Public Interest Registry's .NGO initiative and DEF brings eNGO program to Empower Grassroots Organizations with ICT and .ORG presence & Building support for .NGO gTLD

The Report on the eNGO Summit at 8th Manthan Award & Digital Festival for Development on 1nd December, 2011

Organised by

Digital Empowerment Foundation
www.defindia.net

&

Public Interest Registry

http://www.pir.org

A. INTRODUCTION

Digital Empowerment Foundation and the Public Interest Registry organized the eNGO Summit at the on 1 December 2011 under the umbrella of 8th Manthan Award & Digital Festival for Development with a mission to empower grassroots development organization and to make information communication enabled, while providing free website service and hosting solutions. The half-day Summit-cum-Workshop provided a platform to grassroots organizations and stakeholders to share their experiences, learnings, challenges, and solutions.

The Summit was focused on the DEF&PIR's eNGO Project that aims to provide web enabled facility designed by Digital Empowerment Foundation for grassroots civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with a core objective to empower these groups with web and Internet technology and to create a platform for outreach and networking.

B. PROJECT BACKGROUND

The voluntary segment in India has been prominent since the post independence days. However, these groups achieved a status of "non-governmental organization" (NGO) only in the 1980s. NGOs have had a huge role to play in India's democratic functioning of the society by means of aiding Government agencies in addressing grassroots level issues or by bridging gaps in various development aspects of the society. Hence, these bodies come second in line to the government in terms of possessing huge amounts of information laying in the bottom most segment of the society.

India is home to more than 3.3 million NGOs, Self-help groups and other such units. However, more than 70% of them do not have a virtual face despite doing substantial ground work and having huge repository of information and content probably due to lack of funds, lack of accessibility to resources and lack of awareness. Most of the NGOs working at the grassroots level thus remain unknown and do not earn the appreciation and benefit coming from sources that can provide tremendous energy to them. This anonymity might have been caused for reasons like lack of finance, expertise and foresight.

Being a not-for-profit organization and to address these challenges, Digital Empowerment Foundation conceptualized the eNGO programme in 2009 with a support from the National Internet Exchange of India (NiXi) to provide web-enabled facility in .IN domain name for civil society and non-governmental organizations working at grassroots level to harness the power of modern information and communication technologies to help in dissemination of information, reach out to a wider audience and overall help achieve a holistic ICT integrated development in the communities served by these organizations.

Through the eNGO national programme, the effort will be to enable maximum number of organizations find a virtual identity and be visible online for national and global audience.

The "eNGO" program since its inception has seen over 150 NGOs across 12 states that include Assam, Meghalaya, Bihar, Rajasthan, Kerala, Punjab, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana registering and creating the much needed virtual presence and identity that has been lacking for these entities owing to lack of funds or awareness.

C. SUMMIT PREAMBLE

In order to support these grassroots organizations, and civil society groups, DEF in late 2011, partnered with the Public Interest Registry (PIR) for .NGO initiative which will help these organizations to have their domain name in .NGO. The eNGO project has already been in a process to be implemented in Asia wide and now it is all set to expand to Africa. DEF and .NGO are working to get the ecosystem of NGO information online, not just in India but around the globe. The eNGO program expects that a network of NGO's will strengthen one another and use ICT tools to leapfrog the development cycle.

At the eNGO Summit, the issues around going digital for NGOs and why it is necessary and also what would be challenges of .NGO gTLD were discussed. The Summit also shared the experiences of NGOs who have supported this initiative.

D. PARTNERS AND ORGANIZERS

__About DEF:__ Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), a Delhi based not-for-profit organization, registered under Societies Act XXI of 1860 in the year 2002, working with a mission to create economic and commercial viability using means of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT). Since its inception in December 2002, DEF has engaged itself into number of activities while pursuing its mission and objectives of ICT delivery and promotion in India.

__About PIR:__ The Public Interest Registry, a non-profit, promoted by the Internet Society, is the operator of the world's third largest generic top level domain **.**ORG and maintains the database of all **.**ORG domain names.

E. SESSION FOCUS

- Use of ICT tools and Internet to expand the reach of NGOs
- How NGOs can build and leverage Internet presence
- To explore best practices and multi stakeholder collaboration

– Sharing and showcasing of success stories of NGOs who have excelled with ICT & Internet presence

The Summit was structured in a form of discussion platform for civil society groups, policy makers, private stakeholders, grassroots organizations, etc. The summit started with an overview of the project and how eNGO project helped the grassroots organizations to mark their presence in virtual world. The Summit also shared experiences and success stories from the ground level emphasizing on challenges like the issue of lack of content and services and benefits of eNGO domain name in virtual world.

