Report of the Dynamic Coalition on Child Online safety at the IGF Nairobi 2011

Chair: Anjan Bose, ECPAT International

Participants: About 45

Members present: ECPAT International, eNACSO, FOSI, ITU, Childnet, Safernet Brazil, UNICEF, Microsoft,

Ministry of ICT Egypt, Foundation for Youth Germany, Safer Internet Project EU, INHOPE

Summary

The forum started with the announcement that the meeting will focus more on issues that had been pressing over the last year and areas where the members have faced challenges including identifying key trends in developing strategies around child protection online. Thus the meeting would not overly emphasise on what the individual agencies do in general as everyone around the table were quite familiar with the work of others.

One key issue that came out which many organizations were investing their resources is digital citizenship and concerns around that. It was argued around the table what digital citizenship means, why it is important and whether even the word digital should be included. Empowerment of children and young people was obviously the strong point but the chair pointed out that it is one of the pillars for strategic intervention and should not dilute the responsibility of concerned stakeholders to play their part in making the online space more protective of children's rights.

Another important element pointed out by the chair was the presence of global experts from different disciplines at the forum , both as members and as participants who could highlight and reflect their personal observations on issues related to child protection online covering areas of global policy making, technical solutions and emerging practices.

One of the new initiatives mentioned was the formation of INHOPE (International Network of Hotlines in Europe) foundation that would support the creation of Internet reporting hotlines in developing countries, where the hotlines would get financial and technical support through INHOPE network. It was also pointed out by FOSI (Family Online Safety Institute) representative the emergence of digital natives in Asia and the growth of Internet in the region that and the work commissioned by World Bank to cater to the new top level domains that are being created in the region with lots of local content.

ITU also reported on the technical work that was taken up by the technical standards committee based on the recommendations by the members of the Child Online Project of ITU.

Another very important new development mentioned by eNACSO representative was the recent developments around ICT principles that bring major Industry partners to agree on a code of of practice, which will set out the principles on which they will deliver a whole range of services to children and young people across each of the 27 Member States within Europe. This has been strongly supported by the Industry as this would allow them to have single reference point of discussion and agreement with the relevant authorities.

The EU wide draft document would soon be ready for discussions and comments by the Industry partners and it is interesting to see how the protection concerns of children online are spelt out in this emerging document.

One important aspect of the above document and the discussions that go along with it is the inclusion of multi stakeholder representatives which includes child rights NGOs, particularly in Europe. The Industry has agreed to cover some of the cost of their participation to have an inclusive view of the issues around child protection online, particularly from those who are directly involved in working with children.

Connectsafely.org representatives shared their opinion on how children should be given more responsibility and empowered to protect themselves as no agency can monitor them 27/7. It was pointed out that partnering with youth and providing them the right skills is more urgently required than patronizing them.

They also identified a shift from the control model to the agency model which plays a very important role in a user driven structure that the Internet is becoming.

The chair prompted the participants from other regions to reflect on the idea of digital citizenship and to comment whether they also agree on similar directions. It was noted that the concept of using Internet in every aspect of one's life particularly in education for young people of very young age is gaining ground and from a closed environment becoming much more widely accepted and open format. One thing that was agreed by all speakers is the children are getting into the online world, the social media space and multiculture environment fostered by the Internet and there is a lot of creation of local and regionalized content that has to have specific considerations in light of child protection issues.

Other issues that were highlighted in the discussions were the need for effective research on children's use of technology, robust and scientific models of studies and non duplicative efforts. Industry is willing to take research studies into considerations in their product development and even commission such research themselves.

Another interesting point that was made during the meeting was the fact that many of the organizations who started out as Internet safety specialist have widened their approach to narrow down the distinction between online and offline worlds, focusing more on building the core skills of youth, building ethical guidelines that would be pertinent to both the online and offline worlds- but considering the special requirements and characteristics the online environment demands. UNICEF pointed out specific studies made in countries such as: Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and South Africa on children's use of technology and online interactions and the chair also mentioned similar work done in 5 African countries of Togo, Cameroon, Kenya, Uganda and Gambia.

The representative from Kenya articulated the challenge in addressing the adult and the young people at the same time – about the perceptions of technology, perceptions of risks and trying to achieve a common ground. In light of the rapidly expanding mobile services in African countries such as Kenya, it is important to have a clear and logical understanding of how these technologies serve people and the messaging that is required that would not jeopardize the ultimate aim of such technological services while keeping young people protected from harms. It is very important to strike a balance between protection and empowerment. The representative from the ministry of ICT in Egypt also shared the work done both at the country and regional level and the shift from doing awareness and safety related work with parents , teachers and students to a more research based approach.

GSMA made the only presentation at the meeting, sharing the summary of information from a research done in collaboration with mobile society research institute in Japan and targeting countries such as Egypt, China, Cyprus, Paraguay , Mexico, Japan and South Korea. The research was carried out with a target group of 8-18 year old children about the use of mobile phones and associated risks. One unusual observation from the study was that the ownership of mobile phones did not correlate with the economic background of the family. But some countries did tend to use more second hand phones than others for lower or less privileged families.

Children also showed to be more adept in using more functions on their smart phones than their parents.

Social networking applications were also getting popular on mobile phones and were one of the main applications that children and young people are using increasingly , with a strong growth in African continent.

The representative from the ministry of ICT in Kenya expressed her thanks to the session for providing such valued topics for discussion and providing opportunity for policy makers to learn from such session.

The chair pointed out that it is indeed gratifying to know that such sessions are able to influence and guide the policy makers and concluded by thanking everyone and expecting similar participation and valuable inputs at the next years session in Baku, Azerbaijan.