

Strengthening Information Society Research Capacity Alliance (SIRCA) III

2015-2017

CALL FOR PROPOSALS - OPEN DEVELOPMENT

About SIRCA III

SIRCA III is a theory and capacity building research programme that began in April 2015 and will run for a period of two years. SIRCA III will fund research projects led by teams of two senior researchers and/or practitioners investigating open development topics in developing countries in Asia, Africa, or Latin America.

For the purposes of this call, we define Open Development as the strategic application of digitally-enabled openness to help solve a development problem. However, there are diverse meanings of, and interests behind open development. Improving our understanding of open development through research is an increasingly critical activity. The relevance of “open” and “openness” is an emerging area of thought and practice within international development (Bentley, 2014; Braybrooke, Nissila, & Vuorikivi, 2013; Cyranek, 2014; Girard & Perini, 2013; Smith, Elder, & Emdon, 2011; Smith & Reilly, 2013; Smith 2014). Predicated on the increasing spread of information and communication technology (ICT) solutions, new digitally-enabled forms of openness are increasingly being promoted and implemented in developing country contexts. However, evidence is still scant as to whether or not, how, and under what circumstances openness actually contributes to solving development problems. Rigorous research is essential to inform and assess current and future open activities that have positive impact on development and well-being. We elaborate upon this theme in the appendix with our current thinking.

The objectives of the SIRCA III programme are to:

1. Develop and refine cross-cutting Open Development theory;
2. Interrogate, validate, and test emergent theoretical frameworks of Open Development with empirical evidence gathered in developing countries;
3. Communicate theory and research to influencing policy, practice, and public opinion;
4. Build intellectual leadership and critical research skills amongst researchers in developing countries through mentorship by senior research teams.

There will be two phases of SIRCA III, a theoretical phase and an empirical phase. The following two sections explain the deliverables and rationale for each phase.

Phase I: Theoretical Deliverables

During **Phase I**, four senior research teams will **develop cross-cutting theoretical frameworks and a research agenda** in thematic areas of open development. Teams will collaborate with the SIRCA secretariat and SiRC Principal Investigator (PI) through workshops and online shared resources. The purpose of working across all research teams in this manner is to develop high-quality and interdisciplinary research outputs as a means to synthesise frameworks across themes. Through a shared commitment to openness, senior research teams will work together to provide intellectual leadership for the academic community, to engage with public opinion and to influence policy-makers.

Phase I requirements and deliverables are:

1. Management of a literature review towards identifying research goals and questions;
2. Publish the literature review via public and/or open resources (website, DropBox, etc.);
3. Attendance at a workshop in September 2015;
4. Regular and ongoing collaboration with the SIRCA III Secretariat, fellow teams and wider publics; and
5. Delivery of a quality theoretical paper for an edited book or a special issue of a journal.

Phase II: Empirical Deliverables

Phase II envisages testing and/or verifying theory developed in Phase I. SIRCA III will launch a second call for research proposals to select, with guidance from the senior research team, up to two scholars from a developing country. These scholars will conduct research (including data gathering through fieldwork) **to empirically test the cross-cutting theoretical frameworks** in their country. The scholars and the fieldwork will be funded directly by

SiRC. However, the senior research teams will be responsible for mentoring and guiding the scholars throughout the research project and will be expected to co-author a final paper as an end result.

Phase II requirements and deliverables are:

1. A plan to mentor and share resources with the selected scholar(s);
2. All data gathered to be made publicly available in an open format (provided there are no ethical conflicts);
3. Attendance at a workshop sometime between July and September 2016;
4. Regular and ongoing collaboration with the SIRCA III Secretariat, fellow teams and wider publics; and
5. Submission of empirical paper to a possible edited book or a special issue of a journal.

Additional Overall Requirements

Throughout both phases of SIRCA III senior research teams will be involved in disseminating our research through public fora. All research outputs must be made available with a CC-BY open licence. This will include both offline traditional media outlets as well as online and social media. Teams are also responsible for collaborating with the SIRCA III Secretariat and other teams as they generate findings in a regular and ongoing basis. SIRCA III will provide community and knowledge building support, and will also help with dissemination and coordinating the production of policy briefs, but it will be the responsibility of the senior research teams to participate and provide content for these plans.

Funding Information

SIRCA III is supported by the Information and Networks Programme of the International Development Research Centre of Canada¹. SIRCA III will provide funding in both direct and indirect support for each senior research team. Each team will receive funding totalling between SGD\$20-24,000 in four tranches, each disbursement upon completion of the deliverables. The PIs of the research teams must be affiliated with an institution, such as a university or organization. Individuals are not eligible to apply. There are no eligibility restrictions concerning the background and location of the co-PIs. Projects that utilize the budget in a more impactful manner to achieve programmatic goals will be given preference. The following outlines the four tranches and tentative dates for deadlines:

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| 1) Project selection; | <i>July 2015</i> |
| 2) Theoretical paper at the end of Phase I; | <i>December 2015</i> |
| 3) Completion of Phase II research project data gathering; | <i>September 2016</i> |
| 4) Submission of final empirical research paper that presents evidence of how the theory was tested and refined. | <i>February 2017</i> |

Each project team will also be subject to the deadlines set out by the SIRCA III Secretariat.

