

What does the Internet Governance Forum signify for gender equality?

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“People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does.”

— Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*

Introduction - A feminist critical discourse analysis of the IGF

Feminists have come a long way from the techno-pessimism of the 1980s¹. Digital tools and spaces, especially the Internet, holds a key place in their agenda of, and strategies for, change. It is not that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are no longer the object of feminist critical interrogation. But as the trajectories of a globalising world have proceeded along particular pathways bearing the imprint of ICTs, the sub-text of the 'digital' in social structures and processes has become an important site for active engagement. There is palpable excitement about using ICTs for activism. Also, even if nascent, there is growing recognition that the momentous change evidenced in the world co-constructed by digital phenomena is extremely pertinent for multi-disciplinary feminist inquiry.

However, at a macro level, public policy issues that tie in gender equality concerns with digital technology are yet to find legitimacy within feminist research and advocacy, especially in the global South. Active engagement in this area is still confined to a small group of scholars and activists².

As social norms, practices and institutions adapt to the new formations of the digital era, the foundational questions of justice and equality, access and opportunity – abiding feminist concerns – are recast. The case for active immersion by feminists in the emergent and often piquant aspects of the governance of digital spaces, especially the global Internet, therefore cannot be overstated. While the national arena is still somewhat closer to feminist activism and advocacy in this regard, global Internet governance seems rather distant. At the global level, the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is a key body, carrying out the mandate of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) with regard to multi-stakeholder policy dialogue. Even as global policy making in relation to the Internet is distributed across a multiplicity of sites – organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, European Union, bilateral trade agreements etc. – mirroring trends in international political economy, the IGF still remains an important space for pushing the discourse of equality in the information society.

This paper sets out to study how gender equality gets constructed within the discursive space of the IGF. In spite of its non-binding nature, the IGF plays a key role in structuring global Internet governance debates. As other scholars have pointed out, “the IGF helps mainstream the values of the Internet community within traditional policy-making environments and spreading them beyond

1 For instance, refer the work of the scholar Judy Wajcman.

2 In this context, see the EroTICS research programme of the Association for Progressive Communications (<http://www.eroticsindia.org/>) and the CITIGEN research programme of IT for Change (<http://www.gender-is-citizenship.net/citigen/>).

the boundaries of the tight IGF process³.” Whereas assessments by women's rights groups have pointed to how the participation of women in this space does not automatically translate into inclusion of gendered perspectives⁴, we felt that a systematic exploration of the particular imaginaries of gender equality legitimized in and through the IGF was important. Methodologically therefore, we decided to undertake a discourse analysis of the most recent IGF – IGF 2012 in Baku.

Firstly, based on a review of existing literature on gender equality and gender justice, we evolved an analytical framework that would enable us to understand the debates and discussions at the IGF, through a gender equality lens. As Southern feminists have long argued, the idea of gender justice must straddle both economic and social justice domains⁵. Keeping with this view, and drawing upon United Nations Research Institute for Social Development's framework⁶, this study defines gender equality as comprising the following domains: capabilities and access to resources and opportunities; empowerment; and enabling macro-environmental factors. The manner in which we have interpreted this three-point framework for this study on gender equality in the IGF, is detailed in the table below.

A. Capabilities, access to resources and opportunities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to technological infrastructure (Internet and ICTs), and costs of access 2. Making technologies contextually-appropriate 3. Opportunities for innovation
B. Empowerment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Empowering possibilities opened up by Internet and ICTs 2. Rights and freedoms w.r.t Internet and ICTs
C. Macro-environmental factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. National policy regimes 2. Global Internet governance regime 3. The political economy of global development/ the North-South divide

In order to understand what the IGF signifies for gender equality, we adopted a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to unpack how the above-mentioned domains have been constructed in

3 See Epstein,D. (2012), *The Duality Of Information Policy Debates: The Case Of The Internet Governance Forum* , A Dissertation presented to the Graduate School of Cornell University.
<https://dspace.library.cornell.edu/bitstream/1813/29128/1/de56thesisPDF.pdf> , Retrieved 22 February 2013

4 See APC's Gender report card of IGF 2011 at <http://www.apc.org/en/node/15650>. Retrieved 22 February 2013.

5 For instance, see the discussion on the need to move beyond '*the personal is the political*' by the black feminist Angela Davis cited in the Introductory chapter of Chaudhuri,M. (ed., 2006), *Feminism in India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, and the work of Southern feminist groups like DAWN.

6 See Chapter 4 of the UNRISD Report *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World*

the debates and discussions at IGF 2012. The specific details of the methodology are outlined in the section below.

Methodology:

CDA seeks to “reveal the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of the social world, including those social relations that involve unequal relations of power⁷”. Specifically, when applied to studying the spaces of governance and policy-making, CDA focuses on “revealing structures of power and unmasking ideologies⁸”. Also, CDA primarily focuses on the analysis of discourse as social practice rather than discourse-as-text⁹, for which there is no hard-and-fast methodology. The onus is on the researchers to “develop an approach that makes sense in light of their study and to establish a set of arguments to justify the particular approach they adopt”¹⁰. In prising open, and finding traces of gender in, discursive sites, feminists have the task of deciphering dominant assumptions, scrutinising key constructs and pursuing patterns in the flow, indeed, also following the spaces of silence. Gender may not obtain in simplistic or reductionist pursuits of text alone, but would be articulated in the complexity of sub-text, and assemblages of constructs that may need to be pieced together to build the 'master' narrative. Deconstructing gender through CDA, we found, was about trailing the many narratives in the sub-text for their renderings of power and contestation – unpeeling how what is said is sought to be legitimized and where what is silent speaks louder than words.

We undertook an inductive analysis of the transcripts of the six main sessions of the IGF 2012. We did a detailed reading of the transcripts of the main sessions, to understand the main contexts in which the eight themes of our gender equality framework came up. This first-level reading revealed that invariably, these thematic elements were situated in relation to the word 'access' – a notion that has inspired much writing and scholarly exposition in the field of ICTs and Development, particularly in its connection to women's empowerment. Pegging our inquiry to the systematic tracing of utterances of 'access', we felt, was a useful rhetorical device to grasp the meanings and assumptions embedded in the discursive spaces of the IGF.

Thus, trailing the word 'access', we selected utterances across the transcripts of the six main sessions, and analysed how the eight thematic elements of our gender equality framework had been constructed within these utterances. We used a selective coding methodology, excerpting parts of

7 Jørgensen, M., Phillips, L. (2002) *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. London: Sage.

8 Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2009). *Critical discourse analysis: History, agenda, theory and methodology*. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (2nd ed., pp. 1-33). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

9 This is not to say CDA rejects the analysis of discourse-as-text. In fact, Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA advocates the study of discourse at three levels: discourse-as-text; discourse as discursive practice i.e. discourse as something that is produced, circulated, distributed, consumed in society ; and discourse-as-social-practice, i.e. the ideological effects and hegemonic processes in which discourse is a feature. Blommaert, J. and Bulcaen, C. (2002), *Annual Review of Anthropology*.

