

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

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

Anchored by:

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

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

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

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

Sarala presented on behalf of **Group 2**. She said

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

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

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

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

There were three major substantive issues the group looked which had several subsets. The first



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

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

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

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

which this gap could be bridged and gauge the extent it was possible.

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



Parminder speaking on behalf of Group 3

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

Srilatha, summed up the last session by saying that the groups had actually managed to identify ten themes and ten methods or approaches which would help take forward the conversations of CITIGEN. She then asked the network members how this could be taken forward in a more concrete manner. While IT for Change, she said, would continue engaging with these questions, the other members, she felt, also needed to contribute in a more substantive manner. One of the wisdoms, she felt, that needed to be harvested, was how to generate resources to do this work. What happens often is that we allow someone to take leadership in resource generation and then end up feeling that the situation has become hierarchical. This

implies that we need to work in more collaborative ways, sharing the burden of raising resources in a new way.

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