



# **GRASSROOTS PARTICIPATION IN POLICY ADVOCACY**

*Survey Report*

## **WSIS GRASSROOTS CAUCUS**



## GRASSROOTS PARTICIPATION IN POLICY ADVOCACY

### DEFINING “GRASSROOTS”

Grassroots communities are those communities who are living below poverty line with minimum literacy level and limited knowledge base.

Grassroots organizations are those organizations who are working directly with grassroots communities, enabling them to acquire more information and knowledge to improve their quality of life with holistic approach, may be livelihood, health, social dynamics, higher literacy level, gender to make them empowered with various benefits which government is providing them. Grassroots organizations are also commonly known as community based organizations as they are stationed in the target community and also comprise members from the community. They understand their day to day needs, problems, issues the community is struggling for and also suggest appropriate measures to overcome the struggle according to the local situation. There are also organizations who don't work at the grassroots level but partner with CBO's for implementation of projects, they represent grassroots organizations.

### INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution provides an opportunity for effective participation of the grassroots people. The ICT can be used as a tool to ensure effective participation of the grassroots organisations. In this backdrop World Summit on Information Society has created an opportunity for the international community to agree on a common vision of the Information Society and to develop an action plan aimed at bridging the digital divide and allowing the advent of an Information Society that is balanced and accessible to all

The policy dialogue through WSIS aims to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, besides enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting sustainable development and improving quality of life, premised on the purposes.

While the preparatory process for the second phase of WSIS in Tunis continues, the grassroots communities which lie at the core of all these efforts are hardly represented in this



policy dialogue. Even if they are represented their concerns are not voiced well enough to find a place in black and white.

In this study an attempt has been made to understand the people expectation from meeting like WSIS and understanding of different stakeholders about the grassroots participation at the policy advocacy level. The survey tried to find constrains and challenges for peoples participation in policy advocacy.

## OBJECTIVE

The sample study emphasizes on the concerns of the different stakeholder about grassroots participation at the policy advocacy and their expectation from the platform likes World Summit on Information Society (WSIS). The study focus on

- Level of participation of the grassroots organisations.
- Mechanism for policy dialogue forums for grassroots.
- Concerns of different stakeholder about grassroots participation at policy advocacy.
- Concerns and expectations of grassroots from WSIS and other policy advocacy platform.
- ICT as an effective tool for grassroots participation.

On the basis of some understanding of the process and mechanism of grassroots participation at policy advocacy, it is important to understand its implications on the existing policy planning. After a careful analysis of various issues, stage is set for the policy makers to issue a guideline for policy planning process and how ICT can be used as a tool for policy advocacy. At present the participation of the grassroots people is not reflected in the policy document. The technological revolution and ICT tool can provide support to facilitate grassroots participation at policy dialogue. As such whereas the objective of the study is to understand the level of participation of grassroots at policy dialogue, the objective will be served fully when a suggestive framework is presented to deal with the use of ICT in enhancing the grassroots participation in policy dialogue.

## METHODOLOGY

To serve the objective of the research information has to be collected from the policy advocacy organisation like NGO, Media person, government officer and private institutions. At present there is no mechanism or system through which the grassroots voices can be



reflected in the policy document. A few initiatives have been taken place but does not show much effect at the larger goal. The present study, therefore, is based on data and information collected through various stakeholders.

After collection of secondary information on the grassroots participation in policy advocacy, a detail questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire solicited information on the need of grassroots representation at the policy advocacy, the kind institutions that facilitate policy advocacy, mechanism for voicing grassroots concerns at national level, what concerns of grassroots are represented at WSIS and most important what are the concerns of the grassroots people. To understand the degree of grassroots participation and their ability to voice their concerns at the WSIS process, a survey was conducted with about 35 participants of WSIS PrepCom 2 in Geneva. The survey was conducted through individual questionnaires and observation through the debate process. The survey respondents were representatives of civil society organizations, governments, media and private sector of developed and developing countries.

### **Survey finding**

The result of sample survey shows the reflection of different stakeholders. The representative of government agency, civil society organization, private organization and media representative have shown expectation and experience in terms of grassroots participation in the policy advocacy. The survey result also provides a stakeholder perception about the role of ICT in public advocacy.