10 Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis: Investigating processes of social construction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

text with the word “access” as situated in particular narratives¹¹. In addition, we also decided to use 'gender dimension' – i.e. utterances with explicit references to issues of women's rights, structural exclusions emerging out of the operations of patriarchy and LGBT rights – as a separate category, to assess the prevalence of explicit references to gender, among references to any of the above-mentioned eight thematic categories. We present a synthesis of the implications of the emerging assumptions and sub-texts for gender equality in the concluding section.

We also grouped the actors making these utterances into the categories detailed in the table below, with the view to undertake an actor-interest analysis. For this classification, we relied upon the details mentioned in the IGF 2012 Participants List on the official website of the IGF, and information available on the online public domain:

Type of Actor	Description
Government	Member of an official government delegation to the IGF.
Inter-governmental organization	Official representatives of Intergovernmental organizations other than UN agencies.
UN agency	Official representatives of UN agencies. We kept this category separate from that of 'Inter-governmental organization' because of the location of the IGF within the UN system, and its inter-relationship with other forums of the UN.
Professional Association	Membership based bodies that represent the interests of a specific, clearly demarcated constituency. E.g. ISP Associations.
Non state actor involved in IG	Technical organizations who have been historically involved in Internet Governance, such as ICANN.
Internet company	Including both ISPs and dot-com companies.
Advocacy Group	Groups and organizations that explicitly articulate a rights-based agenda
Individuals	Individual scholars, academics, researchers and professional consultants. Since individuals represent a multiplicity of interests, we assigned them to a separate category.
Unavailable	There are spaces where names are missing in the verbatim

¹¹ rather than in relation to a certain number of pre-decided words.

	<p>transcripts of the IGF. In such spaces, where it was not possible to identify and classify the actor, we have used the category 'Unavailable'. We would like to clarify here that there are only very few utterances falling under this category.</p>
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Through this process, 95 utterances were identified across the six main sessions of IGF 2012 and codified. When we classified the utterances across the thematic categories of our gender equality framework, if we found utterances that pertained to more than one category, we analysed them as part of all the themes they referred to, rather than reducing them to just one category. Because of this, in some cases, the same utterance has been analysed across multiple themes.

While coding, in addition to identifying patterns through inductive and iterative reading, we also did a legitimation analysis following Van Leeuwen's¹² analytical framework on legitimation strategies, using the following:

- Authorization – reference to the authority of tradition, custom, law or person in whom institutional authority is vested. (Authority of confirmity/Expert authority/Impersonal authority)
- Moralization - reference (including oblique references) to value systems (Evaluation/ Abstraction/ Comparison)
- Rationalization -legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action, and to the knowledges that society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity. This can be instrumental or theoretical.

We consider such an analysis to be useful in understanding what discourses (in the sense of social practice) of gender equality, seek and find legitimacy in the space of the IGF.

Clearly, our methodology has some limitations. Following the dots, as we have, in locating discourses of interest through access, we have delimited ourselves to just one axis, albeit a critical one. There could well be some others that construct the totality of the IGF space. We have confined ourselves to analysing the main plenary sessions for only one IGF, proceeding from the fact that the themes of the main plenary sessions have not changed significantly over the years. However, it is possible that a longitudinal study may have revealed historical trends on how the discourse of gender equality in the IGF has moved over time, which may have been missed out in our analysis. Finally, an analysis of the feeder workshops, in addition to the main plenary sessions, may have revealed counter-currents and counter-discourses that are not captured at present. However, based on personal observation as an organization that has been engaged in the discourse of IG for many

¹² Van Leeuwen, T. (2008), *New tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*, New York: Oxford University Press.

years, we have been able to tease out inferences that we believe hold credence and validity.

The following sections highlight the key findings of our study. We would like to clarify here that when we have presented voices from the transcripts that we have analysed, we have reproduced them remaining faithful to the original transcripts, even in cases where there are grammatical errors in the original. However, in some cases, when we felt that the reader would have a lot of difficulty in understanding the excerpts, especially as the original transcripts are unedited, we have introduced some clarifications in parenthesis.

Key Findings

Before we proceed to understand how the discourse of gender equality gets constructed within the space of the IGF, mapping “the ideological effects and hegemonic processes”¹³ that operate in the space is a necessary first step. The hallmark of the IGF is its moorings in the values of the technical Internet community, which are markedly different from the traditional values of global intergovernmental forums. The IGF takes off from the WSIS, which was the first UN Summit to open up participation for non-governmental actors like private industry and civil society. Based on the so-called 'multi-stakeholder approach', a new bottom-up policy development process that may be seen as challenging traditional 'secret diplomacy' through new principles like openness, transparency and rough consensus in global negotiations was attempted¹⁴. The technical community has wielded considerable influence in the WSIS process, bringing into the space of policy deliberation the ideological slant of the entrepreneurial class of the Silicon Valley of the 90s - libertarianism, techno-utopianism and anti-statism¹⁵. The IGF has been a product of this legacy-emphasising openness, meritocracy and multistakeholderism.

The multistakeholderism of the IGF does trouble conventional authority in UN spaces, but in doing so, its specific ideologies and processes do not really generate valencies about Internet Governance as a set of public policy principles. As pointed out elsewhere, the core nucleus of the IGF comprises a closed community that is consistently involved in the creation of the global structures of Internet Governance, who generate a discourse¹⁶ that is paradoxical – emphasising individual freedoms of the members but already excluding those who do not subscribe to the communal culture of the nucleus, and its valued dialogic norms. The IGF thus legitimizes a version of democratic deliberation with no visible resolution in the end. Its openness promotes inclusion by conformity to process norms even as it tolerates and even formally legitimizes differences of perspectives between different actors / stakeholders.

13 Epstein,D. (2012), *op.cit.*

14 Kleinwachter, W. (date unknown), 'The World Summit in Reflection', Retrieved <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/wsis/Kleinwachter.html>, 22 February 2013

15 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Californian_Ideology

16 For example, see the discussion on 'idea entrepreneurs' in Epstein,D. (2012), *op.cit.*

Knowing the ideological terrain of the IGF is critical to explorations of the frames through which gender equality is articulated. We now proceed first to mapping the 'gender dimension' of our analytical framework, tracing explicit references to issues of women's rights, structural exclusions emerging out of the operations of patriarchy and LGBT rights.

I. The absence of explicit references to the gender dimension in Internet Governance debates

Only 8 out of the 95 utterances examined in this study explicitly address the gender dimension. This may be taken as indicative of an extreme under-representation of gendered perspectives in the IGF debates, corroborated by the Association for Progressive Communication's Gender Report Card of the 2011 IGF. The Report Card pointed out that “Although women made up at least half, and sometimes even a majority of participants in 50% of the monitored sessions, and there is a relatively small gender gap between male and female presenters, this did not translate into actual inclusion of gendered perspectives and analysis in the content of the discussion or presentations¹⁷.”

