

**about**





Anniversaries are about memory: perfect plans realized imperfectly; justifications for falling short; celebrating success; and appreciating all who helped. Dreams and reality. Narratives that link the past and the future.

Therefore, this chapter is anchored on the comments made on 1 September 2004, at the opening of LIRNEasia's one-room office under the great Suriya Mara tree (*Albizia odoratissima*) in the SLIDA [Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration] premises.

*Our immediate objective is to build a team of Asian ICT policy and regulatory professionals who can work on equal terms with the best in the world. Sri Lanka will anchor this effort, but it will be a genuinely regional initiative. . . . We aim to build a virtual organization that will one day make working from Bhutan as easy as working from this office. We will work in teams; we will work flexibly and we will work effectively. The organization centered on this office will help each person work to their full capacity; it will be a learning organization; a place where creativity is valued and debate encouraged. It will not be a place to clock in and out from; to engage in office intrigue; or to worry about the next promotion. It will add to your productivity, not drain it.*

Came up short on Bhutan. That's still on the to-do list. Need to do better on the regional thing. Not perfect, but pretty good on the rest: teams, flexibility, learning organization, debate, productivity. And for sure, we have a team that can work on equal terms with the best in the world.

Organization is a means to an end. What was the end we envisaged?

*Our larger objective is to facilitate the improvement of ICT sector performance in Asia. . . . The existing policy and regulatory*



LIRNEasia office opening,  
1 September 2004

*arrangements do not help people use ICTs to live their lives; they actively hinder them . . . But I do not want to leave you with the idea that we measure success only in terms of changes in laws and improvements in regulation. Everyone in the wonderful team we had at PIPU [Public Interest Program Unit at the Ministry for Economic Reform, Science and Technology] knows that we do not measure success that way. Everything we do must have an impact on the lives of people: must put more money in their pockets; must improve the quality of their lives; must give their lives more hope. Reform and regulation are means to an end; telecom and computers are means to an end; the end is a better life for our people.*

*So this is our mission: To improve the lives of the people of Asia; by making it easier to use the information and communication technologies they need; by changing the laws, policies and regulations to enable those uses; by building Asia-based human capacity through research, training, consulting and advocacy.*

How did we do? That is the story that will be told in the following chapters and need not be spelled out here. But the story of the mission, which ended up being printed on each of our business cards (thanks, Deviyani), needs to be told here.

We take our mission very seriously. We have survived and prospered because we had focus: there are things we do and things we don't do. If it doesn't get through the filter of the mission statement, we decline. If the end result cannot be made public (a requirement derived from the mission and the essence of the university), we decline. After two major collective reworkings, the mission statement now reads:

**To improve the lives of the people of the emerging Asia-Pacific by facilitating their use of ICTs and related infrastructures; by catalyzing the reform of laws, policies and regulations to enable those uses through the conduct of policy-relevant research, training and advocacy with emphasis on building in-situ expertise.**

It says what we do, how we do it, and why. Catalyzing, which was not in the original statement, is a critical element. A small quantity of catalyst gets large amounts of chemicals to react (thanks, Sujata). The chemicals do the work; the catalyst facilitates and accelerates. It's supposed to be unchanged by the process. But every metaphor has its limits.

So what are these chemicals that we affect? Our primary audiences were senior policymakers, regulators and senior executives of telecom operators and manufacturers. Our secondary audiences are the media and opinion leaders that shape the symbolic environments of our primary audiences. We know that neither we nor policymakers nor regulators directly provide the equipment and services people need to improve their lives. We know that what does innovation by end-users, service-suppliers and hardware and software makers. But we also know that it is the actual implementation of laws, policies and business models that constitutes the environment within which innovation and use occur. By affecting this environment, we achieve the end objective; we catalyze. It was said in the inauguration speech that;

*380,000 of our fellow citizens are currently on a waiting list for a telephone connection (43 percent of the number who actually have phones in their homes).*

There is no waiting list in Sri Lanka today. The supply of cheap GSM and CDMA connections was made possible by the painstaking work of refarming frequencies that allowed the release of GSM 1800 and CDMA 800 frequencies that led to explosive growth. The refarming work was done primarily by PIPU, the pupa from which emerged the LIRNEasia butterfly. One of the earliest Rapid Response actions of LIRNEasia was a response to a consultation paper which influenced the final outcome. That's catalysis. The rolling out of networks and price and coverage competition is the reaction. The end of the waiting list is the result.

Another way of catalyzing is partnerships. LIRNEasia works with many partners (refer LIRNEasia Partners, p.64) in all its projects. Perhaps our best exponent of partnerships is Sujata Gamage, the director of one of our affiliate projects (Knowledge to Innovation).

She works across the entire local government ecosystem in Sri Lanka, facilitating interactions among various actors and getting wondrous results (see Box).



