

Internet Governance Forum 2017
Geneva, Switzerland

Session report compiled by Sachini Perera and Jac sm Kee

Gender Inclusion and the Future of the Internet

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1400 – 1600
Main Hall - Room XVII - E *United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG)*

Moderated by:

Bishakha Datta (Gender Dynamic Coalition, Civil Society, India)
Emilar Gandhi (Facebook, Private Sector, SADC)

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INTRODUCTION

The session was opened by Bishakha Datta who highlighted what a significant moment the inaugural main session on gender was and detailed the collective effort that went into achieving this including milestones on the way such as the very first main session on human rights as well as the recognition of human rights online at the Human Rights Commission (HRC).

She introduced the topics that each segment will cover and the format the sessions would follow.

SEGMENT 1: Key issues and challenges

SEGMENT 2: Looking at frameworks of engaging with gender and internet policy

SEGMENT 3: innovation, new and emerging technologies

SEGMENT 4: Gender inclusion and internet governance

Emilar Gandhi introduced the speakers for segment one and invited David Kaye to frame the discussion that will follow.

SEGMENT 1: Key issues and challenges

David Kaye, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

David Kaye opened his remarks by acknowledging the significance of the main session on gender. The first issue he discussed was gender-based violence (GBV) and how it is often seen as competing with concerns related to Freedom of Expression (FoE). He referred to ongoing efforts spearheaded by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) to find commonality between the two and to establish that FoE and GBV can indeed go hand in hand. In other words, “expression and protection are not independent of each other”.

He explained that we are asking companies and governments to take on the real serious threat that is online GBV and at the same time not do so in a disproportionate way that impacts the rights that all people enjoy online. He further elaborated on this by noting that addressing online GBV by imposing FoE restrictions/limitations must be lawful, necessary and proportionate. For an example, laws related to non-consensual sharing of intimate images must not be drawn so broadly that they suppress discourse about sexual health. Kaye also included the important caveat that addressing online GBV should not be used as an excuse to reduce people’s right to FoE, especially that of women and LGBTIQ people. The right to justice should not be at the expense of right to sexual expression.

In terms of the responsibilities and accountability of companies when it comes to addressing online GBV and FoE hand in hand, Kaye raised the point that companies should not make rules

in the absence of relevant stakeholders and need to engage with civil society and that civil society on the other hand must advocate for maximum transparency by companies on whether they are upholding their responsibilities. He went on to say that companies should make efforts to obtain deep and regular input from those who are most affected by the enforcement of terms of service (ToS). Transparency around rules of companies and the application of those rules including in content regulation (or takedowns) sets the stage for meaningful conversations about online GBV.

He wrapped up his remarks saying “And thankfully, because of the people associated with APC and the organization itself, there is a framework for thinking about rights and expression that is sensitive, both to the violence and abuses out there but also to the rights that people have to access information and ideas of all kinds”.

Chenai Chair, Researcher with the Research ICT Africa in South Africa

Chenai Chair began her remarks by discussing issues around ICT policy. She mentioned how there is no one-size-fit-all policy response to address issues around internet access and that while efforts have been made to look at the difference between how policy responses would affect men and women, there is less work done on differences between women and especially beyond heteronormative views. In her words, “Not all women are the same and there is a need to understand these differences.” She added that an intersectional approach to ICT policy is also about different sectors and stakeholder groups using an intersectional lens in addressing issues such as meaningful access to the internet and online GBV.

Chair referred to discussions on the same issue from that morning’s Best Practice Forum on Gender and also made the point that while at a global level we’ve come far enough to have a main session on gender, at national level there was a high possibility of the issue still being disregarded.

Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Chief of ITU’s Strategic Planning and Membership Department

Doreen Bogdan-Martin opened her comments saying that 2017 has been an important year for addressing the gender digital divide including the reference to gender in by the G20 and this main session on gender at the IGF. She mentioned that one of the main issues to grapple with right now is the lack of gender-disaggregated data around the digital divide. We can’t address what is invisible. “12% less women than men are using the internet. We know that the gap globally is growing. It’s growing most in Africa where more men are getting connected and fewer women. The gap is about 25% fewer women online than men. And we know that when we look at least developed countries, the gap is even bigger where there’s only 1 in 7 women that are using the internet.”

