

FORUM

through the channel of a nongovernmental organization.

WSIS provided us with an opening to bridging the communication divide that will remain after the digital divide has been resolved through technology. ■

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Globalization and Local Identity as Demonstrated at the ICT4D Platform

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The ICT for Development Platform (ICT 4D) at WSIS demonstrated global civil partnerships by showcasing some of the strong and diverse actions currently being taken at local and regional levels. This was an interesting contrast to the Summit plenary meeting, where policy makers sought a convergence around ideas of the global Information Society as its outcome. I would like to reflect on the enhancement of local identities within the globalization process, which I observed in a series of events and demonstrations at the Platform.

Globalization processes can intensify the shaping of local identities. The age of globalization is also the age of nationalist resurgence, expressed both in the challenge to established nation-states and in the widespread (re)construction of identity on the basis of nationality, always affirmed against the alien (Castells, 2003). What was notably different about the Platform showcase from the nationalist resurgence perspective, however, was that the local identities were resurgent not due to nationalism but in a partnership of local groups within a transnational civil society.

One of the occasions showing the bipolar opposition of globalization and local identity was an award ceremony for the regional Women's Electronic Network Training (WENT) workshop, run by a coalition of women's groups in Asia for the past 5 years. The winner, Chong Sheau Ching, was selected for her outstanding practice in using ICT for women's empowerment. After attending the WENT workshop held in Korea, she built a portal, "ehomemakers.net," helped 200 disadvantaged women to learn about ICT, and prepared them to earn income from home. She organized a number of conferences and seminars, which attracted several thousand homemakers and disadvantaged women in Malaysia. Her remarks on how the WENT workshop contributed to her subsequent works show how she found her local interests through meeting others at this regional-level training workshop:

"It was there that I realized that there is such a network as WENT for women community change

agents, and that I wasn't alone. I met women leaders who worked on issues like child sex trade, migrant rights, labor rights, etc. The obstacles I encountered paled beside their horror stories. But they did not give up. They were right there in Seoul, learning how to use ICT to improve their work! And they had visions just like what I had! . . . This realization was powerful as it spurred me to move on with a government grant for community Web site application as if I had not encountered any obstacles before except rewriting my proposed concepts over and over again! And it became a learning process for me."

The movement of women's organizations such as WENT is generally aimed at building a regional and global alliance for the advancement of women that is visible at the policy level and the advocacy level. Local groups become part of regional and international networks, design common strategies, and strengthen their institutional capacity. Perhaps in a more subtle way, the network also provides an opportunity for them to reflect upon their own organizations by assuming an outsider's view. Local women's groups use the global stage as a vehicle for strengthening their own local identities and activities, whether or not they do so intentionally. When one sees their transnational network expansion as a mere assimilation to the globalization process, one clearly underestimates their level of self-reflection. Their global, transregional network experience, as seen at the Platform, could be a critical element for the formation and strengthening of local groups to advance their local agenda today. Such reciprocal global social interaction and simultaneous localization could trigger a new formation of global civil society. The vital role of ICTs in this process was well proven at the Platform. ■

Reference

Castells, M. (2003). *The power of identity*. Cambridge: Blackwell.

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