### **PURPOSE OF STAKEHOLDERS PARTICIPATION IN SUCH MEETING**

The research study tried to find out what is purpose of different stakeholder to participate in such discussion like Prep Com 2 at Geneva. The different people have shown different objective for participation in such summit.

The representative of the government organisation mention that there objective of attending Prep Com was to safe guard local national interest, learning about strategies and best practices. They also mention that this kind of platform provides learning and sharing opportunities for the government employee. The use of ICT and its effect also motivate them to participate, they point out that they tried to understand ICT development initiatives and



push the agenda for ICTs in least developed countries. They can provide government decision and perception to the WSIS process

The civil society organizations play an important role in putting the grassroots voice at different platforms. The representative of CSO mentioned that this kind of platform provides them an opportunity to learn from the experience of other grassroots organizations. They also put the region specific and country specific issue in front of the international community. They also tried to put their demand from such platforms like free software, discuss other issues like gender, livelihood. This kind of platform provides them space for partnership which supports their cause.

Media and Private sector looked at it as a platform for getting informed, provide their inputs as private sector and media can get involved with information society and promote the power of ICTs.

The research team observes that as regards to attending WSIS or other meetings for policy debate the level of attendance seems to be high but participation levels are low.

There was a general perception where participants felt that there is no impact of the WSIS process on the focus of work of the respondents

### HOW GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS CAN CONTRIBUTE?

It is important to understand the perception of different stakeholders about the potential of the grassroots organizations. The study tried to find out the reflection of different stakeholders about the strength and potential of grassroots organizations. The respondent suggested that the grassroots organization **can provide local case studies** which may be used to understand the grassroots problem. The grassroots organization regularly work with community they capture their issues and concerns in the case studies which will help the other to accelerate the movement of public advocacy.

The second important suggestion comes out is that grassroots organizations **provide local level coordination**. The effective coordination is important for any change. The representation of the grassroots is not reflected in the policy level because the coordination



is not effective. It is true the effective coordination at the grassroots will lead to policy change were local issue get priority.

The third suggestion which emerge from the survey is that grassroots organisation may **provide local knowledge**. The local knowledge and information may be used as an effective tool for advocacy. Most of the content in developing countries is from the experts. The issue of advocacy is also chosen from the top rather than bottom. The local knowledge provided by the grassroots organisations may support the effective cause of advocacy.

The fourth important suggestion emerge from the survey is that grassroots organisation may provides **the priority and perspective for policy advocacy**. Majority of the population stay in the rural areas. The issue and priority of the grassroots is different which need immediate attention. The grassroots organisation may contribute in highlighting the grassroots issue which can be incorporate in the policy document.

Another important suggestion emerge is that the grassroots organisation may **provide both forward and backward linkages in the policy formulation process**. They can provide local issue and priority for the policy makers and also implement the policy decision at the grass root.

### WHETHER GRASSROOTS PARTICIPATE AT NATIONAL LEVEL POLICY?

The survey result shows that in developing countries, **grassroots organisations don't seem to actively participate in national level policy change**. In terms of their participation at national level the important views emerge from the stakeholders is that they use to raise awareness among the people. Through partnership with the local government they provide effective implementation at the grassroots level. Through public forum they also try to raise the grassroots issue.

The survey result shows some interesting finding in terms of constraints faced by the grassroots in participation. They have opinion that **government is too conservative and they discuss the policy in a closed door**. They don't provide space for debate and discussion. Other argument emerge is that to avoid conflicting view the government never encourage grassroots organisations. The lack of opportunities and knowledge also emerge

