

## **Our mission**

*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*

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*We should be happy and content. We are happy but not content.*

## Happiness

We just finished the 2008-10 research cycle where we had set ourselves a rather daunting task, that of developing an alternative to the dominant narrative of ICT futures centered on a “fat pipe” (coaxial cable, fiber or even wireless) coming into each household carrying entertainment and data (including Voice over IP). This vision of a convergence of previously distinct analog or digital information streams over a single bit-stream conduit with different terminal equipment (home theaters for entertainment, different devices for data and voice) did not seem to make much sense for those at the bottom of the pyramid (BOP) in Asia, our people. As Figure 1 shows, the majority of our people in South Asia had barely heard of the Internet and their first and only contact with two-way electronic communication was through the mobile, and, even that, recently.

And we did. We developed a coherent, alternative narrative, drawing from our demand-side, supply-side and case studies that deployed multiple methods and approaches. We identified the actions that had to be taken by policymakers and regulators, by operators, by applications providers and by manufacturers to make the narrative real. The evidence (Figure 2) showed that the narrative is emergent at the BOP, and that not too many people are actually using more-than-voice services over wireless platforms. It also showed that the younger cohort was more comfortable with going beyond voice.

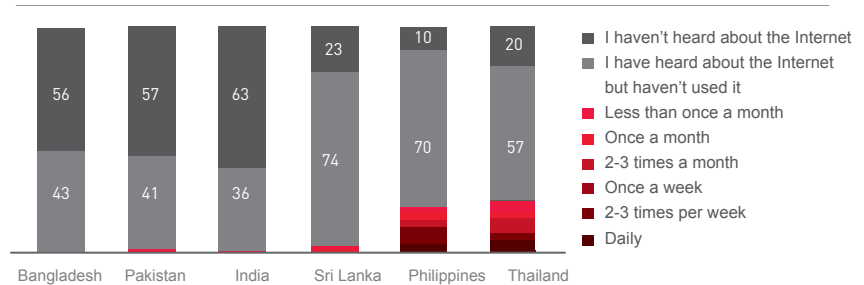
So our narrative was not just about describing the world; it was also about addressing what the world could

be. Not a simple conclusion, but still an achievement. This is cause for happiness.

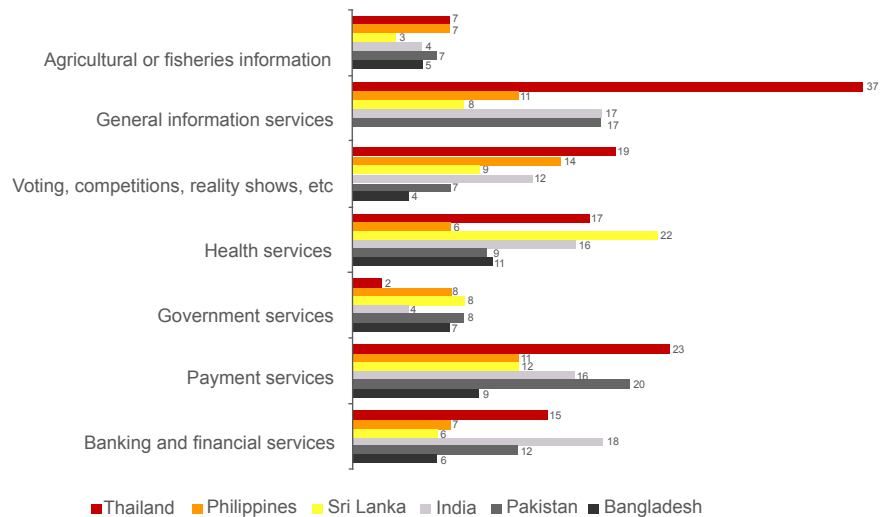
It is not just a story we tell ourselves. We have taken it out to all sorts of audiences, some friendly and others not so friendly. When putting new ideas into circulation, it is only rarely that clear causal connections can be established. In any case, large shifts in discourse such as the displacement of wired desktop computers by terminal devices that

are, for the most part, mobile, are caused by multiple actors. No single actor can take full credit. But reading, for example, the recent *World Telecommunication/ ICT Development Report 2010* of the International Telecommunication Union, we cannot but take satisfaction.

