



Gender-**IS**-Citizenship.net



**Report of the First Meeting of the Asia Research Network on
Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society**

27 – 30 July 2010, Bengaluru, India

Coordinated by



Supported by



**A Report of the
Meeting of the Asia Research Network on
Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society**

27 – 30 July 2010
Fireflies, Bengaluru

Coordinated by IT for Change

Supported by IDRC

2010

IT for Change, Bengaluru

Table of Contents

Abbreviations and Acronyms.....	3
List of Participants.....	4
Day 1: 27 July 2010.....	7
Inaugural Session: Welcome and Introduction to the CITIGEN Programme.....	7
Icebreaker.....	7
Clarification about the objectives and structure of the meeting.....	8
Evening Session: Mapping Initial Thoughts on Digital Technology and Structural Change.....	9
Day 2: 28 July 2010.....	12
Morning Session I: Citizenship, Democracy and the State in a Globalising World: Three Submissions in Nine Minutes.....	12
Morning Session II: Contextualising Women’s Citizenship in a Globalising World.....	15
Morning Session III: Knowing the Information Society Animal: Some Inputs – Parminder Jeet Singh.....	19
Afternoon Session I: Discussion on Reading Resource Set 1	23
Afternoon Session II: Discussion on Reading Resource Set 2.....	25
Evening Session: Some findings from the EroTICs project – Ms. Indira Maya Ganesh and Ms. Manjima Bhattacharjya.....	26
Day 3: 29 July 2010.....	29
Morning Session I: Media and the Public Sphere in the Digital Age – a fiery feminist talk show, hosted by Ms. Srilatha Batliwala. Participants: Prof. Lisa McLaughlin, Ms. Sepali Kottegoda, Ms. Oiwan Lam.....	29
Morning Session II: Knowledge Politics in the Information Age - Inputs by Mr. Gurumurthy Kasinathan, followed by discussion on the presentation and Reading Resource Set 3.....	33
Afternoon Session I: Time-Bound Group Work on Refining Research Questions.....	38
Afternoon Session II: Small Group Work with Leaders of Individual Research Projects and Advisors to the Asia Level Research Programme.....	39
Evening Session: Mapping the Challenges and Spaces for Women’s Citizenship in the Post-National Context – Ms. Gita Sen.....	40
Day 4: 30 July 2010.....	44
Morning Session I: Presentations on Research Projects.....	44
“ <i>The Power to Organise and Engage: The Use of ICT by Women Migrant Domestic Workers’ Organisations</i> ” – Dr. Hsiao-Chuan Hsia and Dr. Philippa Smales.....	44
“ <i>Women’s Online Participation and the Transformation of Citizenship in Hong Kong</i> ” – Mr. Iam Chong and Ms. Oiwan Lam.....	46
Morning Session II: Presentations on Research Projects.....	49
“ <i>Women and the New Media in the Margins of the Sri Lankan State</i> ” – Dr. Sepali Kottegoda and Ms. Sarala Emmanuel.....	49
“ <i>ICTs, Gender and Inclusive Citizenship: The Bangladesh Case</i> ” – Ms. Sohela Nazneen.....	50
Afternoon Session I: Some thoughts on CITIGEN and the path forward: What we have heard in the three days of the workshop – Ms. Srilatha Batliwala and Ms. Anita Gurumurthy.....	52
Afternoon Session II: Presentations on Research Projects.....	53

“Strengthening Capacities and Linkages of Civil Society Groups and Academe-Based Institutions to Promote Gender-Sensitive and Rights-Based Perspectives through Citizens’ Electoral Participation” – Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio and Mr. Ibarra Gutierrez.....53

“The potential of ICT for Elected Women Representatives of Kerala, India” – Ms. Raji P.R.....53

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACTA	Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement
APC	Association for Progressive Communications
APWLD	Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
CITIGEN	Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
EWR	Elected Women Representatives
FOSS	Free and Open Source Software
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFMD	Global Forum for Migration and Development
ICANN	Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IT	Information Technology
ITfC	IT for Change
TASAT	TransAsia Sisters Association
TRIPS	Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UFDWR	United for Foreign Domestic Workers Rights
WHO	World Health Organisation
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organisation

Meeting of the Asia Research Network on Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society

27 – 30 July 2010

Fireflies, Bangalore

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Grantees	
<i>Bangladesh</i>	Sohela Nanzeen, BRAC Development Institute, BRAC University
<i>China</i>	Ip Iam Chong, Hong Kong In-Media, Lingnan University, Hong Kong Oi Wan Lam, Global Voices Online and Hong Kong In-Media, Hong Kong
<i>Sri Lanka</i>	Chandrika Sepali Kottegoda, Women and Media Collective Anne Sarala Emmanuel, Suriya Women's Development Centre Sachini Perera, Women and Media Collective
<i>Philippines</i>	Sylvia Estrada Claudio, Center for Women's Studies, University of the Philippines Ibarra M. Gutierrez III, University of Philippines
<i>Thailand and Taiwan</i>	Philippa Joan Smales, Labour and Migration Programme, Secretariat, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), Thailand Hsiao-Chuan Hsia, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), Taiwan
<i>India</i>	Mini Sukumar, University of Calicut Raji P.R., Society for the Promotion of Alternative Computing and Employment (SPACE)
Advisors	Lisa McLaughlin, Miami University, Ohio, USA Srilatha Batliwala, Association for Women's Rights in Development, India
Resource persons	Gita Sen, Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Bengaluru, India Maya Indira Ganesh, Association for Progressive Communications (APC) EroTICs, India Manjima Bhattacharjya, Association for Progressive Communications (APC) EroTICs, India
IDRC	Ramata Molo Thioune, IDRC, Senegal

IT for Change	Anita Gurumurthy Gurumurthy Kasinathan Parminder Jeet Singh Aparna Kalley Chinmayi Arakali Gabriela Goulart Mora Janaki Nandan Krittika Vishwanath Krupa Thimmaiah Prasanna Kumar Gowda Shivani Kaul Pablo Grandjean
	Meera Pillai, Independent Consultant and Rapporteur of the workshop, Bengaluru, India

A Report of the Meeting of the Asia Research Network on Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society

27 – 30 July 2010, Bengaluru

The Asia-level Research Programme on “Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society”, coordinated by IT for Change (ITfC), Bengaluru, and supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), aims at exploring how the concept of citizenship can be useful to study the gendered context of the emerging techno-social paradigm. The opportunities and challenges for women’s equality and empowerment in the emerging context need to be framed in a nuanced way, juxtaposing the analysis of gender relations with the broader questions of development, participation and power. The Programme is thus an attempt to build a theoretical framework and generate policy directions from the standpoint of marginalised women in the region. It will broaden the conceptual horizon about gender and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), towards a politicisation and radicalisation of the ‘access-centred’ discourse so that the core feminist question about power, justice and equity can be addressed in its full implications.

To this end, pre-proposals were invited from across South and South-East Asia, of which the Advisory Committee to the programme selected six particularly outstanding and diverse pre-proposals to submit full proposals in order to receive grants. The selected research teams, from Bangladesh, China, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand and Taiwan, were invited to a preliminary meeting of the research network, which was held at the Fireflies Ashram in Bengaluru (27 – 30 July 2010)¹.

The meeting had the following objectives:

- To develop a shared understanding of the aims of the Asia-level Research Programme on “Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society” (the CITIGEN programme) towards feminist theory-building and advocacy.
- For the above, to build a shared space to become aware about, understand, reflect and articulate the complexities around the intersecting discourses of gender, citizenship and digital technologies.
- To begin the process of locating individual research projects in relation to a wider ecology of projects that make the CITIGEN programme, so that the whole is larger than the sum of its constituent parts.

Presented below is a report of the workshop.

¹ The Pakistan research team was not present at the workshop.

DAY 1: 27 JULY 2010

Inaugural Session: Welcome and Introduction to the CITIGEN Programme

The workshop began with **Anita Gurumurthy**, Executive Director of IT for Change and Programme Coordinator of the Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society Research Programme, welcoming the grantees from Bangladesh, China, India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Thailand to the workshop. She introduced the members of the Advisory Group to the programme, Ms. Srilatha Batliwala, prominent gender specialist and Scholar Associate with the Association for Women's Rights in Development, and Ms. Lisa McLaughlin, Associate Professor of Women's Studies and Media Studies, Miami University, Ohio. She informed the group that the third member of the Advisory Group, Ms. Andrea Cornwall, Professor of Anthropology and Development, School of Global Studies, University of Sussex, was unable to participate in the workshop.

The group was then introduced to Ms. Ramata Molo Thioune, Programme Officer at IDRC, who, Ms. Gurumurthy said, has been an important partner in conceptualising a discourse on technology going beyond the access-centred perspective, the central question in the literature on the subject for the past ten years, into the politics of exclusion. The idea for the project had originated in a desire to look at how the everyday lives of women, and gender as it was played out in different societies and contexts, were framed by the global everyday as shaped by technologies. **While the proposals that had been accepted were all concerned with citizenship, they nevertheless presented a tapestry of different threads by which information technology (IT) intersected with gender, feminism and citizenship. Creating an umbrella conceptual framework within which these differences could be accommodated, and to find an appropriate expression, would be a challenge, but equally, a strength.** The scale of the project was not large. However, the purpose was to create a network which was not solely based on the sharing of funds, but which could be used for policy advocacy, interventions and reflections on practice. This required relationships of trust, and hence the network was not too dispersed. **Ms. Ramata Molo Thioune** hoped that the workshop would be an opportunity for partners to take back with them more than their individual projects, while contributing to making the whole programme more than the sum of its constituent projects.

Expressing her happiness at being at the workshop, she said that this was her first opportunity to be in Asia. The CITIGEN Programme, and the workshop, were being funded by the IDRC's ICTs for Development programme. She informed the group that, because of a change in programming structure at IDRC, this programme would be actively integrated into other programmes of IDRC, for example, Women and Citizenship, or State, Security and Justice, from the following year.

However, IDRC continues to remain committed to issues of gender and women's rights, including in the context of the information society. Ms. Thioune also stressed that the links within the network should not be limited to the financial, and that the dynamics of participation and relationship would be critical. She also expressed the hope that the project could contribute to learnings related to gender and ICTs and feed into the understandings arising from similar initiatives supported by IDRC in Africa and Latin America.

Icebreaker

Encouraging the participants at the workshop to get to know each other a little better, **Ms. Shivani Kaul** (ITfC) suggested doing a round of introductions about the participants, their work, and their 'secret agenda' while at the workshop. **Ms. Lisa McLaughlin** said that her secret agenda was to

understand the complexities of India. **Ms. Ramata Molo Thioune** shared that she was currently developing a new programme for IDRC on Social and Economic Policy, and hoped that the workshop would give her ideas that could inform the new programme. **Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh** (ITfC) confessed that he generally tended to take an action-oriented stance, and that such workshops often battered his frames of analysis, and he hoped to grapple with the intellectually stimulating talks during the workshop. **Ms. Sohela Nazneen** (BRAC Development Institute, Bangladesh) hoped to stay away from technology while discussing technology, while **Mr. Ip Iam Chong** (Lingnan University, Hong Kong) hoped to get to know Bengaluru better, as he had heard a great deal about its relationship with IT. **Mr. Ibarra M. Gutierrez III** (“Barry”, University of the Philippines) hoped to get in touch with his inner feminist self through the workshop, while **Ms. Hsiao-Chuan Hsia** (Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, APWLD) revealed laughingly that her secret agenda was to add more work to her already overwhelming workload so that she could be even more overwhelmed! **Ms. Gabriela Goulart Mora** (Communications Officer at ITfC) said that she would be supporting the group with all its technology and communication related needs, and that her secret agenda was to contribute to everyone else’s secret agenda.

Clarification about the objectives and structure of the meeting

Taking the participants through the agenda of the workshop, **Ms. Anita Gurumurthy** expressed the hope that the participants would offer their intellectual and creative leadership over the next three days to be each other’s resource persons. One of the ambivalences of the current research programme was that it could not lean on ready-made knowledge: the group was starting from the premise that the intersecting terrains of gender, citizenship and the information society were not well formulated. Hence, at this stage, the notion of a conceptual framework was rather amorphous.

She suggested that what might work was a movement from the general to the particular; sharing the ideas of democracy, equality and justice that ignited our imaginations to take us slowly to the intersecting spaces of gender, citizenship and the information society. The process would involve learning and unlearning, visiting ideas, revisiting assumptions, and taking risks with articulations. This reflective step would hopefully help the participants capture a tentative framework for the programme which they could thereafter use to revisit their own projects, delve deeper into their research plans and assumptions, and eventually share the resulting insights with the commons. Such a process would also involve readings, which the participants would process and bring back to the group.

Ms. Anita Gurumurthy hoped that this progression would make the group a little more confident and a lot more energised in going back to their own research projects. To encourage reflexivity as the group went along, a People’s Wall had been created in the room, for members to share their suggestions, anxieties and Eureka! moments.

On Day 1, there would be formal session which would explore how technologies were changing institutions.

On Day 2, the group would work on getting a good theoretical grasp of how great inclusions and exclusions take place in the intersections between gender, citizenship and ICTs. In order to do so, small groups would discuss various concepts related to the information society, from community informatics to participatory democracy analysis, on the basis of two sets of reading resources². The wisdom of the collective could thereby bear upon the complexity of the structural shifts that are taking place and the way these relate to the embedded and embodied realities of women. This programme wishes to influence the existing body of knowledge about gender, citizenship and ICTs, through a collective reflection triggered by the current theories and leading to deeper analyses.

² The sets of reading can be found on http://gender-is-citizenship.net/?page_id=12#Inception.

Day 3 would give the space for a 'fiery feminist talk show' during which the group would interact intensely with both members of the advisory team, and feminist activist and academic, Ms. Gita Sen, through a combination of methodologies. Such a forum would enable the group to engage with both the contestations around knowledge, our understanding of the public sphere, and of technological governance in the information society, while allowing to bring the micro-level specifics of the participants' projects.

On Day 4, research teams would, hopefully, use the insights of the previous three days to explore how their proposals were located within the larger framework of the information society.

Evening Session: Mapping Initial Thoughts on Digital Technology and Structural Change

Ms. Anita Gurumurthy encouraged participants to explore, in small groups, how ICTs, including the internet, were rewriting the grammar of society and changing its institutions, including the family and the state, as well as notions such as governance and social movements. What is promising about these changes, what is worrisome, and what is ambiguous or confounding? The discussions raised more questions than answers.

Reporting on the discussions of group 1, **Ms. Chandrika Sepali Kottegoda** made three major points. She said that the new spaces created by the internet has been significant for traditionally marginalised groups to articulate shared identities in online communities. However, while ICTs promote participation and can promote organisation, they may also have the effect of putting individual concerns into common fora, instead of sharing as a prelude to make change happen. Hence, whether the spaces created by ICTs could be a substitute for traditional spaces, like political organising through rallies, remained a question. How could excluded groups find a mix that worked, strike a balance between using new spaces and traditional spaces?

Secondly, the group felt that there was a need to look beyond the way digital media impacts civil society to analyse the way the advent of new technologies has changed the structure of governments and markets. However, the tools to be used in such analyses still need to be explored.

Thirdly, the group pointed out that ICTs were, in many ways, still a middle-class preoccupation, with what some take for granted not being accessible to vast numbers across the planet. Hence, in spite of the excitement about technologies lowering the barriers to participation, the class character of the digital world still needs to be interrogated.

The deliberations of Group 2 concluded that ICTs were helpful for political movements in current contexts. Reporting for the group, **Ms. Sarala Emmanuel** said that the experiences in Hong Kong, where people have a high degree of access to ICTs, showed that these were used for political organising during the economic crisis but only to a certain extent . However, in cases of political upheaval, e.g. in the context of the SARS epidemic, ICTs were a lot more used to support people in accessing services. Hence, **access alone was not a sufficient cause for ICTs to become a political force; a political reason, a substantial motivation, was essential to trigger its use in the context of political movements.** Furthermore, the group stated that ICTs helped women overcome the constraints of mobility to a certain extent. For this to be effective, different forms would need to be linked and used in conjunction: for example, using mobile phones to access community radio.

The group also noted the importance of recognising the inherent limitations of certain technologies. For instance, SMS is a useful method for quick organising, but not for detailed political discussions. Furthermore, new technologies can also be used for purposes inimical to the causes of citizenship; e.g., for greater surveillance and control by the state.

Access to ICTs also aggravated existing inequalities. Paradoxically, in some developing countries,

there may be policies to promote greater access, even though these are not backed by sufficiently strong programs and resources. Using ICTs for development is not always consciously related to citizenship but the theme of the workshop worked as a reminder to show how a good deal of this work could qualify as being associated with citizenship.

Group 2 also raised questions about how old and new forms of technology were related and about exploring the impact of decisions related to ICT governance taken at the global level on the local level.

Group 3 stressed the need for a political impetus for an increased use of ICTs to promote greater participation. Group 3 furthermore felt that there was a dialectical relationship between the use of ICTs and social and political action and that such use could expand or reduce the impact on citizenship, depending on the context. Reporting on experiences recounted by members of his group, Mr. **Barry Gutierrez** noted the variety of situations. In the state of Karnataka (India), ICTs are being used to privatise and centralise public services, whereas in neighbouring Kerala, communities are being trained to use ICTs to promote decentralisation and greater transfer of power to local governments.

The group also suggested that concepts of private and public were being redefined by the new media. New technologies help expanding people's private selves, and putting individual lives into social spaces in new ways, but often such participation only occurs at a very superficial level. Likewise, digital media is used to reveal information not published by the mainstream media; nevertheless, the predominant use of English hinders the reach that such publications could have if local languages were used.

Group 3 also raised concerns about the impact of a political use of new media by comparatively weaker groups on extant power structures. For example, in Taiwan, because foreign domestic workers use mobile phones to organise themselves and talk about rights, employers control the use of such devices as they recognise their emancipatory power. Even though it is illegal to confiscate private property, they are nevertheless doing so, knowing that the law would tacitly support their interests over those of the migrant workers.

