

What does the IGF signify for gender equality

(Key findings from a Critical Discourse Analysis of IGF 2012 by IT for Change. The study is being finalised and will soon be available on www.itforchange.net)

- Premise that presence of women does not ensure the inclusion of gendered perspectives.
- Studying gender equality as it gets constructed within the space of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) – a policy forum based on **multi-stakeholderism**
- Critical Discourse Analysis of the six Main sessions of 2012
- Gender equality framework: Capabilities, access to resources and opportunities, empowerment possibilities, macro-environmental factors
- Trailing the word 'access' across the transcripts: 93 utterances identified and codified
- Interest-based analysis of utterances: Who said what? What can we infer from that?

Key Findings

- Only 8 specific references to gender, of which only one explicitly referred to the issue of rights. No reference to the intersections of economic justice with gender justice.
- **Access to technological infrastructure:** Internet not envisioned as a public good, pre-dominantly viewed through the demand-and-supply paradigm. No explicit reference to access costs. Key contestation over mobile vs. broadband.
- **Making technologies contextually appropriate :** Focus on building multi-lingual content. Not sufficient attention to questions of community owned/low cost technologies. No reference to open paradigms nor public policy frameworks in this area.
- **Innovation:** No reference to innovation as a social phenomenon. References to how the Domain Names industry and Open Source platforms can foster innovation. Technical drivers and not policy and others

Key Findings

- **Rights and Freedoms** – Concern with civil and political liberties articulated. Within privacy and security, far more focus on state surveillance and censorship than corporate measures. Socio-economic rights avoided.
- **Empowerment** – Acknowledgement that access is meaningful only when there are empowering possibilities, but largely focussing on inclusion of women in access to the Internet.

North-South divide- ETNO proposal as a key area of contestation. How do deficiencies in Internet access adversely affect developing countries? Counter-voices that recognise technicalisation of the political.

- **Existing policy regimes** - Key contestation over the need for regulation itself. Imagination of the space of policy formulation only as national (not global). Largely dealing with market competition. Key contestation over right to access. Multiple imaginaries of what the Internet is.

Tentative conclusions

- Feminist agenda in the IGF focused on a politics of recognition (unhinged from re-distribution); in keeping with other global trends
- The hegemonic discourse of the self-governing individual (typically a subject of the nation-state) and a techno-utopian 'open' space (typically the ungovernable global)
- Multi-stakeholderism's anti-institutional tendency when not tied to a clearly defined democratic governance process – Dialogue as “voice without agency and participation as presence without politics”
- What does the absence of the global normative principles on IG mean?
- How then does the multiplicity of policy arenas implicating IG impact global democracy? (EU, OECD, ITU, ICANN)?
- How must feminist politics contend with this?