

Round Table on Inclusion in the Network Society

Mapping development alternatives,
forging research agendas

29th September -1st October 2014
Bengaluru, India



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INTRODUCTION

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 (IDRC), Canada, from 29th September to 1st October 2014, in Bengaluru, India. It brought together 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 ICT¹ use, production and policy. Participants also formulated future research agendas in the field of 'networks, development and inclusion'. (See Annexure 1 for details).

This collaboration between IT for Change and IDRC was a result of the shared conviction of the two organisations about the need for informed debates and critical thinking in research on the network society, especially on the question of social inclusion. As Anita Gurusurthy from IT for Change shared with the participants on the opening day of the Round Table, *"In the network society context, there is a dearth of spaces for critically understanding exclusion and inclusion, especially those that foreground perspectives from developing country contexts"*. Also, as Phet Sayo from IDRC put it, *"in the current context, reality is fast outpacing our frameworks and vocabularies, as far as the question of inequality is concerned"*. The Round Table was thus a response to the urgent imperative to explore how best the potential of emerging networks of information, knowledge, production, and cultural and resource flows, can be harnessed for marginalised groups.

In specific, the Round Table focused on the following questions².

1. What is the emerging structural-institutional ecology framing inclusion in the network society? What readings of the current paradigms of ICT diffusion, use, production and policy allow us to trace power and exclusion?
2. How do we map continuities and disjunctures in development practice when technology meets society, to build a 'new' narrative, in which all people matter?
3. Under what conditions can digital technologies bring about 'equitable inclusion' in the network society? What kind of a structural-institutional ecology can facilitate efforts for 'equitable inclusion' in the network society?
4. What broad questions and specific themes would comprise a pertinent research agenda on networks, development and inclusion? What methodologies would be appropriate in this regard?

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This report has broadly followed the 3 day programme, covering 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 area of expertise and interest. Many participants also submitted papers/ essays that elaborated the arguments/ issues they raised in their presentations. 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.

In this report, we first detail the participant submissions (drawing upon their panel presentations and

¹ Information and Communication Technologies.

² For more details on the issues and areas that the Round Table sought to address, see [Concept Note](#).

written inputs, where available), and then move on to outlining the research agenda developed by the participants. In conclusion, we present a synthesis of the key threads emerging from the discussions at the Round Table.

DAY 1, ROUND 1: BEYOND THE BUZZ – MEANING IN MEME-ING

This session unpacked and brought together key theoretical and analytical issues surrounding the politics of inclusion and exclusion in the network society. In doing so, it attempted to frame some of the key points for analysis and discussion.

Is inclusion enough? – Exploring new frameworks to analyse the network society *Andrea Ordonez, Independent Researcher on Public Policy, Ecuador*



As the first speaker on the opening panel of the Round Table, Andrea Ordonez set the stage for the discussions to follow, by flagging key epistemological issues surrounding the term 'inclusion' – moving beyond the buzz around it.

Andrea commenced her presentation by highlighting how the term 'inclusion' is a new entrant to the mainstream development discourse. Fifteen years ago, when the Millennium Development Goals were being framed, one did not hear this term so often. But these days, it is ubiquitous. In fact, in the proposed Sustainable Development Goals, one sees inclusion everywhere – *“from growth to cities to institutions”*. At one level, this movement needs to be appreciated – for it demonstrates an evolution in the analysis of poverty as a social condition. Poverty is no longer seen as an unfortunate accidental circumstance that certain individuals find themselves in and is recognised as a structural condition. However, the mainstream discourse on 'inclusion' does not take this understanding far enough.

The concept of inclusion poses the problem of exclusion as a 'black and white' situation – *“either you are in, or you are out”*. It fails to analyse the exclusions that stem from unequal terms of participation that individuals often face. For instance, such a 'black and white' analysis may lead

us to picture exclusion in the network society context as the condition that those without access to ICTs find themselves in. It may not throw light on the fact that in many cases, individuals with access to ICTs, may be using such access, *“just to replicate the current relations he or she had before, and so, there might, in practice, be many small networks among those that are excluded, but with few and infrequent relations to more central nodes in the networks”*.

Without such a relational analysis, there is the danger of coming up with very simplistic solutions to the problem of social exclusion – where inclusion becomes merely a game of catch-up. A recent instance of this is the exhortation in the Post-2015 High Level Panel Report (entitled A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development), *“to leave no one behind”*, as a key priority in the post-2015 development agenda.

For a stronger theoretical framework to understand inclusion, examining the intricacies of positionalities and relationships in shaping inequality and power, is vital. This requires a reflexive transition *“from a third person, distant perspective of inclusion and the network, to a first person account of what participating in a system entails, and the intended and unintended consequences”* of one's actions.



What the network can't see: Politics of inclusion in connected societies

Nishant Shah, Centre for Internet and Society, India

Building on the framework of critical reflection set up by Andrea, Nishant Shah brought to the table the need to move beyond the politics of inclusion

and exclusion – and interrogate the idea of the network – whose presence in our lives has become ubiquitous, as *“a practice, as a collective, and as a*

metaphor that seeks to explain the world we live in”.

Nishant's key submission was that the binary of inclusion and exclusion, or the quaint notion of building counter-networks, is not very generative in thinking through the politics of digital inclusion. He explained this using the case of the 'Bangalore/ Bengaluru North-East Exodus' (as it was labeled by the press).

After an ethnic-religious clash between Hindus and Muslims in the North-Eastern state of Assam in 2012, rumours started circulating among the diasporic North-Eastern community living in Bengaluru that there would be retaliatory attacks on them, from certain Muslim factions, at the end of Ramadan. This fuelled a mass exodus of the community from Bengaluru, despite a range of messages from local law enforcement and security authorities, and reassurances from political leaders. The authorities' response to this was to try and clamp down mass SMSes and cell phone messaging networks, as their analysis of the situation had identified the digital networks of the North-

Eastern community, and the spiralling information explosion about an imagined situation of precariousness and bodily harm, as the main problem.

Nishant observed that all that had happened in this case, was that at a certain moment, a pre-existing community had rendered itself visible – and the network analysis to understand such a phenomenon was not useful, as it merely displaced the 'unmappability' of certain human actions, and the workings of agency in particular contexts, onto the black box of the network. As Wendy Chun has observed, the network is “*an opaque metaphor*” – as “*the network is not only the framework through which we analyse, but it is also the object of analyses*”. Therefore, it becomes important to develop a theoretical framework that does not reference the network as a starting point, but on the other hand, looks at the “*couplings of the network with a range of social, cultural and political practices which are not of the Internet*”. This is where the new and radical politics of working with the digitally under-served is going to be located.

The many divides in the network society

Baohua Zhou, Journalism School, Fudan University, China

Baohua Zhou brought to the discussion, findings and observations from his empirical studies of patterns of ICT use in rural China, to highlight the many divides in the network society context that had to be overcome for the vision of meaningful inclusion to be realised.

He began his presentation by observing that “*there may be one political China... but many social Chinas*”. These divides get accentuated in the network society context. Cities such as Beijing and Shanghai have Internet penetration rates that match countries in Northern Europe (above 80%) while rural provinces, especially in the Western and Southern parts of the country, have hardly 17%.

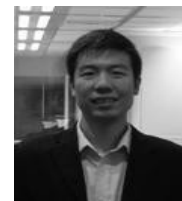
Discussion

The discussion at the end of Round 1 further unpacked the key questions about the mainstream discourse on inclusion in the network society, and the politics of the inclusion-exclusion debate. *What really is inclusion? Is it a mere buzzword*

The digital divide manifests across different social groups as well: between the rural and the urban population, between social classes, and between men and women.

More importantly, we must recognise that mere access and consumption do not constitute meaningful participation in the network society context. Meaningful inclusion can come about only when there are policies and enabling environments that support marginalised groups to use the potential of ICTs to address their basic needs, and not just their consumption 'wants'.

that has rarefied the debate on inequality and exclusion? What is the difference between access and inclusion? Is the network society framing adequate, to address these issues?, were some of the questions debated.



Mark Graham raised important concerns regarding the theoretical and analytical relevance of the term 'network', wondering whether the network lens was productive. Sumandro Chattapadhyay added to Mark's concern, by emphasising the tendency of the network lens to promote a 'solutionist' discourse to the question of inclusion.