Ms. Sohela Nazneen reported more questions than answers from the discussions in the fourth group of participants. First, the assumption that technology causes structural change needs to be investigated. Defining the stage at which a change could be termed structural is problematic. Secondly, who defines a change as being such, and for who, also needs to be investigated. For example, the change brought about by the internet phenomenon could be very different for younger and older generations; the latter have lived without it whereas the former cannot live without it.

Furthermore, the term 'structural change' is often used to imply a change for the better from previously existing inequalities. However, the group felt that inequalities tend to persist, albeit in changing forms, which they illustrated with an example shared by Ms. Lisa McLaughlin. In trying to sell Cyberjaya – the Multimedia Super Corridor in Malaysia, to the public – the government had suggested that the super corridor would create new communities, providing community parks and recreation centres for the people engaged with and employed in the knowledge industries. In reality, existing communities associated with the plantation industry were destroyed to create the techno-city. Today, the techno-city has no history of its own, and no community to speak of, because communities cannot be imposed on people. 90% of those who work in the techno-city leave for their homes at the end of the day, creating cyber ghost towns. The techno-city never really became a community, but it actually broke down communities, because people are no longer living where they are employed, neither are they employed where they live. While these techno-cities have created a great deal of opportunities for women, in terms of education, employment and access to resources, it has also made it very difficult for them to fulfil some of the traditional responsibilities, such as following up on the education of the children in the community.

The group also pointed out that **technology is driven by people, and needs a political, economic, and social context in which to bring about change. A confluence of factors, including global economic policy, national policies and the existing political economy, work together with technology to maintain the *status quo* or bring about change, as the case may be.** At the same time, technologies create new needs which influence how people think about structural change, and the way to make it happen.

Group 4 echoed the concerns of the other groups about ICTs being potentially used like a double-edged sword. For instance, the collection and publication of informations by the government could be about greater transparency, or about surveillance.

In the plenary discussion that followed the presentations, **Ms. Anita Gurumurthy** pointed out that taking the stand that there is no causality between ICTs and structural change can lead to oversimplifications. Even though this causality is complex, technologies have always redefined societies, which is why it is safe to presume that ICTs are also changing society. **Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio** cautioned that nuances of changes should be explored and interrogated to avoid old forms of oppression to persist in more subtle ways.

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala illustrated the importance of looking at social contexts, when exploring the questions of gender, citizenship and technology, through an analogy of the archaeologist who digs and studies a succession of vertical layers. However, when looking at social relationships, the layers seem to coexist on a horizontal axis. For instance, feudal relationships of production and reproduction may go along with very modern technology or communities may use cell phones and cybercafés while defending obscurantist social practices like honour killings.

Concurring with Ms. Batliwala, **Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh** contended that at any given time, the accumulation in time of several societies found an expression in our institutions and practices. **The danger seems to be that IT discourses tend to valorise a certain thin slice of change, a superficial edge of change as it were. Many spaces and opportunities appear to be opening up at the level of individual, but changes are more problematic at the macro structural and institutional levels.** As long as we can preserve our sense of the dialectic, this danger can be kept at bay.

Ms. Anita Gurumurthy suggested that framing issues with new old binary, we assume that the old is frozen and the new is fluid. However, the new and the old impinge on each other and change each other. There are seepages and leakages, burdens laid upon one another which may undermine each other. Even if no primary causality can be established, these relationships may represent important changes.

Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio again sounded a note of warning when she said that we never lose the old: slavery and serfdom, for example. Technology may not necessarily be positive, and in fact transform the old in the direction of civilisational decay. The old needs to be constantly examined to make sure there is nothing of the old that we disapprove or are ashamed of, which may well be exacerbated by technology.

DAY 2: 28 JULY 2010

Morning Session I: Citizenship, Democracy and the State in a Globalising World: Three Submissions in Nine Minutes

To stimulate the plenary discussions on the second day, three participants had been invited to make three submissions in nine minutes each on citizenship, democracy and the state in a globalising world.

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala focused her first and most elaborate submission on the different ways in which men and women have defined democracy and citizenship. Starting from the Greek etymology of democracy – *kratos* (power) to the *demos* (people) – she presented a definition given by Robespierre on 5 February 1794, as “a state in which the sovereign people, guided by laws which are of their own making, do for themselves all that they can do well, and by their delegates do all that they cannot do for themselves” (*Report on the Principles of Public Morality*). The Alexandria Declaration of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (1997) defined democracy in a bland and consensual way as ,

“a universally recognised ideal as well as a goal, which is based on common values shared by peoples throughout the world community irrespective of cultural, political, social and economic differences. It is thus a basic right of citizenship to be exercised under conditions of freedom, equality, transparency and responsibility, with due respect for the plurality of views, and in the interest of the polity”

Giving the group a range of the ways in which men have thought about democracy, she then presented Robert Michael’s pragmatic and amoral presentation of the relationship between democracy and power, from his treatise *Political Parties* (1911):

“Democracy leads to oligarchy, and necessarily contains an oligarchic nucleus... The law that it is an essential characteristic of all human aggregates to constitute cliques and sub-classes is like every other sociological law, beyond good and evil”

Consequently, when she presented the first feminist definition, she suggested that it would “blow you away”, so different was its tone and tenor, substance and spirit, from the definitions that had been offered by men. Mary Parker Follett, the pioneering scholar of organisational theory and the unsung founder of modern management studies, in *The New State* (1909), proffered,

“Democracy is an infinitely including spirit. We have an instinct for democracy because we have an instinct for wholeness; we get wholeness only through reciprocal relations, through infinitely expanding reciprocal relations. Democracy is really neither extending nor including merely, but creating wholes...”

This definition does not restrict democracy to the state or the nation state, but rather expands it to apply to all human relationships. Further, Follett urges us to think beyond the limiting association of democracy with the vote, since claiming entitlements and relationships, without knowing actual and potential rights, may not have the same social outcome.

“The vote in itself does not give us democracy – we have yet to learn democracy’s method. We still think too much of the solidarity of the vote; what we need is solidarity of purpose, solidarity of will [...] it is only through group organisation that the individual learns [...] to be an effective political member”

A basic definition of citizenship narrows it to the relationship between an individual and his/her community, whether social, political or national, which gives the individual both rights and

responsibilities in these settings. Feminist critiques of citizenship theories have challenged such definitions as masking the race, class, ethnicity and gender inequalities where power structures exclude people from their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Furthermore, access to citizenship is mediated by the very institutions that uphold or reinforce patriarchal and other oppressive social power relations. Let us note nevertheless that the formal framework of citizenship, i.e. the right to vote, equal rights under law, etc., may or may not matter in the same way or to the same extent for all women.

Thus, in contrast, women might prefer to define democracy as a principle for organising human relations, based on values of justice, or in other words, equity and equality – in relationships, access to resources, voice, vote and representation. Other important values would include peace and non-violence, sustainability and non-violence towards the earth, respect for and promotion of the full body of human rights and transparency and accountability. Such a definition would also claim the space and the right for civil society organisations to come together for debating publicly about policies or candidates.

Therefore, for women, democracy could be a guiding principle for participation, governance and decision-making in both micro and macro-level institutions – the household, the community, religious institutions, the state, the market, as well as the information society. It would go beyond the widespread understanding of democracy as a system of government, and of political governance. Rather it would serve as a political concept beyond party politics, involving political action in many locations, and a force that transforms formal citizenship into substantive citizenship.

In her second submission, Ms. Batliwala therefore called for a distinction between formal democracy and deep democracy as a necessary and important part of women's political education. This would mean that being part of democracy is not merely about women's participation in formal and institutional politics, whether through suffrage, electoral participation, holding political office or membership of political parties, but participation in the transformative political processes, such as movements, struggles and changing organizations, all of which which constitutes deep democracy.

The third submission comprised three questions on the links between the previous two submissions and the information society:

- How does technology and the information society advance, hinder and complicate women's search for deep citizenship and democracy?
- How are the new architectures of power constituted or enabled by technology impinging on and complicating women's search for deep democracy and citizenship?
- What are the gaps in our understanding of the links between these two? How can they be addressed? And how can the proposed research projects use this lens to fill some of the gaps?

The second presentation was made by **Mr. Ip Iam Chong** (Lingnan University, Hong Kong).

His first submission drew on the argument of the Indian political theorist Partha Chatterjee that only about a fourth of the world's population can engage in western-style civic politics, while the rest do not see themselves or are not seen as sovereign subjects constituting a liberal political order. Rather, they are marginalised by the dominant sections of civil society and are a part of 'popular politics' or political societies.

In this context, Mr. Chong interpreted globalisation as "a global flow of ideologically dominant terms and ideas", in which terms like 'democracy' and 'civic engagement' related to an ideal (or idealised) type of 'liberal democracy' and were seen as essential for defining political modernity. Consequently, almost all governments, including authoritarian governments such as the Chinese government, subscribed to this set of political terms and attempted to selectively put them into institutional practice. Mr. Chong illustrated his point with the Chinese example. After the Fourth World Conference on Women held at Beijing in 1995, the Chinese government acknowledged the

importance of NGOs and their influence on world politics, especially women's and environmental NGOs. Since the beginning of the era of Deng Hsiao Ping (whose influence over the People's Republic of China can be dated from 1978 to the early 1990s), the Communist government's power of social mobilisation has been falling. Nevertheless, it has maintained control over the party machinery as well as on socio-cultural institutions such as schools and the media. Hence it decided to make use of the languages and forms of civic politics, using state patronage to draw in such NGOs, engage and institutionalise them and make them a part of the new state propaganda. In this manner, NGOs which are officially endorsed are used to channelise people's political participation. The official party line has been replaced by a co-opted citizenship mediated by a burgeoning NGO sector which is in partnership with the state. While the NGOs themselves may not be very skilled in using the new ICTs, they receive a great deal of support from the media strategies of the government and the state-controlled media, and together, they can create a public sphere which is subject to state governance.

Mr. Chong's second submission was about how several marginal subjects make use of the new social spaces, partially facilitated by ICTs, to exercise their citizenship outside the government-controlled public sphere. These attempts at exercising citizenship are often either not organised at all or less organised. Rather than functioning as a civic organization, using institutionalised methods of negotiation, they may act like a crowd. The public spheres that are thus conjured up may not be stable, but equally, are not subject to state patronage. For example, during the *weiquan yundong*, the civil rights movement that emerged between 2003 and 2007, a very large number of bloggers engaged in social criticism and citizen journalism, attracting severe censorship of these dissident opinions posted on the internet. Consequently, micro-blogging spheres, such as Twitter, began to be used to exercise alternative forms of citizenship.

In his third submission, Mr. Chong suggested that beyond highlighting the different types of political participation and citizenship, it is important to explore and understand the interactions between them. This would contribute to understanding contemporary politics and envisioning alternative democratic frameworks.

The third presentation in this session was made by **Mr. Ibarra M. Gutierrez III** (University of the Philippines, Manila). In his first submission, Mr. Gutierrez looked at citizenship in its formal sense, which involves a formal legal status and certain entitlements. **Citizenship in law** deals with membership to a certain nation state, with limitations of access to certain formal entitlements and rights. It makes a distinction between those who can participate in various processes, e.g., those who can vote, own property, participate in certain economic activities, etc. This formal notion of citizenship involves differentiations, distinctions and exclusions, based on an abstract concept of legitimacy, which in turn is based on other concepts of identity. These concepts of identity may in turn be the result of an accident, such as being born in a certain place, or as a result of some ritual, i.e., the procedures by which the nation state grants citizenship.

In his second submission, Mr. Gutierrez offered an alternative idea of citizenship, namely, **citizenship as assertion**. Whereas the formal form of citizenship emphasises limitations, the second uses citizenship as a means of asserting legitimacy of participation. Naming this form of citizenship, assertive citizenship, he saw it as a means of engaging in participation regardless of formal limitations. Most formal citizens do not take advantage of the formal space. The notion of empowerment therefore also involves getting people to actually know their rights and organise themselves, instead of merely 'going about their business' leaving the nation state to set the limitations. It is an assertion of the entitlement to participate: the creation of space for such participation, will always exist.

Mr. Gutierrez included the concept of globalisation in his third submission. He suggested that ICTs have lessened the impact of formal citizenship as a limitation, by allowing a level of and space for

formal participation beyond legal, territorial space. Earlier, protests of any significant degree, usually required a physical presence, in order for e.g. to participate in rallies, or to send a letter to a newspaper. However, the use of bulletin boards, discussion groups, etc. allows people to participate even if they are physically absent of the territorial jurisdiction. For example, non-residents may even have lost citizenship, but they are still informed and expressing opinions about political events in their country of origin, sometimes wielding significant influence. This has the result of 'unlimiting' the notion of formal citizenship as a limitation. It also means that citizens are not tied to a 'real' identity, but can have numerous virtual identities, which allows people to participate anonymously, which is a serious advantage when expressing opinions about totalitarian governments.

Morning Session II: Contextualising Women's Citizenship in a Globalising World

In this session, four presenters were invited to offer seven-minute long reflections on two reasons to feel delighted of contextualising women's citizenship in a globalising world, and two reasons why we cannot afford to be complacent.

"As a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. My country is the whole world" (*Three Guineas*, 1938). Beginning her presentation with Virginia Woolf's radical statement, **Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio** invited the participants to remember that the first formulations of citizenship were made by mainstream, white, middle-class men. These formulations of citizenship were very homogeneous and excluded women, those belonging to other races, indigenous peoples, sexual minorities, etc.

The weakening of the nation state and the increasingly globalising world have had two positive consequences in this regard: the capacity to create associations and groups to which women can belong (e.g., women migrants' human rights associations), and the creation of spaces which allow them to shift, escape, or even change social and sexual norms.

Having said that, Ms. Claudio suggested that the seeming dichotomy of being happy or unhappy was not separate but was part of a dialectic. Thus, even though there may be more IT jobs for women, globally, women's work continues to be dirty, demeaning and dangerous. Furthermore, reproductive and sexual norms tend to be replicated and transferred from one country to another, contributing thereby to the globalisation of sexual and social reproduction services through the exportation and importation of women's bodies. In such contexts, **it is important to recognise that in seeking citizenship, women come into spaces which are already globalised and structured by political control.** For instance, Swedish women and Filipino women might both raise their voices protesting violence against women. However, when the same issue is raised by a Filipino maid against her Swedish woman employer, it is differentiated by norms of citizenship, i.e. the migrant worker versus the local citizen.

A second cause for concern is the ever increasing imposition of a patriarchal, consumerist sexuality on women, mostly through the use of highly sexualised images of women in media. This is the capacity of capitalism to extract extreme profit, not just from industrialised structures, but from the very moment we desire to communicate by putting a commercial architecture into virtual spaces. The globalised world, as much as feudal structures controlled by white, middle and upper class men, is regimented and homogenised. The new proletariat therefore is "all of us" and we need to determine what the key struggles are in opposing neoliberalism. Inspiration could be found in the concept of 'radical democracy', forged by Latin American feminists. After demanding rights over their own bodies, they fought to obtain citizenship in both the public and the private sphere – households, families, neighbourhoods, churches.

In her presentation, **Ms. Sohela Nazneen** of BRAC University, Bangladesh, raised the question of

what makes one a citizen. To be a citizen, an individual needs to be recognized as a legitimate claimmaker, by the community or the state. However, this does not automatically mean that his or her concerns are prioritized. The individual may try different strategies: exercise voice or individual or collective agency and try to participate in the polity and seek, or demand, a response. For women, difficulties may arise with what they have to say, the spaces they have to enter to have their say, or the languages they have to use to exercise their voice.

When it comes to exercising individual or collective agency, the nature or extent of participation may not have sufficient collective strength, for example, in terms of votes to push the demands through, and the outcome may be quite contrary to that desired. Nevertheless, because the individual or the group has participated in the process, they are regarded as having consented.

In this context, globalisation combined with the use of ICTs has enabled individuals to transcend geographical spaces, allowing thereby claims for active citizenship, and even inclusive citizenship. Solidarity can be created with other claim-makers, through mobilisation and opening up new ways of forming alliances.

Obviously, similar tools and spaces are used by opposed claim-makers. Another negative is that with globalization, decisions are being taken at the global level which affects life at the local level. The individual may have made claims, exercised voice, organised and exercised collective agency, but none of these may count, as decisions are taken at a wholly different level.

In her presentation, **Ms. Mini Sukumar** (University of Calicut, Kerala) noted that many movements for women's emancipation around the world have emerged from women's claims for space, for political participation and agency, through which, in most contexts, women managed to gain formal citizenship. Economic globalisation requires to discuss once more the notion of women's citizenship, but all reflections remain strongly gendered as they still are framed in a public-private dichotomy.

Nevertheless, Ms. Sukumar saw positively the new employment structures created by technologies which gave more opportunities for women to start working outside the home and be exposed to the market. Thanks to this increased visibility, women's concerns are beginning to be addressed in policy-making circles where the diversity of issues and interest groups has to be acknowledged. In addition, the expansion of technologies, as well as the increased access, have created new ways for women to express their concerns, transgressing the traditional boundaries of gender. Good examples are the increasing number of women bloggers, or the use of modern technologies by women in Iran for political activism.

One of Ms. Sukumar's concerns was that **the expansion of transnational capitalism and neoliberal frameworks create power structures that influence our notions of democracy, privacy and rights in ways that are not always liberating. These may instead reinforce patriarchal values, which can take various forms, such as home-based work, lack of social security, gendered representations of femininity in the media, etc.**

A further concern was the impact of the new notion of state obligations, and the blurred boundaries of controls imposed by the capital and governments on the universal framework of human rights, and therefore on women's rights. Nation states welcome capital from other parts of the world, but are less welcoming when it comes to exchanging labour. States are caught up in the confusion between defending the rights of local women and governments or corporate bodies regarding access to and protection of natural resources, as was evident in the case against Coca-Cola in Plachimada, Kerala.