Rohan Samarajiva at LIRNEasia official launch, September 2004, Colombo, Sri Lanka



Ashok Jhunjhunwala, Rohan Samarajiva and Bill Melody at LIRNEasia book launch, December 2007, Chennai, India

## Partnerships for Knowledge Sharing

Universities and research institutes are exhorted to be sources of knowledge for innovation but now it is becoming increasingly clear that a multiplicity of actors including customers and suppliers are involved in innovation. The focus now is less on the stock of knowledge but more on the flows of knowledge among actors in the innovation system as a whole.

Through our research on knowledge to innovation [K2I] in solid-waste services in Sri Lanka, we have been able to develop several tools for building knowledge-intensive partnerships within an innovation system. The formulation and application of competency standards is one such tool. The K2I program brought together solid-waste service providers, their corporate partners and policymakers to develop national competency standards for solid-waste workers. The standards have engendered a flurry of partnerships among service providers in developing curricula and training programs. Research is underway to track the progression of these partnerships and more fully understand the link between partnerships and productivity.



The Balangoda Urban Council in the Sabaragamuwa Province in central Sri Lanka initiates a training program based on national standards for solid-waste workers in peer organizations

Interview with Ayesha Zainudeen on Teleuse@BOP3 research, Biz 1st (Channel One MTV), 14-Aug-09

When radio meets mobile in Pakistan, MobileActive.org, 13-Aug-09

Mobile phones for inward remittances, awaiting guidelines, Lanka Media Talk, 8-Aug-09

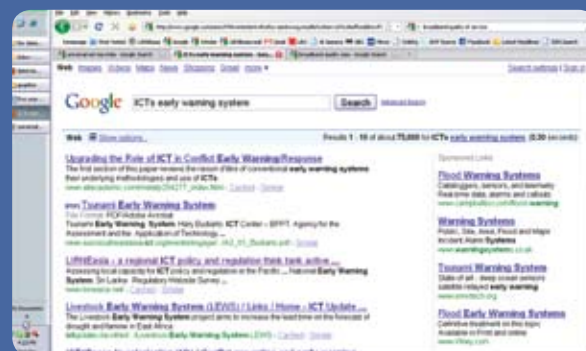
Knowledge wiki: Sri Lanka specific wiki spreads wings on the net, Lanka Business Online, 6-Aug-09

ReBlog of the Week: "When radio meets mobile in Pakistan" by Corinne Ramey, MobileBehavior, 13-Aug-09

India's "connected" poor, Business Today, 9-Aug-09

Sri Lanka specific wiki spreads wings, South Asian Media Net, 7-Aug-09

## Illustrative Google Searches



Our website attracts readers; not only readers but commentators, many with useful insights, some who spam us and others who are downright nasty. Except for the spam, which is mostly caught by filters, we do not moderate comments, believing that public spaces must have rough edges. This is perhaps why the site has accumulated 6,600 plus comments over the past five years. Quality, not quantity, is what we aim for. Our interest is in reducing the bounce rate (those who look at more than the page they landed on) and increasing the time spent on site, especially in the case of readers from our priority regions: South, Southeast and East Asia.



Table 1: Website statistics for www.lirneasia.net: 1 October 2008-30 September 2009

	Visits	Page views	Pages per visit	Average time on site	% new visits	Bounce rate
October 2008-September 2009	187,580	412,666	2.20	00:01:48	79.83%	57.10%
October 2007-September 2008	128,299	261,311	2.04	00:02:04	75.23%	72.55%
% change	+ 46%	+ 58%	+8%	- 13%	+ 6%	- 21%

**Pages/visit:** the average number of pages viewed during a visit to your site. Repeated views of a single page are counted.

**Avg. time on site:** the average duration of a visit to your site.

**% new visits:** the percentage of visits by people who have never visited your site before.

**Bounce rate:** the percentage of single-page visits (i.e. visits in which the person leaves your site from the entrance page).

Mobile phones for inward remittances, awaiting guidelines, Diaspora Journey, 3-Aug-09

Mobile phones for inward remittances, awaiting guidelines, The Sunday Times, 2-Aug-09

The path to digital Bangladesh, The Executive Times, 1-Aug-09

MNP: Multiple number possession? Voice & Data, 31-Jul-09

(Sinhala language coverage of Teleuse@BOP3 Migrant research), Ravaya, 2-Aug-09

Teleuse survey: What women want, Voice & Data, 1-Aug-09

Inbound mobile remittance awaits guidelines, Remitter: Remittance News and Reviews, 1-Aug-09

Our dissemination activities emphasize the use of memes, partly because the repeated use of words and phrases allow for the reinforcement of messages and partly because they allow us to trace influence. For example, the phrase “48 times Indian prices” was repeatedly used in our messages in Indonesia as we sought to bring down excessive leased-line prices. When we heard that phrase being used in the Minister’s speeches that led to the reduction in prices, we knew the memes were running.

