

Round Table on  
Inclusion in the Network Society

Mapping development alternatives,  
forging research agendas

Synthesis

29th September -1st October 2014  
Bengaluru, India



Synthesis Report of the *Round Table on Inclusion in the Network Society-Mapping development alternatives, forging research agendas* (29<sup>th</sup> September to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014)

Coordinated by IT for Change, Bengaluru, India ([ITforChange.net](http://ITforChange.net))

Supported by the International Development Research Centre, Canada  
(<http://www.idrc.ca/EN/Pages/default.aspx>)

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Report prepared by: Akanksha Babbar and Nandini Chami, November 2014.

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## INTRODUCTION

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The Round Table on 'Inclusion in the network society – mapping development alternatives, forging research agendas' was organised by IT for Change and the International Development Research Centre, Canada, between 29<sup>th</sup> September -1<sup>st</sup> October 2014, in Bengaluru, India. It brought together 28 research scholars, development practitioners and activists for three days of intense debates, discussions and deliberations, on identifying appropriate analytical frameworks for tracing power and exclusion in the current paradigms of ICT use, production and policy, and formulating future research agendas in the field of 'networks, development and inclusion'.

Over the 3 days of the Round Table, there were 8 Rounds of discussions. Each Round focused on a specific facet of the 'Inclusion' question, and opened with a Panel Presentation, bringing together key submissions from the panelists, before the floor was opened up for larger discussion. All 28 participants presented their inputs as panelists – based on their thematic area of expertise and interest. Following these 8 Rounds, participants focused on jointly identifying key thematic areas for future research in the area of inclusion in the network society, through brain-storming in sub-groups.

This report is a brief synthesis of the key threads from the various discussions and debates at the Round Table. The programme, with links to panel presentations, is enclosed at Annexure 1. Research themes identified during the brainstorming session for a future research agenda are listed in Annexure 2.

## KEY THREADS FROM THE ROUND TABLE

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The three days of the Round Table provided a number of insights into the question of evolving appropriate analytical frameworks to trace power and exclusion in the current paradigms of ICT use, production and policy, and future directions for research, in the field of 'networks, development and inclusion'. The main threads from the presentations and discussions are synthesised below.

### **1. 'Inclusion', in digitally-mediated networks, may not obtain with connectivity. Understanding inclusion calls for a grasp over the workings of power, whether connectivity brings control over the terms of participation.**

Currently, the debate on inclusion in the network society is informed by the dominant connectivity framework, which casts the problem of exclusion in black-and-white; one is either connected to, and therefore, part of the network society, or one is not ([Ordóñez 2014](#)). The limitation of this framework is that it conflates 'access' to ICTs and digitally enabled networks with 'participation', ignoring the workings of power that structure the terms of participation for different groups. It also encourages a solutionist approach that erroneously presupposes 'exclusion' to be a problem arising from the inadequate reach of digital networks.

Most often, individuals and communities have no say over the terms on which they are being 'included' in the emerging 'networked' social order. Such inclusion may not lead to greater autonomy, nor the strengthening of individual and collective agency. It may well lead to the co-option of the marginalised into existing economic, cultural and knowledge networks, in ways that create dependence ([Zapata 2014](#)). Sometimes, even the very act by which individuals and communities are '*written into*' existing networks is an act of violence (Shah 2014a).

Therefore, it is vital that the 'inclusion' debate is not dumbed down to the simplistic equation of 'give access, get empowerment'.

### **2. 'Being connected' can exacerbate inequality. In fact, digital intermediation and online peer cultures point to a new grammar of exclusion.**

Connectivity may bring some benefits, and even address some dimensions of social exclusion, for members of marginalised groups and communities. However, it may still leave the underlying structures of social exclusion untouched. For example, m-banking services in Africa have received accolades for

their transformatory impact on the lives of poor, rural women, who were previously unbanked. Undoubtedly, m-banking has brought in a number of benefits for these women, especially in managing everyday financial transactions. However, it cannot be seen as a pathway for financial inclusion, as it has not addressed the underlying structural problem of income security that limits women's access to formal savings and credit mechanisms ([Diga and Mbarathi 2014](#)). Similarly, online connectivity for small firms may not necessarily result in the accrual of economic advantages, as it does not automatically translate into access to market information networks ([Graham and Foster 2014](#)). For example, in the East African tourism sector, Rwandan tour operators are increasingly connected online. However, they have been unable to effectively utilise online information networks on tourist preferences, to attractively package their products, as such information is often hidden behind pay-walls (*ibid*).

