

# About LIRNEasia



## LIRNEasia is a think-tank working across Asia-Pacific on regulatory and policy issues in the ICT sector and others such as agriculture and health which can benefit from ICT.

We create and disseminate independent, actionable knowledge that is gained through applied research. Our primary audiences are senior policymakers, regulators and senior executives of ICT sector firms, particularly telecom operators. Our secondary audiences are the media and opinion leaders who shape the symbolic environments of our primary audiences. LIRNEasia is a young and lean organization. We maintain a physical presence in Colombo; however, much of our work happens virtually. At the end of the 2011-12 financial year, we had 10.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees (eight full-time and five part-time) and four experts based in Colombo and 3 FTEs based in Suva, Fiji at the Pacific ICT Regulatory Resource Center which LIRNEasia runs on behalf of the World Bank. However, LIRNEasia's dynamic group of research and policy fellows, from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand, are team members in the fullest sense. This setup is an economical solution to the problem of mobilizing LIRNEasia's geographically-dispersed human resource pool.

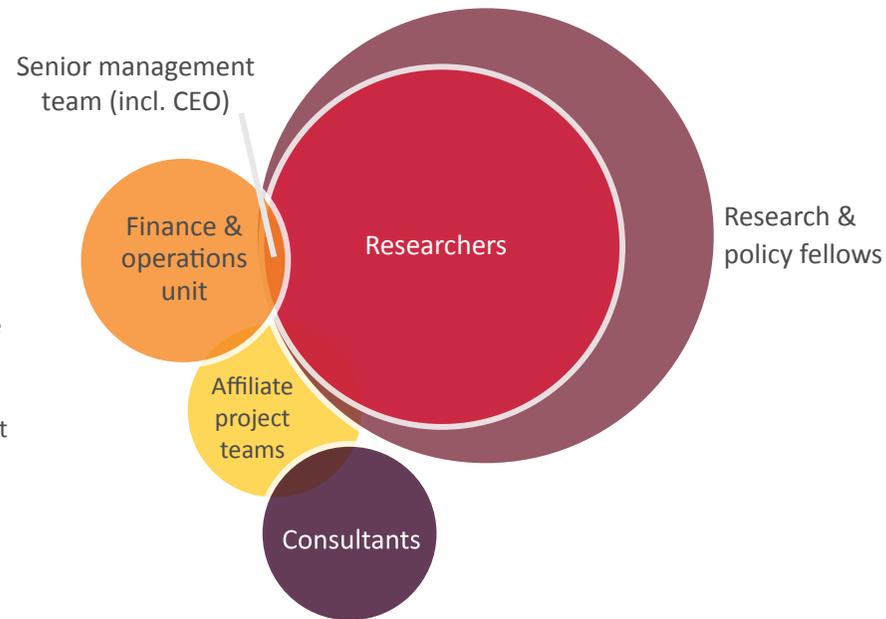


Figure 1: LIRNEasia organizational structure (March 2012)

## Board of directors



**Rohan Samarajiva, PhD (Chair)**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
LIRNEasia,  
Sri Lanka



**Milagros Rivera, PhD**  
Associate Professor, Department of  
Communications and New Media,  
National University of Singapore



**Vinya Ariyaratne,**  
**MD, MPH, MSc (Community Medicine),**  
**MD (Community Medicine)**  
General Secretary,  
Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement,  
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**Mervyn de Silva,**  
**BSc, ACMA, FCA, PGDip**  
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**Anoja J. Obeyesekere,**  
**Attorney-at-law, LL.M**  
Consultant- Executive Vice President,  
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## Scientific Advisory Council



**William H. Melody, PhD (Chair)**  
LIRNE.NET, Denmark; Center for Communication, Media and IT, Copenhagen Institute of Technology, Aalborg University, Denmark



**Johannes M. Bauer, PhD**  
Department of Telecommunication, Information Studies and Media, & Quello Center for Telecommunication Management and Law, Michigan State University, USA



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DIRSI; Universidad de San Andrés, Argentina; Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California, USA



**Alison Gillwald, PhD**  
Research ICT Africa, South Africa; Infrastructure Management Reform and Regulation, Graduate School of Business, University of Cape Town, South Africa



**Sherille Ismail, JD**  
Federal Communications Commission, USA<sup>1</sup>



**Ashok Jhunjhunwala, PhD**  
Department of Electrical Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, India



**K.F. Lai, PhD**  
BuzzCity, Singapore



**Robin Mansell, PhD**  
Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK



**Partha Mukhopadhyaya PhD**  
Centre for Policy Research, India



**Sam Paltridge, PhD**  
OECD, France



**Visoot Phongsathorn**  
Independent development professional, Thailand



**Randy Spence, PhD**  
Economic and Social Development Affiliates, Canada

<sup>1</sup> Not serving in an official capacity.