“Affordable, high-speed Internet access is central to the development of an information and knowledge-based



**Figure 1:** Internet awareness and use among teleusers at the bottom of the pyramid (% of BOP teleusers) (SEC groups D and E) in selected Asian countries (2008) | Source: LIRNEasia Teleuse@BOP3 survey



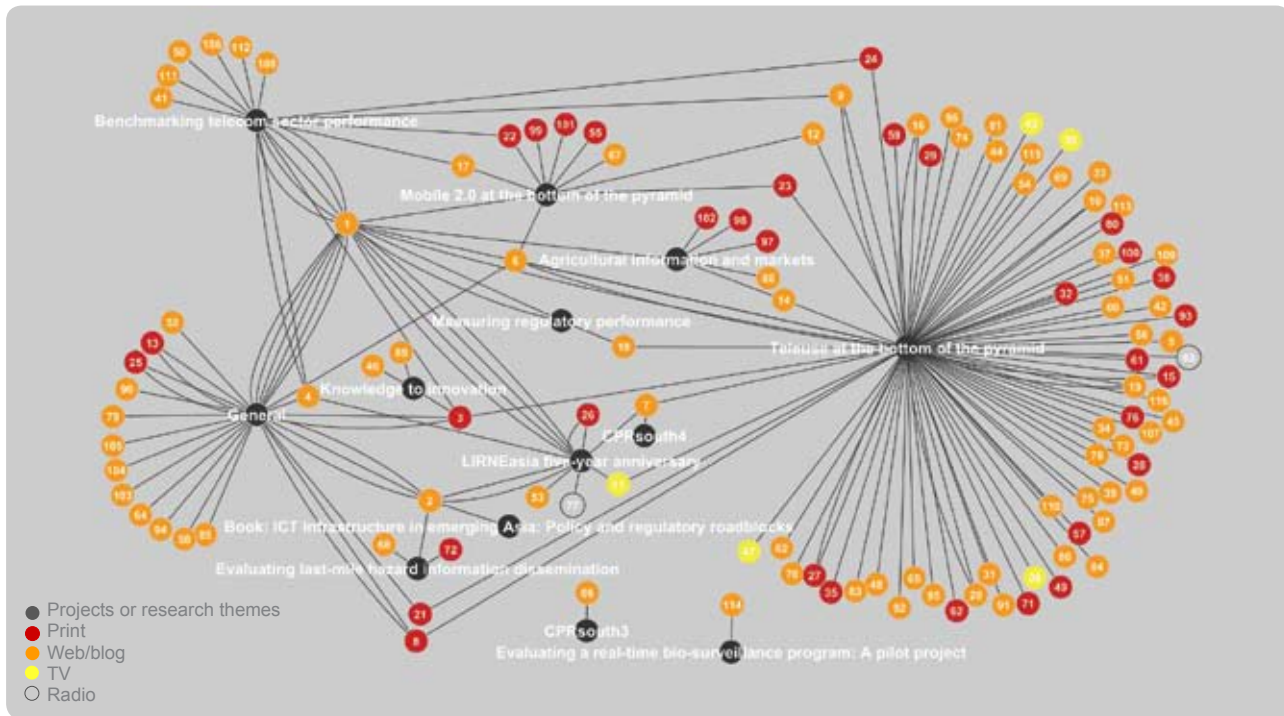
**Figure 2:** Use (regular and non-regular) of more-than-voice services among teleusers at the bottom of the pyramid (% of BOP teleusers) (SEC groups D and E) who are aware of such services in selected Asian countries (2008) | Source: LIRNEasia Teleuse@BOP3 survey

society...Internet, especially broadband Internet, is increasingly accepted as a general-purpose technology that dramatically affects the way people communicate, do business, interact with governments and educate and inform themselves. This requires governments to pursue policies that will have a significant impact on Internet usage including an enhanced effort to deploy (fixed/wired and/or wireless) broadband infrastructure and to include wireless in universal access plans. It might be possible to reach the goal of providing broadband Internet access to at least half the population by 2015 in view of the rapid spread of

wireless broadband.”(p.xxxiv)

“Anecdotal evidence suggests that access to the Internet using mobile phones is a growing trend, including in many developing countries and regions such as Africa. Providing mobile broadband access can be an attractive solution for rural areas since it requires less investment than installing fixed broadband connections. Mobile broadband coverage, or the percentage of the population within reach of a 3G mobile cellular signal, will therefore be an important indicator to measure.” (p. 23-24)

We are a project-based organization. But we do not behave as one, thanks to the understanding and flexibility shown by our principal funder. We build upon and consolidate research lines. We seize opportunities to influence policy and strategy even if the relevant research is not from the current research cycle. We keep our focus on the key audiences of senior policymakers, regulators, senior managers of operating companies and opinion leaders capable of influencing them. We strive to shape their symbolic environments by obtaining extensive coverage in the media, as shown in Figure 3 below and in more detail in Section 4 of this Report.



