

COCONE

DIGITAL RIGHTS CAMP

October 2019 | Antipolo, Philippines

OUTCOMES REPORT

Table of Contents

Coconet II: Growing the digital rights movement	1
By the Numbers	4
Timeline	5
How It Worked	6
Outcomes and Achievements	11
Looking Forward	15

Coconet II: Growing the digital rights movement



For civil society in the Asia-Pacific, the internet has increasingly become a crucial space for human rights, democracy, and dissent. But this space is now under pressure – in many places, shrinking – due to government intervention and corporate misconduct. Civil society faces growing online threats, including surveillance, harassment, and disinformation. Some threats, such as those powered by artificial intelligence (AI) and its subset, machine learning, are still emerging.

In the Philippines, online trolls are coordinating attacks on government dissenters. In Thailand, the lese-majeste law, which forbids insulting the monarchy, is still upheld, and a pro-military government remains in power. In Hong Kong, Indonesia, and West Papua, governments are cracking down on mass citizen protests for human rights.

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened concerns regarding government surveillance and the price of digital privacy. It has also unleashed a disturbing rise in disinformation.

“

We need to continue to build a movement around digital rights in Southeast Asia. Digital rights have become a really important issue for all activists in relation to our continuing struggle for human rights. ”

Chat Garcia Ramilo,

Executive Director, Association for Progressive Communications

Coconet is an Asia-Pacific regional initiative supporting changemakers to build the digital rights movement. Coconet I, the first such digital rights camp, was held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The camp gathered 105 participants from 21 countries in the Asia-Pacific to learn, share, and co-create solutions to their collective challenges in an open space format.

In October 2019, Coconet II built on the momentum and strong culture developed at Coconet I, expanding the space for new changemakers: activists, journalists, artists, technologists, filmmakers, lawyers, and researchers, who represent a wide variety of social and environmental movements. Over 120 changemakers from 22 countries converged in Antipolo, Philippines, to discuss and share their knowledge on digital rights, exchange tactics and skills, and plan joint campaigns and collaborations to strengthen their respective movements as well as support broader ones.

Coconet II aimed to strengthen and mainstream the digital rights movement in the Asia-Pacific by:

- Linking together individuals and groups working in digital rights, human rights, media, and technology for regional advocacy and networking
- Fostering tangible collaborations between these groups at the national, regional, and international levels
- Building skills in communications, campaigning, and digital security
- Promoting the use and development of open technology in civil society

The participatory format of the event gave changemakers ownership over the process, content, and outcomes of the event. Over 60 sessions were hosted at Coconet II, almost all of them run by participants and conceived of collectively on the first day of the camp.



The camp launched various campaigns, including [a joint statement to #StopTheAttacks on activists](#) and the swift support that led to the [release of Vietnamese activist and Coconet II participant Đinh Thảo](#), who was detained at the airport upon her return to Vietnam.

The camp also launched more than 20 collaborations on various topics, including, but not limited to, digital safety, open technology, AI, internet censorship, creative campaigning, and building a feminist internet.

Most importantly, Coconet II launched Coconet as an active network of changemakers. In this network are spaces and activities for collaboration, campaigns, and advocacy. These spaces range from chat groups for daily coordination and debate, to the [Coconet.social](#) website that serves as a regional hub for digital rights activism. EngageMedia and APC, in coordination with Coconet participants, continue to support and build these platforms to sustain and grow digital rights movements across the region.

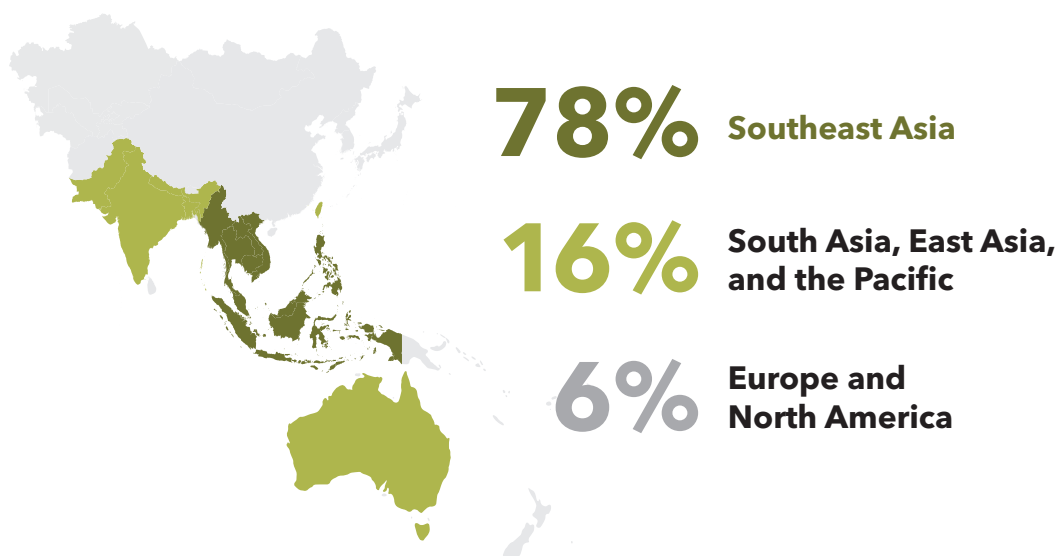
In light of Coconet II's success, we are excited to begin preparations for Coconet III, a digital rights festival set to take place in 2021.