Opinion leaders come in all shapes and sizes. We have, for example, on a number of occasions presented our research to civil-society audiences, the latest being the presentation of LIRNEasia research and approach to over 150 participants at the IDRC’s 2009 PAN All Partners’ conference in Penang that brought together all those funded by the Pan Asia Networking unit. The Global Knowledge 3 conference in Kuala Lumpur in 2007 was another instance. In the former, we were able to present our work in the innovative format of a talk show and a public debate. In the latter we worked up a quiz show.

At the conclusion of the HazInfo project, where we researched the problems of effective early warning at the last mile, we conducted specialized knowledge-sharing workshops for disaster-management professionals in Dhaka, New Delhi and Jakarta and took our results to the International Disaster and Risks Conference in Davos. Here, we were reaching out to opinion leaders and decisionmakers outside our normal circles.

Where do academics fit? We do present at academic conferences and publish in academic journals, but the priority assigned to this is considerably lower than in many research organizations. It is not that we do not care about our peers, but that we assign higher priority to reaching our prime audiences while the research is still fresh. It is in the gaps between communicating to



Helani Galpaya participating in talk show hosted by Michael Clarke, at IDRC PAN All Partners’ Conference, June 2009, Penang, Malaysia



Rohan Samarajiva and Natasha Udu-gama with participants at HazInfo Dissemination Workshop, March 2008, Jakarta, Indonesia

the prime audiences that we write for academic audiences. But we do realize that peer review is important (and put resources behind peer review by policy experts). As we build the brands of our senior researchers and prepare our junior researchers for graduate programs and lead roles, we know that it is necessary to have refereed publications. Increasing attention is being

paid to this in recent years and we organized two primarily academic conferences in 2008-09, the regulatory efficacy conference in Hong Kong, followed by a writing workshop in Negombo and the Mobile 2.0 preconference workshop in Chicago.

We spend a lot of energy on media of the kinds that constitute the symbolic environments of

Wire drop: Sri Lanka wireline use drops, Lanka Business Online, 29-Jul-09

Sri Lanka Airtel says tops one million customers, Lanka Business Online, 28-Jul-09

Domestic freight, post-war regions not given enough attention, The Island, 25-Jul-09

Interview with Kabir Hashim citing Teleuse@BOP3 research, Lakhanda, 24-Jul-09

LIRNEasia clarifies facts, Just Goss, 29-Jul-09

Dr. Harsha de Silva picked for Eisenhower Fellowship, The Island, 26-Jul-09

Daft draft: Sri Lanka govt transport policy slammed by critics, Lanka Business Online, 24-Jul-09

our prime audiences—the trade press and the business sections of leading newspapers—but we also speak to general media. Harsha de Silva hosts Sri Lanka’s most popular economics show on primetime TV. In addition to a few LIRNEasia people, he has interviewed Ashok Jhunjhunwala (IIT-Madras), Muhammed Yunus (Grameen),

David Malone and Stephen McGurk (IDRC) on subjects related to LIRNEasia’s mission. Media build personal brands, and personal brands attract further media coverage. Our senior researchers have personal brands and are thus called upon to comment on many issues. Payal Malik has written several op-ed articles in the economic press in

India that have had strong impacts on policy. Of all the countries we do media work in, India is the most challenging because of the intense competition for the limited news hole in this massive country and because India has some of the most sophisticated journalists in the world. We have, as is our custom, concentrated on the hardest problem and been rewarded with very extensive and sustained coverage in India. In Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines and Bangladesh, we generated substantial media coverage spikes by organizing news events. But we also disseminate distantly and opportunistically, for example, when our research gets picked up by news agencies and then gets carried on the front pages of newspapers of record in Pakistan and when op-ed articles on topical policy issues get published in Bangladesh.



### Rural Telephony

Payal Malik

Posted: Oct 31, 2005 at 0002 hrs IST

TRAI has recently come out with its recommendations on Growth of Telecom services in Rural India (www.trai.gov.in). It is an insightful attempt to address the anomalies of the current universal service obligation (USO) regime for the provision of rural telephone subsidy. In this article I describe the main lacunae of the current USO policy and outline how TRAI’s proposals ameliorate these flaws; the interested reader is directed to an independent research study that reviewed the current rural telephony subsidy mechanism (www.LIRNEasia.net).

This study analysed (1) whether the current USO scheme



From the beginning, LIRNEasia has been fortunate to have had the resources to back up its opportunistic instincts. This is the Rapid Response Program, which allows us to respond to requests for assistance, to prepare and submit responses to consultation papers, and to develop timely op-ed articles. When visits are required, we ask that the requestor ensures that a majority of stakeholders are involved, bears the local costs, and makes best efforts to pay for transportation. Representative rapid response interventions are shown in Table 2.