Ms. Sukumar concluded that changes in **production systems always have redrawn the boundaries of women's citizenship as they affect the political economy and, consequently, the household. In a globalised world, women are more than ever needed as workers but**

paradoxically, their normative role in the domestic sphere is not impacted.

Event though women's virtual mobility and participation have increased, their rights are not sufficiently protected when physical mobility is involved in transnational migration, especially for work in low-paying jobs.

The presentation on "Marriage Migrants, Citizenship and the Immigration Movement in Taiwan" by **Ms. Hsiao-Chuan Hsia** of the TransAsia Sisters Association, Taiwan (TASAT) and the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), used the context of marriage migrants in Taiwan to discuss two positive and negative points associated with citizenship. With more and more Taiwanese women choosing to remain unmarried, Taiwanese men are seeking brides from other countries, including mainland China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia and Thailand, to the extent that almost a quarter of marriages in Taiwan currently involve migrant women, and 1 in 8 births in Taiwan occurs to a marriage migrant. Marriage migration is the combined result of globalisation and unequal development; in Taiwan, marriage migrant women generally seek better socio-economic circumstances. However, these so-called 'foreign brides' frequently face economic harshness and legal constrains. Furthermore, they suffer from prejudice and discrimination as they are seen coming from the 'Third World', therefore being a threat to the 'population quality', this stigma being transferred to the children who are seen as inferior. The bottom line is that since these women are poor, they are not worth having an identity, and therefore, any rights.

Citizenship in Taiwan is traditionally defined by descent, and until late 1992, the country had no immigration policies. The creation of the TASAT in 2003 brought attention on the situation of foreign brides, fighting for both their formal and substantive citizenship. The organisation in turn became a founding member of the Alliance for Human Rights Legislation for Immigrants and Migrants, which gathers organisations that question the prevailing discourses in term of migrants' rights, promoting thereby human rights, democracy and multicultural rights for immigrants. The debates eventually led to the passing of the Immigration Act in November 2007, which entitled marriage migrants to a series of rights, e.g. protection against domestic violence, and rights to assembly and protest, as well as provisions against discrimination and for due process. Ms. Hsia put the light on the continuing discrimination of marriage migrants, including among other national categories of migrants, as the legal conditions to be granted citizenship vary among different ethnic groups. The Taiwan experience emphasises that, unfortunately, citizenship is, in many circumstances, circumscribed by considerations of class, gender and race, and "multiculturalism" is often defined by the state and corporate powers. Nevertheless, the Taiwanese case provides two positives in terms of women's citizenship issues:

- The marriage migration phenomenon can be a valuable opportunity to challenge the traditional link between citizenship and nation state.
- The discourse of "multiculturalism" can be employed as a narrative strategy to gradually force the historically exclusionary model of citizenship to become more inclusive.

In other words, Ms. Hsia felt that opening up spaces for immigrant women, could lead to positive political consequences for both immigrant and local populations.

In the discussion that followed the presentations, **Ms. Anita Gurumurthy** pointed to how third world feminism had not considered issues of citizenship to a significant degree, in contrast with the deluge of writing by women from the west on citizenship. Now globalisation and the information society had added additional problematic layers, and it was important to look at how these were influencing traditional hegemonic notions of race and gender, and how, in this context, we could continue to define citizenship in ways that are transformative. She invited the group to share the thoughts that had been triggered by the discussion. In the plenary discussion that followed, three major threads of discussion emerged.

The first of these addressed **questions linking identity and the new technologies**. **Ms. Srilatha Batliwala** suggested that it is necessary to tease out the way in which belonging to ascriptive associations and/or identities, e.g. “a true Muslim woman” or “a real Hindu”, is being changed by new technologies. **Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh**, referring to both Ms. Batliwala’s notion of ascribed identities and Mr. Gutierrez’s mention of multiple virtual identities, raised a question about the way in which reconfigurations of identity that took place in virtual spaces, whether imposed or not, actually met the needs of marginalised groups, or were merely shaped by the logic of the network.

Ms. Lisa McLaughlin questioned the utility of notions of public and private beyond being heuristic categories. For instance, traditionally, men have more mobility across the private/public divide, whereas women were mostly limited to the private sphere. But men also tended to dominate the private sphere. Hence, women who transgressed this separation and became public women were either feminists or prostitutes. Ms. Mini Sukumar suggested that while notions of femininity might be recast to a certain extent in the globalising context, patriarchal systems continue to insist on values of “traditional modernity”.

The group segued from issues related to identity to a discussion of the public-private dichotomy with a comment from Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio who suggested that the group needed conceptual clarity on what aspect of public/private was being discussed. For instance, a discussion on keeping personal data out of the public domain was very different from notions of public/private in the context of gender. Giving an example of the complexities of public and private identities, she noted that Filipina women who used new technologies to seek Western husbands made it a point to recast their identities in terms of their perception of what men wanted – e.g. “conservative, likes to cook” rather than “feminist with a degree”. Adding a further complication, Ms. Sepali Kottegoda suggested that the way young people use social networking sites, such as Facebook, overrides traditional notions of public and private as they are willing to make the private public. Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh suggested that one way to distinguish between the notion of public and private, as raised by Ms. Sylvia Claudio, is to look at ‘the public as political’. Ms. Sylvia Claudio countered this with a question: would then the political be seen as requiring a physical, public space? If so, it was important to remember that there were many forms of constructing identities and sexualities which had been made possible by the new technologies, which were very important to marginalised groups. Taking away the physical identity could thus be both problematic and good.

Mr. Gurumurthy Kasinathan reminded the participants of Ms. Srilatha Batliwala’s presentation about the traditional definitions of democracy which contrasted with a more inclusive feminist perspective working towards wholeness. In this context, ‘public’ may be what takes into account the well-being of the society, of the commons. From that perspective, private may be an individual interest, an interest which is also important and complements the public interest. For instance, this group had gathered to discuss how ICTs can be gendered. This is an example of ‘public’ interest, beyond the mere sharing of personal details on Facebook. When looking at young people, it may be important to prepare them to participate in the public sphere, as they might ignore that they could participate in ways that do them harm.

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala suggested that the term ‘private’ implied private ‘from someone or something’. Thus, young people may put something up on Facebook for the whole world to see, but still expect to keep it private from their own families. In this context, it might be interesting to explore how individuals are controlling or placing boundaries in certain spaces, in contrast to other spaces which may be more open.

Ms. Lisa McLaughlin suggested that considering the ‘public/private’ dichotomy may be useful in providing conceptual clarity for policy purposes, but equally, we need clarity in terms of practice. She provided various examples. Under communism, in the Soviet Union and in most countries of Eastern Europe, the home became the public sphere, because public spaces were not available for

discussions related to the well-being of the commons. Again, some privates may be subjected to critical scrutiny by the media to promote public interests. At the same time, certain kinds of surveillance, or the use of personal data by governments and corporate interests may represent neither publicity nor privacy, but a violation of both these interests.

Ms. Anita Gurumurthy brought in the third major issue in the plenary discussion, related to governance in a globalised, trans-national, perhaps post-national context. She noted that in many countries, for many years, the state had represented what ‘public’ was, and the state and the public had been tied in ways that were more or less inseparable. Even if we continue to use these epistemological categories, the complexity is that these involve some notion of governance, which, however, is being broken down. The question today is about whether governance is related to national boundaries, or a post-national global, or sub-national locals. Likewise, in looking at who the subject of governance is, one has to contend with the complexity that we are hybrid - there is me in the virtual and me in the real. A framework for governance has to take all these into account.

Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh suggested that whatever they are, boundaries are being challenged by technology, and the strategic implications of this situation needs to be explored. **Two forces in particular seem to be acting on public/private boundaries. One is a private/commercial force which is constantly seeking to expand its own sphere of influence. The second is a public/political force, which both controls people as subjects of governance, and gives them opportunities to determine their destiny. The private/commercial force appears to seek to limit, or even in some cases obliterate, the public/political force, and hence, has to be challenged.**

Ms. Sarala Emmanuel reminded the audience that in democratic spaces, participants agree to a certain set of rules. They may not be heard, but they still have to agree to this set of rules. In this context, she suggested that citizenship is a much larger project than mere political action. It involves democratising, which requires the right to information, to speak, to associate with each other, to be heard – all of which are be a prelude to political action.

Offering her perspective on the plenary discussion, **Ms. Ramata Molo Thioune** said that she had listened with interest to all the presentations. She observed that the challenge of an organisation funding research for development was to come up with coherent theoretical frameworks to inform it. She suggested that a shift in thinking and language oriented towards developmental outcomes would be a huge achievement.

Ms. Anita Gurumurthy suggested that perhaps the group needed to start with confusion which would enable participants to feel free to explore the domain of the primary themes, without feeling constrained. Then, possibly, coherence would emerge.

Morning Session III: Knowing the Information Society Animal: Some Inputs – Parminder Jeet Singh

After the focus on gender and citizenship in the previous two sessions, this session was designed to focus more on the information society, the third important element in the theme of the workshop.

Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh, Executive Director, It for Change, began his presentation by observing that democracy was a principle for organising all of social life. The information society was also a way of organising social life. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to explore the democratic credentials of the information society. In other words, the issue that would be explored in this session would focus less on whether the information society was good or bad, and more on whether and how it was recognising ‘all of us’, who think of ourselves as citizens.

A lot of attention related to the information society in the South has focus on access for marginalised groups. However, there are problems which lie at a much deeper level, the level of

social institutions, which make it imperative to examine the fibre of democracy in the context of the information society. The dominant theories related to ICTs have come from either neo-liberal or post-modern contexts. From the feminist context, ICTs have been perceived as a means by which some of the strong controls of traditional institutions can be challenged.

This, in fact, has been a broader view as well. Under globalisation, there has been a very powerful effort to expand private and commercial spaces and forces, and reduce public and political spaces. Information and communication technologies have acted as a counterforce to this effort. However, ICTs themselves have been subject to a creeping neo-liberal influence. The increasing privatisation of libraries on the internet and the influence of money on IT policies are obvious examples of this. In spite of this, democratic principles still underpin ICTs. Hence these have helped to create a potent counterforce aiding democratic forces in the struggle against neo-liberal forces.

Mr. Singh pointed out that in this context, there were big structural changes taking place, many of which have been identified in the articles by Manuel Castells. In the information society, the forms of human organisation have changed, and how information is placed and shared has changed. In this context, it might be useful to consider how power flowed earlier, and how it flows now. Earlier, the primary frameworks for human organisation were linked to the state, politics, and religion. Today, the major institutions are networks. Earlier, power within the dominant institutions required a spatial context, location and human beings were important. For example, the feudal lord lived close to the people whom he dominated, and however much he may have exploited them, he needed to take care of some of their needs. **Networks on the other hand can change shape, size and location; neighbourhoods are not important, nor are humans. What matters is the logic of what needs to be done; only purpose matters, and networks can shift to achieve this purpose.**

Castell does not believe that this was an inevitable way for the information society to have developed, and links this trajectory of development to certain historical decisions and choices. ICTs are the main tool of our times, and the same technologies could have been used to help and support communities, if certain other choices had been made. **One reason for the more commercial choices is that capital is global, while the nation-state is territorial, hence capital is more powerful than the nation-state. Capital is also more valorised in popular perception.**

In this context, how does the local fit in? The local is usually seen as some part of the world on which the individual has some control. To understand the structural, but non-democratic nature of some of the decisions and practices related to ICTs, Mr. Singh gave some real life examples.

One major example related to the governance system of the internet. The first issue is that internet is governed by bodies incorporated under US law, responsible only to the US. A second issue has related to power wielded by 'techies'. Historically, in times of great change in technologies, the developers and holders of these technologies have wielded great power. For instance, when printing was introduced for the first time, for a while, until the technology became more disseminated, printers held great power. Today, in matters related to the governance of the internet, a major argument of the industry is that "users should be consulted." By emphasizing a discourse of "users", there has been a shift from a discourse of citizenship to a discourse of consumers. A major change resulting from the "user discourse" is that now human beings are defined in relation to technology, instead of technology being defined in relation to human beings. Someone has actually gone on record with the saying, "Ask not what the internet can do for you, ask what you can do for the internet", in a parody of John F. Kennedy's famous patriotic utterance. The ICT industry views consulting the users of technology themselves as the most legitimate process for making policy. Consequently, there are huge email groups lobbying for certain policy positions, dominated by users, where the voices or interests of those sections of the populace who are not techies have no room.

A second manner in which powerful neo-liberal tendencies have had a strong influence, at the

institutional level, on governance of ICTs, relates to funding. There are three possible ways to fund the internet and these are private funding, public funding, and multistakeholder funding. In fact, the industry does not want public funding for the internet, preferring multi-stakeholder funding. This is another form of legitimising the influence of capital on governance issues. **By legitimising multi-stakeholder funding, what is being created is a post-democratic forum, one which says that businesses are equal to government and civil society, and that together, these groups should make policy. This implies that business will make the laws that govern them.**

Another real life example related to the creation of a new e-governance system being set up for India, currently being implemented in states like Karnataka, in which 250,000 telecentres are proposed, which will serve as the front end for almost every governance service, from health to serving warrants. Almost half are in the process of being set up, but there has been no debate about this in the media or in civil society. These consumer service centres have been bid for by corporates and will be managed by franchisees.

The partnership with the government is open, not hidden, and offers many advantages to big business, promoting consumerism and undermining democracy. For one thing, the consumer service centres can be used by franchisees to sell whatever they want. Secondly, businesses get co-branded with the government, which in a country like India, is a huge advantage for corporate interests. Thirdly, the consumer service centres have no relation with the local government, not even with the district administration. The information sharing system only touches base with the state capital and the national capital. The government is forcing all departments to share their services in such a way that they can be handled by franchisees. The government has stated that it wants all these consumer service centres to be profitable in three years.

Although this initiative undermines local democracy in fundamental ways, this has not been seen as a political issue, but only as a technical issue, promoting more efficient service. Hence there has been no media interest or public debate related to this.

A fourth example relating to the structural impacts of ICTs has related to the protection of intellectual property. The neo-liberal view is that there has been too much free sharing of knowledge, and hence the push is towards making knowledge proprietary, so that those who pay can then access this knowledge. This includes the effort to privatise knowledge which has traditionally been in the public domain. As a result, local groups, in order to merely protect their rights to use their own traditional knowledge are being forced to corporatise, and take out a commons license. Mr. Singh gave the example of a group of traditional musicians from Rajasthan, who had been forced to digitise and register their music in order to ensure that their legitimate claim to it is recognised.

Mr. Singh struck a note of caution when he alerted the group about the ways in which **WIPO, the trans-border ICT governance body, was being used by rich countries to frame ICT governance frameworks to protect the business and intellectual property interests of rich countries, while making it appear that the decisions related to technical tools.**

Even the ways in which ICTs are being used in Indian schools feeds into the interests of big business. ICTs are perceived as somehow being 'private' and hence it is believed that the private sector must be given this responsibility. Hence, in very large numbers of schools, the use of ICTs in education is tendered and outsourced to businesses, keeping traditional educators out of decision making and implementation related to education.

Finally, Mr. Singh pointed out to a recent advertisement by India's largest mobile telecom provider, Airtel, that it would be providing the popular application, Facebook, free with its mobile phones. He described this as part of a trend in which several popular applications, like Facebook, Google and Twitter, would be provided on mobile phones. He saw this as the first step in a process by

which the public internet would shrink, with users having to increasingly pay for what they used. This would severely limit the capacity of the internet to serve as an alternate space for re-configuring identities or organising. This would be a violation of the network utility principle. However, this is not becoming a matter of public debate, since the public see themselves as getting freebies or easy access with regard to the popular application. It may well happen that people are lulled into a false sense of control and wake up to this very real possibility too late.

Corporate interests would also regulate the way search engines offer up information, concentrating on ways that support their commercial imperatives. Hence, when health information is sought, a multinational pharmaceutical company's information would appear before information from the WHO. Search engines are already testing the waters with deciding what they think users should see. Not long ago, Google was taken to court after it removed access to a website which showed where the French police had installed speed-detection radar equipment. Google's argument was that it did not think posting such information was appropriate. It lost the case, but if the internet gets increasingly regulated by the companies themselves, then they would increasingly be making decisions about what they think is appropriate for users to know.

A number of applications also specify terms and conditions to which users have no choice but to agree before they can use them, many of which take away any right to redressal in the case of any grievances. Other applications, like Facebook, have a Charter of Rights and Responsibilities, and the right to vote. The companies argue that the applications can be administered by the users themselves, and hence they do not require any further external regulation. In reality, what this translates to is that users can decide on fairly trivial things, for example, what colour they wish to set as their background, but not on really important matters. They cannot vote on important issues, for example, whether commercial and non-commercial information should be separated. This means that many of the new applications are open, but not public.

The way in which information is shared and disseminated is structural to democracy and its civilisational organisation. In the past, everyone more or less read the same news, carried in the local newspapers. Even the rural poor heard the news on the radio or when the newspapers were read aloud at the local tea-shop. Everyone watched the one or two news channels of Doordarshan. Today, if one compares the news on Doordarshan DTH television, and the news on many of the private news channels, they cannot be recognised as pertaining to the same day's news or even to the same issue sometimes. **There are definite communities of interest based on class involving the middle-class, the rich and the super-rich, with these determining the priorities of the information society.** Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh ended his presentation with a question: are we committed to the dominant information society structures?

Ms. Anita Gurumurthy offered a quick summary of the points in Mr. Singh's presentation, and added the observation that **in the context of the open but not public scenario, the Information Society was being reduced to a "Club" good, where one has to belong to the network, or otherwise be condemned to irrelevance.** The information society has involved paradigm shifts, and structural changes necessarily happen over paradigm shifts. Do we then subscribe to the Californian ideology of letting "techies" determine our lives? Do we want to be 'users', however powerful we think we are, or do we want to be citizens? The new patent-copyright regime means that what used to be in the commons is now sought to be licensed, even if the license is that of the 'creative commons'. Is it possible to leave the commons as they are, without giving labelled ownership to everything? The difficulty is that often, we do not even have the vocabulary to connect with or understand the structural changes that are happening, before we can think of contesting it. For instance, the current effort by corporate interests to set up a governance architecture for ICTs that bypasses even the WIPO, is termed the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA). Policies are being made at levels where even most governments cannot participate, leave alone citizens.

