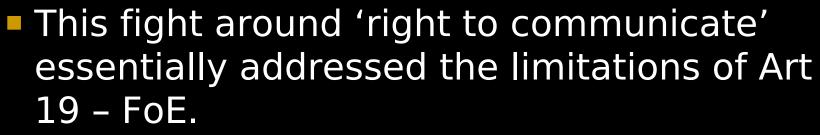# Politics, Power and the Internet

AWID Forum 2008

Anita Gurumurthy, IT for Change

History of NWICO

- 1970s - NAM and the reform of UNESCO, cultural imperialism challenged
- National identity, pol and eco sovereignty,
  - The "free flow" doctrine of information flow, which was reinforcing the dominance of western media and news content;
  - The growing concentration of the media and communication industry translating into more foreign ownership of media in smaller and poorer countries;
  - How the growing importance of western controlled technologies to media production and dissemination was making it difficult for others to keep up.

The Rise and Demise of NWICO

- This fight around 'right to communicate' essentially addressed the limitations of Art 19 – FoE.

- FoE meaningless with cultural imperialism of information flows

- Need for positive and collective rights

- US, UK and private media industries walk out

CR resurfaces

- Late 90s and IS politics – strong CS movement - *creating and environment in which freedom of expression maybe fully consummated.*

- **Enabling rights -** From Right to Communicate to CR., a set of rights

Communication Rights

- A right to participate in one's own culture, and use one 's mother language,
- including ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities;
- A right to information regarding governance and matters of public interest (freedom
- A right to the protection of the moral and material interests of authorship;
- A right to one's honour and reputation, and to protection against attacks;
- A right to privacy;
- A right to peaceful assembly and association;
- A right to free primary education and progressive introduction of free secondary education.
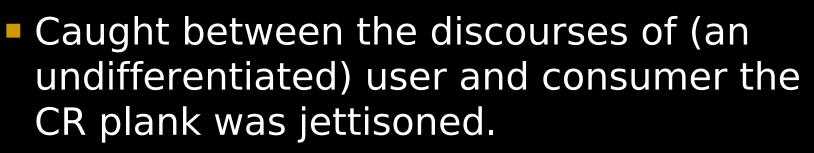
WSIS, CR and hijacked agenda

- WSIS – CR movement finds no traction

- The rise and rise of Neo-liberalism
  - Telecom shifts to WTO, GATT
  - Trade and not redistributive justice; markets and not rights
  - The US sabotages policy outcomes at WSIS – NO GLOBAL POLICY ARCHITECTURE FOR THE INTERNET

WSIS, CR and hijacked agenda

- CS actors and Californian ideologies – ICT utopia, geek-techie approaches and a deep animosity towards governments.

- Individualistic, and ahistorical in their position and against any conception of enabling rights.

- CR movement finds no favourable vibes in digital age progressive politics

CR does not measure up!

- Caught between the discourses of (an undifferentiated) user and consumer the CR plank was jettisoned.

- Also it was increasingly clear that the Internet is not just about information and communication. It was about structural transformation not just of media but of society!!!!

Whither Third World Women?

- Enabling rights imperative for gender equality in the IS :
  - Can we think of a right to the internet?
  - How can we create an enabling ecology for user generated content that women can create? What is the role for public finance and public policy here?
  - What is the place of media regulation to address market excesses and corporatised controls of the Internet?

Citizenship Frameworks in the IS

- The transnational nature of our existence shaped by the Internet – NEED FOR PUBLIC VALUES REGARDING THE PUBLIC SPACE

- Women's cultures enmeshed in the patriarchal and capitalist values of digital spaces.

- State a mediator between global and local?

Towards New frameworks

- New possibilities for Economic and Cultural rights of nations, groups and women

- How do we address women's citizenship on trans-spatial terms outside of neo-liberal, individualised and consumerist frames??

- Start now!!!