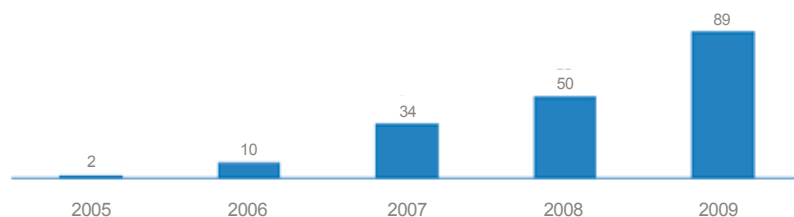


Figure 1: Coverage in Indian media, September 2004-09 (number of published articles)

We love the adrenaline rush that comes from rolling back a regressive tax or abolishing a pernicious rule. But we understand that sustained change comes from changing mindsets more than policies; that the real payoff comes when decision-makers look at evidence and consult stakeholders without external prodding; and indeed when those who need the evidence produce it themselves, making us redundant. That means working across time, through capacity-building and training, in addition

Plain talk? Not anymore, Voice & Data, 20-Jul-09

Early Warning: Cell broadcast ideal for Maldives public warning: think tank, Lanka Business Online, 17-Jul-09

Don't talk time, The Times of India, 15-Jul-09

Only Indians make, receive missed calls: Study, NAM News Network, 13-Jul-09

Going green, The Sunday Times, 19-Jul-09

Over 100 million rural mobile subscribers in India: Opportunity for MVAS, WATBlog, 15-Jul-09

Over 100 Million Rural Mobile Subscribers In India – Opportunity For MVAS, Lanka Business Online, 15-Jul-09

**Table 2:** Selected rapid response interventions: 2004-09

Year	Country	Nature of intervention	Intervention
2009	<i>Sri Lanka</i>	<b>Op-ed contribution</b>	Facilitation of op-ed contribution by regional legal expert to main business newspaper on mobile payments, in light of Central Bank's proposals to issue policy on mobile payments within 2009.
	<i>Bangladesh</i>	<b>Response to consultation paper</b>	Co-response with RIA to Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission's [BTRC] consultation paper on <i>significant market power regulation</i> , highlighting other developing country experiences.
	<i>India</i>	<b>Response to consultation paper</b>	Co-response with TeNet (IIT-Madras) to Telecommunication Regulatory Authority of India [TRAI] consultation paper on <i>broadband quality of service</i> , using LIRNEasia broadband QoSE research. Several LIRNEasia-TeNet recommendations were incorporated into TRAI's final recommendations.
2008	<i>Bangladesh</i>	<b>Response to consultation paper</b>	Response to BTRC consultation paper on <i>issuance of wireless broadband licenses</i> using LIRNEasia broadband QoSE research. Several of LIRNEasia's recommendations were incorporated into the RFP that BTRC subsequently issued.
	<i>India</i>	<b>Response to consultation paper</b>	Response to TRAI consultation paper on <i>phasing out India's access deficit charge [ADC]</i> , using its research on the ADC conducted in 2005. The ADC was subsequently removed.
2007	<i>Sri Lanka</i>	<b>Multiple media interventions; direct advice to policymakers and parliamentarians</b>	Response to proposals to tax the mobile sector, showing the potentially negative effects of the same on the bottom of the pyramid. A floor amendment was moved which resulted in the elimination of the regressive component of the tax.
2006	<i>Bhutan</i>	<b>Advice to regulator</b>	Advised Bhutan Telecom Authority on the appropriate type of media regulation needed in light of the entry of two new private sector newspapers into the market and the upcoming democratic elections (and related campaigning through the media).
	<i>Indonesia</i>	<b>Invited presentation to ICT sector</b>	Advised on what shapes investment decisions in the telecom sector and on current policy and regulatory challenges facing the Indonesian ICT sector at a seminar organized by industry association, MASTEL; audience consisted of commissioners from the regulator, policymakers, operators and civil society.
2005	<i>India</i>	<b>Response to consultation paper</b>	Response to TRAI consultation paper on <i>developing rural telecommunication in India</i> , using LIRNEasia research on universal service instruments.
	<i>Indonesia</i>	<b>Advice to regulator</b>	Assistance to the Telecom Regulatory Body of Indonesia [BRTI; Badan Regulasi Telekom Indonesia] with activating process of asymmetric regulation in a multi-operator environment, through invited presentations to a BRTI seminar, with the Minister in the audience, among others.
	<i>Bangladesh</i>	<b>Op-ed contribution and confidential advisory memo to Minister</b>	Assistance to the Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services [BASIS] on optimal utilization of the new submarine cable, through media as well as policy interventions.
2004	<i>Nepal</i>	<b>Advice/training</b>	Provided assistance to High Level Committee for Information Technology [HLCIT], on jump-starting e-government and reform processes through a three-day workshop for HLCIT staff, senior decision-making level representatives of government, private sector and civil society.
	<i>Sri Lanka</i>	<b>Response to consultation paper</b>	Response to Telecommunication Regulatory Commission [TRC] consultancy paper on <i>realignment/allocation of spectrum in the 800/900 MHz Band</i> . Recommendations partially accepted, and CDMA frequencies issued in different sequence than originally proposed. End result was elimination of waiting list for fixed telephone services.