This research project amount allows discretionary funding for the hiring of research assistants and costs associated with managing the project. The second call for proposals will have separate funding to carry out the Phase II fieldwork and data gathering directly from the Secretariat. There will be additional support for research teams to attend two programme workshops and one trip to meet the selected scholar(s) conducting fieldwork.

Research Proposal Requirements

Please refer to Appendix 1 for a brief overview of our current thinking on open development. We are interested in working with research teams that may take an alternate position or interest in open development and who wish to push or develop an open development theme beyond our current thinking.

SIRCA III aims to support the senior research teams at every step of the programme, including during the proposal stage. We ask that interested applicants submit an expression of interest by May 27, 2015. We will subsequently be in touch to ensure that you have the resources and information needed to complete your proposal. To submit an expression of interest, fill out the following online form: <http://www.sirca.org.sg/sirca-iii-expression-of-interest/>

Interested research teams should download and fill-in the SIRCA III proposal form from <http://www.sirca.org.sg/sircainv-call-for-proposals/>. The form will ask you to outline the following:

A. Research project proposal

¹ To learn more about how SIRCA III strategic fit, read the [I&N Prospectus](#).

- An explanation of how the project addresses a cross-cutting open development theme and/or theoretical framework for investigation.
- A preliminary literature review.
- Clearly articulated research question(s).
- Dissemination plan for project results in online and offline media, as well as through academic, public and policy fora.
- A plan for engagement with the selected scholar(s) that will participate in Phase II.

B. Detailed project budget

- Applicants are expected to provide a detailed research budget, indicating clearly their expected costs for the following line items:
 - Personnel²
 - Equipment
 - Local Travel
 - Research
 - Supporting Empirical Phase II
 - Other Operating Expenses
 - Declaration of existing funding related to your proposal
- International travel is **not** expected within the submitted project budget. All travel for international workshops/fieldwork will be reimbursed by the SIRCA Secretariat separately.
 - Please use the budget template available at <http://www.sirca.org.sg/sircalii-call-for-proposals/>. Instructions for each line item and how to account for them are provided in the template.

C. Research timeline

- Projects will run for 18 months from July 2015 until April 2017.
 - Please use the timeline template available at <http://www.sirca.org.sg/sircalii-call-for-proposals/> and take note of the key dates within this call for proposals to plan your milestones.

D. Qualifications of the Principal Investigators

- Applicants should include a brief overview of the research team's qualifications including past research project grant(s) and their current status, and relevant academic publications. Ideally, each proposal should involve two researchers with multidisciplinary backgrounds.

Review Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed according to the following criteria:

1. Clarity including the literature review, and identification and statement of the research problem.
2. Relevant, cross-cutting open development theme.
3. Significance of the theoretical contribution.
4. Appropriateness of budget and timeline, with demonstrated impact for budgetary requests,
5. Capacity to support and mentor an emerging scholar through the second phase of the research project.
6. Qualifications of the Principal Investigators.
7. According to open development theme to ensure thematic variation amongst selected projects.

Award and Non-Award Decisions

Acknowledgement of receipt of the proposals will only be made to the PI.

Notification of awards will be sent to PI by July 2015. Written acceptance of the terms and conditions of the award co-signed by the PI, Co-PI and the respective employing organization, must reach regional secretariat within 14 working days from the date of the offer letter.

Applicants for proposals that are not selected for short-listing will receive a notification of decline with a summary of the selection process.

Key Dates (Approximate)

May 6, 2015: Release of SIRCA III Call for Proposals

² Personnel expenses may include the hiring of consultants of no more than 50% of the total project budget, there are no restrictions on hiring research assistants.

June 19, 2015: Deadline for proposal submission.

July, 2015: Projects selected and notified.

July 2015 - March 2016: Projects proceed as per stated timeline, with periodic updates on deliverables to the SIRCA secretariat.

September 2015: Attend theory workshop.

December 2015: Submission of theoretical paper at the end of Phase I.

January 2016: Phase II grants awarded.

January – September 2016: Selected Phase II scholar(s) conduct fieldwork/data gathering.

July – September 2016: Senior research team members and selected scholars to attend analysis and publication workshop.

February 2017: Submission of final paper detailing empirical results from Phase II.

The programme will be managed by the Singapore Internet Research Centre, based at the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and is supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada. SIRCA III is led by a steering committee that is composed of four senior members: the SiRC PI, two advisors and 1 senior member from the IDRC. The committee, with SiRC leading, provides high-level direction for the overall SIRCA programme, as well as advising on strategic direction and fund disbursement. The committee oversees major decisions, signs off on technical reports and financials, and approves selections of thematic groups and research directions.

