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YOUTH, ICTs AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN ASIA

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Abstract:

The general objective of the “Youth, ICTs and Political Engagement in Asia” project is to improve the understanding of the relationship between civic engagement of youth and ICTs such as mobile phones, the Internet and games in selected nation states in Asia. In particular, it focuses on how ICTs work together with local political institutions to influence youth’s political engagement. This project used a comparative approach to discover empirical relationships among variables such as political participation, political institution, political culture, and ICTs. Five countries, Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore, are included in this report. The researchers are based in the country examined and have first-hand experience. Moreover, they share the common methods of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions in answering many pressing questions regarding how to engage youth with politics in an era of new ICTs. This report presents the details of operation, activities, outputs, and outcomes.

Key Words:

Political engagement, Youths, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore

ii) The Research Problem:

Political engagement is “at the heart of democracy” (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995:1), and distinguishes democracy from other political systems. It is claimed that only democracy can “offer citizens opportunities to participate in their own governance” (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993:1), providing the mechanisms by which citizens can seek to satisfy their interests, preferences, and needs. Political engagement is thus tightly connected to governance in two ways: First, political engagement provides ordinary citizens venues to influence administration (of government) such as giving feedbacks to public service delivery or inputting lay views on policymaking; second, political engagement is the constitutive block of politics, which could be illustrated in the relationship between voting rates and elections—Any elections without sufficient number of voters would be invalid and misrepresentative.

Democratic governance without thorough and efficient citizens’ engagement is only a “thin democracy” (Barber, 1984). A strong democracy should be engaging no matter whether we take the state-centric or the citizen-centric perspective. Through the medium of political engagement, Scholzman (2002: 436-438) argued that citizens communicate information about their preferences and needs for government action and generate pressure on public officials to heed what they hear. In addition to the government-citizen interaction, political engagement allow people to work together to create communities in which democratic orientations and skills are fostered. Meanwhile, citizens themselves grow and learn through political engagement.

Despite the importance of political engagement in democracy, academic opinion does not always support a beneficial point of view of political engagement. According to Macedo’s summary (2005:10-16), political engagement is by no means a favorite activity of citizens. Lack of political involvement may signal either widespread satisfaction with the status quo or feelings of powerlessness and frustration experienced during political activities (For the later point, see Hibbing & Thesis-Morse, 2002). In addition, from an elitist point of view, popular engagement might undermine good governance because ordinary citizens are simply incapable of making the right decisions (see Lippmann, 1925). Still worse, highly engaged majorities may repress minorities and produce other injustices (Levi, 1996; Tarrow, 1996). Lastly, political engagement is not always democratic because “(f)ree and autonomous participation establishes the democratic character of a regime, while staged mobilization of citizens marks authoritarian societies” (Brady, 1999:737). In other words, political engagement that is motivated by intentional manipulation of political climates by either an authoritarian government or a small group of politically powerful figures is not considered as constructive or even considered as deconstructive to democracy.

The controversy demonstrates the interactive relationship between political engagement and democracy. On the one hand, it is the political system that opens up certain opportunities while closes others for citizens to take part in political decision-making. The diversity of types of political engagement thus could be considered as an indicator about the openness of democratic governance. On the other hand, political engagement can cause pressure on governmental actors such as administrative officials or policy makers through either the formal channels such as voting or the informal spheres such as opinion expressions. Political engagement thus contains the

potential to transform political systems including democracy. However, the dynamics may not always be smooth and the tension could be high. It is especially the case when such an interaction is observed in new democracies that have not evolved into their mature forms. Asian democracies, compared to their Western counterparts, are often new and experiencing significant fluctuations in their development. For example, Cambodia, Nepal, and Pakistan turned to autocracy after their democratic experiments failed. Examining political engagement as an interactive agent that co-shapes the trajectories of these new democracies' development can provide us alternative evidences that help to understand the controversial nature of political engagement.

Youth, ICTs and political engagement

When it comes to political engagement, youth is always a concern due to two reasons: First, youth is found to be less actively engaged than the elders in almost every established form of political activities in various countries. Second, youth is claimed to be more active than the elders in engaging in many risky behaviors including political violence, which have serious outcomes for both youth themselves and the societies they belong to. The first observation often leads to the conclusion that the current young generation is apolitical or politically apathetic. In the US, middle-aged and older people have higher rates of voting turnouts than younger people (Schlozman, 2002), are more active in organizations, attend church more often, work on more community projects, volunteer more, both read and watch the news more frequently, are more interested in politics (Putnam, 2000:247), and have higher interpersonal trust (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). Whether an increasingly apathetic youth exists in other parts of this world becomes an interesting question. No research has been conducted in Southeast and South Asia as far as to our knowledge.

The second observation about youth's involvement in risky behaviors is supported by data from various sources. The 2007 World Youth Report by United Nations shows that early pregnancy, unprotected sex, drug use, tobacco use, excessive alcohol consumption, substance abuse and poor dietary practices are all problems that remain among Asian youth. Due to both the under-developed adulthood and lack of access to necessary resources to support healthy behaviors, youth is a vulnerable population that is susceptible to lots of risky behaviors. Violent political behaviors have been found among Asian youth when they used bitter resentments to express their political views (Urdal, 2006). These findings suggest that if not appropriately incorporated into the political system, youth's energy might be spent on harmful behaviors. This is especially a problem when the political system does not provide channels to conduit such energy.

Both observations picture a confusing image of Asian youth: Are they apolitical or too political? Are they politically indifferent or just different? Theoretical efforts have been made to explain political engagement among younger generations. Life cycle theory suggests that younger people do not involve in politics as much as older people because they are in a unique life stage which exposes them to all kinds of starting-up problems (Zukin, et al., 2006:11). Younger people will reach the same level and take up the same forms of political participation as they grow old. Generational theory counter-claims that every generation grows up in distinctive

environments, in which unique events and trends shape the generation's political socialization. As results, we see very different patterns in different generations regarding their ways to participate in politics (Putnam, 2000). The two theories have been tested in Western countries but neither of them has been applied to alternative contexts. Asian countries have gone through rapid and fundamental changes in the last thirty years. The differences in their environments provide a natural test to the competing theories: If it is merely a life-cycle problem, we should see Asian youth being equally politically inactive. If the second theory is correct, we expect to see that the characteristics of political socialization can shape youth's political engagement.

ICTs enter the frame of youth engagement as one significant factor during political socialization. Political socialization emphasizes the factors that influence the development of one's political attitudes, knowledge, and identity in one's formative years. Early work on political socialization often focuses on the role of family communication patterns, specifically, how parents' political predispositions are transmitted to their children (Peterson & Somit, 1982; Meadowcroft, 1986; Liebes & Ribak, 1992). Later on, political socialization is expanded to other interpersonal communication such as that between children / adolescents and their friends, peer groups, etc. The basic assumption of early political socialization studies is that pre-adult learning is a crucial component of adult political beliefs. Along the same line, civic education works examine how schools and formal education influence children / adolescents' political socialization (Hunter & Brisbin, 2003; Westheimer, 2004). Media scholars add that not only purposeful and active learning can shape political cognitions and behaviors, but also passive consumption of information from mass media is able to affect political socialization. The significant role of mass media, especially news media, has been widely supported (Conway et al., 1981; Garramone & Atkin, 1986; Eveland, McLeod, & Horowitz, 1998; Kioussis, McDevitt, & Wu, 2005). ICTs, as an interactive agent, intervene with all the three political socialization institutions, namely, family, school, and media. Youth's political socialization is thus inevitably changed by the launching of ICTs. This proposal focuses on ICTs as new media whereas the complex interactions between ICTs, family structures and education systems function as the other crucial background factors along with which new media execute their impacts.

How ICTs as new media influence political engagement could be examined through two ways: One is to treat using new media as another kind of media consumption, and ask how this new behavior influences political engagement such as knowledge, interest, efficacy and political participation (e.g., Hardy & Scheufele, 2005; Polat, 2005; Shah, et al., 2005; Uslaner, 2004). When following this logic, any media theories could be applied to new media. New media are able to influence political attitudes primarily because new media contain many information sources. Information-processing theories such as agenda-setting, priming and framing are thus all applicable in explaining new media's impact on youth's political attitudes. Different from traditional mass media, new media contain an enormous amount of information and the sources are literally uncountable. In addition, these sources are often more diverse than those you can find in mass media. Rather, Internet users can easily access sources that promote oppositional viewpoints and dissent opinions. Youth as an age cohort might share a lot of features such as school schedule and peer groups, which lead to similar new media usage patterns. But other factors, such as gender and countries, might diversify their usage to such a great extent that youth relies on totally different sources for political information. However, these

possibilities remain largely un-examined, especially in Asia. This study on youth's political engagement thus can first research on how youth gets information from new media and second, how individual differences and contextual features lead to differentiated new media consumptions.

