

APrIGF Macao 2015

Workshop Summary Report

Date: July 2, 2015

Time: 14:00 – 15:30

Workshop title: Net Neutrality in the Asia-Pacific

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Moderators:

- Ramanjit Singh Chima, Asia Project Lead, Access

Panelists:

- Jonathan Brewer; Trainer, Network Startup Resource Center, University of Oregon
- Jeremy Malcolm; Senior Global Policy Analyst, Electronic Frontier Foundation
- Babu Ram Aryal; President, ISOC Nepal

A brief summary of presentations:

Ramanjit Singh Chima introduced the topic of discussion and provided an overview of global policy developments on the net neutrality front. He also pointed out that the modes of enforcing accepted notions of net neutrality within individual jurisdictions would dictate how the dialogue moved forward. Jonathan Brewer spoke about the element of reciprocity traditionally involved in online interconnection arrangements, and questioned the need to differentiate zero-rated services from other reciprocal agreements such as those found in cable & broadcast television industries. We also heard from Jeremy Malcolm, who felt commercial arrangements that proved workable in the broadcasting industry might distort the Internet if blindly transposed.

A substantive summary of the main issues that were raised:

There were discussions around evolving definitions of net neutrality – both globally and particularly in the Asia-Pacific. As zero-rated services had occupied the centre stage in terms of policy dialogues around net neutrality in the developing world, the desirability of zero-rated services was also discussed. While a majority rejected zero-rating as a potential means to improve access, questions were raised as to why zero-rated platforms should be treated any differently from similar commercial arrangements in the broadcast industry, where consumers don't foot a majority of the carriage costs. Prohibitive costs of Internet data were identified as one of the primary impediments

to enabling widespread access, especially in developing nations such as India. Questions were also raised regarding the permissibility of specialized services as exceptions to the net neutrality principle. The issue of spectrum ownership was also taken up, where spectrum was spoken about as a state-owned natural resource as well as a privately owned (licensed) resource. Alternatives to zero-rating that achieved the same object of universal access were discussed, and provision of free access to Government services under a public-private partnership was highlighted as a viable alternative.

Conclusion and further comments:

This session on net neutrality in the Asia-Pacific saw some very interesting discussions around the issue. As a few panelists from the original list were unable to attend due to unavoidable last-minute scheduling conflicts, the session was conducted more as an impromptu round-table rather than a panel discussion as originally intended. There were several observations and questions from the audience and a few interventions were made by remote participants as well. The overall discussion proved very informative, and the session served as a platform for stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to get together and discuss an important issue bearing significance to the larger Internet as a whole.