike the classical Western subject, where Western institutions had a historical continuity and democracy came as a result of a wealth of historical continuities, for most of us in the South, one fine day we were decolonised, somebody was given the task to write a constitution and we were citizens. So it was not a metaphysical exercise of debating liberty for 200 years or more if you look at Socrates onwards. Which is why it is important to understand post-coloniality and the context that the political scientists like Anupama Roy, who have been writing about how many of the governments in India are making changes to who will have a claim over property based on random interpretations of who a citizen is. That also shows that for the political subjects who are resisting, who are seeking a definition of inclusion - for them the struggle is ongoing based on what kind of claims they want to make. It is interesting in a democracy like India, this debate around rights and the kind of authority the legal normative has – it is actually a process in the making. In the recent years we have had a right to education, a right to information, people are contemplating a right to food, so the whole notion of citizenship is a kind of a process in the making. Hence, one understands political subjectivity as something that is in process.

Politics, Sammadar says, is thus a discourse of actions; and political knowledge is a form of activity. Political knowledge is not the enshrined something, political knowledge emerges in the way we sit in collectives and talk to women and ask them what is it that happened after the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme came. What is it that they are disenfranchised about. Where do they want to assert their identities. So it is in some sense a pedagogy.

The network society context is very important here because what it does do to our subjectivities is what Heike mentioned previously. Only when we understand what it does to depoliticise our subjectivity will we be able to understand where we need to assert out political subjectivity. So what we have today is from the Rawlsian ideal of the male individual, we have a post-modern identity - how is that made? A British scholar,

declares Castells, obsolete. He says Castells says there is a self and the net and there is a bipolarity, and constantly the net and the self are in a struggle. In the past 10 years since Castells wrote, something dramatically different has happened in this time space compression. Today there is no difference between the self and the net - they are one. So that the self has escaped into the net. For the young people, its not so much of what you are doing on Facebook as yourself, but what you are doing in relation to others on Facebook that is important. So in a sense, nodes look to other nodes to orchestrate or choreograph their behaviour. This has led to sexualisation of everyday life, the commodification of everything - including of marginalities, of marginal knowledge - yoga, ayurveda. It complicates the whole business of that individuation, that process that is so necessary, to actually escape into yourself to discover which is the kind of politics that is important. It complicates the building of collectivity, because everybody who is on Facebook, in a sense, is part of a collective. The question is would that be a politicised collectivity? It really infiltrates the formation of political subjecthood. So how does political subjectivity emerge that is not antithetical to collectivity?

As the Sri Lanka team spoke about the SMSes - for the women who were introduced to *Minmini* news the meaning of SMS is vastly different from those of us who transact SMS. The meaning of SMS to them is political SMS. For the rest of us we are trying to delete SMS or to avoid the commercial SMS that assault you. In a certain sense, the semiotics of that space - what are those different symbols, those different tropes, those memes - what are those that make a political syntax. These are material-semiotic practices, same as Desiree and Crystal's paper – what happened to video on the cell phone. The video on the cell phone can now actually be a playful thing for young people but in the context of 'Vagina Monologues' which was translated in the local language and sent far and wide along Youtube, the video on mobiles acquired a special meaning, a special kind of semiotics, this is important to localise any analysis. There are diverse meanings, diverse categories and huge ambiguities in relationship to participatory democracy as the questions we have been hearing. Is the public sphere online? Or is it just 'slacktivism'? The whole question is what is

'participatory democracy'?

As Eric Swyngedouw, political geographer said - How are identity, difference and place loyalty, central in any emancipatory project, negotiated with solidarity, inter-place bonding and collective resistance? That is an important question as now you and the net are not different, both of us are the same. It is important to look at the kind of feminist work being done – it is very few and far between, maybe because it is emergent – one of them is scholar of communication Leslie Shade. She looks at how when initially the cell phone was introduced in 1991 in Canada, it was touted as an interesting thing for women for remote mothering. So you could keep tab of where your daughter went and husband was. Subsequently, the making of pink phones etc. she analyses and says is indicative of a certain generation of meaning, a certain generation of semiotics and sense-making that scripts women as objects and as consumers.

Therefore the question before us is, when you look at the Grameen women, holding the phone or like Aparna's presentation where women are actually looking at the computer and the telecentre and the young girls are using the video to go to the local office and ask questions as an education in citizenship, to them, that space acquires an altogether different meaning.

Moving towards an analysis and interpretation of CITIGEN researches, the questions would be - How do marginalised women enact their citizenship on multiple dimensions of social-space in the network society, and how do they secure an overall coherence of different social orders - rights, community, capitalism, state, etc. through shared meanings, histories and collective subjectivities.

Analysis on how place-making, sense-making and claims-making span through these researches, was then elaborated by Anita. For women in Manila that the Filipino team worked with, the claims-making strategies were tied to the politics of place (church, state, discourses of sexuality). It entailed a publicity of the material gendered conditions of life (women who do not have access to resources, who have several children), and a rearticulation of subjectivity that is marked by marginalities of sexuality, class, and gender. It is both symbolic and discursive of the attempt to bring to the public domain, situated local 'knowledge' that is marginal in the process of national politics over the proposed Reproductive Health Bill.

The women leaders community in Kerala, seeks to forge a political-ethical practice – deploying territory and hybridity contextually (because – the women are actually geographically dispersed and do not meet often but they are connected on a not-public platform, it is a moderated entry, it is like a membership based club. They have used this web platform, this deterritorialised space, and they use their hybridity, i.e. "even if I'm not present in the next *panchayat*, I will connect with the woman in the next *panchayat*") as feminist devices towards progressive ends. The particular semiotics of their praxis reflect claims to local feminist history (Gramamukhya also includes women writers, women who write fiction, the women leaders interact with them), to Malayalam and to a avowal of open technological platforms (they migrated from a closed software to an open software platform). The ecologies of visibility they create has a threshold effect (this is about the liminality). They generate a politics of presence in the public space (in Kerala) - an alternative network semiotics that politicises gender. The 'place of one's own', for a practice of political pedagogy emerges as a symbolic referent that challenges the mainstream (also true for *Minmini* from Sri Lanka; the SMS network challenges the mainstream media).

The Chinese research of the multiple online public spheres reveals a political public arena that is fluid, highly segmented and contested. Place-making strategies differ across segments of civil society (the older style women's organisations who are quasi-governmental NGOs have different strategies, the network based organisations have different strategies and the women activists who are not necessarily connected to organisations deploy different tactics). The politically active subject online is under constant threat and risk under the Chinese panopticon (this is important because materiality is associated with physical space). The study also reveals how strategies for building feminist political pedagogy, in a context marked by postmodern, post-gender politics. Like in Hong Kong, everyone is hyperconnected there is lots of activism but the research bemoans the fact that people are not connected to the oral histories of

women; gender has become a subject in the university; the actual questions of politicisation of gender somehow seem to be more vibrant in the mainland Chinese context than in Hong Kong, therefore it requires a reterritorialisation (as against Kerala where they needed to go online, here there is need to go offline – hence in the particular ways in which feminist politics emerges we do not place a value on whether deterritorialising politics is better or reterritorialising politics is better. Both have a particular context) of gender politics; where place based strategies of renewed history-making through a reclamation of oral histories has been seen as necessary.

For the migrant woman domestic worker, the network catalyses a new politics of scale; it brings her the mobility to connect to communities of fate – (concept by Fraser which implies linked transnational societies) while also politicising the household (of her employer), as a site of power. It could also potentially construct a new geography of politics embedded in more formal-institutional forms of political claims-making (because in Hong Kong for this politics to emerge where across the countryside domestic workers can come together is better than in Taiwan where labour laws differ and do not allow women time off). Yet, the mobile is also an invasive locative technology that makes her potentially vulnerable as a non-citizen; for membership on the network, she trades her unmonitored privacy. Yet by buying a cellphone and connecting to her peers she is making a political statement - "I'm willing to trade my privacy but I want to be connected".

The emerging scenarios of feminist politics of scale suggested in the South Africa paper, present new theoretical avenues to explore local appropriations of the mobile phone and emergent meanings of resistance. One thing we cannot underestimate and we are seeing in Africa is the totally different meaning of the Internet. Because it is almost as if the generation of the Internet was skipped and they went to the Internet through the mobile. In such a scenario, the global political economy of connectivity regimes is very critical because what Africa is condemned to is a new kind of Internet which is closed; mobile networks are 'closed' networks and come with lock-ins to certain platforms.

In reality, decentralisation per se may not imply greater distribution of power. As Sassen says, the decentralised network on which global financial capital rides, ends up concentrating power. Farida's study of women's participation in public broadcast of religious fundamentalism also points to the need to problematise this. Practices of horizontalisation and consensus politics may prevent coherence and purposive leadership from guiding mobs into movements or from enabling movements that may reach their objectives in becoming more permanent civil society organisations.

In conclusion, depending on particular histories – scalar politics of gender assume different manifestations and accompany a unique semiotics and immersed practices of feminist politics i.e. in different places different things happen when we see women grapple with place-making, express their political subjectivity, identifying with collectivity). Scalar strategies/ discourses of citizenship are really very contextual – some places it is reterritorialisation, deterritorialisation (*Minmini*, Kerala), some it is creating community (mainland China), building privileged space (in Kerala), infiltration (South Africa, Manila), etc.) - that then emerge at the intersections of specific conjunctures (capitalism, modernity, post war - conflict), and diverse subject practices.

Tentative conclusions from the programme are as follows:

1. An alternative scalar politics of gender concretise in particular techno-social moments as political practices of place-making, sense-making and claims-making.

2. They arise in and through particular material-technological cultures, where connectivity and mobility, practices of political subjectivity and creation of new semiotics of and positionalities in the network dislocate gender orders.

3. The problematisation of citizenship is tied to political pedagogy. How the subject can define subject positionality and how claims gain recognition becomes important; the process requires an immersion (in place-making – the case of 'freemona' in Egypt is interesting. How

twitter helped free Mona where unique place-making strategies were completely virtual. Therefore we should not think of place-making as constantly fighting on the street).