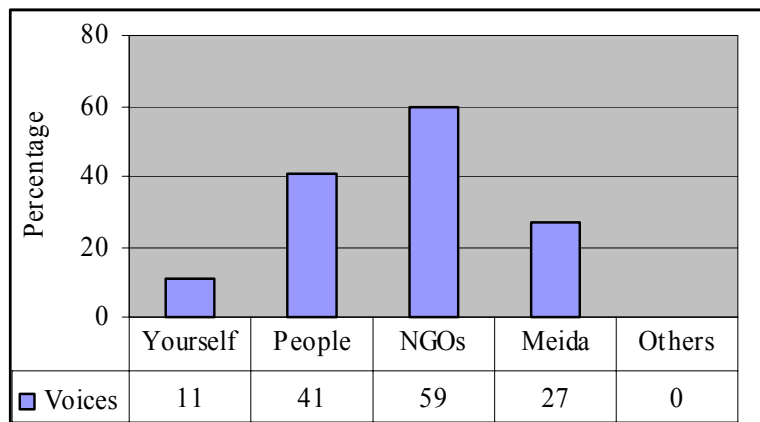


as a challenge for their less participation. The lack of communication infrastructure seems to be important challenges for lesser participation. In fact around 50% of the respondent mentioned that due to **lack of communication facility the voice of grassroots are not reflected in any of the policy initiative**. The low level of literacy is also a hurdle for lower participation. Majority of the respondent have mention that low literacy is an important reason for their ignorance.

### WHO VOICES THE CONCERNS OF GRASSROOTS AT NATIONAL LEVEL?

This is an important question in front of all the civil society organization, researcher, media person and some policy maker that who voice for the grassroots concern. The survey results show that the **NGOs are most active in terms of voicing the concern of the grassroots** in fact about 60% of the respondent mention. The second effective initiative has been taken by the by **people themselves** around 41% of respondent have mention that and followed by Media 27%.

**Figure 1 Voices the concerns of grassroots concerns at national level**



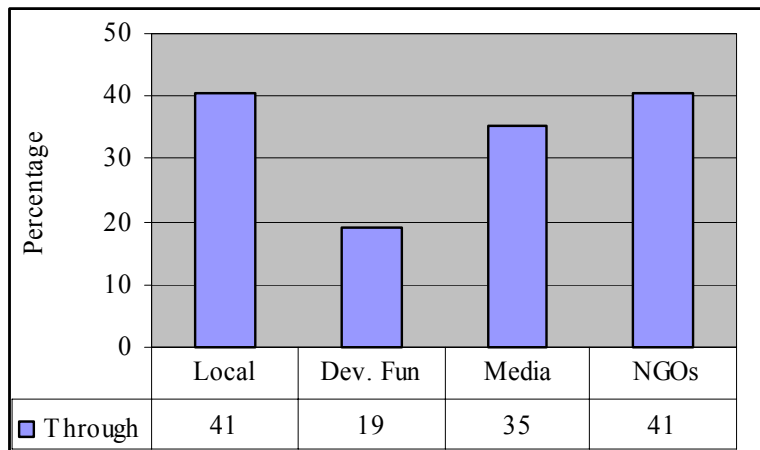
The NGO works at the grassroots and they effectively highlight local issue, linking the NGOs with new technology like internet, TV, Radio channel may help the grass roots organizations to bring positive change. Linking the people with the newer technology is also equally important to enhance the people participation in the policy dialogue. The respondent have mentioned that individuals are taking effective initiative to voice the grassroots concerns but poor infrastructure may ruin there enthusiasm in terms of reflection of their views in the policy document.



**Mechanism to voice concerns at national level**

The survey gave a clear picture that grassroots concerns are voiced at public level by people’s participation, civil society organizations and media through face to face meeting with local government, development functionaries and also with the help of local NGOs.

**Figure 2**  
**Mechanism to voice concerns at national level**



The survey results show that around 40% respondent mention that people use face to face meeting with local self government functionaries as a tool to voices grassroots concern at the national level. The present infrastructure provides restricted mobility to the people. The media has emerged as second important tools for voicing the grassroots concerns at national level. The use technology facilitates frequent exchange of view among the grassroots people and policy makers.

**GRASSROOTS CONCERNS AT WSIS**

The various grassroots concerns that are voiced at WSIS are funding for ICT projects, gender issues, digital solidarity fund, information literacy and rights, transparency to internet governance, free flow of information, Access – the high cost of bandwidth, poor ICT infrastructure in the country, the lack of quick access to the current instruments and systems of communication and information, free software, IPR reform.