Only Indians make, receive missed calls, Telugu Dreams, 13-Jul-09

Phones outnumber radios among South Asia's poor, Digital Opportunity, 11-Jul-09

Only Indians make, receive missed calls: Study, The Times of India, 10-Jul-09

Only Indians make, receive missed calls, Exbii, 10-Jul-09

Only Indians make, receive missed calls: Study, South-South Information Gateway, 11-Jul-09

Cutting Expenses: Only Indians make, receive missed calls, study, Bollywhat Forum, 10-Jul-09

Only Indians make, receive missed calls: Study, Choas, myself and the Universe, 10-Jul-09

### Disaster Risk Reduction in the Information Age: LIRNEasia Senior Research Manager at World Bank internal workshop

Much attention is being paid to effective disaster risk reduction globally, particularly how the information revolution changes the ways by which we deal with disasters. In October 2008, the World Bank organized a two-day workshop for its staff on “Disaster management in the information age.”

LIRNEasia Senior Research Manager, Chanuka Wattagama was invited to deliver opening remarks at the workshop, as well as make a presentation on two Sri Lankan case studies: LIRNEasia’s Haz-Info pilot for a community-based early-warning system, and the Lanka Software Foundation’s Sahana project.

Other key speakers included Saroj Jha (GFDRR, World Bank), Philippe Dongier (GICT, World Bank), Valerie D’Costa (*infoDev*, World Bank), Samia Melhem (GICT/e-Development Thematic Group, World Bank), Gisli Olafsson (Microsoft) and Andrew Levy (IBM).

The objective of the workshop was to raise awareness of World Bank operational staff on opportunities to improve the impact of



disaster risk management projects via innovative and effective use of ICTs and to help them understand better key lessons learned, success factors and good practices. The Workshop identified challenges and key issues, best practices and critical success factors, latest trends, solutions and technologies, as well as the policy recommendations and opportunities for mainstreaming and more effective use of ICTs in the World Bank disaster-risk portfolio.

to the multiple forms of engagement. Five years is not enough to gauge the success of these efforts, truly, but there are some signs that we are having an impact.

Effective communication of research requires credible speakers. Not limiting ourselves to building the LIRNEasia brand, we strive to build the brands of our senior researchers. We want to associate the names of our lead researchers with specific topics. In line with the demand-centered approach that we espouse and teach, we want to position our people to be sought out as resources by the consumers of research.

To communicate one must have good research. If we do not have evidence ready on appropriate and timely topics, all the communication in the world is ineffective. What we supply must be in demand. So far,

we seem to have done well on this count. We keep being asked how we select topics. The answer is judgment based on listening to stakeholders in the course of repeated interactions and on reading market and technology trends.

Looking back on how we set priorities, the Delhi-Gurgaon research planning meeting of March 2006 was one of the most significant, both in terms of laying out the main elements and frameworks of continuing research programs such as Teleuse@BOP and price benchmarking and in terms of laying the groundwork for collaboration with colleagues from Research ICT Africa [RIA] and Dialogo regional sobre la Sociedad de la Informacion [DIRSI].

Research planning is a collective activity that starts well before the start of the

research cycle and continues through the cycle. Once the research topics are selected, topics and researchers are matched and work assigned. All research undergoes quality control, through colloquia and research manager’s review in all cases and peer review in some. The colloquia are conducted mostly in person with Skype and real-time blogging used for connecting those who are not physically present (even presenters).

Good research is produced by good researchers. Key challenges include finding good researchers and then ensuring that those selected give priority to LIRNEasia research. Communication Policy Research south [CPRsouth] has been a good source in addition to continuous scouting. Ensuring that LIRNEasia research is given priority over other commitments, which are many for

*Lifestyle: Only Indians make, receive missed calls: Study, Spoonfeedin, 10-Jul-09*