F. SPEAKERS

a. Chair & Keynote
– Mr. Brain Cute, CEO, Public Interest Registry (PIR)

b. Co-Chair & Keynote
– Ms. Nandita Chatterjee, Deputy Director General, CAPART

c. Moderator
– Mr. Osama Manzar, Founder & Director, Digital Empowerment Foundation

d. Key Speakers
– Mr. Amitabh Singhal, Director, Telxess Consulting Services (Pvt.) Ltd & Board Member at Public Interest Registry
– Mr. Rajen Varada, Founder & Director, Technology for the People (TFTP)
– Dr Arun Chandan, Executive Director, Mountain Forum Himalayas (MFH)
– Mr. Kamaljeet, Director, Srishti Gyan Kendra, Rohtak, Haryana
– Dr. Rajnikant Diwedi, Founder, HWA, Varanasi, UP

e. NGO Case Representations
– Mr. Rameshwar Prasad, Founder, Alok Sanstha, West Champaran, Bihar
– Mr. Devendra Singh Bhadauria, Director, IDAF, Kanpur, UP
– Mr. Rajendra Negi, Director, Henvalvani, Tehri, Uttarakhand
– Mr. Vibhuti Narain Rao, Director, Akhil Bhartiya Jan Kalyan Parishad

G. SUMMIT BYTES

The Summit focused on the recently open gTLD by ICANN and how .NGO domain name could be one of the most aspiring destinations for NGO and community based organizations. The session also highlighted how .NGO domain name could benefit grassroots organizations in marking their presence in virtual world. This session discussed how DEF & PIR have been empowering grassroots organizations with .NGO

domain name in subcontinent, who are proactively looking for .NGO gTLD. The session aimed to maximize the adoption of Internet and related tools for empowering grassroots organizations. The Summit started with the sharing experiences of five best NGOs and grassroots organizations that have supported for the eNGO programme.

1) Mr. Rajen Varada, Founder & Director, Technology for the People (TFTP)

Mr. Varada shared his experience of being part of eNGO initiative and the challenges they faced while implementing the eNGO programme in Karnataka. At Karanataka, literacy and ICT practice were not the issues. He added that the main problem was to connect NGOs with this program because of geographical constraints and they had to go to different villages to explain the concept of eNGO. Further, he emphasized on how eNGO programme is important for such grassroots organizations and now more and more NGOs are showering support to the program. He highlighted what is important in this programme is to realize these organizations that virtual presence is as important as working in grassroots regions of the country and to take the ownership of their website, so that they could share their challenges and experiences of working on the ground.

2) Mr. Kamaljeet, Director, Srishti Gyan Kendra, Rohtak, Haryana

Sharing his experiences of the eNGO workshops organized in Haryana & Punjab, Mr. Kamaljeet when the NGOs were shown the advantages in maintenance cost they were readily and happily associated themselves with the workshop. Mr. Kamaljeet emphasized the cost-effective features of eNGO programme. In any corporate, the website designing cost around Rs. 50,000 and for making e-mail id it costs Rs. 200-300 per e-mail id, whereas this eNGO programme give 50 e-mail Ids free as package along with free-website designing and content uploading for the first time. Moreover, this programme also provides training and capacity skills to maintain the website. He also highlighted the issues about authentication, certification, issues of right and handling the website.

3) Dr. Rajnikant Diwedi, Founder, HWA, Varanasi, UP

Dr. Rajnikant, shared his hands-on experience with NGOs that these grassroots organizations have been facing the issues of designing and maintaining their website as they cannot afford to pay high-cost price of around Rs. 20,000-25,000 for designing their website. He pointed out that local NGOs own local assets of knowledge and the local assets of content. Thus, it becomes extremely important to showcase and share their knowledge base and content in terms of traditional knowledge and cultural information as it is significant to share the knowledge and information to the world. The eNGO programme is very simple to use with given separate login ID and password & training for regular updating within the same cost. Thus, it gives a freedom to all

grassroots organizations and civil society groups to manage their website on their own and share their knowledge and information by putting them online.

4) Mr. Amitabh Singhal, Director, Telxess Consulting Services (Pvt.) Ltd & Board Member at Public Interest Registry

Mr. Singhal elaborated on the range of services offered by DEF and PIR (.ORG) under eNGO programme. Further, he added that it consists of website, content development, domain name & training workshop under one umbrella. Giving an overview of the project, he explained initially, under eNGO programme, DEF & PIR planned to organize 5 workshops but after receiving overwhelming responses from these grassroots organisations, now both organisations already organized 8 workshops this year and will also be organizing 2 more workshops. The best thing about eNGO is that it bridges the gap between NGOs and the funders. By showcasing their works on websites NGOs can attract direct and indirect funding. He urged NGOs to take advantage of the workshops as it is the best way to empower NGOs.

After receiving awe-inspiring response in India, DEF & PIR would like to continue this programme in year 2012 as well. Moreover, the programme will now be extended to Africa, particularly in Nigeria in order to connect and provide grassroots NGOs with websites as well.

5) Dr. Yudhbir Singh Khyalia, Deputy Commissioner, Sirsa

Dr. Singh shared his experience that how voluntary blood donation website helped on facilitating collecting the number of blood donors and the impact of campaign programmes. Initially, when the campaign started, the donor groups were concentrated in one area but once the website was developed and shared by donor community members among people, it immediately spread across among the donor community. The digital platform provided a medium to share the information immediately and same time see the impact on an immediate basis.