Table 1: Gender dimension in IGF 2012 Main Sessions

Type of actor	LGBT rights	Women's empowerment projects	Socio-cultural barriers to access	Inclusion	Total
Advocacy Group	1	2	1		4
Internet Company				1	1
Professional Association			1	1	2
Government				1	1
Total	1	2	2	3	8

As Table 1 suggests, a variety of actors have made explicit references to the gender dimension but the majority of utterances – 4 out of the 8 – are by Advocacy Group representatives. However, it is important to recognise that this shared affirmation of the need to address the gender dimension of access, may come from speakers with conflicting ideologies, and even opposing interests. Among all eight utterances, we found only one explicit reference to women's rights – made as part of a discussion on the adverse implications of anti-pornography laws on LGBT rights.

.....Censorship (limits) access to free flow of informationand there is regulation of sexual content ... (which) is usually couched under the framework of pornographybut what this means, how it is defined sometimes is very loose and very broad. I will you an example: in Indonesia ...there's a website by LGBT organization (LGBT meaning lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) and it talks about rights issues and it was blocked and banned under the anti pornography law.

- Advocacy Group representative

¹⁷ <http://www.apc.org/en/node/15650> Retrieved 22 February 2013

A detailed examination of the other 7 utterances indicate an overwhelming focus on the question of women's inclusion in the information society, and a preoccupation with removing barriers to women's access. For example, consider the following utterance from a government delegate on women's inclusion in the information society:

What we should do, (is that) we should be more active in the rural part of the regions where women have no access to the Internet and they (do) not know how to use this... (So we must focus) on trainings, giving you(women) information and also to go (do) discussions face by face (face to face). So civil society is playing a main role on this issue.

– Government delegate

There is also an acknowledgement of the need for enabling women to overcome socio-cultural barriers to access, arising from the particularistic operations of local patriarchies across different sites, and an affirmation of new possibilities opened up the context-sensitive use of ICTs, through information centres or mobiles for empowerment projects.

One of the things that we have realised works really well is actually small grants initiative(s).....(It is) sort of like having small grants and giving it, to (provide an)opportunity (for small organizations) in order to set up Internet (access points) or more like information access point in different communities..... we've done this in parts of Africa and the Caribbean. (From this experience) we found that actually what happens is there's a lot of consultation with local communities on what do you need? What is this centre for? How then can we make sure that we have the kind of infrastructure and technology that is meaningful to you, that you can access and who are the people even from the level of who is the person who is going to stand there at the opening hour because it is about mobility issues it's about safety issues also like about multiple for women anyway ...

– Advocacy Group representative

In the above utterance, we see how the advocacy group representative is using a rationalization strategy to legitimize civil society interventions in the area of women's inclusion in the information society.

On the whole, the question of enabling women to overcome barriers to access has been placed within the realm of civil society intervention rather than as an issue to be addressed by policy-makers. Out of the 7 utterances on inclusion, there is only one which makes a reference to the need for appropriate policy, and that utterance is a report from a participant in the feeder workshop on 'Technology – Economic and societal opportunities for women'.

ICC Basis , APC and Government of Kenya partnered this year to organize a workshop on technology, economic and societal opportunities for women this is a feeder workshop for this main session. We had a dynamic group of speakers and a very interesting group of participants.... we were focusing on what does it take .. to get women to have access and we identified three areas. One was, first of all, the infrastructure, the access issues (that) need to be addressed... so they(women) need to have access and the policy and regulatory environment issues that make that happen (are

important). We also looked at how social and cultural norms are a barrier to empowering women or women's access, the whole aspect of encouraging girls to enroll in (STEM) studies: science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

- Professional Association representative

The above utterance, while valorising the need for public policy frameworks to ensure women's inclusion in the information society, falls short of explicating the actual public policy issues where regulatory frameworks are required – such as ensuring affordable access, investment in setting up public access infrastructure, ensuring women's safety in the online public sphere and so on. The silence around the role of public policy in enabling access is telling also given that the only reference to regulatory frameworks on censorship cited above, is in the nature of a warning on the dangers of excessive regulation.

II. How gender equality pans out in the IGF – The discourse on capabilities, access to resources and opportunities; empowerment; and enabling macro-environmental factors in IGF 2012

We now highlight the key findings from our discourse analysis of IGF 2012, with respect to the eight dimensions of the gender equality framework deployed in this study.

A. Capabilities, access to resources and opportunities

We have identified the following dimensions as crucial to women's capabilities, access to resources and opportunities : 1. Access and Affordability of the Internet and new technologies 2. Context-appropriateness of technologies and 3. Opportunities for innovation.

A1. Access and Affordability of the Internet and new technologies

We found 29 utterances pertaining to the issue of expansion and coverage of the Internet, and access to new technologies. As Table 2 indicates, there is a predominant concern with the question of developing Internet infrastructure and financing concerns – 13 of the 29 utterances pertain to this.

In fact, the preoccupation mostly is with developing a viable business strategy for expanding the reach of the Internet:

“Despite all the advances that have been made in providing fibre opticin Africa and other continents as well, there is still a lack of penetration throughout the area and in many instances the rate of return is just not there to pick the provider for the services in(these) areas, (especially) in rural areas. I think that there is room for alternative technologies that are much more cost effective.”

– Individual representative

Though the utterance makes a strong case for exploring cost-effective alternate technologies, there

is a clear dismissal of the possibility of expanding broadband Internet in Africa. This is achieved through deploying an economic rationality argument.

Table 2: Access and Affordability

Type of actor	Public Access	Barriers to access	Universal access	Financing Internet infrastructure	Mobiles as key in enhancing Internet reach	Mobile vs broadband	Expanding reach	North South Divide	Total
Government	2			3		1	1		7
Inter-governmental organization				1					1
Individual			1	2				1	4
Internet Company				1					1
Non-state actor in Internet Governance					1	1	1		3
Professional Association	1				1		2		4
UN Agency			1						1
Details Unavailable						1			1
Advocacy Group		2			1	1	2	1	7
Total	3	2	2	7	3	4	6	2	29

The valorization of the economic rationality paradigm in approaching issues of expansion and coverage seems to be dominant in the imagination of a wide range of actors – including government delegates and participants from inter-governmental organizations – as illustrated by the following utterance.

"A very important thing is the accessibility of the net. There, one point is the question of the

financing, financing the infrastructure, financing and finding technological solutions for different ways of building up infrastructure, to have worldwide good access. Especially in Europe we have problems with the rural areas where you don't have the same high speed accessibility of the net in many areas.”

- Representative of an Inter-governmental organization

This preoccupation with financing concerns seems even more striking when it is read along with the fact that there are only 3 utterances pertaining to 'public access' concerns and 2 around the issue of 'universal access'. Unsurprisingly, there are no utterances by Internet Companies or Non-state actors involved in Internet Governance around these concerns.

