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Strengthening ICTD Research Capacity in Asia (SIRCA) Program
Mentorship Model Evaluation

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Any errors or omissions in this report are the sole responsibility of the evaluator.

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Executive Summary

The Mentorship Model evaluation studied more closely what was identified from the first SIRCA evaluation as a powerful and unique component of the SIRCA Program that has contributed significantly towards achieving the capacity building outcomes for ICTD researchers in Asia. The evaluation was entirely qualitative, relying on one-to-one recorded interviews conducted by the evaluator and the SIRCA Secretariat staff with the use of an interview schedule. Principal Investigators (PI) and Mentors participated in individual interviews, and where possible, joint Mentor-PI interviews were also carried out.

The PIs and Mentors both had clear ideas of what an “ideal Mentor” should be like but in reality, there was much ambiguity and vagueness regarding the actual responsibilities of the Mentor. On the one hand, Mentors generally felt hesitant about being too imposing and intrusive into the PI's independence and preferred to take a higher level supervisory stance that failed to result in a proliferation of collaborative work. On the other hand, some PIs yearned for hand-holding and close guidance with the Mentor but their expectations were not met or, in fact, not communicated properly. The current SIRCA model where Mentors are assigned to PIs made it harder for co-authorships to ensue as the matches were inevitably imperfect, but a more fundamental issue that the evaluation found was the lack of communication between the two parties from the very early stages of the relationship where they ideally would have met and frankly discussed with each other their backgrounds, interests, motivations, expectations, and practical issues like time commitment and scheduling. In addition to providing a deliberate space for this kind of discussion to occur, SIRCA can develop sharper definitions of the roles and duties of the Mentor and PI in the Terms of Reference and the Memorandum of Understanding. This can bring more clarity, structure, accountability, transparency, and satisfaction in the relationship.

Mentors are motivated to participate in SIRCA for the opportunity to connect to their areas of expertise, to learn about the latest and cutting-edge ICTD research, or to work in a new geographical area. Besides the intellectual stimulation, Mentors felt that the possibility to co-author and publish with their PIs was a significant motivator, especially since most Mentors were senior academics who regarded peer-reviewed journal publications with prestige. The first round of SIRCA did not result in the much anticipated Mentor-PI co-authorship. It may have been due to the way that the mentorship was set up – assigning Mentors to PIs – which inevitably resulted in imperfect matches, and the fact that Mentors felt unsure about pushing their PIs towards collaboration. The respondents all agreed, however, that co-authorship should not be made mandatory. It should be a natural evolution of the relationship that has the potential to continue long after they depart from SIRCA. Several other mentorship models were hence suggested by the respondents. The Secretariat can choose one or a combination of models to develop the new mentorship framework in the global plan. While nominating one's own Mentor can increase the chances for co-authorship, less experienced researchers felt comfortable about being assigned a Mentor because they did not necessarily know anybody in the ICTD field. In addition, diversity of thought is promoted as PIs would not end up choosing somebody they already know from the same institution or same location.

Improved communication is a theme that underlies several issues in SIRCA – a discussion space for PIs and Mentors early in project, a ‘publication and dissemination strategy’ that would leave a mark in the academic world while making an impact on real-world development problems, and a ‘project management tool’ that would allow real time communication and project tracking among Mentors, PIs, and SIRCA staff. While there were a few communication gaps resulting from language and cultural differences, this was inevitable given the diversity of the Mentors and Mentees in the Program. Moving towards global expansion, SIRCA should consider getting Mentors and Mentees who speak the same language or are proficient in the common language (such as Spanish) and familiar with the cultural context. Cross-continental diversity may be sacrificed for the sake of efficiency but also to facilitate the relationship and make the experience as beneficial as possible for the Mentor and the Mentee.

The possibilities for SIRCA are open and optimistic. Mentorship is an effective way to build capacity of researchers in this Program. This evaluation attempted to unearth the deepest concerns among the key stakeholders as any human relationship has its ups and downs. The PIs and Mentors have been working together for more than a year and the utility of this linkage is undeniable, if at least to know a new person in the field of ICTD. The pioneer round of the SIRCA Program has come to an end, but this is only the beginning for the PIs and Mentors in their continuous involvement and contribution to the growing SIRCA Family around the world.

The SIRCA Mentorship Model

The capacity building mission of the SIRCA Program embraces professional support and career formation for emerging ICTD researchers. A mentorship model was developed within the SIRCA Program where a Principal Investigator (PI) was linked to a senior researcher (Mentor) who would provide continuous guidance, support, direction, and professional networking opportunities throughout the PI's project. It was hoped that the Mentee benefited from this interaction with an experienced researcher whilst gaining confidence and skills to contribute to the field of ICTD through rigorous research, publications, dissemination, and collaboration with the Mentor.

The first evaluation of the SIRCA Program examined three areas – the Grant Review Process, Workshops & Conferences, and the Mentorship Program. One of the questions the evaluation asked was to what extent did mentorship facilitate learning and/or collaboration between emerging and senior researchers. Most PIs felt that they gained a lot from their Mentors through more exposure to different ICTD theories, research methods, ICTD publications and ICTD conferences. Communication between the PI and the Mentor occurred about once or twice a month, mostly through email and on a needs-basis. With scheduling and communication infrastructure challenges facing some PIs and Mentors, on-the-ground Mentor Site Visits were crucial to contextualize the project, and most importantly, to strengthen the relationship between the PI and the Mentor. It was beneficial, therefore, for SIRCA to mandate and fund at least one Site Visit. Fifty-five percent (55%) of the Mentors considered their match to the PI suitable, while 45% of the Mentors felt there was room for improvement. A sense of isolation from the SIRCA community was mentioned by a few PIs and Mentors.¹

Evaluation of the Mentorship Model

In light of the results from the SIRCA Program evaluation, it was deemed valuable to conduct a second qualitative, in-depth investigation of the mentorship model as issues and questions for further clarification surfaced. The SIRCA Secretariat was keen on understanding the Mentor-PI relationship so as to conceptualize a better mentorship model, if any, for the future. Most PIs and Mentors were dispersed in different countries, making the SIRCA mentorship model remote and, therefore, unique in the existing challenges and opportunities.

The Secretariat staff and the evaluator went to the project site, where possible, to conduct personal interviews using a questionnaire guide and a recorder. The evaluator also conducted interviews during SIRCA's final dissemination conference and talked to global experts who managed similar grant programs in their own countries.² PIs and Mentors answered questions individually and jointly, whenever possible, and shared their experiences pertaining to various aspects of the mentorship scheme such as the Mentor's role, Mentor-PI matching, Communication, Supervision, Mentorship Models, and Mentor Site Visits.³ Eleven (11) out of 14 PIs (79%) and 9 out of 10 Mentors (90%) were interviewed individually, while 5 out of 14 pairs (36%) had joint interviews. PIs and Mentors who did not participate in the joint interviews were still asked the joint interview questions during their individual sessions. The PI team members also joined the interviews whenever possible. Table 1 illustrates the participants for this evaluation.

¹ Full results of the first SIRCA evaluation is in the report "*Evaluation of 'Strengthening ICTD Research Capacity in Asia (SIRCA)' Program*", Singapore Internet Research Centre, November 2010.

² "Global Dialogue on ICT for Development", April 15-17, 2011, Phuket, Thailand

³ See Annex 1 for the interview questionnaire.

Table 1. Mentorship Program evaluation interview participants (sorted alphabetically by Principal Investigator's country)

Principal Investigators (PI)	PI Country	PI Institution	Mentor (country)	Mentor Institution	PI Interview	Mentor interview	Joint interview
M. Sirajul Islam	Bangladesh	Bangladesh Centre for E-governance	Dr. Shaikh Abdul Salam (Bangladesh)	University of Dhaka	√	√	
Md. Mahfuz Ashraf	Bangladesh	Brainstorm Bangladesh	Dr. Roger Harris (Hong Kong)	Roger Harris Associates	√	√	√
Chivoi Peou	Cambodia	Department of Media and Communication, Royal University of Phnom Penh	Dr. May Lwin (Singapore)	Nanyang Technological University	√	√	
Phal Des	Cambodia	IT Center, Royal University of Phnom Penh	Dr. John Traxler (UK)	Learning Lab, University of Wolverhampton	√	√	√
Kanliang Wang	China	Electronic Commerce Research Center, Xi'an Jiaotong University	Dr. Arul Chib (Singapore)	Nanyang Technological University	√	√	
Wansong Zheng							
T. B. Dinesh	India	Servelots Infotech	Dr. Rahul De (India)	Indian Institute of Management Bangalore	√	√	√
Balwant Singh Mehta	India	Institute for Human Development	Dr. Rahul De (India)	Indian Institute of Management Bangalore	√	√	
V.L.V.Kameswari	India	College of Agriculture, G. B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology	Dr. Vibodh Parthasarathi (India)	Centre for Culture, Media & Governance, Central University	√	√	√
Devesh Kishore		School of Journalism & Mass Communication, Institute of Management Studies, Noida					
Shefali Oza	Nepal	Nyaya Health	Dr. Arul Chib (Singapore)	Nanyang Technological University		√	
Mary Grace P. Mirandilla	Philippines	Center for Research and Communication	Dr. Alexander Flor (Philippines)	University of Philippines Open University, Los Banos	√	√	
Ma. Regina M. Hechanova	Philippines	Ateneo Center for Organization Research and Development, Ateneo de Manila University	Prof. Ang Peng Hwa (Singapore)	Nanyang Technological University	√	√	
Komathi Ale	Singapore	Nanyang Technological University	Dr. Arul Chib (Singapore)	Nanyang Technological University	√	√	√
MJR David	Sri Lanka	Association for Development and Peace through Community Action (ADAPCA)	Dr. Vibodh Parthasarathi (India)	Centre for Culture, Media & Governance, Central University		√	
Pham Huu Ty	Vietnam	Faculty of Land Resources and Agricultural Environment, Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry	Dr. Richard Heeks (UK)	University of Manchester, United Kingdom			

The “ideal Mentor”

Mentors and PIs were asked to describe the “ideal Mentor” for a research capacity building program like SIRCA. They came up with a list of characteristics that ultimately encompassed the roles and responsibilities of the Mentor, including personality traits that would best facilitate the learning process for the Mentee. It is worth revisiting the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Mentor developed by SIRCA:⁴

SIRCA mentors are expected to fulfill the following objectives:

- a. *provide professional guidance to the PI;*
- b. *provide leadership role model for the PI; demonstrating how the PI might develop greater initiative, increased independence, and self-reliance.*
- c. *share relevant research knowledge and experience with the PI from a variety of sources including research databases accessible through, among other sources, IDRC’s library.*
- d. *identify and resolve potential obstacles to the PI;*
- e. *guide the PI in conducting research ethically and responsibly;*
- f. *assist PI to develop professional networks;*
- g. *enhance the PI’s research and publication efforts; and,*
- h. *collaboratively develop research paper(s) for dissemination at international conferences and peer-reviewed publications.*

(Terms of Reference, SIRCA Mentorship Scheme)

The “ideal Mentor” described by current SIRCA Mentors build on the TOR expectations, but add specific ‘pre-requisites’ to become a Mentor in the first place:

- ❖ Has experience supervising mentees, good interpersonal and mentoring skills
- ❖ Has demonstrated an academic research track record through previous publications and research projects, grants, thematic and geographical expertise
- ❖ Has practical experience, especially fieldwork experience, and definitely more experience than the PI
- ❖ Has experience supervising more than 1 mentee if the mentor is to take on multiple mentees/projects that are not necessarily located near each other or on the same topic
- ❖ Has a broad set of skills – from general social science knowledge to technical ICTD expertise
- ❖ Has a network of professional connections and is willing to link the Mentee to that network
- ❖ Has language ability – it helps if the Mentor speaks the same language as the PI
- ❖ Uses their weight as senior researchers to help the PIs get through barriers that would otherwise be difficult for them

Mentor: *“I think it makes a difference because even if you don’t have that established relationship, what you do have is a credibility that the Principal Investigator doesn’t have just because you are the senior person coming in. I didn’t know the person [from the NGO] but the fact that I was the senior Mentor coming meant that I had way more credibility in asking for stuff that maybe the Principal Investigator could not. So it’s up to the Mentor to use their experience, their caché, their title, to come in and establish very quickly the relationship as well as move stuff forward that the Mentee is not able to do. I think that’s part of the Mentor’s role. Is to help Mentees do stuff that they can’t do because they don’t have the credibility yet.”*

PI: *“He established the contact between me and the NGO director. Then I took it from there. But having him introduce me was a huge help.”*

- ❖ Has mobility to travel and attend SIRCA-sponsored Mentor Site Visits, Workshops, Conferences
- ❖ Has a good sense of timing for interventions, anticipate problems and keep a solution ready
- ❖ Has good judgement about the best phases to conduct Mentor Site Visits
- ❖ Is involved not only with the technical side of ICTD but also with the development side
- ❖ Is open to bounce off ideas with the PI
- ❖ Is open to unexpected developments, not only deliverables and key performance indicators
- ❖ Is familiar with the ICTD journal landscape (journal names, reputation, rankings, writing styles, content, etc.)