The second way to study the influence of new media is to consider new media as venues for civic interactions. For instance, online political discussions in various cyberspaces (e.g., instant messaging with friends, participating in candidates' blogs, debating other citizens in online forums, etc.) provide people new ways to be involved in political dialogues. If new media offer new venues for civic interactions, local governments are not able to manipulate the public as successfully as before. Taking online political discussions as one of the venues, Janssen and Kies (2005) found three types of online forums, including Usenet groups (Davis, 1999; Wilhelm, 1999), web-based political forums (Weiksner, 2004) and e-consultation forums (Coleman, Hall, & Howell, 2002) prevail in the cyberspace. The former two types mainly include inter-citizen conversations. Interviews with online political discussants (Stromer-Galley, 2003) revealed that they appreciated and enjoyed the diversity of people and opinions they encountered online, which is not available in everyday political discussions. It implies that interacting with peer citizens to know different opinions is one of the main motivations for people to get online. We are thus interested in recording youth's involvement in civic interactions supported by new media and how these interactions expose youth to diverse opinions and alternative engagements.

Defining Asian youth and their political socialization

Youth, or young people, is defined by the United Nations as between 15-24 years old, which refers to people who were born between 1984 and 1993 in this proposal. The 2007 World Youth Report¹ indicates that the youth population in Asia reaches 738 million, accounting for 55.7% of the global youth labor force. The current Asian youth population also enjoys the educational attainment that is higher than ever before. The sizable youth population with better education in Asia has been considered as one beneficial factor that contributes to the economic burgeons in Asia (Bloom & Canning, 2003). In addition to rapid economic growth and increasing educational level, Asian youth has experienced enormous changes in both their societies and at the global level. These changes might be summarized as the end of cold war, the financial crisis in 1997-8, and the turbulent development of democracies. During cold war, Asia is basically divided into two worlds: The Northern and Eastern Asia that includes major communist countries such as Soviet Union and China vs. the Southeastern and Southern Asia where locates the allies of United States. When the current young generation came into this world, the hugest political change in their life is the end of cold war. The antagonistic and hostile opposition between two parties as the main theme of political activities worldwide became either a non-experience or a remote memory in their early childhood. Instead, Asian youth spent their formative years² in an environment in which global tensions

¹ The 2007 World Youth Report. the United Nations. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wyr07.htm>

² Although the age limits of formative years cannot be defined universally, Rintala (1968) suggests an approximate time bracket from 17 to 25.

are released but local politics become intense and economic growth is the focus of all Asian countries.

An indicator of the uneasy local politics is the ups and downs of many Asian democracies, especially evident when economies face great challenges. Taking the last twenty years in the 20th century as a sample period, we see that financial crisis swept the whole Asia and radical changes in many countries' political systems occurred. We find that democracy was well established in some Asian countries such as India (since 1950), Taiwan (since 1996) and South Korea (since 1992); democracy in countries such as the Philippines (since 1992) and Thailand (since 1997) underwent important transformations; still some others which tried democracy returned to autocracy, including Cambodia (since 1997), Nepal (since 2002), and Pakistan (since 1999). Asian youth thus went through quite varied processes of political socialization depending upon the vicissitude of local economy and politics. The variation provides researchers excellent opportunities to examine youth and political engagement, as if we are given natural control of experimental conditions. Remembering that a fundamental controversy regarding youth engagement is the debate on whether it is a life-cycle problem or a generational problem, the varied contexts of political socialization in Asia opens up the empirical examination of idiosyncratic characteristics that define the current young generation. How non-democracy, new democracy, relatively old democracy, and abandoned democracy in Asia offers different grounds based on which youth socializes politically and develops their political identity is a unique approach through which scholars can not only broaden the understanding of political engagement but also generate universal findings that are not obtainable from Western experience only.

While a common yet fluctuating economic growth accompanies with differentiated rates of democratic development, scholars start to realize that capitalist economy is not necessarily the prologue of democratic regimes. Many reformists begin to hope that new information and communication technologies (ICTs) would provide the impetus for democratic change where economic pressures had not. ICTs as new media are given particular attention when traditional mass media are too closely affiliated to the state or too vulnerable to state threats to provide sufficient information or to mobilize/organize citizens to become full participants in democratic processes. ICTs development in Asia, including Internet, mobile phones, and personal computers, is as uneven as the democratic development in this region. According to the World Bank's ICT data³, the rates of mobile subscribers range from 116% (Macao, China) to almost none (North Korea). The highest penetration rates of Internet are found in wealthy countries such as Japan (67%), South Korea (68%), and Singapore (57%). But most of Asian countries have less than 10% of their populations that own the access to the Internet. Situations are similar in the ownership of personal computers. The figures show that on the one hand, ICTs have been far from full development in Asia, which means that the potential of ICTs to influence political engagement has yet to be fully appreciated; on the other hand, Asian countries are eager to develop ICTs for both economic and social concerns, which makes us reasonably expect that sooner or later political engagement in these countries would

³ ICT at a glance tables. The World Bank Group.
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/DATASTATISTICS/0,,contentMDK:20459133~isCURL:Y~menuPK:1192714~pagePK:64133150~piPK:64133175~theSitePK:239419,00.html>

shift its nature. Now is thereafter the time to introduce systematic research on ICTs and their impact on political engagement into this region.

The interaction between ICTs and political engagement is particularly relevant to youth considering that young people are the main users of the new ICTs, especially the Internet and short messaging service (SMS) through mobile phones. For example, a World Bank report⁴ shows that 43% of all Internet users in China and 79% in Indonesia are youth. Youth is found to use ICTs for all kinds of purposes, including looking for job opportunities, getting more education, expanding social networks, and obtaining entertainment. When ICTs are comprehensively integrated to youth's everyday life, there are plenty of chances for young people to engage in new forms of political engagement. These new forms of engagement include interaction both between governments and citizens and that among citizens themselves. Some characteristics of ICTs in developing countries are especially friendly to involving citizens in either vertical (to governments) or horizontal (with fellow citizens) political activities. One is that the use of ICTs is a more communal experience in developing countries than that in developed countries. Many Asian youth do not have computers in their own homes and instead access the Internet at school or at Internet cafes. Mobile phone use can also be communal, especially in rural areas where phone resellers have reduced the barrier to access for young people. The communal nature of ICTs usages in developing countries makes youth easily accept the idea of public rather than private roles of ICTs. Another characteristic of ICTs in developing countries is that ICTs are often used as tools to connect to ideas and people outside the countries. Internet users' activities can bypass the limitation of local contexts and expand into the global sphere. A global dimension introduces local citizens to many other forms of political engagement that might not be popular in the local contexts and thus the opportunities to transform local engagement. These two instances only illustrate the possibilities that ICTs reshape the nature of political engagement. However, to what extent the public function and the global dimension of ICTs are exploited in Asia remains an empirical question to be answered.

iii) Objectives

The general objective of this research is to improve our understanding of the relationship between civic engagement of youth in selected nation states in Asia and new ICTs such as mobile phones, the Internet and games.

The specific objectives of this project include:

1. To examine the types of ICTs (e.g., short message service) youth is using for engaging in the political process and to what effect;
2. To understand the role of ICTs in changing relationships between young citizens and the political institutions (e.g., the government, NGOs, etc);
3. To examine how the usage of ICTs is transforming the nature of young citizen's political engagement.

⁴ Youth, ICTs, and Development. The World Bank Group.
[http://iris37.worldbank.org/domdoc/PRD/Other/PRDDContainer.nsf/All+Documents/85256D2400766CC785257298005AA016/\\$File/Youth_ICTs_Development.pdf](http://iris37.worldbank.org/domdoc/PRD/Other/PRDDContainer.nsf/All+Documents/85256D2400766CC785257298005AA016/$File/Youth_ICTs_Development.pdf)

iv) Methodology

A comparative approach

Lasswell (1968) claimed that the scientific approach is “unavoidably comparative”. The comparative method is considered as one among basic scientific methods, which also aims at “discovering empirical relationships among variables” (Lijphart, 1971). There are multiple models within the comparative approach. According to Livingstone (2003), there are four models in which cases are compared for different purposes. The first model is to study particular cases for their own sake, distinguishing what is unique about each case. The second model tests the hypothesized generality of findings across cases in order to support claims regarding an abstract or universal phenomenon. In the third model, systematic relations are sought, each case thereby serving as one unit or data point. The fourth model compares cases insofar as they are systematically interrelated due to some underlying processes.

Our project first is similar to Livingstone’s second model in the aim to examine a universal phenomenon, which is about the changing youth engagement. In addition, our project also takes the traditional goal of the comparative method in our efforts to discover empirical relationships among variables. In particular, we want to know how ICTs work together with local political contexts to influence youth’s political engagement. We chose to focus on ICTs because methodologically, it helps us to reduce the many variables problem of the comparative method. Due to the same concern, we chose to compare countries in one region, i.e., Asia, because they are comparable, meaning that a large number of important variables are similar and thus could be considered as constants, but the factors of ICTs and democratization are quite dissimilar. Our choice is also supported by previous studies, which show that regions not only reflect geographic proximity but also similarities in many basic aspects (Russett, 1968). Culturally, Asian countries share many traditions. Historically, they experienced common trajectories such as periods of colonization and de-colonization. Socially, they entered an era of modern society around the same time and under the same global environment. However, they differ significantly in the evolution of political systems and ICTs were introduced to the region around the same time but followed quite different patterns of development under the different political systems. In short, the similarities and the dissimilarities between Asian countries are ideal for comparative research.