The hegemonic pull of the business-model paradigm on Internet infrastructure becomes clearer when we examine the 3 utterances on 'public access' in greater detail. Out of the 3 utterances, the only strong reference to the case for developing public access points was made by a representative of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. The two other actors who spoke about the issue were government representatives, who mainly focused on highlighting their government's role in developing infrastructure. The examination of the utterances on 'universal access' reveals a similar story. One utterance is by an individual representative narrating India's experience with framing programmes and policy frameworks for universal access, and the other utterance is by a UN agency representative who is rhetorically re-emphasizing the norm of universal access. There is no concrete framing of the concerns of 'universal access' and 'public access' as agendas for global policy spaces on Internet Governance. What is most striking is the avoidance of discussions emerging from the stand-point of ensuring affordable access to the Internet for end-users, especially those located in marginalized communities in the developing world.

We would also like to highlight here some significant points of tension that we observe from our examination of the transcripts. Two such on the ETNO proposal are reproduced here¹⁸.

"Now we are going to have another layer of complicated agreements. At some point, particularly for the poor countries, particularly for areas that are not seen as having high advertising potential, there will come a time when networks and all the top providers will say, 'We can't do this anymore, transaction costs are too high. (Then) What you are going to get is a Balkanised internet. With a Balkanised internet, we will lose the driver that is bringing our people into the internet through a normative business model.

- Individual representative

18 Shortly before IGF 2012, the European Telecommunications' Network Operators' Association (ETNO) came out with a proposal to replace the current manner in which 'interconnection arrangements' are regulated on the Internet. The Internet at present, is a network of networks, and a range of entities operate the multiple networks on which all Internet communications travel. At present, the flow of communications between these various networks is through settlement-free peering – where the networks simply exchange traffic without any payments to each other. ETNO's proposal was to replace the existing arrangement with a 'new IP interconnection system' where the 'sending party network' pays. As you can well imagine, such a 'sender pays' interconnection arrangement would fundamentally alter the present nature of the Internet. At the World Conference on International Communication (Dec 2012), that followed on the heels of IGF 2012, the ETNO proposal was shelved.

I would be delighted if regulators can compel European operators to reduce their roaming charges but to come to (sender pays) from a developing country perspective I think the implications are dire and I think on top of a growing broadband divide I was in a workshop yesterday where we discussed a recent OECD report that looked at the growing broadband divide between developed and developing countries.”

- Advocacy Group representative

These two voices of opposition to the ETNO proposal, on the grounds that it would be a blow to the current open Internet, turn to strategies of moralization and authorisation respectively. The representative from the policy think-tank uses the metaphor of the 'Balkanisation' of the Internet to highlight the adverse consequences that would come about if the ETNO proposal were to be passed. Interestingly, this strategy of moralization (by comparing an imaginary post-ETNO scenario with the historical image of a Balkanised Europe) has been used by the individual representative to build an economic rationality argument against ETNO – that ETNO will prevent a viable business model from emerging in the developing world. The other significant area of contestation is the issue of the broadband vs. the mobile Internet. We found endorsements for the mobile Internet, as well as reservations about the mobile Internet being promoted as the Internet infrastructure of choice for the developing world.

Finally, there seems to be a lack of clarity in the way the Internet itself is envisioned. Though participants allude to the global nature of the Internet, and do speak about the importance of net expansion and coverage for the developing world, this imagination does not percolate to the discussions of the public policy issues involved in the realm of access to Internet infrastructure. Even the discussions around the issues of 'universal access' and 'public access' (few in number to begin with) have been framed within a national imagination of public policy frameworks. The global continues to hover around these discussions as an 'abstract' category invoked to defend the importance of the Internet in the current age, rather than as a material site for concrete action.

A2. Context-appropriateness of technologies

Out of the 95 utterances examined, 17 utterances are related to the thematic area of 'context-appropriate' technologies. As Table 3 reveals, we find that a number of actors seem to be interested in this issue – ranging from Internet companies, professional associations, and individuals to governments, inter-governmental organizations and advocacy groups.

Table 3: Context-appropriateness of technologies

Type of actor	Enhancing online content	Rights over content	Low cost technologies	Appropriate technology in crises situations	Traditional Media	Role of new TLDs in enriching Internet experience	Case against regulation	Technical and political implications of the Internet age	Total
Government	1	1						1	3
Intergovernmental organization	1								1
Individual	2		1						3
Internet Company	2			1			1		4
Professional Association	1	1				1	1		4
UN agency	1								1
Unavailable					1				1
Total	8	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	17

A detailed examination of these utterances reveals that two competing visions of 'context-appropriateness' are operating here. The dominant imaginary of 'context-appropriate' technology seems to be about enhancing the experience of the user-consumer, duly accommodating local cultural factors, with the hope of expanding the market-place of the Internet and the new technologies.

This is evident when we closely examine the discussions on developing appropriate content. In fact, the issue of enhancing online content dominates the entire discussion on 'context-appropriate' technology – 8 out of the 17 utterances are on this issue. Even among these 8 utterances, 5 are on the issue of how appropriate content will attract users, and enhance user experience – the sub-text being that this will allow a viable online business model to emerge. This is most clearly visible in the following utterance:

"You know, wearing my Google hat we spend a lot of time, particularly in Africa, trying to make our content more accessible and **it is always a challenge between how much you (the Internet company) invest and how much you (the end-users) use (emphasis ours).**".... I got a lot of hate mail when we changed the default to Kiswahili on our search page in Kenya to test out this issue of how to make content accessible. I think there is an interesting debate in terms of not just accessibility but what about the role of preservation of languages that are at risk of just not being spoken anymore but can we use technology to preserve language and culture. You certainly see international geographic companies, like Google, taking initiatives in terms of preservation."

– An Internet Company representative

In its invocation of local language and culture, the idea of building profitable online business models for content, remains at the core of this utterance.

In this dominant vision of 'context-appropriateness' as that which is appropriate for the market, regulation is seen as largely irrelevant, and as a distraction to the central question of enriching the experience of the user-consumer in online spaces.

..... So the challenge before us in the course of the next few years is going to be to come up with common rules that apply across platforms to devices, regardless of how they may be labelled, Cloud, desktop or mobile. So, as I mentioned, at the core of all of these devices is code and software. All of our devices that we use, and many of us have multiple devices, phones, tablets, PCs, they are all supercomputer. Why should it matter how the device connects to the internet, whether it's connected by fibre, by copper wire, by Wi-fi or by licence spectrum. All of these things are very important in order to be able to assure that consumers have access but, as to the data themselves and the regulation of the software itself, consumers don't know the differencethey don't care how their devices are connected to the Internet. Since the user doesn't care, Why should regulators?"

– An Internet Company representative

It is noteworthy how a strategy of rationalization has been used here to de-legitimize the need for regulating the new spaces opened up by ICTs and the Internet.

However, there is another imaginary of what 'context- appropriate' technology can mean, that is also present on the margins. This vision foregrounds the questions of developing low-cost, contextually appropriate technologies and the importance of continuing to invest in traditional media. But the voices affirming this vision are few and far between, as evidenced by Table 3. In this vision, the user is not a consumer, but a citizen whose rights – both socio-economic and civil-political – need to be respected in the creation and expansion of new technologies. The two utterances cited below clearly reveal the contrast between this vision, and the dominant, market-centred vision of 'context-appropriate' technologies.

