



OUTCOMES OF GRASSROOTS CAUCUS CONSULTATIONS IN INDIA AND ZAMBIA

TOWARDS AN

INFORMATION SOCIETY FOR THE GRASSROOTS

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OUTCOMES OF REGIONAL CONSULTATION OF GRASSROOTS CAUCUS IN INDIA AND ZAMBIA

INTRODUCTION

The WSIS Grassroots Caucus was formed at Prepcom2 of the Tunis Phase. The need for grassroots caucus emerged with OneWorld South Asia taking four grassroots women to Prepcom2 at Geneva. The participation of four grassroots women made them realise that while there is lot of discussion going on for reaching the advantages of ICTs to the grassroots, there is lack of understanding on the real needs of grassroots communities who are going to make the information society a reality. During their visit the grassroots women raised few issues which went unanswered in various forums.

More on the participation of grassroots women in PrepCom2 (<http://southasia.oneworld.net/article/view/106607/>)

To ensure that the grassroots communities take full advantage of the policies for information society, WSIS Grassroots Caucus was formed. Grassroots Caucus aims to bring grassroots communities and organizations to come together and advocate for inclusion of grassroots concerns in the policy dialogue.

Members of Grassroots Caucus deliberate on various issues relating to WSIS through [e-discussions](#). Through the e-discussion grassroots caucus members share the various ways in which ICTs have actually reached the grassroots and provide their responses and recommendations to the WSIS process.

www.grassroots-caucus.org website has been launched to encourage grassroots communities to be in touch with the policy process and also enable them to voice their concerns and also for the global community to get updated on grassroots.

Recognizing infrastructural constraints of grassroots communities to ICTs and limited access to internet, two regional consultations were organized. First consultation was organized in Delhi from 10th -12th July, and the second one in Lusaka, from 26th – 28th July 2005. These regional consultations gave grassroots caucus members to have face to face discussion the WSIS process.

The discussions in these consultations focussed on:

- ◆ The MDGs and WSIS
- ◆ The role of ICT enabled knowledge centres at the grassroots to accelerate the MDGs
- ◆ Issues underpinning WSIS plan of action

Grassroots Caucus presents the outcomes of both the consultations



While we talk of ICTs reaching the grassroots the benefits of ICTs should be able to improve the quality of life at the grassroots. Through the grassroots consultation following issues were identified to be priority:

WSIS MDG Priorities

1. Health
2. Livelihoods
3. Education
4. Environment
5. Gender

Gender, Cultural & Traditional practices and access to information were identified to be cross cutting issues in case of Africa.

Lack of appropriate information/knowledge was a major concern in all spheres of the identified priority issues.

Issues Underpinning the Priorities

The consultation also brought out the specific issues under each of the identified broader issues and also on the kind of information required, Information Societies concentrating towards provision of this information which should help in achieving the MDGs

HEALTH

The underpinning issues under health was information societies helping to creating awareness regarding HIV AIDS, women being able discuss and understand about various aspects of reproductive health and child care, preventive measures against malaria, skin diseases, tuberculosis methods of immunization. Balance nutrition for children, expecting mothers. The information centres helping in improving quality of health services in their community.

LIVELIHOODS

The ICT revolution revolves around this basic issue for the grassroots. The prime concern from grassroots was it should help in improving their livelihoods which means that the information and services provided should be useful to enhance their present income patterns. The MDG issues around agriculture were undeveloped agriculture leading to poor economy; Productivity related issues, Marketing of Agricultural produce, Finance & credit, Technology, Lack of support service like Soil testing, pest control, Allied Agricultural Activities-Animal Husbandry and fisheries, Productivity Issues, Marketing issues, Non-agricultural livelihoods, such as salt farming, forest produce, artisans, handicrafts like coir making, weaving, Finance and credit, Marketing.

It was felt that quite often we forget the landless and migrant labourers while planning to create livelihoods opportunities. The issue of low wages, discrimination, insecure livelihoods opportunities was some of the other issues which never get the prime attention.



EDUCATION

Information Societies helping to achieve education for all overcoming the existing constraints of lack of classrooms, lack of teacher accommodation, lack of furniture and equipment, lack of electricity, distance to the schools, basic education expensive, lack of teachers, lack of quality education, early marriages, increased girl child drop outs, poor remuneration of teachers. Education has not yet been perceived as a fundamental right. Need to address in a holistic manner.

ENVIRONMENT

Information societies enabling improvement of infrastructure facilities like water and sanitation, Disaster management.

GENDER

Engendered Information societies, enabling women to be a part of decision making, overcoming various forms of discrimination in the society like Traditional, Social, based on religious grounds, Economic, Educational and Physical.