Specifically, we choose three Southeast Asian countries (Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore), and three South Asian countries (Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka) to serve the purpose of comparative research on ICTs and youth engagement. Two of them could be considered as countries which have relatively advanced ICT development: Singapore has 101% of mobile subscribers, 57% of Internet users, and 61% of personal computer owners; Malaysia has 77% of mobile subscribers, 44% of Internet users, and 20% of personal computer owners. Two of them have medium levels of ICT development: Philippines have 42% of mobile subscribers, 5% of Internet users, and 5% of personal computer owners; Sri Lanka has 17% of mobile subscribers, 1% of Internet users, and 3% of personal computer owners. The other two countries have low levels of ICT development: Bangladesh has 6% of mobile subscribers, .3% of Internet users, and 1% of personal computer

owners; India has .8% of mobile subscribers, .6% of Internet users, and .2% of personal computer owners.

Along the dimension of democratization (Croissant, 2004), these countries could be grouped into less liberal democracy and more liberal democracy. Please note that the categorization here is highly relative and does not reflect sharp differences as those between black and white. Rather, the grouping here provides a tentative base built on which we can have a general understanding of the political systems in these countries. According to the Democracy Index compiled by The Economist in 2007⁵, Singapore was named as hybrid regimes, ranking 84 on the list. Malaysia and Bangladesh were labeled as flawed democracies, ranking at 81 and 75 respectively. The other three countries were also flawed democracies but enjoyed relatively high rankings. Philippines, Sri Lanka, and India were ranked at 63, 57 and 35 respectively.

By using these two criteria to choose our sample countries, we are able to compare the development of ICTs and political engagement while this relationship is conditioned on the democratization procedure in specific countries. We are especially interested in how ICTs interact with existing political systems to affect youth engagement. We believe that the sampling strategy we use here can sufficiently control for the factors we focus on, i.e., ICT development and political systems.

In-depth interviews

Participants and procedure. Interviewees who were invited for in-depth interviews include two groups of youth: The first group is made up by young people who actively use the Internet to engage in civic activities, including activists, NGO participants, and online opinion leaders; the second group involves youth who has special interest in political engagement and does not have to be experienced Internet users. The recruitment of the first group of interviewees were based on researchers' search. We searched for NGO websites, famous blogs, youth-oriented websites, and youth organizations. We also consulted data from syndication websites such as digg.com to identify young opinion leaders on the Internet. The recruitment of the second group of interviewees included young people who have direct experience with political engagement, no matter whether the experience stems from their profession or their social relationships (e.g., relatives). Both recruiting procedures used the snow-ball sampling strategy.

Interview guidelines (see Appendix 1). Although we assume that an apolitical generation is common, we do not want to impose our definition of "political" or "apolitical" on youth. Therefore, we started asking what youth is doing everyday and which activities they consider as civic or political. We then asked them how important they think these activities are among their other activities such as getting good grades and playing video games. We also wanted to know how these activities are connected to or isolated from activities such as video game playing. In addition, we wanted them to comment on traditional forms of political participation such as protesting on the streets and criticizing the government in public. After this general conversation on

⁵ The world in 2007, Democracy index. The Economist.
http://www.economist.com/media/pdf/DEMOCRACY_TABLE_2007_v3.pdf

political and apolitical, we turned to the two factors that interest us, ICTs as new media and political institutions. We asked interviewees about their experience of political institutions. When asking these questions, particular questions such as how new media are used to obtain information about these issues, or how new media provide them opportunities to participate in discussions about these issues were emphasized. At last, we asked open questions about their usage of new media for all kinds of purposes, during which we asked interviewees to name their favorite websites or blogs. We also asked them to compare their new media usage to traditional media usage. Interviews ended with a brief survey about basic demographics such as age and family income (see Appendix 2).

Focus group discussions (FGDs)

Participants and procedure. Focus groups were held among average young adults, including both students and professionals. Young adults are considered as between 18- and 25-year old. They are average in the sense that they are not particularly interested in political participation despite their differential levels of use of ICTs. Our recruitment started from locating colleges and universities, targeting at coverage of geographical diversity (e.g., The North vs. the South) and different types of institutions (e.g., polytech vs. university). Students from various schools were recruited to participate. After that, we called for focus group participants through personal contacts with young professionals. These young professional were already working and supposed to take different views regarding ICTs and civic engagement compared to students.

Discussion guides (see Appendix 3 for an example from India). We took what we learn from in-depth interviews to frame our discussion guides. Therefore, the questions asked during focus groups across countries varied at some extent although a set of key questions such as how ICTs are used is shared. The purpose is to use what our interviewees told me and see how popular or unpopular their views and activities are among these focus groups. This could be considered as a first step to test the reliability and validity of certain questions to capture the variation among a more representative sample. Focus groups also ended with a brief survey about basic demographics such as age and family income.

The following table shows the number of interviews and focus groups completed.

	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	Bangladesh	India	Sri Lanka
Interviews	26	29	24	23	26	15
FGDs	8	8	12	7	6	N.A.

Data analytic strategy

Interviews. Researchers transcribed interviews and translated them into English. When transcripts were ready, researchers classified texts along different

themes, such as definition of the political or usage of the online games. This step ended up with a collection of extracts for each theme. Then we examined whether there are instances that could not be classified and refine our themes to include the deviant cases. The classification and revision were repeated in each interview transcript and our coding themes were constantly revised until no unclassifiable texts emerged. Different interviews then were compared to each other and examined for similarities and differences. A comprehensive list of views on each theme were constructed and tested with focus group data.

Focus groups. Our major purpose of focus groups is to test the generalizability of certain views and activities that we obtain from interviews. Therefore, our first analytical step was to see whether new themes emerged from discussions in focus groups. If yes, we incorporated them into our current structure. After revising coding themes, we focused on how popular or unpopular certain views and activities are among our focus group members. The next step tried to link the distributive pattern to youth's personal characteristics such as gender, family income, and so on. In other words, we wanted to know whether there are significant divides among sub-groups of youth.

v) Project Activities

Recruitment of country collaborators (May 2009 to June 2010): The PI started to recruit collaborators since May 2009, during the annual conference of International Communication Association. The first collaborator recruited was our Filipino researcher, Dr. Clarissa David. The Penang conference organized by IDRC in June 2009 provided the PI a great opportunity to network with regional researchers. Two collaborators, Dr. P. Vigneswara ILAVARASAN and Mr. Ahmed Swapan, were recruited during the Penang conference. Our Malaysian colleague, Dr. Zaharom Nain, offered his generous help to find collaborators for this project. The first recommended person was not able to participate due to institutional constraints. Dr. Nain then took the trouble to find us another competent collaborator, Dr. Joanne Lim, for this project. The PI stayed in Kuala Lumpur for a weekend in order to secure the partnership with Malaysia. The PI also got help from LirneAsia to recommend collaborators in Sri Lanka. During the first year of project, the PI continued to seek partnership and met Prof. Sahid Ullah during his visit to National University of Singapore (NUS) as well as Mr. Sagara Chandrasekara during the PI's first visit to Sri Lanka. The recruitment was completed by January, 2011 when the last collaborator signed the contract with NUS.

Agreement signing (May 2009 to January 2011): There are two steps of agreement signing that took extensive time and energy to deal with. The first step was to sign the agreement between NUS and ideacorp. The PI had to go through four different offices in order to get the contract signed. This procedure has stretched to five-month long. The second step was to sign the agreement between NUS and individual countries. In order to fulfill IDRC's requirement, our collaborators had to seek institutional endorsement. Despite the willingness of individual collaborators, not all institutions were supportive to such research work. For example, our first Malaysian collaborator was very willing to contribute to the project but his institution was teaching-oriented and thus did not support his research activities. For relatively new institutions, they often do not have the scheme of international collaborations

based on grants and the collaborator him/herself has to figure out how to make things work. We have learnt that in the future, we need to allocate ample time to contract-signing, at least half a year for multinational studies.

Team management (May 2009 to now): To manage the communication and collaboration between researchers, ICTs were fully utilized for the purpose. Emails, Skype calls, and online chats were regularly conducted to facilitate communication. A Google group named “Youth Engagement Team (PANeGov)” has been created by the PI. The group now has 16 members and 60 messages. This group serves as information sharing and dissemination portal for all the team members. Important updates regarding the project progress were announced on the discussion board. Documents that are necessary for running the studies were shared on the Files page. In addition, some of the documents such as interview guide were indeed a group work by incorporating members’ contributions in Google docs (See Appendix 4 for an illustration).

