

WORKSHOP no. 91 REPORT

ICC BASIS / APC / Government of Kenya

Internet Governance Forum (IGF) 2012, Baku, Azerbaijan

Technology, Economic and Societal Opportunities and Women

ORGANISERS

- Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
- Government of Kenya
- International Chamber of Commerce's (ICC) BASIS initiative (Business Action to Support the Information Society)

MODERATOR

Erika Mann, Head of Global Public Policy at Facebook

PANELLISTS

1. Antoaneta Angelova-Krasteva, Head of Unit, Stakeholders, DG CONNECT, European Commission
2. Alice Munyua, Ministry of Information and Communications, Kenya
3. Yara Sallam, Manager of the Women Human Rights Defenders Program, Nazra
4. Theresa Swinehart, Executive Director, Global Internet Policy, Verizon

LEAD DISCUSSANTS

5. Grace Githaiga, Kenya ICT Action Network (KICTANet), Kenya
6. P. Usha Rani, Director, Institutional Building, SERP of Government of Andhra Pradesh

Discussion

Ms Erika Mann welcomed all participants, introduced the panellists and explained the focus of the workshop. She began the workshop by asking panelists and discussants to

describe the existing Internet-related economic, cultural, political and social opportunities for women, and the gaps that exist.

- Ms Antoaneta Angelova-Krasteva emphasized the importance of the knowledge economy and digital skills in order to foster opportunities for women and social innovation. She also stressed the need for more girls in STEM and women pursuing ICT career.

Ms Mann followed up by asking the panellists to describe some of the online threats faced by women human rights defenders (WHRDs).

- Ms Yara Sallam, manager of the WHRDs programme at Nazra in Egypt, discussed the gender-based abuse of WHRDs online, including posting photos of women activists drinking in public, undermining their reputation, and in some cases, forcing them to withdraw from public activism. On a local Facebook group, The Girls Revolution¹, an Egyptian woman who posted an artistic photo of breastfeeding was subject to sexual harassment and defamation.
- Ms Munyua discussed recent research conducted in Kenya, which demonstrated the ways in which cybercrime affects women, including fraud, and gender-based abuse on social networks, which has forced some women to withdraw from online spaces. Ms Githaiga also described the results of mapping exercises to understand the type and prevalence of violence against women (VAW) online.²
- Workshop participant, Ms Nighat Daad, who works with the Digital Rights Foundation in Pakistan, told the panel about online threats she received in response to articles she wrote following the shooting of Malala Yousufzai, on education in conflict zones in the country. When Ms Daad reported the threats to government authorities, she received no response, and eventually felt she had to take down her articles from apc.org for her own safety. Nighat expressed serious concern over the lack of formal protection for WHRDs.

Ms Mann followed up by asking how rights can be enhanced through the Internet, including issues of empowerment, abuse, and technology-related VWA.

- Ms Grace Githaiga emphasized the importance of online services that are relevant to women's daily life, and described the situation in Kenya, where women's issues are still considered a soft issue by legislators, and a formula for implementation is needed.

1 <https://www.facebook.com/Revolution4Girls>

2 KICTANet and APC, 2010; Women and technology: the dark side of ICTs.

- Ms Munyua recommended a multistakeholder response, with policies not only from government, but from business and the technical community in the provision of services and development of contracts.
- Ms Theresa Swinehart followed up by discussing existing industry initiatives, such as working remotely, contributing to education initiatives in communities, and developing a national hotline for reporting VAW, with direct contact by mobile phones. Ms Swinehart also emphasized the importance of the free flow of information, and discussed the factors that limit online participation by women, including literacy and influence in government.
- Ms Usha Rani described projects in India intended to improve the daily lives of women, including family planning, pensions, micro-finance, micro-insurance, agricultural practices, and online tools for plotting the growth of young children.
- Ms Usha Rani underlined that some of the projects implemented by the Government in India are utilizing various technologies (such as viz., mobile, web-based, IVRS and Smart card) to support the ultra-poor in managing their own institutions (viz., community-based organizations), and in improving the quality of life of the poor. She also described how these technologies were used effectively for capturing data of more than 10 million members, providing micro-finance, micro-insurance, agricultural practices, growth monitoring of children, coverage of immunization and addressing various gender issues, such as viz., atrocities on women, dowry, domestic violence and wide-spread child marriages.
- A workshop participant, Ms Valentina Pellizzer from Bosnia-Herzegovina, suggested that online platforms should develop terms of service that recognize human rights, and provide default privacy settings.