Afternoon Session I: Discussion on Reading Resource Set 1

The first set of reading resources consisted of two articles: Michael Gurstein's "Towards a Critical Theory of Telecentres: In the Context of Community Informatics" and an interview with Manuel Castells, published in the September 1998 issue of *Social Science*. The participants, divided into four groups, discussed these articles guided by three questions, before sharing the key elements of their discussions in the plenary session. The three guiding questions were

- What is the nature of exclusion in the information society?
- What seems to be the nature of emancipation in the information society?
- What are the concerns for gender justice?

Ms. Sepali Kottegoda, **reporting on the discussions by Group 1, observed that physical and educational access to ICTs would constitute the first level of exclusion, but there are exclusions beyond basic access, relating to being part of a network without decision-making power, because the centre of power is diffused. A second issue relating to the democratic credentials of ICT is that regardless of where the criticism is directed, against any existing hierarchies in the network, the network itself largely reflects middle and upper class concerns. What is more, the concerns of the middle and upper class urban elite in Asian countries coincide with those of the middle class in developed nations. The resulting marginalisation is difficult to resist, since the methods of political organisation and resistance used earlier are no longer viable in the context of the information society.**

A point was also raised about children, who are 'digital natives' born into the information society, compared to many of the adults in their lives who are 'digital migrants', which marks a change from the traditional pattern when children migrated into adult worlds, with the transition being mediated by a process of education. Now, however, a large number of parents and teachers are unable to help with this mediation, and are excluded their comparative lack of comfort excludes them from the digital worlds occupied very comfortably by children. Nevertheless, children might require support to negotiate the digital world in safe and appropriate ways, but adults may lack the comfort necessary to help them with this, and consequently there is a lot of unmediated participation by children in public spaces, which could be discomfiting. Here too, there is a class factor, with lower class parents being excluded to a greater extent.

The group wondered whether the caution and suspicion associated with ICTs was similar to the feelings associated with older technologies when they were first introduced.

When men are in charge of telecentres, often, the access of women to ICTs is compromised. However, overall, communication had become much cheaper because of ICTs. Skype was used extensively for communication across the Asia-Pacific region because of the significant difference in cost. There were many examples of ICTs being used for disaster management, for instance, when the government failed to respond adequately to a typhoon in the Philippines, rescue operations were coordinated by the community using cell-phones. Community radio was used for similar purposes in India during floods. However **the group recognised the need to move from anecdotal evidence of emancipatory change to change to institutions and systems related to ICTs that have been expressly set up with the aim of serving public interest.** There was also a need for setting up a fair global governance structure, which seemed difficult to set up in the current context.

Group 2 had largely focused on Castell's interview in *Social Science*, and had discussed the nature of power structures, and how new power structures made new forms of exclusion possible. Reporting to the plenary session, **Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh** said the group had felt that a sterile theory of inclusions versus exclusions did not do justice to exclusions in specific contexts, and depending on who was in the centre and who on the margins. The excluded could behave in two

ways, either by delinking from the dominant structures, or by linking to a familiar identity on the premise that nostalgia about marginalisation was better than irrelevance. The discussion primarily threw up a number of questions. The group felt that it would be worthwhile to explore how those made irrelevant by new power structures reclaimed identities, and which identities were reclaimed. Like Group 1, Group 2 also felt that a range of exclusions were possible. The participants felt that the readings reiterated the fundamental that power constructs social identity, and offered concepts that they would need and use in their individual projects. They wondered whether the concerns related to democracy and citizenship as linked to the information society required a new framework altogether, or whether they echoed familiar patterns. The group also noted that **by and large, in the discussions, when the focus was on the information society, gender was left out. When gender was discussed, issues of the information society were left out. There was need for a theoretical framework to connect issues of feminism and the information society.**

Mr. Ip Iam Chong shared that Group 3 had started by discussing some of the paradoxical qualities of ICTs and their applications. **Networks may have inclusive potential, but have equally exclusive mechanisms which prevent communities from realising this potential. ICTs can encourage people to remain passive, but equally can be a source of agency. It was necessary to recognise this double nature and use the qualities that worked to the advantage of promoting democracy and citizenship.** The group also identified a primary quality of the new information society as being a persistent anxiety about becoming disconnected. Hence a lot of the literature focused on connecting and networking.

However, the group felt that much of the literature that looked at the information society was not grounded in the experience of working with women, collectives, etc. Where effective mobilisation of women had happened, for instance, where women functioned as elected representatives in some significant number, there had already been a context of political mobilisation of women. At the same time, **the group felt that the hypothesis about self-organising networks that would automatically build on pre-existing political organisations was a myth. Not only was the notion of “leave it to the people – they will self-organise if necessary” a myth, there was also no guarantee that self-organised groups would a priori be democratic or promote democracy.** What was achieved would depend on how the network was used.

Nevertheless, telecentres could play the role of being potential sites for the new knowledge democracy” and taking the citizenship debate forward. However, the group felt that the concept of community presented in Gurstein’s article was an idealised, Westernised one. **In South Asia, a community could be a great site for divisions, hierarchies and contestations. Hence, citizenship could be expressed in terms of assertion, but equally, in terms rejection and resistance, and refusing to join a community.** For example, in Kerala’s e-governance initiative, there is a tension between the policy which tries to take e-governance to the grassroots and the global market which wants to promote a different version of e-literacy. However, what gets reported may make it appear that the government policy is anti-ICTs. The media determines what is news and what isn’t, and can distort through selective presentation of the news.

Ms. Oiwan Lam, reporting on the discussions in Group 4, said that the group had considered two ways in which ICTs could be involved in exclusion for marginalised groups. One form would be to be forced into networks, so that inclusion itself is part of an exclusive process. The second is to use technologies to create alternative spaces to get what they want. The group had considered two cases to anchor this dichotomy, and to underscore the point that ICTs are embedded in the socio-political context in which they are used. The first looked at the e-governance projects as envisioned and practised differently in the states of Karnataka and Kerala. While in Karnataka, the government was setting up telecentres as a top-down method of delivering services in ways which would undermine local democracy, and focused on getting people into the e-system, in Kerala, the e-governance project was being used to encourage e-literacy in local governments as a step towards

better transparency, and consequently, improved service delivery. On the other hand, community radio in Kerala almost inevitably gets entwined in the tangles of local party politics and its tensions, whereas the collaborative community radio project of IT for Change and Mahithi Manthana had given rural women without many opportunities to use their voice as means to express their views on issues that mattered to them on radio. Nevertheless, this project too faced its challenges – in the first case, it was important to ensure that community radio remained relevant to the whole community and remained apolitical in that sense. In the second case, radio might be useful to the community, but to what extent could it be politically influential to help the community secure its needs was yet to be explored.

Increasingly, in many contexts, including that of ICTs, the role of the state was changing from a champion and promoter of rights to a promoter of business models. If the state's motive too was profit, then concerns about how to deal with exploitation were relevant and immediate. Group 4 also felt might also be useful to look at what happens to the community, and the cultural and social norms regulating behaviour, once ICTs are introduced.

Afternoon Session II: Discussion on Reading Resource Set 2

The second set of readings had three articles: the first contained excerpts from IT for Change's forthcoming Annual Report; the second, by P. H. A. Frissen, was entitled "Representative Democracy and Information Society – A Postmodern Perspective; and the third was about "Gendered Meanings in a Digitally Transformed World", by Anita Gurusurthy. After they had discussed these articles within their small groups, the participants shared their ideas in the plenary session.

Ms. Sohela Nazneen reported that the discussions in the first group of participants had largely focused on Frissen's article on representative democracy and the information society, and its key points related to the increasing horizontality of social relations in the information society, the difficulties of the nation state in keeping political control in the context of the deterritorialisation achieved by ICTs, and the virtualisation of identities. Given these characteristics, **the group felt that national policies, especially as they intersect with global policy, could not be blind to contexts, and had to consider whether they facilitated or challenged democracy.** The concepts cited by Frissen presented a challenge to the nation state, but equally, they presented a potential for decentralisation. Nevertheless, **the potential of these new technologies had to be buttressed by old-fashioned, hands-on, political action.** For example, the extensive use of technologies to monitor the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme allows for some amount of accountability and transparency. However, if contestation was to happen, civil society actors needed to be in place, asking questions based on the information presented through these technologies?

The group also had concerns about the meaning of the feminisation of the web and felt that **social reproduction functions of gender were also acquiring a neo-liberal form.** It also wondered whether social networking sites were apolitical as often projected by their promoters, and if not, what kind of ethos the different kinds of politics espoused on these sites embodied.

Ms. Mini Sukumar, reporting on the discussions by Group 2, noted their concerns that limiting the elements of the theoretical framework of the information society to inclusion and exclusion was inadequate, as people continue to be affected by globalisation, and social inequalities persist in the information society. The processes determining policy making and institution building in the information society were also important, changing, and inadequately understood and addressed by governments and their citizens. Likewise, **while these technologies could be useful tools in assisting with good governance, this was not a given, it might be possible to use a barrage of**

information as a specific means of obfuscation, and to mask the truth, there could be failures in processing this information, difficulties in verifying information, and outright deception which could be practised.

Further, **the nature of the medium is such that it promotes shorter attention spans, and ensures that the shelf-life of information is shorter.** Also, increasingly, information about critical issues, including the texts of bills being debated in parliament, are seen as being in the public domain, because they are published on the web, whereas in the past, these would be published in leading newspapers. The current trend means that millions of people who are affected by the law-making process and its laws, do not get to participate even in the formation of an opinion about these laws. However, even small organised groups, using these technologies, could enhance engagement considerably. They could then connect with grassroots group for more broad-based action. Hence, **ideally, information would feed into action and vice versa.**

Members of the third group, reported **Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh**, had felt that the excerpts from IT for Change's forthcoming annual report had helped them connect important theoretical issues with practice at the grassroots, and see how **some of the issues of lack of participation and agency at the local level mirrored the realities of governance issues related to ICT at the global level.** At the same time, the use of ICTs could help to connect broad issues, for example, violence against women, in local contexts using technologies like community radio for this purpose. At the same time, fundamental questions of citizenship as defined formally by the state, influence these issues much more critically. For instance, violence against women would be dealt with differently depending on whether the person involved was a citizen or a migrant worker. The group felt that the paper on violence against women was too cautious in terms of the positives that the internet can offer to women, for example, the spaces for alternative sexuality-related sites. There was also an opinion that it had perhaps, insufficiently addressed feminist engagements and interventions with sexuality minority issues.

The fourth group observed that the possibility of making representative democracy happen through the tools offered by ICTs is complicated by the sense that the whole idea of the information society and how its elements relate to each other has happened in an undemocratic way. It begged the question, what if democratic processes had shaped the information society - would it have been different? Is it still possible to reclaim democratic elements? Whatever the answers, the participants were sure that resisting the information society was not the answer. The community must engage with it.

Evening Session: Some findings from the EroTICs project – Ms. Indira Maya Ganesh and Ms. Manjima Bhattacharjya

In this session, a team of researchers from the EroTICs project of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), **Ms. Indira Maya Ganesh** and **Ms. Manjima Bhattacharjya**, shared some of their initial findings from India, from the multi-country research project on the Internet and Sexuality, which was being undertaken across Brazil, India, Lebanon, South Africa and India. The impetus for the project was the increasing interest in internet regulation. The group was interested in how the sexuality rights and the community rights of women would be impacted by regulation. Regulation was driven by two imperatives: the first was economic security, and the security of international financial transactions, which then, in turn, also influences other regulatory policies and practices. The second was morality, and the desire to 'preserve the traditional culture' of societies, and fight 'moral pollution', for instance, the sexualisation of children. The project had hoped to bring out the voices of women in relation to how they were using the internet. Were they exploring themselves? Were they expressing themselves? How did they perceive harm? Is the law protecting them?

The subjects of the research had not been the traditional subjects of ICT4D. These were middle-class women, reasonably well to do, but not elite, with access to mobile phones, ATMs etc. They represented a group not largely represented in the feminism discourse or ICT discourse in India. Nevertheless, many of them included women who were marginalised or silenced for various reasons, for example, their youth (18 year old women), or for being queer women or women with disabilities. The research had a qualitative and a quantitative component. The quantitative component tried to map what people thought of the internet, and comprised a quantitative survey of 150 people, 120 women and 30 men. The men served as a control sample to explore if their answers were significantly different. To access the participants, the team had made use of a marketing recruitment agency. While this was an unusual strategy to follow in social sciences research, the strata of society the project needed to explore were also the ones accessed for market research by consumer goods firms. Those surveyed anonymously were offered the opportunity to participate in a detailed interview, but as none responded, a different sample from the same demographic was interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule to obtain rich data.

Ms. Indira Ganesh remarked that it was difficult to explain that they were researching sexuality and the internet. A common reaction was, “Oh, you’re researching porn?” However, this was an attempt to understand the interior worlds of people, as well as how this translates into reality, in terms of choices women make about what to wear, or whether they have access to contraceptives, or if they were lesbian, whether they could rent a house. Sexuality-related studies in India have focused on women of the subaltern or marginalised classes rather than the middle or neo-liberal classes. Likewise much of the writing, organising and activism around sexuality among feminisms have come from what is perceived as the ‘bigger’ and ‘real India’.

Ms. Indira Ganesh and Ms. Manjima Bhattacharya felt that their research had an important role to play in revealing the dissonance between popular understanding and reality, and discourse. Very often, moral panic decides policy. Anxiety about “where are our children going and what are they doing” may trigger knee-jerk reactions which may be justified only to a limited extent. In this study, they found that the participants in the quantitative survey gave very politically correct answers to many questions, which were in contradiction to what was revealed in the qualitative interviews. For example, watching pornographic material on the internet was completely rejected as a threat to morality, unhealthy, and leading to addictive behaviours, etc. However, the qualitative data suggested that many young women did not perceive watching pornography as being real sexual activity.

Another theme of many debates relates to privacy on the internet. The researchers felt that there was both a generational and a cultural component to these debates, as well as anxieties related to wanting to protect the notion of the heteronormative family. Young people did not feel the need to keep things private from their peers, but were anxious to do so from parents and teachers. Many of them felt that their engagements on-line (for example, posting pictures of themselves on-line in jeans or other ‘daring’ clothes) largely involved a manipulation of images, and was a kind of learning by doing, and these were not really viewed as harmful. Many of them felt that harm came from the off-line implications of their on-line activities; danger was perceived as arising from people that they knew, not strangers; many women reported experiences of off-line surveillance, or controlling behaviour by relatives. Many social interactions were limited by questions like “Where are you going? Who are you speaking to? Is it appropriate?” In this context, they could shed some of their inhibitions on-line; at the same, time, people they knew could constrain access to on-line space. Further, public spaces for internet use were shrinking in every country, and this was also a result of increased regulation. The researchers used the voices of many of the participants in the research to emphasise their findings.

Ms. Anita Gurusurthy suggested that though the theoretical and conceptual layering was useful, structuring the analysis on the basis of ‘on-line’ versus ‘off-line’ was rather simplistic. **It was**

important to address how spaces were being reconfigured with regard to patriarchal social mores and oppressive gender orders using ICTs. Ms. Lisa McLaughlin observed how certain objects, like blue jeans, could become objects of independence or resistance. Sometimes, these could function in paradoxical ways. For instance, veiling is a product of a controlling structure, yet when attempts are made to control veiling itself, as in some European countries, the veil becomes a site of resistance, even if it means recapitulation to and strengthening of gender and social norms .

DAY 3: 29 JULY 2010

Morning Session I: Media and the Public Sphere in the Digital Age – a fiery feminist talk show, hosted by Ms. Srilatha Batliwala. Participants: Prof. Lisa McLaughlin, Ms. Sepali Kottegoda, Ms. Oiwan Lam

The morning session employed the format of a ‘fiery feminist talk show’ hosted by Ms. Srilatha Batliwala. Presenting the show as part of a series on how digital technology was changing the world, Ms. Batliwala named it “Tea with Sri”, being shown on ‘TV for Change’. The show focused on Media and the Public Sphere in the Digital Age and featured three guests, Ms. Sepali Kottegoda, of the Women and Media Collective of Sri Lanka, Ms. Oiwan Lam, who had worked in mainstream and alternative media in Hong Kong for over fifteen years, and Ms. Lisa McLaughlin of Miami University, who had written extensively on global communication in the public sphere.

Ms. Batliwala addressed her first question to Ms. McLaughlin, asking her what the public sphere was and why it mattered. In her response, **Ms. McLaughlin** said that the first definition of the public sphere had been offered by Habermas in his 1962 publication *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, recording the change that had come about in the 18th Century when big individual capitalists, including the royals in France, began to lose some power, which was gained by the ‘common’ people, who helped to create a ‘civil society’. The definition left out women, slaves, people of colour, the working class, etc. When the book was republished in 1989, it talked about the issue of the exclusions in the public sphere, which continues to be the major issue, and which would repeatedly be addressed during the course of the talk show.

Ms. Sepali Kottegoda, invited to make the link between the media and its role in the making and changing of the public sphere in the context of Sri Lanka, focused on the gendered nature of the change. She noted that there had been a significant expansion of media, with a mushrooming of TV, radio and newspapers, in the previous ten years. There had been an expansion of programming, especially with regard to entertainment, and increased presence for women, who were coming into the spaces created as journalists and presenters. However, matters related to the public sphere were addressed through ‘serious talk shows’, which, significantly, were always scheduled post-prime time, after 10 p.m. This was the time when matters of public import were discussed, and politicians, financial experts, and others who had made contributions in various fields participated. However, no women participated in these – it was as if no woman was considered worthy of contributing to discourse related to public issues.