Financial management (May 2009 to now): Managing finance was another activity that poses a lot of challenges. Different countries have different rules and policies regarding fund transfer. For example, the Philippine collaborator had to bear almost 25% of loss of the fund due to policies at the university and the national level (see the Philippines part under this section for details). The Indian collaborator indicated that his bank was not providing any notices and expected him to inform them about the transfer. The Malaysian collaborator was asked to provide official transfer notes if she wants to take out the money from the university account. We had to work closely with NUS and our departmental finance officers to address these problems. However, due to the fact that NUS finance is at a higher position in the university hierarchy and is also very rigid, we had to wait for a long time to get a small request dealt with. For instance, towards the end of this project, three officers at our department general office left their jobs and the PI had to supervise the financial matters for several months.

Training and capacity building (May 2009 to now): The PI has travelled to Sri Lanka (February, 2010), India (March, 2010), and Bangladesh (April, 2010) to provide face-to-face training on how to conduct in-depth interviews. Both country researchers and their research fellows were included in the training. The PI often started with a personal talk with the researchers, followed by sitting in a few real-case interviews side by side with the country researchers. The PI then provided immediate feedbacks on the details she observed during the interviews. After the trip, the PI followed up with a summary email on what to improve. The PI also provided constant feedbacks on any questions the country researchers raised. The PI had made many efforts to ensure sufficient communication by constantly checking the working progress through emails/chats/video calls, monitoring the data quality by reading the transcripts and questionnaires, giving out detailed and quick feedbacks, and providing research support such as training materials. The country researchers themselves also spent a lot of time reading the documents, writing the reports/papers, communicating with the PI, and doing their own work to reach the standards. In addition, the country researchers also trained their team members. For instance, the Malaysian collaborator carried out a series of training sessions and workshops with the research team (interviewers/transcribers) between April-May 2010 and Jan-February 2011 to highlight issues and provide tips on how to conduct in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, respectively.

Workshops, conferences, and meetings (throughout the whole project): A major research event, the midterm review workshop, was held during June 20 to June 23, 2011. In total, 17 participants sat in the workshop, including six country collaborators, five graduate students, four resource persons (two intentional two local), one IDRC representative, and our project leader. One full day was used on reviewing the research progress, identifying potential problems, and discussing future research. The resource persons have given us excellent feedbacks that would help us to improve our research. Students have also learned from this experience. During this workshop, a panel that exclusively focused on our project was presented at the 19th Asian Media Information and Communication (AMIC) Conference. Four country collaborators presented their preliminary findings with the PI as the panel chair and Dr. Emanuell Lallana as the panel respondent. Our panel has attracted many academics and the comments from the outside experts inform as well as motivate us to think further.

Two members of this project, the PI and Dr. Clarissa David, participated in the Cebu midterm review meeting in May 2010. Both made a presentation in the meeting and actively participated in the discussion on other projects. Our project has incorporated the feedbacks from the meeting into our research design later. First, a gender break-down of males only, females only, and mixed focus groups was required for all countries. We also conducted comparisons using the gender perspective in our data analysis. Second, in order to make more policy impact, we decided to start writing policy briefs from the step of compiling background information for each country. The background document includes an overview of all the relevant policies with regards to youth engagement and ICTs (Please see the document “country background” for five reports). By identifying the existing policies, we would be able to suggest new policies based on our research findings.

Individual collaborators also took their research to various meetings, conferences, talks, and so on. A list of such activities is provided here:

- Prof. Joanne Lim, participant at the *Youth '10 Festival* – 28-30 May 2010, Putra World Trade Centre
- Prof. Joanne Lim, participant at *Youth '10* – 28-30 May 2010, Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur. <http://www.theyouthfestival.com/>
- Prof. Joanne Lim, participant at the *Asia Pacific Youth Conference*, Malaysia – 28 July – 2 August 2010, Kuala Lumpur. <http://www.iofc.org/node/45693>
- Prof. Joanne Lim, participant at the *Malaysia Young Female Entrepreneur Forum* – 26 & 27 October 2010, Kuala Lumpur.
- Prof. Joanne Lim, guest speaker at the *Erican International ELT Conference 2010 – Kuala Lumpur* (20 November 2010). Topic: Communications, Media and English Excellence (critical attention towards everyday media environment of young adults, including their familiarity with Facebook, blogs, and YouTube).
- Prof. Joanne Lim, participant at *Youth Redefined: ETP/GTP (Economic and Government Transformation Programmes) Conference* – January 2011
- Prof. Joanne Lim, participant at *Public forum: Net censorship via PPPA: Who's afraid of the big, bad web?* – 9 February 2011 (Annexe Gallery, KL)
- Prof. Joanne Lim, participant in a series of public dialogues entitled *Production, Distribution and Consumption* held in April 2011, which

encouraged young adults to engage with practitioners from the creative industry (journalism, film, PR) to discuss the uses, abuses and potential of (new) media tools in Malaysia.

- Prof. Joanne Lim, participant at *New Media Asia 2011* – 11-12 May 2011, Royale Bintang Kuala Lumpur.
- Prof. Joanne Lim, participant at *Asia Media Summit 2011: Digital Media Everywhere: Repositioning Broadcasting* – 24 - 25 May 2011, Hanoi, Vietnam, organized by Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development.
- Prof. Joanne Lim, participant at *Youth Nation Summit* – 28th -30th May 2011.
- Prof. Joanne Lim, participant at *World Blogger and Social Media Summit 2011*, 15-16 June 2011, PWTC, Kuala Lumpur.
- Prof. Joanne Lim, participant at *TedEx*, 20th August 2011, MAP@Publika.
- Prof. Joanne Lim, participant at *One Young World Conference* – September 2011, Zurich, Switzerland.
- Prof. Weiyu Zhang, invited talk, *Urban Youth, ICTs, and civic engagement in Asia*, East Asia Institute, National University of Singapore, September 13th, 2010
- Prof. Weiyu Zhang, invited talk, *Youth Engagement and ICTs in Asia: A Comparative Analysis*, Young Scholar Forum 2010, School of Journalism, Renming University, July 10th, 2010
- Prof. Weiyu Zhang, invited talk, *Youth Engagement and ICTs in Asia: A Comparative Approach*, The Joint Summer School by Chinese University of Communication, Chinese University of Hong Kong, University of Westminster and University of Pennsylvania, Chinese University of Communication, July 8th, 2010
- Prof. Weiyu Zhang, invited talk, *Youth, ICTs and Political Engagement in Asia*, Workshop on Potential for Mobile 2.0 in Emerging Asia, LIRNEAsia, June 22nd, 2010

Teaching-relevant activities (throughout the whole project): As most of our collaborators are university professors, this project provided a great opportunity to inform our teaching through research. The knowledge regarding the role of ICTs we accumulated through reading the relevant literatures was included in our teaching. The inputs and insights obtained through the project became up-to-date and vivid examples to teach our students. The methodological issues we encountered informed our teaching of research methods. A list of such activities is provided as below:

- Prof. Clarissa David, one of the special topics courses in the undergraduate program in the Communication Research program was devoted to ‘ICTs and Civic Engagement’ and included many things learned from this research project.
- Prof. Vignesh Ilavarasan was invited to deliver guest lectures at National Institute of Science, Technology & Development Studies, New Delhi and The Energy Resources Institute, New Delhi on ICT for Development in 2011. He used the findings of the study as part of the talks.
- Prof. Joanne Lim, lecture series convener: *Transformations: Media and Identity in Contemporary South-East Asia*. University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus (Autumn 2011). A five-session public lecture series took place from October – December 2011. As series convener, the project researcher incorporated

the project aims into the planning of topics (to be) discussed in the sessions. The majority of speakers/discussants are youth activists themselves.

- Prof. Joanne Lim, lectures, two teaching modules were designed based on input from the project and relates closely to the uses and implications of ICT in contemporary society. They are being delivered by the collaborator at the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus.
- Prof. Weiyu Zhang, keynote lecture, *Change, Youth, Failure, Excellence*, the 22nd International Youth Forum, Seoul, August 18th, 2011
- Prof. Weiyu Zhang, guest lectures, *Activism and ICTs*, presented three times for different courses and students at NUS. Many of the examples used were obtained through running this project.
- Prof. Weiyu Zhang, lectures, Research Methods for Communications and New Media, taught three times at different levels (i.e., both undergraduate and graduate). The difficulties we encountered during interviews and focus groups were used to teach these two methods.

What was learned: The key factor to a successful project is to identify capable and committed collaborators. There are a few lessons learnt regarding the choice of collaborators. First of all, a research project needs to work with researchers, not activists nor commissioned workers. There shall be a common understanding and appreciation of research work in order to carry out the project consistently well across a two-year span. The best researchers still are found in research institutions such as universities and research centers. Despite the often time-consuming and frustrating process to deal with research institutions, it is worth the troubles to get a collaborator from such institutions. Second, the social status of the researcher him/herself has significant impacts on the research work. An individual who is well integrated in the local network has more formal and informal resources to support him/her on completing the project work. A background check or a personal interview is necessary but more networking events may better help with the recruitment and identification. Third, collaborators are pursuing multiple goals at the same time and some of the goals are unknown to the PI and may have conflicts with the project. Such information shall be clarified in the early stage of research projects and clear instructions need to be given to researchers who have multiple obligations (e.g., the emphasis on submitting work on time).

vi) Project Outputs

Research

- One interview guideline, one discussion guide, and one questionnaire that can be used in future research on the same topic in other countries.
- 143 in-depth interviews with transcripts in English and individual questionnaires.
- 41 focus group discussions with transcripts in English and individual questionnaires.