Another initiative, farmers of Haryana created a website that gives information about usage of fertilizers in order prevent soil degradation in Haryana district. This presents an incredible effort by a group of around 30 farmers, the entire website was created by the farmers themselves, website contains knowledge on how to not use fertilizers and still safe your farms or not hurt them forever, it's a grassroots knowledge, which they have developed and have shared with the block in local language despite the fact that they are all illiterate.

6) Ms. Nandita Chatterjee, Deputy Director General, CAPART

Ms. Chatterjee highlighted over the different domain names available and role of ICANN (Internet Corporation for assigned name and numbers) in regulating these domain names. Further, she explained why website is being important for grassroots organisations and NGOs and how .NGO domain name would help in creating distinct extension for them in virtual world. Today all the NGOs are incorporated with .ORG, this .ORG extension contains organizations which are not NGOs also. Hence, the distinction becomes difficult. She added that .NGO will provide an immediate recognition to the NGOs and when it will be known that to get .Ngo extension an NGO has to pass through a rigorous screening process; one will look up to that NGO with expectations and reliability. This will not only provide recognition to NGOs as the term, 'NGO' is widely acknowledged and distinguishes it from commercial or governmental entities but also give them a platform to show their work and share their challenges and solutions with masses. She highlighted the following major points:

- **Visibility:** It will provide a distinctive identity to the NGOs separating it from commercial and other organizations which are not governmental.
- **Exclusivity:** NGO is no longer confused or taken to be a part of commercial organizational, educational organization or any other organization.
- **Reliability:** The biggest question of reliability will be solved. Issues of accreditation, issues of certification, Date of registration, where the NGO has been registered, and the issue of blacklisting are all taken into consideration while screening process for assigning .NGO extension
- **Opportunities:** It will create a brand of the NGO. The extension will give credibility to the NGO hence facilitating donations and funding.
- **Rank Factor:** A distinct domain name will offer advantages of getting ranked higher in the search engine.
- **Ambiguity:** The issue of spam texting, spam indexing will be resolved

She concluded the session that the eNGO programme will facilitate the whole cycle of content development, website designing, and the domain name .NGO will ensure that they become a very empowered group through the process since it will be widely recognized by big international development organizations, the government or the cooperate sector. Thus, supporting for the .NGO domain will ensure to achieve the ultimate goal of empowering NGOs through ICT.

7) Mr. Brain Cute, CEO, Public Interest Registry (PIR)

Mr. Cute initiated his address by saying that it is not about being present on the internet, but it is about being found on the internet. Mr. Cute highlighted the concept behind preferred to initiate the project, .NGO by PIR is to bring:

1. Element of exclusivity
2. Visibility
3. Accountability
4. Transparency

He informed that because of new Top Level Domain (TLD) coming in year 2013 it is expected that over a 1000 new extensions will be floating in the sea of new domain. The .NGO initiative will provide a closed directory service, if any NGO registers under the .NGO domain name, its contact & other basic information will automatically get inserted in directory. It will be a single place where funders and partners would be able to find a NGO. He also shared that the social media has become an important tool over the internet to get identified and be visible. But NGOs don't have a dedicated team to handle social media 24x7.

He also stressed on adding social media services in the directory services. He informed that PIR has a good source of data and contacts to prevent fake and fraudster NGOs to take advantage of this domain name. By creating a certification filter NGO check will take place. This is a challenging job and efforts are being made to collect as much data and sources of authentic information. He concluded by asking the support of NGOs in certification process if they feel that this new extension will empower the NGOs and promotes accountability, authenticity and visibility.

H. RECOMMENDATIONS

– One of the major recommendations that emerged is a need of creating certain standards to measure the work of an NGO who can apply for free websites under this program; this will help to differentiate genuine NGOs with non active NGOs.
– Presently, all the NGOs are majorly incorporated with .ORG, and at times, this extension name is not necessarily NGO. Hence, it becomes difficult identify these NGOs from other organisations. Thus, it becomes vital to have .NGO domain name specifically for these grassroots organisations.

- Another major recommendation was that each NGO should pass through a meticulous screening process to register with .NGO domain name, so that reliability and authentications of NGOs could also take place at the same.
- There should be a process of certification filter to check NGOs. However, it requires meticulous efforts to collect data and sources of authentic information from different organizations.
- The eNGO workshop consists of four (4) components; ICT Awareness, Website Designing & Content Management, and How ICT will benefit NGOs. The second part of the workshop concentrates on learning how to develop a content that will give the framework. The third procedure us to develop the website in front of the NGO in order to showcase how it is developed. The last procedure is to fourth take a registry by each NGO who wants to do their website their name and their desired web address which they want to use.
- One of the major recommendations is that to develop a model of using social media tools for NGOs.

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