⁴ See Annex 2 for the Mentorship TOR.

- ❖ Is proactive and interested in the PI's situation, including the research environment and who other team members are
- ❖ Can provide a support structure, even if the topic match is not closely aligned
- ❖ Mentor can be an expert in the ICTD theme, in the geographical area, and/or research methodology
- ❖ Can see the big picture, particularly the project's horizon to map out broad research directions and the next stage of ICTD
- ❖ Can master resources available in the project site if the Mentor and PI are located in the same area/country
- ❖ Can connect academia to practice and has experience in both worlds
- ❖ Can provide the PI with contextual information, beyond professional communities

Mentor: *"In terms of literature, in terms of people to meet, conferences, not pushing some kind of list but platforming the things which are available in case you want to use it. I think that's the strongest role of the mentor, to make the environment for the person.....In this case I would like to have the mentees focus on their research and the role of the mentor is to provide some kind of contextual environment. "So and so is coming to town", it's not just networking....Give some kind of enabling environment. I've got to know there is a special journal issue coming out. I think that's the most delicate role for a Mentor without being too imposing."*

In turn, the SIRCA PIs listed traits for the "ideal Mentor" that corresponded to their own position as emerging ICTD researchers:

- ❖ Has genuine interest in the PI's project, committed and willing to give the time to it. "Full Professors" may have less time than lower ranked mentors.
- ❖ Has good mentoring skills such as giving constructive feedback and coaching
- ❖ Has an expertise in the sub-area of ICTD, such as e-health, e-governance, mobile phones
- ❖ Has technical skills such as writing, data analysis, and field work
- ❖ Has a good professional network and is willing to connect the Mentee to that network
- ❖ Gives the Mentee concrete suggestions such as reading lists, authors, ICTD models and theories to explore, but also gives Mentee the freedom to explore
- ❖ Is approachable, supportive, motivational, inspirational, encouraging, challenging
- ❖ Is able to advise the PI on where to send the work for publication and dissemination, including journal ranking and indexes
- ❖ Is knowledgeable on specific fieldwork skills and techniques such as questionnaire development, survey types, interview skills, focus group discussions, equipment use
- ❖ Is 'open door' and allows the Mentee to feel comfortable in expressing any concerns regarding the project
- ❖ Is timely to respond to queries
- ❖ Is open to scholarly inquiry and other scholars' points of view
- ❖ Is a good fit to the Mentee in terms of "working style"
- ❖ Is not self-conscious about the position or ranking with the PI and/or team members, particularly if a PI team member is older and more senior than the Mentor
- ❖ Is culturally sensitive, better if the Mentor is already familiar with the culture and/or language
- ❖ Tries not to impose their own views on the project, particularly in regards to how to do the study or what to study

PI: *"Someone who can guide me through those areas which I am not familiar with and add value to what I am doing. Add value in terms of project output and also in terms of the quality of work that I am doing. Mentor should be able to add something to our own ability, in our work. Mentor should be able to guide us in what we are doing presently, if there are any loopholes, to fill the gaps. It is not just about the project but about our own capability to do things. Not just adding in terms of my project output, or quality of my work, but also improving my abilities. I see it at both levels, at the personal level and at the project level."*

Both Mentors and PIs felt that apart from fieldwork in which the Mentor did not usually participate for on-site data collection, the Mentor had an important role to play in the other three project areas delineated in the evaluation – Theory and Conceptualization, Publication and Dissemination, and Verification and Approval of PI deliverables. The Mentors ensured that projects were not only applied but also grounded on theory which is absolutely necessary to get published in peer-reviewed journals. In fieldwork, the Mentor reviewed and gave feedback on data collection tools and gave more advice during Mentor Site Visits. The PI also had local resources to tap into for fieldwork and given that many projects were remotely located, the Mentor was usually satisfied with a snapshot of the reality on the ground. A Mentor with fieldwork experience is obligatory in the SIRCA Program as they can use their experience to resolve issues such as logistics and ethics. It is equally important for the Mentors to advise PIs in the area of publication and dissemination in both the beginning and end stages of the project. One PI specified the Mentor's help in introducing

her to a journal's 'impact factor' and 'indexed' journals. Another Mentor perceived his duty to be encouraging journal publications so that the work "sees the light of day".

Mentor: "A more proactive role of the Mentor would be to make sure that this research in whatever form, an article online, could be fed to their students, part of the curriculum, written up in case study form, be shared with students in ICTD instruction. There is so much material but so little analysis...With SIRCA, the understanding and the explanations are there. It should be fed back to instruction."

Mentor: "If anything to suggest to SIRCA, in the publication process, the appropriate reviewers should be identified, making sure that they come from a tradition that research is coming from. Otherwise, it shakes the ground... SIRCA Secretariat identified with Media Asia Journal...I did not suggest her any other...I served as a reviewer in many ISI journals. Media Asia Journal is not ISI and although [my PI] is not in academia, ideally I would have asked her to publish in 'Community Informatics'...It's considered high level. It would give her tenure if she was in academia. I hope AMIC people don't mind me saying that."

Finally, the verification of PI deliverables was an administrative exercise that the Mentors just did to comply with SIRCA rules. However, in one case, the Mentor did not even read the PI's progress reports. The PI sent the reports directly to the Secretariat without the Mentor knowing the status of the project. It was not surprising that the Mentor was unaware of how much funding remained in the PI's project and whether it was sufficient for an extra phase of data collection.

Although Mentors and PIs used mostly e-mail and the phone to communicate, physical proximity was convenient to set up face-to-face meetings and arranging travel. This evaluation corroborates the findings from the first SIRCA evaluation that PI outcomes in terms of capacities built, personal and professional growth, and publication and dissemination can still happen successfully even if the Mentors and PIs were based in different locations, rendering both cross-country and within-country linkages as entirely compatible with SIRCA's objectives.

Ambiguity, Expectations

Despite the confidence and clarity with which the Mentors and PIs listed out the role of the Mentor, a sense of ambiguity pervaded in reality as they felt unclear about the extent to which they could enforce the TOR and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).⁵ The TOR explicitly recommends the Mentor and the Mentee to discuss with each other about expectations in the relationship before starting the work on the project:

The amount of time a mentor commits to a project varies depending on the needs, expectations, and desires of the mentee and the mentor. SIRCA highly recommends that both parties discuss their expectations at the beginning of the relationship. One of the most important factors is time: How often and for how long will you be available? Do you have a commitment at certain times that would make you unavailable? When is it appropriate to call? The time commitment at the beginning of the will focus on getting to know each other and on building the relationship, while on an on-going basis it will focus on research activities. Towards the end of the project, it is expected that more time will be spent on conducting analysis and preparing quality research manuscripts. (Terms of Reference, SIRCA Mentorship Scheme)

The Mentor-PI MOU emphasizes the Mentor's supervision in terms of administrative tasks to accomplish rather than the 'soft skills' and 'interpersonal skills' that are necessary to become an effective Mentor. Procedural duties are easier to cross out from a 'to do list' of progress report verifications and Mentor Site Visits than supporting and nurturing a person in his or her professional career. The MOU highlights in general terms:

The Mentor is required to provide guidance and supervision to the research groups, which are assigned to him/her, in the research development and execution of the research study throughout the course of the programme (Point 1.1)

Mentors are required to be in regular contact with the Principal Investigator and should provide as much guidance as they deem fit in order to aid in the growth of PI as a researcher. (Point 1.5)

⁵ See Annex 3 for Mentor-PI MOU and Annex 4 for Mentor-SIRCA MOU.

The Principal Investigator's responsibilities in the MOU were more "behavior-oriented" than the Mentor's responsibilities.

2. Principal Investigators

- 2.1 All Principal Investigators (PIs) should expect to work closely with their mentors and be prepared for one (1) field trip visit by their Mentors;
- 2.2 PIs are expected to hold regular meetings with Mentors to discuss the progress of their research;
- 2.3 PIs are expected to be sensitive to the demands placed on the time of mentors and prepare in advance for scheduled meetings;
- 2.4 PIs are expected to have a genuine interest in their own professional and personal growth;
- 2.5 PIs are expected to possess an open and receptive attitude to feedback and advice from their mentors;
- 2.6 PIs must be willing to take part in collaborative activities designed to foster the goals of the mentoring program and provide oral and written feedback as requested to facilitate assessment of the program by the SIRCA Management Board.

There was a "gray area" within this framework that was open to interpretation and created some tensions between the Mentor and the Mentee. Most Mentor-PI pairs skipped the first crucial step – to frankly discuss with each other the time investment, as well as the extent and the nature of advice that the PI sought from the Mentor.

The SIRCA Secretariat could consider organizing a formal "orientation workshop" as soon as the program starts and provide a space for all Mentors and PIs to get acquainted with each other and discuss issues about expectations, time commitment, and schedules.

One Mentor was hesitant to impose too much of his views on the PI because he felt that he could have been crossing a fine line between "policing" and "friendly encouragement". For all respondents, there was no explicit "moral authority" of the Mentor over the PI except the former's seniority in terms of experience. But even this fact was watered down when the Mentor was not an expert in the PI's project domain.

Mentor: "On the one hand, there was clearly a kind of compliance angle to it: Are you doing what you signed for? Are you spending the money right?...on the one hand you are supporting, but on the other hand you're checking. I don't have a problem with that as long as it's explicit...it's that role, being nice, supportive and friendly, then saying 'look, look, do this'...If it could be built in at a contractual level so everyone knew that was what the deal was, that was the contract, then maybe."

There was confusion about equating the Mentor to a PhD advisor. Some Mentors felt that their role was similar to that of an academic advisor, while others took a more distant stance because they assumed their PIs to be more mature than PhD candidates as they were able to write a grant proposal. Issues emerged when a Mentor assumed that his or her PI had a certain level of independence when in fact, the PI wanted more 'hand-holding'. This was compounded by the fact that Mentors had different interpretations of a "PhD advisor".

Mentor: "I think it's a delicate matter. It's not like a formal supervisor, a boss, it's not a reporting structure. Not like a PhD student-advisor relationship. The PhD is longer duration and it's an administrative exercise, deadlines, exams. This is more like guiding a research fellow, a grantee. Nor is it like an employee, a commissioned research. It's mentoring, depends upon what the mentee asks and what the mentor can anticipate."

Mentor: "It's different than a PhD advisor. In PhD, the focus is much more academic and you guide people for a much longer time, you have much more say in what they are reading, what they use as a theoretical basis, you have much more say in the analysis...my inputs were more occasional, "focus on this, do this"... the way it was structured also...I too feel that I didn't want to interfere too much. I wanted them to have their own say in what should be...that's important because the objective is to develop capacity for researchers, for them to be able to explore...With a PhD student, you are much more in charge – no, you can't do this, do that."

Mentor: “[A PhD candidate is] expected to conduct independent research. PhD supervisor would guide advisee to a certain extent but main decisions are made by the PhD candidate. Mentor is something else. You guide the PI at decision points that have to be made...Frankly, there were times when the performance of my role as Mentor has been influenced very much by my role as PhD supervisor...But then I had to correct myself.”

Mentor: “It’s a bit like supervising a PhD student.”

SIRCA Mentors should not come into the program assuming that their PIs are fairly mature researchers, first because the program objective is to support emerging researchers, and second, while some PIs may already have PhDs or a fair amount of research experience, their familiarity with the ICTD field is supposedly limited and hence, deserving of SIRCA’s grant. Mentors should adjust their views after talking to the PI and perceiving the latter’s actual level of experience in ICTD research. The Mentors tended to “shrink” from a more active role in the project not out of laziness, irresponsibility, or lack of commitment, but because of the lack of a defined notion of ‘high level supervisor’ versus ‘full project collaborator/writer’.

PI: “How much time was expected of the Mentor to be involved in the project? Two hours per week? Two hours per month?”

PI: “How much contribution do you expect from the Mentor? Or what kind of a contribution? Because that is not very clear, contribution in terms of time commitment and also the activities that you expect them to be involved in. I don’t think it’s really clear to us and also to the Mentor. The task should be defined, his role should be spelled out. He will be doing this, this, this.”

PI: “In our case as young researchers, the Mentor should have not just the idea. He should be able to correct us, guide us, something like an adult taking the hand of a kid so he can go very smoothly.”

PI: “Because SIRCA is about research initiation and promotion so I would bring that component there...it would be equivalent to a PhD mentor, PhD advisor because there will be typically people who worked on this grant but they may not come from a research background. So you want to bring them into research, which is what I understand from SIRCA, and that’s why I think it’s like a PhD mentor...”

PI: SIRCA’s objectives and a PhD program’s objectives are similar. As a PhD graduate, I can claim that I am a ‘researcher’. My Mentor should agree with this. I feel that not all Mentors in SIRCA right now have the same understanding of the objectives. The Mentor’s objective should be to make a person a ‘good researcher’. The Mentor’s role here should be parallel to a PhD supervisor. I understand that there are different output expectations from PhD student and SIRCA fellow. For PhD, the output is to get a degree. For SIRCA, it’s to build capacity. But they overlap.”