Adding to this set of critical concerns, Alex Gakuru and Roberto Bissio raised questions about what does inclusion really mean, in the current context where the underlying architectures of the networked social order are not democratic: *On whose terms is inclusion being defined? Do marginalised groups have a right to refuse to be a part of the dominant network paradigm?*

Parminder Singh interjected with an observation

that inequality may be a more pertinent framework than inclusion, to understand these questions. This also resonated with Cristian Berrio-Zapata's concern regarding the false sense of "sameness" that the power-neutral connectivity discourse tended to create: not all those who are on the network have shaped its terms, and so, not all are on an equal footing.

Nishant Shah responded to these concerns, acknowledging the need to politicise network analysis – examining how power shapes the current context. The uncritical deployment of the network lens he averred, is the problem – for this encourages a tendency to frame everything else in relation to the network, and what is outside tends to get analysed only through a "negative relationality" approach.

DAY 1, ROUND 2: COLLECTIVITY IN THE SPACE OF FLOWS: DECONSTRUCTING / RECONSTRUCTING ICTs AND DEVELOPMENT

This session attempted to deconstruct the implications of emerging relations and patterns of power for collective agency and political action in the network society context.



Reflections on ICTs and collective empowerment

Wallace Chigona, Department of Information Systems, University of Cape Town, South Africa

According to Wallace, in much of the ICT4D literature around agency and empowerment, the default assumption about individual subjects is one that is rooted in Westphalian individualism. However, attention to the collective dimension of these concepts is important to capture the complexity of factors that characterise group action, and relationships among members of a community. In this context, he detailed several examples in which the digital medium has been appropriated through collective patterns of use – even if it had been initially designed to cater to individual needs.

For example, he described how in Africa, the introduction of mobile phones in many contexts has contributed to an unintended and almost organic emergence of "infomediaries" – when an

individual woman using the instrument focuses on addressing those needs that she has identified as "collective" priorities. Thus, the subject, in this case, identifies herself through the collective – rather than as an (atomised) individual – and appropriates technology, accordingly.

In his presentation, Wallace emphasised the need to shift our analytical focus from the "individual" to the "collective", in order to understand how various groups in the community adopt ICTs. In fact, an in-depth understanding of these multifarious patterns of use among different communities can contribute to a much needed policy level engagement with the ways in which ICTs cultivate agency and capabilities at the group level – going beyond a 'one size fits all' approach.

Inclusion online: How offline discrimination closes off online spaces for political action

Sonia Randhawa, Centre for Independent Journalism, Malaysia



In her presentation, Sonia Randhawa focused on the following question – Can online freedoms, guaranteed by legislation, be a reality, in the context of offline discrimination? She addressed this question through a case study of Seksualiti Merdeka – an annual festival held between 2008 and 2011 to celebrate sexual diversity in Malaysia, supported by online mobilisation through a website and a Facebook page.

Seksualiti Merdeka was launched in 2008, by the LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Trans-sexual, Inter-sex and Questioning individuals) community in Malaysia, as a “cautious celebration” of the rights of sexual minorities. However, this festival lasted only 4 years. In 2011, the close ties of the organisers of the event with the Bersih electoral reforms movement in the country, led to suspicion among authorities and a police shut-down of the festival.

At this juncture, contrary to sociological common-sense about the online being a natural alternative for political organising in such a repressive environment, such a shift did not happen. This, in spite of the fact that “the online environment in Malaysia is comparatively free of governmental surveillance and control”.

Collective agency in the network society

Eduardo Villanueva, Department of Communications, Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru



Eduardo Villanueva began his presentation by pointing out that even for those of us who are not fully convinced about the usefulness of the network society lens to study the emerging digitally-mediated social context, what is undeniable is the need to wrap our minds around the multifold “manifestations of agency” that digital media have enabled – from acts of consumption to expressions of political voice to political participation.

Eduardo then highlighted how the current emphasis on access, rather than inclusion, in the mainstream discourse on technologies and

What we see here is a case of extra-legal censorship in the online environment. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) function as a proxy state in censoring the freedom of expression in online spaces. Their acts of covert censorship are rooted in a licensing system that requires ISPs to maintain goodwill with government agencies, which in turn allows the latter to ensure hetero-normative control over content. Such covert censorship can silence social groups whose voice threatens the ideological foundation of the state. Even as the Internet has opened up new possibilities of connecting and coming together, what the case study shows is that the online public sphere begins to reflect the contours of the ‘offline’ social structure, clamping down the emerging LGBTIQ discourse in the country. A focus that is exclusively on state-led oppression hence, cannot help us comprehend the manifold curbs on freedom of expression, in online spaces.

In conclusion, Sonia emphasised the need to shift the locus of practice, to the possibility of creating alternative digital structures – community-owned and localised network infrastructure – so that the initial, romantic dream of the Internet as an inclusive space could be re-captured.

development, is symptomatic of the valorisation of digitally-enabled consumer agency, and the lack of attention to the question of making digital spaces work for political dialogue. The digitally-mediated world has opened up hitherto unprecedented opportunities for the exercise of a consumer agency, totally by-passing the nation-state. However, the pathways that digital media have opened up for political expression have not been so efficacious – online expression has not always translated into successful political dialogue and the exercise of a collective will of the citizenry. This is because we are not questioning the emergent power structure – the

“diffusion of power upstream” to bureaucrats and large corporations, that leaves individuals with no power, except the power to consume!

Thus, according to Eduardo, far from being a simple equation of access leading to

empowerment, inclusion is about enabling the expansion of cultural and social conversation, so that this existing consolidation of power is challenged. In other words, it is about questioning “*what are we being included into*”.

Discussion

The discussion following the second session focused on understanding agency, in the network society context.

Commenting that an analytical lens that dichotomises individual agency as ‘citizen agency’ and ‘consumer agency’ may not be useful, Dorothea Kleine pointed to how such a dichotomy may ignore the fact that consumption can also be a political act. Alison Gillwald added that similarly, polarising individual agency and collective agency was also not very useful, as this would promote a tendency to romanticise the collective and the communal.

In the same vein, Sumandro Chattapadhyay argued that the polarity between citizen and consumer agency reflected the tendency to over-valorise the idea of the ‘citizen’, forgetting the fact that citizen agency is an equally problematic construct – as the formal equality that is the foundation of citizenship brackets out other inequalities – especially that of social origin and of class.

Roberto Bissio intervened by highlighting that though the practice of citizenship was imperfect, it was at least rooted in a utopian vision of equality. All individuals, however great or small, have only

one vote in a democracy. But consumers are not equal – so if we are saying let us not dichotomise the consumer and the citizen, we are essentially saying the new economic order ushered in by globalisation can substitute the nation-state.

Gurumurthy Kasinathan observed that in the network age, when we ourselves have become the product for online social media and networking platforms, it was difficult to view transformative potential in consumer agency.

Sonia Randhawa responded to this debate by pointing out that by promoting a hybrid consumer-citizen identity, we are subverting the language of politics to depoliticise consumption as we are saying what consumers do, when they exercise their choice, is politics. We are not able to influence the actual politics that structure these choices.

Eduardo Villanueva responded to these observations arguing that, in the end, no analytical approach can be absolute. Irrespective of our individual standpoints, we must all understand that individuals are “*a collection of possibilities*” who cannot be reduced to any single identity.

DAY 1, ROUND 3: KNOWLEDGE REGIMES AND DEVELOPMENT STORIES - WHOSE REALITY, WHOSE TRUTH?

This session unpacked the ICTs and knowledge domain, examining the nature of structural exclusions and perpetuation of existing hierarchies.

ICTs in the Indian education system: Consolidating existing inequalities?

Biswajit Mohapatra, Department of Political Science, North-Eastern Hill University, India



Biswajit Mohapatra discussed the increasing enthusiasm among policymakers for investing in ICT-enablement of the education system at all levels – primary, secondary and tertiary. Such investments in ICTs are recognised as important for making good quality education accessible to disadvantaged populations across many developing nations. In his presentation, Biswajit argued that in India's case, systemic reform for 'ICTs in education' has been crippled by the paucity of funds for building the requisite ICT infrastructure, and augmenting traditional methods of teaching-learning with the new possibilities opened up by digital technologies.

Thus, according to Biswajit, the “*effects of the information revolution*” have been slow in coming to educational institutions in India, and even in

the immediate future, there may not be measurable effects.

Under these conditions, the eventual danger, he pointed out, will be the emergence of a two-tier educational system – a more expensive upper tier with sound traditional education, supplemented with the benefits of full IT mediated access to learning, and a cheaper inferior tier dispensing programmed training (especially in rural and semi-urban areas) that completely side-steps the traditional goals of liberal education. Biswajit concluded by underscoring the need for policymakers to guard themselves against such incongruous outcomes, while developing strategies for an ICT-mediated inclusive educational system.