*I'll give you a missed call, Uber Desi, 9-Jul-09*

*No computers in poor Bangladeshi households, Dhaka Mirror, 7-Jul-09*

*Phones outnumber radios among South Asia's poor, The Hindu, 5-Jul-09*

*Missed facts in missed calls article, Techgoss, 10-Jul-09*

*No computers in poor Bangladeshi households, New Age, 7-Jul-09*

*No computers in poor Bangladeshi households, News Bangla, 6-Jul-09*

### Key decisions of the 2006 Delhi-Gurgaon meeting: Next Steps

In order to develop sustainable supply - and demand-side data collection procedures with the participation of national data collection authorities (principally national regulatory authorities in telecom) in South Asia, LIRNEasia will undertake the following steps:

- 1) It will develop an Indicators Manual based on input received from participants at the Delhi Workshop;
- 2) Develop a prototype indicators database and web interface that NRA data reporters in South Asia will use for inputting ICT/telecom indicator data;
- 3) Organize a second Indicators' Meeting during mid-November of 2006 in Pakistan or Sri Lanka (TBA) where participants and experts from the Delhi Workshop will be invited;
- 4) Present the draft Indicators Manual at the second Indicators Meeting for review by NRA participants and approval for adoption;
- 5) Present the prototype database and web interface to NRA participants for suggestions on improvement. Currently, indicators for the ICT sector are collected in three principal ways: data are collected from suppliers (especially regulated suppliers) either directly by NRAs or through operator associations; data are collected from national household surveys by NSOs; data for specific purposes are collected on a case-by-case basis by various entities. Given LIRNEasia's focus on ICT infrastructure, the limited resources available for research and the necessity of ensuring that data collection is conducted on a sustainable basis, the focus of the current activity will be primarily on the first of the above three modes, with strong efforts being made to catalyze greater attention to ICT use on the part of NSOs. LIRNEasia does not envisage replicating the work of NSOs or doing their work for them; only assisting them in their work and moving them toward the inclusion of ICT questions in their surveys. In light of the critical importance of NRA buy-in, the initial focus is to get South Asian NRAs to co-develop and adopt the indicators Manual. Subsequently, formal endorsement of the Manual will be sought from the South Asian Telecom Regulators' Council [SATRC]. Once the Indicators manual has been accepted by the SATRC, it will be taken to the ASEAN Telecommunication Regulators' Council. If accepted there, most, if not all, of emerging Asia will be covered.

Full meeting report available at [http://www.lirneasia.net/wp-content/uploads/2006/05/Indicators\\_Report.pdf](http://www.lirneasia.net/wp-content/uploads/2006/05/Indicators_Report.pdf)

productive researchers in researcher-deficit regions, is a continuing effort. Good recruitment, training and motivation are the key elements of success in creative organizations. We sent two of our people to grad school and plan to do more on these lines. No bonds, just a good farewell and trust that they will return (the first one did; thank you, Sriganesh). Internal training is done, but we have to improve the execution of our learning organization ideas.

The long-gestation capacity-building work undertaken through CPR*south* is continuing, but has not yet helped LIRNEasia locate good researchers in countries such as

Indonesia and Afghanistan. This research is being conducted by non-native researchers. This is one of the main shortcomings of LIRNEasia's work in the past five years. The internship program that has been broadened to include non-Sri Lankans in 2009, after painstaking efforts to obtain immigration clearances will hopefully help remedy this weakness.

More than we thought, we have come to depend on researchers at the Colombo office. And sadly, after Divakar Goswami's departure and then Natasha Udu-gama's, the Colombo office has lacked the international flavor that was originally intended. Divakar

was a keystone and the fact that one of the keystones was not a Sri Lankan helped shape LIRNEasia's identity. Sadly, the increasingly inward turn of public discourse in Sri Lanka and the mysterious refusal of the ICT Agency to support our applications for residence permits (something they kindly did at the start; thank you ICTA), has made it difficult to keep with the original plan of having a multinational staff at the Colombo office. The alternative that now has to be explored is the building of a multinationally staffed office in another more hospitable location, while keeping costs down.

Phones outnumber radios among poor in South Asia, Samachar.in, 5-Jul-09

Phones outnumber radios among poor in South Asia, Prokerala.com, 5-Jul-09

Phones outnumber radios among poor in South Asia, Zillr, 5-Jul-09

Phones outnumber radios among poor in South Asia, New Kerala, 5-Jul-09

Phones outnumber radios among poor in South Asia, ThalIndian, 5-Jul-09

Phones outnumber radios among poor in South Asia, Simple Thoughts, 5-Jul-09

Phones outnumber radios among poor in India, Silicon India, 5-Jul-09

### LIRNEasia's second researcher at Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy: Tahani Iqbal



Following Sriganesh Lokanathan's footsteps, Tahani Iqbal, LIRNEasia researcher, commenced her graduate studies at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy [LKYSPP] of the National University of Singapore [NUS] in July 2008 on a full scholarship like Sriganesh.

Tahani joined LIRNEasia full time in 2006 after working on an assignment-basis for six months. While at LIRNEasia, she helped develop and fine-tune the mobile price basket methodology for emerging Asia (adapted from the OECD user baskets) to enable regional price comparisons. Mobile and other benchmarks are now regularly published by LIRNEasia.