The current Mentor-PI MOU can be fine-grained to define:

- ❖ The Mentor’s 1st role: An academic advisor, critical friend and guide who provides a supportive, enriching and resourceful environment for the PI. The Mentor should be genuinely interested in helping the PI maximize the quality of the project outputs (*expand on MOU Point 1.1 under ‘Supervision’*)
- ❖ The Mentor’s 2nd role: A monitor of project deliverables. He or she accompanies the PI through project milestones and verifies their content (*expand on MOU Point 1.2 under ‘Supervision’*)

Motivation

Mentors participate in the SIRCA Program for intellectual and academic pursuit. While the Mentor honorarium was mentioned as “symbolic”, monetary compensation was secondary to what Mentors could gain from the program - the opportunity to deepen their current research interests, to engage in cutting-edge research, and to be part of a global ICTD community. Having all program expenses covered such as on-site field visits, and attendance for SIRCA workshops and conferences, however, were important incentives to join the program. Higher honorariums may attract famous senior researchers who are extremely knowledgeable, experienced, and whose name can increase the profile of the SIRCA Program. The downside to this is that a Mentor who is too senior may have no time to advise and guide their Mentees properly. When probed if Mentors could actually be recruited at a pro bono basis, they said it was possible if the project truly interested them.

Matching the Mentor to a project was therefore crucial to benefit both the Mentor and the Mentee. On the one hand, most Mentors stated that a close match to their field of expertise was important to ensure effective mentoring as they could provide the PI with the most resources. A few Mentors, though, enjoyed being matched to a different field than their background because they were able to learn from this opportunity. Most PIs agreed with the first scenario – that they could get most help from Mentors who were fully knowledgeable of the subject. One PI was an anomaly and did not mind being assigned to a Mentor who was not an expert in his field. This PI was fairly young and new to academic research and accepted the SIRCA program as an extension of his graduate studies, feeling open about learning new things from any senior researcher. It is clear that SIRCA brought together a variety of opinions, which makes it difficult for program implementation to satisfy all different “tastes”, but at the same time facilitates certain aspects of the program such as accommodating imperfect matches.

PI: *“My mentor does not have any background on mobile phones. So he became reliant on my way of approaching things, instead of me relying on him because of my familiarity with the issues of the project. He would basically agree with anything I did because he didn’t know much.”*

PI: *“[My mentor] offered help in writing if I needed help but I didn’t think it would be logical since he would have to study my topic and then he might not know a lot about it. It would be more effort for me to explain to him.”*

Publications and the possibility for collaboration and co-authorship with the Mentee was a second significant motivating factor. SIRCA recruited senior academic researchers interested primarily in peer-reviewed journal publications that had an impact on their academic careers.

Mentor: *“If it was an area where I am less familiar, of less research interest, I would probably be less motivated to work...if I were [working as an academic], I’d be interested and looking for opportunities for research and publications for instance. That’s what motivates academics...It’s hard to publish in a field that’s not your own. Even if it’s closely allied but not exactly, it’s still hard to publish in the better publications. So if you’re looking to senior academics for mentors, the research has to really fit in with their research to make it successful.”*

Mentor: *“To be a co-author in some way, some credits...like an acknowledgement on the bottom of the article on the first page. For academics, this is more important than the money.”*

The PIs viewed co-authorship with the Mentor as something that should be left between the two parties because it was a natural process or idea that developed over time. Forced collaboration would be detrimental to the relationship. Mentors cited a few reasons for not co-authoring with the PI – they took a more distant supervisory role to the PI’s day-to-day work, their expertise was not completely aligned with the project, they simply preferred not to co-author the work, and they wanted to give full credit to the PI. SIRCA had a few successful Mentor-PI collaborative outcomes which budded spontaneously as a result of mutual interest in the work.

PI: *“PI and Mentor would be in the best position to know whether it was indeed a collaboration in terms of design, analysis, write up and so on.”*

PI: "I think SIRCA should not care so much about this co-authorship, they should focus on the PI, as long as the PI is producing papers."

PI: "I can see the need to disseminate but I don't see the need to disseminate within the SIRCA project timeline...[there may be] a natural dissemination after the end of the project, over the next 2-3 years after SIRCA is done."

Mentor: "Another way of doing it is to say that there is one publication that has to happen between the Mentor and Mentee...Not necessarily on the core project idea, maybe on another issue. Because the idea of collaboration is to improve the writing and publication skills and the confidence of the mentee. What they are writing on is not that important. What's important is to write together. May or may not be directly on the scope of the project."

Co-authorship should not be mandatory in the SIRCA program. It should be up to the Mentor and the Mentee to decide whether working and writing together interests them. The Secretariat should continue to monitor the PIs and Mentors even after they leave the Program for collaborative outcomes triggered by their participation in SIRCA.

One Mentor raised the issue of "intellectual property rights" of the data and of publications that materialized beyond the SIRCA project period. Peer-reviewed publications can take many years with submissions, reviews, re-submissions, acceptance and finally publication. The same project data can be used in different papers by various stakeholders who are not necessarily the original PI and/or Mentor. In one case, the SIRCA PI decided to forgo collaboration with the Mentor because he was too busy and could not commit the time. The Mentor, with the PI's consent, decided to look for another collaborator. As there are no "authorship guidelines" in SIRCA, the Mentor questioned the effort it takes to publish without getting proper credit in the future.

Mentor: "Who owns the data right now? Does SIRCA own the data? I don't know. For us, when a university student does a Masters or a PhD thesis, the university owns the data, the copyright of the data is with the university. In order to do further work from there, sometimes the journal publication process could be 3 years. The PI could have disappeared. You have the data, the supervisor could be working on the data and turn it into a completely different paper in 3 years because different reviews come back and so on. In such cases, the supervisor should be able to take the lead authorship in the paper...I mean, whoever takes the lead and does a lot of work in it will take the lead role but the other party should still be somehow beneficiary to this and not be cut out."

SIRCA could think of emulating the "authorship guidelines" available in universities (e.g. Nanyang Technological University) and incorporate that into the TOR and MOU to safeguard against unethical behavior in collaborative work.

Mentorship Models

In terms of the benefits of becoming a Mentor, the SIRCA Mentorship TOR lists the following:

- a. *Personal satisfaction—mentors develop a sense of pride at helping a junior researcher succeed;*
- b. *Sharpened leadership and interpersonal skills—mentors sharpen their own skills as they challenge and coach their mentees;*
- c. *Source of professional recognition—SIRCA mentors will be co-authors of the resulting project publications;*
- d. *Expanded social network within the discipline—mentors develop professional contacts by interacting with other mentors and with the broader SIRCA network;*
- e. *Information gathering—mentors may be exposed to fresh ideas from their mentee. Some senior scholars can be isolated or set in their ways, mentees can offer new insights into research.*

(Terms of Reference, SIRCA Mentorship Scheme)

This evaluation suggests that co-authorship should not be mandated but it was certainly a desirable outcome of the SIRCA Program as it would increase the visibility of Asian researchers in the ICTD field, develop cross-regional networks, and presumably increase the quality of the papers as they are written with experienced, senior people. To enhance the possibility of more integration between the Mentor and Mentee, as well as to maximize the benefits of the mentoring experience to both parties, the evaluation asked respondents for suggestions of a better mentorship model. The following are a few ideas illustrated diagrammatically:

Mentor =  PI =  Expert =  Collaborator =  Academic advisor = 

Model 1. Allow the PI to nominate the Mentor or rank multiple Mentors. SIRCA would have to disregard conflict of interest issues in this model.



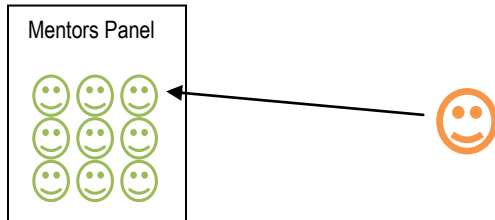
Pros:

1. The PI already knows the Mentor and is familiar and comfortable with his or her background and working style
2. The PI knows best what kind of help he or she needs in the project and may choose Mentors who can fulfill those specific gaps
3. SIRCA can expand its network of ICTD researchers
4. Language or cultural barriers are reduced or non-existent
5. It is not an artificially assigned or forced relationship

Cons:

1. The PI may not know anyone to nominate, in which case SIRCA would still have to prepare a list of available Mentors
2. The PI may not know exactly what are his or her needs simply because they lack experience
3. There is risk of “inbreeding” – the PI and the Mentor may come from the same department/institution and the possibility for new thinking, new discoveries, and diversity of thought can be curtailed
4. In the case that the PI and Mentor come from the same location, the cross-country / cross-continental linkages would not be created
5. The PI may be nominating Mentors but he or she does not know whether there is somebody “better” out there

Model 2. SIRCA would have a panel of Mentors with their background for the PIs to choose from *in the beginning of the program*. Ideally, the Mentors on the list would have a diversity of experiences.



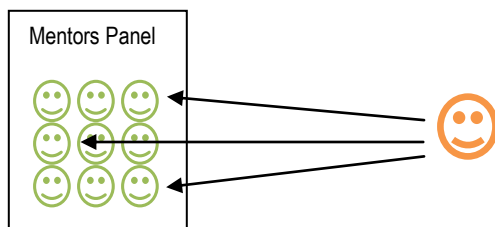
Pros:

1. The PI would have the benefit of seeing all available Mentors before choosing the expert who would most fit their project
2. Mentor matching is visible and transparent

Cons:

1. PIs can flock towards a few Mentors because of reputation or expertise, and leave other Mentors empty-handed

Model 3. A variation of Model 2, SIRCA would have a panel of Mentors but the PI would not choose one person at the beginning. Instead, the PI would *work alone* and seek the expertise of multiple Mentors from the panel on a *needs-basis throughout the project*.



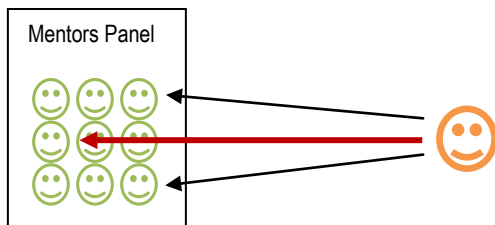
Pros:

1. The PI can seek help from Mentors at their own pace
2. The PI can seek Mentors with different expertise depending on the project phase/needs

Cons:

1. A stable PI-Mentor relationship would not exist. A fluid and informal arrangement with Mentors having multiple PIs may not agree with PIs who prefer more structure and organization
2. PIs would not be assigned to the Mentor from the beginning of the project and those who need early help may feel lost
3. Mentors consulting many PI can feel overwhelmed

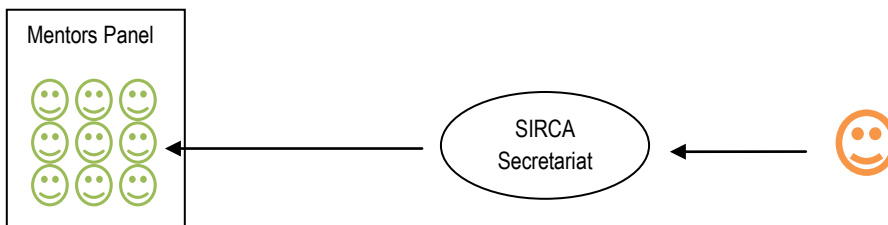
Model 4. Another variation of Model 2, but the only difference is that the PI and Mentor can eventually become a *stable pair* if they “clicked” after frequent communication and consultations.



Pros: Same as Model 3

Cons: Same as Model 3 with the added disadvantage that in the hypothetical case of a PI not having “clicked” with any of the Mentors, SIRCA would still have to assign a Mentor to the PI. There is too much uncertainty which is counterproductive to a stable, nurturing research environment for the PI

Model 5. Another variation of Model 2, the PI would seek help from a panel of available Mentors but the PI would go through a *nodal person at the Secretariat* who would then connect the PI to the expert. The PI would not request for a specific person, but voice their *specific need*, e.g. “an expert in structural equation modeling”.



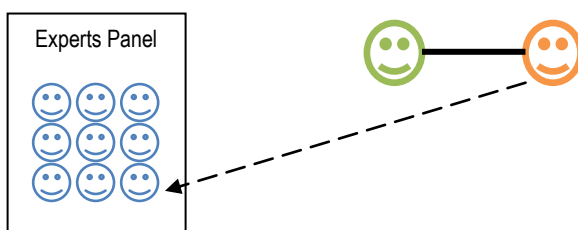
Pros:

1. Ensures that one Mentor is not bombarded by PI requests because the Secretariat acts as a filter and the sole connector to the Mentor
2. Increased bureaucracy and administrative work for the SIRCA Secretariat

Cons:

1. The PI is not free to choose the person
2. Relies on the Secretariat's selection criteria of the Mentor

Model 6. SIRCA has an anchored panel of experts in addition to the usual Mentor-PI pair. The PI would work closely from the beginning with the assigned Mentor but is also able to *freely consult* the panel of experts on an ad-hoc basis.