**Figure 3:** Frequency of media coverage by research project and related themes, 2009-10. The dark grey subject nodes indicate projects or themes. Each line extending from a subject node to a numbered node indicates coverage (print, web/blog, TV or radio). Each number represents a different publication (see Table 7 for a numbered list of publishers). For a complete list of publications, see Section 4’s subsection on media coverage. For a complete list of coverage from 2004 to date, including web links where applicable, visit <http://lirneasia.net/about/media-coverage/>.

Figure 3 privileges frequency of coverage. But obviously, that is not all that matters. It is not the most important aspect either. Coverage in a major Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi newspaper that is read by our audiences is obviously more valuable for our purposes than mention in a radio broadcast in the evening. In *LIRNEasia's 2004-09: Five years in review*, we made our first attempt to address the quality of publication, going beyond the simple frequency count. We are not yet fully satisfied, but the results of the method applied to 2009-10 show we

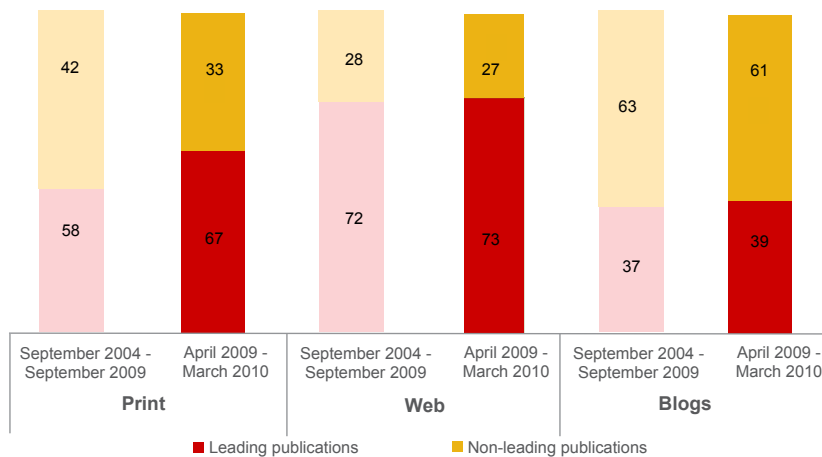
are improving the quality of print coverage (where we spend most time and money), whilst web and blog coverage appears to have kept to the former pattern (Figure 4).

We celebrated our first five years in the company of friends, colleagues and present and future partners from 25 countries. This too was a cause for happiness.

I never thought about the importance of surviving for five years, but when the day came and I thought about it, it was a

good feeling. This was odd because I did celebrate when the Public Interest Program Unit at the Ministry for Economic Reforms survived 548 days, recalling the Soviet revolutionaries celebrating their survival for 72 days, the duration of the Paris Commune. The benchmark was the duration of my first round of duty in government in 1998-99. But *LIRNEasia* was unique; what was the milestone? Five was just an arbitrary number, plucked out of the air.

*LIRNEasia* was almost an impossible dream. No endowment, no core funding, location in a war-torn, small and peripheral country that was increasingly disaffected with Western conceptions of good governance — not the best ingredients for a regional think-tank that sought to reform laws, policies and regulation, the building blocks of good governance. Yet we succeeded, as evidenced by policies, practices, frames and mindsets changed (documented in *LIRNEasia's 2004-09: Five years in review* publication issued for the fifth anniversary celebration) and confirmed by an external evaluation report conducted as part of IDRC's evaluation of the Pan Asia Networking Program.



**Figure 4: Media coverage by leading vs. non-leading publications (% of all media items)**  
 Print media were differentiated as leading and not, based on informed opinions of researchers from the countries we work in. Web and blog media were classified based on three-month Alexa (<http://www.alexa.com/>) rankings: ranks from 1 to 200,000 were considered as leading

Taken one day at a time, it was a great ride and a lot of fun too.

There were many other causes for happiness, but these should suffice for now.

## Discontent

Looking back over the past five years, we can see the flaws. The management team was too overworked to systematically and consistently engage in fundraising and diversify revenues. It is not that we did not try. But the results, except for the USD 75,000 contribution made by Telenor



**LEFT:** Steven McGurk, Robin Mansell, and Randy Spence at LIRNEasia@5 celebrations at the Galle Face Hotel, Colombo, December 2009 | **RIGHT:** Ashok Jhunjunwala speaking at LIRNEasia@5 celebrations at the Galle Face Hotel, Colombo, December 2009

Research and Innovation Asia Pacific to Teleuse@BOP3, were not adequate. We are, perhaps, even more fragile in financial terms than we were at the end of Year One. LIRNEasia judges itself by results, not by effort. By results, we have failed on the sustainability front. We have to refocus and get results.