The dominant, market-led architecture (and ideology) of connectivity reinforces traditional structures of exclusion. Access to digital technologies is seen as a 'magic wand' that enables completely disintermediated access to information and communication networks, in all spheres of life – economic, political, social and cultural. It is assumed that connectivity will also bring openness, inclusiveness and democratisation to information and communication networks, through disintermediation.

However, digitally enabled networks are based on new forms of intermediation. The Internet architecture – the heart of the emerging network society – is itself subject to intermediary controls at multiple levels ([Gakuru 2014](#)) – the technical community associations that control the routing system, and determine the protocols and standards that enable the Internet to exist as a global 'network of networks'; and the Internet Intermediary companies that own and operate the platforms through which users access, produce and share content (such as social media, social networking platforms and search engines). Similarly, time and space barriers that digitally-enabled communication networks can overcome, enable the re-organisation of production chains along new lines, and the extension of markets to hitherto unconnected populations, without necessarily displacing the powerful intermediary nodes in existing global economic networks. This means that inequalities in existing relations of production and value distribution are, invariably, reproduced.

In fact, a new form of capitalism is evident – one where command over production is substituted by command over the emerging (digitally enabled) networks of information, knowledge, expression and exchange ([Gurumurthy and Chami 2014](#)). This presents a conundrum for initiatives that attempt to utilise the digital opportunity for knowledge creation and political expression. Theoretical and policy frameworks need to account for the particular ways in which digital intermediation and peer-based platforms produce inequality and exclusion, as suggested by the following:

- Initiatives that seek to create a digital knowledge commons, rooted in the vision of a generative, rather than an extractive, economic model, are at risk of being appropriated for the consolidation of big business ([Bauwens 2014](#)).
- Agency online may lose political substance. For example, queer sexual expression online is subsumed within pre-defined categories of gender identity on social media platforms ([Moawad 2014](#)). Such classification furthers the faultlines of neo-liberal market ideologies.
- The co-option of grassroots voices by global development networks creates 'elite enclaves' of civil society activism ([Lewis 2014](#)). 'Who can speak' and 'who is speaking for whom', have become important and contentious questions.
- Contrary to early expectations, the Internet has not emerged as a space that is free from social markers. Its socialisation perpetuates existing social hierarchies. The knowledge commons for instance, continue to remain blind to social and environmental externalities that contribute to online exclusion – such as the exclusion of women from these spaces because of their overtly 'white, male, geek' culture ([Bauwens 2014](#)).

Connectivity can be beneficial, if a framework on inclusion can grapple with the nature of digital intermediation ('what kind of intermediation can be useful?') and the sociology of power in online peer cultures ('into what we are seeking to include the excluded?').

### **3. Dominant inclusion frameworks can undermine collective agency, where political solidarities at the community level may be traded, for becoming connected.**

Experiences from community informatics reveal that a “*leaving-no-one-behind*” (United Nations 2013) approach may present more choices at the individual level, but such access/ use can instrumentalise and undermine collective agency. For example, new Bottom of the Pyramid models use the language of value creation, innovation and partnership (Gurumurthy and Chami 2014), to offer the poor membership to new networks. But these models, built on the top of group solidarities, are a means to simply deepen markets. Also, in the absence of strategies for mediating connectivity in a manner that creates ICT-enabled community-owned spaces for local action, access alone can spawn a culture of possessive individualism (Gurstein 2014). Agency has both individual and collective dimensions. It cannot be conflated with the expansion of consumption choices (Zhou 2014). It is political.