By the Numbers

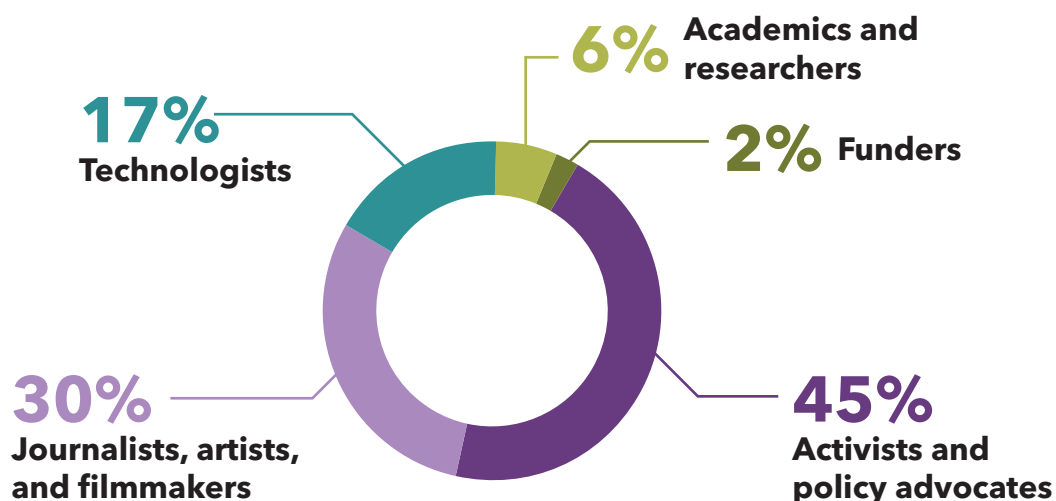
Who are the changemakers?



