fast facts

Project: Sinar Project
Lead Organization: The Malaysian Society for Transparency and Integrity
Country: Malaysia
Budget: 29,000.00 AUD

situation

Government organizations and services in Malaysia lack transparency and accountability, which hinders effective citizen understanding and involvement in politics. Much of the data that could increase transparency and give citizens insight into the workings of the Malaysian government could be made available online in structured, open standard, and interoperable data formats so that citizens, journalists and IT professionals could access and visualize important governance information.

solution

The Sinar Project is an initiative that encourages transparency and open data technologies so Malaysian citizens can access important government information, engage directly with government officials and services, and enjoy greater citizen involvement in the public affairs of the nation. The project is inspired by the tenets of the Open Government Partnership (http://www.opengovpartnership.org), which is an international platform whose international members are "committed to making their governments more open, accountable, and responsive to citizens". While Malaysia is not a member of the OGP, the Sinar Project similarly aims to empower citizens to monitor and participate in the process of government policies and implementation. The effort has several active partners in Malaysia who also support the overarching goal of "open government." These partners include Transparency International Malaysia and the Malaysian Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights (MCCHR), as well as their networks of related civil society organizations. There was a significant learning curve in understanding the legal system in Malaysia, especially in regards to public information and the Official Secrets Act. Human crowdsourcing can only go so far when the legal environment prohibits some information to be shared; however, there is growing interest from local councils to use the Sinar tools as examples of good governance.

The Sinar Project is comprised of six components, all designed to demonstrate that citizen reporting and monitoring are possible through the use of open source technologies and open data, such as GIS platforms, web scrapers, social networking software and data mining tools. The six components include an Open Data API that allows software developers to conduct consolidated search information from online data sources, as well as five website projects:

- **Elected Representatives:** This website contains both crowd sourced and automated information about all elected representatives and their positions on issues of public interest. (http://reps.sinarproject.org)

- **Accountability Website and Service:** This site tracks cases of corruption and abuses of power, including human rights violations. It provides temporal structured and relational data to show the connections between issues, organizations, persons and sources. This site leverages geo-location and network mapping. (http://accountable.sinarproject.org)

- **Construction Industry Monitoring:** This is a data-scraping and crowdsourced database platform designed to record the procurement process and progress of construction project approved by the Construction Industry Development Board. It links to the Elected Representatives and Accountability websites. (http://www.sinarproject.org/projects/construction-industry-development-board-cidb-database)

- **Billwatcher:** This site allows users to view, discuss and track upcoming parliamentary bills. (http://billwatcher.sinarproject.org)

- **FixMyStreet**: The project aims to empower citizens to report problems such as potholes, uncollected garbage and faulty streetlights – and monitor local government response to the problem. This site has generated the interest of many city councils. The Kuala Lumpur City Council, Putrajaya Development and Subang Jaya Municipal Council are supporting partners for the pilot phase. (http://aduanku.my)

These projects have been featured on various parliamentary websites, mass media, and at events like TEDxKL (Kuala Lumpur). During the 2013 general elections, the Sinar project was cited on many government and governance websites, and was featured on Google Malaysia as an important resource for citizens.

broader impact

The biggest impact the project has at this point has been our ability to champion a strong technical community to support on-line open government tools. We are now sponsoring **SinarNGOs** – a program to provide long term technical support for organizations working for Open Parliamentary Data. We are happy to share our technical expertise and resources to other CSOs in Malaysia. The Sinar Project serves as an example of how a start-up developer community that can have a large impact on the governance of the country despite many democratic restrictions. As a result, we are often invited as speakers to talk about our projects. Some of our services are getting attention globally – the anti-corruption platform is being considered for use in the Philippines and Brazil. As we improve our tools, we hope that others reuse or adapt what has been done and shared freely in the spirit of good governance.

project contact

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Project update… to get from the PI on notable things that have happened, like a link to an article or information about a workshop, etc…