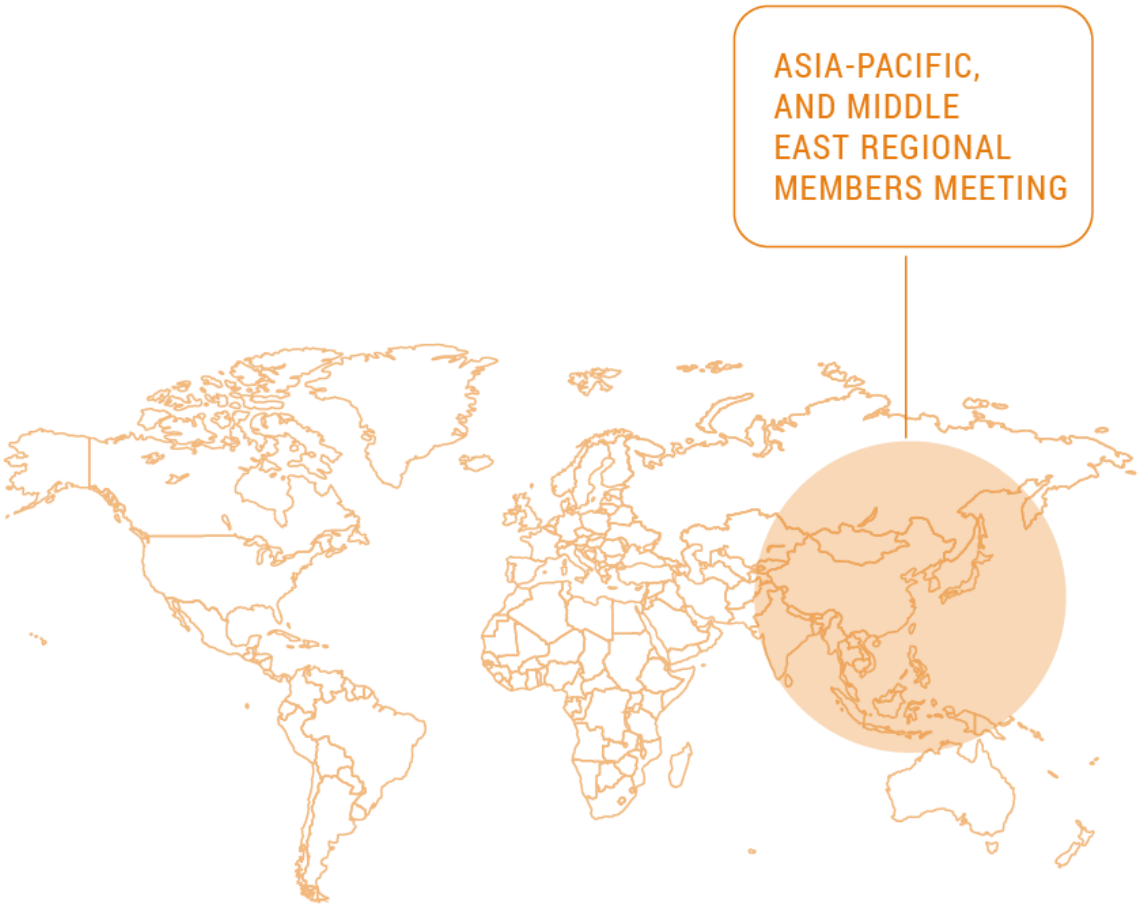
More highlights from day 1



APC Asia regional meeting

The Asia regional meeting, facilitated by APC's Pavitra Ramanujam, commenced our Member Convening with a richly interweaving discussion between both older members and newer ones, including one who recently reconnected with the network after a long gap. The members and staff present explored some of the key areas we should all be looking at in the region as well as how the APC network members can help each other, what is the role of a regional network and opportunities for collective collaboration.

Given how significantly the digital landscape has shifted in the last year, some of the key areas that members highlighted for the coming future were the value of raising public and government consciousness on digital encryption as well as technology’s impact – both good and bad – on democratic processes like elections. One participant questioned if encryption and privacy should go hand in hand since they find “there is an erosion of what right to privacy is, [and it’s] talked about as having something to hide instead of as the right to choose what to share when and with whom.”

Members brought up tech-enabled anti-democratic trends in their countries like India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Australia. A common thread was how governments have used the COVID-19 pandemic to shrink civic space and increase citizen surveillance. Bangladesh has implemented the draconian Digital Security Act, while in Nepal there are concerns about how those in power might use the ongoing census in upcoming elections next year.