4. As subjects of 'development projects' women may make claims from within the given liberal framework but the politicisation of claims must embrace scalar politics of gender (engage the spaces of global/national church, post-colonial state, the civil society RH Bill movement etc.) and build a new semiotics that make what is public also visible in the attention economy.

5. The associative milieu for an alternate semiotics is what makes for a feminist political subjectivity. Having a technological paradigm that enables 'open' forms of communication and 'collaborative' methods of engagement are certainly not enough. In fact who is to be kept out is as important as how to collaborate; preserving safe/closed space is as important as opening up. From a gendered study of scale and hybridity it is understood that it is important to have closed spaces.

6. Privacy may be traded for other things like safe spaces. Disclosure becomes a political strategy for women. For example, disclosure in closed 'public space' to build solidarity against masculinised spaces of local politics.

7. In the case of the migrant women, the reason they might not be able to engage in that the population is not always stable and can be floating. This is because the global politics of where labour can be outsourced has also a certain geo-political context of women in the Global South who serve households where their labour rights and rights as human beings is heavily compromised.

8. In the attention economy, big interests shape the politics of dissent. Here what is important to study is why did Egypt happen and why did Bahrain not happen – this is actually a function of the politics of

oil – where US and Saudi have entrenched interests – and despite organising and mobilisation, the movement has not taken off.

After outlining the questions, Anita revisited Castells. She asked - is this a 'space of flows', the world we are living in? Yes, it is a 'space of flows', but it is also a 'space of places'. For the project of seeking enfranchisement for women and other marginalised people in network society, the 'space of places' remains abiding. It enables the political to descend to the ordinary/real/chaotic/from grand renditions of the idealised 'global' public sphere. The 'space of places' as normative sites of emergent political subjectivities presents segments of stability (in this world where the net and the self are the same) that allows navigation between normatively bound sub-worlds in the space of flows (that rejects normativity) that also resist the totalising power of the space of flows.

Discussion:

Crystal Orderson noted two points from the African context. The first point raised was about skipping a generation, in the African context there is constant conversation on creating a post colonial state and how the West shaped and had influence in Africa and about how technology actually created some space. The mobile phone has become a safe space to communicate but we have not critically looked at mobiles tying us into other regimes. Secondly, it is interesting how citizenship is under threat. The case study of Free Gender points to this – you have post apartheid South Africa, you have a rights based approach, one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, same sex marriages legalised, yet as a black woman you are not able to live out your sexuality which means your citizenship and your notion of womanhood is under threat so how do you really define that space.

Ranjita Mohanty asked for point four of the conclusions to be expanded. Anita replied by saying that she meant that, taking the example of the Philippines paper, the question raised was - if the blogs were in the local language would the politicians have read it? The outcomes of all these ICTD projects where women were online

depends a lot on how it is taken and embedded in other processes and how that is politicised. When women make such moves what they are doing is claims-making, to have a concrete outcome, a certain scalar embedding, is required.

Lisa noted that you have to be careful that several time people are making claims and taking action but might be not using the word claims-making, as is the case in Philippines.

Parminder added to the question - are women already making these connections? These connections being proposed now are different from pre-existing relationships they may be making. There are two differences: One is they are new ways of making those engagements; something even more important though is that the nature of those actors is also embedded in the new network logic. Whether it is age, capital or civil society or other community groups or just online groups - nature of those actors embedded in the new network logic allows us a telescopic view and thus changes the strategies we make which proceed from the kind of engagements they may already be making.

Srilatha mentioned that the need to be critical is being underscored also because if you do not politicise or inform your claim with an understanding of other struggles around this issue, then it can constrain your claim-making. If you do not understand the proprietary base, you are looking at the issue partially and seeing only a few pieces. This has become even more critical than in the past because of the sheer weight of the history of feminist struggles, scales, complexity, multiple contexts - strategies have been tried, victories and losses, if you do not make this connecting i.e. informing women's struggles with a larger political history then your claims-making process becomes weakened or diminished.

Ranjita enquired if at all the sites studied, there were parallel physical protests alongside of the virtual. Parminder said that in all sites these debates were part of the larger conversations and movements.

Sepali shared that the blog created by them was part of the larger programme working with women interested in standing for elections and so there were ads, workshops etc. The blog was the 'invented space' which people were asked to access. The impact was that people knew there was this site, and women wrote their stories, but what they wanted to say was not accepted by the print media and this then became a space for exercising expression instead of articulating citizenship. The question then was - what next? Do we go to other women as well? When we identified women bloggers and brought them together for a discussion many of them did not know each other. It was a strengthening of a use of a space, together and on their own.

SESSION VII: Technology, transformation and tipping points – Case studies of non-linear change

This session demonstrated how progressive community based change can be effected through technologies. Panelists shared experiences and perspectives elaborating how the nature of technology-induced change presents itself, and what could be the key 'tipping points'.

Presenters:

Jessica Colaco, Research Lead at iHub Research, iHub, Kenya
Meghana Rao, Manager - Communications, Breakthrough, India

Chair: *Chandrika Sepali Kottegoda, Director, Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka*

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Jessica Colaco - Research Lead at iHub Research, iHub, Kenya

Jessica began by saying that her objective was to give a concrete example of how technology has impacted a community. She began by examining *Ushahidi*. *Ushahidi* emerged as a physical and virtual space at a time when Nairobi was plagued by riots. The community of technologists and the community of bloggers who were involved in *Ushahidi* thought they should create a platform that provides information to riot victims and simultaneously helps people reach out to each other in terms of providing food, water and aid. Bloggers were on the ground transmitting information about what was happening.

One of the co-founders of *Ushahidi* actually said, "Why should we not do a mash-up on a map and disseminate information over the web and mobiles, in order to show people around the world and around the country what is happening in Kenya?" Consequently, volunteer developers built the platform that became *Ushahidi*, after the co-founders came together and reached out to the developer community. *Ushahidi* means 'Witness' in Swahili, and this platform has become a witness to events.

When we look back to what has happened, the 'tipping point' was how the technology evolved in that particular situation, and how we responded to that situation. Over the last three years, *Ushahidi* has evolved and has been used in very different situations ranging from war reporting, crisis monitoring and media monitoring.

What does *Ushahidi* actually do? It provides community members the tools to recount their stories and with these multiple snippets, we can construct stories of communities.

There is also available - supporting technology such as search engines that can be run on *Ushahidi* for throwing up relevant results. Through *Ushahidi*, 'invited spaces' are being created for more and more people to participate.

That is the story of *Ushahidi*. As one of the co-founders (Eric Hersman) says, "Technology exists. But it is how people decide to use the platform that makes a difference". In 2009-10, technological infrastructure was on the rise and the technology communities were very capable. *Ushahidi*, in this climate, got

Jessica Colaco

funding to create a physical space called iHub where developers and technologists could come together and innovate, addressing questions of how the new developers in Nairobi could help transform the lives of people - such as the farming communities.

Jessica related two such stories of support that were made possible through iHub. One was the story of AkiraChix - a venture which supported the technical training of women in the slums of Nairobi – 30 women who underwent the training are now working in start-ups. The other story is a start-up by some of the members involved in a training venture in the agricultural sector. They got together and identified the gap in the agricultural sector as far as price information for farmers was concerned. Not having information really limited the existing marketing

opportunities available to farmers. So they started thinking and built an SMS based technology to enable farmers to find out the prices of agricultural commodities across the various markets. Crowdsourcing is used to gather this information. Farmers use this platform today. There are many such stories from the iHub and she stressed on the key points below:

1. Virtual and physical spaces are co-constituted and have a cyclic relationship.

2. Another initiative that emerged from *Ushahidi* is '*Huduma*' (which means 'ask for help'). This platform addresses six key areas from health to education to gender to infrastructure in order to improve their constituencies. For example, if a road is pot-holed, one can report to the MP. So it is a platform which supports the enforcement of governmental accountability and give people a 'voice'.

These she said were a few examples of how the virtual space created by technology is capable of bringing about social change.

Meghana Rao — Manager,Communications, Breakthrough, India

Meghana began her presentation by playing a clip from Breakthrough's '*Bell Bajao*' (Ring the bell) campaign. The clip urged women and men to take a stand against domestic violence and not be quiet bystanders. The video focused on the small actions taken by communities to challenge domestic violence in their communities, and on Breakthrough's trainings that focussed on challenging the popular perception that domestic violence is a 'myth'.

Meghana, then spoke about how the media could be used in the non-profit sector. Breakthrough's mission is to use media in the non-profit sector to challenge violence against women, by building partnerships with governmental and non-profit sector organisations, and work in Karnataka, Delhi and UP. One of their key partners is Vimochana.

As the clip played demonstrated, Public Service Ads (PSAs) constitute an important part of Breakthrough's media strategy. The other strategy used is going into communities and performing plays against violence. In UP, they have used 'puppet theatre', and in Karnataka, they have use '*Yaksha Gana*'. The media is carefully selected fitting into the existing folk traditions.

Media has been crucial to Breakthrough right from the beginning – as those familiar with '*Man Ke Manjeere*' would know. in fact '*Man Ke Manjeere*' is a video about choices a woman makes to transform her life positively, and emerges from an experience of violence, by taking her life into her hands. Breakthrough was trying to use a media strategy that was not reliant on mass media, from the outset. '*Bell Bajao*' is one of the more successful campaigns and has been adapted for use in the Chinese and Pakistani contexts.

Meghana Rao

From Breakthrough's experience, media enables the creation of a cathartic moment that is important in discussing sensitive issues.

Coming to new media, Meghana said that they had been moderately successful in new media discussions on this issue. They conduct bloggers' meet to get young people to write about the issue. The challenge has been to get the content on the mainstream media.

She ended by showing another video on people's reflections on their attitudinal change to violence against women.