### **4. In a digitally-mediated, global society, democratic norms and practices are in a flux. Data-driven governance can fall short of accountability, while multistakeholder public policy may lack legitimacy. Open data offers some possibilities for a democratic transition, but to start with, data structures and standards need to be visible to citizens.**

In the new global economic order, co-constituted by digital technologies, democracy – as we know it – has been completely transformed, in form and substance.

At a global level, we are witness to the rise of digitally-enabled transnational economic and political networks not bound by the control of nation-states. The mainstream development discourse has responded to this situation by turning to the current multistakeholder governance model of the Internet, for answers (Bissio 2014). Even though its capacity to further inclusiveness and democracy is not demonstrated, we see circular and recursive arguments of the benefits of multistakeholdersim, built up by its proponents (Singh 2014). In this approach, many development actors see a solution for overcoming the limitations of the existing multi-lateral, global governance model. However, the right of elected governments to formulate policy for their citizenry cannot be equated to the right of civil society groups and corporations to represent the voices of their specific interest groups, during democratic decision-making processes. Multistakeholderism in public policy processes, is thus questionable; it lacks representativity and hence, legitimacy.

At the national level, we are witnessing the emergence of a new data-centred governance paradigm, especially in the democracies of the global South. The state is attempting to harness the expertise of multiple actors to overcome the failure of the developmentalist model (Mohan 2014), while developing data-based tracking mechanisms to check inefficiencies in the delivery of services to citizens. The resultant blurring of boundaries between governmental, semi-governmental and private providers of welfare and services (Chattapadhyay 2014), has meant slippages in accountability – a virtualisation of ‘here and now’ human responsibility into ‘there and later’ technological problems. This has destabilised current modes through which citizens politically organise, on the ground, for demanding services and rights.

‘Open data’ – the idea that states should publish data sets currently held by them, on the Internet, with license terms that permit anyone to use them with appropriate attribution – has gained currency in the meanwhile. However, for the open data movement to fully realise its promise, and truly enable democratisation, it is important to visibilise the processes through which the data structures get framed in the process of converting the data for online publication and the manner in which standards for open data get formulated. At present, this is largely a closed process – and this needs to change, if indeed, open data is to enable citizens to fully view the state (Davies 2014).

### **5. Making connectivity work for the marginalised calls for new imaginaries and pathways to inclusion.**

The discussions at the Round Table identified insights on how connectivity models can work to transform power:



## 5.a Refining our analytical frameworks

Some concrete suggestions to look beyond an 'access and connectivity' model, were made. This included:

1. Moving away from frameworks that adopt a third person perspective of inclusion and the network, towards first person accounts of the consequences of participating in specific networks ([Ordenez 2014](#)).
2. Shifting the locus of analysis away from the network as a static entity, and instead focusing on specific couplings of digital networks with the multifarious facets of everyday social hierarchies ([Shah 2014b](#)).
3. Using intermediation as an analytical lens to understand the dynamic between structure and agency, in the network society context ([Gurumurthy 2014](#)).

## 5b. New topologies of connectivity that work for communities and collectivities.

Sociologies of connectivity are predicated upon the architecture of networks, since the architecture governs positionalities and relationships, determining who has power, who can exercise control, and who is included. The goal of inclusion hence requires adequate attention to how networks are configured, that includes:

1. Investment in creating alternative, community-owned and localised network infrastructure. This is one potential pathway for reclaiming the original vision of an open and inclusive Internet architecture ([Randhawa 2014](#)).
2. Creating topologies of intermediation and peering arrangements that can challenge existing structures of inequality. The maximisation of the potential of peer to peer production networks for the inclusion agenda depends on intermediation mechanisms that can prevent the enclosure of such peer production models for extraction and commercialization. In specific, commons-based reciprocal licensing systems, and levies on private actors who extract resources from the common pool, can be explored. Additionally, it is important to invest in the material and immaterial conditions that can enhance people's participation in the knowledge commons ([Bauwens 2014](#)). This includes a wide range of strategies: from exploring Open Hardware for science labs that can reduce about 7/8<sup>th</sup> of the cost of setting up such labs; to creating Open Agricultural Design communities that enable citizen-scientists and farmers to develop their own appropriate farming technology.
3. Seeking diversity in perspectives, forms of knowledge and of linguistic and cultural expression, in the online public sphere ([Kleine 2014](#)). To prevent online networks of knowledge and cultural expression from being co-opted into the reproduction of existing hegemonies, policy and practice frameworks must develop norms/ standards, and create the structures that build a sustainable foundation for diverse collectivities to thrive on the network.