Some of the common concerns:

- ✓ Non-availability of quality human/infrastructural services.
- ✓ Discriminatory practices based on caste, gender and disability etc.
- ✓ Accessibility and affordability of services.
- ✓ Discrimination against women at all stages of life
- ✓ Lack of knowledge/skills to cope-up with changing trends in all spheres, specially on livelihoods.
- ✓ Lack of skill enhancement in all sectors.
- ✓ Accessibility to and cost of credit is a problem.

Are we talking of a information society which can address the above issues which is prime for any grassroots community and Information Society is for the benefit of Grassroots Communities!



Grassroots identify a combination of following tools to be a part of the information society for effective dissemination of information/knowledge.

- ◆ Radio Drama
- ◆ Live Radio/TV Phone in programme
- ◆ Tele health
- ◆ Internet connection for accessing health information packaged as per grassroots needs
- ◆ Newspaper in local languages
- ◆ Posters
- ◆ Mobile
- ◆ Mobile video vans
- ◆ Using local cable TV and radio to get proper and correct information about various livelihoods opportunities

C1: The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development

- ✓ Development affordable and user-friendly ICT infrastructure
- ✓ Ensure rural electrification
- ✓ Introduce grassroots community based information centres, wherein funding for infrastructure could be provided by government/private agencies as a grant but for recurring cost could be met by the community.
- ✓ Advocacy of ICT to sensitise grassroots communities on benefits of ICTs
- ✓ Provision of market access
- ✓ Promote User education & Awareness on On-line Privacy
- ✓ Provide enabling environment to access information and freedom of expression
- ✓ National Governments involvement in the domain administration and control

C2: Information and communication infrastructure: an essential foundation for the Information Society

- ✓ User friendly & Affordable technology
- ✓ Appropriate technology such as access to radio and TV in all grassroots communities
- ✓ Mainstream radio to reach all grassroots villages
- ✓ Introduce new technologies at primary levels such solar computers
- ✓ Rural electrification and introduction of lower tariffs for grassroots communities
- ✓ Improved access to internet in terms of atleast one information centre per 1000 people.
- ✓ Wireless is the most preferred option, but it should be based on the geographical specifications.



- ✓ Dial-up options also preferred based on viability.

C3: Access to information and knowledge

- ✓ E services should be secured
- ✓ People should be free to express their views
- ✓ Information should be archived
- ✓ Mechanism to share information by creation of grassroots networks
- ✓ Content which is relevant and aimed at empowering the communities
- ✓ All stakeholders, government, private sector, CBO, NGOs, grassroots communities to be involved in content generation and provision.
- ✓ Showing reliability of information for the grassroots
- ✓ Print, audio, video formats for dissemination of information
- ✓ Blend of local and global knowledge which should be collected, collated, conceptualized and computerized as per local needs.
- ✓ The whole process should be supported by a well-designed network of human resources/institutions/organizations etc.
- ✓ Content in local language
- ✓ Mandatory provision of contents by all government departments.
- ✓ CBOs should collect the local contents.

C4: Capacity building at the grassroots level

Grassroots Communities are aware of the problems that confront them and have solutions to them except they lack capacity to implement developmental projects.

- ✓ Capacity on using computers, mobiles in grassroots communities
- ✓ Introduce south to south learning exchange programmes
- ✓ NGOs to train grassroots communities on ICT skills
- ✓ Hands-on training formal or informal training about these gadgets
- ✓ Need to develop training modules based on the whole mechanism keeping in view various aspects, for effective running of the tele-centers.
- ✓ Online and regular face-to-face interface for learning and sharing experiences.
- ✓ Capacity building is needed at various levels in relation to publicising, mobilising, creating awareness and sensitising communities

C7: ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life

- ✓ Economic empowerment
- ✓ Focus towards reducing the cost of computers for people to access
- ✓ Emphasis on applications that benefit grassroots in agriculture, commerce, health, education, security, and public administration
- ✓ Encourage people for volunteerism
- ✓ Encourage and implementation of open source software.
- ✓ There is need to put emphasis on applications that benefits the grassroots in agriculture, commerce, education, security and public administration.
- ✓



C8 Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content

- ✓ Introduce good Legal framework to safe guard local traditional practices and knowledge.
- ✓ Maintaining cultural diversity and ethical practices at the grassroots
- ✓ The caucus reiterated the need for a balance between the provision of ICTs and the preservation of the cultural diversity and identity, the linguistic diversity and the local content. The caucus called for the introduction of good legal structures to safe guard local traditional practices and knowledge.