Discussion:

Parminder observed that he found the extension of the idea of 'invited' spaces to the analysis of technological platforms - interesting. He asked Jessica to expand on her idea of the continuities between offline and online spaces, through this lens.

Jessica replied by saying that she felt that the continuity lies in trust-building with the communities they work with. Offline trust building goes a long way and there is need to take care to support this in the online platforms that are built. *Ushahidi* and iHub have managed to create community based and community run platforms, and develop a sense of community

ownership.

Meghana responded to Crystal's question on partnering with mainstream media by sharing that Breakthrough has always found mainstream media partnerships tough and challenging. It requires intense lobbying and a long wait, but they have managed to do this at Breakthrough, especially in terms of putting the PSAs on air.

Sarala mentioned that coming from an organisation that provides direct services to women, one recognises the importance of such campaigns but the issues remain complex. If a woman watches, and she is in an abusive, complicated marriage – what does she do next?

Phet commented on Jessica's presentation and said that Sri Lanka had a similar initiative called Sahana - the post-tsunami work conducted was similar to *Ushahidi*. They were successful after the Tsunami but where are they now? There may be some lessons one can learn from that experience. Also, regarding crowdsourcing – how do we ensure ethical practice? Reliability? These are difficult questions to think about.

Gayatri felt a crucial question to ask was - who are the people benefiting from this technology?

In *Sahayog*, FAT started a project where they could use the *Ushahidi* platform to help women record their stories of corruption but then they found that there was no way to reach them through the Internet and it was only possible through phones. This started them thinking about the limitations involved.

Shakun responded to Sarala by saying that from their experience partnering with Breakthrough, they found that men acting in the community plays against domestic violence has a huge impact. A question she brought up was - why has ham technology not seen the response digital has?

Srilatha asked Meghana if Breakthrough had studies that demonstrate the impact of their campaign on behaviour? On whether women are more likely to access the protection of the law after campaigns.

Meghana responded by saying that there exist progressive anti-domestic violence law but there is need to work on the implementation. Even if there is a change of 2-3 percent in women accessing the law, it is an impact.

SESSION VIII – 'Money, a room and network freedoms' – My vision of democracy and gender justice

This session adopted a 'reading out' format. Virginia Woolf, English writer and publisher, said in her book in 1929 that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is going to write". Just to provocatively rephrase Virginia Woolf, 'network freedoms' has been interpolated into her quotation as a metaphoric reading of the possible ingredients of contemporary feminist politics. Participants in this session shared their vision of gender justice and democracy, interpreting what rights, freedoms and citizenship imply in contemporary times shaped by digital technologies.

Presenters:

Disha Mullick, Project Coordinator, Nirantar, India
Srilatha Batliwala, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Scholar, AWID, India
(Provided below are transcripts of their story-telling)

Chair: Graciela Selaimen, Coordinator, Instituto NUPEF, Brazil

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Srilatha Batliwala - Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Scholar, AWID, India

Foster and McChesney, in 'The Internet's Unholy Marriage to Capitalism', say: "But technologies do not ride roughshod over history, regardless of their immense powers. They are developed in a social, political, and economic context. And this has strongly conditioned the course and shape of the communication revolution" - and I would add, how people engage it.

"Every species forces the natural historian
To take as much to account for its evolution
Through an innovative form of narration
As it took the species to survive."

- Bruno Latour, Foreword to Power and Invention by Isabelle Stengers

From the digital diary of Shabana, in Dhaka, Bangladesh:

So here I am at my special time, in my special place. A room of my own – but not really my own, but a space at the women's centre, the only place where I am ever able to be alone and with just myself. Also the only place where a few of us lesbians – just seven in fact – can meet once a week as ourselves, not as pretend best friends pretending to be doing joint study for our exams.

At home, even though they scraped and saved to get a computer for my brother, I am not allowed to use it, because they are afraid I will get under some bad influences or look at dirty pictures (how do they know you can see dirty pictures on the computer?) or learn about things they'd rather I didn't know about, like sex. "After your marriage ask your husband to get you a computer" they say, "and then do what you want. But as long as you live under our roof, you must remain pure and innocent".

The computer at the women's centre has become my lifeline and my refuge. Even though we find it difficult to find and connect with other lesbians in Dhaka or even Bangladesh – surely there must be more than seven of us in this whole city, in this huge country? At least we can connect with our kind in other places, in places where they can openly gather and belong to lesbian groups and actually ask their societies and governments for their rights! One of the *didis* here helped me find those groups. How lucky they are! They can be there openly in Facebook and other networks without hiding themselves.

Online, I have taken the name Sapphorani – I learnt about her from the website of Sappho, a lesbian rights group in Kolkata in India. And I can read about lesbian women of today, Bengali like me, who have come out, I can read their stories too. But there is one big problem – so many things about lesbian issues is in English, and my

Srilatha Batliwala

English is very poor. In Bangla, there is not much. So I forced my parents to buy me a Bangla-English dictionary, saying that learning more English before my marriage will help me get a better husband. They support that.

And it is not just the English – I am really dying to write my story, to write about my anger and the revulsion I feel about marriage, but I am afraid. The women's centre people told me I must be careful about what I write on the net, because there are ways they can find out who you are, there are invisible people who are watching and there are many people in the police who are especially watching the women's groups in Dhaka because they have been active in politics and in supporting many groups of women they do not like. But Bangladesh is a free country now – we fought a big war and so many people gave their lives for us to be free, to have our own freedom and laws. Why then is there no law against forcing a woman to marry against her will?

In school, we were taught in our Islamiyat class that Muslim women have rights. We were taught that Allah is merciful and all-forgiving. He created us, and we are his children. So if I have these feelings, surely He knows and will forgive and accept me and love me. But they say that what I feel towards other women is a sin. And I went to the websites of different Islamic organisations and they all say that Allah is merciful but I am a sinner. They even say that we in Bangladesh are not true Muslims, because our women are given too much freedom, we do not dress or behave as proper Muslim women should. That we should all wear full *hijab*, hide our hair, and not be on the street going anywhere alone.

I do not understand this – my grandmother and great-grandmother did not wear *hijab*, they wore saris, and they wore big red *bindis* like their Hindu neighbours, and they also did their *namaz* five times a day. And my grandmother told me how she marched on the streets with her brothers against the British, and how she and her entire neighbourhood women burnt their imported British-cloth blouses in the street, how they were encouraged to take part in all these actions by their own fathers and brothers and husbands. That is why they put their daughters in school. My aunt is a doctor, another aunt a professor in the university.

In the website of *Ain-o-Shalish* Kendra, the women's legal aid organisation, they say that Bangladesh has given equality to women. This must be true because we have had two women Prime Ministers. And they say the law against people of the same sex loving each other was made by the British, not by my country. I also saw in *Ain-o-Shalish* that there is a group called Sisters in Islam, and Women Living Under Muslim Law. Our small group of seven discussed this – we were very excited. Will these groups help girls like me? Can we become members? Will the police find out if we send them an email and ask them for help? So again, I am afraid. So again, I must depend on the *didi*s of the Women's Centre to help me find out if we can get help from these organisations.

The other day the police arrested a group of boys who like boys in Dhanmondi, who had a social club of their own. They beat them up very badly, almost killed one. They threatened their parents and demanded money. But one of the families was a very powerful one, close to the ruling party, so the Minister came on TV and said they will have an enquiry. But he also said that what the boys did was illegal and un-Islamic and against God's will.

Sometimes I cannot think about all this anymore. I get tired of feeling alone and afraid. So I come to this room and when the *didi*s are not looking, I just like to go to the Internet and watch the Bollywood songs on the YouTube – I really like *Chhammak Chhalo* and *Kolaveri di*, or bits of Bollywood movies, or those two cute little twin girls talking to each other. At least at those moments, I feel free and happy.

From the digital audio diary of Sundaramma, leader of the village collective in Ittagi village of Bidar District:

Every day, I thank God that he helped some clever men to make a machine like this – the computer. Thanks to this miracle, a Dalit woman like me, illiterate and poor but clever and strong, can keep my thoughts safe somewhere, without knowing how to read or write. I can talk to myself, remind myself of all that I have done for our village – me, who only knew how to sow and weed and harvest a *ragi* or lentil crop, rear chickens, or sweep a floor or carry a bundle of firewood on my head or a howling child on my hip! – and I can remind myself of what I still

have to do. It also helps me talk to my unborn granddaughters and great-granddaughters so that they will get the courage to keep up the fight for women's equality, for an end to our poverty of learning and in resources, the fight that I began here in this small and ancient village, with a small group of other women like myself.

And that is not all. My son Mallesh is very clever. I have slaved and saved to make sure he stays in school, even fought when his father wanted him to quit school and join him in wage earning. And because the Goddess has made him so clever, he has been sent to the district government school, where the teachers are better and they have computers. And through that computer, he learnt that the government is giving computers to women's groups to help them learn more and manage the small businesses they have made with the many, many different loans that everybody now wants to give poor women.

So then we went to the *panchayat* and forced them to apply and get the computer for our women's group. "Fools!" they said. "You cannot even sign your names, what will you do with a computer?" But we are *sangha* women – we are long past the time of being scared of those stupid men. "Don't worry about that" we said, "that is our problem". Fools are they, not to know that to use a computer you do not need to be literate, you just need to have control over your children who can read! And we are not fools to believe everything the computer says just like we do not believe everything the landlord, or the government officer or the elected politician tells us - we discuss things and decide for ourselves.

Anyway, thanks to our Dalit leaders and our Dalit movement, all our children – at least the boys - can go to school, and some of them even managed to learn to read, even though those rascals who call themselves teachers hardly turn up once or twice a week. Well, we fixed them. We once picketed a teacher who was constantly absent for three days – he could not go home and we barely let him come out to pee (though we gave him food), so they started being afraid and coming more regularly. Anyway, the thing is even though I am his mother, my Mallesh was the cleverest of all the children, so he won a full scholarship to the district school.