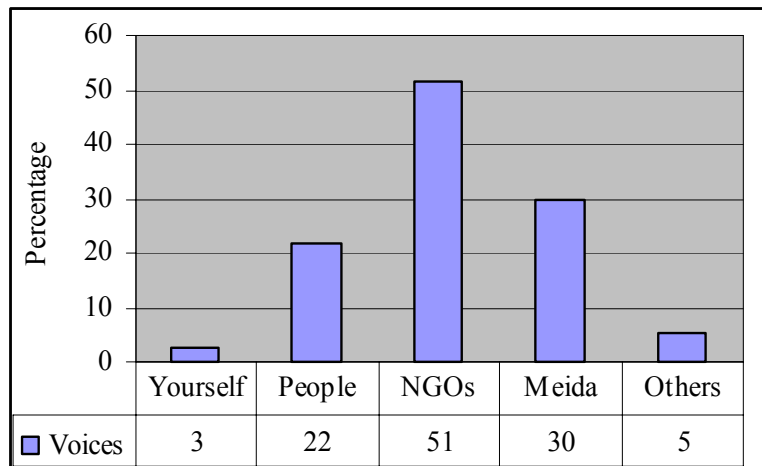
Most of these concerns are not voiced or not well voiced to reach the policy dialogue. However it is important that these concerns are addressed in the policy dialogue. About 50% of the respondents said that **their concerns were not voiced**. The rest of the respondents were not sure if these concerns were voiced

### WHO VOICES THE GRASSROOTS CONCERNS IN POLICY DIALOGUE FORUM?

In this section an attempt has been made to understand how far the people priority changes from national framework to international forum. In the earlier section we tried to understand the respondent reflection in term of national policy debate. Here we discuss the issue at the policy dialogue forums. The survey result shows that NGOs play vital role in bringing grassroots concern at policy level. Media is another medium for voicing the grassroots concerns at the policy dialogue forum.

**Figure 3**

#### Who Voices the concerns at International level



Here the important difference that emerges from national perspective to policy dialogue forums is that the roles of people's participation to voice the concerns of grassroots come down. The people may raise issue at local level but due to poor connectivity and access to knowledge they can not reflect the issue at the policy dialogue forums.

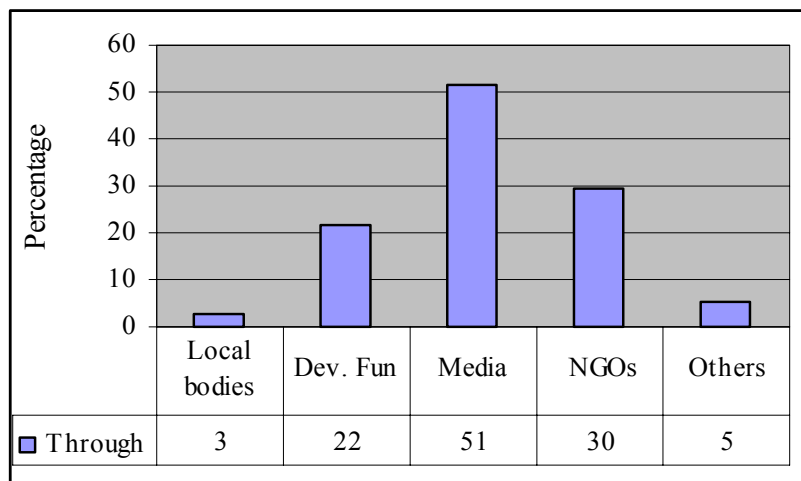


### **Mechanism to voice concerns**

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**Figure 4**

**Mechanism to voice concerns are voiced at policy dialogue forum**



The figure shows that Media is an important mechanism for voicing grassroots concerns at policy dialogue forums. The networking between people and information dissemination at the grassroots level may bring important policy change.

### **SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Grassroots Participation Should Increase:** Grassroots organisations and grassroots people were poorly represented at the policy advocacy forum. The grassroots people participation at the forum like world summit on information society may create awareness among the people.