Ms. Oiwan Lam **made the very interesting point that** the media constituted an important part of the public sphere that entered private spaces, i.e., homes, whether in the form of television, radio or newspapers. Consequently, it was subject to a lot of manipulation by the market and regulation by the government. **Giving a concrete example of how this might occur from her native Hong Kong, Ms. Lam noted that a shift in media operations became evident during the transition of her country from a UK colony to a China Administrative Zone. Earlier, the media had played a role in defending the autonomy of Hong Kong, which had received considerable backing from the UK perspective of trying to maintain its hold on the strategic colony. However, post-1999, the media business had taken its cue from the China market and establishment, and started imposing self-censorship. This became evident in the interactions of journalists with their bosses in the newsroom as well as with journalists. Consequently, from 2004, there had been a growth in alternative media to counter this trend of the mainstream media.**

Ms. Batliwala asked Ms. McLaughlin to comment on how the age of technology was reshaping the public sphere. **Ms. McLaughlin** said that the term “age” suggested a segment of history, and she

was uncomfortable with this term as it did not seem analytically precise enough. She suggested that we did not really know how technology was reshaping the public sphere, and that there were a variety of different views. Some held that that the internet was the public sphere, not as a combination of software and hardware, but as a phenomenon that was a social experience and engaging a public. However, there are others who hold that this is not adequate, as roughly half the population of the world had never used a piece of digital technology. **The internet radically decentres, but equally, it is against communicative rationality, because informational capitalism was such a strong force that it did not fit into the public sphere.**

At this point, Ms. Batliwala invited comments and questions from the audience. **Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh** suggested that he would like to extend the connection from the internet to the public sphere further, to include democracy. **It appeared that power in democracies had shifted from representational structures to voice and the formation of opinion allowed through the new digital technologies. While both had always been there, it appeared that the latter had gained in strength to the detriment of the former.** He wondered whether the small changes in agency suggested by this shift were in fact hiding the larger structural changes.

Ms. Batliwala raised the question of whether the changes in agency suggested by the rise of the internet translate into political action. For instance, when one participates in a Green Campaign online, is one acting politically?

Mr. Barry Gutierrez observed that the question was whether the same level of political interaction could be achieved in the virtual space – whether clicking the “Like” button on Facebook to a political comment was the equivalent of participating in a political rally. Participation in the internet was a highly individualised experience. While an individual might have interactions all over the globe, s/he remained isolated from everyone else. Participation on the internet included no requirement that brought those involved towards a common direction or action, which was a defining characteristic of participating in the public sphere.

Ms. Batliwala suggested that such participation could make one a ‘consumer’ of a political cause rather than a political participant.

Ms. Ramata Molo Thioune observed that the discussion hitherto had focused on the internet. She added that in the African context, community radio played a big role in influencing opinion. She wondered whether the medium was relevant in Asia, and while it was not very interactive, it might be useful to consider whether it was a technology that could work in building citizenship.

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala chose this moment to bring the discussion back to the panel, asking how the traditional handicaps in accessing the public sphere, particularly for women, to claim citizenship and act politically, were being changed by the new technologies.

Ms. Sepali Kottegoda addressed the issue of the individualised nature of political participation on the internet, and suggested that contrary to the earlier opinions that this was a safer and less real means of political participation, it might still carry with it the risks of ‘real’ political participation as in a rally. She gave the example of ‘Ground Views’, a website which also allowed podcasts that served as a citizen journalism space on Sri Lanka, where people come to exchange ideas in and on the public sphere. However, these spaces are also monitored by the authorities, and surveillance has led to people disappearing under an authoritarian government, just like those who might have been associated with distributing leaflets, posters or cartoons critical of the regime, in the more traditional modes of political activism.

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala suggested that such surveillance was slightly more difficult, and in spite of the limited access afforded by these technologies, they were still valuable. Hence, the issue of how to keep these media independent, both in terms of funding, whether from political parties, the state or business corporations, and in terms of regulation by the state was very important.

Concurring with Ms. Batliwala on the value of the new media, **Ms. Oiwan Lam** reiterated that the new media could certainly feed into ‘real’ old-fashioned political action. The counter-media in Hong Kong includes entities called *minjian* reporters, “grassroots people” reporters who played a significant role in contributing to political action. In one instance, the *minjian* reporters had focused on an urban planning initiative to destroy a historical building, drawing sufficient attention to it that it became the focus of a public campaign, which eventually resulted in a political action in which the buildings, the Star Ferry Pier and the Quince Pier, had been occupied for 100 days by political activists. Consequently, the building was saved and a series of policies related to historic and cultural preservation adopted. In another instance, the reporters had drawn attention to a large infrastructure project which was threatening the livelihood of a rural village. In this case, the law authorising the project was passed anyway, suggesting that such actions may not always be successful. Nevertheless, some political objective had been achieved in that consciousness had been raised about the community implications of large construction projects.

Building on Ms. Lam’s observation, **Ms. Srilatha Batliwala** highlighted that the main purpose of the public sphere, where people can debate on the public good, also carried with it the limitation of who was defining the public good. She also wondered what the implications of the increasing possibility of the privatisation of the internet were going to be for it as an important part of the public sphere. She wryly observed that a point which had come up in the previous day’s discussions of the reading resources, that when we speak of the information society, we do not speak of gender, and vice versa, was proving true on the ‘fiery feminist talk show’ as well.

Trying to redress this imbalance, **Ms. McLaughlin** suggested that most feminists tend to link the terms ‘we’ and the ‘internet’ too much forgetting that 50 percent of the world’s population have never made a phone call. The feminists who are able to gain access and have the skills to use these technologies to address their concerns form a very small group, as compared to others, with other equally important feminist causes, who lack access and skills. Most of those who lack the literacy skills to use the internet around the world are female. Other difficulties related to some feminists who are able to advocate at some of the highest levels, for instance, at the UN, completely losing touch with local issues and constraints, or adopting identities of the marginalised in ways that were deeply troubling. She mentioned representatives of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan from educated, upper-class backgrounds, standing in for victims who had been killed, on western media shows, reconstructing the identities of the victims in ways that would be acceptable for the west, and then claiming that if they had not done that, the sufferings of the real victims would not have been recognised. The problem with constructing stories around themselves to create collusional representations to share in media conduits like the Oprah Winfrey show is that they end up lacking any communicative rationality and being unable to represent anyone.

Almost in a parodic portrayal of the kind of representation that Prof. McLaughlin had just been talking about, **Ms. Anita Gurusurthy** took on the persona of Shanti, a resident of one of Bangalore’s slum areas, who protested that the language was too difficult for her to understand, and asked what communicative rationality and informational capitalism were.

Ms. McLaughlin explained that the term communicative rationality had to do with process-oriented communication, with people engaging in discourse on issues of common concern. Since it was difficult for the individual to talk to the state easily, several individuals with common concerns come to a consensus as a group and then together address policy makers. They are concerned not with particular interests but with the general interest, of collectively working together to influence government decision making by state officials and other policy makers. **Traditionally, however, feminism has been against the general interest because this has typically been defined as male, educated, property-owning etc.** There is also concern that while the nation state may not have eroded, it has directed its interests to those of business corporations. In this context, feminists groups may use the new technologies. When sometimes the state gives no satisfaction on demands

for meeting certain basic needs, feminist groups may use the internet to leapfrog over the state to influence the supranational level, and put pressure on the state to bring about change. Traditional capitalism tended to largely ignore marginalised communities. In the current context, certain kinds of information and knowledge which were considered as traditionally belonging to or proprietary to women, for example, related to cooking, healing and herabal medicine, are becoming increasingly commoditised and commercialised. Prof. McLaughlin gave the example of tamarind-based soups which were part of easy, everyday ordinary cooking in South-East Asia, which had been patented by the Knorr brand of the Unilever group, and is now available with bad chemical additives and an increased environmental load. The internet has great potential. However, informational capitalism goes hand in hand with the service economy, in which women have tended to play an extensive role. The important strategy was to use information technologies in ways in which the slum did not fade away, but could network and engage with any institution, and ensuring that interpreters, mediators and interlocutors used in this process did not distort, and were willing to let go of the interlocutory role and let marginalised communities speak for themselves.

In this context, **Ms. Oiwan Lam** emphasised the need to bridge the use of new and old forms of media. Just as many slums and rural areas may not have access to new technologies, a domestic migrant worker may not have access even in a global city like Hong Kong where almost unlimited connectivity is available at the cheapest rates in the world. In such a situation, they may use mobile phones to access internet broadcasts. She noted wryly that often state and business interests make the public sphere uncivilised, and hence not rational but manipulated. In reaction, sometimes, we may need to choose strategies that are not that ‘civilised’ as well.

In the persona of Shanti, **Ms. Anita Gurumurthy** also raised the issue of who owned the internet.

Mr. Gurumurthy Kasinathan explained that the notion that everybody owned the internet or nobody owned the internet and it gave power to the edges was one part of the truth. At the same time, the internet was not dispersed in that democratic a fashion. For instance, decisions on what languages the internet will speak or not, which will determine access to a great degree is determined by ICANN, Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, a US not-for-profit company incorporated under California law, which is answerable to the US Department of Commerce. It was only last year, for instance, that languages like Hindi and Tamil were added to the list of languages which can be used for internalised domain names, as earlier, the organisation felt that the barriers in terms of technical difficulties and resources were much too daunting to include more languages. There was also concern that ICANN, which had been conceived as a body that would take care of a number of technical functions, was now undertaking political functions, including decisions related to who will connect to the internet and how it will be used, without adequate accountability.

Ms. Sepali Kottegoda highlighted the importance of safe spaces for women to discuss issues of concern, and the role of alternative media in this endeavour, allowing discussion of domestic violence, CEDAW, farmers’ suicides, etc. She also noted that the ambivalence of the state, especially authoritarian regimes, to new technologies, on the one hand asking that “all children should be computer literate” but on the other, calling for a ban on Facebook.

Ms. Lisa McLaughlin suggested that in the global north, political discourse on the internet frequently did not go beyond internet listserves, many of which did not have very clear objectives and led to little collective action. Using the internet as a platform for political action tended to be most effective if a well-defined set of objectives led to change, and from this point of view, the internet was probably used in the global south as a means of organisation that worked, but even here, they probably served only a limited use as compared to networks that engaged in ways that were not virtual.

Ms. Oiwan Lam shared three ways in which her organisation tried to engage with feminism. Firstly, feminist concerns framed the content of their independent media initiatives. For example,

there was a box on gender and sexuality on their home page, and readers could write responses in the box. The website also had a gender editor to enhance content related to feminist issues. Secondly, the independent media organisation worked in close cooperation with a local, overtly political feminist organisation. The third effort had been to try to get housewives to obtain greater access to independent media and the concerns of social reporting, but this effort had been less successful. She also said that there were occasional alliances around specific issues, for example, against the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance, which fell apart after a certain goal was reached. In addition, there were constant attempts by the authoritarian Chinese government to coopt women into the censorship project of the government, for example, by a “Do you have children?” campaign to enlist mothers in favour of censorship, or using them as part of China’s 50 cent army, as part of which internet users were paid 50 Chinese cents for every posting in favour of the party line.

Ms. Hsiao-Chuan Hsia observed that often the alternative media ended up preaching to the choir. She gave the example of the spate of deaths at the Foxconn factory in mainland China, whose Taiwanese owners had been roundly condemned by the alternative media in Taiwan. However, the same owners were portrayed as national heroes by the mainstream media. She noted that **the dominant media had shaped the ways in which people consumed media, hence alternative media needed to make itself attractive and engage with the general public in order to get its message across.**

Prof. Mini Sukumar also contended that while there was a tendency to idealise community radio, the increased listenership of commercial FM radio, and the ways in which, as an interactive medium, it was engaging with youth, needed to be analysed and theorized.

Ms. Chinmayi Arakali suggested that community video could become an alternative to commercial television. It could become a very effective means of encouraging discussion and building opinion. A lot of good content was available, but the government would need to work on giving distribution rights to NGOs who could reach this valuable content to the people who needed it.

Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio suggested that when the state consciously employs certain identities to work in its favour (e.g., using mothers in its campaigns), it was important for political movements too to deploy identities consciously and strategically.

Ms. Krupa Thimmaiah offered that IT for Change’s experience with using community radio with rural women had shown that using the voices of marginalised groups tended to legitimise them and increase their sense of agency. Whereas earlier, the perception was that only the government got to be on radio, now there was a feeling that “I am a woman and I can be on air, discussing issues that matter to me.”

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala brought the fiery feminist talk show to a close, reminding the audience that alternative media were also powerful tools in the hands of fundamentalist religious and racial agendas, which could and did use them in aggressive political ways, including for proselytisation. Other social causes were in competition for these spaces, and they needed to be used intelligently and strategically.

Morning Session II: Knowledge Politics in the Information Age - Inputs by Mr. Gurumurthy Kasinathan, followed by discussion on the presentation and Reading Resource Set 3.

Mr. Gurumurthy Kasinathan observed that his presentation would continue with many strands from the previous session, looking at media and gender justice in a broader manner. Researchers

tend to note changes in the landscape, and the discourse around the information society was an acknowledgement that some changes were happening at the societal level. He suggested that there had been a change in the mechanisms of constructing knowledge as a result of which the human culture had evolved from the oral through to the written to the digital cultures. Initially, with the development of language, knowledge was produced, preserved and transmitted in oral forms. In India, the religious texts, the Vedas and the Upanishads, include non-religious information, for instance, on health and agriculture, a body of knowledge which was called 'shruti', emphasising the importance of aural processing. There was a strict limitation on who could know what, and someone who had heard knowledge not meant for his/her consumption was punished with molten lead being poured into their ears. With oral transmission of knowledge, however, the persons giving and receiving information had to be present in the same physical space at the same time. The development of writing removed this precondition, and led to a greater democratisation of knowledge sharing. The asynchronicity of space and time in knowledge production and sharing increased with the development of the printing press. As we move to the change brought about by digital processes, we realise that this is not really understood, as we are in the middle of the change and do not have the benefit of hindsight. In the information society, production and sharing of knowledge is possible much more widely across space and time.

At the same time, the economy has moved from being dominated by hunting and gathering, through the agrarian mode, through an industrial mode with the primary emphasis on manufacturing and production to an increasingly service-oriented economy. (For example, 40% of India's GDP is now derived from the service sector). And the service sector has a very strong knowledge component. With increased access to digital technologies, barriers to information sharing can come down, promising access to and participation of all in knowledge construction. Mr. Kasinathan quoted George Bernard Shaw who said, "If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples, then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas."

In the movement towards a digital economy, Sally Burch lays out two alternate paths, one proposed by the World Bank, in which proprietary, intellectual property-based information and knowledge will be marketed to individuals and communities, and the second, which involves the creation of a Knowledge Commons, in which intellectual goods are shared by countless number of people without destroying the resource. However, this is viewed by institutions like the World Bank as ineffective and inefficient. Which path the world follows will have huge implications for four major anchors of the digital world, namely, the Knowledge structure, Mass Media structure, Education structure, and Technology Governance Structure. For example, **letting the market determine decisions can hugely distort what knowledge is produced, with the luxury requirements of the rich getting privileged over basic needs of the poor. The market will decide what is relevant, what knowledge is constructed, by whom, with whom, and how the constructed knowledge is shared. The Commons mode is a different mode of how technology transfer can happen so that communities evolve what they need. It was necessary to understand how the elites are pushing the agenda of proprietisation, and the alternatives emerging against this trend.** Mr. Kasinathan felt that these trends were sufficiently important that they needed to be discussed not only among the converted, but among a larger audience.

With respect to knowledge structures, the first change was with respect to the changing role of copyright. Whereas earlier, copyright assumed that unless explicitly stated, knowledge belonged to the commons. However, **the current trend is that unless it is explicitly stated that a certain piece of knowledge belongs to everyone, it belongs to the creator. The United States and Europe have realised that in the changing world order, if it is to retain its traditional domination of the world, it is important to hold on to its knowledge base, and this change reflects this realisation.** A second change is with respect to the increasing scope of patent law,

with an increasing emphasis not only on product patents, but on process patents, including very small parts of a process. There is also the growing strength of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and TRIPS (Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights). Mr. Kasinathan referred the participants to Yochai Benkler's book, *The Wealth of Networks*, which argues that **systems which depend heavily on proprietary approaches to information production are not only inefficient but unjust, but showed how, nevertheless, the protectionist policies of Europe and America are constraining low and middle-income nations to play by these rules.** The disturbing trend was being copied by developing nations too; the Protection and Utilisation of Public-Funded Intellectual Property Bill (also referred to as the Indian Bayh-Dole Bill) by which research funded by public money in Indian universities would be patented and largely used for commercial licensed use rather than for more accessible public health services.

Although WIPO was trying to protect big business interests, several corporate stakeholders felt that that it was moving too slowly because it was an intergovernmental body. Hence a few select countries, notably, the United States, Europe, Japan, Switzerland, etc. had come together to create ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement), also taking inputs from corporate houses and associations, through a secret process. Leaks have suggested that the provisions of the proposed treaty are draconian and apply not only to the countries framing the agreement but others as well. For instance, a shipment of life-saving drugs from one developing country to another may be seized if the ship carrying it stops at a country which has signed ACTA and the shipment is deemed to have violated the terms of the treaty, even if the two developing countries are not parties to the treaty. Although nation-states are supposed to protect the interests of the public, they are acting in collusion with the corporate elite.

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala noted that the most common argument in favour of intellectual property rights related to the investment made in inventions and innovations and the right of investors to get a return for the risk they have taken and a payback for the investment. However, it is hard to apply that justification when efforts are made to patent the leaf of a plant, and not only all currently known applications but all future applications as well.