So with the help of the computer – and Mallesh of course - the *sangha* women and I have started to think about how we can make our village a model village for women. And when that happens, it will be a better place for everybody. Mallesh told us about many ideas he found on the computer. I like thinking about ideas – I never had the chance before - but the ones I like best are justice and equality. I think these are women's ideas – only women really care about justice and equality. This is what we need in our village – it will be the foundation for everything we must build to make this an ideal village.

Our village will look like this:

- There will be justice and equality in all relationships – first in the family and then the whole village – nobody will be high or low, big or small, too powerful or powerless.

- There will be justice and equality in the distribution of all resources – the land, water, forests, grazing land, firewood;

- In the same way, there will be justice and equality in health, education, and all the services we need in the village - every child, girl or boy, will go to school and really learn important and valuable things, the schools will work well, the doctor and nurse will come to health centre regularly and not charge us extra money for what should be free; no woman will die in pregnancy or childbirth, no newborn will die because there was no one to save their life.

- In the same way, there will be justice and equality in the sharing of private resources like food, or the money we earn, our savings, property like animals, house, or land etc.

- Everyone will have an equal voice in decisions whether in the family or at the village council, in decisions about both private and public matters.

- In our village, no woman will ever cry because she was beaten or otherwise threatened or insulted or harassed by anyone.

- But if she is, she can go freely and unafraid to the police or the *panchayat*,

and her complaint will be heard, her case registered, and justice done.

- Everyone will have an equal right to participate in any forum if they have a right to be there - the right to participate in everything – a woman farmer in the farmers federation, a Dalit woman in the Dalit association, a Dalit or tribal girl or boy in the youth club, every member of the village, including the children, in the village council meeting and budget setting, the village meetings held by the district collector, the political party rallies, any space they want to be a part of or influence.

- There will be justice and equality in information – everyone will have the right to know the village budget, how it was spent, who decided what, who got what, who did what. We will especially know information about who stole what from whom – how much of the money for the village went into whose pocket, so we can punish them in the women's court and stop this corruption. Everyone's knowledge will be valued and respected – no one will be dismissed as ignorant or foolish.

- Everyone will be treated equally by government officials, the police and the court. But the police and court is sometimes very far away for us, so we women have created our own court in the village. The women's group came and gave us training in laws, and we are continuing the training through the computer, every month (the women's group ladies are teaching us through the computer, which becomes like a TV, but we can also talk and ask questions). Some of us have become very good judges – we have been handling many cases in the village, and especially cases where women have faced injustice. Even a lot of men – even upper caste men – have started trusting us and bringing cases to the women's court. They know we are fair and cannot be fooled, bribed or threatened. Our punishments are also fair – sometimes it is just a public acknowledgement of your mistakes and a public apology, but sometimes it is concrete penalties and fines – whether for beating your wife, encroaching on your neighbour's land, or the child care worker stealing the food from the child care centre.

- And no girl will be forced to marry if she wants to study, and no girl will be married before she is 18 years old.

Well this is all I have thought of so far, and other *sangha* women have added to it. Oh, I am not as crazy as you think. I am very serious. I am so serious that I sent a message about this plan of mine to the Chief Minister of our state (I do not know what a state is, but Mallesh says he is in charge of our village in the big city of Bangalore). I sent my plan the Prime Minister of India (Mallesh says our village is in a big country called India, he showed me a picture of this country on the computer, and I still do not understand what a country is, but I was happy I lived in such a beautiful country, shaped like a conch shell!). He says the PM is a very important main person in the government, which is like the village council of this India country. And I sent it to the President of this India country, because Mallesh said she is a lady and she would understand and support me, even though neither Mallesh nor I can understand what her job is.

I am waiting for their reply. I do not want anything from them. Everything we did so far in our village we did without knowing they existed. But I just want them to know about our plan and give their blessings. And if our village is in their 'state' and their 'country', they should know what plans we women have made to change it.

Mallesh says they will send their reply to the computer. So I am waiting. They are very busy and important people, so it will take time. In the meanwhile, I am very busy too. There is so much to do.

Disha Mullick - Project Coordinator, Nirantar, India

Prologue: A collective autobiography

Just as living and teaching in the digital, new media, network age has pushed me to push others to do – I have pulled at, interacted with, adapted, modified, shared - stretched out of shape - both my autobiography, and others', in an

attempt to create this narrative of nothing so onerous as a vision, but rather of the (collective) experience of engaging in and with a contemporary moment in feminism.

My idea was to read out (or show) a range of voices – mine, *Khabar Lahariya* journalists from Bundelkhand region of UP that I have worked with, Muslim women that have been trainees in new media trainings – emails, letters, stories, blog posts, poems, news reportage.

This is an imaginary story, of a woman in a village.

Disha Mullick

I was travelling in a train once. I was sitting on my berth. The window next to me was open, and cool breeze was coming in through it. It seemed like the trees and shrubs were running past us. The mountains and waterfalls were walking with us. I was absorbing this scene when my gaze fell upon the seat in front of me. She was sitting there, lost in her thoughts, as if she were lifeless. I stared at her for a long time. Then I broke my silence and began the conversation, with a laugh.

I've been thirsty for so long - for stories and pictures of movements and women that worked and wrote and shouted and blocked and occupied and sang and danced and stepped on toes and learnt and taught and travelled and decided to step outside before me. And lead to me being where I am. Up all night on trains that snaked through barren terrain, now cracked, now green, now yellow, listening to tales of other friends and sisters, some that turned bitter, some lost along the way, reading about them, writing about them, slipping through yellowed transparencies to see familiar faces, familiar spaces – finding my place in the past, finding a collective that I was part of, obscured in the mystery of oral histories passed down. Whoever thought about the images and stories I am living, the friends and colleagues that slipped into my life, their own experiments with form and medium, making possible re-visions of themselves, becoming bits and pieces of my kaleidoscopic vision of the world, changing its colours, making them richer, darker?

Working in Punjab is not easy

"Last year I went to Punjab to work. I took my children along. When I boarded the train from Banda I had to sit in front of the toilet, as there was no other place. The children sat on my lap the whole night. Every time someone went past, I got kicked. After a lot of difficulty on the train I managed to reach Jhansi. From Jhansi I had to take a different train and change two buses before I could reach Punjab. It took me two-and-a-half days to reach Punjab and during this time I barely ate or slept. I was exhausted by the time I reached. As soon as I reached, the contractor of the brick kiln gave me several instructions. He told me to start work immediately, even before I could cook any food for the children. I was told to use a spade to dig and break up clumps in the soil. After this I had to turn the handle of the generator for about one hour in order to pump water, which was used to moisten the soil. Then I had to further break clumps in the hard soil in order to make it soft like clay. Only after this was the soft soil used to make bricks. I used to get up at 2 am to cook food. At 3 am I had to leave home even when it was bitterly cold. I had to walk for a mile to reach the brick kiln. Things were so bad that getting one square meal in the day used to make me feel good. I got only two hours of sleep in the whole day. Sometimes out of exhaustion I used to sleep on the ground while working. Despite working so hard I was not given my full wages. The contractor even tried to molest me several times. Even if a worker made a small mistake the contractor would throw them out. On top of all this he would use the choicest abuses on us all the time. After a year of working in these conditions, I have come back to my village. But famine and starvation continue. I fear that I will have to migrate to Punjab for work again."

- KL Issue # 29, December 16-31, 2006
  (Special Issue on Famine)

I saved my own life

"My name is Muniya. I live in Ranipur village of Manikpur block. Fifteen years ago I got married to Kishori who lives in Sidhi district in Madhya Pradesh. Kishori used to frequently beat me for dowry. I finally separated from him and filed for maintenance. For the last ten years I have been living in my maternal home. In July 2005 I won the case. Kishori called to me Satna so that I could take the maintenance amount. But when I reached Satna, he took me to Maihar, and left me

with a *sadhu*. The *sadhu* said that my husband had sold me for Rs 20,000. When I heard this, I made the excuse that I needed to visit a temple to pray to a goddess and managed to leave the *sadhu*'s clutches. Instead I called the local police *thana* and told them everything. They immediately investigated the matter. Kishori and the *sadhu* were arrested and sent to jail. I am now staying with my parents and earning my own living."

- KL's concluding comment: Kishori and the sadhu *were in jail, so we could not speak to them KL Issue # 61, 15-31 August, 2005*

Am I a feminist? The question sat heavy in my inbox, sometimes from older feminists, sometimes my contemporaries and friends. It always befuddled the hell out of me. I could not imagine not being feminist. I could not imagine not being acutely aware of my gender, my normativity, my non-normativity, my class, my educational privileges, my language, my discomfort with being in the position of 'trainer' just because I had gotten off the train from Delhi, being called '*didi*' for the first time by a woman my age, but married for 12 years, been neglected, separated, now leading her own media collective. I could not imagine a self not engaged in a pedagogy of resistance in some tiny, relentless way, in imaginations of new worlds. My feminist awareness of power lurking in every observation, training, conversation, pinched me relentlessly, so that my relationship with feminism was, in a word, uncomfortable. Where did I fit into the long journeys, the pedagogies and possibilities of empowerment, the production and contestation of a public space and voice that my rural, Dalit, tribal, Muslim women colleagues and friends, had negotiated over the years?

I took up this book with a kind of idea that I might say something about my writing but now what do I feel about my writing? One must write from deep feeling, said Dostoevsky. And do I? or do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do? No I think not. In this book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense – but here I may be posing. Am I writing the hours from deep emotion?