**Grassroots coordination with National Consultation:** The sample survey also shows that there is a lack of coordination among the grassroots workers and national consultation. The effective policy and implementation can ensure only if the grassroots need is reflected in the policy documentation. The participation of the grassroots people in the national consultation will ensure their participation in the implementation process. There is a need to



establish proper dialogue platform between this two. A community radio and digital channel may be important tools to connect this two.

**ICT infrastructure at Grassroots:** Bad connectivity has emerged as an important challenge for poor participation of the grassroots people. The national and international advocacy platform should demand for the IT infrastructure at the grassroots.

**More Reflection of Local issue:** The respondents have shown their concern about the poor participation of the local issue at the international platform. The issue like poverty, gender and livelihood should also discuss on such platform. There is a need to understand how ICT can be useful tool to reflect the local issue at different platform.

**Democratisation in participation:** The policy advocacy platforms were represented by few. There is need to encourage more people for participation. The e-discussion mode may be used to get maximum representation from the people. The survey result shows that people need more representation of civil society organization. The NGO works closely with people so there representation should be also encourage.

**Establish National and international network:** The participation of the grassroots people cannot be ensured until unless they are part of strong network. The digital connectivity is emerging as an opportunity in this regards. There should be effective initiative to establish network among community based organisations and civil society organization.

**Advocacy for direct consultation with community:** Till now no concrete step has been taken about effective decentralize planning and community participation in the decision making. Important barriers which came in the way are connectivity. It is always difficult to mobilize people on all the important issue. The consultation at different level also does not emerge as an effective tool. Connectivity through internet is suggested by the participation. The advocacy through net can generate people voice at the larger level.

**Establish Linkages between grassroots organisation and international organisation:** The survey result shows that people need a linkage between grassroots organisation and international organisation like UN. There should be initiative to establish linkages between grassroots organization and International organisation.



**Survey Conducted among following stakeholders**

S.No.	Country	Organisation	Focus of work
1	Switzerland	Gester consulting	Research
2	Ch		Representative private sector
3	Angola	Dreadlocks/SACOD	Communication & Development
4	Switzerland	Freelance Journalist	Journalism-research-documentation
5	UK-London	Brahma Kumari World Spiritual University	Research and economy
6	India (NGO)	Digital Governance Org Initiative	Innovative model for use of ICT
7	Switzerland	Communication	Civil society organization
8	Hong-Kong, china	Hong-Kong Council of Social Science	Promoting ICT among disadvantage group
9	German	German civil society coordination group	Civil society organization
10	Denmark	WFUNA	Education and ICT
11	ANGOLA	Dread Locks	Film and Video production
12	NIGER	Prime Minister Office	Communication
13	Serbia & Montenegro	Diplo Foundation	Civil Education
14	Serbia & Montenegro	Diplo Foundation	Internet, Governance
15	Tunisia	ATIM	Human Right, governance
16	Tunisia	Association Tunizinne	Gender
17	France	Holosophic Society	Spirituality in world
18	USA	Georgia Institute of Technology	Research
19	Spain	Association for progressive communication	ICT policy, free software
20	USA	Centre for Democracy & Technology	Civil liberties, privacy and internet



21	Germany	Network Nene Redien	IPR, Free Software
22	Denmark	United Nation Association of Denmark	Development Issue
23	Mozambique	United Nation association of Mozambique	MDG-Campaign
24	India	Datamation Foundation	Gender equity, youth empowerment, poverty alleviation using ICT
25	UAE	General Information Authority	IT
26	Senegal	Presidence De La Republique	Councillart, information centre
27	Ghana	Ministry of Education	Promoting ICT among girl especially at grass root
28	Cameroon	Ministry of higher education	ICT policy and Implementation
29	Trinard and Tobaco	Caribbean Telecom union	ICT Policy
30	Eritrea	Ministry of Transport and communication	Communication
31	Yemen	Public telecommunication, Yemen	Operation manager of ICT
32	Zambia	Government Ministry	ICT policy making, Licensing of Radio and Television station
33	India	Government of India	E-learning, e infrastructure
34	Switzerland	Swiss Federal Office of Culture	Cultural Diversity and information network
35	Tanzania	Tanzania Communication Regulatory Authority	Regulation on communication and postal sector