The voices of the digital divide: A discursive critique

Cristian Berrio-Zapata, Universidade Estadual Paulista, Brazil

In his input to the Round Table, Cristian Berrio-Zapata offered a discursive analysis of the conceptual domain of the 'digital divide', by identifying the characteristics of the research literature around it. In specific, he examined the extent to which this literature reflects the 'Center-Periphery' relation described by Dependency Theory (that critically analyses the economic relationship between countries of the global North and the global South).

The methodology adopted for this study was a “*domain analysis*” of the concept of the 'digital divide' in research literature around this topic, in three languages: English, Spanish and Portuguese. The key insight from Cristian's research study was that the field tended to be dominated by studies

that transposed the analytical frameworks utilised in the context of the global North, to developing country contexts. The 'digital divide' concept also perpetuated a messianic narrative about the power of science and technology.

What the analysis points to is the need to move beyond viewing technology as a “*symbolic normaliser*”, in order to fully understand how players from developing communities can appropriate digital technologies on their own terms. This is essential if we are to facilitate a shift from the existing global order of dependency, to a more democratic, heterogeneous world.





The politics of inclusion in knowledge creation: Reflections on the ICT4D conference 2013

Tigist Hussen, Women's and Gender Studies Department, University of Western Cape, South Africa

Tigist Hussen brought to the table a strong feminist critique of the way the question of inclusion is framed in the mainstream ICTs for Development (ICTD) discourse. Her critique was based on her experience of participating in the ICT4D 2013 international conference, collaboratively hosted by the University of the Western Cape and University of Cape Town, from 2nd to 10th December 2013.

She built her argument through a critical reflection on three open sessions of the conference that she attended: “*ICT and the Social System (Gender, Class, Race and Generation)*”, “*Gender and ICT4D*” and “*Punk ICT4D*”. She had three main critiques to offer.

Firstly, sufficient attention is not paid to research that examines social inequalities and gender relations. Instead, research on technological innovation for the poor, even if has utilised strategies that assume participants' access to high-end infrastructure (such as apps that require high-end mobiles) tend to be valorised. In fact, at ICT4D 2013, the session examining the dynamic between technologies and unequal social relations, had one of the fewest number of participants.

Discussion

The discussions following this session reflected on the inequalities in knowledge production arising out of the new ‘*centre-periphery*’ relationships emerging in the network society context, as well as the inequalities in knowledge production within the very discipline that is devoted to studying the interrelationship between technology and development – ICT4D.

Taking off from the presentations made by Tigist Hussen and Cristian Berrio-Zapata, Dorothea Kleine acknowledged that the field of ICT4D and technology studies is not free from the structural inequalities that hinder knowledge production in the academic world. Publishers and brand-names

Secondly, within ICTD academic spaces, of which ICT4D 2013 is an exemplar, young scholars find it difficult to gain recognition for their work. In the spaces within the conference where they are invited upon to present their research, they are cast as “*emerging scholars*” – and their work is not fully acknowledged.

Finally, in the ICTD policy and programming space, the mainstream trend is that the design and implementation of tools and strategies is often done by “*experts*”, without consideration of differences across local contextual realities – as testified by the experiences of African countries. Such an approach, by being “*interventionist*”, does not acknowledge the ways in which the diversity of social and political experiences of individuals define their relationship with digital technologies. By excluding the voices of these “*marginalised*” communities from the conception, design and implementation of technologies in such a way, these practices not only pose the risk of reinforcing existing inequalities, but also contribute to the persistence of exclusionary ICT4D policy and programming.

continue to matter, and existing knowledge production mechanisms in the academic world are extremely hierarchical. Tim Davies added that in this situation, those of us occupying positions of privilege within these networks of knowledge production, must act responsibly, and recognise our ethical obligation to further democratic frameworks for knowledge production.

Some participants commented on how the inequalities embedded in the knowledge production processes in the field of ICTs and development, have adversely impacted policy and practice frameworks that seek to harness the potential of digital technologies for

empowerment. For instance, Alison Gillwald and Nishant Shah highlighted how the solutionist discourses emanating from knowledge centres in the West have led to the oversimplified logic of access, dictating ICT policy making in the global South, without adequate thought on allied education and human development concerns. Norbert Bollow added that the concept of 'autonomy' was crucial in designing inclusive ICT policy and practice frameworks, since cultures that

do not mesh well with the dominant Californian ideology-led ICT paradigm must have the option of designing their own pathways to meaningful appropriation of technologies for empowerment. Both Biswajit Mohapatra and Cristian Berrio-Zapata re-emphasised the need for alternative discourses based on a recognition of, and respect for, sources of knowledge production at the peripheries of the emerging globalised information order.

DAY 2, ROUND 4: DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS IN NETWORK CIRCUITS - DISRUPTION OR ASSIMILATION?

This session reflected on the question of doing development differently in the current context, examining the possibility of creating development pathways that would enable the most marginalised to participate in the network society, on their terms. It also critically examined the political economy of network society, in which connectivity is offered, only to further consolidate market power.

Discontinuities in m-banking and development policy: A case study of women in Kenya's agricultural sector

Kathleen Diga and Nduta Mbarathi, School of Built Environment & Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa



In their input to the Round Table, Kathleen Diga and Nduta Mbarathi explored the question, "how have Kenyan women who are engaged in rural low-income agricultural activities responded to mobile banking, specifically for the purpose of savings?", through a qualitative research study covering 15 rural women engaged in agricultural livelihoods in Maragua, Kenya.

Presenting this input paper, Kathleen spoke about the focus in mainstream ICTD on service delivery innovations that cater to the needs of "people at the margins". M-banking services in particular, have received numerous accolades, for their ostensibly transformatory impacts on the lives of the rural poor, especially women who were "previously unbanked". The authors had undertaken the research study, as they felt that this hype around m-banking must be critically examined in the Kenyan context, where the structural adjustment policies of the 1980's in conjunction with customary laws, have restricted women's ownership and control over land, and

limited their access to opportunities for improving farm livelihoods.

The study revealed that even though there has been a lot of uptake of m-banking among poor, rural women, for managing day-to-day transactions (such as receiving money transfers from a family member in the city, or payment of a child's school fee), it has not become a pathway for financial inclusion. In times of crisis, women still fall back on their pre-existing informal savings and credit mechanisms – and do not use the formal banking system. This is because of the existing structural problems in the Kenyan agricultural sector that lead to sub-optimal outcomes for rural women's livelihoods, and limit their savings capacities. Without transforming these existing institutional structures in the agricultural sector that exacerbate inequalities, the 'disruptive power' of m-banking to lift poor women out of their income insecurity, can never be realised.

In conclusion, Kathleen stressed the need for

synchronising policies that aim to promote ICTs for development and policies that aim at poverty

reduction, if inclusive development pathways in the network society context are to be realised.



Geographies of information inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa

Mark Graham and Christopher Foster, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, UK

In their input to the Round Table, Mark Graham and Christopher Foster critically interrogated the popular imaginary of connectivity becoming a driver of economic change, in Sub-Saharan Africa. In specific, they examined the impact of ICTs on the engagement of countries in this region, with the global knowledge economy. The specific question they focused on, was: *“Are ICTs fuelling a new era of development in the continent? Or, has Sub-Saharan Africa’s engagement with the global knowledge economy continued...on terms that reinforce dependence, inequality, under-development, and economic extraversion?”*.

To address this question, Mark and Christopher brought in the following insights from two multi-year research projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, that they had undertaken: one on the effects of changing connectivities on global geographies of voice, representation and participation; and the other on the relationship between connectivity and the performance of firms in the core sectors of the economy.



Changing connectivities do not seem to have transformed existing relations of production and value distribution in core economic sectors in Sub-Saharan Africa. Also, new knowledge sectors often

described as *“the cornerstone of economic leap-frogging”* have not taken off.

Much of Sub-Saharan Africa is left out of online platforms, tools, and databases. Also, Internet users from these contexts tend to focus their attention on the global informational cores of North America and Europe, as there is a paucity of locally produced knowledge about their contexts. This exacerbates the existing geographies of informational inequalities. The absence of representation does not just amount to loss of political voice for the concerned people and places; it also amounts to an *“invisibilisation”*.