A year passed, more maybe. My feminist pedagogy, worn down by self consciousness,

stretched itself to accommodate new technologies of communication. The murky fact of the digital divide, the pleasure and danger innate in each grip on the mouse, each page typed, email sent out, accessing desired people and places, each portrait or photo story or film that recreated or reshaped their very immediate worlds and relationships, reshaped the way the world saw them, each posting on the blog that registered that they were there, in that bus, listening to that conversation, reacting to it – voicing that reaction in a sphere distinct to the very local one they moved and worked within – being part of sparking the thrill, the capability, the exploration of a new space for knowledge production, experiencing a very different role as trainer, with the power to show how technology worked, but not what it could produce, being surprised by this rapid proliferation of new selves and stories and articulations of feminism layered in with the old. The very electric overlap between virtual and real, urban and rural, privileged and marginalised, traditional and new forms of storytelling, this is how I found my feet within feminism. Democracy can be broken into little bits. New languages – words, syntax, grammar, semantics – took form, bending and twisting existing practices of communication between us. Indeed, new ways of talking within the new network society began to be inscribed on old relationships of power, necessarily changing them, recasting them. New ways of determining who is looking, looked at, possibilities and challenges of new compositions emerged.

Disha then showed a short film where women spoke on their experience with the Internet and computer.

Still, questions of who was inviting whom into the new spaces of knowledge production, what actually happened to the new knowledge or identities created through new media, what currency they held within the terms of the local contexts and structures of our feminism remain. How do these new pedagogies of resistance, of understanding and framing the world and ourselves in it, expand the spaces we inhabit, push our ownership of them?

This is a photograph of me

It was taken some time ago.
At first it seems to be
a smeared

print: blurred lines and grey flecks
blended with the paper;

then, as you scan
it, you see in the left-hand corner
a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree
(balsam or spruce) emerging
and, to the right, half way up
what ought to be a gentle slope, a small frame
house.

In the background there is a lake
and beyond that, some low hills.

The photograph was taken
The day after I drowned.

I am in the lake, in the centre
of the picture, just under the surface.

It is difficult to say where
precisely, or to say
how large or small I am:
the effect of water
on light is a distortion

but if you look long enough,

Eventually
you will be able to see me.

- Margaret Atwood, 1966

Disha then showed the blog run by a women collective and followed it by a reading of an entry by Laxmi, who is one of the editors of Khabar Lahariya in Bihar:

"I like emailing the best, searching on google, because when I used to see people emailing, I used to wonder what they were doing and will I ever be able to do it. So when I first touched the computer and sent an email, the happiness I felt, I cannot describe in words. I was able to search for jokes and poetry and photographs. I was able to email my own experience out and read other peoples. Typing, photography, videography – I enjoyed it a lot. I keep looking for new things."

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Graciela, the moderator of the session, to conclude, read out Audre Lorde's 'Tranformation of silence into language and action' followed by excerpts from 'Human rights for the information society' by Cees J. Hamelink.

SESSION IX - Pointers from CITIGEN - What do we need to take away for theory and practice

This session presented a review and assessment of CITIGEN's research and conceptual contributions from scholars new to the network.

Reflections from:

Ranjita Mohanty, Consultant, Local Governance Initiative, Swiss Co-operation Office India & Visiting Scholar, University of Western Cape, South Africa
Shakun Daundiyakhed, Programme Coordinator, Vimochana, India

Moderator: Desiree Lewis, Think piece author, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, University of the Western Cape, South Africa

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Ranjita Mohanty - Consultant, Local Governance Initiative, Swiss Co-operation Office India & Visiting Scholar, University of Western Cape, South Africa

Ranjita began by saying that she hoped her comments would help the group think through some of the concepts mentioned in the discussions so far. She said that she would look at some key concepts from a citizenship perspective that might help revisit the idea and assumptions this project is working on.

One of the core issues of discussion, she said, was the interaction between cyberactivism, online feminist activism and the real world. Even if we are theorising about ICTs, gender and citizenship, we need to understand what is the positioning of ICTs vis-à-vis the positioning of the older media – how do they intersect, where do they remain separate, what do they borrow from each other and give to each other. Looking at ICTs activism alone, she felt, would be very limited. Ranjita mentioned that she would cover four key components of citizenship that have been generated through activism and citizenship research through the years and within those look at the issues relating to cyberactivism.

The key areas were:

1. Looking at the area of identity construction - Who is the citizen? How is a citizenship identity constructed? What are the components of it? What kind of methods? Who is doing what? Who is boundary keeping? What kind of safe spaces are constructed?
2. The terms and conditions under which citizenship practice takes place.
3. Mapping of the points of interface that the powerful actors made, whether the state, the corporates or the society or whosoever that people are pitching against.
4. How do citizens and the actors they are interfacing with them, mutually constitute each other?

Firstly, visiting the notion of identity, Ranjita said that three categories emerged from the point of view of poor women who are part of struggles. The first is that there is an online space and a physical space between which the actors are moving back and forth. They are using different kinds of strategies for communication and for networking and activism. This needs to be nuanced to begin to

Ranjita Mohanty

really see what is happening when these actors as they move through spaces - sometimes sequentially, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes with substantial time gaps. We need to understand more clearly what really happens when this kind of an activism takes place.

Another scenario, she said, was that of a conflict or when there is physical danger of being in the field, and the actors concentrate mostly on the online, not because they do not want to engage but the physical space is simply being closed or is too life threatening. In that particular context online activism is the only hope to get across their thoughts.

The third point she made was that a lot of the struggle takes place in the physical space but simultaneously there exists a cyber space. There

is a need to tease out and see who are the actors which constitute the two different spheres. It is not necessarily true that the actors who are in the real physical world are also a part of this cyberactivism. Some actors may intersect, transcend and span both the worlds but in online activism especially those using tools such as Facebook and Twitter, there exists a population which will not go out in the real world. To have access to the Internet is a privilege, and in some ways an expression of a class position. The poor women struggling will not have these resources whereas the people who are online are privileged to those kind of resources. The question then is - Is their construct of citizenship similar? If not, then what is the difference?

One of the crucial differences in cyberactivism is that it is largely disembodied and alienates itself from the capitalist context. Those who are flocking the cyberspace for solidarity are not necessarily the people carrying out the real struggle. It is good to know so many people support a cause but they are not present when the activism is taking place. This difference is very crucial to examine. Again we can ask here - is this is a new kind of construction of the citizenship identity? These disembodied selves who are clicking and saying we 'like' this, can they be ignored or overlooked if they are situated in a different material and social sphere? Are they emerging as a different kind of online 'netizen'?

The second issue is understanding the terms and conditions that the citizenship practice is enacted within. What we find in the struggles that take place in the material world is that nothing is given. What are then some of the preconditions for practising citizenship? One is information. You have to know what kind of information is there for you to act like a citizen. The second is the skill to collectivise. Not necessarily everyone knows how to collectivise and 20 people meeting is not necessarily like collectivising. So what are those skills one needs and the material support required? This might be done with the support of civil society or by themselves but the reality is that these are preconditions.

In the real world the space of activism is bound by society and the powerful actors one is pitching against. One of the theories of civil society by Neera Chandhoke says that while one is practising the citizens right to speech and expression and to collectivise - in the physical space there are norms which need to be followed. For example, you cannot be violent. The moment you become violent, you are transgressing the boundaries set by the state and your legitimacy can be questioned. So how do actors protect their legitimacy in this bounded space, needs to be understood. Also what are the preconditions and the boundaries in the cyberspace? The discussions have covered the issues of privacy and of surveillance but maybe there are more that we have not even begun talking about. It would be interesting to see the preconditions and terms and conditions under which surveillance happens for example.

Ranjita's next point was regarding interface. It is argued that in the context of global activism you cannot have everyone come together and strategise and communicate, hence a lot of that communication and strategy building takes place in the online space but we would still need an Occupy movement, a World Social Forum and a space where all the ministerial gatherings take place because that is the point of interface. Here, one has to be careful not to confuse between the methods and strategy building and the actual interface that happens vis-à-vis the actor claiming the right. You have to be there to be seen and the numbers have to be large.

The last point is how the citizens and the forces they are fighting against, mutually constitute each other. As the citizens strategise and build their online communication, do we know how the other party is responding? Are they building alternative strategies? Do they know you? Are they aware of the threat? In the physical world of activism you can see how the state and corporate respond to you and what kind of strategies they make and there is a cycle where the citizens respond and the state responds and so on. Yet in the Internet do we know if there is a response? This is to say that it could be one sided communication – we are communicating a lot among ourselves as fellow citizens and activists but how much of that is taken cognisance of and responded to by the actors we are pitching against?

Shakun Daundiyakhed - Programme Coordinator, Vimochana, India

Shakun began by saying that was work with

Vimochana which has modelled itself as a feminist group which responds to violence. The core area of their work is to reach out to women who are facing all forms of violence – whether it is in the community or a case of domestic violence at home – women of all classes and all locations are covered.

Shakun D.

She mentioned that she would attempt to flag points where the issues at hand intersect with Vimochana's work.

Vimochana works with individuals and has an outreach programme in two communities where women's suicide was very high. One is a predominantly Muslim community, the other is a migrant community. The organisation undertakes surveys with these groups and one of their conclusions was that data greatly differs when outsiders collect it, from when the women themselves collect their data. Shakun took the example of a survey undertaken of 150 women on street prostitution by 6 women from within the group. Some very interesting insights came up which had not come up before. Women, for example, confessed that they enjoyed having sex with their partners/husbands the most, which was fascinating because usually they exploit them the most. Also while it was suspected that most women would be from the lower castes their data would not clearly reflect this until the organisation collected an application for a housing scheme where women actually revealed their castes. Shakun asked that in the case of such information where the individual was studying the self - would this kind of data be evinced in an online space?

Vimochana also uses community radio in Bengaluru which has a 10-15 kms. radius and covers the Muslim community of women they work with. In about a month of establishing it, women were speaking freely on several issues – the mafia that managed their region, how they negotiated PHCs etc. They also have a website which, Shakun confessed, was difficult to maintain as the organisation is small, catering to a large population and resources are stretched. She also added that considering the discussions around 'invited spaces' – Vimochana, having observed the need for spaces to vocalise

women's issues, began having open courts of hearings for women where different stakeholders were called in to listen and participate. This, she felt, becomes an 'invited space' where policy makers are asked to listen and reflect on the policy suggestions.