“The study which UNESCO, OECD and ISOC did last year proved that there is a very, direct and positive correlation between the volume of local content which is kept on local Internet infrastructure, which includes also local ISP's and the access price with local Internet users are paying. (The more) local content you have; ... (along with the) right policy; the quality of service will be better and the access price will be lower; bit paradoxical, but that is what happens.”

- Representative from an UN agency

"..... So content is quite indistinct....., (you tend to view it as) something that flows quite naturally. It is not the case in my opinion..... and there is behind (it), a lot of reflection and a lot of rights incorporated..... not only rights of the owner of the (content) (i.e. the) holdersbut also rights of the citizen..... in terms of how they (citizens) access to these contents, how they can use it, how they can make better the (their) life using this information."

- Representative from a Professional Association

A3. Opportunities for Innovation

Out of the 95 utterances examined , only 3 address the issue of opportunities of innovation, as explicated in the table below.

Table 4: Opportunities for Innovation

Type of Actor	Domain Name industry and Innovation	Open Source as an enabler of innovation	Innovating in Crisis situations	Total
Government		1		1
Internet Company			1	1
Non state actor in Internet Governance	1			1
Total	1	1	1	3

These 3 utterances are on disparate themes: the importance of open source platforms in enabling innovation, the importance of developing innovative technological responses to crises situations and enabling the domain names industry in order to foster innovations by young entrepreneurs.

As the following utterance illustrates, the idea of innovation in the IGF debates is firmly rooted in the techno-economic paradigm. Innovation is not envisioned as a social phenomenon.

"..... I would like to tackle a very important issues which is related to the development of the logical infrastructure on top of this physical infrastructure. We talked about content but between the layers of content and the physical infrastructure we have a missing layer which is enabling of the domain name industry. This is where we want to focus within the next couple of years, specifically to empower young entrepreneurs and to empower innovation and to empower incubators and the establishment of incubators for start ups to enable the domain name industry, because it is one of the driver for content development as has been mentioned. We need to build on the success that we have witnessed in the African continent and in any parts and in other parts of the world from a developing countries perspective and to develop the next layer really that enables entrepreneurship and enables innovation and I think we have a wonderful opportunity to do that in Africa and outside Africa."

– Non state actor in Internet Governance

The strategy of instrumental rationalization is being used to play up the role of the market in fostering innovation; there is marked silence on the role of public policies in creating equitable opportunities for innovation.

B. Empowerment

The gender equality framework used in the study identifies empowerment as comprising of the following dimensions: 1. Empowering possibilities opened up by Internet and ICTs and 2. Rights and freedoms w.r.t Internet and ICTs

B1. Empowering possibilities opened up by Internet and ICTs

Out of the 95 utterances examined, only 7 refer to empowerment possibilities opened up by the new spaces of the Internet.

Table 5: Empowering possibilities opened up by Internet and ICTs

Type of actor	Empowerment possibilities for people with disabilities	Women's empowerment	Importance of empowerment possibilities in meaningful access	Technology for citizen empowerment	Total
Advocacy Groups		1	3		4
Individual				1	1
Non state actor in Internet Governance	1				1
Professional Association				1	1
Total	1	1	3	2	7

As is indicated in Table 5, though the issue of empowerment has been raised by a range of actors, the majority of references are from representatives of advocacy groups. We also find that within the larger debate on empowerment, there is only one explicit reference to women's empowerment, in the context of recounting experiences from a 'mobiles for empowerment' project.

We notice that the invocation of the empowering possibilities of ICTs is largely at the level of rhetoric – whether it be a reference to the general idea of empowerment possibilities as being important for meaningful access or a particular reference to the possibilities that technologies offer for the inclusion of marginalized groups such as women and the disabled, as illustrated by the following utterances.

At the end of the day the Internet is about people and the issues of access and diversity need to make sure that we are addressing issues that are going to extend human empowerment, extend the value proposition of the Internet and deliver on that promise to all people.

- Advocacy Group representative

We're also talking about what content is delivered to engage the people but what we didn't really talk about also is how the content is delivered and mobile devices and mobile services are very important for people with disabilities as is access to the Internet because mobile technology and the Internet as a whole provides an equal level playing field for people with disabilities to actually be able to contribute to society in a way that they are not able to in the physical society.

– Non-state actor in Internet Governance

Apart from the empowerment rhetoric, we found 2 utterances on the possibilities that technologies open up for citizen empowerment. Out of these 2 utterances, one is a specific discussion of a government initiated project. The other utterance is a rationalization of the importance of discussing the changing nature of state-citizen relationships in Internet governance debates.

B2. Rights and freedoms w.r.t Internet and ICTs

Out of the 95 utterances examined, 22 pertain to rights and freedoms. As evident from Table 6 on the following page, there are a range of issues that have been covered in the IGF 2012 discussions. We also notice that though all actors have engaged with this issue, the engagement of government, intergovernmental and advocacy group representatives is far higher than that of other actors.

The utterances on rights and freedoms broadly fall into the following categories – rhetoric on the importance of Internet rights, debates around the paradigms through which the question of Internet rights can be viewed, discussions on specific negative rights, and discussions around specific positive rights. There is only one utterance out of the 22 that is at the level of rhetoric. Next, we come across 6 utterances that are largely centred around debating the paradigm through which the question of Internet rights must be viewed. The predominant contestation here is between the human rights paradigm and the consumer rights paradigm – and we find 3 endorsements each for the two paradigms. Unsurprisingly, Internet companies and professional associations are absent in this debate. The contestation over using the human rights paradigm to approach the question of rights and freedoms w.r.t Internet and ICTs is well-explicated by the following utterance.

"(I am) the moderator of the Panel is ""access to the internet a human right"" and we actually had a standing room only event.....We actually talked about what is a human right to start off with and this question about you know in order to lead a full and dignified life in modern society do you need access to the Internet, with the definition being that if that right is taken away then is a person unable to live in dignity and fully participate in society?.....Whether it (this right) was actually codified or could be acknowledged as a human right unto itself was the question that we also looked at in the positive sense. Does the State have an obligation to provide access?....We certainly agreed that it was a serious human rights issue. We had a number of members from the corporate sector... They were concerned if there was a positive right what that would mean for the obligation to provide service and, in particular, whether that would mean greater regulation in the sector and they were concerned about that issue. Civil Society, on the other hand, was like, well, if we have access to the Internet as a human right that enables us to be able to advocate, to be able to lobby, it creates accountability from the State. I don't think there was necessarily a conclusion from our discussion."

- Advocacy Group representative

Table 6: Rights and freedoms w.r.t Internet and ICTs

Type of actor	Internet freedom as a human right	Preventing online violence	Consumer rights of Internet users	Rights and freedoms in the Internet age	Citizens' rights on the Internet	Net neutrality regulation	Privacy and Security	Content regulation	Importance of Internet rights	Total
Advocacy Groups	2	1					1	1		5
Government				1		1	1			3
Individual		1	1				1	1		4
Intergovernmental organization			2			1		1	1	5
Internet Company							1			1
Professional Association					1					1
UN Agency	1						2			3
Total	3	2	3	1	1	2	6	3	1	22

In the area of negative rights, the predominant issue seems to be privacy and security with over 6 utterances pertaining to this. We find re-affirmations of the need to protect user privacy and user data confidentiality and the need to safeguard these rights in the face of excessive regulation. There is also one reference to the threats from the actions of Internet companies to these rights. But on the whole, excessive regulation by states is seen as the main threat to rights of privacy and security and not so much the arbitrary actions of Internet companies. Even in the one specific reference on safeguarding users from online violence, the predominant concern that is expressed is that of ensuring that user freedoms are not compromised in the process of creating such safeguards.