- Four research presentations (Malaysia, Philippines, India, Sri Lanka) made at a panel in the 19th Asian Media Information and Communication (AMIC) Conference held at Singapore during 21-23 June 2010.
- A 100-page long report of five-country background (Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Bangladesh, India) with information on basic demographics, ICT development and policy, media history and policy, and youth policy. The country of Sri Lanka was not able to produce the background report because the country collaborator did not submit one.
- Five country research reports (Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Bangladesh, India) that include major findings and policy implications. The country of Sri Lanka was not able to produce a research report because the country collaborator did not finish the research work.
- A planned panel proposal to the 2012 annual conference of International Communication Association.
- A planned special journal issue or edited book that includes the research findings from participating countries.

Capacity

A rough estimation shows that a total of 35 people (Bangladesh: 9; India: 3; Malaysia: 5; Philippines: 3; Singapore: 11; Sri Lanka: 4) were trained through the project, including university faculty members, research assistants, free-lance researchers, and students. In addition, seven different institutions (Bangladesh: VOICE and FOCUS; India: Sampling Research; Malaysia: University of Nottingham, Malaysia campus; Philippines: University of Philippines; Singapore: NUS; Sri Lanka: Beyond Borders and University of Colombo) worked together to make this project happen. All the institutions have strengthened their capacities of international collaboration on research projects through this experience. A highly competent team of researchers was built through running this project and this team is expected to be able to conduct more such international projects in the future. Last but not least, the numerous young people who were involved in this project were given the chance to express their opinions, to communicate with fellow youth, to enhance their understanding of their own situations. The youth organizations were also informed about their environment by our academic activities. Details regarding each individual country are provided as below:

Bangladesh: Two collaborators were involved in the Bangladeshi part. The first collaborator was Ahmed Swapan from VOICE (Voices for Interactive Choice & Empowerment), Dhaka. He was in charge of the first part of the project, which means the in-depth interviews and three rounds of reports. The second collaborator was Prof. Ullah Sahid from FOCUS (Forum for Development Journalism and Communication Studies), Chittagong. He was responsible for running the focus groups, writing the fourth and final reports, as well as academic writing. Four other researchers were involved in the interview phase when Ahmed was taking the lead. Another five-member research team was engaged in conducting the FGDs, recording, transcribing records and translating the transcripts. Two junior journalism faculty members from Chittagong University, Ms. Rawshon Akhter and Mr. Shahab Uddin Neepu, and an independent freelance researcher, Mr. Wahid Bakul, moderated all FGDs. Mr. Ferdous Uddin Chowdhury, research director of FOCUS, compiled the datasheets.

The Bangladesh part helps enormously in building research capabilities of the researchers involved, who have almost no experience in conducting such research methods earlier. Participants from different geographical areas and subject majors enrich the capacities of many of the participants to talk about their lives.

Though FOCUS conducted a number of surveys, content analysis of different newspapers and radio and television contents, this is the first time it facilitated FGDs with some journalism educators, which ultimately make its human resources more competent in conducting in-depth and rigorous research on media and communication in the coming days. In addition to these, FOCUS has the opportunity in working with a Singapore university and experienced with international management system in running such a research project. Though young academics have very limited room to have collaboration with overseas and experienced media researchers, the execution of this project enlightened the country researcher and two academic fellows who have no international exposure prior this research on methodology and writing the transcripts.

India: As the India research is not familiar with the local language, Hindi, a PhD qualified female researcher was employed throughout the project period. It enhanced the capacity of the researcher to conduct the qualitative research, especially FGDs. As the research was conducted in Hindi, data were translated into English and analyzed. There was a continuous interaction between the researchers which enhanced the team work capabilities. The Indian researcher's capacity to conduct research in alien languages has improved. Sourcing of potential participants and interviews was done by Ms. Kanchan Sinha. She also cross checked the transcripts of the interview and FGD data. According to her, she gained competence in conducting academic research which is not directly market oriented. Lessons learnt from the focus group discussion, sourcing of participants, moderating, transcription of audio data and analysis were directly shared with thirteen PhD students of a course, social research methods. Though the impact is not direct, students reported that the experiences from live project are more insightful than the text reading. Indian research team was in constant touch with the primary researcher at Singapore and had opportunities to interact with the international researchers. This international exposure is invaluable to the Indian researcher as similar opportunities are minimal.

Malaysia: The five-member research team (including the collaborator) was responsible for conducting, recording and transcribing the interviews and focus group discussions. The collaborator also moderated all interviews and FGDs, completed all project reports and collated the country background information document. The research team comprised both undergraduate and postgraduate level students – University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus: Mushamir Mustafa (International Relations), Lynnett Yip (International Communications Studies); Help University: Danielle Cheng (Business Studies); and Universiti Putra Malaysia: See Silk Inn (Journalism). There were many firsts with this research project – it was the first IDRC project signed with the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus; the first project with the collaborator as country researcher; and the first experience of conducting fieldwork for all three of the interviewers. Hence, it was very much a learning experience for all involved and this proved to be beneficial especially with each team member possessing/pursuing different qualifications. It was also useful that team members were either from public or private institutions as this enabled easier/direct access to a range of respondents from both types of higher learning institutions (in fact, there seemed to be vast

contrast in the way interviewees responded to the questions, based on where they were studying – i.e. focus group discussions held with students from a public university would seem more repressed as a higher degree of self-censorship was evident). It is also useful to note that the ‘participatory’ method of interviewing was very useful especially for two students who have now started their own youth groups as a result of their involvement in this project. Mushamir is now a youth ambassador for Malaysia in various international events and is a writer for the One Young World report (the brainchild of an interviewee – Michael Teoh). Danielle is a coordinator of a human rights project in her university with the theme ‘Conform no more’.

This project has opened up possibilities for both the researcher and members in her team. The School of Modern Languages and Cultures (SMLC) at UNMC has gained much recognition from this research and youth leaders are increasingly looking to collaborate with the researcher and the School. SMLC is now in a better position to organize, influence, and mobilize young adults by becoming a support partner to various youth organizations. Knowledge and experience gained from this project was also vital in the successful attainment of a national grant to continue researching/understanding the issues that are important to young adults in Malaysia. It is important to highlight that four of five members in this research team comprise women. This was a deliberate step to provide opportunities for further involvement of women in research activities within their own areas. Informal and “on-the-job training” sessions carried out during this project has raised their confidence level to lead similar projects in the future, regardless of whether it is related to ICT/ youth. Most significantly, the various links forged between them and other youth groups have given young adults in our team several platforms to pursue their goals of serving the community in terms of education, environmental justice, and entrepreneurship, among others. In terms of women and young adults who have participated in the project (as interviewers, respondents, transcribers, etc.) the very act of sharing ideas and discussing the topic of ICT and youth activism has increased an overall awareness of the “power” and agency of youth in Malaysia. Many have “discovered” their communities through our project (during FGDs) and have found the Internet to be a “safe space” for them to confront and challenge media restrictions imposed by the ruling state.

The project (through interviews and participation in youth events) enabled networking with youth leaders of groups and organizations listed below (leaders of all the youth groups/organizations below are respondents in this project). Many of the youth events attended by the research team had been organized by policy makers including Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak; Minister of Youth and Sports Ahmad Shabery Cheek; UMNO youth leader Khairy Jamaluddin; and member of parliament Nurul Izzah Anwar, among others, and direct exchanges have been made with these individuals to alert them to this research project and its outcome. The opportunity to forge ties with policy makers will enable proposals to be put forward more effectively and efficiently.

- Youth Entrepreneurs Malaysia
- KOMAS (Popular Communications Human Rights Centre)
- Students In Free Enterprise
- Malaysia Youth Climate Justice Network
- Social Spark Malaysia
- Children Behind Us project - South East Asia

- Jazzada Solutions & Penang Youths
- Angels & Mentors
- Young Corporate Malaysians
- RandomAlphabets.com
- KREAM
- AIESEC Malaysia
- Malaysiakini.com
- Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ)
- Youth 4 Change
- Youth Malaysia
- Popteevee.net
- Youth Asia (SEACHANGE report)
- Malaysian Youth Council
- National Council of Women's Organizations
- National Writers Federation (Gapena)
- EngageMedia.com

Philippines: Two scholars collaborated with the lead researcher in the Philippines, Ms. Jenna Mae Atun and Ms. Airah Cadiogan. Ms. Atun is a faculty member of the Ateneo de Manila University in Manila and Ms. Cadiogan is a Master's degree candidate at the University of the Philippines Baguio program on Communication. Both provided substantive inputs and assistance in the logistics, planning, and running of all focus group discussions and interviews. They were deeply involved in everything from recruitment to moderation to transcription. Ms. Atun also co-authored a paper from this project presented at the Asian Media and Information Communication Conference in Singapore in 2010. Research capabilities were built among the participants as well as the collaborators as awareness of the procedures and provision of inputs in the research allowed for learning. Ms. Atun and myself teach undergraduate courses and we have both been able to use findings in this research to enrich the courses we teach.