Mark and Christopher concluded by observing that *“connectivity certainly isn’t a sufficient condition for inclusion and equity, and we need to ask whether it is a necessary one”*. On the other hand, connectivity tends to be an amplifier: one that reinforces, rather than reduces, inequality. Hence, there is an urgent need for a strong shift in the focus of mainstream ICTD policy and programming: from the pre-occupation with the *“connected”* and the *“disconnected”*, it is imperative to move onto deeper and critical socio-economic interrogations of the structures that reproduce inequality.



Some thoughts on evolving a research agenda on inclusion and development in the network society

Dorothea Kleine, ICT4D Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK

Inspired by Amartya Sen’s *“Capabilities Approach”*, Dorothea Kleine brought to the table a compelling list of suggestions towards shaping a future research agenda on inclusion and development, in the network society context.

She highlighted the need for examining the ongoing discussions about the governance of the Internet, to assess the relative merits and demerits

of a *‘public goods’* vs *‘private goods’* approach to this issue.

She then stressed the importance of continued engagement with the technical complexities and business/community funding models for first mile connectivity, along with a recognition of the diversity of not just access devices but also *access spaces*, and the social norms that govern the use of these spaces.

Apart from this, Dorothea reminded the group that “*inequality in access is not... (and) cannot be solved by framing it in terms of availability, affordability, technical constraints or economic inequality alone*”. Socio-cultural norms (including on mobility and on time use) and socially embedded injustices structured along gender, ethnicity, disability etc. have a key role to play as

well, in structuring inequalities in access. In conclusion, Dorothea underscored the need to address the political economy and cultural geopolitics of content and language online, through a policy level recognition of the need for public discussion on the value of diversity of perspectives, forms of knowledge and ways of linguistic and cultural expression.

Network morals, development ethics: Some empirical explorations

Anita Gurumurthy and Nandini Chami, *IT for Change*



Anita Gurumurthy presented a discursive analysis of the network society phenomenon, a paper authored with Nandini Chami, tracing challenges for development ethics.

Old alliances among elites are replotted in new network formations. Neo-liberal policies for poverty management follow these new cartographies, helping the elite further aggrandise their power.

Contemporary capitalism is centred around the accumulation of immaterial assets – information resources, that are patented, and then used for the creation of surplus value resulting from monopolistic rents. In this scenario, command over production is substituted by command over the emerging (digitally enabled) networks of information, knowledge, expression and exchange. Development and change efforts are transposed into the market – through Bottom of the Pyramid models where “*a curious mix of corporate dogooding and capitalist greed for deep markets masquerade as value creation, innovation and partnership*”.

The emergence of Internet platforms that promote ‘paid change’, suggests another incursion into the space of traditional political organising. Such platforms use business models that rely on ‘sponsored’ petitions and targeted advertising. Political constituencies become the new commodities of emerging online platforms that exhort their *clients* to “*make change a part of their everyday life*”. Struggles for justice thus become oversimplified, as these developments “*decouple smoothly, the individual pursuit of justice from complex and fraught ethical explorations at a collective societal level*”.

In the network society, collectivities are valuable only to the extent that they can serve networked capitalist order. The elite create new networks of value, using their positions. Reducing the poor to ‘data’ that can be expropriated, and capitalising on connectivity to divest collectives of their solidarities, they consolidate their social position.

For development practitioners, there is an urgent imperative to grapple with a new ethics – one which honours nature and culture as *apriori*, and not the commodity fictions they have been reduced to.



Discussion

The discussion primarily took forward the debate on the new forms of intermediation emerging in the network society context, and their implications for the inclusion agenda.

Tim Davies observed that the idea of ‘*mediation*’ and the devaluation of local cultural practices and communities through the consolidation of market power by the new intermediaries of the network age, was a common thread running across all

presentations. He said that maybe the way forward was to draw inspiration from the idea of “*meaningful inefficiencies*” offered by some scholars (indicating that there was more to life than economic efficiency) – to construct an alternative imaginary of mediated connectivity. Kathleen Diga reflected that local cultural practices may also have a key role to play in building new forms of intermediation – such as that played by informal savings groups in Kenya,

in furthering the uptake of m-banking among rural women. Chris Foster responded to Tim Davies by highlighting that the problem with the current imagination of connectivity is that the state of being connected is seen as one that will collapse all spatial differences and remove all intermediaries. A more useful one would be to accept that what ICTs do is to create new forms of intermediation – some of which could have beneficial impacts for marginalised groups. The question to ask, then, is: What kind of intermediation is useful? In the same vein, Anita Gurumurthy added that intermediation and disintermediation are both different lenses to examine structure and agency – lenses which help us further unpack the dialectic between the individual and the society, in today's digitally transformed social order.

Alex Gakuru raised the question of how can we capture the transformations in the sphere of culture, that are arising in the network society context. He said that we need a more holistic analytical framework that can understand what is happening to the question of culture – going beyond the question of its commodification. He also posed the question of how we can develop metrics for bringing in culture into the analysis of

'inclusion and exclusion' in the network society context. Dorothea Kleine responded by expressing her discomfort with the idea of developing 'metrics' to assess cultural transformations, while at the same time acknowledging the fact that whilst each of us finds fulfillment in the 'cultural', and cherish this relationship with culture in our personal lives, we tend to bracket out this question, in professional discussions. This has to change – and we need to factor in the complex changes at the socio-cultural level, in the analytical lenses we use, to map inclusion-exclusion. Nandini Chami added that the question of culture today was tied to the question of understanding intermediation in the life-world – going beyond the sphere of work and labour, to that of love, and play, and leisure.

Michael Gurstein reflected that the debates on intermediation that the Round Table had opened up, through this session, had also shed light on what needs to be learned and unlearned by practitioners and policy-makers in the space of ICTD, and also demonstrated that our understanding of the relationship between technology and exclusion, has come a long way, since the days of the World Summit on the Information Society.

DAY 2, ROUND 5: HYPERVISIBLE OR INVISIBLE? - MARGINAL DISCOURSES IN NETWORK LOGIC

This session examined the following questions: Are the voices of marginalised groups and their claims gaining greater visibility in the current age of Internet-enabled civil society activism? Or is the online opportunity for political voice and expression, a mirage? What is the impact of the emerging network society on the discourse of rights-based development?



Dilemmas of civil society activism among South African marginalised women

Desiree Lewis, University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Desiree Lewis offered a critical analysis of contemporary ICT-enabled civil society activism among marginalised women in South Africa, reflecting on her specific experiences of engaging with a civil society initiative that works with sex workers.

Building on Partha Chatterjee's influential critique of civil society being just an "elite enclave" in post-

colonial democracies, Desiree reflected on how the complex, everyday struggles of marginalised groups are flattened out through the interventions of NGOs, activists and progressive academics. She also extended Chatterjee's critique to ICT-enabled civil society initiatives that have sought to build the political agency of marginalised women – by highlighting the "(mis)representation, translation, mediation, and appropriation" they foster. She

illustrated this through a critical reflection of her experience of recently attending a photo-voice methodology workshop organised by the NGO SWEAT, that works towards building sex workers' political voice.

Desiree observed that at the workshop, the emphasis was more on producing acceptable photo-voice outputs for donors, rather than invest in the complex process of equipping the sex workers to politicise their experiences. Her

presentation raised questions such as – “*who constitute the 'elite' translating voices of the marginalised?*” and “*what are the challenges in using ICTs for this?*”, pointing out how her experience with the workshop is illustrative of the larger problem with civil society activism – its tendency to engender complicated patron-client relationships between marginalised groups, academics and activists, during the development of situational strategies for accessing resources from the state and donor agencies.

Rights-based development discourse in the information society context

Roberto Bissio, Third World Institute, Uruguay



According to Roberto Bissio, there are two key shifts in the development discourse, that have been wrought by the emerging informatised social order. One, the idea that the data revolution ushered in by digital technologies, is essential to development. And two, the conviction that the multistakeholder paradigm in Internet governance, is appropriate for the global governance system in its entirety.

Roberto first traced the history of the 'big data for development' discourse – highlighting its valorisation by the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 development agenda, and its validation by the United Nations Secretary General, through his move to establish UN Global Pulse – a flagship innovations initiative whose vision is to harness big data for transformatory change. He highlighted the consolidation of market power and the violations of privacy and rights that big data can bring about. He then went on to critically examine the multistakeholder governance model that policy makers and

corporate lobbyists are trying to transpose from the field of Internet governance, to the entire global governance system. He spoke about the UN Secretary General's controversial proposal to the Fifth Committee of the UN General Assembly – to institutionalise a UN partnership facility that would bring in private sector companies as key partners in implementing the post-2015 development agenda (even whilst the discussions to finalise this agenda remain underway). Roberto highlighted how the Snowden revelations have led to a complete loss of legitimacy for this multistakeholder governance model in Internet governance, and by association, in other areas as well. Shortly after these revelations, Brazil and Germany withdrew their support for the UN partnership facility proposal. At least for the time being, the multilateral global governance system stands tall – and country governments are again going back to speaking about global partnership rather than multiple (multistakeholder) partnerships for global development!