## Funding

During the year in review, LIRNEAsia's research and capacity-building programs were funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada, the Department for International Development (DFID), UK, the World Bank, Kubatana Trust of Zimbabwe, Humanitarian Innovation Fund, Xavier Institute of Management, India and International Labour Organization (ILO). In addition to these, LIRNEAsia has received funding from the following

sources in past years: Telenor Research and Development Centre, Malaysia, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Gates Foundation through the Institute for Money, Technology and Financial Inclusion of the University of California at Irvine, infoDev, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the ICT Agency of Sri Lanka (ICTA).

**Tahani Iqbal, Assistant Manager regulatory affairs division at a telecom company**

“The learnings and experiences during my LIRNEAsia days have had the most influence on my current occupation, my career goals, and also my personal life. It was Professor Samarajiva who encouraged me to complete my Masters in Singapore - where I met my husband. Professor Samarajiva also recommended me for my current job at Axiata Group, Malaysia.”



Relationships as treasure

## People

When King Datusena (455-473 CE) was asked where his treasure was, he pointed to the water of the Kala Weva reservoir that was built in his reign, which even today serves the people of Sri Lanka's North Central Province. If we at LIRNEasia are asked what assets we have built up over the seven years of our existence, we too cannot point to land, or buildings, or bank deposits of any magnitude. We cannot even point to water like the King did.

LIRNEasia does own some physical assets, a vehicle, the laptops, the projector, an exercise machine, and so on, but they're peanuts. Our real asset is intangible: the brand. But that is too abstract.

Brand is the aggregate of all relationships that LIRNEasia has. But even that is not specific enough. No one has a relationship with an organization, unless it is a generic customer relationship where one is just an entry in a database. Any significant relationship one has with an organization is with some human being who is part of it.

Our most valuable asset is the aggregate of the professional (and to some extent personal; all professional relationships have a personal component, but not vice versa) relationships maintained by LIRNEasians. Relationships are embodied in people.

Our real assets are the people who are part of LIRNEasia. That's what we portray on the cover of this year's Annual Report.

What do we do to build up our assets? What do we do to safeguard them?

## Hiring and retention

We can't offer lifetime employment. We can't even guarantee a job beyond two years, the average length of an anchor project. We can't compete with most private-sector salaries. So a stimulating and intellectually challenging work environment and opportunity to build your own personal brand have to be sufficient inducement. It helps that people we want to hire consider travel to exotic locations as a bonus, not a chore. Over the years, we've tried our best to be flexible –allowing researchers to move from part-time to full-time employment or vice versa based on their personal circumstances, and by allowing employees to work from home where possible, even when home is as far away as China and the United Kingdom.

We've found some brilliant people through ads in newspapers or social media sites. Some of our best people have come to us through the grapevine. Others have found us through CPRsouth, our primary capacity building vehicle, and joined us as interns.

It's not enough that the CEO or the COO is impressed. When we are serious about hiring someone, we insist on a "coffee chat." The rest of the staff take the prospective employee to coffee and all get to ask the questions they were too polite to ask during the formal interview. Input from coffee chats has swung a hiring decision more than once.

**Dimuthu Ratnadiwakara, manager at own consultancy firm**

“I had no prior experience working as a consultant. However, as part of my work, I was exposed to bidding, preparing project proposals, making presentations and report writing. I also became familiar with the management of consultancies. This knowledge has been extremely useful in my current work.”

## Review

The challenge of any organization is to ensure it meets its objectives, while also fulfilling those of its employees. Our annual review is our attempt to meet it. Researchers are evaluated in three areas: how well they contribute intellectually to the research, how well they carry out research management duties, and how well they build their personal profile and LIRNEasia's public profile.

A staff member who doesn't regularly work with the evaluatee carries out the evaluation. The evaluator must talk to the researcher's seniors, peers and juniors, and also to one or more persons outside LIRNEasia the researcher works with. Based on the gaps identified, a professional development plan is mapped out for the following year. As a small organization, we can't always implement the recommended changes, but we have moved researchers from one project to another or given them different professional challenges based on their development plans. We have also consciously invested in training people and insisted they take part in field research.

There are no routine pay raises. The grade from the annual evaluation determines the pay increase.