She put forward her concern with digital spaces by quoting Audre Lorde – the masters tools will never destroy the masters house. In every sphere of work that one wishes to change there is a need to push borders. There was, she said, a need to look for transformative justice instead of retributive justice.

She ended with a quote for feminists: A free bird leaps on the back of the wind and floats downstream till the current ends and dips her wings in the orange sunrise and dares to claim the sky.

Discussion:

Desiree, the moderator of the session, began the discussion by summing that both speakers had concentrated on how feminist activism complicates the way we theorise around ICTs and feminism. In many ways the discussions went back to issues raised by Heike and other people. Ranjita for example pointed to the reality of the digital divide. We also need to think about the issues that the tools we are trying to use are precisely the tools that are used by global capitalism, patriarchy etc. Shakun also highlighted that the tools used by feminists can often work against them.

Srilatha asked Ranjita – if somewhere there is an implicit assumption that, citizenship is only expressed through activism? She asked this in relation to the debates of the 80-90s about passive citizenship. If one takes the example of *sanghas* which are acting on informal systems lets say customary systems and institution through which they are negotiating their lives, do we not call those as expressions of citizenship? They are not directed at the state.

The other point she made was regarding the resources one needs to act as a citizen. An important one she felt was 'enabling conditions'.

Sarala agreed with Srilatha and said how in their

own work they had tried conducting some research on the impact of women's peace activism in Sri Lanka and it was felt that protests could be measured by presence. Yet women protest in differing ways and that is not the only space of resistance. Sarala also added that she appreciated the conversation of the norms of and boundaries of public activism mentioned by Ranjita. She asked what those norms were in terms of virtual activism.

Parminder felt that Ranjita's presentation helped flag a lot of important points when one is faced with the network society scenario. Questions to ask are - What are the skills in these new spaces? Whether there are resources available? And if yes, then what happens? The good part is that it is still a space under construction. Its vocabulary, its semiotics, its boundaries - are being defined right now. So the question is - what is our contribution?

We cannot always contribute but we can identify the actors like open source groups or such groups which are helping the space to build in a certain manner and hence we know that our fights lie in these directions. Though most of the open movements mostly tend to equalise the playing field, we know that it should be a more proactive construction which goes beyond the openness movement. Similarly, regarding the point on the actual interfaces where the policy changes can take place – this is also is a problem in the online space.

Regarding Shakun's presentation, Parminder felt that the kind of descriptions she gave of how actual resistance take place, should always be kept in mind and there is need to keep learning from such experiences. When we remove ourselves from that space we will make a mistake. Those narratives are very important every time we decide to take a step.

Ranjita replied to the comments by saying that one way to build citizenship was also to build a space of one's own away from the preying eyes of the state, and it is not necessary that every act is to connect to or challenge the state. But in rights claiming the state comes into play. Of course there is a localised context in which citizenship takes place but there is also an overarching one and no matter what people say of the disappearance of the nation state, there is a nation state and it is becoming increasingly strong and overbearing. So how do we act out citizenship activism there? What is enabled in a democratic polity is that there is a space to act. Otherwise you'd have to do your citizenship act underground. So that is the enabling environment that a democratic polity provides by giving you a set of rights. At the same time, no liberty is unbounded. Who bounds it is the entity that gives you the right. It is to be understood where the boundaries come from and its not that they are never to be broken. They are broken but nonetheless it helps to accept that there are boundaries. What kind of boundaries the cyber space needs and what feminist activists can take from their own practice to this sphere, will evolve. It is an area that needs to be given serious thought.

Once concern about cyber space is that it is evolving everyday. So how do you build capabilities to enter that space? You build on the earlier capabilities but you also require newer capabilities. It changes even faster than the physical space which more or less remains the same for sometime. When we talk about terms and conditions, that is one of the challenges that needs to be thought about. How do we learn and cope with new technologies?

Shakun added an example from her experience regarding how much more proactive the lobbies of the corporate are than civil society, in responding to the issues in their environment.

Gurumurthy Kasinathan directed a question to Shakun asking – if there were any tools which were not the 'master's' tools. If the tools are used against the master does he have the choice to appropriate those tools also for the very process of oppression? Do we describe something as the 'master's tools' and leave it at that?

Shakun replied by saying that she did not think so. She felt that the digital should become one of the many ways of functioning and not the sole.

Srilatha flagged the fact that construction of norms itself had to be interrogated. Including by feminists – there existed a need to revisit their own norm construction which has generally been very exclusivist. This is deeply problematic. One of the biggest master's tools in fact is the human rights framework. They were constructed by

white Western men but some co-construction has taken place. We need to interrogate that and put it on our collective agenda.

Session X: Pointers from CITIGEN - What do we need to take away for theory and practice

This session presented a review and assessment of CITIGEN's research and conceptual contributions from scholars who are a part of the network.

Reflections from:

Lisa McLaughlin, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, Miami University, USA
Andrea Cornwall, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Professor, University of Sussex, UK
Phet Sayo, Senior Programme Officer, IDRC

Moderator: *Heike Jensen, Think-piece author, CITIGEN, and Post-doctoral researcher and lecturer, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany*

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Heike, the moderator of the session, asked the panelists to begin the session by discussing what they liked and what they were disappointed by in the researches. She added that this was not to be taken as a value judgement but as a learning. As a feminist researcher, she felt that the advisors should also speak about their personal journeys in CITIGEN.

Andrea began by sharing that she was initially reluctant to become a part of the network as she felt that she did not know enough about information society. Yet she was persuaded into joining as she had worked on participation, gender, equity and such issues, especially in the light of her work with 'Pathways of women's empowerment' research programme. Since then she has grown more and more interested in information society issues, and this project has been a big learning experience.

Her comments, she said, would reflect her pre-occupations with participation, democracy, democratisation of the public sphere and citizenship.

One of the most interesting issues that emerged from the project was how women can use digital spaces for publicity, and this emerged most significantly in the case of the women political candidates using the digital sphere. This also opens up spaces for women's creation of their worlds, and their engagement such as the case of the *Minmini* news network where they create their own versions of the news or journalists in the Philippines choosing the stories they think are significant to report. Even with all the caveats we have been discussing about privacy, the publicity is important, she felt.

Also following from the discussion on how 'the master's tools cannot be used to destroy the master's house' − she felt that the new media had something substantial to offer and that is why the discussions on resistance were interesting. She felt that it would also be interesting to observe how people who are leading non-normative lives discover themselves online.

The idea of how women change with the camera in their hand or by going online - the opportunities online spaces offer for women's play - is interesting. Hence, women's play online and their creativity and the issues of self-representation need to be looked into. Both representation and the re-presentation of the self are an important part of going into the public sphere. Who is doing the representation is also an important point in the context of participation along with the ways in which people can speak back if they feel they are being misrepresented. Andrea explained this by giving the example of a film which was made by a journalist on the sex workers of Maharashtra. This film was very racist and outrageous and it somehow reached the women. The women were deeply offended and used the camera to make a recording of their feelings and so in this manner, media provided an opportunity to talk back to power.

She said that the digital media provided the possibility to 'imagining the world differently' and this possibility to go beyond the everyday was

exciting.

Lisa shared that what excited her the most about the network was that people seemed to really own their research and were not hesitant to contradict/disagree - which was important. The fact that these studies are very grounded and focus on the local specific commonalities and differences is very important.

Phet added that the previous session about reading and silences really resonated with him as he grew up as an immigrant in Canada, and grew up feeling like a second class citizen. He was left wit hthe feeling only the words within were his although they were not articulated. He always cherished his silences and that has always guided his sense of justice, equity, aspirations. He felt that what ICTs offer, is a window to ones dreams and aspirations. Having listened to the projects, the focus on dreams and aspirations came back to him, for working at the policy level he often misses these conversations.

Heike then asked the panel to reflect on stumbling blocks/failures.

Andrea felt that the theorisation of citizenship needed to be sharpened up. Theorising citizenship in the post-colonial world, she said, was complex as one had to work through Western paradigms of the state. She felt that there was need to engage with the broader literature on citizenship such as the work of those who write about citizenship as practised solidarities, citizenship as dislocated from notions of state authority, work of people who write for and against communitarian notions of citizenship, and citizenship and spaces – that she thought might be interesting. The work of civic republican authors, the work of Hannah Arendt – she said, might be interesting and useful.

She also brought up the question of writing - what does it mean to write in a language? The movement between writing and the visual needs to be investigated, she felt. Also what are the broader implications of people spending more and more time online? This would makes the question of the relationship between lived, real spaces and digital spaces important.

She added that she was also critical of the tendency of developmental and empowerment literature to deny women the opportunity to engage with spaces for pleasure and leisure.

Lisa added that one thing that troubled her about the researches that came in, and not the think-pieces, was that, most applications that came in had inadequately developed theoretical frameworks. Not only referring to citizenship theories but also public sphere theories, feminist technology studies, political economy, cultural studies, new media and information society theory. Yet, she felt, that the network seems to have learnt along the way.

Lisa McLaughlin, Phet Sayo and Andrea Cornwall

She congratulated the teams on their work but also urged them to take their work forward. She also added that all of the studies were potentially publication worthy and that should be taken forward. It would be disappointing, she said, if this got put away just because the grant period is over.

Phet responded to Heike by saying that he felt that we had to get out of the trap of thinking that access is inclusion. We cannot think that solving the question of the digital divide will solve the questions of vulnerability, equity and inclusion. Access we have is an exclusion for someone else.

The other issue that he pointed out was regarding donor constraints and he urged the researcher community to push back on issues and constantly endeavour to negotiate with the donors.

Heike added to the discussion and said that coming from a gender studies perspective, it was important to ask why is it that we are focusing on women? She felt that the gender dynamics picture was missing and hence maybe we are not clearly seeing or analysing situations of power. A

fuller look into how these powers operate might be better, she felt.

Heike added that through the course of the meeting we had heard a lot of grounded experiences but the tough question was: Are we aiming at a grand theory? Can we do this at all? Can we do this in a regional context? Have we learnt something because we chose the South Asian region?