Singapore: The PI has worked closely with graduate students to design and implement the project. Two master students, Catherine Candano and Jodie Luu, have contributed to the interviews through acting as interviewers and transcribers. Another two master students, Chengting Mao, and Yoke Hian Chan, have helped with recruiting and moderating FGDs. A recent university graduate from NUS, Wanyu Lee, was hired as a management assistant to prepare and help on the midterm workshop. During the midterm workshop, a master student Christopher Ong functioned as the video photographer and helped to record the entire workshop. In addition, four undergraduate students were trained to transcribe the FGDs. A total of 11 people were thus trained during the procedure. The ability of the PI to manage an international collaboration as well as a local research team has been enhanced tremendously. The PI has learned many invaluable lessons during the process. All the students have been able to improve their research skills by running the studies. Some of them were also involved in academic writing such as the country background report and thus, improved their knowledge and paper-writing skills. Another valuable achievement is that all the team members have learned a lot regarding how to work in a team environment to reach collective goals.

The institutional capacity of Department of Communications and New Media (CNM) has been strengthened, too. As a young department at NUS, CNM did not have much experience with externally funded projects which involve international collaborators. This project has introduced many first-time practices to the management team at CNM. The CNM leadership, including its Dean Prof. Millie Rivera and Deputy Dean Prof. Sun Sun Lim, has been very supportive to the project. Despite the fact that many things were the first time to be done, the leadership has made great efforts to ensure problems solved and project ran smoothly. The management team at CNM now was much better equipped to negotiate with various levels of management at NUS and much more experienced with diverse situations. The capacity of NUS offices such as those of Industrial Liaison Office and Finance Office was also improved in terms of dealing with international collaborations.

Finally, the capacity of the young participants to articulate their opinions, to communicate with other youth, and to know about the promises and risks facing them was also greatly enhanced. Many of our interviewees are young activists themselves. The questions we asked, such as defining political, civic, and communal, provoked them to reflect on what they are doing and how they can do better. Researchers also served as connecting points to communicate what we learned from one participant to another participant, especially with regards to different viewpoints. Considering that many young activists are affiliated with youth organizations, our impact on the individuals is supposed to transfer to their organizational activities in the future. Participants in FGDs were offered the rare opportunity to discuss politics with other peers in a permissive environment. Some components of our design, such as mixing both genders, are indeed very rare opportunities that are hardly found in everyday life. Our female participants are empowered through expressing their views along male participants and being treated equally during the discussions.

Policy and practices

Please see the conclusions sections in the country research reports.

vii) Project Outcomes

This project contributes to scientific knowledge by providing a rare dataset that examines an important topic through a shared research method. This topic, ICTs and youth engagement in Asia, has yet to be well studied despite its extreme importance in the development future of these countries. Our project is the first to study this topic with a scope that allows not only country analysis but also comparative analysis at the regional level. In addition, the questions we asked are generic enough to provide a comparable baseline with the developed countries. Our project is supposed to complete the picture about how young people around the world use ICTs in civic engagement. Furthermore, our project is expected to derive insightful conclusions regarding how existing political systems both enable and constrain the usage of ICTs among youth. These conclusions will help to answer a more fundamental question about the role of ICTs in contemporary societies.

All of the researchers who are involved in this project benefited from the collaboration in various ways. Researchers who have been focusing on local issues

had the chance to know the research topics that are shared by the international community and connect their research to global issues. The vision of these researchers was certainly broadened. Researchers who have not been experienced with doing research in developing countries were equipped with local knowledge and practical wisdoms through running this project. They were also exposed to real-life issues that matter in the context of developing countries and educated about doing research for real impacts. The grant experience also helps the researchers to be competent in applying for future projects. For example, following this project, a separate research proposal led by the Malaysian collaborator has been made to the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia under the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) to fund a research on *Social Media and the Agency of Youth in Malaysia*. The project has been granted RM50,000 to be conducted over three years (from September 2011). In addition, all researchers were able to form a network of research and administrative collaboration through this project. This network serves as a promising base for future projects and collaborations.

The institutions involved in this project also strengthened their capacity for supporting international research collaboration. Some of them (e.g., University of Nottingham, Malaysia campus) were the first time to do such collaboration and the procedure they experienced helps to establish a routine for their future dealing of such matters. Some of them (e.g., FOCUS) were young organizations that need to both gain experience and receive resources. Through running this project, the institutions were able to grow both research-wise and management-wise. The other institutions (e.g., University of Philippines) are relatively more established but through this project, they further developed their leading roles in their countries. The project outputs, including academic publications, conferences, and talks, have contributed to building the reputation of all the institutions involved.

Our research subjects, young people, not only functioned as important informants but also became one of the beneficiaries of this project. They were invited to voice their opinions regarding many public issues. The expression itself, in many countries such as Singapore, is already an empowerment by giving them a voice. In addition, FGD participants were involved in discussions with the fellow youth on issues that might not be discussed in everyday life. Our research also provided young people the opportunity to understand alternative opinions and to engage in debating such opinions. We plan to send our final reports back to our research subjects for their learning. We expect to see young people taking advantage of what we have found to better understand their situations and do their work.

During the project, various researchers have been actively involved in youth-relevant activities including meeting policy makers and talking to young leaders. We plan to send our final reports, including policy implications and recommendations, to relevant youth organizations, governmental agents and policy makers. We also plan to make our research outputs available online to the public when the necessary steps of academic publications are finished.

The comparative approach taken in the design of this project has shown to be fruitful. In terms of conducting research, the focus on comparable data has motivated researchers to contribute to research design collaboratively rather than being top-down assigned by the PI. Researchers also tried their very best to fulfill the methodology requirements, which give our data the reliability. Meanwhile, each country was also encouraged to take their contexts into account and include context-appropriate questions, which give our data the validity. In terms of capacity building, this comparative approach turns out to be surprisingly helpful. When different country

researchers have different strengths and weaknesses, the group interaction allowed them to see these differences. Not only the PI has been trying to be helpful but also the group members were trying to help each other. For instance, our Filipino collaborator finished the tasks faster than the rest. She volunteered to send her work to other researchers for reference. In short, the comparative approach turns our collaboration into a group learning process.

In terms of policy influence, this comparative approach will help policy makers to think about their own situation. It occurred to the PI that policy makers are often very interested in what have been done in other countries and what have been successful or failed. Providing regional and international benchmarks often helps policy makers to decide whether certain actions are necessary for the particular country.

However, a multi-nation comparative project imposes many challenges as well. The biggest challenge is to identify competent and committed researchers in each of the six countries. The PI had literally no social connections in many of the countries and had to rely on networking events and colleagues' recommendations. Unfortunately, these means of getting collaborators do not always work. Our first Sri Lankan collaborator was recommended by a colleague of a colleague and despite his willingness to participate in this project, his work turned out to be less than satisfactory. He seemed to be distracted by another project and became slow in delivering outputs after the project ran for half a year. He then refused to communicate with the PI by not answering emails and hanging up phone calls. After several attempts to talk to both him and the colleague who recommended him, it appeared that the PI cannot do much to bring him back to track. The agreement had to be terminated and a second Sri Lankan collaborator the PI met during her trip to Sri Lanka was recruited. Again, despite this person's willingness to contribute, he was not able to catch up with the work that has already been seriously delayed by the previous collaborator. When the first collaborator failed, the PI thought it could be the reason that this collaborator was not in a research institution and had limited research capacity. The PI changed her orientation to sign an agreement with a second collaborator who came from a university. However, this collaborator was not very much committed although he had better skills.

Another challenge with a multi-nation project is communication. Although ICTs have helped a lot to facilitate communication globally, we are still very limited in terms of efficient communication such as building the bonds between team members. Such bonds are important in sustaining the collaboration in front of various personal, institutional, and academic barriers. However, we only had financial as well as manpower resources to hold one in-person midterm workshop. What is even worse is that it is extremely hard to bring researchers from multiple countries under one roof because all of them are busy with other commitments. But it occurred that attending conferences as a panel helped enormously to build the group cohesion as all members needed to present their research in one session and collectively addressed critiques from the audiences.

The success of the project thus depends on how well the two challenges are dealt with. In the future, it will be better to have the team members interacting with each other even before the project officially starts. There needs to be other team building activities scheduled regularly during the project, be it academic conference or team meeting. However, the burden put on researchers have to be carefully managed as many of our researchers are too busy to attend many events.

viii) Overall Assessment and Recommendations:

Our partnership with ideacorp has been very pleasant and highly productive. Ideacorp and our project leader, Dr. Emmanuel Lallana, were extremely helpful on many matters. The institutional arrangements have been accommodated very much at the side of ideacorp when NUS made quite a few requests regarding the agreement. In addition to be flexible, ideacorp has always been very responsive to any of our questions and requests, thanks to the competent and friendly managers working at ideacorp. Dr. Lallana also offered his experience and advices regarding project management to the PI in many occasions. The workshops and meetings ideacorp organized were also instructive for us to develop further steps in our research. Last but not least, Dr. Lallana is an excellent academic too. His contribution to our AMIC panel was insightful and his plans for academic publications grant us the opportunity to further disseminate our research findings.

