A REFLECTION ON CIPESA'S FORUM

KAMPALA, UGANDA

28-29 September 2015

Acknowledgement:

Many thanks to the Collaboration of International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa **(CIPESA)** and partners for implementing the idea of having a forum on internet freedom in East Africa 2015. Through this forum, more than 60 speakers from more than five countries met in 13 different panels to discuss and share their experiences from their respective countries and beyond.

As for me, I have learnt a lot from my fellow panellists discussing about the role of creative expression online. It was a nice platform to hear what other countries are doing in advocating for favourable policies which promote freedom of expression and relate with the situation in Tanzania. From the feedback I got from the audience who came to attend our session, they were happy to hear what measures are we taking as artists and as an organization (CDEA) in promoting creative expression online.

All in all, it was a space to learn, share experience, meet new partners, network and grow!

LESSONS LEARNT

- **PLATFORM TO NETWORK**

CIPESA's forum on internet freedom was a platform where different people from Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia and others from Europe as well as Latin America came to Kampala and make new connections. By networking with people from those places, I got a chance to create new connections and develop projects.

PHOTO: Naamala Samson (Tanzania) and Herman Kabubi (Uganda) during FIFEA 2015.

- **THE IMPORTANCE OF INVOLVING THE GOVERNMENT**

  In this year's FIFEA I have learnt that it is important, very important indeed, to involve the government so that they know different efforts done by stakeholders in ICT sector. Many governments especially in Africa, they are seen as not supportive when it comes to the issue of discussing about human rights like the right to freedom of expression.

  Ugandan government supported the forum and above all celebrated the International day of freedom of speech and also launched the report on internet freedom in Uganda. By these two activities, I see a brighter future if the government will keep on supporting these great initiatives done by organizations.

  If the situation will be as what I have seen in FIFEA, it will change the whole idea of the government to be seen as a threat to people who shares their ideas and express their thoughts online.

- **SEE EAC IN PRACTICE**

  Most of the events, be it a workshop, training, festival or just a forum, are called *"East Africa"* but in reality participants are from one or just two countries! BUT this forum made it possible to see East African Community (EAC) in practice by making sure that all 5 countries are represented.

  Good enough, there were even people from Somalia, Ethiopia and beyond. This was a very good initiative to connect people from different places and sectors in discussing about internet freedom.

- **POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

  This forum indeed showed how powerful is the internet in giving a room for people to discuss openly and exchange ideas about different things around the right to express someone's thoughts. It was a space for FIFEA's participants to engage other people outside the conference room through hashtags and CIPESA's social networks.

  The accounts **@opennetafrica @cipesaug** and hashtags #**FIFEA** (being a primary one) and **#InternetFreedom** (used as a secondary) were trending as one among the top three trends in East Africa during those two days especially in twitter.

  After the conference, it was a very good idea to post videos on youtube so that other people from allover the world can see what was discussed and the resolutions made.

- **TIME MANAGEMENT AND TEAM WORK**

  Having a well coordinated team, it was observed very clearly -*even before the conference during the preparations*- that CIPESA has got the best team in planning and other logistics. During the event, things were moving very fast but the team was very organized in making all arrangements go smoothly and timely.

  Apart from learning about internet freedom, I have learnt how to manage stress, team work and the power of communication in ensuring that things are conducted according to the time allocated and being flexible when needed to do so.

- **PUBLICATIONS**

  It was a very good idea to make sure that participants get enough publications concerning the conference and other related policies and activities that are conducted in different parts of the world. Publications such as reports can be used in conducting other researches on internet freedom and citizens' participation in airing their views on what they want to see in their respective countries.

AREAS TO IMPROVE

- **DOCUMENTARIES IN BETWEEN BREAKS**

During the conference, there were some breaks which could be used effectively to learn related issues by using different tools of learning. Organizers could come up with just two short documentaries or short films on how to promote internet freedom. By doing so, participants can be not just listening to presentations and discussions but also watch something and gain some new skills and knowledge.

 For example, there is a documentary about the activism through music and internet titled "*CHANJO YA RUSHWA/Vaccination against corruption*" by a Tanzanian musician called Vitali Maembe, which could be screened and provoke discussion after that. I am sure participants could learn something new.

- **FLASH WITH DOCUMENTS**

It was a good idea to give the participants booklets and other publications, YES! But it could be a better idea to put PowerPoint presentations, handouts, summary of what was discussed in different sessions in ONE flash disk drive.

On the other hand, the use of flash disks could save a lot of money which were used to print papers and save energy as well!

CONCLUSION

All in all, FIFEA was one of its kind and I see the sustainability of it because of having support from the government and other stakeholders who are promoting freedom of expression not only online but offline as well.