As the organization grew, monthly expenses increased, despite various organizational innovations that kept it lean. As the staff and expenses grew, it was necessary to grow the budget; but as the work and budget expanded, coordination costs increased, making the earlier strategy of financing the CEO from projects unviable. Luckily, the funding of multiple projects, including the anchor project, from the same source, allowed us to keep the management structure compact and transaction costs manageable. There is no doubt that IDRC's simple and flexible procedures have greatly contributed in this regard. Yet, excessive reliance on a single source of funding has its own problems.

IDRC has been the dominant donor by far. We will have been funded by IDRC for seven years at the end of the next cycle in 2012. And it is not unreasonable to ask of plans for life after; it would be irresponsible not to make and execute them. Plans can be made, but are not that easy to implement. The conditions that prevented us from fundraising effectively in the past five years have not changed, but raise funds we must. Or gracefully exit.

When one is faced with a challenge of this scale, it is good to have external affirmation. There has been a lot to keep us going. The citation of the Communication Research as an Agent of Change award given by the International Communication



LIRNEasia being welcomed at the Deshodaya village in Menderigama, Sri Lanka, December 2009

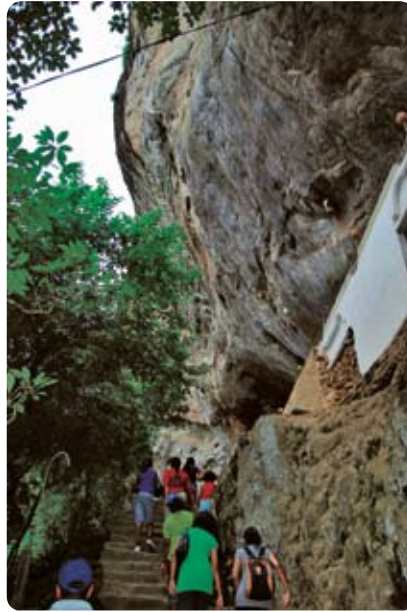
Association clearly showed that it was recognition of LIRNEasia's entire body of work, even if the award was given to a single person. Our work on agricultural markets being included in the Minister's report on official development aid to the Canadian Parliament (see p. 69) indicated that the people who were paying the bills also seemed to think we were doing well. For a former Canadian taxpayer, who takes seriously the responsibility of spending Canadian (and British) taxpayer money frugally and effectively, this was especially significant. Our methods are being replicated in other regions. The thinking behind the design of CPR<sub>south</sub>, described in more detail in Section 4, is being incorporated into the design of capacity-building initiatives in Africa and Latin America. LIRNEasia is being consistently invited to UN System ICT indicators events in recognition of the work we have done in advancing knowledge in that area.

Thus fortified, we have now set out to climb the next mountain. We have a proven

product; not plans and promises. We have commonsense backing our cause. Our work is benefiting millions of people in an awakening region, more than hundreds of pilot projects combined. We believe that the stakeholders from the region who benefit from our work will acknowledge the value of our work in a tangible way, with financial support for a think-tank that serves the region.

### Corporate social responsibility

Financial fragility has never stood in the way of fulfilling our obligations. Given our expertise and interest in disaster risk reduction and the unfortunate prevalence of disasters in our region, we have generally tended to focus our CSR and individual philanthropic efforts in this sphere. However, we ventured into a new area in 2009, leveraging the presence of members of our International Advisory Board in Colombo for LIRNEasia@5. We offered to provide two speakers for a session on ICT entrepreneurship to SLASSCOM, the Sri Lankan IT industry body. They organized the



LEFT: The second floor of LIRNEasia's office after renovation | RIGHT: Climbing Pahiyangala, July 2009

event with support from Dialog Broadband. I served as moderator and our two speakers, Professor Ashok Jhunjhunwala of IIT Madras and Dr. K.F. Lai of BuzzCity, were very well received. The event led to the formation of an innovation and entrepreneurship forum within SLASSCOM and the designing of entrepreneurship training in collaboration with the British Council.

## People and place

Sandya Salgado, CEO of Ogilvy Action, a Sri Lankan firm specializing in rural markets joined the Board in 2009 replacing Sithie Tiruchelvam who stepped down after years of valuable service. We deeply thank Sithie for helping us get on our feet. The Board held a significant strategy meeting together with the International

Advisory Board in Kandy immediately after LIRNEasia@5 in December 2009. A visit to an organizationally-advanced Deshodaya village, organized by our partner Sarvodaya, was a high point. This was connected to a proposal we had written to develop a novel think-tank approach whereby LIRNEasia would train and equip with evidence village leaders of the Deshodaya Program, instead of engaging the government of Sri Lanka in proven, ineffective ways. Unfortunately, the funders chose to go with the conventional.