The indirect partnership with IDRC was valuable for this project. IDRC and its various officers have been accessible and helpful. For instance, IDRC Singapore office sent us an officer during our midterm workshop to help the collaborators to understand the missions and structures of projects funded by IDRC. During the Cebu meeting, we received many great feedbacks from IDRC officers and incorporated their suggestions in our research. Informal talks with IDRC officers during conferences such as ICTD 2010 also helped the PI to see the picture better. The most significant contribution IDRC made to projects and researchers like us is the continuous support to research on developing countries ,which is rare among funding organizations.

This project contributes to our understanding of political development through examining how the younger generation gets involved in political and civic activities with the aid of ICTs. Political development focuses on the development of political systems and actors, which is not very well studied in development literatures. However, the political arrangement has great impacts on many development goals such as poverty reduction, education, health, etc. How do young people consider the existing political development and how ICTs may help them to change the existing conditions may determine the future of the entire country, including its future of development.

Considering the scope (six countries) and the depth (interviews and focus groups) of our research, the investment of funding definitely receives more than sufficient returns. Many projects focused on one topic in one country but received the same or higher amount of funding compared to ours. This could be done mainly because of the dedications of researchers. All of our researchers have a full time job but they still manage to invest a large amount of time and energy on this project. For example, some researchers have to teach three courses (i.e., 9 hours) every week. Some other researchers did not take any salary but instead, invested all the money in conducting the research. However, all researchers believe that the topic is crucial and our investment is worth the knowledge we extract from the data and the potential impact we may make. This belief has supported our dedications and will support our future work.

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Appendix 1. Interview guidelines.

Interviewee profile

Total sample size: 20-30

Age: between 15 and 30 (the limit could be relaxed if the interviewee is a very important informant.)

Gender: Half male half female

Location: Metro city area is fine enough. You don't have to go to rural areas.

Occupation: A preference is put on the diversity of occupation. Students, NGOers, activists, bloggers, online opinion leaders, and so on. No requirements about issue domains. They can be activists on any issues.

Activists and Internet experts: We are actually looking for interviewees who can be generally grouped into activists vs. Internet experts. There is overlapping between the two groups for sure. For example, a person who blogs about environmental issues is an environmental activist as well. The classification implies more about how we locate them than labeling them. We can start with NGOs and identify activists from there. We can also start with famous blogs and contact the bloggers.

Ethnicity: For countries where ethnicity is a core issue in politics, please include a few (3-5) ethnic minorities. If race is not a big concern in your country, no need to consider ethnic diversity.

Group 1. Key questions (MUST be asked)

1.1 The civic, the political, and the communal

What does your everyday life look like? Describe one typical weekday and one typical weekend day. Which kind of activities are you engaged in those typical weekdays and weekends?

Among the activities you mentioned, which ones are considered as civic activities? Which ones are community activities? Which ones are political activities? Which of these activities are relevant to ICTs and how?

If the interviewees tell us that they don't know how to tell the differences between political, civic, and community, ensure that we are only interested in their own definitions.

If no civic/community/political activities are raised after posing this set of questions, we instead ask why they don't do anything that they think are civic/community/political. **In addition**, we ask which kind of activities they think are civic/community/political although they themselves do not do those. *From here, we directly jump into later questions such as attitudes towards the political institutions, ICT behaviors, etc.*

How important do you think these civic/community/political activities (mentioned by the interviewees) are in your life? Are these activities essential to your life style? And if yes, how? And if not, why? *Please remember to follow up on ICTs if the interview mentioned them. Here is also where we get the stories.*

When did you begin being involved in these activities and what were your original motivations? What were the circumstances around your first engagement in political/civic activism?

What do you enjoy the most by participating in these activities? Do you enjoy the activities for social reasons? Any other reasons?

What are the difficulties, in work and in life, when you are being involved in these activities? How important is your being an activist to your self-identity?

1.2 Political institutions -- Tell us about your experience of and opinions about the following institutions (*note: does not have to exhaust the whole list. ask only about those that are relevant to the interviewee. No need to specify issue domains.*):

Federal Government (including president/prime minister/cabinet)

Your city government (including mayor/other top officials)

General election

Your city election

Parliament or congress

Elected delegates

Political parties

Courts

Civil service agencies

The military

The police

Local NGOs

International NGOs

Mass media

Schools

Among all the institutions you mentioned, which one(s) are most open to youth engagement? Which ones are most difficult?

How do ICTs play a role in the relationship between you and these institutions? Do you think ICTs are able to change your perception of your own ability to make a difference on the political institutions? Do you think ICTs empower you as a citizen (e.g., increase your interest in politics, or boost your sense of responsibility with regards to civic issues)? What are the limitations of ICTs in enhancing your perceived agency of being a citizen?

For interviewees who have interacted with these institutions: Are these activities specifically targeted at certain offices in institutions? Whom in the political institutions are you trying to influence? Do you think that your engagement in these activities will make a difference in the long run? How much faith do you have in the effectiveness of your participation in these activities on changing the institutions?

1.3 ICT related questions (*note: record the ICT sources interviewees mention so we can compile a list later*)

Which kind of ICTs do you own (e.g., cellphones, computers, laptops, internet phones, etc)? Which kind of ICTs have you used? How do you get access to the ICTs if you don't own them?

What do you use the internet for? Name your online activities. What do you use mobile phones for? Name your mobile activities. *Which of the online and mobile activities are considered as civic/community/political? (Could be skipped if the interviewee has already mentioned this in previous answers.)*

How do you use ICTs to (1) get information about political/civic/community activities, (2) participate in these activities, and (3) disseminate information and recruit participants? Name the sources and comment on their features. What do you like about them? Do you face any problems with ICTs in your activism?

Could you leave your contact information with us? Emails, facebook accounts, personal blogs, etc.

Group 2. Optional questions

2.1 Generational difference (*note: additional questions if we have time*)

What do you think that makes a good citizen? Compared to your parents, do you think you are as good a citizen as them or a better one or a worse one? How do you perceive the differences between you and people older than you, and you and people younger than you in terms of civic, political, and communal activities?

Compared with your parents, do you think you are more or less politically active? Why? What do you think of the political activities that your parents once were involved?

Appendix 2. Background questionnaire.

BACKGROUND VARIABLES

SE1a COUNTRY CODE

Bangladesh	01
India	02
Malaysia	03
Philippines	04
Singapore	05
Sri Lanka	06

SE1b CONTACT INFORMATION (voluntary)

Email: _____
 Phone number: _____
 Address: _____

SE2 GENDER

Male	1
Female	2

SE3 BIRTH YEAR & ACTUAL AGE

Use Year of Birth. Then convert to actual age.

[Lower limit: 15. Upper limit: 35]

SE4 MARITAL STATUS

What is your marital status?

Single/Never married	1
Married	2
Living-in as married	3
Widowed	4
Separated/Married but separated/ not living with legal spouse	5
Divorced	6
Decline to answer	9

SE5 EDUCATION

What is your highest level of education?

No formal education	01
complete primary/elementary	02
Complete primary/elementary	03
Incomplete secondary/high school: technical/vocational type	04
Complete secondary/high school: technical/vocational type	05
Incomplete secondary/high school	06
Complete secondary/high school	07
Incomplete polytechnic	08
Complete polytechnic	09
Some university education	10
University education completed	11
Post-graduate degree	12

SE5a How many years of formal education you have received?

(EXCLUDE Kindergarten)
 (2-digit code)

SE6 RELIGION

What is your religion? _____

For example, Roman Catholic; Protestant; Jews; Islam; Hindu; Buddhist; Sikhism; Aglipayan; Iglesia Ni Cristo; Born Again; Others

SE7 RACE (optional)

What is your race? _____

SE8 POLITICAL NEWS ATTENTION

SE8a How much attention did you pay to news about politics and government in the last week?

None	1
Very little	2
Some	3
Quite a bit	4
A great deal	5
Decline to answer	99

SE8b Please tell us how many days in the past week you did each of the following?

[Ask this question regardless how one answers SE7.]

Watch news about politics and government on national /local TV _____

Read news about politics and government on newspapers _____

Listen to news about politics and government on radio _____

Read/Watch/Listen to news about politics and government on the Internet _____

Decline to answer 99

SE9 INTERNET USE

SE9a How many years have you been using the Internet?

(2-digit code)

SE9b How often do you use the Internet?

several times a day	7
about once a day	6
3-5 days a week	5
1-2 days a week	4
every few weeks	3
every few months	2
less often than all the above	1

Do not understand the question/Not applicable 99

SE10 ANNUAL OR MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME

SE10a Here is a scale of household monthly incomes. We would like to know in what group your household on average is, counting all wages, salaries, pensions, dividends and other incomes that come in before taxes and other deduction. Just give the letter of the group your household falls into.