One participant praised Body & Data's recent report that was unique in the region in how it analysed trends in internet use in Nepal and recommended how to build a more inclusive, tolerant and feminist internet, and highlighted APC's own Internet Rules workshop to make digital laws and policies more accessible. In general, participants agreed that legislators automatically seek more regulation in times of any crisis, and our network must create resistance against this urge.

From Australia to India, one common concern that emerged was the rapid rise of digital misinformation and its misuse by political actors, on subjects from climate change to COVID-19 vaccines. "It takes more effort to disprove something than to make something up," is how one member put it. There is a compounding effect here: not only does misinformation mislead citizens, it is also used by governments to push for more surveillance laws – to ostensibly crack down on bad actors spreading the misinformation. And there is the extra wrinkle of how right-wing and anti-democratic groups often exploit and migrate to privacy-protected tools like Telegram to continue their operations.

One key question that was raised was whether organisations feel there are sufficient resources and legal support for themselves when needed. One participant pointed out that even when they get legal aid, it's still hard to find good lawyers who don't work with a protectionist lens. Another challenge that several participants noted was that while they often try to engage with digital policies and laws, they often don't know how to work on them in a long-term way. One interesting response was how "in terms of study and research purpose, the laws are accessible, although the language is not much friendly for commons." There is the issue of how to address digital platforms and their vast lobbying efforts, given the monopolised industry where, according to APC columnist David Souter, "China and the United States have 90% of market capitalisation in the 70 largest digital platforms. Africa and Latin America between them have just 1%." And one member emphasised that a key priority for the APC network should be how to offer technical support for secure communications with people inside repressive countries like China and Hong Kong.

The final point that members roundly agreed upon was the need to navigate language issues across Asia. Currently, many feel they work in their own silos due to language barriers in the region. While the internet is global, citizens in countries like Japan only access Japanese-language information, creating an information bias. Ideas for clearing language barriers included human translation (expensive), creative alternatives to Google Translate like DeepL, and exploring real-time CC and transcription tools.

The session ended with the open question of how the APC network can engage more deeply with the Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum (APrIGF), including perhaps even hosting it in the future and creating more opportunities for connections and impactful engagements with each other.



APC Africa regional meeting

During the APC Africa regional meeting, members and staff in the region reconnected with each other and explored the value that they derive from being a member of the regional network, and also validated its importance and its place in APC and in the wider movement. Some of the points discussed in open plenary revolved around the connected/disconnected and the gaps African members see between APC priorities vs their own priorities in the region; what are the challenges that African members face in engaging at global and national level; and finally, what sort of capacity building, support, training or mentorship they think would facilitate their engagement.

With facilitation by Poncelet Ileleji from The Gambia YMCAs Computer Training Centre & Digital Studio and Koliwe Majama, APC's AfDec coordinator and AfriSIG organiser based in Zimbabwe, each participant introduced themselves and then moves into a very fruitful conversation around the gaps that African members see could be addressed to enable and foster a greater engagement with APC priorities in general and the priorities in the region.

The nature, the frequency and the spaces for communications about what the members and APC staff are doing in the African region was one of the identified gaps.

Although there was agreement that the larger membership list is very active in sharing what is happening broadly, and even in the African region, the emphasis was put on finding ways to make

the Africa members list much more active, as well as to use it to activate issues that are specific and relevant for the African members.

Some of the themes in which the members and staff expressed particular interest in knowing more about, were digital safety, environmental sustainability and digital inclusion on the continent. There was also a suggestion to have someone to write the history of APC members and work in Africa!

Meeting opportunities were also raised as an important way of communicating with each other. There was an acknowledgement that members in the region do not have many opportunities to meet, and there were suggestions to hold quarterly online meetings to learn more about each other, to share experiences in a more timely manner, and to address possible avenues for members' engagement in APC's areas of work within Africa but also in relation to global spaces. Informative sessions around "What is APC doing in these areas" was another suggestion made during the regional meeting.

To develop webinars on common themes among African members was proposed as another concrete format to update each other on developments related to shared priorities and to exchange knowledge. One suggestion was to have a webinar with KICTANet unpacking the recently announced experience with the Communications Authority in Kenya (CA) which formulated a Licensing and Shared Spectrum Framework for Community Networks with contributions from KICTANet, the entire community, and other partners like APC and the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow and Scotland, with support from the United Kingdom's Digital Access Programme. Another example was to hold feminist learning circles for African members, as it is being done more broadly in the APC network.

Another example of expertise and experience sharing opportunities mentioned was the case of the collaboration between Zenzeleni and Computer Aid who deployed a solar learning lab, as well as the experience from Zenzeleni and CITAD on cultivating the relationship with regulators in African countries.

