



APrIGF Macao 2015
Workshop Summary Report (workshop No. 28)

DRAFT 10 July 2015

Date: Thursday 2 July
Time: 9.00 to 10.45am
Workshop Title: Access to ICTs to further development: assessing the importance of ICTs in the post-2015 development agenda
Reported by: Mr Winston ROBERTS (representing IFLA)
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Gender Balance: approx. 15 female and approx. 20 male participants (total 35 including panelists)
Moderator: Winston Roberts

Panelists:

- 1) Dr Jim Hok-Yan Chang (Chief Librarian, Hong Kong Central Library, within the Hong Kong Public Libraries, Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the Hong Kong SAR of the PR China)
- 2) Prof Kamolrat Intaratat (Director, Research Center: Development and Communication Knowledge Management – CCDKM, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Nonthaburi, Thailand)
- 3) Ms Bettina Quimson (Deputy Executive Director, e-Society Office of Information and Communications Technology, DOST, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines)
- 4) Prof Rohan Samarajiva (LIRNEasia, Colombo, Sri Lanka)

A brief summary of the workshop plan:

The plan for the panel's presentations and discussion with the audience was as follows:

1. At one end of the spectrum of development, Dr Chang spoke about the importance of ICTs for access to information by the general public through a sophisticated metropolitan library system in a heavily populated area of relatively high GDP, following the principles of the UNESCO Manifesto for the Public Library, and looking at the future role of libraries.

2. Then, in dramatic contrast, Prof Kamolrat talked about the functions of telecenters in Thailand and ASEAN generally, and the application of ICTs to help marginalised mainly rural communities become digitally literate and improve their economic life-chances.



3. Then Ms Quimson spoke about a strategic national information planning process which takes into account the whole spectrum of information needs, types of infrastructure, types of communities, and provision of support (hardware and software, planning, consultation and funding), and which includes support for education.

4. Then Prof Samarajiva gave a quite different perspective talking about the case of Myanmar, where the country has been opened up, mobile telephony is the thing (leaping over the gap where there is little 'conventional' ICT infrastructure for public use, and so few telecentres with PCs..) - but identifying that people there want access to information for the same things as they do in large urban environments (daily life, health, government information, etc.,) and that older people need help to do all this.

Then the moderator asked the panellists to consider two questions in dialogue with the audience. The questions were: what were the obstacles to using the internet to providing services for access to information; and how did the speakers conceive of a better Internet in the future...

Details of presentations:

Presentation by Dr Chang: "Hong Kong Public Libraries, an Overview, and its e-Services"

Dr. Chang gave audiences a brief overview, history and background of the government-funded Hong Kong Public Libraries (HKPL) and how the libraries provide a wide array of e-services to urban citizens living in a densely populated city through the Internet and a 5-tier network of 79 public libraries distributed throughout the territory of Hong Kong. He emphasized that HKPL's values and missions and Strategic Plan 2009-2018 are closely tied to the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 1994, in particular leveraging on new technology and the use of ICT for developing the public libraries into an information hub and a "Library without walls".

He further elaborated his presentation with 2014 statistics on penetration of ICT in Hong Kong such as household ownership of personal computers, usage of smart phones and the Internet. While the penetration rate was generally high, a gap of low penetration was identified in the low income group. Being one of the major public bodies providing free Internet access to the general public in Hong Kong, HKPL has been playing the critical role of filling that penetration gap.



The goal of serving, among others, target users of low-income groups in Hong Kong is being fulfilled by provision of free access to the Internet via over 1,900 computer terminals in 67 branch libraries and 29 Computer and Information Centres. The ICT infrastructure is further enhanced by HKPL's dedicated web portal and two mobile applications for access to the libraries' e-resources, including e-books, electronic databases and significantly, a resource-rich digital library of Multimedia Information System in which digital archives of various formats such as documents, leaflets, posters, photos, videos and sound recordings are readily available for access through the Internet.

Presentation by Prof Kamolrat: “.....[correct title to be checked]...”.

Dr. Kamolrat shared on how to empower marginalized, grassroots and disabled communities in Thailand with ICT through partnership with telecentres and professional training partners such as Microsoft, Intel, Cisco and Google by way of formal and informal education. Her perspective focused on using telecommunications and ICT to provide the under-privileged with equitable access to information and hence preserve people's dignity and local wisdom, stimulate community innovation and eventually provide entrepreneurs opportunities of offering saleable package of local trip for tourists to visit and experience the real community. The short community-experiencing trip becomes a saleable tourism product available for purchase on the Internet. She added that formal and informal education offered at tele-centres also promotes digital literacy, advocates smart farming and leverages on the power of mobile devices.

Presentation by Ms Quimson: “Tech4Ed: creating the Tech4Ed Centers toward ONE Philippines”

Ms Quimson spoke from the perspective of the government information policy agency and attempted to identify some common issues that have to be dealt with as part of the Internet Governance process in developing large information systems in rural areas of the Philippines. She emphasized that telecentres are not just for promoting digital literacy, but goes deep in the business. Telecentres were set up to provide a single platform, in the form of a one-stop shop, for users to access content aggregated from a national level. It also creates equal opportunities for everyone to receive informal education and skills training and hence helps people to find jobs. This is particularly true when forming partnership with service providers like Google, Microsoft and Visa. Entrepreneurs could also be empowered to develop profitable businesses. As a result, the telecentre becomes also a business centre for people to do business. Setting up



Internet connectivity in villages in remote areas could increase GDP of the areas. Providing connectivity in public schools could improve teaching and learning. Public schools would be required to pay a service charge to the Internet service provider. To make the telecenters into a sustainable operation, a small fee is charged as a minimal service fee on a per person per hour of use basis.