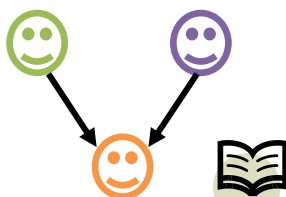
Pros:

1. A separate panel of experts who are not Mentors may reduce any conflict of interest issues. One Mentor made it akin to a “journal’s editorial board and its independent reviewers”
2. The PI can select from a diversity of experts and consult them during different project phases while not being limited to one Mentor

Cons:

1. Ego conflicts may arise between the Mentor and the Expert
2. The PI would have to selectively heed the advice of two different people which might confuse instead of help
3. Questions of authorships in publications when multiple people have had input may eventually arise

Model 7. To enhance the publication aspect, each PI can be assigned a 'Mentor' who would supervise and guide the PI throughout the project, and assigned a 'Collaborator' who would be there for the sole objective of writing the paper with the PI. The Mentor may request to be part of the paper since a lot of effort and investment went into the project.



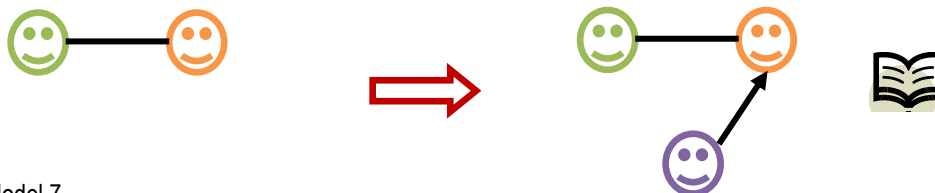
Pros:

1. Publication would be a definite outcome of the Program
2. The PI would have the certainty of having explicit support for writing the paper with a senior person (if the Collaborator is a senior researcher)

Cons:

1. Ego conflicts may arise between the Mentor and the Collaborator
2. The PI would have to selectively heed the advice of two different people which might confuse instead of the help them

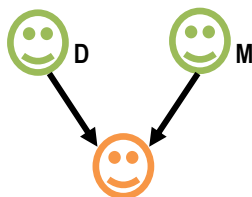
Model 8. A variation of Model 7, the PI and Mentor work together and when the project is approaching the writing stage, the PI calls a Collaborator to join the project with the explicit purpose of writing the paper.



Pros: Same as Model 7

Cons: Same as Model 7 with added uncertainty that the Collaborator may be joining too late into the project. The more people involved, the more complicated the relationship can become.

Model 9. Similar to Model 7, the PI is assigned to a 'domain' Mentor and a 'methodology' Mentor.



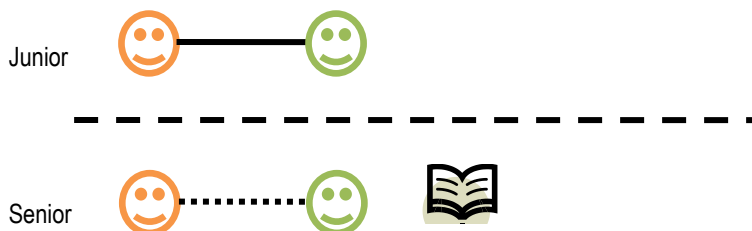
Pros:

1. Beneficial in the case where a Mentor is not assigned to his or her field of expertise and does not have to learn about the new topic or methodology

Cons:

1. Ego conflicts may arise between the domain expert and the methodology expert
2. It may save time and effort from the Mentor but the PI may get confused with 2 different opinions
3. Lack of one stable person to support the PI throughout the entire project
4. Limits the learning opportunity for the Mentor

Model 10. SIRCA could structure a two-tier program with “junior researchers” and “senior researchers”. The junior researchers are younger and emerging, learning the landscape of rigorous academic research, perhaps in the midst of their PhD programs, while the senior researchers are advanced and poised to make an impact in the field of ICTD through prolific publications.



Pros:

1. SIRCA can almost guarantee publications from senior researchers who would carry SIRCA’s name and raise the Program profile
2. SIRCA would not have the dilemma of having a single cohort of PIs that is too diverse in terms of research levels

Cons:

1. SIRCA would have to organize different capacity building activities catered to the 2 groups
2. The question of whether Mentors should be assigned to both groups or only to the junior researchers comes into play

Model 11. SIRCA could consider not assigning any Mentors to PIs who are already linked to an academic advisor. For example, one PI in the Program was a PhD candidate and used his SIRCA project as his PhD thesis. He also had a PhD advisor from his home university who accompanied the entire work. Although the PI requested that a Mentor need not be assigned to him, SIRCA assigned a Mentor who happened to lack expertise in the project domain. The PI found it hard to accommodate the ideas of the two mentors and ultimately put more weight on the guidance of the PhD supervisor who was an expert in the ICTD sub-area. The PI tried to incorporate the SIRCA Mentor’s advice but due to the lack of familiarity with the topic, the Mentor often gave “incorrect” advice. The PI also decided to publish his work with his name only because incorporating the PhD advisor and not the SIRCA Mentor or vice versa would have been ethically inappropriate. In such circumstances, the Secretariat could request background information of the academic advisor who is attached to the PI and verify that he or she is appropriate for the Program. Perhaps due to concerns of conflict of interest, SIRCA resolved to assign an independent Mentor to the PI.



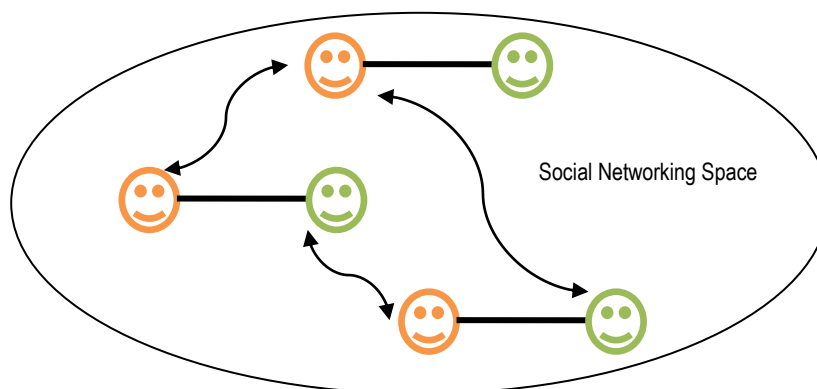
Pros:

1. The PI will not have to deal with two different opinions
2. The PI already has an established relationship with the academic advisor

Cons:

1. The academic advisor may not be the “right” Mentor for the SIRCA Program
2. There would be no point of the Mentorship program for this PI
3. The PI may have built capacity, gotten a PhD, and published the work but it may not be fully attributable to the SIRCA Program

Model 12. “Peer to peer” mentoring where SIRCA PIs can consult each other through a social networking space



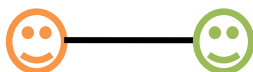
Pros:

1. PIs can share ideas with each other which can help their projects
2. Reduces a sense of isolation felt by researchers
3. Naturally builds a community of researchers which can grow as more SIRCA participants are added
4. A flexible platform can be private for confidential consultations or completely public. For example, there are options to simply “Like” a Facebook page without having to share one’s personal life with others
5. SIRCA keeps up with the latest ICT trend – appropriate for an ICTD grant program

Cons:

1. Most PIs and Mentors in the first SIRCA cohort dislike Facebook or any other social networking site and prefer to resort to traditional email. They do not want to be bombarded with more emails or open a new account
2. Most PIs opposed institutionally imposed / top-down efforts of communication and community building
3. Most PIs dislike sharing information and photos. Flickr is still not utilized by all PIs and some distrust the security and accuracy of site content (e.g. Wiki)
4. The choice of the social networking site such as Facebook or Ning comes into play, with the added layer that people are accustomed to habitual tasks and more popular sites
5. Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and Google are currently banned in some countries
6. Some Mentors dislike having their own PIs getting ideas from other Mentors
7. If it is not mandatory or part of the requirement, participation and enthusiasm tends to be low
8. Some see communication with the rest of the group as irrelevant as long as the primary communication between the Mentor and PI is strong

Status quo Model: The current SIRCA Mentorship model assigns a Mentor to a PI based on the Mentor’s interest in topic and geographic area. Priority should be given to two factors – Mentors who understand the culture and context of the project because he or she is from there, and /or Mentors who are experts in the specific sub-area such as mobile phone technology.



Pros:

1. Stable PI-Mentor relationship and the PI has support from the very beginning until the very end of the process
2. The PI is able to learn new things from a new person

Cons:

1. Assigning the Mentor to the PI was seen as a problem for a few PIs, especially when the Mentor was not an expert in the project domain
2. Cross-country / cross-continental linkages and ensuing logistical issues such as travel and time zones will have to be considered when SIRCA establishes global nodes

Conflict of Interest

SIRCA will make every effort to ensure not only that its decisions are fair and objective, but also that they are seen to be so. Therefore, no member of the SIRCA mentoring scheme with an actual or potential conflict of interest may participate in the mentoring of a SIRCA project. All such Individuals must declare any potential conflict of interest to the Director of SIRCA immediately. For further clarity, Individuals are in a conflict of interest when they:

- *Are from the same immediate department, research group, centre, institute, company or other type of institutional subdivision as any PI named in a project;*
- *Named as PI or co-PI in a SIRCA project;*
- *Have been a student or supervisor of the PI within the last ten (10) years*
- *Are or have been a close personal friend or relative of the PI*
- *Have had long standing or serious scientific or personal differences with the PI.*

(Guidelines on Conflict of Interest for SIRCA Mentors, Terms of Reference, SIRCA Mentorship Scheme Appendix A)

The evaluation revealed an intriguing case of conflict of interest that was underlying the relationship of one Mentor-PI pair throughout the entire project. The Mentor had openly expressed his interest to the Secretariat in mentoring a particular PI's project because it was closely aligned to his own work. The PI understood the rationale behind SIRCA assigning this Mentor to them but was disappointed due to historical differences. They knew each other's work quite well through readings and overlapping professional circles but had an academic argument in the past as they belonged to rival schools of thought. While the Mentor genuinely believed that his match to the PI was logical, the PI felt an implicit wall between his team and the Mentor which prevented sincere collaboration on the project. Unfortunately, neither the Mentor nor the PI raised this conflict of interest with the Secretariat as was stipulated in the TOR.

PI: *"The Mentor here was a burden because it was like asking two competitors in research fields...If they collaborate, it's like trying to make trade-offs among their ideas. It felt more like that here because of earlier prejudices and knowing each other...Because [my research team and the Mentor] have been reading each other's work, sometimes they would be engaging in discussions, arguments, so once that happened 3 years ago, there would be a lot of hesitation to even share stuff with the Mentor. It would be academic competition. For [our research team], it would be the worst thing if [the Mentor] wrote about these things before it was published. Even if it's hinted thus. It's like secrets. So until [our research team] published, it had to be kept a secret from [the Mentor] because it was such an overlap. [The Mentor] is known to have appropriated work"*

The opportunity for capacity building and future collaboration is not completely lost, however, as the fundamental problem is not the Mentor's personality or his mentoring skills but the pressure from the Mentor and the Secretariat to write collaboratively. Given their present circumstances, the PI felt that sharing information was out of question but it may still happen in the future.

Conflict of Interest between the PI and the Mentor may arise depending on the mentorship model. Whether it was a deliberate or unconscious act, the PI and the Mentor in this case technically breached the TOR for not letting the Secretariat know that there was a historical tension between them which prevented them from fully achieving the Program outcomes. SIRCA can only request the parties to honestly disclose any past relations with each other and thereby determine if there is a true Conflict of Interest. If Conflict of Interest is not disclosed until the end of the project, the Secretariat can consider seeking reimbursement of funds in extreme cases. If at all, this clause can serve as a severe warning for all parties before launching the project.

Communication Gaps

Communication is the foundation of a good mentoring relationship. Both the PI and the Mentor have the obligation to consistently communicate with each other and with the Secretariat. While communication frequency depends on the project stage, a minimum level communication should be established by SIRCA at the contractual level so that PIs and Mentors abide by their responsibilities.

One PI was disappointed that communication with the Mentor was sparse and most of the project was conducted without the Mentor's input, including the lack of Mentor Site Visits. They had problems physically locating the Mentor early in the project and the Mentor had not proactively reached out to the PI. SIRCA does not have any protocol except termination of the contract if the Mentor or the PI does not fulfill their duties. The PI is the one who bears the consequences because they have lost the opportunity to learn from a senior researcher.

PI: "One big shortcoming was that I didn't get to meet [the Mentor] for almost a year...Initially, I had no clear idea where he was stationed...[We were able to meet] almost 1 year after the project started....We were not able to get his mobile number, his whereabouts. For quite some time we didn't have his details, where he was, his contact.... And in my feedback to SIRCA, I told them that they should have called the Mentors also with the PIs [for Workshop 1]."