Sriganesh Lokanathan returned to LIRNEasia. He left us to fulfill some obligations in the US; came halfway to Singapore to start his MPA at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy; and fully returned after graduation to help manage the complex agricultural projects that were underway. We assist and encourage

our young researchers to enter graduate school, but we do not formally require them to return. Thus their return is a cause of additional happiness and affirmation.

Ranjula Senaratna Perera and Shazna Zuhlye joined the research team. A junior researcher, Ranjula brings skills in economic analysis. With experience at one of Sri Lanka's leading software firms and a graduate degree from University College London, Shazna is a welcome addition to the management team. Ayesha Zainudeen, employee No. 1, took maternity leave but has come back to work part-time, utilizing the flexible work modes we offer at LIRNEasia. She moves up to Senior Research Manager.

Sumudu Pagoda came from Red Cross to take over as Operations Manager from Sanchala Arangalage, who rejoined the Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka after being admitted to the Bar. Kasun Suranga joined us as he awaited the results of the university admission exam (which he passed very well). Sajeevani de Silva left the Knowledge to Innovation project to teach.

Harsha de Silva, Consultant Lead Economist, was appointed a national-list Member of Parliament in 2010 by the Leader of Opposition. He has made a significant contribution to raising the level of debate in Parliament, bringing evidence to bear on debates on macroeconomic management, as has been his wont since he began to engage in public debate five-six years back. Below is an excerpt from our message that wished him well as he moved to the next level as a public intellectual:

*He had the greatest impact in contributing to the shifting of the frame for discussing inflation in Sri Lanka*

*from the misguided focus on imported inflation to one that correctly places the actions of the Central Bank and the now commonly understood term, money printing, at the center. His persistence paid off; his words made it into the discussions of the Monetary Board. He was called names, but the Central Bank corrected itself.*

*Dr de Silva's interventions, along with those of Fuss Budget's Thrift Column in LBO, served the country well. In particular, business and the asset-poor benefited. While LIRNEasia would like to take credit for this stunning achievement, it cannot. Dr de Silva was our Lead Economist, only part of the time. He did all his macroeconomic work in the rest of his time. That subject falls outside the remit of LIRNEasia, however broadly defined.*

The responsibilities of a national-list MP in Sri Lanka do not include constituency service and do not preclude professional activities. Harsha is thus able to continue his work with LIRNEasia, though scheduling meetings with him is a little harder now and he sometimes brings his security detail to the office! We and Harsha venture into uncharted waters hoping that clear communication and principled action will help us avoid the shoals.

Sanchala started, and Sumudu finished, the first refurbishment of the LIRNEasia office.

Dilini Wijeweera, a multi-talented architect, who had been assisting with conceptual work in the Knowledge to Innovation project,

helped with the interior redesign. The bright orange that was the most controversial element of the redecoration was later found to be the most conducive for creativity, a trait we definitely wish to encourage. A few judicious structural alterations created more space and light and reduced heat. The new furniture allows for easy reconfiguration. It was a significant investment, but one that we hope will help us get the work done, better, faster.

Every July LIRNEasia goes on a trip. There is always a participant from beyond the shores to remind us we are a regional organization that happens to have an office in Sri Lanka.

Always, families are invited. Sometimes we combine work with pleasure, like in Kukule Ganga in 2009 when we spent a day brainstorming the next proposal. And almost always, we climb some rock, of which there seem to be an endless supply in Sri Lanka! In this instance, it was Pahiyangala, the location of Sri Lanka's largest cave, where the Chinese scholar monk, Faxian (Fa Hien) is said to have spent some time after visiting the Abhayagiri University in Anuradhapura to collect scriptures in around 410-11 CE.

Every January we have a party. Some years, we invite parents. Others, we invite partners. Always, we invite families. For the first time, we held this event outside Colombo, where a walking tour by an architect followed by a wonderful meal in the salubrious surroundings that served as the laboratory for Sri Lanka's greatest modern architect, Geoffrey Bawa.

2009-10 saw the birth of Ayesha Zainudeen's and Zafir Hashim's baby Yameena. Lorraine Salazar and Francis Hutchinson welcomed Carlos into their family. They joined Kinuli Qui Xi, the firstborn of Nuwan Waidyantha and Li Xiu Fang, who arrived in 2008. Divakar Goswami, a key contributor to the establishment of LIRNEasia, who now works at Deloitte in Hyderabad, married Aarti Vir in late 2009. LIRNEasia's family continues to grow.



*Rohan Samarajiva*  
**Chief Executive Officer**