## 5c. Policy and programme design that strengthens individual and collective agency

1. In order to effectively utilise the network society opportunity for strengthening individual and collective agency, it is important to look beyond the connectivity question, while designing 'access policies'. ICT policy and programming frameworks must go beyond an 'interventionist' approach, acknowledging the ways in which the diversity of social and political experiences of individuals define their relationship with digital technologies. They must recognise the ways in which ICTs nurture agency and capabilities at the group level – going beyond a one size fits all approach ([Chigona 2014](#)). Marginalised groups must be able to use the potential of digital technologies to address their basic needs, and not just their consumption 'wants'. ICT policy and programming must be synchronised with larger poverty reduction and development efforts, and not be silo-ed.
2. Access spaces must be designed to foster collective agency. Telecentre initiatives that have gone beyond the 'service delivery' mode, becoming community-directed spaces, demonstrate a pathway that opens up multiple affordances of technologies, for collective agency ([Gurstein 2014](#)).

## 5d. Changes to global and national public policy frameworks to further democracy and citizen participation

1. Global governance of the Internet has to be democratised. The current multistakeholder model is not adequately representative; it privileges the technical community ([Bollow 2014](#)), and gives big businesses and the more powerful countries greater say ([Purkayastha 2014](#)).
2. Strengthening state capacity to effectively leverage the market as an instrument to achieve public interest ends in the digital domain remains critical ([Gillwald 2014](#)).
3. If we are to further the potential of digital technologies for enhancing citizen participation and deepening democracy, policies and programmes need to encourage community networks based on trust, shared norms and values. The debates on data need to move beyond the standard rhetoric for truly heterarchic forms of governance that deepen democracy.
4. Researchers working on inclusion in the network society need to develop agendas and questions from the standpoint of the poor and marginalised. If research has to be a transformational endeavour, it has to be rooted in the language of the people, and in the real sites of struggle, and not become an exercise where *“people who really do not deal with power are discussing questions of how power is organised”* ([Dey 2014](#)).



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## ANNEXURE I.

## AGENDA WITH LINKS TO PRESENTATIONS

29 <sup>th</sup> September	Day 1
2.20 PM	Welcome and context setting – IT for Change and IDRC
2.50 PM to 3.30 PM	<p><b>Round 1:</b> Beyond the buzz – meaning in meme-ing</p> <p><i>Speakers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Andrea Ordonez, Independent Researcher on Public Policy, Ecuador</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Nishant Shah, Centre for Internet and Society, India</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Baohua Zhou, Journalism School, Fudan University, China</a></li> </ul> <p><i>Chair</i></p> <p>Dorothea Kleine, ICT4D Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK</p>
3.30 PM to 4.00 PM	Discussion
4.00 PM to 4.20 PM	Tea
4.20 PM to 5.00 PM	<p><b>Round 2:</b> Collectivity in the space of flows – de-constructing / reconstructing ICTs and Development</p> <p><i>Speakers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Wallace Chigona, Department of Information Systems, University of Cape Town, South Africa</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Sonia Randhawa, Centre for Independent Journalism, Malaysia</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Eduardo Villanueva, Department of Communications, Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru</a></li> </ul> <p><i>Chair</i></p> <p>Desiree Lewis, Women's and Gender Studies Department, University of the Western Cape, South Africa</p>
5.00 PM to 5.30 PM	Discussion
5.30 PM to 6.10 PM	<p><b>Round 3:</b> Knowledge regimes and development stories - whose reality, whose truth?</p> <p><i>Speakers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Biswajit Mohapatra, Department of Political Science, North-Eastern Hill University, India</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Cristian Berrio-Zapata, Universidade Estadual Paulista, Brazil</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Tigist Hussen, Women's and Gender Studies Department, University of Western Cape, South Africa</a></li> </ul> <p><i>Chair</i></p> <p>Sonia Randhawa, Centre for Independent Journalism, Malaysia</p>
6.10 PM to 6.40 PM	Discussion