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Discussion:

Sepali said that her organisation came into this project kicking and screaming because they did not know much of about the Internet and digital spaces except for using email, but the journey of the research she felt had been a great learning experience. They discovered that there were women bloggers in Sinhala and Tamil, and for them this opened up a huge area of communication. While computer use is small and access is limited – yet to find that amidst that women are accessing these spaces for their own personal reasons, is exciting and it opens up a huge area for the organisation.

Srilatha felt that another area the group needed to work on was to debunk some of the myths on the fear of technology. She felt that there was a need to examine these very complex, interesting and diverse relationships - especially to posit ideas about how certain groups of people relate to technology in a certain way. Here she gave the example of a research by a Western researcher who studied traditional stoves and bemoaned their vanishing status considering it to be a loss of culture, whereas the women who actually used that stove jokingly responded and said that they would be happy to exchange their technology with hers. She felt that this possibility of re-examining ones relationship with technology was possible through all the research projects presented.

Phet mentioned that a book he would like to recommend was - 'The nature of technology' by Brian Arthur.

Lisa responded that when speaking of stoves, she was reminded of a study on the microwave oven and how it developed in a gendered way. The microwave was actually made for single men who could not cook but then this brown good became a white good for women to use. These sort of studies need to be looked at, for the talk of fear of technology can become a self fulfilling prophecy.

Parminder posited a question for the reviewers. One of the challenges that faced this research was that what it deals with – the network society - is still formative, but we know that it is critical and will become a huge issue in the future. This is challenging for both activists and researchers - dealing with a phenomenon that is not fully formed.

Oi Wan also alluded to the tricky relationship one had with technology and the need to understand it. She additionally pointed to her dilemma of constantly swinging between her research and activism aspirations. She said that initially she had been hesitant to joining this network as her organisation was not a woman's organisation. Yet now she feels that this markedly brings out the need for different types of organisations – communication rights and women's for example – to come together.

Desiree responded to Heike's comment on how gender studies demanded a larger understanding which went beyond women's experience with technology. She said that from her own experience with South African projects on making men a part of the solution, she felt very uneasy about opening up the project.

Crystal added that she felt that many Southern women's organisations were conservative in their analysis of the Global South and hence there was a need for the women of the South to assert their voices. They are far over shadowed by Western voices currently, she felt.

Anita responded by saying that this was a *deja vu* moment for her. She was once asked to write a piece for the IDS Bridge series – a primer on gender and ICTs. The editor and the reviewers said that the piece was fine but it is about women, and not about gender. She said that she then wrote a mail about how she felt it was an immense paradox to write about gender structures as superior to an opposition to patriarchy. She felt that talking about women is implicitly talking about gendered structures. Why should we follow the Western norms about analysis? Why should we just be playing with categories? For her, the politics of gender in this

sense is interconnected with analysis of patriarchy and needs to be. This is the Southern point, she felt.

Andrea responded by saying that this was the exciting part of the research. Why do we have to be academic? It is very important to keep the activist side alive to enrich the North-South academic debate. The conversation around including men, is a very contested arena. Yes there was a move towards men, but that was quickly surpassed by focussing on girls and women and boys and men as separate areas of programming. Masculinity studies has tended towards being a depoliticised area that does not touch on patriarchy or such structural issues. There is a need to get away from the essentialism in this, she felt. We need to be careful not to romanticise oppressive relations among women themselves and need to be able to look at the hard questions.

Lisa added that the theory-practice debate has been with us for long. She often felt that the sharpest most critical people are often from NGOs and some of the least capable people are sometimes from the universities. Yet she felt polarisation does not work and is not helpful. She considered herself to be an activist and an academic. She also said she believed in situated knowledge but it did not mean that one cannot be home and studying a topic. While she will never be able to experience the lives of women interviewed in Asia she does realise that there are power differentials and aspects of hierarchy that need to be taken into account.

Phet added that in IDRC, the intent behind funding was to work towards policy change but they were aware this happens in complex ways and that in development research, both theoretical and empirical studies are thrown up.

Session XI: Space for musings – Reflecting about the CITIGEN network and beyond

This session was an open space to reflect upon and look at individual and organisational points of interest in the network and its future.

Anchored by:

Srilatha Batliwala, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Scholar, AWID, India
Anita Gurumurthy, Coordinator, CITIGEN, and Executive Director, IT for Change, India

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For the last session of the meeting, the participants were divided into four groups which had some quality time to reflect upon the points of interest in the network and its future. Srilatha, who was anchoring the session along with Anita, introduced the session mentioning that she felt the exercise being undertaken, be titled - 'Feminist visions of the network society'.

The thoughts of **Group 1** were shared by Crystal who said that the first issue that they identified was citizenship and talking about citizenship in the Global South and developing the South-South connection. They wanted a deeper enquiry which took into account the regional and the local in light of the discussions at the meeting, where many felt that it was important for to ground our work in our literature and theory in the South and study how we see it unfold and unpack.

Oi Wan added that this referred to studying both the physical and the virtual space, asking how people can get together in a network, what are the factors or what is the motivation for them to get together and how do we create a network space among the global civil society.

She added that the network space was also related to the concept of 'invited space' that was discussed. How do we get people together and then 'invent' in this space, for all groups of people? Within virtual space the group wanted to look into the politics of representation and how certain kinds of representation can empower people. They were also interested in the symbolic and imaginary space in the virtual world and how it affects reality – they expressed the need to understand the dynamics between the virtual and the real.

Sarala presented on behalf of **Group 2**. She said that they had discussed the need to develop a feminist framework, or provide feminist input into the discussions taking place on the regulations of the network society - the rule settings, the norms. Yet the question that arose was what would be a feminist's take on those questions? What would be our vision? What would those norms, rules, regulations look like? The group felt that the form should be friendly so that all sections of society could understand them. Conversation should not only remain at the theoretical level, or at UN forums.

It was felt that it was also important to include the vulnerabilities of the feminist engagement - what it means to participate in the network society and why we withdraw because of the risks involved in participating in the network society – should get covered.

In terms of strategies, the group felt that more collaborations between South-South feminist groups were required. The group, she said, also spoke about building capacities of women's groups to understand the structural aspects of ICTs. Connect the different type of rights and ensure that communication rights are incorporated in other struggles.

The thoughts of **Group 3** were presented by Parminder. He reported that they had spoken of two methods of moving forward. One was through face-to-face meetings. These meetings could also be used to discuss the larger general framing of issues like what is gender, power, where is power located etc. The second point was that the activists - researchers mix must be maintained and the network that is created should consist of both.

There were three major substantive issues the group looked which had several subsets. The first was that participatory communication work being done using traditional communication technologies like video and community radio should be shared across geographic spaces and should be mixed and matched with online work that is being done and seen together. This should include seeing how normative frameworks from one, which has been in practise for longer, can be used in online spaces and what kind of normative sharing and shaping can be done through this process. Also, an important question arose – what happens when small things go to big screens (like for examples, a small local video gets shared on the Internet)? New changes emerge - a video which was not supposed to be there is suddenly open to the whole world. Even if we do this deliberately, what happens then? Taking online spaces into the hold of participatory communications is one area on intervention.

He reported that the group also spoke extensively on power play in online spaces. Power as a principle analytical tool for all network society work should be developed and a methodology created around it. The group also suggested looking at how power is exercised, for example, when a meeting is held in online and offline spaces.

The third issue that was tackled by the group, was the politics of representation. The group expressed concern that in projects we are constantly trying to push a computer in the hands of a woman and are not sure what she wants to do and end up trying to represent her interests unsuccessfully. In online spaces too representation is a big issue. So as a whole the politics of representation, needs to be studied.

The **Group 4** presentation was made by Graciela who shared that the issues that the group raised as relevant are actually questions that need to be probed further. The first question was: What happens when new technologies come to communities at the grassroot level and how do they change relationships between the women in the community and the community. Another question was - How do we bridge the gap between the inside and the outside and to what extent can we do it? The inside being those who have access or who have particular abilities or are within the language group and the outside being those who do not have access, or do not

share these particular abilities or are from less dominant language groups. The group felt that there was a need to understand the ways in which this gap could be bridged and gauge the extent it was possible.

Another issue discussed was – language. The group asked what kind of horizontal networks and relationships are we able to build between the determined linguistic identities and different linguistic groups? What are the power relations embedded in these networks?

Parminder speaking on behalf of Group 3

In terms of methodologies the group spoke about the importance of using video and audio; revisiting the strategies that were used in language studies and language issues; working within feminist strategy of inclusiveness and openness; and also using non-hierarchical and circular methodologies in ways of working. Also the group highlighted the importance to revisit older feminist strategies and try to incorporate them in addressing new challenges. They also felt that there was need to look, using the feminist perspective, at how self-representation and identities form using new media.

Srilatha, summed up the last session by saying that the groups had actually managed to identify ten themes and ten methods or approaches which would help take forward the conversations of CITIGEN. She then asked the network members how this could be taken forward in a more concrete manner. While IT for Change, she said, would continue engaging with these questions, the other members, she felt, also needed to contribute in a more substantive manner. One of the wisdoms, she felt, that needed to be harvested, was how to generate

resources to do this work. What happens often is that we allow someone to take leadership in resource generation and then end up feeling that the situation has become hierarchical. This implies that we need to work in more collaborative ways, sharing the burden of raising resources in a new way.

The concluding meeting of CITIGEN was then closed with a thank you note from Anita Gurumurthy.