Appendix 1 – Progress and critiques of open development

There has been a great deal of progress and uptake of Open Development by a variety of actors and individuals within the past five years. Civil society movements mobilising around Open Development have flourished; for example, the Open Knowledge Festival has brought together over 1000 participants from across the globe to share ideas and debate emerging issues over the past three years (Open Knowledge Foundation, 2014). Governments have established Open programmes and commitments to open up and engage citizens through open data and e-government strategies (Madon, 2009; Rahemtulla et al., 2011; McDermott, 2010); as well as to provide better services, like education (Hoosen, 2012). CSOs and networks are applying Open Development tools and concepts to address a range development problems (Ardema, 2012; Making All Voices Count, 2014; Endangered Languages, 2014), as well as to enhance a variety of initiatives and processes (Harvey, 2013; Ndunda, 2012; Young, 2014). Multilateral and bilateral donors are also developing their own Open Development agendas in order to open up their knowledge and experience whilst establishing a means for better governance and accountability of development aid resources (World Bank, 2011; DFID, 2013).

However, what is lacking in progress to date are cross-cutting theoretical frameworks and associated evidence to make clear connections between the promise of Open Development and development outcomes that transpire. A main critique of Open Development is the tendency to “overlook the ever-present dimension of [how] power manifest[s] in new forms of networked relationships. The outward appearance of access, participation, and collaboration can mask less desirable social and political outcomes undermining equity and social justice” (Singh and Gurumurthy, 2013, “The Theory of Openness”).

To illustrate, increasing access to information by making it freely and openly available fails to acknowledge the skills, infrastructure and freedom needed to take advantage of such resources (Gurstein, 2010). Crowdsourcing, although it can be more efficient and effective mode of production, has been shown to maintain existing power relations and favour traditionally dominating perspectives (Graham and Haarstad, 2011). Similarly in open access computer lab facilities, women have been excluded because of existing gender hierarchies and their roles and responsibilities in their home lives (Buskens, 2011). Impact studies of open data initiatives exhibit mixed results, acknowledging that there are still issues related to capacity building, rights and participation that require greater attention (Chattopadhyay, 2013; Beghin and Zigoni, 2014). These studies have pointed to a need for research into how Open Development can be inclusive of, and responsive to marginalized people. Gendered perspectives on Open Development are also severely lacking.

Additionally, institutions such as the World Bank are not showing signs that their commitment to Open Development has drastically changed the way it carries out its work. Easterly and Williamson (2012) analyzed progress of high-volume development aid donors towards ‘best practice’ standards established through high level forums on aid effectiveness. Their analysis contends that only a small number of exceptions indicate that donors are following identified best practice standards. Whilst opening up information for public scrutiny and use is valuable, there are still a great number of issues to treat that openness as transparency does not fix; such as, donor selectivity and

decision-making power of development aid recipients. In this sense, the transformative potential of openness on institutional structures is not well-understood.

Another critique is that Open Development is actually making development worse. Singh and Gurumurthy (2013) argue that information and knowledge distributed through mobiles is often commoditized and establishes entrenching dependencies. Benkler (2010) says that a smart-phone networked environment capable of modelling itself to the open Web would require voluntary large-scale business decisions to give up control of mobile-based infrastructures like apps, or for regulatory intervention to take place at the policy level. The roles and responsibilities of governments, regulatory and international organisations, and how and whether they can interact with private sector interests to create Open Development is not clear.

A further vein of this critique is that the advent of social media platforms and networked socialization are divorcing social movements from the forces that propel fundamental social change (Schlozman, Verba and Brady, 2012). Civil society movements have been successful when masses of people make ethical ideals a reality at all levels of society–business, law and family-life–combined (Edwards, 2009). Hashtag activism is an example of when social movements mobilise around a cause but fail to dismantle the structures that stand in the way of improved human rights and liberation (Filar, 2014). It is not clear what cultural and political conditions are necessary for openness to improve rights, liberation, civic participation and activism.

Lastly, there is also the critique that existing ideas and practices of development condition the ways in which actors approach Open Development, and that Open Development should therefore be understood as embedded within wider global and societal contexts and ideologies. Buskens (2013) implies that Open Development researchers need to critically engage with the intentionality of their efforts in order for this area to fully realise its potential. Although Open Development has presented a wealth of potential and some positive examples, what we should take from lessons in ICT4D is that Open Development is not merely about the possibilities but about what should be done, and that how Open Development is performed has a profoundly moral agenda (Tacchi, 2012; Unwin, 2009). There is also a need to better understand how Open Development could help researchers adapt to and respond to methodological, ethical and theoretical challenges in multi-disciplinary and critically engaged ways.

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