PI: "I wrote to SIRCA several times asking whether it is upon me to ensure that the Mentor comes to the site or whether it is part of his mentoring duties. Even that was not clear to me. Whether the duty is on ME to take him to the site, or whether he is expected to do it...But [the Mentor] should [have] come forward saying 'this is an important stage and we should have a discussion'"

Defining Communication:

- ❖ The Mentor must report to the Secretariat once every 3 months to update the status of the PI. This responsibility would make them more proactive to resolve any communication gaps.
- ❖ Communication frequency between Mentor and PI: Minimum once every 3 months should be mandatory, and the rest on a needs-basis. (expand on MOU Point 1.5)
- ❖ Communication method is best determined between the Mentor and PI who know the communication environment (i.e., availability and ease to do Skype calls, mobile phone reach).

SIRCA had several Mentor-PI pairs from different countries and the diversity did not affect the outcomes. One Mentor-PI pair, however, faced language and cultural barriers because the PI's level of English was poor but they were able to overcome those barriers thanks to a common background in computer science. The PI and his team members considered themselves as inexperienced ICTD researchers and expected more attention from the Mentor. They could not express their expectations of closer supervision and more "hand-holding" from the Mentor and ultimately blamed it on the latter's lack of cultural awareness and zero knowledge of the local language. The Mentor, fortunately, facilitated the Mentees with technical backgrounds into social science realm by using "the language of software engineering as a way of explaining the social science dimension."

PI: "He should know our culture a little bit, our work culture a little bit, that would be better for our team in the future.... Sometimes he talks too fast, we cannot catch [what he is saying]. I think he was in the middle...Not too helpful, not useless. He is helpful but sometimes he doesn't know what we have, what we need...He doesn't know our culture, our research level."

It is recommended that the SIRCA Secretariat interviews the PI to assess his or her English level (if English remains the primary medium of oral and written communication) as well as the PI's research experience and motivation. At this stage, or maybe in the application form, SIRCA could request a 'self-assessment' from the PIs to describe their strengths and weaknesses coming into the program. The self-assessment could also serve as a basis for organizing the content of Workshops. Mentors can also be interviewed to evaluate their interest and commitment.

Publication and Dissemination Strategy

Publication and dissemination goes to the heart of the SIRCA Program as it is a visible outcome of capacity building. A strategy should be devised early in the program to give PIs a broad perspective on the landscape of publications and, at the same time, to help them orient the scope and direction of their projects early on.

Mentor: “What’s happened is that we’ve gone through the process of choosing projects, assigning mentors, go towards writing, documenting, then deciding the publication outlet. In my experience, publication comes at the beginning. Where I come from and where I live, academics have to publish. If they don’t, they won’t survive. Not only that, they have to publish in the right place...If you publish in an A-grade magazine, you get more points than if you publish in a B-grade magazine, than C-grade journal, anything below that, no points. And it’s very competitive, very cut-throat. In all the top universities in the Western world, this is how academic life works. Publish or perish. Just to keep your job, not just getting promoted to associate prof, then to prof, you gotta publish in the top journals. So the starting point is – Which journal I gotta publish? Not necessarily to operationalize the process. Academic life and SIRCA have the same objective - to raise the quality of research. You gotta do high quality research and publish in the top journals. So the starting point is deciding, identifying the top journals – this is before I identify any project topic at all – and then look at the journal and ask what’s the trend this year, what’s the trend next year? Who are the reviewers? What did they publish? Who are the editorial board? What do they publish? What are they interested in? Now you are looking at the top journals, the best research. And this is what SIRCA wants to address, I assume. So you develop a publications strategy. Think I want to publish in journal A and here are the topics they are interested in. Next, what kind of research do they publish? More qualitative, quantitative, mixed? Look at the papers, look at their further research at the end. Then look at what kind of project you will work on, think of the methodology for the study. And that’s how to build a publications strategy. Starting with the idea that you will produce top-quality research – and the resources available to SIRCA make it capable of achieving that – you got funding, you got serious backing, very professional team in Singapore, access to people in Asia, mentors from all over the world, you got everything you need to get the best quality research possible. Consider what actually happened – we did all the good research, then put together at the end a ‘Media Asia Journal’ which I never heard of and which is not the top quality research. From information that I’ve gathered, and from people who study the journal rankings, you gotta get into journals that are cited. The more you get cited, the more chances for professorship. So academics, where are we going to get published, how are we going to get cited – as much as you can, publish in the top journals. As a mentor, that’s what I say to my Mentee. He has to know this, the process. I’m not sure that publishing in this journal, Media Asia Journal, is the best outlet, given all the attention and the resources that have been put into SIRCA...Academic journals are for careers. We spent 2 years, a lot of resources, a lot of intellectual investment...We hoped at the time, to use resources in SIRCA to bridge this gap. Facilitate work to affect this change in the wider world. Devise a communication strategy, who are we trying to influence? Put SIRCA into the wider world, like “The Economist”, “Time” magazine. This is what policy makers read. Bullet point thinking, sound-bites that gets published...policy makers and advisors read different things. Why do you do research? For a closed loop of academic communication for self-promotion? Given that you’ve already created that knowledge, I am a little disappointed that we are not working in this realm.”

PIs wanted exposure during the SIRCA Workshops to learn how to write in non-scientific styles. They did not expect their Mentors, who were assumed to be “hard core academics”, to be adept at publishing outside the academic circle, i.e. to mass media and the general public. One PI suggested having a ‘proposal revision stage’ after they were accepted where several experts on public communication and dissemination would comment on the proposals. These experts could give constructive feedback on how to craft their projects with an eye for certain non-academic publishing outlets, layperson audiences and policy maker/decision maker audiences.

PI: “I enrolled into a creative writing class so now I can write opinion pieces and columns in the newspaper. I find that more people read that than a ISI journal. People will never pick up a ISI journal in their life... If we could add that to the curriculum of helping the PIs not just writing for a journal but how to make a good public presentation, how do you write a good opinion piece, how do you translate your research into something that is more readable?”

Mentor: “ICTD due to the nature of the field is more useful in policy, than in scientific research. The deliverable that was focused on – academic, technical paper, not the policy paper that would be submitted to parliament, lobby group. This would have resulted in a lot of changes.”

Likewise, one PI expressed concern that writing for academia was not informing his own project beneficiaries. In addition, perspectives and methods from “outside” were also “irrelevant” in the local context but he still had to use them because of pressure from his Mentor, the academic custom, and peer-reviewed journal standards. Mentors would ideally be open to change and overcome the ingrained notions that have been inculcated into them from decades of academic life.

PI: “[My Mentor] started to suggest modeling...It might be good for academics outside [my country] but [for my fellow countrymen], it’s not relevant, especially for those who should benefit the most...The methodology, the more advanced you go, the more you leave them out.”

A Workshop in the beginning of the Program should introduce PIs to all types of publication outlets, academic and non-academic. Writing for the mass media such as newspapers takes many years of practice. It is not expected that the PIs gain this skill level through a couple Workshops. But some exposure through guest speakers, on-going consultation with a public communications expert or a journalist, and revisions of the final report to be readable to the lay person or a policy maker can be incorporated. The Workshop should invite Mentors so that both the Mentor and the PI can be informed of the avenues for publication and dissemination.

The PI’s context

The PIs freely expressed their concerns in the evaluation and one of them was related to financial matters. One PI mentioned the Amy Mahan Research Fellowship Program based in Barcelona, Spain which was modeled after the SIRCA Program. The Amy Mahan program compensated PIs for any amount of financial loss incurred as a result of detaching themselves from income-generating activities in order to spend time on the research project. For example, one PI said that he had to teach at least 18 hours a week in order to make a decent living in his country. He taught while working on his SIRCA project which “had no money in it”. Another PI requested funds to present his SIRCA work in seminars and conferences after the end of the program as he was concerned with post-project sustainability issues. A problem that may surface here is for SIRCA to determine how relevant the PI’s presentations are to the SIRCA project and whether merely tangential mentioning of the project warrants a full funding.

More support and flexibility was requested when inviting people to SIRCA Workshops. Two PIs felt that a fellow teammate should have attended the Workshops with them or on behalf of them. In one case, the PI requested funding for a second person from the team to accompany her because two people from the team could bounce off ideas presented in the Workshops and bring back the discussion to their team. They believed that having a back up person would facilitate the transmission of information. In another case, the PI’s ‘best researcher’ who was less experienced and completing her PhD studies should have come to Workshop 2 instead of himself because she would have gained a lot more from seeing the posters and the exposure provided by the Mobiles Preconference and the ICA Conference. There was also interest from one PI, a rather experienced researcher, in helping the Secretariat determine the agenda for Workshops, such as what they would like to learn, or even presenting. However, given that most PIs are emerging researchers, they may not be ready to teach or train others. He requested that Workshops be locally based, such as in Southeast Asia or South Asia, where PIs from that region could congregate.

PI: “SIRCA has never been participatory. It has always been top-down. Conference and workshop organization, no ideas have been asked, nothing has been asked for, ‘you have worked on this, you are an expert on this, by having worked on this, how can we put this [workshop] together?’ SIRCA never asked this.”

More support given to PIs with consideration to their local context was mentioned by one Mentor-PI pair. Two Mentors highlighted the lack of research capacity in ICTD in the entire country of the PI, and more community capacity building could be developed. A small example was the lack of resources such as access to online journals in some developing countries. SIRCA’s provision of NTU and IDRC library resources was very helpful to all the PIs but some of them were not adept at using it. SIRCA could briefly show the PIs how to access the library system and e-resources at a Workshop.

Mentor: *"[The PIs] were saying that it was difficult [to use the NTU system] and I couldn't quite understand whether that was for technical reasons, bandwidth and connectivity, or whether it was to do with usability. They could get connected but they didn't know how to use the system or actually, also possibly, they didn't know why they should use the system...They weren't familiar enough with referencing in general."*

Similarly, another Mentor contemplated the possibility of SIRCA playing a role in connecting institutions since PIs and Mentors were both based in academic entities. When the Mentor is conducting a Mentor Site Visit, the Mentor, many of them heading research centers, can be the "ambassador" of his or her institution and make a presentation on an ICTD topic. This would benefit the PI, the PI's research team, the PI's department, and ultimately, the PI's research community. A formal structure that allowed the sharing of ideas to foster critical dialogue on local, regional and global ICTD issues can be established without much added cost. SIRCA can trigger cross-institutional relationships that will build support and capacity around the PI's context.

Mentor: *"This is a country with no researchers...It's not like Mumbai IIT where there is some good junior researchers in a research culture. [My Mentees] are potentially good researchers but in a whole country with no research culture."*

The Mentor Site Visits were, in fact, the highlight of the mentoring experience because this was the time when intense face-to-face discussions took place between the PI and the Mentor. When asked how to best take advantage of the Mentor's visit to the project site, the respondents elaborated on already existing stipulations based on challenges they had faced:

- ❖ The Mentor Site Visit Checklist should continue to be distributed as it was a useful tool to broadly delineate guidelines for what to seek out during the visit. The checklist, however, was only distributed to the Mentors in the first round. The PIs should also get it in the future so both can reference the same document.
- ❖ The PI and the Mentor should set an itinerary prior to the trip to minimize a fluid agenda, including the preparation of transportation, logistics and meetings. The Mentor Site Visit funding is limited in terms of the number of days and a loose program would not use time efficiently. They should have a contingency plan in case the Site Visit does not go as planned such as disruptions from natural calamities or political conflicts.
- ❖ The PI should share data collection tools with the Mentor, where possible, before the visit.
- ❖ The Mentors should prepare themselves for the trip with questions and gain as much familiarity as possible with the project.
- ❖ It is strongly recommended to conduct the first Mentor Site Visit early in the project, assuming SIRCA funds at least 2 site visits. How "early" and at what phase can be decided between the Mentor and the PI. The total number of Site Visits should be determined between the two parties and inform the Secretariat.
- ❖ Administrative flexibility by the Secretariat has been much appreciated thus far. Respondents said that the Secretariat has been generous regarding ad hoc changes to the schedule, adjustments to the budget, and flexibility with travel reimbursements.
- ❖ Some projects had sites dispersed around the country and visiting them would have taken more than the allotted 3 days of the Mentor Site Visit. PIs and Mentors would like continued support and flexibility to accommodate difficult terrain and lengthy transport time.
- ❖ PIs wanted more facilitation from the Secretariat for data collection. In one instance, monetary incentives to the survey respondents would have increased participation rates but it was "refused" by SIRCA for "unethical" reasons. Another PI wanted a formal letter of support from the Secretariat to quell suspicions from NGOs where he was gathering data. He stated that a letter could have given him easier access to the respondents as well as credibility.
- ❖ If Secretariat members participated in some Site Visits, it would help them better appreciate the conditions in the field, the resources required, and a realistic idea of timelines. One Mentor felt that the sponsors, including IDRC, could also participate in the site visits.