The Internet and the sexual rights movement: New marginalisations?

Nadine Moawad, Lebanon-based activist, Association for Progressive Communications



Nadine Moawad began her presentation by observing that, in the discussion around inclusion and participation in the network society, the politics of sexuality tends to get sidelined. This is not surprising, as in most development debates, this issue is seen as a less important one, when

compared to others that are considered to be “*core*” rights debates. Nadine said that it was this mainstream thinking that she intended to challenge, through her presentation, by demonstrating how online sexual rights activism opens up some critical questions and

concerns that strike at the heart of the inclusion debate.

Nadine highlighted that the Internet has always been a key space for women and people of marginalised sexual identities, to assert their sexual desires, share their fantasies, freely express themselves; and most importantly, further their rights struggles. In fact, in a recent survey of sexual rights activists across the world that she has carried out, as part of her work on the [ErOTICS](#) project of the Association for Progressive Communications, over 99% of the participants responded that the Internet was critical to their activism. However, over 51% had received hate mail, and violent threats, over the Internet. Clearly, the Internet has not materialised to be the 'free speech utopia' that queer activists had dreamed of, in its early days.

The main reason for this, is that the status-quoists

Discussion

The discussions in Round 5 grappled with the several tensions between content regulation and freedom of expression in online spaces, as far as the issue of sexuality is concerned.

Alex Gakuru said that as someone with experience in media regulation, he felt that there was a tension between ensuring online freedoms, especially in the area of sexual expression, and that of protecting child rights in online spaces. All attempts at regulation cannot be brushed aside through a blanket critique of censorship. At this juncture, Tim Davies reflected that maybe we need to invest more in building young people's resilience to cope with the sexually explicit content they encounter in online spaces, through honing effective educational strategies, rather than use technology-based solutions such as Internet filtering.

Both Nishant Shah and Desiree Lewis pointed to the deep structures of heteronormativity in the debates on content regulation and sexual rights.

(right-wing politicians, governments and religious authorities) have always responded to any movement for free sexual expression, with "moral panic". This "moral panic" not only leads to the hounding of those activists who attempt to assert their right to free sexual expression in online spaces, but also the dumbing down of complex debates on pornography and children's access to content about sexual identities, to the discourse of "harmful online content". Expressing concern about the reductionism *vis-a-vis* sexual identity, Nadine described how content regulation today leaches off the promise of the Internet as a space where human beings can come together and explore new identities and new intimacies. Nadine concluded with a provocation - "*When you sign up, Facebook offers you 52 different options to select your gender identity from. Is gender politics to be reduced merely to a privately -owned and -structured neo-liberal identity politics?*"

Specifically, Nishant argued that the very same institutional practices aimed at regulating children's consumption of content, also enabled the "pathologisation" of marginalised sexualities, leading to their further stigmatisation. Desiree Lewis highlighted how even civil society practices could contribute to the reinforcement of heteronormativity - because of the widespread practice of side-lining the struggles of sexual minorities as "specialised" struggles, which are somehow removed from "mainstream" rights struggles.

Responding to the issues raised, Nadine argued that the construction of the issue of marginalised sexualities through the discourse of regulation does a great disservice to child rights. According to Nadine, regulatory frameworks arise out of a deep-rooted moral anxiety about sex, and protect only the harassers and paedophiles - as they reinforce taboos which embed children's relationship with their sexuality, in fear and shame.

DAY 2, ROUND 6: TECHNO-POWER, STATE AND CITIZEN – OLD ANXIETIES, NEW EXPRESSIONS

This session examined the changing nature of the state-citizen relationship, in the current context where a new, heterarchic, data-centred governance paradigm, is emerging.

Can network forms of governance ensure inclusive development? – A case study of the Municipal Reforms Programme of Karnataka, India

Anjali K. Mohan, Institute of Information Technology - Bengaluru, India



In her presentation, Anjali Mohan focused on critically evaluating the emergent “*networked forms of governance*” or “*heterarchies*” – collaborative forms of governance that bring together state, private sector and civil society actors, as equal partners. These have attempted to overcome the failure of the state, and that of traditional public-private partnerships, by evolving a coordinated response to developmental challenges.

Anjali commenced her presentation by tracing the genealogy of these emergent heterarchic governance models. She explained that the social re-organisation facilitated by the rise of digital technologies has led to a new set of supra-national and sub-national actors occupying the spaces that have been traditionally the domain of the welfare-state. In this push for a new model of governance, the state relinquishes its traditional “*command and control*” role, and moves instead into a “*facilitative*” role, bringing together multiple actors (from public, private and civil society sectors), and creating an enabling climate for knowledge exchange and coordination, among them. Often, ICTs play a central role in the implementation of the new administrative arrangements that emerge alongside these new

modes of governance. Anjali then went on to interrogate the question of whether these new heterarchies were truly capable of overcoming the failures of traditional developmental models, by bringing in insights from her case study of the ambitious Municipal Reforms Programme (MRP) of the state government of Karnataka – which promoted an ICT-based restructuring of administrative processes of over 213 urban local bodies in the state, with the aim of strengthening urban local governance. Though the aim of the MRP was to strengthen urban local governance, in practice, the ICT-enabled restructuring of urban local governance was carried out in a manner that reinforced the concentration of power at the state government level, strengthening existing hierarchical governance arrangements. A heterarchic arrangement where urban local governments became equal partners did not materialise on the ground.

Anjali observed that the emerging forms of heterarchic governance (including new multistakeholder partnerships) may suffer from the same defects that plagued earlier forms, and that an investigation into the conditions under which heterarchies fail, is an important research agenda for the future.

Does open data automatically enable accountable governance?

Tim Davies, World Wide Web Foundation



In his presentation, Tim Davies focused on a technical analysis of the material structures – the networks of data – that are proliferating in the digital age. According to Tim, while the standard narrative of open data suggests that it is a simple

conversion of data sets currently housed within the state, to online, machine-readable formats with license terms that permit anyone to use them, this turns out to be far more complex in practice. In fact, data sets get constructed during the process through which they

are opened up – as for example, what gets extracted, what will be the categorisations under which the extracted data will be aggregated, and so on.

Tim highlighted that these decisions that get made, are not mere technical issues, but core architectural decisions that create new regulatory frameworks. In fact, in the current context, the power to use open data is actually vested with those who are able to shape the construction of such data. In fact, the categories that guide the construction of the data-sets determine which narratives get included, and which excluded, in these new data structures – also determining whose voices are amplified, and whose stories visibilised.



Information, infrastructure and inclusion: Research notes on a new materiality of electronic governance in India

Sumandro Chattapadhyay, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, India

Sumandro Chattapadhyay focused on unpacking the new imagination of governance that the rise of the big data discourse has facilitated, through a case study of the Unique Identification Number (UID) project of the Government of India. The UID project strives to build an electronic governance apparatus that will make all residents of the country uniquely addressable, by systematically generating a database where biometric information of individual residents of the country is bundled with a randomly, electronically generated unique identification number. This database is intended to serve as a common platform that facilitates the inter-linking of the numerous data-sets about citizens, that are currently held across multiple governmental agencies.

Sumandro highlighted that the UID database does not accumulate data – it only creates a mechanism through which all the data traces that are associated with a specific individual (whose biometric information bundle has been tied to a unique number) can be shared across multiple agencies.

According to Sumandro, the vision behind the UID is most clearly elaborated in a 2007 Report of the Planning Commission, titled “*Entitlement reform for empowering the poor through an*

Therefore, we need to invest in making these data structures visible – a process that other scholars have termed as “*infrastructural inversion*”.

Standards development is an important step in this process of visibilising data structures, as standards “*both enable certain uses of data, and provide a constraint on what can be expressed, what can be known from data, who can be known, and who can know*” At present, open data standards development continues to remain a relatively closed process, “*that tends to restrict rather than enhance our ability to see the state*”. This must change, if ‘*open data*’ has to translate into ‘*open and inclusive data*’.

integrated smart card”. The authors of this report imagine welfare delivery as a multi-storey building where each departmental scheme is a different floor. The UID card is the key to the building – but each floor has its own key, managed by the scheme administrator. Thus, the UID card can never be used as proof of eligibility, but can be used to confirm only if a particular card-holder is the individual that s/he claims s/he is.