Joyce Dogniez, Senior Director of Global Engagement at ISOC

Joyce Dogniez took the discussion on access further in her remarks. She said that we need to go beyond affordability and look at broader social, economic and cultural aspects in order to address the issue of access to the internet. "From a very young age, we have to fight the idea that technology is just for men and that only one part of the population needs access". She added that "we need to look at what happens after people get online."

She reinforced her comments with some statistics around access to the internet. "There are 200 million fewer women online than men. In developing countries women are 25% less likely to be able to access the internet. We fight the fact that the internet and access is not just for men".

SEGMENT 1: Comments and Questions from the Audience

"Thank you very much Joyce for remind us again about the need to actually go much deeper when we talk about gender and internet governance, right to the roots of patriarchy." – Bishakha Datta

Queer and LGBTIQ bodies make a difference on the issue of access. Also at the point of data collection in exchange for access it must be noted that technology is not neutral and comes from a specific place of power. What are we doing with our privilege? - valentina hvale pellizzer

Invitation for women to join the Internet Society's Special Interest Group for Women (SIG Women). Looking forward to more members and collaborations. - Angie Contreras

SEGMENT 1: Responses from Panelists

Context of where a person comes from affects the impact that technology will have. Privilege and technology is about backing down from our own understanding of what it means for people to have access. - Chair

The biggest misconception of young people being on social media is that they are wasting time, but they are using these platforms to push their businesses. – Chair

We can't underestimate how crucial role models are when it comes to bringing more women online. Who do you want to #ShineTheLight on? - Dogniez

SEGMENT 2: Looking at frameworks of engaging with gender and internet policy

Veronica Birga, Chief Women's Human Rights and Gender Section OHCHR

Veronica Birga opened the segment on frameworks of engaging with gender and internet policy by remarking that while states may not have enough capacity to immediately provide universal access to the internet, the human rights framework places an obligation on states to address the gender digital divide. She said that we can learn from lessons on advancing human rights of women and gender inequality offline and apply them to online contexts. She further clarified how gender and internet policy can be firmly placed within the human rights framework by highlighting that ICTs are now critical for the realization of a broad range of human rights. The gender digital divide exacerbates discrimination and therefore it is a human rights issue. Birga also warned that efforts to promote gender equality must look at women as subjects of rights and not as objects of protection.

Amos Toh, legal advisor to the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Amos Toh focused on the different kinds of intersections that need to be captured in internet governance and emphasized that these cannot be addressed in silos. For an example, in terms of methodology we cannot only think about law and policy but must also take into account social and behavioral science approaches.

He raised 6 points of intersectionality that must be considered in internet governance.

1. Sexual orientation and gender identity
2. Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) and Civil and Political Rights (CPR)
3. Online and offline violence against people of diverse sexualities and genders
4. State obligation and citizenship
5. Terms of service and
6. Transparency on platforms

SEGMENT 2: Comments and Questions from the Audience

CEDAW General Recommendation 35 on GBV and Access to Justice makes a reference to technology but online GBV is addressed in more detail in the new GR 36 on access to education. – Patricia Schulz, CEDAW Committee Member

SEGMENT 3: innovation, new and emerging technologies

María Paz Canales, Executive Director of Derechos Digitales

Maria Paz framed her remarks around why a feminist lens is so important when discussing innovation and new and emerging technologies. According to her, feminism by design is not just

a declarative effort but are very intentional spectacles that interrogate and develop technology. In terms of algorithmic gender bias, she highlighted that we require more transparency about human inputs into algorithmic design. Only then can we catalog and examine possible gender bias. To put it another way, technology is constructed through what we feed it including our values so what does it mean when we feed it with considerations that are dominantly from a male perspective? Especially given that data generated from such technology will then feed decision-making based on machine learning.