In the area of positive rights, there are 2 utterances on the need for net neutrality regulation, from a government delegate and a representative from an inter-governmental organization. The other issue that is discussed here is that of content regulation – but we find an anxiety in all three utterances around content regulation that excessive regulatory measures may impact user freedoms adversely, as evidenced in the utterance below:

Young people should be able to learn the positives and negatives of the Internet, they should not be restricted by the blocking.

- Advocacy Group representative

On the whole, a libertarian vision of rights and freedoms is endorsed in this theme.

C. Macro-environmental factors

Our gender equality framework focuses on the following three macro-environmental dimensions in the space of Internet governance: 1. National policy regimes 2. The global Internet governance regime 3. The political economy of global development/ the North-South divide

C1. National policy regimes

We found only 8 utterances that explicitly relate to the area of national policy regimes for Internet governance, as detailed in the table below.

Table 7: National policy regimes

Type of actor	Ensuring competitive markets	Deregulating ccTLDs	Application of USO funds	Long term policy issues in IG	Threats of excessive regulation	Total
Advocacy Group					1	1
Government					1	1
Individual				2		2
Intergovernmental organization	1					1
Professional Association			1			1
Non-state actor in IG		1				1
Internet Company	1					1
Total	2	1	1	2	2	8

We notice that there are multiple issues being raised here by a range of actors. 3 out of 8 utterances pertain to issues of de-regulation at the national level – which is seen as key not just in the area of ensuring access to ccTLDs¹⁹, but also in the area of creating competitive national telecommunications markets. On the whole, there is a tendency to argue for 'less' rather than 'more' regulation at the national level. This becomes clearer when we examine the two utterances that explicitly refer to regulatory frameworks at the national level, both of which highlight the threats of excessive regulation, using rationalization strategies.

I think national security has been used as an excuse to deprive from an exercise of Human Rights in many legislations around the world. For example, it is not absolutely linked with this issue but, for example, in access to information policies they usually have these security or national security exceptions which are usually used to not allow the citizens to access to some public information.

- Advocacy group representative

¹⁹ Country code Top-level domain. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_code_top-level_domain

There have been some efforts around the world to have a governmental approach to the Internet; whichimposes governmental control,..... with concepts of monitoring and censorship that are a real problem. We have heard other panelists say there are certain lines,..... I think every society recognises them, including the U.S. ... it is important when we do(frame) the policies (that) we don't use security as a way to hamper free expression.....

- Government representative

As corroborated by the analysis in preceding sections, there is a disproportionate focus on the threats to civil and political liberties arising from national legislation – such as the dangers of pornography legislation for LGBT rights activists – rather than on legislative and public policy frameworks to promote socio-economic rights. For instance, there are only 3 utterances that approach this issue of long term public policy issues in Internet governance, one of which is reproduced below.

.....it seems to me (that there is) a responsibility on the sector (Internet and ICTs) to address the problems that arise from it. So the question is there are ways of managing of mitigating these negative impacts on the environment of the ICT sector. Should we leave that to the private sector or do we see it as part of a role of Internet governance? Should environmental factors be incorporated in the engineering of the Internet, in network architecture, in the design of devices, data centres, applications?

- Individual representative

The third utterance in this area pertains to the issue of Universal Service Obligations but it is a narrative by a government delegate on the experience of a developing country in this regard, rather than a framing of the questions that national policies must address, for ensuring affordable, public access to the Internet.

C2. Global Internet governance regime

There are 21 references pertaining to the Global Internet regime, as revealed by Table 8 on page 25. We also notice that all the actors involved in the space of the Internet governance seem to engage with these debates, and that it is difficult to make an overall observation about the kind of debate within Global Internet governance each actor is invested in. However, there are some broad trends that seem to emerge.

The debates about the Global Internet governance regime pertain to four kinds of issues – the question of frameworks for thinking through Internet governance, including concerns about high level principles and multi-stakeholderism; reflections on the space of the IGF; specific issues within the Internet governance regime; and reflections about regulation itself.

We found 4 utterances pertaining to the first issue (of frameworks) – 3 of these utterances address the issue of high level principles on Internet governance, while the remaining utterance is an

endorsement of multi-stakeholderism in Internet governance. It is also interesting that this endorsement of multi-stakeholderism is from an individual representative, while the fore-grounding of high level principles has been done by actors from governmental agencies and inter-governmental organizations.

We found only 1 utterance pertaining to the nature of reflections on the space of the IGF. This was about making dissemination of the IGF debates more efficient and not so much a comment on the political configuration or the effectiveness of the Forum itself.

A wide range of specific issues pertaining to the global Internet regime have been raised – domain name deregulation, the need for greater diversity in gTLDs, de-regulation of domain names, the issues involved in transitioning to IPV6 systems to net neutrality, the question of generic gTLDs and the ETNO proposal.

There are 2 explicit references to net neutrality – from a government delegate and a representative of an inter-governmental organization – both of whom strongly endorse it. As explicated in Section A1, the ETNO proposal emerges as a significant point of contestation. The debate on generic gTLDs also emerges as a significant point of tension, as illustrated by the following excerpt:

"If you take somebody with a completely clean mind who is not deeply involved in the ICANN space and you say to them, quote mark, should somebody be allowed to register a generic name in a top level domain space like .book? quote mark They look at you and say, quote mark Why not? What is the problem there? quote mark Then you try to explain to them why this is controversial in the ICANN context. There is actually no way to explain that without pointing out that under the old system you had a Class of registrars who had guaranteed access to register names, names like .com or .org, and these registrars wanted to maintain that guaranteed access to these terms. In other words, this isn't really about dominance of the language or anything like that. It is about business model competition. It is about whether you are going to have different business models in the name Space."

– Individual representative

Table 8: Global Internet governance regime

Type of actor	Importance of MS	Generic gTLD debate	gTLD diversity	Domain name deregulation	ETNO debate	More registries for developing countries	IPV6 transitioning	Net neutrality	Case against excessive regulation	Case for extending regulation	Space of the IGF	High level principles in IG	Total
Advocacy Group		1			1								2
Government			1					1				1	3
Individual	1	1			2								4
Intergovernmental organization								1		1		1	3
Internet Company									2				2
Non-state actor in IG				1		1							2
Professional Association					1				1				2
UN agency												1	1
Unavailable							1				1		2
Total	1	2	1	1	4	1	1	2	3	1	1	3	21

Interestingly, the strategy of theoretical rationalization is used to discredit the view that allowing generic names for TLDs will result in a privatization of the linguistic commons.