**Divakar Goswami, Manager strategy & operations at a consulting firm**

“Compared to LIRNEasia, I now work in a much larger, more formal, transnational organization. However, I feel the concepts we developed at LIRNEasia, particularly with relation to cross border collaboration and virtual organization structures, are still applicable to my current work.”

## LIRNEasia as a platform

With LIRNEasia being purely project-funded, it is tough to provide lifetime career paths. There was a time, early in LIRNEasia's development, when we thought of career paths in terms of graduate school. One joins LIRNEasia; works for 2-4 years; gains good experience, gets a good publication or two and builds relationships; and gets admission to a good graduate school on those strengths. We did send three of our researchers on full scholarships to the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore.

But the strategy was flawed because it only served the needs of young researchers who wanted to go to grad school, but not of others who had joined us with Masters Degrees and who did not want to go on for a PhD. They were not senior enough to mentor the junior researchers and they could not benefit from LIRNEasia's ability to prepare them for further education. The biggest flaw was that the strategy did not address the needs of the senior researchers. It imposed burdens without commensurate benefits. If you were senior enough to mentor you got extra work and no benefit other than the intrinsic rewards of mentorship.

So, we have now evolved a different approach. We now see LIRNEasia as a platform. The emphasis now is on attracting mid to senior-level researchers (i.e., those with a second degree, Masters or PhD) and providing them with opportunities to develop their personal brands whilst advancing the objectives of the organization. As they develop their profiles and relationships (measured and rewarded in the annual reviews), they will become capable of launching their own social or commercial enterprises.

If it is a commercial enterprise and LIRNEasia supports its launch, we hope to set up some mechanisms for the enterprise to give something back, thus supporting LIRNEasia's continued existence. If it is a social enterprise or a project that fits within the mission of LIRNEasia, we will provide the administrative support, eliminating the need to

engage in the onerous tasks of setting up new organizations, establishing financial systems, etc. Nuwan Waidyanatha's real-time bio-surveillance program is an example.

In this model, we do not push good research managers out because there is no room to rise. Some will, we hope, stay in the organization taking over the leadership. Others are encouraged to branch out, using LIRNEasia as their platform.

The new strategy does not mean that LIRNEasia no longer welcomes junior researchers. However, they will be recruited only in numbers that can be supported by the existing senior staff. If they wish to pursue graduate studies, all encouragement will be given. Once the degree has been obtained, they would be welcome to return as research managers.

**Natasha Udu-gama , PhD student at Macquarie University in Sydney**

“Because of my work in the HazInfo project, I became more aware of the opportunities and challenges of partnerships, in ensuring that community early warning systems are community-owned. The contact base I developed during my work at LIRNEasia has also been helpful in working further in these areas and this is what I am now focusing on for my PhD at the Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia.”

## Alumni

The cover page includes pictures of alumni: those who once worked with us, but now are doing something else. The Report also includes quotes of selected alumni. This indicates that we do not really see alumni as external to the organization: as we sometimes say, “you can never really leave LIRNEasia.”

The conceptualization of LIRNEasia as a platform naturally leads us to think of our alumni as part of our achievements. When one of our own moves on to work in government or in a company, that means leverage for our ideas and values. When projects are developed and companies started to commercialize knowledge that means our mission of catalysis is effective.

We try to maintain the relationships with alumni through the website, social events and otherwise. It's too early to start an alumni organization, but who knows? That day might come.

**Asanka Kumara, entrepreneur - manufacturing and retailing compost and exporting fresh vegetables**

“Whilst gathering information on solid-waste management techniques for the 3R project, I identified a large, unmet demand for compost in areas such as Puttalam and Kalpitiya. Therefore, I decided to start my own compost site in the Kurunegala District, to market the compost to farmers in Puttalam. So my compost manufacturing venture is a direct result of my exposure while working at LIRNEasia.”

**Chammi Gunatilake, teacher of biology and chemistry**

“Teachers do not have practical experience in conducting research and application of different research techniques. So their knowledge of research is more theoretical than practical. However, I have been able to teach the course module on Research Methodologies more effectively, as I am able to illustrate how to apply these methodologies in real life.”

**Sanchala Arangalage, Attorney-at-law, a Company Secretary and Notary Public**

“I was not qualified as a Company Secretary and had not considered this profession. It was my work at LIRNEasia that directed me towards this field.”

**Iran Fernando, Rice Project Executive**

“Due to my extensive dealings with farming communities, I am extremely adept at conducting meetings and communicating with farming communities. In addition, my contact base in the agriculture sector has been useful in many different ways.”