"The expertise is there, people are doing different things. For me the question is more how can we collaborate in the areas in common, how can we have more members involved in APC programmes and have their expertise strengthened?" one member emphasised.

Capacity building was another need expressed by the participants in the African members meeting. Peer-to-peer skills sharing or mentoring learning between members were some of the proposals brought by the members.

It was suggested to ask regional members for their ideas and needs and to then offer some periodic trainings, whether at the above-mentioned members' meetings or also pegged to other activities that the members are developing in the region. "For instance, if a member produces a research report on a topical issue of interest to many members, we may consider having a capacity development event around that," suggested one of the participants.

Making sure that there is continuity in these capacity buildings was flagged as an important factor, in the sense that even if the project that a particular training was linked to came to an end, the

area of interest remains and the capacity building needs persist and/or grow, as for example in the case of secure online communications.

The value of coming together as African members was reiterated, not only to strengthen the connections within the region, but also to become more strategic when engaging and advocating in global spaces as Africans.

“Sometimes there is no recognition between members of the power that comes from collaborating regionally or subregionally. When you look at the African IGF it becomes difficult to share your stories and not everyone can attend due to connectivity. When it comes to African advocating on the global level, we don't have enough to take to the table and present as a wholesome African position because the interaction inside the region is quite limited,” was said.

Coupling the APC members' meeting with other events taking place was deemed as a good idea, as besides such events subsidising costs of attendance, they also help members with learning and networking with a wider community, as was the case of the members' meeting at FIFAfrica in Accra in 2018.



APC Europe regional meeting

The Europe regional meeting was an opportunity for members to re-connect with each other, explore shared priorities and validate the importance of our regional network. What is the relevance and purpose of the European member region within the APC network? What are European members' priority issues? How do member priorities intersect with one another and with APC?, were the questions that framed the meeting, facilitated by Rozi Bakó of Romania-based member Strawberrynet Foundation.

In terms of the issues and priorities members address through their work in Europe, environmental sustainability was repeatedly raised as a central issue. "It's uplifting to know APC is so invested in this issue in such a structured, open and participatory way, as the GISWatch 2020 edition and the Guide to the circular economy of digital devices evidence. This has led me to be more involved with APC than in previous years," one of the participants said.

Ethical aspects were mentioned as key to building infrastructure from a climate justice perspective. "How can we all go from being consumers to being responsible for our own infrastructure, and what ethical aspects should we keep in mind?"

The pandemic and post-pandemic context were very present in the discussion. How can APC and members use all this infrastructure to stay together at a time when it's key to stay "closer than ever"? Subgranting was mentioned as one of the strategies. "APC is working with members early in the design stages of projects, through participatory processes, and we keep thinking of ways to bring members together, create bridges and network connections." The need to document our work and how to use the tools we offer to break isolation was also highlighted.

Regarding the challenges APC members face in their different contexts, disinformation was raised as a key issue. Climate change and its impact on women's rights, migrants and refugee rights were also presented as a big concern, particularly in a context of increasing division and exclusion within the European borders.

Scarcity of resources and the need to prepare for a future where less energy will be available were also highlighted. "We've reached a diesel peak, there's more and more dependence on China, we'll have less energy in the future. The situation will change in the coming years, so how can we prepare ourselves to use less energy?"

The need to involve young people and connect with them was raised as a key, cross-cutting issue to address all these challenges.



APC LAC and North America regional meeting

Our day 1 ended with the regional meetings for the Americas, where members from the Latin America-Caribbean (LAC) and North America subregions reconnected and reflected together on the common challenges faced and the opportunities for collaboration to strengthen the impact of our collective actions. Although it was initially planned to have two parallel meetings taking place - one for LAC and another for North America - and then bring the two groups together to explore regional connections, the low numbers of North American members saw the two meetings being merged from the beginning, highlighting the necessity of network cooperation across the broader region.

Facilitated by Julián Casasbuenas, director of APC member in Colombia, Colnodo, Valeria Betancourt, APC's Communications and Information Policy Programme manager, and Jaime Villarreal from May First, the participants shared their thoughts and experiences in relation to questions like: What would your organisation need to be more effective and which challenges are you struggling with to do your work effectively?

It was a consensus that the multilayered impacts of the pandemic brought new contours to the challenges faced. The work overload, a combination of remote work and domestic and care work, which falls mostly on women's shoulders, volatility in the organisation's teams and the need to constantly respond to emergencies were some of the challenges mentioned by members. The impact on the communities and social movements that the organisations work with in the region was also greatly felt and most of them are also struggling with similar challenges at the organisational level. They indicated, in turn, the need for investment in human resources, better planning of financial resources, participatory institutional planning processes, prioritisation and organisational strengthening as important measures to be amplified in this context.