The gaps between being fair to individual innovations and the public good needed to be clarified, noted **Ms. Anita Gurusurthy**. Efforts to patent life forms should take into account imbalances between what should be public and what private, as these have strong implications for development. The United States, as an emerging economy, had borrowed heavily from Europe. Europe had then protested against its violations of European copyright law, and the US had defended itself saying that it was a young nation which needed to establish itself. However, it was denying developing countries these same privileges. Likewise, **the US was protesting trade barriers in many countries as being monopoly rights, while simultaneously defending intellectual property rights which were also monopoly rights.**

Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh observed that **the dominant players in the world markets had made a careful analysis of the directions in which the ICT world was developing, identified their own interests within this trajectory, and were now setting up the legal infrastructure necessary to protect their interests. When developing nations protested, they were giving in on very small issues, while solidifying the legal infrastructure in the meantime. This march was not being stopped.**

Mr. Gurusurthy Kasinathan pointed out that, against this trend, in a variety of areas, the idea of the commons was emerging or getting stronger. For example, collaborative efforts across locations in the pharmaceutical industry were being tried. An Indian consortium is trying to decode the malarial parasite and see what can work against it. These **efforts at collaborative knowledge production were not easy, but were nevertheless emerging.**

Ms. Anita Gurumurthy contended that the capacity of the internet to bypass national borders, and traditional copyright boundaries and national enforcement regimes was threatening both to capitalism and the state. Hence, there was an increasing incentive and impetus to monitor the network. In such a scenario, content companies could tie up with telecom companies to prevent peer-to-peer, horizontal transactions of copyrighted materials, or bring these into the domain of legal contestation and litigation.

Continuing with his presentation with a focus on the impact on Media Structure in the Information Age, **Mr. Gurumurthy Kasinathan** noted that the media serves as a watchdog on society and the state, and is a common space which allows for participation of citizens, though this is not always sufficiently realised or used. This is, however, more possible in the information society, and media can become a more democratic force. **Paradoxically, though, ICTs have a tendency to accentuate monopolies, and assist with the concentration of ownership through mergers and acquisitions and the formation of cartels to reduce competition, and consequently the progressive space diminishes.**

Another issue is stratification, which also tends to divide up the commons. Whereas, earlier, social networking sites like MySpace and Orkut were more popular, now Facebook is more popular. The reason is that earlier, standards were open, and once a certain standard was established, other competitors could employ the same standards. Increasingly though, standards are being proprietised, and imposed on the public.

Ms. Sylvia Estrada suggested that the loss of the commons had paralleled the rise of Western liberal democracy, and to compensate for the loss of the commons, the state had introduced social services, which had also played its own role. For example, in the case of HIV and AIDS, the struggle had come not only from the commons, but from the health sector. Feminism had played its own role in the nurturance of the social services, and there were certain social services which had to be provided by the government, e.g., immunization.

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala contended that both the commons and social services were relevant and critical. The commons was essential as a site that was not controlled by anyone, not just as a site for providing or receiving services, but which could be entered and exited at will without gatekeeping. It could then be used to create a public sphere, or not. However, like the historical enclosure of the commons in England, the value was often realized only once it was gone.

Ms. Sylvia Estrada clarified that she was using the logic of social services as a mode of countering corporatisation.

Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh suggested that **some of the resistance to claiming public spaces had to do with people's fear of state control. The commons could be perceived as a middle stopping ground from which to move to more enabling spaces of public goods and services.**

Going back to some of the earlier premises of Mr. Kasinathan's presentation, **Ms. Sarala Emmanuel** suggested that it was important to problematise the standard economic analysis, and whether a linear progression was the best way to capture some of the changes that had occurred. Some communities had leaped from the oral to the digital age, with illiterate interpreters using radio and video to tell their stories. Some agrarian communities likewise had moved to the service economy without experiencing any significant presence of the industrial manufacturing economy. Ms. Emmanuel also pointed out that speaking of public health or education implies the existence of rights for citizens and accountability on the part of the authorities. **When we speak of the commons, who takes responsibility for the space? Is it really free, or are there hierarchies operating there?**

The two-tiered system involving the corporates and the commons in ICTs, **Ms. Estrada** felt, mirrored the situation in healthcare. Poor communities suffered from poor quality services, but

equally, it could be said that corporate health care facilities were unequivocally good for the rich. For example, the proportion of Caesarean sections for this segment of the population was much higher than normal.

Ms. Anita Gurumurthy stated that ICTs worked in cahoots with globalisation to determine who would benefit from informational capitalism. In analysing this, we needed to consider an ethics beyond economics, as human beings have dimensions beyond being economic beings. However, Yochai Benkler, in his book, tries to provide a cogent economic argument to suggest that even by their own standards, the standard strategies applied to maximize returns from property – squatting, gatekeeping and rent-seeking – might not work with intellectual property, and what is going to work is collaboration and cooperation.

Ms. Oiwan Lam felt that academics and activists had been among the first groups to introduce the Creative Commons license to counter the strong copyright laws which they felt were going to be introduced, and to protect their own work which they felt businesses might appropriate to make money. They remained within their affiliated groups even while struggling to keep content in the public domain. It might be useful to be conscious about using both the commons and social services. Nevertheless, it was important to remember that liberal democratic governments have used social services to put down social movements, and that they can abrogate social services whenever they choose.

Mr. Gurumurthy Kasinathan suggested that the notion of the commons as excluding state-supported efforts was problematic, and that on many matters, the state should not give up its responsibilities. However, **new definitions of traditional institutions might be necessary by which there are more opportunities for communities to participate without the state abdicating responsibility.**

Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh noted that there was a complex relationship between state funding and community participation, with problems on both sides.

Mr. Ip Iam Chong made the point that unlike the original commons, the creative commons was not just ‘out there’ to be claimed, but needed to be consciously made. While in some cases government funded universities functioned like puppet institutions, a number of new opportunities for the creative commons had come from state-funded institutions. This was also true of the over 300 independent media initiatives around the world, which made up the media commons. It is important to remember, when we speak of the commons, that they often have quite some institutional background.

Mr. Gurumurthy Kasinathan said that this was also true of free and open source software – many of the creators had come out of publicly funded universities. He noted that another difference between the traditional and knowledge commons was that the former was a finite, limited resource, and use depleted it, which was not true of the latter. There was need for more peer collaborative processes, but also for a strong governmental role.

With regard to the impact of ICTs on educational structure, he observed that the public education system in most countries contributed to a foundational commons with, often, a philosophical belief regarding universal entitlement. Some initiatives that had come about as a result of technology, for example, the Open Courseware movement from MIT and other big universities, also worked along the same philosophical lines. Such initiatives make positive co-construction easier than before. Paradoxically, ICTs were driving the privatisation of curriculum development and curriculum transactions and pedagogy, as they were being increasingly handled by private vendors. There appears to be a perspective that since it deals with ICTs, the private sector should be involved. Hence, the policy on ICT education had been vendor-driven, with inputs from Microsoft, Intel, NIIT, etc. – organisations with significant vested interest, and people working traditionally in

education were excluded. This was almost as if the country were to adopt a health programme run by Pfizer. Also, as curriculum development and assessment processes get increasingly privatised, public accountability decreases. Another disturbing trend is that child psychology, which studies what children think and how they learn, and which should fuel how they are taught, is today used together with ethnography to study what children ‘want’, because that is what parents buy. There is a great deal of corporate effort going into influencing how children are raised.

There are structural issues related to how ICTs are governed as well. Unlike phone call costs, for which rich countries pay more than poor countries, and a social justice principle operated, poor countries pay more than rich countries for internet connectivity costs on the principle of market-based transfer. At the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society held at Geneva, a Digital Solidarity Fund was created so that poorer countries could participate equitably, but this initiative has all but disappeared. Services are maximum for customers in the US. The internet is also able to target advertising in much more nuanced ways, and hence more and more newspapers are losing out on advertising revenue and closing down as a result, affecting structurally the way in which people receive information.

The principle of network neutrality, according to which there is no intelligence in the network which determines what content travels at what speeds and which users get what content and how fast, is another principle that internet service providers would like to curtail. Internet service providers say that making all content available to all users is a drag on their resources.

Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh pointed out that businesses tend to extract the maximum profit they can from consumers. For example, market researchers found that US consumers would pay about USD 1000 for a computer, and hence, over the years, the costs of new computers have never really fallen, with various features being packaged to bring the cost to that level. Likewise, optical fibres for network connectivity run to within 20 to 25 kilometres of almost all villages in India, but only 2% of this is being used, because companies have not figured out a business model to use it.

Mr. Gurumurthy Kasinathan said that network neutrality was already being diluted with internet service providers like Comcast slowing down peer to peer sharing of files of large volume involving audio and video content, and the government was unable to regulate this. Another way in which net neutrality is being threatened is by promoting the mobile phone as the major way to communicate. However, mobile communication is not an open net, and what the consumer can access is determined by the service provider, who in turn makes deals with manufacturers of applications so that profit is maximised. In time, this is likely to result in the public net becoming more expensive.

In spite of some of the draconian possibilities, there are exciting things happening as well. The Free and Open Source Software(FOSS) movement is inspiring collaboration and innovation in other areas too, for example, open-access peer-reviewed professional journals, collaborative pharmaceutical drug production, etc.

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala emphasized the importance of creating local business models that work, even as local knowledge is protected from expropriation. “There should not be a false dichotomy; we are ‘moneyed beings’ living in a moneyed world. If the poor are not only poor, but condemned to the commons, it will be difficult for them to use their knowledge even for their own survival, let alone a reasonable profit.” Would it be necessary for the state to get involved to protect knowledge placed in the public domain so that it is not expropriated in ways that threaten the livelihoods of traditional communities? The questions are very challenging.

Afternoon Session I: Time-Bound Group Work on Refining Research Questions

This session focused on using the insights received from the reading resources and the discussions to further refine research questions that could be used in the programme. In an exercise facilitated

by **Ms. Anita Gurumurthy**, the participants in the workshop were asked to think of four important research questions for the programme in about five minutes. They were then asked to pair up, share their questions, and then choose four out of the total number of questions between them, refining and recasting them as necessary. The fours were then asked to join up with another group, and then again refine and recast the questions, arriving at a final four. The groups then came back and shared their questions in the plenary, to consult as a resource when the research teams tried to write their final proposals.

The research questions that emerged from three groups through this exercise were as follows:

Group A:

- What are the aspects and conditions that facilitate/limit women's application of ICTs to claim their citizenship?
- How do ICTs change the nature of accountability and relations with civil society?
- How do we approach research on gender, citizenship and the information society in a way that accounts for both agency and structure?
- How do we advocate for ICT policies that enable and enhance gender justice?

Group B:

- How will the research project explore the issues of expressing, transgressing and transcending identities (looking at gender, masculinities, and transgender identities) in an ICT context?
- How do individual agency and collective participation vis-à-vis external support and control work in the context of the research project?
- How can ICTs be used effectively to help women ensure accountability at different levels (local, sub-national, national) to bring about greater gender justice?
- What key engagements and enabling policy dimensions can be identified from the project?

Group C:

- To what extent are ICTs advancing women's citizenship by enhancing their capacity to make governance more accountable to their practical needs and strategic interests?
- How do women make use of digital technology and how do the patterns of their uses affect themselves and their citizenship?
- How are women using alternative media and technology to create new public spheres, and how are these leveraged to challenge local and global structure?
- What kind of institutional framework is needed for enhancing women's access to ICT?

Issues of accountability, access and women's agency, positive changes in structure, and enabling policy dimensions emerged as key concerns in all the sets of questions.

Afternoon Session II: Small Group Work with Leaders of Individual Research Projects and Advisors to the Asia Level Research Programme.

This session provided an opportunity for the Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society Programme to move from the general and theoretical to more specific and contextual discussions related to the selected research projects. The researchers involved in the individual research projects obtained an opportunity to discuss their projects at length and seek support from the Advisors to the programme. The work was undertaken in three clusters.

Mr. Ip Iam Chong and Ms. Oi Wan Lam from Hong Kong, and Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio and Mr. Ibarra Gutierrez III respectively met with Ms. Lisa McLaughlin to discuss their projects, “Women’s Online Participation and the Transformation of Citizenship in Hong Kong and Guangzhou” and “Strengthening Capacities and Linkages of Civil Society Groups and Academe-Based Institutions to Promote Gender-Sensitive and Rights-Based Perspectives through Citizens’ Electoral Participation” respectively. Ms. Srilatha Batliwala served as advisor to the group of Ms. Hsiao-Chuan Hsia and Dr. Philippa Smales of Thailand and Taiwan to discuss their project “The Use of ICT by Women Migrant Domestic Workers’ Organizations” and to Prof. Mini Sukumar and Ms. Raji P. R. for their project on the “Effectiveness Potential of ICT Among Women Elected Representatives in Kerala State, India”. In the absence of Prof. Andrea Cornwall, Ms. Anita Gurusurthy and Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh provided advisory support to Prof. Sohela Nazneen for the project “ICTs, Gender and Inclusive Citizenship: The Bangladesh Case” and to Ms. Sepali Kottegoda, Ms. Anne Sarala Emmanuel and Ms. Sachini Perera for their project, “Women and New Media in the Margins of the Sri Lankan State: A Critical Review of Two Local Citizenship Initiatives.” The advisors enquired about general concerns, offered suggestions about linking up research projects with existing bodies of literature (for example, for the Hong Kong project, on feminist activist projects that had been reined in and institutionalised) and other concerns related to developing specific conceptual frameworks within which to carry out the research. The advisors also helped the researchers think through methodological questions, including potential risk factors, working through the rather short timeframe for the research project, etc.

Evening Session: Mapping the Challenges and Spaces for Women’s Citizenship in the Post-National Context – Ms. Gita Sen

Instead of launching into a lecture, **Ms. Gita Sen** invited participants in the workshop to express some pressing concerns that had developed in relation to the topic for discussion over the course of the three days of the workshop, in response to which she would then attempt to formulate some ideas.

Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh observed that generally, ICTs were perceived as an empowering, space-giving mechanism, and hence important for women, while what it was doing to the macrostructure was also a concern. These issues need to be dealt with at the same time, in the context of any project, or even at the level of the individual, and Mr. Singh invited Prof. Sen’s views on this.

Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio wondered whether the concept of citizenship was useful in the era of globalisation. Largely designed as a concept for white men, it had left out many groups, including indigenous peoples, sexual minorities, etc. Given that it was a broad, slippery, contestable concept to start with, was it useful then to link it to gender and ICTs?

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala reminded the participants of the workshop that Prof. Sen had led DAWN’s pathbreaking critique of globalisation, studying global markets and movements of capital and the attempts to link national economies in 1983. She asked Prof. Sen what the differences were between the old and new forms of organisation to shape struggles and movements for justice and rights, especially for women.

Ms. Sepali Kottegoda observed that while people of the generation of the researchers had known a time before the advent of digital technologies in a big way, and they know the information society now, young people do not know of a world prior to the information society. How do we therefore understand young people and how they understand citizenship?

Ms. Ramata Molo Thioune expressed concern that most donors were moving away from the social dimension. For example, with regard to ICTs, they understand that these technologies are changing lives, but don’t know the nitty-gritties of the changes, nor do they have comprehensive policies to

address them. She wondered how donors could back to the social dimension in the context of the information society.

Mr. Gurumurthy Kasinathan asked what the new challenges (or old ones in new forms) were that feminists were facing in the context of the information society and citizenship, and how they were responding to these challenges.

Prof. Gita Sen contended that the issues of gender and citizenship and feminist agency in the information age were complex in a peculiar way. ICTs appear to be fairly straightforward, but then the nature of their context and use shifts shapes; you think you have got your mind around the issue, and then it changes. It may well be that not enough feminists are thinking about these issues. There is no doubt that the information society is, above all, a generational revolution, and instead of worrying about putting systems of control in place, the older generation must think of actually engaging with this new generation and the ideas and experiences coming from them. Older people have concerns about changes in cognition and mind-body synchronicity that are happening for the younger generation because of the ways in which they use new technologies; worry that what we value may itself be changing, and that we may not be able to take this world for granted. There are suggestions that utopia is around the corner, but equally, that doomsday or the apocalypse is around the corner.

The question is, has this never happened before? Ms. Sen suggested that it was not true that this was the first time that such big technological changes, which have changed in fundamental ways how we live and interact, have occurred. There have been two major industrial revolutions, with steam and chemicals as their bases respectively, and the information society represents the third such revolution. If we look at the first two, human beings have been through and come through these, and they need to figure out how to get together, organise and come through this challenge as well. We should not deceive ourselves about how big this is; but equally, Ms. Sen said, she believed in the human spirit, and we will deal with the challenge.

Ms. Sen said that ICTs can be empowering, but not without human agency, and in the feminist context, not without feminist agency – and this is what makes ICTs a terrain of struggle. She felt that movements would lose a great deal because of the strength of traditional capitalist forces. The struggle should be to see how many spokes can be placed in the wheel of the capitalist project so that the use of these technologies moves in a more humane direction.

Ms. Sen also asked the group whether the questions it was asking, about gender, citizenship and ICTs were too soft and nice, whether the harder questions of social justice needed to be asked when impoverishment and inequality were increasing at an enormous pace. She pointed out that struggles around language were also relevant, keeping the social justice issue firmly in sight. Speaking about citizenship, duties and rights, without addressing social justice would imply giving the battle away. It was important to force the perception that the two sides of the ICT coin have to be, not about rights and duties, but rights and duties on the one side and social justice on the other. It was important to keep the rights language clearly in the arena of the dispossessed, and not give it away to the strong capitalist forces. She quoted from Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, "Never fight the enemy on the enemy's ground, you are bound to lose. You need to bring the enemy to your ground."

She agreed with Ms. Ramata Thioune that it was a very tough time to be a progressive donor. Donors needed to figure out how they could pull away from technocratic agendas. This was very difficult, since power among the donors was also siloed, and ICT barons were among the biggest private donors.

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala offered another relevant aphorism from the *Art of War*: "If you don't change direction, you will end up where you're going."

Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh said that Ms. Sen's assurance that society would come through the

upheavals brought about by ICTs was timely, and suggested that when we demonise the changes wrought in the ICT context, we may think we are representing the present and future, but this may not be true. It was important to continue examining the discontinuities related to basic concepts, such as democracy and the public sphere.