7.30 PM	<b>Dinner</b>
<b>30<sup>th</sup> September</b>	<b>Day 2</b>
9.15 AM to 10.10 AM	<p><b>Round 4:</b> Development pathways in network circuits – disruption or assimilation?</p> <p><i>Speakers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Kathleen Diga, School of Built Environment &amp; Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Christopher Foster and Mark Graham, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, UK</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Dorothea Kleine, ICT4D Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Anita Gurumurthy, IT for Change, India</u></a></li> </ul> <p><i>Chair</i> Roberto Bissio, Third World Institute, Uruguay</p>
10.10 AM to 10.55 AM	Discussion
10.55 AM to 11.15 AM	Tea
11.15 AM to 11.55 AM	<p><b>Round 5:</b> Hypervisible or invisible? - marginal discourses in network logic</p> <p><i>Speakers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Desiree Lewis, Women's and Gender Studies Department, University of the Western Cape, South Africa</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Nadine Moawad, Lebanon-based activist, Association for Progressive Communications</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Roberto Bissio, Third World Institute, Uruguay</u></a></li> </ul> <p><i>Chair</i> Alison Gillwald, Research ICT Africa, South Africa</p>
11.55 AM to 12.25 PM	Discussion
12.25 PM to 1.20 PM	Group Task – World Cafe
1.20 PM to 2.30 PM	Lunch
2.30 PM to 3.10 PM	<p><b>Round 6:</b> Techno-power, state and citizen – old anxieties, new expressions</p> <p><i>Speakers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Sumandro Chattapadhyay, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, India</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Tim Davies, World Wide Web Foundation</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Anjali K. Mohan, International Institute of Information Technology - Bengaluru, India</u></a></li> </ul> <p><i>Chair</i></p>

	Norbert Bollow, Just Net Coalition, Switzerland
3.10 PM to 3.40 PM	Discussion
3.40 PM to 4.00 PM	Tea
4.00 PM to 4.40 PM	<p><b>Round 7:</b> Open <i>and</i> inclusive – working the network</p> <p><b>Speakers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Michael Gurstein, Centre for Community Informatics Research, Development and Training, Canada</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Alex Gakuru, Creative Commons , Kenya</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Michel Bauwens, Foundation for Peer to Peer Alternatives, Belgium</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Chair</b> Christopher Foster, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, UK</p>
4.40 PM to 5.20 PM	Discussion
<b>1<sup>st</sup> October</b>	<b>Day 3</b>
9.15 AM to 10.30 AM	<p><b>Round 8:</b> Governing globality - can democracy rise up to the occasion?</p> <p><b>Speakers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Alison Gillwald, Research ICT Africa, South Africa</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Prabir Purkayastha, Knowledge Commons, India</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Norbert Bollow, Just Net Coalition, Switzerland</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Parminder Jeet Singh, IT for Change, India</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Nikhil Dey, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghatan, India</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Chair</b> Michael Gurstein, Centre for Community Informatics Research, Development and Training, Canada</p>
10.30 AM to 11.30 AM	Discussion
11.30 AM to 11.50 AM	Tea
11.50 AM to 12.45 PM	<b>Round 9:</b> Open discussion – critical threads, vital debates
12.45 PM to 1.15 PM	Group task – Themes for a research agenda on 'Networks, Development and Inclusion'
1.15 PM to 2.15 PM	Lunch
2.15 PM to 4.15 PM	Group task – Key research questions on 'Networks, Development and Inclusion'
4.15 PM to 5.00 PM	<p>Closing session – Where to, from here?</p> <p>Phet Sayo, IDRC, Canada; Anita Gurumurthy, IT for Change, India</p>