Ms Mann then opened the floor to questions and comments:

- A participant from Jamaica described the case where women outnumber men in tertiary education, and the public perception that there is a bias towards women, and asks if this perception undermines advocacy for increased access to STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education by women.
- Ms Angelova-Krasteva responded that this perception is dangerous, and is being looked at by the European Commission. In general the number of young people studying STEM is low – e.g. in OECD countries only 5% of girls expect a career in engineering and computing while 18% of boys expect career in these fields. She also emphasized the importance of using economic value as an argument for women's access to online spaces and tools. Several other participants and panelists agreed on the need to frame women's rights issues in terms of economic development in order to gain legislative support.

- A participant working in Afghanistan asked whether the broad range of issues faced by women in different countries prevents effective work in this area.
- Ms Sallam followed up by suggesting a focus on human rights frameworks, which have universal relevance, even if those rights are applied differently in various contexts and countries.
- Another participant from Afghanistan, Mr Omar Mansoor Ansari, suggests that universal human rights may not take into account cultural norms and sensitivities, suggesting projects take on culturally non-controversial issues first before tackling issues of human rights in countries such as Afghanistan. The notion of “cultural appropriate-ness” was contested by some other participants in the session.
- A participant from Kenya highlighted the way in which online abuse reflects offline marginalization, and the importance of culture shifts offline in order to improve women's empowerment both online and offline.
- A representative from the Cairo Institute for Human Rights stressed the importance of local experts partnering with international institutions to address issues at a local level, being aware of cultural specificities without compromising human rights.
- Ms Lillian Nalwoga, a participant from Uganda, described the need for leadership and role models for women to work with ICTs. Participants at the workshop agreed with this statement, and Ms Rani described a case in India, which demonstrates the impact of community-based leadership. After serious issues with micro-finance institutions resulted in suicides by women in a particular community, women in that community brought an ordinance to the local government, and forced deliberation on micro-finance activities. After gaining confidence both at household and society level, women in this community are moving on to high-level issues.
- Ms Usha Rani described a case in India demonstrating the impact of community-based leadership. Due to charging of exorbitant interest rates and usage of coercive methods for recovery of loans by some of the micro finance institutions, around 400 poor members committed suicide. The community-based organizations of the poor strongly protested it and put pressure on the provincial Government in bringing out an ordinance for regulating the activities of micro-finance institutions. She concluded that after gaining confidence, both at the household and society level, the women are able to play a pivotal role in bringing out pro-poor and gender sensitive policies.

- A participant from the UK asked for advice on how to respond to the circulation of sexist photos and jokes in online social networks particularly amongst young people in schools, and Ms Sallam responded by suggesting that girls should name the circulation of materials as discriminatory so that this does not become normalized.

The final discussion focused on freedom of expression, including the principles involved, and questions around roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders. Jac SM Kee, APC, re-emphasized the impact of social and cultural norms on women's access to the Internet for their rights and empowerment. Business, government and civil society agreed on the need for coordinated efforts.

The following policy options and issues were discussed:

1. Provide training and support to encourage community women's leadership on Internet access issues for addressing issues relevant to their daily life.
2. Education and capacity building for girls and women on ICT skills as well as addressing socio-cultural norms that act as barriers are critical components of access – one which the private sector can play an important role in, in collaboration with civil society.
3. Further and sustained multistakeholder dialogue on strategies for women's leadership and active participation on Internet-related activities and empowerment.
4. Emphasize the economic development opportunities when discussing women's empowerment and access to the Internet with government.
5. Work with government to develop legislation that provides specific protection for WHRDs and Internet activists threatened in online spaces.
6. Programmes and recommended solutions to address issues of access and empowerment for women and girls must take into account multiple dimensions – economic, political as well as importantly, social and cultural issues.
7. Building on initiatives that companies like Verizon, AT&T and others currently undertake.