Ms. Gita Sen said firmly that we need to stop thinking that we need to shepherd this generation. We need to worry less about what ICTs will mean for the young generation of the middle class, who are currently using them, and more about the implications for the young generation who will be impacted by the changes ICTs have brought about but don't have access to these. There is no doubt that questions of culture, state and communication will sit on the hard realities of the economics of the ICT world. The financialisation of the economy, together with globalisation, pre-dated the internet by 15 or 20 years, but it was greatly fuelled by ICTs, making big economic decisions much more difficult to control, regulate, direct and modify. The nature of the state, and the policy space and who has access to it has changed, and we fight over what the state does and doesn't do. But real production systems are tied in with IT, and this also impacts the poor, and the simple rights of people to live, to food, and to the wherewithal for survival. She reminded the group that it behoved them to make the necessary connections and lay the ground for appropriate action - this was a responsibility that came with the access to and understanding of this world. Who was going to say what global financial crises mean in terms of food security at the village level if not us?

Prof. Sen said that this was where the shapes had not shifted, were set in concrete, and had already been so set. The gaps between the haves and have nots were continuous and increasing, and divisions of labour have become even more pronounced. Feminists had done some tilting at windmills in the 1980's and '90's at the outward manifestations of structural adjustment like World Bank policies, but at that time they did not see, as sharply as they do now, many of the built-in structural and systemic means of perpetuating inequities. At the Beijing Workshop in 1995, nearly 75% of the workshops had been about the impact of the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank. Hence, when James Wolfensohn, the then President of the World Bank, had come to attend the conference, expecting to be welcome as a liberal president, he was completely unprepared for the hostility of the delegates around the world, who denounced the Bank for not allowing enough spending on health and education. The Bank promised to look into it, and in five years, the spending by the Bank on health and education increased significantly in many countries. But with this, came greater promotion of the privatisation of the health and education sectors as well. So the enemy is far deeper, and so a more profound transformation of systems is necessary.

At the same time, it is very difficult to bring about a change in the nature of the perennial. For a brief period, from the end of World War II till about 1975, there was a slow movement in a different direction. However, even though today's world is different in such significant ways, the substratum of social injustice has not changed.

Ms. Oiwan Lam said that one reason for the difficulty in creating feminist agency was that there could be such a thing as too much debate. Language was also a problem. For example, the State uses the term "protection" to legitimise censorship. Even mothers buy into this discourse. For instance, there is even a demand that Hong Kong should withdraw from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) so that the government can undertake stronger 'protective' actions, like random checking in schools to control drug use.

Ms. Gita Sen challenged the group and asked whether the significant struggles were really about the internet. Childhood has had different meanings in different ages, and each generation has negotiated these meanings. It is important to remember that the struggle is not about whether a group has or does not have access to one more site – such a struggle is narcissistic, what she termed an "ice-cream soda struggle".

Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio offered a counter provocation, suggesting that of far greater

significance than the industrial or chemical revolutions was the move from the pictograph to the alphabet, as it constituted a movement away from the real and actual to a level of symbolization. Perhaps it might be more useful to use this as a yardstick of comparison while discussing the information society.

Ms. Gita Sen countered that while both changes were about communication, the shift from the pictograph to the alphabet had occurred so far back in history that it was difficult to calculate what that change had meant at the time. A more conceivable example from history related to the solidification of the caste order in India, which affected the entire political economy of work – affecting the whole structure of production, livelihoods and the creation of poverty as the division of labour was altered. In considering the internet as well, it is important to consider the ideologies that back up the systems of hardware and its connections that constitute the net, to study the meaning and the contours of the work that we do.

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala noted that part of the struggle related to the contours of the information society is that we do not know where they lead. We are riding the wave of ICTs, not knowing where it will crest, where it will break or how the coastline will be reshaped by it, trying to see what lies ahead even as we are on it.

Ms. Gita Sen said that it was for us to see that ICTs did not constitute one more layer being added to the old oppressions. Just for a while, for countries coming out of colonisation around the end of World War II, it appeared that there was hope, but the political economy is becoming much more challenging. It seemed, at that time, as if it was possible for labour to find a formal context, but most of labour continues to be informal and it looks like the pressures are such that it is likely to be increasingly so. She recalled Marx's critique of the socialists of his time, the Fabian socialists, Robert Ohler, etc. that they were living in a past that was gone while the world was changing before their eyes. It is as important for us not to give *a priori* answers and examine in what ways oppression has continued, and in what ways it was different. **Feminism is about completing the project of democracy, and therefore, exploring whether culture, communication and the economy were being driven by information technologies in ways that were causing the world social order to change is part of our generational responsibility and indeed a very legitimate feminist concern.** As long as the enemy was tangible, it could be recognised and efforts made to protect and organise ourselves against it. But when the enemy is intangible and the protector amorphous, the forms of feminist action that we will choose becomes much more confounding.

Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio agreed that technology has changed and is changing everything, but the techno-determinist perspective is set within a certain social order and context. In this context it might be useful to consider what political economy means.

Ms. Gita Sen clarified that political economy as a term covered the systems by which energy was converted from one form to another, and with it, who owned, who processed; who hired, who worked, who did not. How we projected our existence in the social order was also part of political economy, and our concerns relate to what ICTs do to these aspects. She also cautioned the group about writing off the nation-state. She observed that the nation state had not disappeared, and was continuing to operate in ways that were not radically different. While in many ways, globalisation had taken away the intermediary role of the state in both positive and negative ways so that it was difficult for citizens to make demands on it, in other ways, things are similar. For example in the struggle for the Right to Food, we are still holding the state accountable.

DAY 4: 30 JULY 2010

Morning Session I: Presentations on Research Projects

“The Power to Organise and Engage: The Use of ICT by Women Migrant Domestic Workers’ Organisations” – Dr. Hsiao-Chuan Hsia and Dr. Philippa Smales

Presenting on their proposed research project, Dr. Hsiao-Chuan Hsia and Dr. Philippa Smales said that the study had been conceived out of a concern about how migrant domestic workers could organise to secure their rights. Domestic workers were rarely recognised and protected in the laws of their own countries; in another country, there were no laws to protect them in terms of safe migration or conditions of labour. Many of them were physically isolated because of their location in their employers’ households. Using mobiles, and accessing radio through mobiles, had proved an effective tool in organising and supporting migrant workers. The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development had observed that ICTs were used a great deal in Hong Kong, which had large groups of Filipino, Indonesian and Thai domestic workers. Pre-departure trainings are held in the sending countries, and information is also provided in the receiving countries, on obtaining support over cell-phones, what kind of SIM cards and cell phones work, emergency numbers, etc. In Hong Kong, workers were allowed to form unions, and hence there was a lot of political organising by the workers. In Taiwan, migrant workers could not form unions of their own, but could only join local unions, and could not be office-bearers. Hence, they formed loose associations. The researchers were not aware to what extent ICTs were being used in Taiwan, though migrant workers were using them. Hence there were various comparison points that were possible.

Summarising the core idea of the research proposal and its connection to the CITIGEN programme, Dr. Philippa Smales said that an extensive study into the use and effectiveness of ICT by migrant domestic workers had not yet been done. The research had the potential to highlight the importance of ICT to collective organisation and representation. It could also lead to an understanding of how these technologies could be used by migrant women domestic workers to be politically engaged as citizens of their own countries and as residents of the receiving countries. This information could then be further disseminated among organisations of migrant domestic workers about how ICTs could be used to organise their constituents. It was hoped that the research could also inform national policies and practices, including the briefings conducted by sending and receiving countries.

On the hypothesis that the effective use of ICTs could enhance freedom of association, collective representation and political engagement of migrant women domestic workers in selected countries of Asia, the research aimed to identify the potential for ICTs to organise, empower, and engage migrant workers in collective and political advocacy, while developing policy recommendations for governments unions and migrant worker associations to enhance domestic worker civil participation.

Among the questions the research hoped to answer were:

- What is the history of organising and of citizenship and gender policy in Taiwan and Hong Kong in relation to migrant domestic workers;
- What main forms of communication and collective organisation are currently used by Filipino, Thai and Indonesian women migrant domestic worker organisations in Hong Kong and Taiwan;

- Do Filipino, Thai and Indonesian women migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong and Taiwan currently have access to ICT and what are the impediments to that access;
- Are ICTs currently being used by Filipino, Thai and Indonesian women migrant domestic workers and their organisations in Hong Kong and Taiwan formally or informally to organise and engage migrant domestic workers in individual or collective advocacy;
- How the use of ICT can be further developed for women migrant domestic worker organisations in Hong Kong and Taiwan to collectively organise, to inform and to politically engage women migrant domestic workers;
- How the use of ICT can be further developed to inform and politically engage women migrant domestic workers at all stages of employment: from pre-departure training, engagement with ‘agencies’, recruitment, to access complaints mechanisms, and repatriation; and
- What policies recommendation on the use of ICT can be developed for the governments of countries of origin and countries of destination?

The research would begin with a review of relevant literature, including that around the use of ICTs to enfranchise unorganised labour with research on organising of migrant domestic workers in Asia. The primary research would be carried out using both structured and unstructured qualitative interviews with individual migrant domestic workers. The strong existing links with domestic worker networks would be used to access a pool of interviewees. Various kinds of domestic worker associations (registered unions, semi-structured associations and informal social groups) would also be interviewed to obtain information about existing levels of use of ICTs and the limitations on their use.

Once the level of access of domestic workers to ICT in the focus areas identified by the project, and its impact on social protection was determined, the findings of the research would be disseminated using the forms of ICT most commonly used. The findings would also be used to print an information booklet and poster, translated into the languages of the research participants. The Asia-Pacific Forum for Women, Law and Development is part of the co-secretariat of the United for Foreign Domestic Workers Rights (UFDWR) coalition, and the UFDWR google group and blog site would also be used to disseminate information. Broader communications and advocacy efforts were also planned using the findings of the research, for example at the second discussion by the ILO on the proposed convention and recommendation on domestic workers, the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD), etc. Targeted handouts and media releases would be prepared, to advise governments, other stakeholders, and other advocates in the field.

The group wondered whether there were anticipated political fallouts or risks to the participants in the research. **Ms. Hsia** explained that while workers in Hong Kong already had the right to unionise, the law in Taiwan had been changed so that migrant domestic workers could organise protests. Undocumented workers were protected by local NGOs. Hence no political fallout was anticipated.

Ms. Sepali Kottegoda observed that the private space of the employers formed the workspace of the employees in the case of domestic workers.

Ms. Hsia acknowledged that this was indeed a source of tension, as was the parallel dichotomy that when domestic workers needed to use their private time to relax, they needed to go out into public spaces in the foreign country, for instance, at picnics with their national groups in parks. This led to protests that the foreign workers were “taking over our public spaces”?

Ms. Oiwan Lam wondered whether it might be possible to get the migrant workers to keep a diary to record their practice of daily ICT use for a period of a month. This might help identify which

components were useful for developing targeted programmes and organising.

Ms. Hsia felt that participants in the research project were likely to perceive this as ‘work’ and might not be enthusiastic.

Ms. Anita Gurumurthy said that the main difficulty would be to link the micro to the meta – how data from questions about access, usage patterns, etc. could be recast to answer questions related to structure and agency from a gender or social analysis perspective. Were the present trajectories of ICT use emancipatory enough? What might be desirable use patterns? Such concerns might help to interpret social justice in the information society. The promise of ICTs relate to the fluidities happening in society, though it may be that these fluidities represent recastings of the old in new shapes that are as yet unrecognisable. The challenge of ICTs is that the state appears to be lost and does not seem to know how to react to some of these recastings. It would be useful to help the state respond if microexperiences could be linked to meta-analyses of the information society.

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala suggested that the Social Network Map methodology might be useful to understand what happens to diaspora communities in the place of migration. Studying the impact of migration at home, and in particular, whether experiences of political organisation as a migrant worker leads to greater politicisation of workers at home, would be useful.

Ms. Anita Gurumurthy noted that technological challenges were embedded in the social context, and hence challenges too should be mapped at the structural level.

Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio felt that the researchers could focus on intra-country migration for this phase so that they were not overwhelmed in this short duration.

Ms. Hsia said that this was a particularly rewarding community to study in the context of the concerns of the gender and citizenship programme, because on the one hand, migrant workers did not have too many rights because they were not citizens in the receiving country. At the same time, they were asserting their rights, and helping to expand the concept of citizenship both in their own and the receiving countries.

“Women’s Online Participation and the Transformation of Citizenship in Hong Kong” – Mr. Iam Chong and Ms. Oiwan Lam.

The proposed research project is based in Hong Kong and Mainland China, looking at what has happened to women’s citizenship after the mid-90’s, post the Beijing Conference in China, and in post-colonial times in Hong Kong. This is especially relevant in the milieu of ICTs, because of the advances in the new technologies – China has the biggest labour army employed in ICT as well as the largest number of users of ICTs. The discussions about the China model and the China miracle make such explorations of citizenship particularly pertinent. In this context, Prof. Chong quoted Chris Hunter, the last governor of Hong Kong, as saying that China’s challenge was not about whether to become a super power or challenge other countries. China’s challenge was to give us a model for economic prosperity without democracy and freedom. If it did, it would pose a real problem for the rest of the world.

The research project would explore two kinds of citizenship, in Hong Kong and Guangzhou in Mainland China, looking at women’s NGOs and individual women activists, in the contexts of post-colonial and authoritarian state projects respectively. The research would also examine cultural and political globalisations – how the global flows of civic and gender discourses help activists understand themselves as well as national development. The relationship between the state and civil society, including virtual civil society will also be examined, including the ways in which the authoritarian state “pretends to listen to civil society”.

There is a debate in China on what kind of civil and political participation the country should have,

while in Hong Kong, concerns about authoritarianism are increasing. In this context, the research questions are important:

- What kinds of online public sphere do women's NGOs and female activists create respectively?
- What are the differences and the dynamics between them?

The research questions explore how to situate the rise of environmental groups, women's organisations and development NGO projects in mainland China.

Establishing the context, Prof. Chong said that Hong Kong's situation was different from that of China, but related to China, post-colonial but also with a history of commitment to mainstream capitalism. Feminists there have had the freedom to get organised, but over time, have also become institutionalised. The interesting aspect in China is that NGOs are built up on state patronage. They cannot register independently. They have to go through various official procedures and register under a state or party organisation. NGOs therefore have developed strategies to be embedded in the party-state and take advantage of it. There are, therefore, two different kinds of gender politics and citizenship in operation involving those who are embedded in the party state and those who are not, which co-exist, which this research will study, to see if they co-exist without overlapping, or are in conflict. In comparison to China, Hong Kong is a soft totalitarian state, but some of these parameters still apply.

In terms of methodology, the study would carry out qualitative interviews to try and understand the development of feminism, leading to its increased institutionalisation in Hong Kong, and in contrast will look at lesbian groups and individual activists. In China, the participants in the research would be a women's issues-related NGO and women bloggers, who might be opinion leaders, activists or dissidents. The researchers hoped that the research would help the state-party embedded women NGOs to develop a certain self-reflexivity. They also hoped that the findings from the research would contribute to cultivating a self-awareness of developing alternative forms of gender citizenships.

In the discussion that followed the presentation, **Ms. Anita Gurumurthy** asked how pure the dichotomy would be between individual activists and organisations – would individual activists not have organisational affiliations?

Ms. Oiwan Lam shared that there were many individual women activists because it was illegal to register NGOs without a state or party affiliation – the government would track the organisation down.

Ms. Anita Gurumurthy asked if individuals worked through informal groups, and whether this would qualify as a category, as against the individual researchers.

Ms. Oiwan Lam said that this was where ICTs came in, they gave resources for individual activists to network with like-minded individuals, a statement which was supported by **Mr. Chong** who said that ICTs provide spaces for dissidents.

Ms. Oiwan Lam gave the example of a woman who had killed a government official who had tried to sexually assault her and who was awarded the death penalty. Persistent protest blogging by individual activists forced the members of the state-supported All-China Women's Federation to take a position and sign a petition which saved her life, although she had to admit to psychological problems and agree to house monitoring for three years.

Ms. Sarala Emmanuel wondered whether it was a good idea to highlight the dynamic things that were happening in an authoritarian environment. If research happened, what risks might this bring along with it?

Ms. Oiwan Lam said that a number of activists were adopting the lesbian strategy of ‘coming out’– “Yes, I am doing this, so what? I’m not doing anything illegal, only activities allowed by the constitution.” More and more activists are being persuaded to use their real names on the internet.

Mr. Chong said that the biggest risk to the research project might be that they might not be allowed to go to mainland China.

Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh **wondered whether the space dealing with feminism was less dangerous than other activisms.**

Ms. Oiwan Lam felt that the researchers would be less at risk because they were from Hong Kong, and mainstream China wanted to “present a nice face” to Hong Kong. She also felt that the establishment was harsher on male bloggers. The official list of dissidents was largely male, and women were slightly safer. Unlike other activisms that directly challenge the government, feminism is slightly safer. However, there are sensitive issues related to which women could be placed at risk, e.g., the poisoned milk issue, or the complaints about corruption related to the construction of the buildings which collapsed during the earthquake. The other issue is that state-party affiliated NGOs get opportunities to be invited to government consultations, assist in writing policy papers, etc. There is less access to such opportunities for individual activists.

Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio commended the purposive sampling of LGBT activists proposed in the research, because looking at multiple marginalities would cause issues of entitlements, claims, and citizenship to arise. A lot of research had been done around analyses of power in the political economy, how markets operate, etc., and not enough about use patterns among marginalised groups.

Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh suggested that one route might be to start from use patterns, move on to the macro-critical-economic questions, and then claim all our diverse struggles again.

Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio contended that desire was central to macroeconomics, and the “I want- I get” pattern was at the heart of all consumerisms. The heterosexual family drives the classic neo-liberal theory and practice. However, this theory and practice may be nuanced by talking to groups of lesbian women.

Ms. Anita Gurumurthy felt that the CITIGEN project was not a culture studies project, and that the research project would have to link to the institutional ecologies of states and markets, and address questions related to markets adequately. The aim of the research was to enable the group to politicise the issue of gender, citizenship and ICTs from a southern perspective, rejecting northern theories if necessary, and not to affirm scholarly space.

