

Sexual rights, internet rights, & feminism!

Sexual rights! What are you talking about? Does this kind of right exist in India? I never thought about it before I attended Global Meeting on Gender, Sexuality and Technology.

The meeting was organized by Association of Progressive Communications (APC) from 11th to 17th April 2014 in Port Dickson, Malaysia. The main objective of this 7-day workshop was to explore and develop a collective dialogue on gender, sexuality and the Internet.

Participants from different backgrounds and diverse experiences, came from countries such as India, Uganda, Canada, Pakistan, China, Pakistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the United States, South Africa, the Dominican Republic, Jordan, Mexico, the Philippines, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malaysia, Brazil, Lebanon, Indonesia, New Zealand, Kenya and reflected their views and opinions on the issues of gender, sexuality and internet.

For the first three days (11-14 April), academics, feminist, internet, sexual and queer activists and policy specialists discussed and analysed questions around 'harmful content', 'pornography', 'hate-speech', 'digital misogyny', 'gender-based violence', 'freedom of expression' and 'sexual rights'.

Discussions went deeper and everyone was asking questions, sharing their experiences and issues that exist in their countries. 50 participants had discussions in small group forms and were trying to find answers in relation to the following questions -

- What do we expect from the internet 10 years ago? What did we hope it would do for feminism?
- Why internet rights are important for sexual rights activists and why sexual rights are important for internet rights?
- Do sexual rights go along with internet rights?
- Is internet rights basic sexual rights?
- Who has access to the internet? And whose body is becoming the part of internet?
- What are the policies and laws which protect women's rights that can be applicable to both offline and online world?
- Where women's free speech is not regularly squelched by constant harassment, bullying, attempts to silence?
- How does misogyny manifest on the internet? What are the new and old ways?
- How has the internet facilitated the proliferation of sexual expression online? Have diverse sexualities been part of this? In what ways?
- What does it mean for us to be safe online, as individuals or groups? What are the threats?
- How has the internet changed social constructions of gender? Has it changed how femininity or masculinity constructed?
- Do we need feminist internet?

With continuous process of discussions, debates, arguments and thorough brainstorming sessions, gradually we all realized that these questions are important and play vital role in shaping our online world. In the next two days (15-16 April), we established overall strategy towards –

- Establishing network of sexual rights activists, women's human rights defenders and internet rights activists to strengthen understanding on how sexual rights, internet freedom and democratization are inter-connected and how to advance these across the human rights and internet policy ecosystem;
- Framed privacy and online safety as a community issue and how activists can engage in community-building while also managing their risks to privacy and personal safety;
- Defining feminist internet and creating bottom-line privacy standards for a feminist internet and underline mechanisms and approaches for developing feminist internet;
- Develop an agreement on core feminist principles for a transformative internet, in order to develop a set of evolving feminist principles of the internet;
- Develop an online space that is easily accessible, giving voices to marginalized communities; able to protect from corporatization and monopolization over the internet

Finally we engaged ourselves in understanding human rights mechanisms and various UN instruments such as CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women); UPR (Universal Periodic Review), etc., to address and advocate sexual rights and women's human rights issues in relation to the internet.

All these days were mind-boggling on identifying solutions around it. Last day (17 April), we established the connection between sexual rights and internet rights and how much it is important to integrate each other in our advocacy work.

Working in space of internet rights, freedom of expression, access to information in India, gave a perspective to look at these issues around gender rights and internet rights and develop a framework around 'Gender & ICTs' in India.