Less than S\$2,000	1	S\$6,001 to S\$8,000	4
S\$2,001 to S\$4,000	2	S\$8,001 and above	5
S\$4,001 to S\$6,000	3	Decline to answer	99

SE10b Does the total income of your household allow you to satisfactorily cover your needs?

Please tell me, which of the following statement is closest to your situation?

"Our income covers the needs well, we can save."	1
"Our income covers the needs all right, without much difficulty."	2
"Our income does not cover the needs, there are difficulties."	3
"Our income does not cover the needs, there are great difficulties."	4
Do not understand the question/Not applicable	99
Decline to answer	99

SE11 POLITICAL INTEREST

How interested would you say you are in politics?

Not at all interested	1
Not very interested	2
Somewhat interested	3
Very interested	4
Decline to answer	99

SE12 POLITICAL EFFICACY

How much would you say you agree with the following statements?

1=Disagree strongly, 2=Disagree somewhat, 3=Neither, 4=Agree somewhat, 5=Agree strongly, 99=Decline to answer

People like me don't have any say about what the government does. _____

Sometimes politics and government are so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on. _____

I don't think public officials care much about what people like me think _____

You can generally trust the people who run our government to do what is right _____

SE13 POLITICAL DISCUSSION

How many days in the past week you discussed politics and government issues with _____? Days

Family members	_____
Friends	_____
People at work	_____
Acquaintances	_____
Someone you met offline	_____
Someone you met online	_____

Do not understand the question/Not applicable 99

Interviewer name _____

Interviewee name _____

Interview date _____

Appendix 3. Discussion guides (India).

FGD procedure

- Average youth (high school students are NOT included)
- 6-10 groups (2 males only, 2 females only, 2 mixed)
- Group size 6-10 people

FGD guide

Main points to address:

- (1) Are Indian youth participation levels in political affairs low? Why?
- (2) List of political, civic, and community activities they are involved in.
- (3) Use of ICTs used by youth in personal and activism domains?

Start of discussion:

- Before we begin, can we have a brief introduction about yourselves. This will help us to understand each other and discuss freely.
- Please tell the group your name, where you are studying, what year you are in, and if you're in college what your major/course is.
- Which NGO you are working? What are the activities done by you?
- If you associated with any kind of social service activities, please do mention them.
- Thank you all for coming, let's begin this conversation by talking a little about your activities in community, socio-civic, and political affairs.

Participation in political affairs

- In your daily life, please describe to us what types of activities you do that you would consider political.
- Are these activities in organized groups? What types of groups?
- Is it on a volunteer basis or do you get compensated?
- What are your main reasons for engaging in these activities?
- How do you define 'political'?
- For the political activities you mentioned, what are the goals of these activities?
- Are you trying to influence political institutions? How?
- Are you engaged in political activities in your school / college? What kinds of activities and how did you become engaged in school / college politics?
- Aside from the political, do you engage in activities that you would consider socio-civic or community-related? What kinds of activities are these?
- Can you differentiate socio-civic & community related activities?
- Which set of activities dominate in your work? Why?

ICT related questions

- Which kind of ICTs do you own (e.g., cellphones, computers, laptops, internet phones, etc)?
- Do you use any of ICTs, but not own?
- How do you get access to the ICTs if you don't own them?
- For what purposes, non-connected ICTs (example - computer/laptop without internet connection) are used?
- What do you use mobile phones for? Name your mobile activities. Which of them are considered as civic/community/political?
- Name your online activities.
- Which of them are considered as civic/community/political?
- What are your favorite websites and blogs? Why do you use them?
(Please probe, if the answer is google.com. We want more information on what kind of websites are being used by the respondents)
- Do you visit particular websites or discussion groups for your activism related work?
- Briefly describe about them.
- What do you like about them and what do you dislike about them?
- Where do you get information required by your politics/civic affairs/community activities?
- How much of ICTs is used in getting or passing the information?
- How much use of ICTs is important in performing political engagement activities?

Perception of political apathy among youth

- Compared to your friends and classmates, do you think that you are more or less politically engaged? Or is your level of engagement the same?
- Do you follow the news regularly? If you do, why? If not, why?
- How interested are you in politics in India?
- Do you think that the youth are generally apathetic to or generally involved in politics?
- Why do you think so?
- Nowadays there are lot of young politicians like Rahul Gandhi, Sachin Pilot, and others are there in the government? What's your opinion about them?
- Is it important for the young to be involved politically and civically?
- Did you vote in last elections?
- If No, why?
- If yes, what factors determined your voting choices?
- According to you, what makes a good citizen?
- Compared to your parents, do you think you are as good a citizen as them or a better one or a worse one?
- Compared with your parents, do you think you are more or less politically active? Why? What do you think of the political activities that your parents once were involved?

- How do you perceive the differences between you and people older than you, and you and people younger than you in terms of civic, political, and communal activities?

Influence on political institutions

- Do you think that youth engagement in politics make a difference in the everyday conduct of government?
- In your opinion, do you think that Indian political institutions are responsive to the needs of the youth?
- Will your social engagement activities improve governance and politics in the long-term?
- As a citizen, what do you think your role is in Indian politics? Do you think that your opinion and actions matter in local or national-level politics? Why do you think this is?
- How do ICTs play a role in the relationship between you and these institutions?
- How do you get information about them with the help of ICTs?
- How do you get in touch with them through ICTs?
- What is your experience using ICTs in this regard?
- How do you try to influence these institutions through ICTs?

On students / professionals who are involved in activism:

- When you are involved in activist activities, whom in the political institutions are you trying to influence? Are these activities specifically targeted at certain offices in institutions? Why?
- Do you think that your engagement in these activities will make a difference in the long run? Why / How?
- How much faith do you have in the effectiveness of your participation in these activities on changing the institutions?
- How long is your participation expected to continue?

On NGO workers

- What is the role played by NGOs in India?
- What does the presence of NGOs in India infer? –
- In general why people work in NGOs?

Appendix 4. Screenshot of the Google group page.

The screenshot displays a Mozilla Firefox browser window with the following tabs: Gmail - Academic format r..., Google Calendar, Google Docs - Home, Interview guide V3 - Goo..., Youth Engagement Tea..., NUS WebMail, High Fresh - Fresh Seafood, and a plus sign for more tabs. The address bar shows the URL: <https://groups.google.com/group/youth-engagement-team-idrc?hl=en>. The page title is "Youth Engagement Team (PANeGov) | Google Groups - Mozilla Firefox".

The main content area is titled "Youth Engagement Team (PANeGov)" and includes a search bar and a "Search Groups" button. Below this, there are navigation tabs for "Home" and "Discussions". The "Discussions" tab is active, showing 8 of 80 messages. A "+ new post" button is visible. The list of discussions includes:

- [Reminder: Our project is going to end in September!](#) By Weiyu Zhang (lvy) - Sep 22 - 1 author - 0 replies
- [Our project is going to end in September!](#) By Weiyu Zhang (lvy) - Sep 11 - 1 author - 1 reply
- [Fwd: Reminder for 4th Interim Technical and Financial Reports for Pan eGov - A Follow-up Reminder](#) By Weiyu Zhang (lvy) - May 18 - 1 author - 0 replies
- [Happy year of 2011!](#) By Weiyu Zhang (lvy) - May 17 - 2 authors - 2 replies
- [4th Interim Technical and Financial Reports due on May 20](#) By Weiyu Zhang (lvy) - May 5 - 1 author - 0 replies
- [update: youth engagement project](#) By Weiyu Zhang (lvy) - Mar 22 - 1 author - 0 replies
- [3rd technical report is due in one week \(and other issues\)](#) By Ahmed Swapan Mahmud - Nov 11 2010 - 3 authors - 5 replies
- [Singapore background information uploaded](#) By Weiyu Zhang (lvy) - Sep 25 2010 - 1 author - 0 replies

The "Members" section shows 16 members with a "+ invite" button. Visible members include:

- Joanne...@nottingham.edu.my (Member)
- Boying (Member)
- Chan Yoke Hian Isaac (Member)
- Chengting Mao (Member)
- Cherry Pie Felisse Maraya (Member)

There is a "Tune your group's settings" button. At the bottom, there is a "Report this group" button and a link to "Send email to this group: youth-engagement-team-idrc@googlegroups.com".

The right sidebar contains a "Home" section with a search bar, "Discussions" and "Members" links, and a "Group info" section showing 16 members and a language of "Not categorized".

The footer includes links for "Create a group", "Google Groups", "Google Home", "Terms of Service", and "Privacy Policy", along with a copyright notice for ©2011 Google.

The Windows taskbar shows the Start button on the left. Open applications include "Youth Engagement T...", "reports", "myNUS Staff Portal - ...", "Final Technical Repor...", and "final_tech_report.pdf...". The system tray on the right shows the language set to "EN", a battery level of "99%", and the time "1:17 PM".