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala interjected that even if the state left us alone, the market would not.

Ms. Oiwan Lam felt that different sub-groups would emerge in the course of the research, bringing up issues of class. For instance, the way young people relate to ICTs and work was very different from the perspectives of her own generation.

Mr. Chong felt that while most of their informants belonged to the middle-class, they were not engaged in middle-class action. Many issues, of class, political economy, and social justice were related to feminist concerns. Some organisations, often extensions of the Chinese government, were actually doing formal class analysis. Others were not looking at it formally, but issues of class continued to come up in the course of their work.

Morning Session II: Presentations on Research Projects

“Women and the New Media in the Margins of the Sri Lankan State” – Dr. Sepali Kottegoda and Ms. Sarala Emmanuel

Explaining the general context on ICTs and women, **Ms. Sepali Kottegoda** said that only about 12% of women in poverty in Sri Lanka owned mobile phones, and only 1.2% of the total population had access to the internet in 2005. Using a sample that would be part Sinhala speaking and part Tamil speaking, the research project would study two specific initiatives, of Our Media Ourselves and the Women’s Media Collective, to use new media tools as a means of empowering women as citizens in Sri Lanka. The engagement of women in Sri Lanka with new media was an emerging area of knowledge, both in terms of access to and use of technology by women, as well as in terms of the understanding of citizenship as articulated by women using new media. The research team felt that it was important to document these dimensions, as women have faced many challenges in becoming visible in mainstream political discourses using mainstream media.

The research questions that the project would try to answer were whether new media provided a transformative platform for women to exercise their citizenship rights in Sri Lanka and enabled women to renegotiate citizenship rights in their local contexts, for example in terms of access to resources, information or decision making bodies. The research would also explore whether new media enabled women to contribute to discourses on formal citizenship at the local and national levels and how new media engaged with and fed into mainstream media and vice versa in the discourses on women and formal citizenship.

These questions were significant in the context of high literacy but low participation of Sri Lanka’s women in party politics and election processes – there was only 2% participation by women in local government, and 5% in national government. Another relevant factor was the post-conflict situation, and how this affected women’s participation. Exploring women’s engagement with the mainstream media and new media at the local and national levels, the research would look at how women were creating news related to their issues from the margins, and whether this was making change in terms of their engagement in the public sphere as active citizens. Women’s local news networks, using SMS, email, video/audio posts, webpages and websites would be studied. At the national level, the project would profile potential women candidates who were eligible, capable and willing for political participation through a website which would have written content, video and audio clips, to form a pool that political parties would find it difficult to ignore while selecting candidates for political participation. The site would receive newsfeeds from district level campaigning and activism, including posters, videoscreenings and community radio inputs on interventions by and for women and feedback about these, and also engage with mainstream media instruments.

The research methodology would involve action research. Interviews and focus group discussions with women consuming and engaging with new media would then feed into a mid-term feedback workshop. How women relate to new media: using mobile phones and SMS, accessing the internet, engaging with information websites, blogging, webradio and social networking sites. The Women’s Media Collective would consider three “learning encounters”, firstly, while the new media initiative for increasing women’s participation was being set up, and then three and six months into the process. Individual interviews and focus group discussions would be conducted with the women working in local government and women’s groups working on citizenship issues, who would generate the content for the proposed website. The intervention would have a survey component built in, and also try and gauge the reactions from mainstream media, and the public, to the use of new media by women. The project would also consider whether a link-up with the Sarvodaya

telecentres in Sri Lanka was possible.

The findings of the research would be used for advocacy through mid-term workshops in Batticaloa and Kurunegala and a final seminar at the national level, published and disseminated, and also used in discussions with policy makers, in the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Science and Technology.

Commenting on some of the issues raised by the Sri Lanka research project, **Ms. Anita Gurumurthy** observed that the first generation failures of telecentre projects had led to the current thesis that telecentres could work only with private partnership. Examining the institutional basis of the information society, and the perceptions of the local communities (for example, were the telecentres identified too much with government? were important. The evidence-based research would be useful to identify whether certain ICTs were not being used because of gender barriers. Since every reconstruction effort also requires building up communication technology, it would be worthwhile to see whether the learnings from the project would help to reclaim and advocate for the idea of the telecentre.

Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh agreed that it would be useful to look at Sarvodaya in a role to help women build a political constituency, not in terms of "more bang for the buck" in the research grant, but because the technology infrastructure was already in place. Also, while using the internet was important, it was also important to look at other media like community radio, which could be very helpful for identifying and reaching women's issues to a larger audience.

Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio wondered about the kind of women that the project would be looking at for participation in the political process.

Ms. Sepali Kottegoda explained that the project would try to empower women leaders, not necessarily members of any political party, to publicise their profiles through the new media, and then encourage political parties to nominate women candidates in their districts by highlighting their achievements and their suitability as candidates for the electoral process.

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala felt that it was important to clarify that political participation and representation were not the same, and that it was important for women to participate in all kinds of political processes, including women's meetings, rallies, etc.

Ms. Sepali Kottegoda countered that the project was an opportunity to document how far ICTs could support women's effort to move from political participation to representation. On the one hand, new media could support the process of building a women's movement in general political participation, on the other, it could partner in the pragmatic process of getting women into parliament. One aim of the action research would be to try and use ICTs to make women more attractive as candidates who could secure votes to mainstream political parties.

"ICTs, Gender and Inclusive Citizenship: The Bangladesh Case" – Ms. Sohela Nazneen

The core idea of the Bangladesh research project, according to **Ms. Sohela Nazneen**, was to study how ICTs facilitate inclusive citizenship for marginalised women from rural areas in Bangladesh. The ICT issue in Bangladesh was under-explored. The group under consideration, marginalised rural women, was more or less homogeneous, with the marginalisation being defined in terms of gender and class. Bangladesh has a policy on ICTs, called "Digital Bangladesh". However, the document uses gender-neutral language, and only in the education section is gender mentioned at all. Nevertheless, this policy will decide who gets access and what kind of access. There has been little research on the issue and the study will help to address the policy and practical dimensions of the current gender-neutral approach.

The study would use three ICT organisations as entry points for case studies. The organisations

were chosen because they work at the local level, and profess to work for social transformation, two of these, D-Net and Click-Diagnostic have been working since 2008, and hence it will be possible to get some information on the impact. D-Net offers a range of developmental services, including agriculture, health and law-related queries, through internet kiosks, and 41% of the users are reported to be women, who also have infomediaries who help them cross gender barriers and access information from the kiosks. Information about women's access would be obtained from secondary sources including the local body office, and directly from users. The study would look at how the spaces are managed, and how much local ownership there is of the initiative, in the context of facilitating women's access and use of ICTs. Click Diagnostic is a private company that works with partner organisations and provides information through mobile phones and the internet on health, especially maternal health. The study would explore to what extent rural women are being benefited by this initiative. The third case study would be about the only functioning community radio in Bangladesh, which has no license and is therefore, illegal. The radio plays popular music, but also provides vital local information, including about immunisation, or even lost cows!

The study would consider whether the access to and use of ICTs by marginalised women promotes inclusive citizenship at the local level. It would consider four sub-questions: whether technology has helped them renegotiate rights, obtain recognition as claim-makers, challenge power structures, and whether existing policies and regulations create the scope for such transformational activities. It would investigate whether getting information through ICTs at their doorstep versus through entry into public spaces act in confluence, and help women gain access to new spaces. The study would look at the use of digital technologies for individual and collective protests, and making change at the local level. It would explore whether the policy context creates possibilities for women, or instead, regulates women's agency.

Presuming that the three entities agree to participate in the study, a series of initial interviews would be carried out with key informants, as part of a scoping study to understand their own theories of change and where gender fitted into these, and where and under what conditions they had been most successful in bringing about transformations. Once three sites for study had been selected on the basis of these scoping interviews, field participant observations, and interviews with frontline workers (e.g., infomediaries) and users would reveal how change could happen on the ground. Interviews with policy makers, for example, the national NGO body on community radio would help with policy analysis from a gender perspective.

As part of its communication strategy, the project would organise a workshop with various stakeholders, including the participating organisations, representatives of the Government of Bangladesh, Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNRCC) and the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC). Based on the research findings, a policy brief would be prepared in both e-format and print, and stories of transformatory change would be captured through audio-visual clips. The literature review associated with the project would also be useful to identify further gaps to be researched. For reciprocity, follow up meetings to support the participating organisations would be held.

Ms. Nazneen felt that there were also some risks associated with the project. The first was the difficulty in fine-tuning indicators which would capture the role played by ICTs in bringing about transformative changes in the lives of marginalised rural women. Secondly, after the scoping interviews, it may be that the organisations currently identified for the case studies might not be appropriate, and this might cause difficulties and delays. Thirdly, the community radio that the project hopes to study is illegal. While the government is aware of it, it may not want to draw more attention to itself by participating in the study.

Ms. Ramata Molo Thioune hoped that the research would help to identify entry points or windows of opportunity to make an impact on the Digital Bangladesh policy.

Ms. Srilatha Batliwala felt that the four sub-questions identified were completely inappropriate for the time-frame of the research project, and needed to be asked after ten years. Only after a minimum of five, but more appropriately ten years, if there were no major structural shifts, could we say that ICTs have failed in helping women exercise their agency. It might be better to see whether the research reveals some early signs or indications that the country is moving in the direction of major changes in the serious processes of renegotiations of rights in ten years' time. Many of these processes, she felt, were "imponderable and unpredictable", and hence perhaps the research was an artificial exercise anyway. She felt it would be more appropriate for the project to attempt something more modest, which was amenable to the given time-frame, and locate this piece of research within a longer trajectory of inquiry.

Ms. Nazneen felt that the research project "gives us hands and legs to show what is happening on the ground" and hence would be valuable to argue for more access for rural women.

Sharing an experience in which some research participants from rural areas had helped researchers frame questions which would help them gather the requisite data on sensitive issues, **Ms. Srilatha Batliwala** felt that this was an approach that could be considered while designing the semi-structured interview format for rural women and infomediarities.

Afternoon Session I: Some thoughts on CITIGEN and the path forward: What we have heard in the three days of the workshop – Ms. Srilatha Batliwala and Ms. Anita Gurumurthy.

In this presentation, **Ms. Srilatha Batliwala** attempted a recap of the premises and assumptions that would inform the CITIGEN research programme, as discussed over the previous three days. The key endeavour of the programme, drawing on the knowledge emerging from the ground through the individual, multi-country research projects, would be to attempt to build a feminist theory on the information society that was not reactive and not through the categories/givens from the north, though building on it. Such a grounded theory would balance the meta and the micro, while being aware that both were valid and in a dialectic. This effort would recognise that social change is happening through the creation and expansion of the information society, and that at a point in time when southern feminists were yet to respond to this change, this research programme would make an attempt to build this.

One premise for such a theory building exercise was that there was a techno-social phenomenon that was expressing itself in shifting shapes that were worth examining, in terms of production, reproduction and social reproduction; the public and the private; the local and the global, the individual and the social/political, through realities that could be embedded or embodied. The findings from the research would provide insights into the role that feminist philosophy could play in all the new and emerging, inter-generational debates, as identities, masculinities, hegemonies and transgressions were negotiated and adjusted. Another premise was that the project would claim feminist ethics to revisit the semantic and syntax of the emerging information society, examining the ways in which it was reconstituting old identities and structures, and in the ruptures, disruptions and transgressions that were also occurring. The project would also take up the challenge of reviewing meanings, using citizenship as a lens to critique the user-consumer discourse, and to articulate the precise connections between social justice and the publicness of the techno-social paradigm.

The programme would also try to bring the rigour of southern feminist thought to capture the problematic of state, market and civil society in its new configurations, and rearticulate what social justice meant in this shifting picture. For this purpose, it would examine the spaces of the local and the supra-local, as well as the global and the sub-global. Within this it would investigate

manifestations of agency and structure, identify enabling factors and institutional mechanisms, spot controls and gatekeepers, explore the accountability of institutions, never forgetting that needs and rights are interconnected. It was also expected that the products from the research should belong to the research programme to publish first, but in the meanwhile, researchers would also use it in whichever ways would help to make social change happen, at the level of governments, women's movements and other social justice movements, civil society actors, donors, and in the discourse on formal citizenship.

The second part of the presentation, by **Ms. Anita Gurumurthy** focused on process considerations that needed to be discussed. Issues for discussion included ways and means by which the partners would work in collaboration with each other and how they would approach time-lines and outputs.

Afternoon Session II: Presentations on Research Projects

“Strengthening Capacities and Linkages of Civil Society Groups and Academe-Based Institutions to Promote Gender-Sensitive and Rights-Based Perspectives through Citizens’ Electoral Participation” – Ms. Sylvia Estrada Claudio and Mr. Ibarra Gutierrez.

The research team from the Philippines said that their original research project had intended to assess, gather recommendations, build on and reassess the existing communication efforts and technologies meant to serve a European Union funded project, related to capacity building and linking of civil society organisations in the context of greater gender-sensitivity and rights-based perspectives. However, the European Commission had been very particular about its control of the project content, and had wanted any references which were critical of the government to be removed from even the project proposal.

However, the issues being discussed were critical from the health and rights perspectives. The Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines had been adamantly opposed to the provision of many sexual and reproductive health services and products to young people, especially young people with alternative sexual identities. This had had many important serious health implications: for example, the mayor of Manila banned condoms, and during the HIV and AIDS pandemic, no condoms were available in the city for almost nine years. Hence, the research team had felt that it could not dilute the research project to favour the government. Consequently, it had refused to work on the project.

Consequently, the current research project had also had to be modified. The current research project would therefore involve collaboration with an NGO working on sexual and reproductive rights in 10 slums, six of which were in metro Manila. It would be a citizens' journalism project, involving youth groups, which would make use of digital technologies. A website would display news bulletins regarding young people's issues, including sexual and reproductive rights. Opportunities for interaction with young people would be built into the project. The rigour of the project would be enhanced and ensured by the presence of Mr. Ibarra Gutierrez, who had been the editor of the Philippine Collegian, which had been the most prominent independent newspaper during the dictatorial regime of the former president Marcos. The project would be documented using self-reflexive methodologies, and would also try to understand the role of digital media in empowering young people with health information, and also how it was used in queer politics within identities and coalitional politics across identities, as it struggled with oppressions from the dominant patriarchal culture.

“The potential of ICT for Elected Women Representatives of Kerala, India” – Ms. Raji P.R.

Presenting on behalf of herself and her principal researcher, Ms. Mini Sukumar, Ms. Raji said that

the proposed research project was undertaken in the context of the increased emphasis on both women's participation in local politics and e-governance that was happening in the southern state of Kerala. While elected women representatives had begun to make their presence felt in local governance, they appeared to be very hesitant in using computers, in spite of significant inputs by the state government to provide the requisite training. The core ideas of the research would look at the role played by new information and communication technologies in women's participation in local governance and institutional transparency. Since participation in local governance was an undeniable measure of citizenship, the project would explore how ICTs help elected women representatives participate, and also how they can be harnessed to help them participate better.

The research would explore whether there were gender-specific barriers, arising out of the larger patriarchal context, for the elected women representatives (EWRs) in accessing ICTs and engaging in e-governance. It would also try to understand the role of ICTs in reshaping gender roles and strengthening the boundaries of citizenship. Local government elections were to take place later in the year, and the research project would interview both outgoing EWRs to understand the extent of their use of ICTs in their work, and ask those EWRs who intended to recontest about the extent to which they intended to use ICTs. The context of the study was defined by the high status of women in terms of social development indicators in Kerala at a time when economic spaces were shrinking, and decentralisation programmes focusing on good governance, capacity building of elected representatives, infrastructure development, and for stimulating economic growth were being implemented by the state government. The state was also placing a significant emphasis on e-governance, with increased government spending on developing and deploying e-governance software and systems.

Elected women representatives were seen as 'slow learners', reluctant to master new skills and with inhibitions about using the internet. The researchers were offering the hypothesis that it was not the technology itself, but the way society controlled and perceived it that was a problem. If gender barriers existed in ICTs, they were an extension of the same barriers which operated in the larger patriarchal society of Kerala.

For their research, the team would be using multiple methodologies, including evaluating e-governance programmes through a review and content analysis of government websites and training modules used in training elected representatives. Interviews and FGDs would be carried out to study the use of ICTs by outgoing members who had received training from the government. ICT use by women contestants in the local elections scheduled later in the year would be used. The project would build an ICT platform for EWRs to share their concerns and build their collective strength. Currently, because of the strong political divide along party lines, no informal networks existed for women to share their concerns as women.

As part of their advocacy strategy, the research team would share their findings at a dissemination seminar involving policy makers in local self-government issues, agencies involved in e-governance development and training in the state, and women activists.

Ms. Sarala Emmanuel suggested that there might be similarities, and hence learnings to share, across the Kerala and Sri Lanka projects.

Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh felt that the exercise could reveal what was right and what was wrong with the government's current approach and contribute to developing another model in collaboration with the state government on increasing the use of ICTs by EWRs.

To a question from Mr. Chong requesting more information on e-governance in Kerala, Ms. Raji said that several softwares had been developed by the state government, which were to be deployed by local governments to provide information, ensure transparency and help citizens interact with the government.

Elected representatives were being trained to help undertake this project in a big way.

Ms. Ramata Thioune asked what some of the expected changes as a result of the project were.

Ms. Raji replied that Kerala had pioneered several projects on ICT which had been replicated in other states, but these had never been analysed from a gender perspective. This would be the first such analysis and could provide important insights which could inform the e-governance programmes of the state, and also provide learnings for other states.

Ms. Hsia felt that it was very important for the various research teams to understand each other's contexts and constraints. She felt that a lot of time had been spent on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks and more could have been spent on learning about each other's work.

The conference came to an end with both **Ms. Anita Gurumurthy** and **Ms. Ramata Molo Thioune** thanking the research teams for their participation and wishing them well in their research projects.