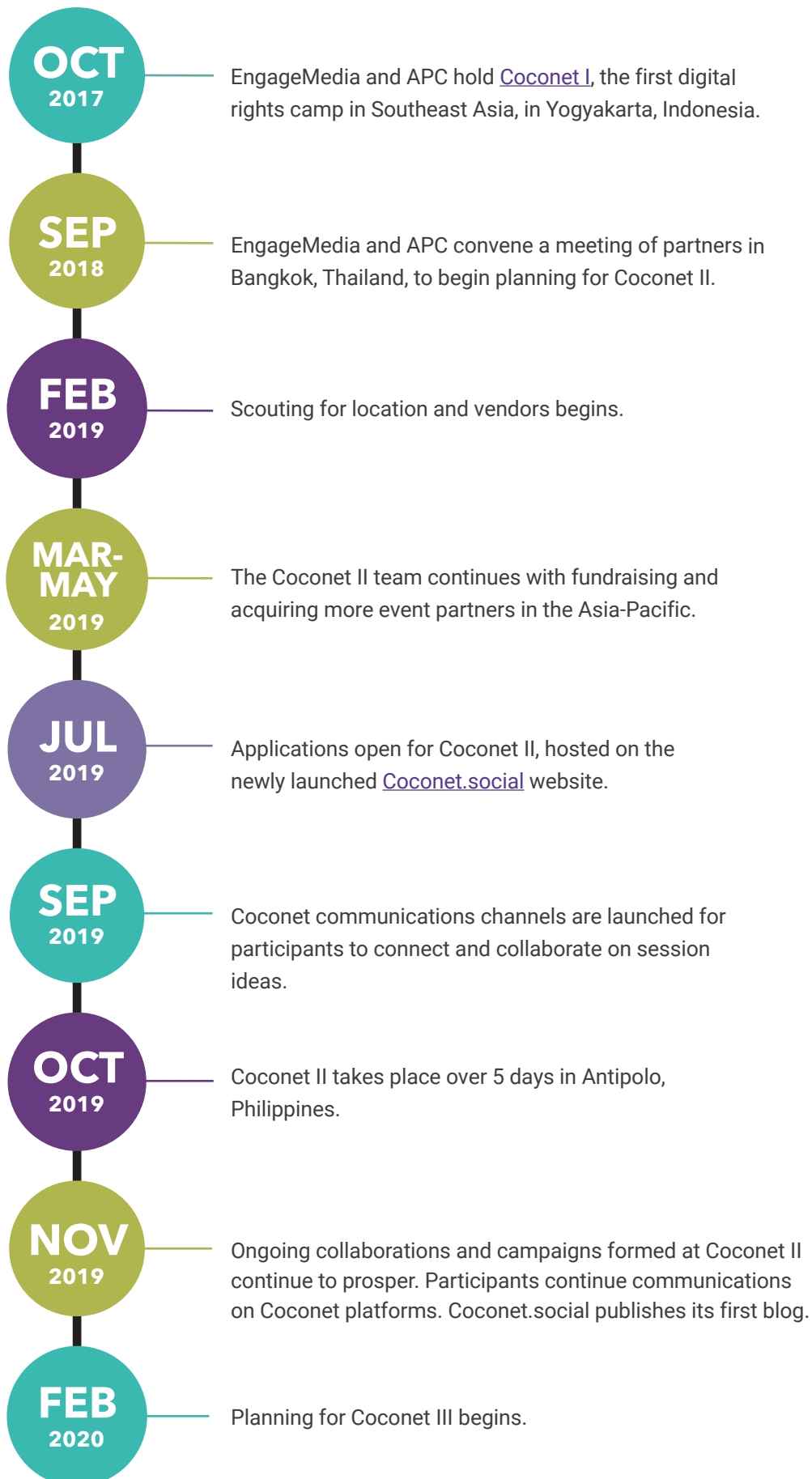
Where were Coconet II participants from?



What kinds of changemakers participated?



Timeline



How It Worked

“

The strength of Coconet is its philosophy, which draws on work from many advocacy movements to encourage cross-cutting, intersectional spaces—linking people from different movements to support each other. ”

Arthit Suryawongkul

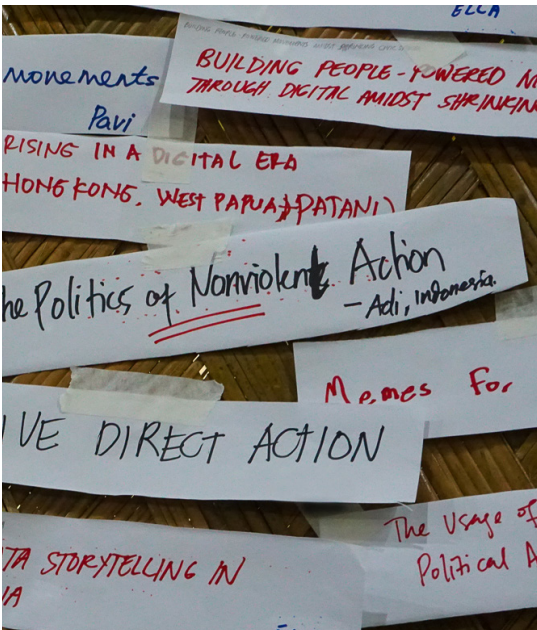
Co-founder, Thai Netizen Network

DESIGN: Co-designing the camp with a consortium of digital rights and media organisations

Collaboration is the cornerstone of movements. The success of Coconet is built through the process as much as it is through the program itself. For these reasons, EngageMedia and APC gathered a strong consortium of partners to co-design the camp. These partners included the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, Dakila (Philippines), Empower (Malaysia), the Foundation for Media Alternatives (Philippines), HURIDOCs (Global), MIDO (Myanmar), Open Culture Foundation (Taiwan), PERIN+1S (Indonesia), the Southeast Asia Press Alliance (SEAPA), Thai Netizen Network, Voice (Vietnam), and WITNESS (Global).

In September 2018, EngageMedia and APC convened this regional consortium in Bangkok, Thailand, to begin the co-designing process. Here we reflected on the strengths and weaknesses of Coconet I; clarified the objectives and methodology, the role of partners, and major themes of Coconet II; and brainstormed location ideas. Going a step further, we also sought to define Coconet as more than just an event—we wanted to grow a platform and network for digital rights movement building in the Asia-Pacific.

