NETWORKING THE WORLD THROUGH IDEAS

TELENOR YOUTH SUMMIT 2014

KARIM WAHEED

In a world inhabited by "digital natives", no man/woman is an island. What we consider as "local/regional" problems are not random, isolated occurrences. In other words, an issue might originate somewhere and the solution may very well come from somewhere else.

To better understand how young individuals interpret this interconnectivity and how they use this to bring about social change, one of the world's major mobile operators (with 179 million subscriptions), Telenor Group hosted a three-day summit at its headquarters in Fornebu, Norway. Starting from December 9, Telenor Youth Summit 2014 challenged 27 aspiring changemakers from 14 countries to demonstrate how digital communication can improve lives, fuel inclusive growth and promote cross-border dialogue. Over the course of the summit, the participants – including Ashrarul Haq Sifat and Nowshin Mehzabin Chowdhury from Bangladesh – pitched and refined ideas that could have

Jon Fredrik Baksaas (centre), President and CEO of Telenor Group, with the Youth Summit participants at a reception in Oslo.

Denmark, Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, Serbia, Russia, Sweden, Montenegro, India, Norway, Hungary, Bulgaria and Pakistan presented their ideas – covering education, healthcare, public service, gender violence, safe internet, finance etc. – to and inspired Jon Fredrik Baksaas, President and CEO of Telenor Group; Bente Erichsen, Executive Director, Nobel Peace Centre in Oslo; Ola Jo Tandre, Director, Sustainability and Head of Social Responsibility, Telenor Group (who also led the program and MC'd throughout the summit) and HRH Haakon Magnus, Crown Prince of Norway, among several other dignitaries. Most importantly

> "Communication is the key to achieving peace."
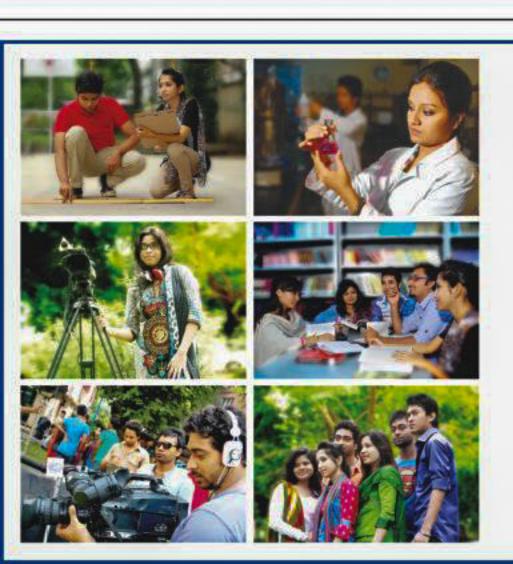>
> – Bente Erichsen,
> Executive Director, Nobel Peace Centre

though, they inspired each other and alliances were formed. For instance, both Bangladeshi participants expressed their interest in working with Jyotsna Kalra, a Law student of Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies, India. Jyotsna's idea involves a mobile app to address sexual harassment and abuse in public spaces; the app would allow people to report cases of harassment, mark out hotspots prone to crime, send out alerts, give tips and receive interactive information.

One particular idea that made a deep impact on this writer, and several others attending the sessions, came from Daniel Šaranović, a Mathematics student at the University of Belgrade, Serbia. Daniel's idea, called "Sonochrome", is to develop a mobile app that would enable the visually impaired to experience images and

them at the global summit.

Bangladesh at the Summit

Ashrarul, studying Electrical and Electronics Engineering at BUET, and Nowshin, studying at NSU, got their tickets to Oslo after winning the Bangladesh chapter of the summit –

> "When we entered Bangladesh in 1996, we didn't foresee that we'd be delivering mobile services to 50 million people in 2014. We've been part of the journey of providing basic connectivity, and along the way it has transformed societies – bringing more influence, more opportunities and more power in the hands of the many. The same will happen with internet, but it will happen faster and have even wider repercussions."
>
> – Sigve Brekke, Head of Asia Region, Telenor

impacts on their countries and around the world.

Back-story

This was the 2nd instalment of the program, and around 2,000 socially active digital natives applied to take part in the summit; individuals (18-25 years) in Telenor Group's markets across Asia and Europe were eligible to participate. Through an extensive process, involving universities, partner institutions and organisations, selection panels in the 14 countries decided who will represent

organised by Grameenphone – last month.

The Indian, Malaysian, Serbian and Bangladeshi contingents also included media personnel. Sayed Talat Kamal, Head of External Communications, Grameenphone accompanied the Bangladeshi team.

At the summit, Nowshin pitched her idea: "First Lady: Ensuring a safe society for women" – a mobile app that would work against gender violence. Her app would require women to register with their personal data and location,

through which a regular dialogue between the user and the local authority/network service provider would be initiated. Failure to communicate would result in the helpline service calling the user to get assurance of her current situation. The app would also be able to send out a distress signal to the local authority.

Ashrarul's idea, called "Digital Maduli: Keeping kids safe near water", deals with drowning, the third leading cause of unintentional injury-related death worldwide. Children with increased access to water – particularly in rural Bangladesh and across South and Southeast Asia – are most at risk of drowning. Based on a geographical information system and a low-cost wearable monitoring device with SIM card integration, the Digital Maduli would send signals to the parents and local rescuers with directions to the victim's location.

Getting Inspired and Making Connections

Young delegates from Myanmar,

> "We're a company that builds infrastructure; we can assist organisations and parties working towards social good. At the moment, we're considering working with UNICEF Bangladesh to establish a helpline for children."
>
> – Ola Jo Tandre, Director, Sustainability and Head of Social Responsibility, Telenor Group