**APrIGF Seoul 2013**

**Workshop Summary Reports**

**(Revised 10 September 2013)**

**Date:** 4 September 2013

**Time:** 2.30-4pm

**Track:** Multi-stakeholder Enhanced Cooperation/Openness/Security/Access

**Workshop Title: A Multi-stakeholder Approach to providing Public Access**

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**Moderators:** Winston Roberts (Senior Advisor, National Library of New Zealand; member of the IFLA Regional Standing Committee for Asia-Oceania)

**Panelists:**

* Ms Susan Chalmers (Policy Lead, Internet New Zealand)
* Assistant Professor Giyeong Kim (Dept. of Library & Information Science, Yonsei University, Seoul)
* Professor John Ure (Executive Director, Asia Internet Coalition)
* Mr Atarino Helieisar (Chief Law Librarian, Supreme Court, Federated States of Micronesia; representing PIALA, the Pacific Islands Association of Libraries, Archives and Musems)
* Ms Valerie Tan (Director of Internet Policy for Asia, Microsoft)

**A brief summary of presentations:**

Susan Chalmers spoke on:

* The vision for public access to the Internet in the WSIS process
* The importance of public access in developing countries
* Public access in the post-2015 WSIS Framework

Giyeong Kim spoke on:

* Public access to the Internet in Korea

John Ure spoke on:

* Regulatory issues affecting public access to the Internet in the region

Atarino Helieisar spoke on:

* The importance of public access to the Internet in remoter islands of the Pacific
* The challenges facing those providing access in the Pacific

Valerie Tan spoke on:

* How the business sector supports public access to the Internet in developing countries in the Asia-Pacific

**A substantive summary and the main issues that were raised:**

Susan Chalmers recalled the ‘Principles’ and Action Plan agreed by the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), in Geneva. She recalled the Action line C3 referring to access to information, and other wording referring to access to information at community level, through such facilities as community centres, schools, post offices and libraries.

She commented that governments clearly have a role in facilitating such access by the public, as many of the facilities for access are developed with public funding and operated under the responsibility of local government authorities.

She noted that in New Zealand, a lot of work has been done across all government departments to facilitate citizens’ digital interaction with government for routine transactions. The current government has declared that access to government information will become ‘digital by default’ by 2017. To make this digital access ‘by default’ a reality for all sectors of the national community, across the digital divide, it will be important to leverage the existing service infrastructure represented by public libraries.

Giyeong Kim noted that in Korea there were 30+ million Internet users already in 2004; yet there was still a digital divide. The 3 main aspects of the question are a) access (marginalised people’s Internet access level is 93.4% of the general public’s), b) ability to use the Internet, and c) use of the Internet (the level of digital skills and use of marginalised people is about 56% in 2012).

It is recognized that cooperation between government and community is necessary for the development and implementation of programmes to promote digital information literacy.

The Korean Information Act is administered by the Ministry of Science, ICT and Future Planning; but it is the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism which is responsible for policy for public libraries. Clearly, effective national public access to the Internet through publicly-funded facilities depends to some extent on effective cooperation between different agencies, and policy ‘silos’ may work against this.

John Ure showed a brief Powerpoint presentation on the work of the AIC. (This PPT is available at: <http://trpc.biz/asia-pacific-regional-internet-global-forum/>.)

Prof. Ure commented on regulatory issues, noting that governments may adopt one of three possible positions:

* They may act (regulate) to maintain the status quo;
* They may be pragmatic and allow the Internet to develop in order to “see what works and what doesn’t work”;
* Or they may be proactive in promoting the development of access to the Internet.

Prof Ure noted that the outcome of the ITU World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT) in December 2012 was regrettable: it meant that governments could claim to have an encroaching role in the development of the Internet. This threatens the International Telecommunication Regulations (ITRs), and the whole multi-stakeholder approach. (In fact Prof Ure quoted with approval the speaker at the Opening Plenary of the APrIGF who called the process a ‘multi-EQUAL- stakeholder’ approach.) The not-so-well hidden intention of some governments to claim a greater role implies in fact that they want to be more than equal. Not so much a stakeholder model as a shareholder model in which some shareholders have more shares or preferential shares.

Prof Ure noted that we are moving away from a *linear* society to an interconnected *non-linear* society, and governments must adapt to that. Governments should not try to apply off-line regulations that arose from a top-down ‘mass consumption, mass communications’ linear society to the emerging non-linear horizontally- as well as vertically-interconnected society of the Internet. They just won’t work.

In answer to a question on regulatory barriers to public access to the Internet, Prof Ure noted that ‘white space’ in the spectrum was available for use.

Atarino Helieisar noted that in the Pacific island states access to the Internet, and also television, is limited, even with satellites. Public access is subject to geographical factors (great distances) and environmental factors (such as high humidity). On the other hand there is a proliferation of mobile phones.

There are public libraries which serve as community centres, providing Internet access free to those who can’t afford it in their homes. These facilities serve all ages, from school children to senior citizens. Pacific islanders consider public libraries as important, and the Internet as a lifeline.

With respect to support from business for public access to the Internet, Valerie Tan noted that Microsoft had been leading research on cognitive radio technology and the use of TV ‘white spaces’ (TVWS) – this sharing of the spectrum was being trialled by Singapore, and similar discussions are ongoing with Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines to promote affordable access using TVWS technology. Ms Tan noted that the topic of access itself raised issues around net neutrality which should, from a policy perspective, start with a general prohibition on the blocking of legal content, applications and services.

The panelists agreed that public library services did support the achievement of development goals, through support for education (for school-aged students and older people engaged in life-long learning), and the delivery of health and welfare information. It was also agreed that public libraries had a role to play not only in delivering Internet access but also in promoting the acquisition of the skills to use it – that is the digital literacy required for citizens to function effectively as members of society. This digital literacy was required not only to surf the Internet directly, but also to deal with e-resources for education, and to understand how to handle new technology and software (such as e-readers and e-books).

The moderator noted that in New Zealand high-level discussions were taking place on the developing role of public libraries as ‘community digital hubs’ and how this development might be encouraged and promoted by government at central and local levels, for public policy reasons.

Questions and comments to the panel from members of the audience came from:

* Gunela Astbrink (GSA InfoComm, Australia)
* Dan McGarry (Pacific Institute of Public Policy, Vanuatu)
* Alfred Wu (Singapore Management University)

These comments dealt with practical questions affecting the operation of community centres for access to the Internet in various countries of the region, and the sharing of spectrum (white space). They also discussed the importance of consultation within the community and explaining and advocating to the authorities for public access at community level.

**Conclusion & Further Comments:**

Just as the workshop was closing, Mr Indriyatno Banyumurti (ID-CONFIG, Indonesia) observed that Indonesia has built “5000 rural telecentres, and not all of them were operating properly”. He asked what the reasons for that might be.

The moderator replied that such a question goes to the heart of the issues being discussed – what public access means, how it should be delivered, who should be responsible for it - but the question should be posed at the start of the discussion, not the end. He recommended to APrIGF that this question should be forwarded to the IGF for further exploration in a workshop at the forthcoming IGF meeting in Bali.