Project Management

While Mentor Site Visits are one of the most effective ways for both the Mentors and the Secretariat to monitor the progress of the projects, another method is to have “real time” monitoring through the use of an online “project management tool”. Project monitoring and management is fundamental to maintaining the transparency, accountability and integrity of any grant program. The PIs currently submit a progress report to the Secretariat every 6 months detailing the academic work and the utilization of the grant funds, along with the endorsement of the Mentor and the Financial Officer of their institution. The PIs reported that filling out the progress reports were tedious but useful to push them forward with the project. The biannual frequency was acceptable but anything less than 6 months was not favored by any PI. Three PIs compared SIRCA to other research grants they have received in the past, two of them which happened to be funded by IDRC. One of the IDRC-funded grant programs did not request any reports from the PI and the other IDRC-funded program was less structured than SIRCA. The third PI said his past funder only requested a mid-term and a final report. Therefore, at least in comparison to other grant programs, SIRCA seemed to be much more systematic. For the Secretariat, there are at least three issues with progress reports. First, not everyone submitted their reports on time and the staff needed to repeatedly remind people of the deadlines. Second, there is a sudden surge of paperwork during submission period and the turn-around time for feedback given by the Secretariat becomes hectic. Third, PI projects have different timelines and the Secretariat has difficulty keeping track of “who is at what stage”. One Mentor noticed the significant amount of time that his PI team was spending on writing the progress reports that it almost seemed like the progress reports overtook the actual execution of the project.

The idea of an online project management tool suggested by a Mentor has several advantages. If constructed with a tailor-made timeline for each project with certain broad milestones – for instance, “literature review”, “begin data collection”, “end data collection”, “begin Mentor Site Visit” – the Secretariat as well as the Mentor and the PIs themselves can easily visualize the progress of the project, and most importantly, check if they are behind schedule. The Secretariat can include its own timeline of activities, workshops, conferences in parallel to the individual project timelines. The PIs can update the timelines regularly and tag reports, surveys, and pictures of fieldwork. The Secretariat should be able to interact with the PI in this environment giving feedback to the work. In addition to the practicality of such a dynamic tool that can be maintained in “real time”, the PIs can see each other’s progress and feel some peer pressure, inspiration, and healthy competition.

PI: “It’s absolutely important to know what other PIs are doing. It’s also important to see if we can share research tools, methods. I found that there are 3-4 people doing similar things, they were using a software to analyze data. But nobody mentioned this. I only knew this at the Workshop. If you have a common platform for all, then we can browse. I hardly see other PIs work, how many publications they have. It’s very useful to know.”

PI: “What’s important is to have some comparative. If somebody is doing a good theoretical model, or good data collection method, I can copy it, it’s not a problem! Because you are doing it in your country, I am doing it in my country. And you are learning something new. And I can suggest, ‘if you are having difficulty, you can read this method.’ Sharing is there. Mentors can also be in this network. Again, it’s not SIRCA only. It should be open to the public.”

A Project Management Tool can facilitate the tracking of projects by the Secretariat and allow PIs to update it regularly with ‘bits and pieces’ and smaller reports. This can replacing the large 6-month progress reports which are reported to be a “burden” to fill out. The Tool should allow monitoring by the Secretariat, the Mentor, and let other PIs views the progress of other PIs for comparative purposes.

Conclusion

SIRCA's Mentorship Model has undeniably had a great influence on the personal and professional growth of PIs. It also provided a unique opportunity for Mentors, lured by the potential to co-author with the PI, to also learn and grow from the experience of connecting with their Mentee located in a different institution or a different country with entirely different cultural and social nuances. The diversity of people and ICTD themes brought under SIRCA has made the experience richer and more motivating for all participants - the Mentee, the Mentor, and the Secretariat. Satisfaction with the current mentorship model was found to be dependent on the level of the PI as a researcher - younger, emerging researchers tended to be more open about being assigned to a completely unknown senior researcher, whereas more experienced researchers knew exactly what they wanted from a Mentor in terms of expertise and inputs into the project, and hence expected a Mentors to fill those gaps. The PI's capacity building outcomes are much more enhanced with a Mentor, but a Mentor was not an absolutely necessary factor. In fact, some PIs regardless of their research experience could not rely heavily on the Mentors because the latter was not an expert in the ICTD sub-area. Thus, Mentors were not indispensable but their guidance unquestionably raised the bar in terms of quality outputs and successful outcomes. SIRCA can contemplate on the various mentorship models suggested by respondents or a combination of them while structuring communication a bit more between the PI and the Mentor – enabling one-to-one meetings, explicitly defining the PI and Mentor duties in the TOR and MOU, establishing guidelines for authorship, publication and dissemination, and facilitating the PI's project update through a dynamic project management tool. As SIRCA expands its wings and goes global, it has sown a seed into the PIs and the Mentors who can continue to tap into each other's resources and transform the link ignited by SIRCA into a long-lasting and fruitful collaboration in the future.

Annexes

- Annex 1. SIRCA Mentorship Questionnaire**
- Annex 2. Mentorship Terms of Reference (TOR)**
- Annex 3. Mentor – PI Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**
- Annex 4. Mentor – SIRCA Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**
- Annex 5. Mentor Site Visit Checklist**
- Annex 6. Mentor Application Form**

Annex 1. SIRCA Mentorship Questionnaire

MENTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

To be a Mentor

1. How did you learn about the SIRCA Mentorship Program?
2. Was the 'Call for Mentors', and the timing of the processes - application, selection, notification - appropriate?
3. How can Mentors be motivated to fulfill their mentorship roles, including any monetary or in-kind incentives?
4. Mentor's Job Description: What qualifications are important for one to become an effective Mentor?
5. Is the Mentor similar or different to a PhD advisor?

Mentor-PI Matching

6. How suitable was the PI project matched to your expertise? Please state any criteria you think are important for matching.
7. Should Mentors have more than 1 Mentee?
8. Should Mentors be challenged and matched to a different field of expertise?

Communication

9. What is the ideal frequency of communication with your Mentee?
10. Would having a Mentee in the same institution or same city help you fulfill your role better, or is location irrelevant?
11. How could the Secretariat have intervened to resolve problems, including communication problems, you had with your Mentee?
12. What is the best mode of communication with your Mentee? Why?
13. Would online communication platforms like Facebook improve your communication with your Mentee, other participating SIRCA Mentors, PIs, and the Secretariat?
14. Have you felt any sense of isolation during your participation in SIRCA? If so, how could it have been resolved?
15. What has been your experience thus far with communication with the Secretariat? Was the frequency enough? Did they respond to your needs?

Mentor Site Visit

16. What are some things that you currently do to help you prepare for the Mentor Site Visit?
17. What kind of preparation would you have liked the Mentee to undertake before the Mentor Site Visit?

Supervision of Mentee

18. What is the Mentor's role in each of the following areas pertaining to the Mentee's work? (1) Theory and Conceptualization, (2) Field Work and Execution, (3) Publication and Dissemination, (4) Verification and Approval of Deliverables
19. Which areas did you have the most difficulty? Which areas were easier for you to supervise?
20. How can SIRCA improve Mentor-Mentee collaborations on papers as final outcomes? Should SIRCA make co-authorship mandatory in the program?
21. Which areas could the Secretariat have supported the PI better, for example, through workshops?
22. How did your PI grow as an ICTD researcher over the course of the SIRCA project? Please be specific on "soft skills" such as building confidence and "hard skills" such as learning how to write research papers or conducting statistical analysis.
23. What did you learn from guiding and supervising your Mentee?

Mentorship Models

What are your thoughts on:

- Mentor & Collaborator model of having 2 people per project?
- Mentees nominating their own Mentors?
- Having a panel of 'experts' and Mentees being able to consult any of them throughout the project?
- Mentees freely connecting with member of the expert panel and allowing a natural Mentorship relationship to occur? (not assigning Mentor)

MENTEE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Mentor-PI Matching

1. What characteristics does the ideal Mentor possess?
2. How suitable was the Mentor matched to your project?
3. How can the Mentor-PI matching be improved? Please state any criteria you think are important for matching.
4. Is the Mentor similar or different to a PhD advisor?

Mentor's Supervision

5. What is the Mentor's role in each of the following areas pertaining to the Mentee's work? (1) Theory and Conceptualization, (2) Field Work and Execution, (3) Publication and Dissemination, (4) Verification and Approval of Deliverables
6. Which areas could the Secretariat have supported you better, for example, through workshops?
7. How can SIRCA improve Mentor-Mentee collaborations on papers as final outcomes? Should SIRCA make co-authorship mandatory in the program?
8. Would having a Mentor in the same institution or same city help you with your research, or is location irrelevant?
9. Please elaborate on your Mentor's attitude using examples. Here are some adjectives:
Motivating, Encouraging, Supportive, Committed, Resourceful, Timely in his/her responses to my queries, Moral Support, Intellectual engagement, Frustration, Too much pressure, Too passive, Irresponsible, Too busy for me, Not up to my expectations.
10. Please elaborate with examples on the following, if any, through your relationship with your Mentor:
 - a. The Mentor advanced you:
 - 1) Knowledge in ICTD research theory
 - 2) Knowledge in ICTD research methods
 - 3) Fieldwork skills
 - 4) Writing skills
 - 5) Publication skills
 - 6) Dissemination skills - conferences
 - 7) Knowledge and skills in accountability and transparency issues
 - 8) Knowledge in research ethical issues
 - 9) Exposure to the latest ICTD trends
 - b. The Mentor connected you to:
 - 1) Professional communities in the ICTD discipline
 - 2) ICTD literature
 - c. Other _____

Communication

11. What is the ideal frequency of communication with your Mentor?
12. How could the Secretariat have improved your communication with the Mentor?
13. How could the Secretariat have intervened to resolve problems you had with your Mentor?
14. What is the best mode of communication with your Mentor? Why?
15. Would online platforms like Facebook improve your communication with your Mentor, other participating SIRCA Mentors, PIs, and the Secretariat?
16. Have you felt any sense of isolation during your participation in SIRCA? If so, how could it have been resolved?
17. What has been your experience thus far with communication with the Secretariat? Was the frequency enough? Did they respond to your needs?

Mentor Site Visit

18. What are some things that you currently do to help you prepare for the Mentor Site Visit?
19. What kind of preparation would you have liked the Mentor to undertake before the Mentor Site Visit?

Mentorship Models

What are your thoughts on:

- Mentor & Collaborator model of having 2 people per project?
- Mentees nominating their own Mentors?
- Having a panel of 'experts' and Mentees being able to consult any of them throughout the project?
- Mentees freely connecting with member of the expert panel and allowing a natural Mentorship relationship to occur? (not assigning Mentor)

JOINT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Mentor Site Visit

1. What kind of preparation would you have liked the Secretariat to undertake before the Mentor Site Visit?
2. How many Site Visits would you ideally like to have? During which stages of the project?
3. What are the plans for each Mentor Site Visit?
4. How many days per Mentor Site Visit is the ideal?
5. Who else should take part of the Mentor Site Visit besides the Mentor and the Mentee?
6. What kind of deliverables do you expect to get after each Mentor Site Visit?
7. Would it help to have an outline or template of a report to help keep track of outcomes of the Mentor Site Visit, or would this be redundant?
8. Please cite examples of the following challenges and resolutions faced by you, if any, during the Mentor Site Visit.
 - a. Scheduling with PI
 - b. Accessibility of research site
 - c. Inadequate SIRCA funding
 - d. Uncertainty of the best phase at which to plan visit
 - e. Unsure of objectives of Mentor Site Visit
 - f. Too few Mentor Site Visits
 - g. Not applicable
 - h. Other _____
9. Please cite examples of the following positive outcomes, if any, during the Mentor Site Visit:
 - a. Improved working relationship with through face-to-face interaction
 - b. Gained better understanding of research site context
 - c. Facilitated consultations on the project
 - d. Explored/found other research opportunities
 - e. Explore potential research collaborations
 - f. Ensured compliance with SIRCA program objectives
 - g. Ensured research was conducted ethically and responsibly
 - h. Developed professional networks
 - i. Other (please elaborate) _____

Communication

10. How often do you think is necessary to provide feedback to the Secretariat, and what kind of feedback?
11. The Secretariat requests several administrative deliverables from the Mentee and Mentor, particularly during the arrangement of upcoming workshops, conferences and Mentor Site Visits. Is there anything that the Secretariat could do to facilitate and/or improve this process?
12. Please elaborate on the following as you think of what it means to have “good” or smooth communication with your Mentor/Mentee. Please give examples or challenges faced on:
 - a. Scheduling issues
 - b. Language barrier
 - c. Communication Infrastructure
 - d. Other _____
13. In the next round of SIRCA's global grant, what would you like to see incorporated in this new mentorship model?