Paz concluded her remarks with two important points. One was that integrating gender diversity into innovation and new and emerging technologies is not something that can happen and is actually about a process. The other related point was that many women are tired of just focusing on resistance and want a positive approach that leads to more opportunities to build their own empowerment to access. Her main recommendation moving forward was that if we can hack gender into the conversation around technology, change can happen and that a multistakeholder approach is critical for this to happen.

Titi Akinsanmi, Head, Policy & Government Relations, Africa, Google

Titi Akinsanmi addressed the question about new challenges that emerging and data-driven technologies present for women's rights and gender equality in the digital age by stating that we don't have new challenges and rather, amplified challenges. She elaborated on this saying "When you indicate you have new challenges, it more or less begins to distract from the fact that we've been faced with so much that has not been addressed. We've been given a platform that has made it exponentially more painful to be a woman".

She referred to progress made in the internet governance space by reminding everyone how far we have come from the gender paragraph being almost dropped during the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to now having a gender main session during the IGF. She concluded her remarks saying that to create lasting change we need to be able to educate and include in the education that we give young girls irrespective of their present realities the ability to connect with and be a part of the creation process.

Desiree Miloshevic, Senior Public Policy and International Affairs Adviser at Afiliis

Desiree Miloshevic was the final speaker of the third segment and her comments addressed inclusive models that the private sector can develop and support on the area of innovation and empowerment. Similar to Paz, she also raised the issue that gender bias in design of technology and in the collection of data affects and exacerbates similar bias. Her main recommendation was that there is a need to work in multistakeholder and multidisciplinary ways including to put policies in place.

SEGMENT 3: Comments and Questions from the Audience

What shall we do when the language about women's empowerment is co-opted for capitalist gains?

SEGMENT 4: Gender inclusion and internet governance

Lise Fuhr, Director of the European Telecommunications Network Operators' Association

Lisa Fuhr opened segment 4 commenting on gender inclusion in the ICTs industry and how out of a 7 million workforce, only 30% are women which is simple mathematics on how the industry is losing out on what women can bring to the table. This has to also be extended to the lack of representation of women in leadership positions and in Fuhr's words "Women in places of power where decisions are being made can make a difference". She went on to say that we need diversity and women role models across the field of ICTs including in internet governance spaces. Such representation would demonstrate to young women and girls that there are opportunities in this field for them.

Avri Doria, IRTF Human Rights Protocol Consideration Research Group

Avri Doria spoke about the representation of women in engineering in particular. She said that a change has taken place in the engineering community since 2000 and even if the landscape may look the same when you look at it from a distance, there are definite changes taking place.

Chat Garcia Ramilo, Executive Director - Association for Progressive Communications

Chat Garcia focused on internet governance and discussed what needs to be done in order to take gender and internet governance to the next level. She said we have to intentionally bring women in all their diversity to internet governance spaces, whether national, regional or global and continue to support such efforts. She referred to the policy of the Asia Pacific Regional IGF where it is mandatory that 50% of the fellowships are awarded to women. She noted that these are small but important steps in supporting more women to be active in internet governance spaces. She spoke about APC's efforts at pushing for gender to be constantly and consistently discussed and analyzed in internet governance spaces and referred to the effort in integrating the Gender Report Card at IGFs since 2011.

Lissette Perez Perez, Official of the Directorate of International Relations and Foreign Trade of the Ministry of Communications of Cuba

Lissette Perez Perez spoke about some of the efforts made in Cuba to deal with issues around gender, the internet and related policies. Cuba was the first country in the world to sign CEDAW

and the second to ratify it. She said that Cuba firmly supports the agreements from the 2030 Agenda, especially SDG5. With over 40% of the Cuban parliament consisting of women, she felt confident Cuba would be able to ensure that women are both beneficiaries and key players of development.