The emphasis on co-creating the event is critical to developing Coconet, contributing to a range of both immediate and longer-term objectives. Partners co-selected participants from their respective countries, co-designed the program, and took on



Top: Participants visualised their understanding of digital rights during one of the sessions.

Middle: Participants proposed and led almost all sessions at the camp.

Bottom: Some sessions at the camp explored sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics (SOGIESEC) in the Southeast Asian context.

critical roles during the camp, such as arriving days earlier to prepare the site and assisting with participant arrivals and orientation. During the camp, they led nightly film screenings, assisted with facilitation, and set up the tech and campaign labs.

The regional consortium also remains the foundation for developing and expanding the Coconet network. The buy-in and ownership from partners were critical to the success of the post-camp momentum, particularly in the development of the platform and network.

Applications and Selection Criteria

Continuing the design of Coconet as a convening of experts in their respective fields, the application process highlighted both the existing skills and knowledge of applicants, including their willingness to share their expertise to a larger audience. Consortium partners promoted the camp and solicited applications from promising candidates, including reaching out to activists and human rights defenders, digital security trainers, technologists supporting non-profit organisations, artists, designers, filmmakers, journalists, bloggers, policy experts, lawyers, researchers, and academics.

More than 400 applications, including organisers and Coconet I returnees, were received for a total of 80 spaces. The selection criteria focused on developing a diverse cohort that represented a range of expertise and backgrounds, and active involvement in networks and movement-building initiatives. We also ensured a balanced number of participants according to gender and country of origin.



Participants discussed the impact of AI in the Santol hut, one of the many open spaces for sessions named after fruits endemic to Southeast Asia.

“

The mind-blowing thing is you arrive, and all the agenda is free slots, you know. We craft together and we think together. We decide where to go, which place to go. You have all the rights. We can take a break and consider, reflect, and make an action plan together on what we are going to do together. ”

Hein Min Oo

Founder and Director of Youth/29, Myanmar

THEMES AND APPROACH:

Opening spaces and setting the tone

Coconet II, like its predecessor, used an open space method for building the program, which allowed participants to propose topics that were important to them and take responsibility for facilitating their sessions. Bobby Soriano served as lead facilitator and co-designer of the camp program and methodology. He guided participants through the open space, leading them in collectively building the agenda and facilitating collaborations between them.

The week-long agenda was built collectively on the first day. While agenda-setting was chaotic at times, the first day generated a great number of ideas and, more importantly, a high level of ownership of the camp. This ownership is one of the key reasons for the extremely strong follow-up among participants after the camp.

TIME	DAY 1 October 21	DAY 2 October 22	DAY 3 October 23	DAY 4 October 24	DAY 5 October 25
9:00 – 10:30 (1hour and 30mins)	Assembly Opening Circle	Assembly Digital Rights	Assembly Participation	Assembly Collaboration	Assembly Future of Coconet
10:30 – 11:00 (30 mins)	Morning Break				
11:00 – 12:30 (1hr and 30mins)	Assembly Session Building	Sessions: Open Space	Sessions: Open Space	Sessions: Open Space	Sessions: Open Space
12:30–14:00 (1hr and 30mins)	Lunch Break				
14:00 – 15:30 (1hr and 30mins)	Assembly Session Building	Session: Lighting Talks	Group Excursion	Session: Lighting Talks	Assembly Moving Forward
15:30 – 16:00 (30mins)	Afternoon Break			Afternoon Break	
16:00 – 17:30 (1hr and 30mins)	Sessions: Tech Lab Campaign Lab	Sessions: Tech Lab Campaign Lab		Sessions: Tech Lab Campaign Lab	Assembly Closing Circle
17:30 – 18:00	Evening Break				Assembly Closing Circle
18:00 – 19:30	Dinner				
19:30	Evening Activities			Market Night	Party!

Overview of the Coconet II schedule

Over 60 sessions took place at the camp and comprised of the following styles:



Assemblies: Each morning, all participants gathered in the main hall to explore a common theme related to digital rights. These themes provided a loose structure that participants could adhere to when scheduling their sessions. Assembly topics included digital rights, democratic participation, collaboration, and the future of the digital rights movement.



Open Space: Participants, either as individuals or as groups, led sessions on topics related to digital rights, skill-sharing, project presentations, creative exercises, and more. These occurred in parallel breakout sessions and lasted 1.5 hours, including session setup and other preparations.



Lightning Talks: Speakers delivered five-minute talks (informal or formal presentations) to small groups of people, rotating between groups after every five-minute period. (Imagine speed dating in a huge circle, but with each speaker moving to a new group instead of a new individual).