## BRAINSTORMING SESSION ON FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

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### Research Questions from Cluster 1

- 1.1. What is X (where X can be – democracy, state, market etc) in the context of an inclusive network society? (The question can straddle the empirical and the normative)
- 1.2 Who creates, controls, captures, and gains from social and economic values in networks?
- 1.3 What kinds of systems and structures across different scales, in the network society, (can) enable communities and individuals to live (or constrain them from living), the lives they have reason to value? What transformations count as emancipatory inclusion? How can such systems and structures be transformed towards such emancipatory inclusion? How do we achieve an inclusive network society?
- 1.4 What are the power structures, configurations, and geographies with regard to voices and representations in the network society? Under what institutional conditions do these voices and representations lead to claims-making?
- 1.5 What do the institutional landscapes of data look like in the network society? Who controls these and how are they controlled? How can data regimes be made accountable, and under what kinds of ethical frameworks?

### Research Questions from Cluster 2

- 2.1 Architecture – What are the components of network architecture?
  - a) who has the power to create architecture?
  - b) how do we understand the first mover advantage?
  - c) how do we make those who are marginalised the first movers?
- 2.2 Networks and collectivity  
How do we move networks from a state of activation to mobilisation: how do you codify political sentiment? (or) what does this transition to mobilisation entail?
- 2.3 Is openness an ideology, value, or liberation? Unpacking openness and access as problematic concepts.
- 2.4 "I am, if I have a mobile", seems to define our existence. When can one be the person one wishes to be? (*This will examine the distinction between 'you are, because you buy', vis-a-vis 'you are, because you are a person or you are a citizen.'*). Can the mechanics of inclusion be re-imagined beyond action (citizenship and rights) and transaction (consumer/producer)?

### Research Questions from Cluster 3

- 3.1 What is the nature of research in the area of Inclusion in the Network Society? What are the connections of such research to political activism on the one hand, and to dominant / vested interests interested in influencing research outcomes, on the other?
- 3.2 What kind of research methodologies – evidence-based research and its effective presentation, participatory research methods etc – would lead to empowering relationships between the researcher and the communities that are the subject of such research?
- 3.3 In what ways do ICTs support (and constrain) the diversity of knowledge forms? How do ICTs codify

socio-cultural norms that validate or de-validate forms of knowledge, including local or indigenous knowledge? How do local cultural practices and languages impinge upon universal human rights norms, and what role do ICTs play in this relationship?

3.4 Network societies can tend to marginalise women. How does this correspond to the initial utopian visions of the Internet? To what degree does the on-line amplify the off-line?

3.5 How can we understand and use the potential of ICTs to create new public spheres that facilitate symbolic and material exchanges between emerging, issue-based groups and traditional community-based political actors?

### **Research Questions from Cluster 4**

4.1 There are various conceptualisations of the Internet-infrastructure, services/platform, communication, repository of information and knowledge, repository of data, means of production, economic market place, public forum etc. What are the geographies of these conceptualisations?

4.2 For the various conceptualisations of the Internet (see above), what are the respective modes of production, reproduction and consumption? How is labour valued, and rent/revenue accumulated and distributed, in these conceptualisations? How are labour and rent accounted for?

4.3 What parts of the Internet should be considered as public goods and what parts as private goods?

4.4 Is personal data private data? What lens can we use to see information (other than through the notion of private property)?

4.5 What is generative innovation?

### **Additional questions that came up in the plenary**

P1 How do knowledge paradigms transform in the network society?

P2 What specific implications for the environment and sustainable human development arise in the network society?

P3 What are the connections between democracy and technology governance?

The following question was suggested on email by one of the participants of Cluster 4, after the Research Questions were circulated for additions/modifications, after the event.

E1 How can social accountability be fostered in a networked society, where e-governance practices (or the introduction of technology in governance) in the last two decades have fundamentally altered/ blurred existing state-citizen accountability lines/mechanisms?