fast facts

Project: Internet Rights Are Women's Rights
Lead Organization: Point of View (POV)
Country: India
Budget: 19,686.00 AUD

situation
It is well-known that there is a gender gap in internet access in use, but there is also a gender gap in how the internet is understood and shaped by social pressures. While women in India use the internet in their daily lives and can outnumber men on social networking sites, women’s voices are disproportionately absent in shaping and defining internet rights and internet governance. This is due to the fact most women do not understand that many “offline” rights also apply “online” – or should. Cyber stalking and online sexual harassment, for example, are issues many women face online that create an online environment that is neither equitable nor just for women.

solution
More and more women around the globe are users and consumers of the internet - but women’s voices are critically absent in shaping and defining the ways in which the internet is used. In India, the world’s largest democracy, it is critical to demonstrate that internet rights are women’s rights and to bridge this gap by collaborating with partners who are active in both policy arenas. To this end, this effort supports increasing the technical capacity and advocacy skills of gender rights activists and organizations, while bringing gender to the forefront of the attention of internet rights activists and policy makers.

If we consider the internet to be a public good, with open content and access as a right, women should have full and equal access. Likewise, if we consider the internet a democratic space, women need to be able to participate as equal citizens in this democracy. These principles need to be communicated to women so that all women, and men, understand that there is no gap between “Internet rights” and “Women’s rights”. Apart from a small minority of activists affiliated with various rights movements, there is an acute lack of awareness that people, especially women, have rights on the internet. This means that most women use the internet in ways that are less than equitable, and will continue to do so and open themselves up to threats against their liberty, unless made aware of their rights. The understanding of internet rights needs to expand not just for the sake of women, but so that we are able to enjoy an internet that is inclusive, just and has respect for human rights.

To accomplish that, this project aims to:

• To build a dynamic network made up of researchers, activists, policy advocates and members of the technical community working on sexual rights and women’s rights to take collaborative action for advocacy, strategizing, research, support and response. This will support greater engagement and participation of gender/sexual rights activists in the area of internet rights and regulation by facilitating information exchange, knowledge sharing, discussions and strategizing for collaborative action.

• To develop a monitoring platform on threats, regulation of online sexual content and practices, and to assess the role and value of the internet that is potentially impacted by these measures. This will render visible the specific threats and challenges faced by individuals and organizations working on gender/sexual rights in their ability to use the internet in their work, which will in turn, inform strategies on democratizing internet use and governance.

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• To make users of the internet, especially women, aware of internet rights and of the relationship between women's rights, sexual rights and internet rights.

Our strategy to build this network and strengthen the capacity of activists consists of two platforms, a website on gender, sexuality and the internet (www.eroticsindia.org), and a series of city-level workshops held in collaboration is partner organizations. The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) is our global partner on this project, and is able to help us expand our reach by facilitating our participation in such global meetings as the internet Governance Forum. We are also collaborating with the internet Democracy Project, Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action, and local gender and internet partners in Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai and Kolkata. The first workshop was held in Mumbai in November, 2013 and can be viewed at http://eroticsindia.org/category/connect-your-rights/mumbai/.

broader impact

We believe that the networks this project will create and sustain include the following stakeholders, both in India and globally: gender rights activists, sexual rights activists, internet rights activists, media and journalists covering technology or gender, policymakers and non-profit organizations working on gender, sexuality or internet rights, technical communities working on internet policy and development, and all internet users as eventual beneficiaries of a more just internet. All these constituencies will be able to use the findings of this project to broaden and deepen their own understanding of the intersections between gender, sexuality and the internet, and to build informal networks that advocate for policy change on these issues. To support this larger outreach effort, we have developed http://www.eroticsindia.org as one of the project’s key outputs and networking strategy.

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