Finally, in the area of reflections on regulation, tensions seem to run deep. There are 3 voices arguing against regulation, as opposed to one that explicitly is making a case for regulation. The case against regulation emerges from representatives of Internet companies and Professional Associations. The voices against regulation use a rationalization strategy of stressing the irrelevance, long-windedness and inconvenience of regulation to buffer their case, as evidenced by the utterance below:

About the law and the regulations of new media, we have also a lot of difficulties to access a lot of contents (especially from) the US.... we cannot access the content because we are using the ip address or account based in the Indonesia,.....Of course, the law is the law and the people know how to deal with it and they make another account using another addressThey just buy the prepaid card and they make a US account. It is quite common.

- Professional Association representative

The one utterance that makes a strong plea for regulation, is by a representative from an inter-governmental organization, in the context of regulating content in the case of connected TV for protecting children from inappropriate content. (Countering the moral panic around protecting children from inappropriate content as a justification for content regulation has been one significant area of feminist advocacy in relation to Internet policies. However, a tension between Internet freedoms and content regulation remains a significant area of engagement, requiring more contextual research and informed advocacy perspectives.)

On the whole, 'public access' and 'universal access' related issues are absent from the discussions that explicitly raise questions about regulatory frameworks. We also find that there are more discussions on the Global Internet regime in IGF 2012 than in earlier years – one reason could be that the IGF 2012 was organised just before the ITU's World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT) in December 2012.

C3. The political economy of global development/ the North-South divide

There are 8 utterances that deal with issues pertaining to the North- South divide, as explicated in Table 9 below.

Table 9: The North-South divide

Type of actor	ETNO proposal	Technical layer	Sustainable development and IG	Geographic diversity in IGF	Total
Advocacy Group	1				1
Government		1			1
Individual	2		2		4
Non state actor involved in IG		1			1
Professional Association				1	1
Details not available			1		1
Total	3	2	3	1	9

Of these 9 references, one reference is about increasing the geographic diversity of participation in the IGF, with an implicit allusion to the need for including more non English-speaking speakers from the Global South. Two are about technical layer issues that are of importance to developing countries – such as their need for more domain name registrars in countries located in the Global South. As discussed in preceding sections, the adverse implications of the ETNO proposal for developing countries emerge as a significant issue.

Finally, there are three references to sustainable development frameworks and their implications for Internet governance. Out of these references, one utterance by a speaker from a developing country (details of organizational affiliation not available in the transcript) is particularly striking in its explication of the political economy of Internet governance.

".....I think when we discuss the governance of the internet, in the long term we should talk about the future of the development of the world, this is also sustainable (development). Therefore we should discuss our topic at a higher level, of course domain names are important, GTLD are important, however I think our discussions should be beyond this level. We should talk about questions at a higher level.

- Participant from a developing country, details of affiliation unavailable

Note the use of the strategy of legitimization by evaluation – that relegates technical debates as 'lower order' ones implicitly – to argue how in the space of the IGF, there is an ongoing technicalization of the political.

How IGF as social practice frames the gender equality discourse

We began by wanting to look at the IGF and how gender equality is coded into its discursive spaces. Unpacking the different themes that together speak to a working definition of gender equality, we traced the manner in which hegemonic discourse emerges in the social practice of the IGF. A synthesis of the analysis from each thematic area is presented below.

The Internet market place as sub-text

The unpacking of specific narratives from the IGF clearly reveals that the dominant discourse in the IGF is that of the market; where economic growth provides the pathway for development, with preoccupations around the rate of return on infrastructure, and the need for policy to calibrate demand and supply. Social policy is relegated as residue; development is signified as a paradigm of catch-up post-growth; and individuals using the Internet are invoked as consumer-users whose preoccupation is with access in the sense of assimilation into a gadget- and applications- centric market. The archetype of the user is thus of an economic subject. Social antecedents -like linguistic diversity - are explicit in the overall discourse of access within the overarching idea of demand and supply. The idea of governance for the market place follows tenets of new public management with the 'user' as the standard (either in situations of commodified access or as rights bearers).

Access is not explicitly ascribed as a public good. Free access find an exceptional mention but the pressing concern even here is about return on investment rather than on the 'free'. In the delineation of the Internet as a multivalent, abstract global phenomenon, access also is alluded to in a global sense, whereas governance is seen as confined to the national. The global-universal is valorised as the scale and space of value. The right to the Internet does not find explicit mention in relation to access. It is present as an abstract question but not in relation to its political, public policy dimensions.

The reality of the IG policy space is that IGF is one of the many discursive sites. Governments and corporate actors actively intervene in the Internet regulation space. Within the IGF however, as our study reveals, regulation is aligned only with governments. The actions of others like ICANN are not cast as acts of regulation. Also, despite explicit utterances pertaining to global and national contexts – the former is not linked to regulation but to the abstract ideal of the open. Regulation in its varied contexts of utterances, is assumed to be value-loaded, something that is universally deemed as undesirable and not about a normative process.

Gender equality as neoliberal emancipation

Early in the paper, we traced how the IGF was part of the legacy of a particular genre of participation - multi-stakeholder processes informed by the very values that have seen the Internet evolve as an open, global architecture. The strains of this world-view – described as Californian ideology - combine radical individualism, libertarianism, and neo-liberal economics. It is a curious hybrid of the New Left and New Right based on their shared interest in anti-statism, the counter-culture of the 1960s, and techno-utopianism²⁰. It is within these contours – the attributes of the hand that shapes and moulds the vessel - that social process characterizing the IGF is produced.

Understanding how gender is constructed and rendered in the IGF is hence a deeper search for what is valued and legitimated and what is devalued and invalidated. Performing gender politics presupposes contestation. Its techniques entail disruption of status-quo. The social process of the IGF however, does not accommodate the enactment of adversarial politics. Yet, in its modus operandi, the IGF does not as much silence dissenting voices as rely on subtle methods of coercion, necessitating conformity to a discourse opposed to traditional inter-governmentalism. Here is where it seeks to generate a sense of hope – in the possibility for expedient, if not, perverse alignments between 'stakeholders' who in their varied persuasions, see a conflation of interest in the new promise of technology and the shared distrust of state power.

The hegemonic processes of the IGF thus emphasize an openness through multistakeholder dialogue that accommodates differential politics. Its neo-liberal leanings produce, reproduce and legitimize a politics of recognition, sidestepping the political economy questions of governance in its redistributive sense. Analogous to this, the discourse of gender equality in the IGF gets constructed in a manner that preemptively excludes a vision of women's rights as materially embedded, gender politics as contested, and gender justice as critically hinged on normative institutional frameworks.