Presentation by Prof Samarajiva: “What do users want? Data from the ‘last greenfield market’, Myanmar”

Professor Samarajiva provided the audience with information collected from a survey on the use of ICT in Myanmar, which is a rather unusual country coming into engagement with the world at a late stage. It is a huge market with 50 million people and has a high cellular coverage of about 87%. People skip old technologies and go directly to smart phones. Unlike traditional public or academic libraries which are built to fulfill education needs, telecentres in Myanmar focus on the information the public really wants e.g. job opportunities, weather, national news, community news, where to get household goods, services, e-Commerce, financial information, new job skills and market information. He expressed the view that in developing ICT infrastructure for the purpose of reducing the digital divide, the government must understand the demand first, instead of focusing too much on the supply side. The government needs to fully understand what the public wants and what capabilities the public has.

(This presentation can be shared, it is on the web at: <http://lirneasia.net/2015/07/myanmar-findings-shared-at-ifla-session-at-asia-pacific-regional-igf/>)

Key issues that were raised:

The following issues arose from the presentations, and were discussed in the workshop:

1. Information intermediaries such as libraries and telecentres need to focus on the demand side, not the needs of information providers on the supply side. The general public must be provided with the information it needs, instead of the information which providers want to provide.
2. No matter whether in densely populated cities or rural areas, people have information needs relating to their daily lives such as employment, health, finance, trading, community and market information, public services, job skills, vocational training, national news and even weather. This is particularly relevant in the public

libraries and telecentres settings, whilst academic libraries focus on the traditional process of developing reading for education purposes.

3. In relation to the development of ICT infrastructure, developing countries skip older technologies and go direct to the latest technologies such as smart phones. Myanmar is an example.
4. One of the obstacles to providing access to the Internet in the sustainable development process is to make information targeted for public users available on the Internet by way of websites, portals or e-books. In working towards that goal, the big economic issues of intellectual property, Digital Rights Management (DRM) and licensing inevitably arise and should be properly addressed.
5. Internet access charges remain high for people living in rural areas in some countries such as Thailand. The government should make access to the Internet more affordable for everyone, in particular the marginalized communities.
6. Relevant information policy should be in place to encourage the public to make profitable use of the Internet for the betterment of human development and personal prosperity, instead of focusing on the entertainment side of the Internet. Building meaningful content for the public to access through the Internet is essential in the sustainable development process and for the development of the digital economy.
7. Countries should strive to raise educational outcomes and level of achievements through national information policy for the betterment of the Information Society and also the information economy. This goal could be achieved by empowering people with access to wealth of information available on the Internet and thereby encouraging people to read, think, write, report and create new and fresh content on the Internet so that the information economy can be further developed.
8. Apart from content development, public users should also be provided with good experiences in accessing the information through the Internet by enhancing user interfaces, connectivity and affordability.
9. Unlike voice communication, communication and accessing information through the Internet requires certain skills and equipment such as mobile devices and computers. In this respect, the needs of disabled people such as blind and handicapped must not be overlooked. The ultimate goal is to provide equitable

access to ICT through a decentralized network of telecentres or libraries for everyone, including the under-privileged, marginalized people, the elderly and the disabled.

10. Telecentres should be operated according to a sound self-financing model so that the movement can be developed in a sustainable fashion.
11. In a multi-lingual environment such as Hong Kong and the Philippines, the support of multiple language characters is crucial for the development of ICT infrastructure.
12. Libraries and telecentres should take on the role of providing a safe environment for public users to access safe content on the Internet. This is relevant not only to the issue of preventing minors from accessing obscene and/or objectionable content but also to preventing the Internet, in particular social media such as Facebook, from being adopted as means for promoting racial or religious conflicts/discrimination, violation of human rights or even terrorism. The goal could be achieved by neutrality of technology, technological and policy interventions by way of login mechanisms or user authentication and adapting/updating legal frameworks for ensuring protection of human rights as an integral part of Internet governance in the sustainable development process.
13. Apart from mainland Asian countries, the telecentre movement is highly relevant in small Pacific Islands. But there are massive problems of telecommunications and regulations in those islands. The distances between the islands also create a problem for connectivity. Assistance should be provided to support sufficient connectivity in small Pacific Islands for education and communication purposes. The Governments of the Pacific Islands are encouraged to make their voices heard in the sustainable development process.
14. ICT service providers such as Microsoft which provided certification and training courses on their products are encouraged to make their training materials shorter in length, break them into small parts, say by software function, and hence make them more 'digestible', requiring less reading time, such that users can quickly acquire necessary fundamental ICT skills without reading the bulky materials.

Conclusions:

IFLA believes that the workshop at APrIGF in Macau successfully highlighted a range of different scenarios, in countries at different stages of development, but which all share certain things in common:

- They all demonstrate that the public has a thirst for information, and a desire to learn;
- They show that publicly-funded information services can take many forms and are evolving to meet new needs and adapt to new socio-economic conditions;
- They all demonstrate that new forms of ICTs (new applications, devices and platforms) can help overcome some former barriers to equitable access to information (such as geographic isolation, low socio-economic level, various forms of disability);
- However access to ICTs, and therefore access to information (which is a human right) still depend on effective governance and regulation of the Internet.

(Report compiled and edited by W. Roberts for IFLA, with the valuable assistance of TM Tse, Kevin KL Chen and LM Chang, professional information specialists from Hong Kong who attended the workshop.)