Annex 2. Mentorship Terms of Reference (TOR)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

SIRCA MENTORSHIP SCHEME

Background

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Singapore internet Research Centre (SiRC) are pleased to announce the maiden call for grant proposals under the new initiative, Strengthening ICTD Research Capacity in Asia (SIRCA). The SIRCA Program seeks to identify future research leaders and to facilitate their development through the support of research grants. The awards are intended to ensure capacities to conduct research in the area of Information and Communications Technology for Development (ICTD) are built in Asia. This applies particularly to emerging researchers based in Asia who are relatively new to ICTD research and interested in undertaking theoretically-based and methodologically rigorous research. Additionally, these applicants would benefit from concerted capacity building exercises including a mentorship arrangement.

The SIRCA Program has five fundamental goals:

- Support research capacity building;
- Support theoretically based and methodologically rigorous research ;
- Create opportunities for mentorship between established researchers and grant recipients;
- Provide spaces for recipients to share experiences in face-to-face settings; and
- Disseminate research findings.

Part of the SIRCA Program consists of a Mentorship Scheme which provides an opportunity for senior scholars to enhance their research acumen. A mentor and mentee (i.e. the Principle Investigator) together plan, activate and monitor a specific research outcome desired by for the mentee. The focus of the scheme is on the research needs of the mentee, in particular the establishment of a productive, independent researcher. The issues discussed and the tasks will be unique to each pair.

Mentor Eligibility, Responsibilities, and Compensation

The SIRCA Mentorship Scheme consists of senior scholars who bring together a breadth of knowledge and experience across a wide spectrum of ICTD research. Each mentor-mentee team will be decided upon based on the alignment of research interests, and mentors are expected to commit to the mentoring relationship for the duration of the assigned project/s.

The general roles of SIRCA mentors are to:

- a. mentor up to three SIRCA projects;
- b. make one site-visit to each mentored project within the research period;
- c. attend SIRCA final dissemination conference, and if possible, training workshops;
- d. ensure the project impact as well its contribution to knowledge; and,
- e. ensure the general progress for the projects under their theme/s including guiding the preparation of periodic reports for programs such as mid-term assessments and end-of-project review, and the final research paper.

More specifically, SIRCA mentors are expected to fulfill the following objectives:

- a. provide professional guidance to the PI;
- b. provide leadership role model for the PI; demonstrating how the PI might develop greater initiative, increased independence, and self-reliance.
- c. share relevant research knowledge and experience with the PI from a variety of sources including research databases accessible through, among other sources, IDRC's library.
- d. identify and resolve potential obstacles to the PI;
- e. guide the PI in conducting research ethically and responsibly;
- f. assist PI to develop professional networks;
- g. enhance the PI's research and publication efforts; and,
- h. collaboratively develop research paper(s) for dissemination at international conferences and peer-reviewed publications.

The amount of time a mentor commits to a project varies depending on the needs, expectations, and desires of the mentee and the mentor. SIRCA highly recommends that both parties discuss their expectations at the beginning of the relationship. One of the most important factors is time: How often and for how long will you be available? Do you have a commitment at certain times that would make you unavailable? When is it appropriate to call? The time commitment at the beginning of the will focus on getting to know each other and on building the relationship, while on an on-going basis it will focus on research activities. Towards the end of the project, it is expected that more time will be spent on conducting analysis and preparing quality research manuscripts.

Compensation for SIRCA mentors include:

- a. Travel expenses incurred for site visits and program meetings (including air and land travel);
 - i. Mentors are required book their own travel, including flights and ground transport. Mentors should consider the financial guidelines and provide SIRCA with necessary information regarding their preferred travel means. Mentors can only proceed with the booking after receiving approval from SIRCA. After confirmation of booking, Mentors will need to forward a copy of the booking invoice and/or e-ticket to SIRCA within 3 days of the date of confirmation. SIRCA will then send the required travel funds to the Mentor. Boarding passes should be submitted to SIRCA via the posting of true copies or emailing of scanned copies within seven days of return from workshops, conference or site visit.
- b. Accommodation;

The SIRCA program will secure bookings for hotel accommodation for all mentors for the duration of the program meetings. All mentors will also receive a subsistence allowance to cover their other expenses.

All Mentors will receive a subsistence allowance for each of their site visits to cover their accommodation, meals and ground travel costs.
- c. Per diems;

Mentors will receive subsistence allowances for meetings and site visits for their entire travel period after the approval of their travel bookings by SIRCA. The subsistence allowance will be sent to the Mentor together with the travel funds. No receipts are required for the subsistence allowances. The per diem schedule used by the SIRCA program will reflect current economic situations.
- d. Each mentor will receive an Honorarium of SGD 2,400/year for each project mentored. The projects are expected to last to a maximum of 2 years.

Pairing of Mentor with Projects

Both mentors and PIs will be able to express their preferences in the partnership; however, where the possibility of conflict of interests arises, the SIRCA Management Board maintains the right to decide on the partnership. The proposals which have been selected for the SIRCA grant will be collated and sent to all mentors. Mentors will rank the top three projects they wish to mentor. The SIRCA Management Board will take into consideration each mentor's preference during the allocation of projects. However, Mentors should note that it is likely that their preferences may coincide with those of the other Mentors. The final decision of the mentor-mentee team will be made by SIRCA based on preferences and match in expertise of Mentor.

Benefits of Being a SIRCA Mentor

There are outcomes that SIRCA mentors are expected to benefit from this mentoring connection, including:

- a. *Personal satisfaction*—mentors develop a sense of pride at helping a junior researcher succeed;
- b. *Sharpened leadership and interpersonal skills*—mentors sharpen their own skills as they challenge and coach their mentees;
- c. *Source of professional recognition*—SIRCA mentors will be co-authors of the resulting project publications;
- d. *Expanded social network within the discipline*—mentors develop professional contacts by interacting with other mentors and with the broader SIRCA network;
- e. *Information gathering*—mentors may be exposed to fresh ideas from their mentee. Some senior scholars can be isolated or set in their ways, mentees can offer new insights into research.

Challenges that compromise the mentor-mentee relationship

Both mentee and mentor stand to benefit greatly when the goals and expectations of their mentoring relationship are clearly defined, the responsibilities and activities are well executed, and goals and objectives are achieved in a timely fashion. While these are reasonable expectations of a rewarding relationship, untoward events can affect the mentee/mentor bond. In cases of changing commitments, incompatibility or where the relationship is not mutually fulfilling, then either the mentee or mentor should immediately seek advice from the SIRCA Director who will either find a new partner or help to resolve the reason for the difficulty. It is important to realize that changes can and should be made without prejudice or fault. All SIRCA mentors are required to observe the *Guidelines on Conflict of Interest* (Appendix A).

APPENDIX A

Guidelines on Conflict of Interest for SIRCA Mentors

SIRCA will make every effort to ensure not only that its decisions are fair and objective, but also that they are seen to be so. Therefore, no member of the SIRCA mentoring scheme with an actual or potential conflict of interest may participate in the mentoring of a SIRCA project. All such Individuals must declare any potential conflict of interest to the Director of SIRCA immediately. For further clarity, Individuals are in a conflict of interest when they:

- Are from the same immediate department, research group, centre, institute, company or other type of institutional subdivision as any PI named in a project;
- Named as PI or co-PI in a SIRCA project;
- Have been a student or supervisor of the PI within the last ten (10) years
- Are or have been a close personal friend or relative of the PI
- Have had long standing or serious scientific or personal differences with the PI.

If any of these circumstances apply, the Individual will not be assigned the role of Mentor to the project. Where an Individual seeks direction on the exercise of his/her discretion in the event of a potential conflict, the next level of authority shall exercise his/her judgement and/or seek a vote of the SIRCA Management Board GRC to clarify the appropriate course of action.

When a member of the SIRCA Mentoring Scheme has concerns about the potential perception of conflict in such matters, they may refer the issue to the SIRCA Management Board for advice and direction.

Annex 3. Mentor – PI Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)
BETWEEN
(Mentor's title/name)
Research Mentor,
Strengthening ICTD Research Capacity in Asia (SIRCA) Program
AND
(PI's title/name)
Principle Investigator
Strengthening ICTD Research Capacity in Asia (SIRCA) Program

The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is to establish and define a collaborative relationship between the SIRCA Mentor and the SIRCA Principle Investigator of < insert project title and project number> under the SIRCA Mentorship Scheme. Both parties to this agreement share the broad goals of fostering collaboration between Principal Investigators and senior researchers (mentors).

1. Supervision

- 1.1. The Mentor is required to provide guidance and supervision to the research groups, which are assigned to him/her, in the research development and execution of the research study throughout the course of the program.
- 1.2. Mentors should work with SIRCA to ensure timely submission of Progress Reports, Mid-Term Progress Reports and Final Reports by Principal Investigators (PIs) under their care. These submissions, presented using pre-defined templates, should include all necessary components and information required by SIRCA.
- 1.3. Mentors are required to make one site visit to each research group under their supervision. It is the responsibility of the Mentor and PI to ensure the successful completion of the site visit.
 - 1.3.1. Mentors should notify SIRCA promptly should there be problems arranging for site visits.
 - 1.3.2. Mentors should seek to obtain in-depth understanding of the site through close observation and interaction with the Principal Investigator and his/her Co-Investigator(s).
- 1.4. In the course of his/her supervision, if the Mentor becomes aware of actions or behaviours of a Principal Investigator and/or his Co-Investigator which are against the interests of IDRC, SiRC or SIRCA, the Mentor should notify SIRCA promptly and aid in any investigative action.

Mentor

- 1.5. Mentors are required to be in regular contact with the Principal Investigator and should provide as much guidance as they deem fit in order to aid in the growth of PI as a researcher.
- 1.6. Mentors should, as far as possible, complete his/her mentorship with his/her assigned research groups. In the event that work relationship between the Mentor and PI is strained, the Mentor and PI are required to seek formal approval from the SIRCA Director to resolve the situation, failing which, to terminate the partnership.
 - 1.6.1. The Mentor will be required to cooperate with SIRCA to re-evaluate his/her compensation should termination of work relationship occur during the course of mentorship.
 - 1.6.2. The Mentor may be required to supervise another Principal Investigator. In this case, the Mentor should respect the decision of SIRCA in the assignment of Principal Investigator.
- 1.7. The Mentor should not request PIs to engage in work or activities not directly related to the SIRCA-funded research.
 - 1.7.1. If such activities are deemed necessary by the Mentor, he/she should first seek the advice of SIRCA management before proceeding.
- 1.8. Mentors and PIs should practise good judgement when disclosing any information relating to IDRC, SIRCA, and SiRC, Principal Investigators or other related matters.

2. Principal Investigators

- 2.1. All Principal Investigators (PIs) should expect to work closely with their mentors and be prepared for one (1) field trip visit by their Mentors;
- 2.2. PIs are expected to hold regular meetings with Mentors to discuss the progress of their research;
- 2.3. PIs are expected to be sensitive to the demands placed on the time of mentors and prepare in advance for scheduled meetings;
- 2.4. PIs are expected to have a genuine interest in their own professional and personal growth;
- 2.5. PI's are expected to possess an open and receptive attitude to feedback and advice from their mentors;

- 2.6. PIs must be willing to take part in collaborative activities designed to foster the goals of the mentoring program and provide oral and written feedback as requested to facilitate assessment of the program by the SIRCA Management Board.
3. Finance
- 3.1. Mentors and PIs are required to provide all necessary documents and receipts as proof of expenditure, as requested by the SIRCA secretariat for accounting purposes.
4. SIRCA Workshops and Conference Participation
- 4.1. Mentors and PIs are contractually obliged to participate in the final dissemination conference.
- 4.2. Though non-obligatory, Mentors are encouraged to participate in the SIRCA training workshops. If they wish to participate, they are required to notify SIRCA in advance and obtain necessary documents and information. PIs are contractually obliged to participate in this component of the program.

Signatures:

_____	_____	_____
Signature of Mentor	Title/Name of Mentor	Date
_____	_____	_____
Signature of PI	Title/Name of PI	Date
_____	_____	_____
Signature of SIRCA Representative	Title/Name of SIRCA Representative	Date

Annex 4. Mentor – SIRCA (MOU)

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)
BETWEEN
Director, Strengthening ICTD Research Capacity in Asia (SIRCA) Program
(Nanyang Technological University)
Singapore
AND
(Mentor's title/name)

The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is to establish and define the roles and responsibilities of the SIRCA Research Mentor, <Insert Mentor's title/name>, under the SIRCA Mentorship Scheme.

The SIRCA Research Mentor agrees to the following programmatic roles and responsibilities:

1. Supervision

- 1.1 The Mentor is required to provide guidance and supervision to the research groups, which are assigned to him/her, in the research development and execution of the research study throughout the course of the program.
 - 1.2 Mentors should work with SIRCA to ensure timely submission of Progress Reports, Mid-Term Progress Reports and Final Reports by Principal Investigators (PIs) under their care. These submissions, presented using pre-defined templates, should include all necessary components and information required by SIRCA.
 - 1.3 Mentors are required to make one site visit to each research group under their supervision. It is the responsibility of the Mentor and PI to ensure the successful completion of the site visit.
 - 1.3.1 Mentors should notify SIRCA promptly should there be problems arranging for site visits.
 - 1.3.2 The Mentor should seek to obtain in-depth understanding of the site through close observation and interaction with the Principal Investigator and his/her Co-Investigator(s).
- In the course of his/her supervision, if the Mentor becomes aware of actions or behaviours of a Principal Investigator and/or his Co-Investigator which are against the interests of IDRC, SiRC or SIRCA, the Mentor should notify SIRCA promptly and aid in any investigative action.