What is important to remember here is that the UID card will not just remain an authentication tool at the point of delivery of services. It will eventually become a universalising infrastructure for network governance that facilitates all kinds of information sharing between public and private agencies. Thus, the UID cuts across all existing regulatory frameworks for the protection of data, through this new material infrastructure that it is creating.

According to Sumandro, “*The UID conceptualises inclusion through intertwined terminologies of ‘access’ and ‘delivery’, which implies an ideological collapsing of the agencies that provide welfare-services and uphold human rights, and the diverging modalities of relationships between those who access services and those who deliver them*”. He also observed that this move resulted in a conceptual blurring of governmental, semi-

governmental and private providers of welfare and infrastructural services, deeply undermining the

available and effective modes of demanding of services and rights by citizens.

Discussion

The discussion focused on the challenges of promoting the inclusion agenda in the current, data-centred, governance paradigm. Alison Gillwald raised concerns about how in the absence of mature institutional frameworks, the rhetoric of openness is tolerated at the technical level, but not at the political level, where many bottlenecks come up. Sometimes, especially in open data efforts, when the idea leaders leave the government department or agency, the whole effort collapses.

Alison emphasised that we need to reflect more on the question of how can we successfully institutionalise open data efforts. Biswajit Mohapatra highlighted the numerous ways in which governments are collaborating with private actors and corporate agencies, to develop data-oriented governance regimes, and how this has led to the furtherance of the exclusionary politics of classification of citizen-subjects and the emergence of the Orwellian state. He also raised the question of whether the UID project was strengthening neo-liberalism.

Anita Gurumurthy reflected that the data-centred governance paradigm has facilitated the recasting of structural exploitation of the poor by local elite as a technical problem that renders social movements powerless in demanding local level accountability. Machines can now be blamed with impunity. For example, the legitimate

entitlements of poor people can be dismissed through false claims that the biometric device is not working or that there is no electricity and hence the payment cannot be made. Local bureaucracy can thus find new ways to escape accountability. In India, the experience certainly has been that data-based systems for monitoring and tracking schemes, have created new forms of corruption.

Responding to the discussion, Tim Davies agreed that open data initiatives have largely been predicated upon volunteerism, and institutionalisation has therefore been a challenge. However, he shared his conviction that the few governments who were leading the way by publishing open data, and the standards they have used would be able to convince many more governments, to follow.

Responding to the question on whether the UID project was furthering the neo-liberal agenda, Sumandro Chattapadhyay observed that the lens of “neo-liberalism” was a rather limiting one – as it could explain everything, and at the same time, nothing. He then argued that today, the state can no longer be understood by adopting the lens of bureaucratic reform alone, and that it was important to understand the materiality of its architecture, especially as it is being transformed through technological restructuring.

DAY 2, ROUND 7: OPEN AND INCLUSIVE – WORKING THE NETWORK

This session examined current concerns about the openness and inclusiveness of the underlying architectures of the network society (both material and discursive), and lessons from the p2p and community informatics movements that have been engaging with these concerns, for a long time.

What can the p2p discourse offer the debate on 'inclusion in the network society'?

Michel Bauwens, Foundation for Peer to Peer Alternatives, Belgium

Michel Bauwens commenced his presentation with a declaration that he was speaking as an observer of

the emerging field of peer production – a term that is used to



refer to a specific form of value creation and distribution, where communities of contributors create shared pools of text, code or design that feed into the production of a knowledge commons (which can be connected to free software, open hardware, distributed manufacturing, open design etc.).

Michel then pointed out that discussions on peer production can no longer be ignored in the current age, as the contributory economy is growing at an astronomical rate. In fact, in the United States, *'Fair Use in the Economy'* reports have estimated the share of the contributory economy to be about one-sixth of the Gross Domestic Product. He then went on to highlight three main issues that emerge, when we reflect upon the question of the promise that peer production models offer, for the inclusion agenda.

There is a contradiction between the theory and practice of peer production frameworks. In theory, peer production models are supposed to allow for open and free contributions from all interested individuals, without any structural impediments. However, in practice, peer production models are not automatically inclusive; they operate within an existing social structure, biases and shortcomings of which are reflected within these models as well. For example, most software developers tend to be men. And therefore, free software communities tend to evolve a male culture that puts women off, inadvertently dissuading them from contributing to such communities. Merely following a peer production model is not a solution to addressing such structural barriers to participation.

While it is true that peer production communities are committed to the production of a knowledge commons (in the form of text, code or design), it is possible that they remain selfish and oblivious of social and environmental externalities. In other words, they may have a narrow and limiting vision that ignores the larger structural factors that reproduce exclusion in society.

If we are looking for a peer production model that can promote the inclusion agenda, investing in access to digital technologies and building people's generic ability to use them is not enough! We need to invest in the material and immaterial conditions that can enhance people's participation in such knowledge pools. Examples from around the world, include: investing in Open Hardware for science labs that can reduce about 7/8th of the cost of setting up such labs; or creating Open Agricultural Design communities that enable citizen-scientists and farmers to develop their own appropriate farming technology.

To conclude, Michel raised a generic issue that plagues all peer production experiments – how can we ensure that such experiments truly create income for their contributors instead of becoming yet another route through which commons are appropriated by capital? Options such as commons-based reciprocity licensing which aims at creating an ethical market around the knowledge commons, where no individual is allowed to create a “*for-profit*” capture, without contributing to the network and other contributors in it, therefore, need further exploration.



Architectures of exclusion? – Some reflections on the Internet *Alex Gakuru, Creative Commons, Kenya*

Alex Gakuru examined the structures of exclusion that hinder inclusion in the network age, through an examination of the existing Internet architecture and its governance arrangements.

He began his presentation by deconstructing the 'Open Internet' rhetoric, by highlighting that the Internet's core and secondary layers, and

connections are all organised in a manner that furthers the private interest of the actors controlling them. Alex referred to Internet protocols such as IPv6 that structure its very being and network applications that operate on the Internet layer – such as online platforms, networking software etc, as the core and the secondary layers, respectively.

Alex argued that in the long run, existing

arrangements regulating the Internet architecture will serve only the interests of big business. Alex also explained that ISPs who today control our connections to the Internet pose a big challenge to the open and inclusive nature of the network architecture, with their efforts to undermine net neutrality.

Alex then went on to offer some reflections about online content – as most debates today, tend to focus on the question of how to build content repositories that reflect the spirit of the commons. He said that solutions such as creative commons licensing which have been proposed by the peer production movement, can only be partial at best, as such licenses cover only the 'content' produced, and do not protect the platform or production model under which it is created, from being taken over by capital. He also observed that the space for creating a digital knowledge commons – such as Open Educational Resources – is constantly being

threatened by draconian copyright law. In fact, when the advocates of such legislation are failing to push it through at the international level (such as in the case of [SOPA](#) and [PIPA](#)), they try to re-introduce them at the bi-lateral and local level.

In conclusion, Alex critiqued the existing structures by which the Internet architecture is governed, for its non-inclusiveness and lack of representation – “*At the Net Mundial initiative organised by ICANN and World Economic Forum, in London, earlier this year, there were 3000 participants. And at the most recent Internet Governance Forum, held in Nairobi, over 2000. Even if you assume that there was no overlap between the participants at both the events, that's a grand sum of 5000. Do we want the fate of the 3 billion who are connected, and the unconnected majority, to be decided by such a small group? Where is the representativeness?*”

What can the community informatics movement offer, to the 'inclusion in the network society' debate?

Michael Gurstein, Centre for Community Informatics Research, Development and Training, Canada



In his presentation, Michael Gurstein focused on the lessons for inclusion that the experience of the community informatics movement offers, drawing upon his own long-standing engagement in this domain – as a “*reflective activist and a practitioner-scholar*”. The history of community informatics can be traced to the community networking efforts of about 15 years ago, when academic and university communities in North America and Western Europe attempted to take Internet access to rural communities in their immediate geographies – in a context where Internet access infrastructure was extremely costly. Most of these initiatives had an extremely utopian vision of Internet-enabled social change – they assumed a linear connection between technology access and social liberation, and were steeped in the 'digital divide' rhetoric.