Perez Perez mentioned that when it comes to ICTs, 6400 women have been able to graduate from information science institutes and that there is no gender divide when it comes to ICT education in Cuba. Cuba is focused on achieving the commitments made at WSIS and this would lead to an enabling environment for a dynamic information society.

Tara Dunham, Canada Global Advisory Council

Tara Denham shared that gender remains a priority for Canada and that violence against women online is a global issue despite a dominant narrative that it isn't. She elaborated that the approach and policy of the Canadian government is one that they call "gender plus" which is about "inclusion and diversity of people beyond". In her words, "gender plus and a human rights-based approach is up front in the policy and that creates an environment (in which) we can continue to take the steps necessary that we see to push this agenda further."

Denham went on to say that we must have honest multistakeholder conversations about the role of tech in human rights and gender equality. For an example, discuss if there is a role government plays in the application, rollout and development of Artificial Intelligence to ensure they are respecting and promoting human rights.

SEGMENT 3: Comments and Questions from the Audience

How can we make sure that the Gender Main Session is not about talking heads, but also about action? And also, we need to get female engineers into the room.

CLOSING REMARKS

Emilar Gandhi

Thank you to everyone who attended the Gender Main Session. Thank you to APC and other organizations who have been working in this area for several years as well as the organizers. This is not the end of the conversation and we hope to continue having this conversation with governments, civil society and companies.

Bishakha Datta

Thank you to all the panelists for making the time and giving us hope that this can happen. Two people have worked very hard behind the scenes on this. We sincerely thank both Jac sm Kee and Raquel Gatto. Thank you.

ANNEXURE 1

Key Messages

- There was strong recognition on the significance of the first main session on gender at the IGF, and its importance in addressing this as an integral and cross-cutting issue in Internet governance and policy discussions. It was also that gender should be understood through the lens of intersectionality, which integrates diversity, including on rural/urban locations, economic power, and sexual orientation and gender identities.
- There was general support for the view that gender digital divide is still a reality manifesting itself in multiple dimensions. Therefore, efforts to enable women and girls to access the infrastructures and digital technologies need to be complemented with actions creating digital literacy and helping them to make meaningful use of technologies, encouraging them to prepare for jobs in technology fields, enabling them to create content that is relevant and valuable to their lives and contexts, as well as empowering them to contribute to Internet governance and digital policy processes. Some pointed out that gender equality is also a matter of culture and norms, and that stereotypes should be fought against through education and awareness. Context was stressed as an important factor that impacts on both barriers as well as responses to address the gender digital divide.
- It was pointed out that digital divide facilitates discrimination of women and girls and as such, is a human rights issue that states should address in line with international human rights frameworks. Cooperation is key, and also other stakeholders have critical roles to play.
- Several discussants pointed out that technology is not neutral, and that gender diversity should be taken into account when technologies are designed. They warned for the potential impact of data-driven technologies on gender digital rights, and called for multistakeholder action to avoid that opaque algorithms and machine learning systems make gender-biased decisions.
- It was underlined that special attention should be given to gender related issues of subgroups (such as rural women, girls, women in refugee camps) and gender minorities (such as LGBTQI).
- The issue of online gender-based abuse and violence was highlighted as a continued challenge and issue to be addressed by all stakeholders. Some warned that states and Internet intermediaries, when tackling online gender-based abuse and violence should not do so through a protectionist framework, but through the framework of human rights. This includes the need to potentially balance different rights – including the right to safety and the rights to freedom of expression – and that the principles of necessity,

proportionality, and transparency should be respected in so far as they limit the freedom of expression.

- The important role played by civil society actors in developing research and coordinating collaboration in deepening the understanding of key and emerging gender-related issues were acknowledged by several speakers in other stakeholder groups.
- Many acknowledged the progress made in recent years to integrate women rights and the gender issues into Internet governance processes, mechanisms, and structures (including the IGF). Yet, it was felt that gender equality and inclusion should remain a priority area. A multistakeholder approach was underlined as an important model and approach in this.

ANNEXURE 2

Compilation of tweets from the session available at
<https://twitter.com/i/moments/973910880336269312>