2. Mentor

- 2.1 Mentors are required to be in regular contact with the Principal Investigator and should provide as much guidance as they deem fit in order to aid in the growth of PI as a researcher.
- 2.2 The Mentor should, as far as possible, complete his/her mentorship with his/her assigned research groups. In the event that work relationship between the Mentor and PI is strained, the Mentor and PI are required to seek formal approval from the SIRCA Director to resolve the situation, failing which, to terminate the partnership.
 - 2.2.1 The Mentor will be required to cooperate with SIRCA to re-evaluate his/her compensation should termination of work relationship occur during the course of mentorship.
 - 2.2.2 The Mentor may be required to supervise another Principal Investigator. In this case, the Mentor should respect the decision of SIRCA in the assignment of Principal Investigator.
- 2.3 The Mentor should not request PIs to engage in work or activities not directly related to the SIRCA-funded research.
 - 2.3.1 If such activities are deemed necessary by the Mentor, he/she should first seek the advice of SIRCA management before proceeding.
- 2.4 Mentors and PIs should practise good judgement when disclosing any information relating to IDRC, SIRCA, SiRC, Principal Investigators or other related matters.

3. Estimated Timelines

- 3.1 The approximate calendar of key SIRCA events are outlined in Table 1

Table 1: Timeline for key SIRCA events

Date	Action
13 th Oct 08	Call for Mentors
20 th Oct 08	Deadline for Mentor Registration
29 th Oct 08	Confirmation of teams mentored
Feb-March 09 (TBC)	First Workshop registration

April 09 (TBC)	First Workshop
Jun-Jul 09 (TBC)	Second Workshop registration
Sept/Oct 09 (TBC)	Second Workshop
Jan 10 (TBC)	Third Workshop registration
Mar 10 (TBC)	Third Workshop
Jul 2011 (TBC)	Registration for SIRC/ ICA conference
Dec 2011 (TBC)	SIRC/ICA Conference

3.2 Project Milestones

- 3.2.1 Table 2 shows the estimated deadlines for the maximum project duration, 24 months.
- 3.2.2 Examples of project milestones for 12-months, 15-months and 18-months projects are projected in Appendix A of this document.
- 3.2.3 These milestones are only a guide. Actual deadline for each stage of the project may vary.

Table 2: Key milestones for a 24-Month Project

Date	Action
2 months after Letter of Agreement	Due date for commencement of research project
3 months of Date of Commencement (DOC)	Finalization of Literature Review
6 months after DOC	Finalization of Methodology
6 months after DOC	1 st Progress Report
8 months after DOC	Commencement of Data Collection
12 months after DOC	Mid-Term Progress Report
15 months after DOC	2 nd Progress Report
20 months after DOC	Completion of Data Collection
23 months after DOC	Completion of Data Analysis
24 months after DOC	Completion Research Project
27 months after DOC	Submission of Final Report

4. Finance

4.1 Compensation for SIRCA mentors includes:

4.1.1 *Travel expenses incurred for program meetings (including air and land travel);*

The SIRCA program will pay for travelling expenses of SIRCA mentors for journeys made in the performance of their mentoring duties. The most economical method of transport should be used, taking into account efficient working practices. Usually this will be second-class rail or economy class air travel, although staff should consider different options, for example public transport, private car, or hire car, depending on the destination, and the numbers of travelers.

Mentors are required to book their own travel, including flights and ground transport taking into consideration the SIRCA guidelines travel options. Mentors should proceed with the booking only after receiving approval from SIRCA. Mentors will be required to forward a copy of the booking invoice and/or e-ticket to SIRCA within 3 days of the date of confirmation, for funds to be remitted.

True copies or scanned copies of boarding passes must be submitted to SIRCA within seven days of return from workshops, conference or site visits.

4.1.2 *Subsistence expenses;*

The SIRCA program will secure bookings for hotel accommodation for all mentors for the duration of the program meetings. All mentors will also receive a subsistence allowance to cover their other expenses.

All Mentors will receive a subsistence allowance for each of their site visits to cover their accommodation, meals and ground travel costs.

Mentors will receive subsistence allowances for SIRCA meetings and site visits for the entire period of travel, after their travel bookings have been approved by SIRCA. Mentors will receive their subsistence allowance together with the travel funds. No receipts are required for the subsistence allowances.

The per diem schedule used by the SIRCA program will reflect current economic situations.

4.1.3 *Honorarium*

Each SIRCA mentor will receive an Honorarium of SGD2400/year for each project mentored. Payment will be made at the beginning of each year of supervision.

4.1.4 In summary, SIRCA will provide compensation for Mentors up to the following amounts:

	Mentors' Compensation (SGD)	
	Asian	International
Airfare (per project/ per meeting)	1000	2500
Per Diem	200 (meeting)	200 meeting
	250 (site visit)	250 (site visit)
Ground Transport (per project/per meeting)	200	200
Compensation/project/year	2400	2400

4.2 The mentor is required to provide all necessary expenditure documents and receipts as proof of expenditure, which must be arranged in chronological order and attached with the claim. Each receipt must show the date, cost and the nature of the expense.

5. Workshop and Conference Participation

5.1 Though non-obligatory, Mentors are encouraged to participate in the SIRCA training workshops. If they wish to participate, they are required to notify SIRCA in advance and obtain necessary documents and information.

5.2 Mentors are contractually obligated to participate in the final dissemination conference.

6. Additional Terms of Agreement

SIRCA will make every effort to ensure not only that its decisions are fair and objective, but also that they are seen to be so. Therefore, no member of the SIRCA mentoring scheme with an actual or potential conflict of interest may participate in the mentoring of a SIRCA project. All such Individuals must declare any potential conflict of interest to the Director of SIRCA immediately. For further clarity, Individuals are in a conflict of interest when they:

- Are from the same immediate department, research group, centre, institute, company or other type of institutional subdivision as any PI named in a project;
- Named as PI or co-PI in a SIRCA project;
- Have been a student or supervisor of the PI within the last ten (10) years
- Are or have been a close personal friend or relative of the PI
- Have had long standing or serious scientific or personal differences with the PI.

If any of these circumstances apply, the Individual will not be assigned the role of Mentor to the project. Where an Individual seeks direction on the exercise of his/her discretion in the event of a potential conflict, the next level of authority shall exercise his/her judgement and/or seek a vote of the SIRCA Management Board GRC to clarify the appropriate course of action.

When a member of the SIRCA Mentoring Scheme has concerns about the potential perception of conflict in such matters, they may refer the issue to the SIRCA Management Board for advice and direction.

Signatures:

Name of SIRCA Director_____
Signature of SIRCA Director_____
Date_____
Name of SIRCA Mentor_____
Signature of SIRCA Mentor_____
Date**APPENDIX A**Table 3: **Key milestones for a 12-Month Project**

Date	Action
2 months after Letter of Agreement	Due date for commencement of research project
3 months of Date of Commencement (DOC)	Finalization of Literature Review
5 months after DOC	Finalization of Methodology
6 months after DOC	Mid-Term Progress Report
7 months after DOC	Commencement of Data Collection
10 months after DOC	Completion of Data Collection
11 months after DOC	Completion of Data Analysis
12 months after DOC	Completion Research Project
15 months after DOC	Submission of Final Report

Table 4: **Key milestones for a 15-Month Project**

Date	Action
2 months after Letter of Agreement	Due date for commencement of research project
3 months of Date of Commencement (DOC)	Finalization of Literature Review
5 months after DOC	Finalization of Methodology
6 months after DOC	1 st Progress Report
7.5 months after DOC	Mid-Term Progress Report
8 months after DOC	Commencement of Data Collection
12 months after DOC	Completion of Data Collection/ 2 nd Progress Report
14 months after DOC	Completion of Data Analysis
15 months after DOC	Completion Research Project
18 months after DOC	Submission of Final Report

Table 5: **Key milestones for a 18-Month Project**

Date	Action
2 months after Letter of Agreement	Due date for commencement of research project
3 months of Date of Commencement (DOC)	Finalization of Literature Review
5 months after DOC	Finalization of Methodology
6 months after DOC	1 st Progress Report
8 months after DOC	Commencement of Data Collection
9 months after DOC	Mid-Term Progress Report
14 months after DOC	Completion of Data Collection
15 months after DOC	2 nd Progress Report
17 months after DOC	Completion of Data Analysis
18 months after DOC	Completion Research Project
21 months after DOC	Submission of Final Report

Annex 5. Mentor Site Visit Checklist

SIRCA Mentorship – Site Visit Checklist

The SIRCA program seeks to build research capacity amongst emerging ICTD scholars in Asia. As part of our efforts to provide learning opportunities for our PIs, SIRCA requires all PIs to expect a site visit by their assigned Mentor. As most PIs and Mentors are geographically-dispersed, the purpose of the site visit is to facilitate SIRCA mentors to gain a clearer and more in-depth understanding of the research site. Furthermore, this will be an opportunity for fruitful discussion and exchange between Mentor and PI. To maximize the benefits of the site visit, Mentors are encouraged to refer to the below checklist of key areas to take note of during the visit. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Moreover, it tends to focus on matters that are related to research support and framing, and thus not directly related to the research design. Please note that points VI and VII fall under the responsibility of the SIRCA Secretariat. If there are things that are flagged during the mentor visit, these should be communicated to the SIRCA team at NTU.

I) Context of Research Site

1. Are the following characteristics of the research site correctly described and reflected in the literature review and/or prior correspondences with the PI:

- a. Demographics
- b. Social and gender norms
- c. Economic development
- d. Culture
- e. Religion
- f. Political climate
- g. Language
- h. Literacy rate
- i. ICT policy environment
- j. Levels of exposure and access to different types of ICTs

II) Making use of Available Resources

2. Are the PIs aware of the different resources that are available to them as part of the SIRCA project?

- a. IDRC research library
- b. NTU research resources
- c. Existing resource packs that have been assembled

III) Potential Impact of Research

3. Has the PI considered the potential impact of the research including:

- a. its relevance to the needs of the intended beneficiaries;
- b. sustainability issues given the context of the research site including
 - i. Scale of research
 - ii. Cost of research
 - iii. Training of locals
 - iv. Technological requirements
 - v. Infrastructure requirements
 - vi. Human resource requirements
 - vii. Skill requirements
 - viii. Political support/climate
 - ix. Community acceptance/involvement
- c. Benefits the study will bring to the local community;
- d. Harm the study will bring to the local community.

IV) Potential Challenges of Research

4. Has the PI considered the potential challenges of his/her research including:

- a. risks the study may encounter;
- b. other barriers the PI will face in the course of the study?

V) Ethical Considerations

5. Has the PI considered the ethical implications of the research?
 - a. Have steps been taken when conducting research to ensure compliance of the following
 - i. Legal procedures and requirements
 - ii. Social/cultural standards
 - iii. Institutional procedures, regulations, frameworks and codes
 - b. Have the ethical considerations and steps to mitigate risks been documented?

VI) Institutional Support

6. Is the PI's affiliated institution providing adequate support to the research including:
 - a. Administrative support;
 - b. Accessibility to SIRCA Grant?

VII) SIRCA Compliance

7. Is the PI acting in compliance with the requirements and conditions of the SIRCA Grant Award including:
 - a. Distribution of research responsibilities amongst PIs, Co-Investigators and Research Assistants;
 - b. Progress of research study with regards to proposed timeline;
 - c. Expenditure with regards to proposed budget?

Annex 6. Mentor Application Form**APPLICATION FORM****SIRCA MENTORSHIP**

The candidate is kindly requested to complete this form and attach his/her full curriculum vitae, which should include his/her educational/professional qualifications, research interest, research area of expertise by topic and geography, professional memberships, honours and awards, employment history and list of publications. This form, together with the CV, should be submitted as an attachment via email to The SIRCA Secretariat at sirca@ntu.edu.sg

PERSONAL PARTICULARS

Full name (In BLOCK LETTERS and underline Surname/Family Name):

Correspondence Address:

Telephone:

Home:

Business:

Permanent Address (If different from above):

E-mail:

Fax:

PRESENT APPOINTMENT

Appointment:

Name and Address of Employer:

Date of Appointment:

RESEARCH EXPERTISE (list by topics and geography)

PREFERENCE FOR PROJECT SUPERVISION

I would prefer to supervise projects in the following topics:

- i)
- ii)
- iii)

I would prefer to supervise projects based in the following countries:

- i)
- ii)
- iii)

The maximum number of projects I am willing to supervise is: _____ (Please indicate a number from 1 to 3).

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