In the late nineties, community informatics began to shift from this largely middle class academic orientation to a preoccupation with the development of community information systems owned and managed by grassroots communities, in the less developed countries. At this stage, along

came the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), attempting to reduce this debate into a narrow “*NGOism*”. This resulted in community informatics practitioners standing in opposition to the dominant, top-down WSIS discourse on the information society, which had been constructed with only placeholder representation from grassroots NGOs. In the aftermath of the WSIS, a number of major donors started taking over the agenda of community-based technology development – and public access for developing countries through promoting telecentres, became the flavour of the day. Sadly, most donor agencies did not invest in thinking through their telecentres strategy. As a result, they ended up propagating top-down models that did not have in-built accountability mechanisms. Most of these telecentres closed down, and there were also some large-scale, embarrassing failures.

However, there continue to be some appropriate computing and community networking models (especially efforts with indigenous communities in North and South America) that have built successful alternatives – which have used

community needs and local priorities, as their starting point. From the mainstream failures, and from the success of those few initiatives that have gone against the tide, what emerges is the need to completely abandon naive theories of technology-driven social change which assume that “*technology can be used locally without mediation*” and that “*technology can be a secular driver*”. The diffusion of technology (when non-mediated) can only guarantee the linking of communities to larger society, it does not “*network them*”. Building community networks requires the intermediation of technology appropriation, by grassroots organisations that consciously put in efforts to widen the number of connections that

Discussion

The discussion at the end of Round 7 focused on two aspects: the creation of a truly open and inclusive digital knowledge commons, and the retreat of telecentres from the mainstream ICTD discourse.

Mark Graham questioned Michel Bauwens on the effectiveness of licensing as a strategy for protecting the digital knowledge commons from being captured by powerful intermediaries. Licensing he observed, cannot change the underlying social structures that enable a powerful few, to profit from the free labour of the many. Michel Bauwens responded that the reason why current licensing practices are unable to control the capture of the commons by powerful interests is that “*the more communist the license becomes, the more capitalist the practice becomes*”. Licensing terms for the commons should be developed in a way where generative, rather than extractive, economic practices are encouraged. One possible way to do this is to levy a fee on for-profit users who take away resources from the knowledge commons, as their act does not add anything to the common pool! This is the underlying principle of reciprocity that should guide all licensing policies, he opined.

Wallace Chigona reflected on whether telecentres had any future, when the world is becoming increasingly ‘mobile’. Dorothea Kleine interjected

these communities have, to core nodes in mainstream societal networks. Such efforts at intermediation also have to recognise that “*digital inclusion cannot be mandated from above... (and has to) be achieved through a process of self empowerment from below.*”

In conclusion, Michael observed that the only hope for all of us to escape the net of the emerging digitalised totalitarian state was to invest in more and more efforts that utilised technologies for “*networking communities, and not individuals*” – efforts that focused on building communities based on trust, shared norms and values.

by adding that in development, there is a trend of practices going in and out of fashion. Today, it seems that telecentres have gone out of fashion. However, before we jettison them completely, we must pause and look at examples like that of Chile, which indicates immense scope for building telecentres as spaces that offer more than just connectivity, spaces that can further community knowledge processes, and collective action spaces for women. They can indeed be transformed into spaces that act as cultural bridge-builders, and enable communities to build their capacities to maneuver larger structures.

Michael Gurstein added that it was important to avoid conflation between telecentre models that are just about service delivery and those that are intended to be spaces where communities can appropriate technology for local-level action, when discussing the future of telecentres. Both models of course have their uses. But while the first type of telecentre is in many cases, a government-run cyber-cafe for service-delivery to rural populations who otherwise would not be able to access the benefits of e-services, the latter type of telecentre has a very different vision – that of opening up technologically-enabled pathways to empowerment for communities.

Connectivity solutions cannot offer an alternative to these kinds of telecentres.

DAY 2, ROUND 8: GOVERNING GLOBALITY – CAN DEMOCRACY RISE UP TO THE OCCASION?

The final session of the Round Table reflected upon the question of how can we infuse democracy into an increasingly networked, globalised world; even as democracy itself is being completely transformed – in form and substance – through the globality ushered in by the forces of economic development, and the imbrication of digital technologies in our everyday lives. This session also examined the specific challenges for ICT policymakers, in the current context.

Inclusion in the network society: A policy perspective

Alison Gillwald, Research ICT Africa, South Africa



In her presentation, Alison addressed the challenge of framing appropriate policy frameworks for ensuring inclusion in the network society context. At present, most of these discussions tend to remain confined to polarised “*market vs. state*” debates, which are extremely unhelpful – as ideological prescriptions are not of much help in finding empirical, evidence-based solutions to the “*here-and-now*” problems that policy-makers have to grapple with. Alison used the “*access to ICTs*” debates, to demonstrate this.

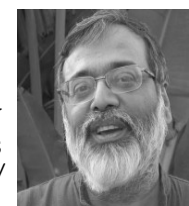
As far as the question of access to ICTs is concerned, it is certain that in the African context, it is market liberalisation that has helped an increasing number of people get access to ICTs. But this is not to say that markets have all the solutions, or that markets cannot fail. What we need to realise is that markets can ensure access, but cannot help in automatically translating this access into equitable use and reduction of inequality. This needs a number of interventions from the state – such as state regulation of pricing mechanisms to ensure fair and affordable prices, the state acting as proxy for competition in infrastructure industries where competition is limited, and state interventions geared towards building the capabilities of their citizens, to

effectively use ICTs. What this means is that states in the developing world, whose democratic institutions have been weakened by the Washington Consensus, have to build their capacities to direct markets to function effectively.

In conclusion, Alison made a number of specific suggestions on improving the current frameworks that govern the global communications system. Firstly, those states (such as African states) whose voices are marginalised in the global governance forums where decisions about the global communications system get made, need to be assisted in honing their voice in these forums. Secondly, country governments need to renew their commitments to human rights frameworks in the network society context – only then can we move beyond connectivity and access, and truly address the question of inclusion. Thirdly, governments of developing countries need to find context-specific policy pathways that work for them, instead of blindly emulating developed countries. Finally, we have to recognise that the market is an instrument to be effectively leveraged to achieve public interest ends – and devise appropriate policy measures.

Internet and bourgeois democracy in the age of globality

Prabir Purkayastha, Knowledge Commons, India



Prabir Purkayastha began his presentation by clarifying that any discussion about democracy in the current context can only refer to a “*bourgeois democracy*”, which overlaps with mass politics. As

history teaches us, there is a very close relationship between mass communication and mass politics/democracy. Mass communication

can trigger transformative change and strengthen democracies; or it can build its antithesis (as testified to by the role of films in the consolidation of Nazism, and that of radio, in strengthening Italian fascism, during the 1930's).

Prabir then went on to reflect upon the relationship between democracy and the Internet. The Internet has certainly opened up a number of opportunities for political expression and organising. However, in the current context, where the nation-state has been rendered powerless by the workings of global capital, there is no global framework for Internet governance. This has created a situation where the control of the Internet rests in the hands of about 5 companies – that design and control the global communication protocol, and manage the networking and media platforms that operate on the net. To suit their business interests, they can tweak the algorithms that constitute the foundations of the Internet architecture, any which way. They can control user

behaviour, manipulating the content that users access. Certainly, this contributes only to the march of capital, and adds nothing to democracy.

In conclusion, Prabir offered 3 submissions. First, we do not have any alternative institutional arrangement that can guarantee redistribution, except the nation-state. Therefore, its weakening is a serious problem – not only in the area of creating an inclusive Internet architecture, but in terms of challenging the structures of exclusion, across all spheres of life. Second, to realise the vision of democracy in this 'globality' that we inhabit, the only institutional mechanism that is available to us is the United Nations machinery. Therefore, despite the many problems with UN multilateral governance arrangements, we have to work with them. Finally, people's struggles must re-invent themselves – and communities across the world must unite, as the fight against the capture and control of the network society's arteries by global capital continues.



Logic Trees for inclusive Internet governance debates: Complexity management in public policy and democracy

Norbert Bollow, Just Net Coalition, Switzerland

Norbert Bollow brought to the table his concerns about the lack of democracy in the prevailing (multistakeholder) Internet governance architecture. He said that the current model of formulating Internet policy is one that “puts the fox in charge of the hen house”. In the Internet governance arena, it is not just the most socially and economically marginalised groups who are excluded – it is also the liberal middle class who have traditionally taken up the role of rights advocates in democratic nation-states. At present, the mainstream Internet governance discourse rests on the assumption that it is something which the techies have to be in charge of. It completely sidesteps the fact that there are many non-technical public interest issues at the heart of

Internet governance, which cannot be left to the technical community, who often refuse to take a stand on matters that may hurt their professional interest.