She also managed CPRsouth, LIRNEasia's capacity-building initiative, which culminates each year in an annual conference attracting up-and-coming policy intellectuals from around the world.

Since her move to Singapore, Tahani has continued to work with LIRNEasia as a Research Fellow; she was responsible for a study on mobile number portability in 2009. Tahani holds a bachelor's degree (external) in economics and management from the London School of Economics, University of London.

### Peruvian Intern: Aileen Agüero



Aileen Agüero is LIRNEasia's first international intern. Having worked at DIRSI, the Latin American sister network of LIRNEasia, with Roxana Barrantes, Aileen first interacted with LIRNEasia at a meeting of LIRNE.NET members at IDRC in Ottawa in July 2008.

At DIRSI, Aileen worked on the construction of mobile telephony baskets for a set of Latin-American countries; she was also involved in a multi-country study of mobile use among the bottom of the pyramid in Latin America and the Caribbean [LAC].

After an arduous process, Aileen finally joined LIRNEasia in June 2009 for a six-month internship. Since then, she has worked on estimating the income elasticity of demand for telecom services at the Asian bottom of the pyramid, using LIRNEasia's Teleuse@BOP3 data, and comparing results from DIRSI studies. She has also worked on comparing price basket methodology used by LIRNEasia in Asia and DIRSI in LAC (respectively) making recommendations on how the two methodologies can be made more comparable.

We are confident that her presence will facilitate cross-fertilization between LIRNEasia and its LAC counterpart, enabling improved methodologies as well as greater comparability of research findings.

Phones outnumber radios among poor in South Asia, Smashits.com, 5-Jul-09

Public telephone booths: Means to empower women, Khaleej Times, 29-Jun-09

Women's empowerment at PCO booths, Overseas Indian, 29-Jun-09

Safe, comfy and chatting away: Women's empowerment at PCO booths, Silicon India, 29-Jun-09

AT-Tester: Broadband testing tool by LIRNEasia and IIT-Madras, Vinuthomas.com, 1-Jul-09

Safe, comfy and chatting away: Women's empowerment at PCO booths, NextBillion.net, 29-Jun-09

Empowered by phone, Shvoong, 29-Jun-09

Any kind of hiring we take very seriously. We believe that good outputs can only be produced by good organizations and that hiring good people and motivating them (or not demotivating them) is 99 percent of the answer. We conduct multiple layers of interviews, including in some cases, tests, to identify the best candidates. Recruitment we know is an art more than a science, but we are happy with what we have achieved on balance.

Where do these wonderful people work? First, in a one-room office under the giant Mara tree at the back of the parking lot of the SLIDA. The conference room was a picnic table in the shade of the tree. Since more than five people worked at the five tables crammed into the room, the rule was that all phone calls had to be taken outside on the cordless phone. It was one of the very first Wi-Fi equipped offices in Sri Lanka and we had prohibitions on desktop computers, hardcopy newspapers and tea; coffee was a-plenty. So people could, and did, work out in the open. Not because of the rules that prohibited newspapers and tea, which would have brought in the horrible ambience of a Sri Lankan government office, but because of the laptops. That rule also frustrated the unfortunate robber who made it into the subsequent office and found very little to take since all the computers were in people's homes.

Internal communication was great; even overdone. Everyone knew what everyone else did and more. Divakar Goswami was working on Indonesia's Wi-Fi story and Sriganesh Lokanathan was benchmarking leased-line prices. Two completely different projects but the connections were found because of the unavoidable proximity. Result was the meme "Indonesian prices are 48 times that of India". End result was one of our biggest wins.



Inside our first office (top right); our new premises (left and bottom right)

Now that we are in somewhat more spacious premises (we still can't accommodate more than 10-12 people in our conference space), we have to work harder on internal communication. We now meet every Thursday for one hour to go over what everyone is doing and to see if there are potential synergies.

But the office still runs as an unoffice. Few procedures, flexible working hours, no one to make coffee (self-serve with coordination through missed calls), cross-trainer for anyone who wants to exercise the body as well as the brain, etc.

LIRNEasia's organizational philosophy and commitment to capacity-building come together in our approach to outsourcing. In the case of our high-profile Teleuse@BOP research, we focus our resources on questionnaire design and analysis. We out-

sourced the task of conducting over 10,000 field interviews in 12 languages in six countries to a professional market research firm selected through competitive bidding. The qualitative research was outsourced to CKS Consulting, a cultural anthropology specialist firm based in Bangalore. Our researchers accompanied CKS staff on the field and immersed themselves in the analysis of the raw data. In addition, we have outsourced video documentation of the results to TVE Asia Pacific. And we have the best travel agency in the world making sure we get to places with minimum hassle (thank you Enoka and Amitha). We believe that outsourcing and the division of labor that it represents not only yields superior results but also results in building capacity among our subcontractors.

