

## Report on LIRNEasia's Rapid Response Program

Based on the idea of the teachable moment, LIRNEasia makes quick responses to specific requests for training/advice by governments/entities in the region. The response primarily takes the forms of (a) a written submission (e.g., to a public consultation or to media) or (b) a country visit that includes one or more presentations.

In the case of a country visit, the following rules of engagement apply:

1. The Requestor shall bear all local costs and will make best efforts to reimburse the receipted airfare of the LIRNEasia Consultant. LIRNEasia shall bear the professional fees of the consultant.
2. The Requestor will ensure that a productive program with the participation of government, private sector and civil society representatives at a decision making level will be arranged. The Requestor will distribute and make available background documents provided by the Consultant and agreed to by the Requestor.
3. The Consultant will provide mutually agreed upon deliverables.
4. The Requestor will provide a report on the efficacy of the visit and any actions resulting from it to LIRNEasia within one month of its completion. LIRNEasia may post this information on its website and otherwise use it in its work.

Under (a) the following actions were undertaken

1. Response to Telecommunication Regulatory Requestor (TRC) consultancy paper on Realignment/allocation of Spectrum in the 800/900 MHz Band issued by the Telecommunication Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka (October/November 2004) [http://www.trc.gov.lk/trc12\\_consultation\\_document.htm](http://www.trc.gov.lk/trc12_consultation_document.htm)
2. Response to Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) consultancy paper on rural telecommunication development in India (October 2004) <http://lirne.net/live/content/view/72/26/>

Under (b), the following actions were undertaken

1. Provided assistance to High Level Committee for Information Technology (Nepal), on jump-starting Nepal's e-government and reform processes (9-11 December 2004) <http://lirne.net/live/content/view/76/26/>
2. Provided assistance to the Telecom Regulatory Body of Indonesia (BRTI; Badan Regulasi Telekom Indonesia) with activating process of asymmetric regulation in a multi-operator environment (8-11 March 2005). The presentations that were made during the visit are attached. The presentations were:
  - a. Plenary presentation to BRTI Seminar audience of around 200, including Minister

- b. Summative comments at end of session.
  - c. Presentation on licensing to BRTI workshop. Audience of around 50.
3. Provided assistance to the Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) in the form of an op-ed article in the Daily Star newspaper and a confidential advisory memo to Minister of Telecom immediately following a UNDP sponsored presentation on optimal utilization of the new submarine cable.  
<http://www.lirneasia.net/2005/12/bangladesh-to-be-connected-to-submarine-cable-next-week/>

The year's RR actions mapped LIRNEasia's research focus areas: four in South Asia and one in Southeast Asia. Except for Sri Lanka, LIRNEasia had an active research project in each of the countries and there were useful synergies from the action in the form of higher visibility for LIRNEasia and greater access for researchers as a result. The Indonesia action led to a partnership with MASTEL and the holding of the networking meeting in Jakarta.

In all cases of country visits, there was initial difficulty with regard to provision of airfare by the Requestor, but in the end, no IDRC funds were spent on airfare. However, the ability to go ahead with planning despite uncertainty about airfare reimbursement was a major strength of the RR Program.

In Nepal the airfare was reimbursed in local, non-transferable currency, but because LIRNEasia had ongoing research in Nepal, the money was spent in Nepal and recovered in transferable currency. All Requestors lived up to their side of the bargain except for item 4, the provision of a report on the efficacy of the LIRNEasia action. Repeated requests failed to extract the reports.

#### Overall assessment and recommendations

1. The RR Program was very useful in terms of the overall objects of LIRNEasia and the program of activities funded by IDRC. It allowed LIRNEasia to seize opportunities for effective policy intervention in a flexible manner.
2. Success can be measured by the immediate reception of the intervention or in terms of outcome.
  - a. Immediate reception was very good in all cases. For example, 13 Secretaries out of 22 attended the presentation in Katmandu and the Minister stayed on for the entire presentation in Jakarta.
  - b. In terms of outcomes, Nepal was disappointing but the cause was more the overall political environment rather than factors specific to ICT. Indonesia too is thin on immediate visible outcomes because the host entity BRTI is quite marginalized in Indonesia's perverse dual regulatory agency set up; however, it is possible that the RR intervention weakened the position of the retrograde regulatory agency DG Postel.
  - c. Surprisingly, the written submissions in response to the Indian and Sri Lankan consultation papers were perhaps the most effective in terms of outcome:
    - i. Though TRAI does not link the final recommendation to specific points in specific submissions, a reading of the final

- recommendations on rural access show that LIRNEasia's comments, in conjunction with others, had a significant effect on TRAI.
- ii. The release of CDMA frequencies in Sri Lanka first to the new entrants and then to the incumbent was a recommendation of LIRNEasia. This was exactly the opposite of what TRCSL originally proposed. The spike in fixed phones in Sri Lanka <http://www.lirneasia.net/2005/08/fixed-line-spike-in-sri-lanka/>
  - d. It is too early to tell how effective the Bangladesh RR intervention was. The BASIS/UNDP organizers were extremely pleased that the seminar drew a full house of 250 despite a general strike/hartal that caused the speaker to be transported in an ambulance to the conference site. The Minister sat through the entire session of 2.5 hours and specifically requested an advisory memo. Even the Chairman of the incumbent and senior officers were not hostile in their response, seeking to understand the benefits of corporatization. All concerned felt that the momentum built up by the successful presentation would be consolidated by an op-ed piece. Because of the RR Program, LIRNEasia was able to respond.
3. Originally, it was thought that airfare costs would have to be borne by RR funds. In actual fact, even Nepal managed to pull the funds together to pay the airfare. Therefore, the spending on the RR program was considerably lower than expected. It is therefore proposed that only CAD 12k be set apart for the RR Program in 2006. However, it must be noted that the RR Program is by nature unpredictable; unless requests are made and judged to be worthy of a response, no action will ensue.
  4. In the first year, all the RR actions were undertaken by the Executive Director of LIRNEasia. As the team achieves a higher profile in the region, it is hoped that others too would engage in RR actions in the future.