Norbert proposed the “logic tree” method coming from the “Theory of Constraints”, as a highly promising means of managing complexities and ensuring that the objectives of inclusion are met. According to him, mapping concerns by such logic trees allows us to identify power structures (which turn up as root causes for conflicts) and also furthers the discovery and discussion of innovative ideas. Therefore, it is important to research the possibilities that can emerge from the application of such methods, to further the “inclusion and democracy” agenda in Internet governance debates.



The ideology of Multi-stakeholderism: A new threat to democracy in the age of globality?

Parminder Jeet Singh, IT for Change, India

Parminder Singh, in his presentation, reflected upon how the metaphor of

“network as governance” has sidelined that of “network as democracy”, in the mainstream

discourse on the Internet and on governance, in general.

The idea of “*network as governance*” he argued, encapsulates the mainstream argument in the space of Internet governance, which holds that the Internet is a new space that demands a new model of governance. Many academics and civil society actors are also being swayed by this argument, and some are even extending the argument to the network society context as a whole – advocating that multistakeholder governance needs to replace traditional nation-state models, in all spheres. Parminder highlighted that this was unhelpful naiveté on the part of academia and civil society. What they don’t realise is that the advocates for the multi-stakeholder governance model make a circular argument, whose only intention is to promote an ideology that can extend the control of the dominant group over the most valued resource of today – the Internet.

He explained what he meant by this “*circularity*”, using the contradictory references to the multistakeholder model in the ‘Global Redesign Initiative Report’ of the World Economic Forum, as an exemplar. In its first few pages, this report

claims that the Internet, because of its uniqueness, should be governed by multistakeholder organisations, on all issues. Needless to say, this gives Internet corporations, a veto on all issues of governance. On the other hand, in its later sections, the report claims that the governance of the Internet has demonstrated a pathway to the governance of all forms of the social system (which contradicts the previously stated viewpoint that the governance of the Internet is a special case). Therefore, what this report inadvertently reveals is the push by the power-elite to slowly use the Internet governance debate as a vantage point from which the multistakeholder discourse can be promoted as the default governance model for the current age.

In conclusion, Parminder submitted that to protect democracy, civil society organisations should stop lending their legitimacy to this multistakeholder governance model to ensure that existing regulatory mechanisms at the national and global level, which guarantee human rights, work for all. The hope today lies with the social movements currently fighting for re-building normative frameworks that draw upon the democratic tradition.

Research and the Democratic Ethos: A critical perspective

Nikhil Dey, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, India

As a veteran activist of the Right to Information Movement in India, Nikhil Dey sought to ground the larger discussion on framing a research agenda for examining inclusion and democracy in the current social context in a normative framework.

Underscoring how dominant power structures influence research initiatives, Nikhil emphasised the importance of demystifying the debate on technology structures, in order to ensure participatory processes to policy making and implementation. Critiquing the overwhelming emphasis that most donor-driven research initiatives tend to place on tangible and quantifiable outcomes of social change initiatives,

he noted that this leads to the alienation of those whose inclusion is intended by the research.

Therefore, as the architecture of the Internet consolidates more and more control and power, it has become an absolute necessity for the poor to understand and engage with this power, in order to challenge and subvert it. And for the same reason, it is pertinent that the formulation of any research agenda that seeks to challenge this existing social order in the digital age, accommodates the voice of the marginalised, in the framing of the politics of change.

Discussion

The discussions at the end of Round 8 focused on examining the crisis of the global governance paradigm. Anjali Mohan spoke about how the

capture of governance architectures by the power elite was not a new problem ushered in by the digital age, also, it was not something peculiar to



the Internet. The ideology of multistakeholderism predates the Internet, and has been used as an instrument for consolidating power relations, even in the past. She wondered what we could learn from historical experiences, in countering the challenges to democracy, in the current context.

Roberto Bissio observed that in the current context, multistakeholderism has received the support of civil society organisations who mistakenly believe that the multistakeholder model is a logical extension of the vision of representative democracy, and that it can extend democracy beyond the traditional boundaries of nation-states. What these civil society organisations fail to recognise is that the multistakeholder model gives corporations an illegitimate hand in public policy processes.

Another key issue that came up in the discussions pertained to Norbert Bollow's observation about the domination of the technical community in the forums where Internet governance is debated. Michael Gurstein and Anita Gurumurthy commented that in these forums, it is important to recognise the power that automatically accrues

to "*techies*", because of the position of privilege they occupy in these spaces as "*experts*". Tim Davies responded that to remedy the existing situation, it was important to build multi-disciplinary collaborations, between individuals who occupy differing, and sometimes multiple positionalities.

The panelists made a few closing remarks, speaking to the question of how we can move towards a democratic governance model in the age of globality. Parminder Singh said that it was important to bracket out certain key questions while addressing the question of building inclusive governance architectures. Right now, the problem is that we want to analyse every single strand of the shifting landscape, simultaneously. Alison Gillwald remarked that in addition to the critique of the role of corporations in the current governance architecture of the global communications system, we have to also critically examine the problems that plague nation-states and not make erroneous, ahistorical assumptions about them being liberal states. Only then can we effectively discuss their role in regulating markets, and in guaranteeing rights to citizens.

BRAINSTORMING SESSION ON FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

On Day 3, after the last Round of panel presentations and discussion was completed, there was a Brainstorming Session in small groups where the participants focused on developing the contours of a future research agenda.

This discussion happened in 4 sub-groups/clusters at the end of which each group came up with a set of questions that can serve as pegs for shaping future research projects.

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?

CONCLUSION: KEY THREADS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS AT THE ROUND TABLE

The three days of the Round Table thus 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 ([Ordonez 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 (Chattopadhyay 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 (Ordonez 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 7/8th 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

AGENDA OF THE ROUND TABLE ON 'INCLUSION IN THE NETWORK SOCIETY - MAPPING DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES, FORGING RESEARCH AGENDAS' (29TH SEPTEMBER TO 1ST OCTOBER 2014), WITH LINKS TO PRESENTATIONS

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

	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Cape, South Africa</u></p> <p><i>Chair</i> Sonia Randhawa, Centre for Independent Journalism, Malaysia</p>
6.10 PM to 6.40 PM	Discussion
7.30 PM	Dinner
30th September	Day 2
9.15 AM to 10.10 AM	<p>Round 4: Development pathways in network circuits – disruption or assimilation?</p> <p><i>Speakers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kathleen Diga, School of Built Environment & Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa • Christopher Foster and Mark Graham, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, UK • Dorothea Kleine, ICT4D Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK • Anita Gurumurthy, IT for Change, India <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>Round 5: Hypervisible or invisible? - marginal discourses in network logic</p> <p><i>Speakers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desiree Lewis, Women's and Gender Studies Department, University of the Western Cape, South Africa • Nadine Moawad, Lebanon-based activist, Association for Progressive Communications • Roberto Bissio, Third World Institute, Uruguay <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>Round 6: Techno-power, state and citizen – old anxieties, new expressions</p> <p><i>Speakers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sumandro Chattapadhyay, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, India • Tim Davies, World Wide Web Foundation • Anjali K. Mohan, International Institute of Information Technology - Bengaluru, India

	Chair 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	Round 7: Open <i>and</i> inclusive – working the network Speakers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Gurstein, Centre for Community Informatics Research, Development and Training, Canada • Alex Gakuru, Creative Commons , Kenya • Michel Bauwens, Foundation for Peer to Peer Alternatives, Belgium Chair Christopher Foster, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, UK
4.40 PM to 5.20 PM	Discussion
1st October	Day 3
9.15 AM to 10.30 AM	Round 8: Governing globality - can democracy rise up to the occasion? Speakers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alison Gillwald, Research ICT Africa, South Africa • Prabir Purkayastha, Knowledge Commons, India • Norbert Bollow, Just Net Coalition, Switzerland • Parminder Jeet Singh, IT for Change, India • Nikhil Dey, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghatan, India Chair Michael Gurstein, Centre for Community Informatics Research, Development and Training, Canada
10.30 AM to 11.30 AM	Discussion
11.30 AM to 11.50 AM	Tea
11.50 AM to 12.45 PM	Round 9: 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	Closing session – Where to, from here? Phet Sayo, IDRC, Canada; Anita Gurumurthy, IT for Change, India

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

December 2014.

Report prepared by



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More information is available at: <http://itforchange.net/inclusionroundtable2014/profile/itforchange>