Looking at the external context, participants agreed that the emerging barriers there were also hard to face. To mention some of them: Participation in regional and global internet policy processes has become more complex due to the adoption of online models. The dissemination of the work being done in a way that influences the public discussions on technology and human rights is not always easy and sometimes it is challenging for the regional perspectives to influence the global agenda. Meanwhile, authoritarian measures and practices underpinned by digital technologies have increased, and the consolidation of the power of large internet corporations and far-right initiatives challenge human rights on the internet every day.

The combination of internal and external challenges in the pandemic was acknowledged as a heavy burden. "A major challenge is the diversity of challenges and the breadth of issues. It is very necessary to focus," one member summarised. Increasing the collaboration among the organisations in the region also emerged as key to increasing effectiveness and slowing down the overload in the face of such challenges. How cooperation is established, however, was pointed out as a very important issue since it can mean extra work and extra burden if not built strategically and based on trust and care relationships.

How can we cooperate more? How can we avoid duplicating our work? Are we calling the same constituencies to attend separate events or activities that could be done together? When can we establish linkages and synergies between the members in the two sub-regions? What value does the APC network have or could have for this intercontinental intervention? With those questions on the table, on the one hand the members explored some initial ideas on how to face creatively and effectively the need to internationalise our impact. On the other hand, they also explored ways to strengthen the organisational capacity and actions at the local level.

As a way to move forward, the member convening was pointed to as an opportunity to learn from each other and identify synergies. It was emphasised that we should keep in mind the need to find ways of cooperation during this week and to continue the conversation afterwards, taking advantage of the spaces being created. In the words of one member, we should let people "know what we are doing and use the communication channels available through APC." Hopefully, this will lead to concrete steps to formulate one joint activity of the Latin American organisations by 2022. It was said that we can start small "but have a concrete plan and a broad process in a way that it is an additional support and not additional work for the organisations." It was also noted that "the concrete work helps to materialise the network, to create the links, the trust and the processes needed to tackle the bigger projects."

Finally, it was flagged that these next steps could be built on top of existing collaboration experiences and opportunities. Concrete examples were shared, such as the possibility of members presenting joint propositions to APC subgrants, as well as considering the opportunity to build projects together when there are open calls, as this can lead to close collaboration in the project implementation. The example of the cooperation between APC member in Costa Rica, Sulá Batsú, and Colnodo in Colombia, as part of a consortiumon working with digital appropriation in Central America, Bolivia and Colombia (https://apropiacion.digital/) was mentioned as a concrete example for APC to think about as part of its efforts to encourage this type of initiative among members. "Let's reflect on what we have worked on in the past, but also look to the future," highlighted one of the facilitators.

POP-UP - Film screening and discussion: The Offensive Internet

APC member EngageMedia worked with Asia-Pacific filmmakers to produce short films on digital rights issues to be included in the Tech Tales film collection. These films employ various storytelling forms and tools, from narrative fiction, documentary format to animation. This was the first of some screenings of the Tech Tales films during the APC Member Convening.

Yihwen “Wen” Chen is a Malaysian documentary filmmaker and journalist whose documentary on female circumcision won the 2019 Society of Publishers in Asia (SOPA) Award for Excellence in Reporting Women’s Issues. She is also a Pulitzer Center grantee. Wen presented her animated documentary film "The Offensive Internet" today. The film recounts how Malaysian authorities have targeted, intimidated and harassed South China Morning Post journalist Tashny Sukumaran and veteran cartoonist Zunar for doing their jobs – holding the powerful accountable. Both not only recount their harassment but also describe why they choose to continue their important work.

There was a lot of applause for the film after the screening, with many appreciating both the lyrical imagery and powerful documentation of how the government is hounding critics. The actions against Sukumaran and Zunar have been justified by the Malaysian government under Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act, and one participant commented that the film resonated a lot for him because in his country, the government is considering passing a new law that allows authorities to prosecute internet users who criticise the government.

Wen told an anecdote about the filmmaking process: she had planned to film the people in the film, but due to the pandemic and lockdowns she ended up sending microphones to them for recording the interviews remotely and ended up creating an animation film. She also described how she has connected to other artists across Southeast Asia through film projects, especially on freedom of expression and human rights, through EngageMedia’s initiative. And she urged everyone to support Zunar's works at www.zunar.my. One participant even suggested that we should all buy Zunar's products as Christmas presents!

Go back to read the rest of the Dish of the day!

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