*Calling home means a lot to Bangladeshi expat workers, The Financial Express, 29-Jun-09*

*(Bangla language coverage of Teleuse@BOP3 presentation, 28-Jun-09, Dhaka), Shamokal, 29-Jun-09*

*Bangladeshis spend more calling home than others, News Today, 29-Jun-09*

*(Bangla language coverage of Teleuse@BOP3 presentation, 28-Jun-09, Dhaka), Jugantor, 29-Jun-09*

*Bangladeshi migrants call home more frequently: Survey, The Daily Mirror, 29-Jun-09*

*(Bangla language coverage of Teleuse@BOP3 presentation, 28-Jun-09, Dhaka), Prothom Alo, 29-Jun-09*

*Expat Bangladeshis make calls home more than others, New Age, 29-Jun-09*

## The origins of LIRNEasia, according to Rohan Samarajiva

All history is subjective. This is my story. There may be others.

It came into being because several people believed that improving the quality of the policy and regulatory processes could do more to improve the lives of people in emerging economies than end-less pilot projects. We knew that allowing greater participation in infrastructure supply would improve performance, but that these imperfect markets needed regulation. We also knew that regulation badly done was like erratic traffic lights. This thinking is what led Bill Melody, Knud-Erik Skouby and I, then working at the Delft University of Technology and the Technical University of Denmark to establish LIRNE.NET in late 2000. We were soon joined in this enterprise by Alison Gillwald, who had set up the LINK Centre at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa after the end of her term as a communication regulator.

Applied research of immediate relevance to telecom policymakers and regulators, then our principal audience, was conducted in multiple sites with infoDev funds we obtained through a competitive process. The first cycle findings were disseminated through expert fora and training courses, offered in Europe and then across the length and breadth of Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America and through the web. But Asia was absent, except for some volunteer training that Bill Melody and I did in Bhutan in the context of my consulting work for the Bhutan Telecom Authority (now, Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority).

Then, the decisive detour happened. Responding to an unexpected invitation (thank you Milinda) from a newly-elected reformist government in Sri Lanka, I relocated to Sri Lanka with family in 2002. To fast-track infrastructure reforms, a small unit called the

Public Interest Program Unit [PIPU] was established. Among other things, it utilized the findings of the first cycle of LIRNE.NET research in designing South Asia's first multisector regulatory agency, the Public Utility Commission of Sri Lanka.

That government failed to hold on to power and PIPU was abolished with 15 days' (modified to 30) notice. Its people became the kernel of LIRNEasia. With the invaluable contribution of Divakar Goswami who came from India, via the United States and the Netherlands, this team drove the research. Sabina Fernando, on leave from the Australian government, helped set up the organization (thank you Sabina). Payal Malik of India, Abu Saeed Khan of Bangladesh and Malathy Knight-John of Sri Lanka added their shoulders to the research work. Prashanthi Weragoda took over the financial management in the first few months and saved my life. Bill Melody helped mightily from afar (thank you Bill). Randy Spence had faith (thank you Randy). Indi Samarajiva started us off on the blogging path and Jayanat Herat helped set up one of the earliest Wi-Fi workplaces in Sri Lanka. So began the research organization under the great Mara tree.

From the beginning, LIRNEasia was financially fragile, being funded solely on projects and lacking core funding. As its funding has grown, the need for institutional funding to cover the common costs of fund-raising, donor-management, and coordination has grown even more acute. Progress has been made in developing product lines and marketing them to different potential funders, with Telenor Research and Development Center (Malaysia) partially funding the Teleuse@BOP3 research in 2008.

*(Bangla language coverage of Teleuse@BOP3 presentation, 28-Jun-09, Dhaka), Jajjaidin, 29-Jun-09*

*(Bangla language coverage of Teleuse@BOP3 presentation, 28-Jun-09, Dhaka), Bhorer Kagoj, 29-Jun-09*

*(Bangla language coverage of Teleuse@BOP3 presentation, 28-Jun-09, Dhaka), Amar Desh, 29-Jun-09*

*Safe, comfy and chatting away: Women's empowerment at PCO booths, AusssiIndoLanka, 28-Jun-09*

*(Bangla language coverage of Teleuse@BOP3 presentation, 28-Jun-09, Dhaka), Ittefaq, 29-Jun-09*

*(Bangla language coverage of Teleuse@BOP3 presentation, 28-Jun-09, Dhaka), Banglabazar Patrika, 29-Jun-09*

*(Bangla language coverage of Teleuse@BOP3 presentation, 28-Jun-09, Dhaka), Amader Shomoy, 29-Jun-09*