Appendix I : Background note and agenda
Appendix II : Participants List

<p style="text-align:center">Final meeting of the</p>

Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society (CITIGEN) Research Programme

<p style="text-align:center">15th to 17th February 2012, Bengaluru</p>

<p style="text-align:center">Organised by IT for Change and supported by IDRC</p>

Background and Agenda

The final meeting of the CITIGEN Asia research network will be an occasion for the network members to take stock of the work done and to reflect upon the questions and concerns framing the research endeavour that they have been a part of. The network is a loose group of researcher-activists and activist-researchers interested in examining the relationship between gender and the information society, a key construct to understand contemporary life, from the vantage point of women's participation and citizenship. Starting off in the middle of 2010, the researches undertaken by network members have been accomplished in a very short and tight time span, allowing for certain questions to be problematised sharply, although explored only in somewhat reasonable, but not entirely satisfactory, depth. There is a need to look back at the research findings and re-map the analytical field along with those who may be new to the network, and re-frame the field of feminist knowledge and praxis in this emerging domain.

While the insights from the work done are sought to be shared with a wider group, an equally important agenda is to invite engagement from those who are new to the network, and collectively, delve into, tease out and make sense of the gender and social justice politics of the network society. At a meta level, the research 'outputs' of this network comprise work in progress as tentative framings informed by the urgent need for feminist political theory to be alive to an emerging social order that is mediated by digital technologies. The meeting is thus an occasion for scholars of different persuasions and epistemic fields to come together along with other social change actors, to chart Southern feminist positionings, concerning theory and practice, in and about the network age.

Day 1	15th February 2012
3.30 pm	Registration and tea / coffee
4.00 to 4.15 pm	Introduction to the meeting - *Arpita Joshi, Research Associate, IT for Change, India*
4.15 to 4.45 pm	Warm up, ice breakers and introductions
4.45 to 6.15 pm	**Session 1: What is network society all about? - Feminist analysis of contemporary times** **A freewheeling conversation with:** *Andrea Cornwall, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Professor, University of Sussex, UK* *Graciela Selaimen, Coordinator, Instituto NUPEF, Brazil* *Lam Oi Wan, Regional Editor for Northeast Asia, globalvoicesonline.org, China* *Srilatha Batliwala, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Scholar, AWID* **Anchor:** *Parminder Jeet Singh, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Executive Director, IT for Change, India* *The panel will reflect upon critical questions confronting feminist politics in relation to the rise of the global middle class, the fragmentation of the public sphere, cultures of consumerism and hyper-capitalism, and the changing nature of the state. Exchanging views, panelists will explore how networked ways of being and doing change institutions, social practices and norms, requiring new frameworks to grapple with the feminist project of democracy and gender justice.*
6.15 to 7.45 pm	**Session 2: Techno parables and feminist paradoxes - Narrations of the CITIGEN stories** *This session will follow a story telling format. Rather than talk in a linear way about 'findings' and 'conclusions', it will present readings of research contexts that highlight the complexity of the technology-gender discourse. Stories of women's embeddedness in the context, their creative and subversive adaptations of digital space, and the paradoxes that arise in the process, will be shared. This will make explicit the power structures, including digital architectures, that clash with feminist methods and conceptions of change. The moderator will synthesise the narrations and facilitate interactions with the audience.* **Story-tellers:** **The Philippines story** *– Francisco dela Tonga, Youth Coordinator, Likhaan, Philippines; and Lisa McLaughlin, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, Miami University, USA* **The South African story** *– Desiree Lewis, Think piece author, CITIGEN, and*

	Associate Professor, University of the Western Cape, South Africa; and Crystal Orderson, Think piece author, CITIGEN, and Specialist Correspondent, SABC News, South Africa **The Taiwan and Honk Kong story** *– Philippa Smales, Researcher, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, Thailand* **Moderator:** *Phet Sayo, Senior Programme Officer, IDRC*
Day 2	**16th February 2012**
9.00 to 10.30 am	**Session 3: Making network society deliver for gender justice - Some answers and questions from the CITIGEN researches** *Presentations in this session will draw upon situated research in different contexts, addressing the following points:* • *The context and issues* • *What the research explored* • *What the research found – a thesis on technology, networks, gender and citizenship* • *Open questions – for theory and practice* *The discussion following the presentation will attempt to engage with the questions, opening with comments from the moderator.* **Presentations:** **India**: *Binitha V. Thampi, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, India; and Aarti Kawlra, Associate Faculty and Project Consultant, Department of Humanities and Social Science, Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, India* **Sri Lanka**: *Chandrika Sepali Kottegoda, Director, Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka; and Sarala Emmanuel, Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka* **China:** *Lam Oi Wan, Regional Editor for Northeast Asia, globalvoicesonline.org, China; and Michelle Fong, Campaign and Advocacy, Internet Governance and Freedom Project, Inmedia, China* **Moderator:** *Lisa McLaughlin, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, Miami University, USA*
10.30 to 10.50 am	Tea / Coffee break
10.50 to 12.20 pm	**Session 4: Can we grasp the big picture? - A panel discussion** *This session will address the ecologies shaping gender and citizenship in the network society. It will take on the big questions of democratic deficit in global governance, the complexity around free speech in relation to the national and global Internets, network capitalism, and the commodification of sexuality. The discussion following*

	the presentations will explore the limits of existing analytical categories and the crisis of the normative-institutional. **Panelists:** *Big business and big brother: Revisiting 'old' issues around gender and citizenship in the network society* – Heike Jensen, Think-piece author, CITIGEN, and Post-doctoral researcher and lecturer, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany *ACTA, SOPA, IG and the rest: Making sense of the global politics shaping network society and gender justice* – Parminder Jeet Singh, Advisor, CITIGEN , and Executive Director, IT for Change, India *How the Internet recasts questions of sexuality, subjectivity and violence* – Jelen Paclarin, Executive Director, Women's Legal and Human Rights Bureau, Philippines **Panel moderator:** *Andrea Cornwall, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Professor, University of Sussex, UK*
12.20 to 1.30 pm	Lunch
1.30 to 3.00 pm	**Session 5: What matters in building feminist power through technologies** *The session will reflect upon the way power relationships are inscribed in the autonomous course of the 'digital everyday'. It will then engage with the question of how technology can be appropriated to serve a collective feminist consciousness and what would be the way to make this happen. The anchor will open the session with her remarks and then invite the speakers to deliver their power speech. (No text, go multimedia!)* **Power speeches delivered by:** *Gayatri Buragohain, Executive Director, Feminist Approach to Technology, India* *Aparna Kalley, Project Coordinator, Prakriye – Centre for Community Informatics and Development, IT for Change, India* *Jan Moolman, Women's Rights Projects Coordinator, Association for Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme, South Africa* **Anchor:** *Geetanjali Mishra , Executive Director, CREA, India*
3.00 to 3.20 pm	Tea / Coffee break
3.20 to 4.40 pm	**Session 6: Towards a synthesis of CITIGEN's thoughts and practices – what does the network society have to do with discourses of gender and citizenship** *This presentation will attempt a tentative synthesis of the research projects*

	undertaken by the CITIGEN research programme. **Presentation by:** *Anita Gurumurthy, Coordinator, CITIGEN, and Executive Director, IT for Change, India*
Day 3	**17th February 2012**
9.00 to 10.20 am	**Session 7: Technology, transformation and tipping points – Case studies of non-linear change** *Taking forward perspectives from practitioner standpoints, this session will demonstrate how progressive community based change can be effected through technologies. Panelists will share experiences of work with communities and elaborate how the nature of technology-induced change presents itself, and what could be the key 'tipping points'.* **Panelists:** *Jessica Colaco, Research Lead at iHub Research, iHub, Kenya* *Meghana Rao, Manager - Communications, Breakthrough, India* *Arpita Joshi, Research Associate, IT for Change, India* **Moderator:** *Seema Nair, Programme Officer of ICT / Media and Gender, Women and Development, HIVOS*
10.20 to 11.30 pm	**Session 8: 'Money, a room and network freedoms' – My vision of democracy and gender justice** **An book-reading session with:** *Disha Mullick, Project Coordinator, Nirantar, India* *Srilatha Batliwala, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Scholar, AWID* **Moderator:** *Graciela Selaimen, Coordinator, Instituto NUPEF, Brazil* *This session will adopt a 'reading out' format. Virginia Woolf, English writer and publisher, said in her book in 1929 that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is going to write". Just to provocatively rephrase Virginia Woolf, 'network freedoms' has been interpolated into her quotation as a metaphoric reading of the possible ingredients of contemporary feminist politics. Participants in this session would share their vision of gender justice and democracy, interpreting what rights, freedoms and citizenship imply in contemporary times shaped by digital technologies. The moderator will sum up with her comments on global developments around Internet rights.*
11.30 to 11.50 pm	Tea / Coffee break
11.50 to 12.40 pm	**Session 9: Pointers from CITIGEN - What do we need to take away for**

	theory and practice *This session will present a review and assessment of CITIGEN's research and conceptual contributions from scholars new to the network. The moderator will help sum up the reflections.* **Reflections from:** *Ranjita Mohanty, Consultant, Local Governance Initiative, Swiss Co-operation Office India & Visiting Scholar, University of Western Cape, South Africa* *Shakun Daundiyakhed, Programme Coordinator, Vimochana, India* **Moderator:** *Desiree Lewis, Think piece author, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, University of the Western Cape, South Africa*
12.40 to 1.40 pm	Lunch
1.40 to 2.40 pm	**Session 10: Pointers from CITIGEN - What do we need to take away for theory and practice** *This session will present a review and assessment of CITIGEN's research and conceptual contributions from advisors of the programme, and IDRC, the funding agency that supported the programme. The moderator will help sum up the reflections.* **Reflections from:** *Lisa McLaughlin, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, Miami University, USA* *Andrea Cornwall, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Professor, University of Sussex, UK* *Phet Sayo, Senior Programme Officer, IDRC* **Moderator:** *Heike Jensen, Think piece author, CITIGEN, and Post-doctoral researcher and lecturer, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany*
2.40 to 4.00 pm	**Session 11: Space for musings – Reflecting about the CITIGEN network and beyond** *This will be an open space to reflect upon and look at individual and organisational points of interest in the network and its future.* **Anchored by:** *Srilatha Batliwala, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Scholar, AWID* *Anita Gurumurthy, Coordinator, CITIGEN, and Executive Director, IT for Change, India*

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