Against the backdrop of the Internet as a marketplace, the IGF constructs gender equality as an abstraction that is perfectly admissible but within an idea of the world that unhinges empowerment and agency from resistance. Its structures and processes draw legitimacy through, and demand conformity with, the core practice of multi-stakeholderism - an unequivocal avowal of the idealized notion of equal participation of civil society actors in the Internet Governance space. But in reality, the architectures of association that govern its openness, recast multi-stakeholderism as a romantic, masculine notion of unencumbered, free, self-governing individuals forging a dialogic community. As a microcosm of the techno-mediated world, where power is ever-present but obfuscated, the IGF reproduces emancipation of the neo-liberal variety that also co-opts gender justice in its framings. What is rather salient in the examination of the debates and discussions across the 8 thematic

20 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technological_utopianism

domains identified, is that there is a high degree of congruence between actors and their stated interests. Yet, by privileging dialogue and preventing contestation, the IGF's ideology and processes reinforce a status quo politics.

The IGF as symptomatic of the rise of a 'disorganised neoliberal capitalism'

In these nascent times of policy making around digital technologies and information and communication ecologies, women's rights advocates and women's movements have been absent in the IG policy discourse. Although digital space has catapulted localised action into transnational movements for solidarity, a process in which women's rights advocacy has gained considerably, this has coincided with the following global trends-

- a. The rise of what Nancy Fraser refers to as 'disorganised neoliberal capitalism'²¹– with a flexible form of organization, fuelled by a masculine romance of the free, unencumbered, self-governing individual that has particular real-life labour market effects, both in undermining worker rights and in squelching out local and small livelihoods.
- b. Legitimization of the marketisation of development and instrumentalization of women for neo-liberal visions of economic growth.
- c. Fragmentation in global governance and the proliferation of sites of governance , often as privatized clubs that are non-transparent and unaccountable.
- d. The split between socio-economic and civil-political rights accompanied by a feminist transnational agenda focused more on recognition rather than re-distribution along with an NGO-isation of campaigns that have created a global strata of elite professionals representing soft-touch versions of gender that are removed from the lived experiences of women (what Fraser refers to as servicing of 'the administrative needs of capitalism'),
- e. Convergences between neoliberal capitalism's penchant for diversity and feminism's new tryst with multiple splinterings coming from over-extended cultural analyses at the expense of political economy and an affinity between new capitalism's utter disdain for traditional authority, and feminist skepticism of traditional authority.

Technology is not just accidental to this schema. The structures of the world are being shaped by the nature of the digital beast as it is mutually reconstituted by the values of flexible, neo-liberal capitalism getting more flexible. Chaos and decentering, inherent to network age architectures, have birthed new forms of subordination and expropriation giving rise to what is called, network age capitalism (whether they be the logic of online 'publics' or the tenacious instinct of Internet corporates to expand market share through expediency, comprising either evasion or conformity - as may be gainful - to state sovereignty). The powers that be in international political economy have increasingly sought to align global regimes of technology with that of trade, finance and intellectual

21 See Fraser, N (2009), FEMINISM, CAPITALISM AND THE CUNNING OF HISTORY, *New Left Review*, <http://newleftreview.org/II/56/nancy-fraser-feminism-capitalism-and-the-cunning-of-history> Retrieved 23 February 2013.

property to further the status quo. The arena of technology is also marked by posturing by powerful countries and corporations to perpetuate the governance deficit at the global level – the latest instance of the US in not signing up to the WCIT²² outcome document after negotiating hard, and managing to introduce the text that it wanted on global telecommunications.

The IGF is an apt illustration of the 'new normal' in global governance. It represents a discursive site that cannot address appropriately the question of citizenship. For the marginalized, it is at best, yet another site for a politics of presence, and at worst, yet another red herring where real business is not transacted.

The structural aspects of the network society also make power more obscure. The diffusion of power, corresponding to network age 'dis-organization', paradoxically works to create constellations of actors bound less by ideology and more by class. Corporates use this for organising 'big society' production through small world networking; states use it for building illegitimate nexus with the elite, NGOs, for consolidating legitimacy. Digital technology also completes the project of neoliberal capitalism's insatiable thirst for "taming politics". Market is finally dis-embedded from society – market *is* society, and discourses of justice across axes and scales are abstract rhetoric that cannot coherently challenge the anti-institutionalism of neo-liberal, techno-mediated domination.

The particular confluences of feminism at this historic juncture with neo-liberal capitalism's version of emancipation create both an intellectual and political crisis. The discourse of gender in the space of technology policy that this research has prised open is a signifier of this larger crisis. It is the depoliticised product of the way the many actors in IG space transact notions of gender and justice. It is also one of the devices constructing the structural elements of the information-communication ecosystem and its anti-institutionalism.

In lieu of a conclusion – How can feminist politics address gender equality agenda in Internet governance?

For women's rights activism, the agenda of Internet governance holds particular significance. It is about intervening in the discourse of technology, and perhaps more importantly, about the foundational task of institutional reconstruction, as the digital re-plots the coordinates of the social. Shaping frameworks and norms simultaneously at both national and global scales, is therefore imperative for gender justice advocacy.

One problem with women's rights activism, and civil society advocacy in general, in the Internet space, is the tendency to rely on the national as the preferred scale for institutional change. But the global-international remains a key site for feminist action, witness as it is, to momentous change:

²² World Conference on International Telecommunications, see <http://www.itu.int/en/wcit-12/Pages/default.aspx>

- As the Internet becomes a key site for global social and economic activity, institutional arrangements commensurate with these emergent global configurations are conspicuous by their absence at the global level.
- A new geography of power is being wrought by economic globalization. This new geography entails the formation of a new private institutional order linked to the global economy. Firstly, it concerns the relocation of national public governance functions to transnational private arenas. And secondly, as scholars like Saskia Sassen²³ alert us, this new institutional order has a new normative authority that comes from the world of private power installing itself in the public realm, contributing to state actions towards denationalization. Indeed, in both developed and developing countries, the media and telecommunications sectors are witness to the huge power exercised by private interests on public policy.
- The principles, values and manifestations of multilateralism – coming especially from the UN tradition – are under assault. The promise of global citizenship, even as technology weaves together the hope for this, remains a far cry, as the scope and even exclusivity of international human rights regime are challenged by the emerging geographies of power.

The task of reining in states – in their national laws and policies in relation to the Internet, and the rights and freedoms such laws and policies implicate, is crucial. In the emerging order, as has been repeatedly highlighted in this paper, it would be counter productive to merely pursue demands for inclusion. The shifting rationality of the state requires a new agility to trace and respond to state politics in its relationship with the global economy. At a tactical level this requires a new skill to map the political fluidity across different actors and geographies of power. Alliances with national and global movements working to democratise the information and communication realms – the knowledge commons activists, the open source community, and with movements against runaway, global capitalism – the right to livelihood and fair trade movements, global democracy movement are vital to shape new policies and normative frameworks that contribute to progressive and long term visions of gender justice.

In the network age, state patriarchy renews itself through moral panic and anxiety. At local levels, such anxiety is extremely palpable as we see digital technologies destabilise gender equations, bringing new affordances for women's autonomy. Democratising the debates around information and communication rights is therefore key to deep change. It would also be a necessary complement for any new institutional frameworks in Internet governance.

23 Sassen, S. (2002), "A New Cross-Border Field for Public and Private Actors", in *Political Space: Frontiers of Change and Governance in a Globalizing World*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.