Labs: Permanent spaces in the camp housed the Tech Lab and Campaign Lab, both hosting sessions related to technology (both software and hardware) and campaigning, respectively.



Evening Activities: Optional film-showings, game nights, open discussions, and other activities took place every evening to give participants time to relax and provide additional opportunities for learning and relationship building.



Human rights films were screened during a session on campaign strategising.

Structuring the camp's agenda using this method ensured that almost every attendee had some level of meaningful participation. We were also mindful to ensure that all genders were given equal opportunity to lead main workshop sessions.

By the end of the camp, women had led 31 of the 60 sessions, gender diverse individuals had led 12 sessions, while men had led 28 sessions. Examples of the sessions included introductions to digital rights and internet governances, feminism and the internet, organising protests and successful campaign stores, internet shutdowns and how to strategise communications around them, and reporting on human rights stories in the digital age.

All of this work took place in a venue nestled on the foothills of the Sierra Madre Mountain range outside of Manila, where participants could connect with one another without the usual distractions of the city. The work was also framed by the camp [principles and guidelines](#), which included:

- Embracing a spirit of sharing, participation, and respectful debate
- Respecting the environment and minimising waste
- Ensuring harassment-free spaces, supported by a committee of volunteers to address any incidents
- Respecting the privacy of participants by default

Reflection and Collaboration

The last day at Coconet II took stock of what had been learned and committed to during the week, looking toward the future of the Coconet community and broader digital rights movement. Most of the last day was given over to participants to develop collaborations with others, the results of which are highlighted in the next session.

Ample time was also dedicated to a final sharing session, where participants could speak freely about their personal experiences at Coconet II and its impact on their lives and work. Emotions and gratitude flowed freely during the course of the 2 hours, with many inspired to grow their efforts despite the difficulties they are facing.

Outcomes and Achievements

“

There's a lot of work that needs to be done... for the rest of civil society... especially as more Southeast Asians go online ... [W]e need to be prepared for all of the opportunities and threats. ”

Dr. Jun-E Tan

Independent researcher, Malaysia

Key Collaborations: Working together towards concrete initiatives and collective goals

One of the key objectives of Coconet II was to foster tangible collaborations across countries and specialities, from digital rights to human rights, media, art, technology and beyond. Below, we highlight ten of the most notable collaborations that happened directly as a result of Coconet II.

- 1** When Vietnamese activist and Coconet II participant Dinh Thao returned home following the camp, she was detained upon entry. While detained, fellow Coconet participants mobilised to support her. Members quickly contacted Michel Forst, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, and David Kaye, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, sharing information about Thao's arrest and raising the profile of her case. [Dinh Thao was eventually released](#) and in her [post-arrest update](#), she said the solidarity of her supporters, including members of the Coconet community, fast-tracked her release from detention.
- 2** [Access Now](#) has started a network of Southeast Asian security helpdesks that provides rapid response services to civil society. While the network is still in the beginning stages, Coconet II became the platform that more deeply connected global response teams like AccessNow and Greenhost to existing initiatives in the region.



Participants were vocal about their support for the anti-corruption movement in Indonesia.

- 3 [Myanmar ICT for Development Organisation](#) hired Access Now and [Greenhost](#) to conduct internal capacity building on digital safety and security.
- 4 Dr. Jun-E Tan, a digital rights researcher from Malaysia, collaborated with EngageMedia to develop a [three-part series](#) on AI and human rights in Southeast Asia. EngageMedia also produced a [video](#) summarising the series.
- 5 A participant from APC wrote an article on [the use of internet memes for activism in Southeast Asia](#). Her examples were crowd-sourced from Coconet II participants.
- 6 [Oxfam](#) invited APC and [GØv.tw](#) to a four-day learning event on advancing digital spaces and action in Asia that gathered activists and creative communicators across the region.
- 7 Indonesian participants galvanised at the camp around [#ReformasiDikorupsi](#), a movement challenging corruption in Indonesia. [SINDIKASI](#) (Media and Creative Industry Union for Democracy) collaborated with [SAFEnet](#) and [ELSAM](#) (Lembaga Studi & Advokasi Masyarakat) on focus group discussions on the Perlindungan Data Pribadi (Protection of Personal Data Bill) in Indonesia.
- 8 On Feb. 28, 2020, members of the Coconut community joined a worldwide social media campaign calling for the lifting of the internet shutdown in Myanmar's Rakhine and Chin states. Over 100 students have since joined the protests. Using the hashtags [#StopTheAttacks](#), [#StopInternetShutdownMM](#), and [#keepiton](#), members were also in solidarity with nine student protesters, among them a Coconet II participant, who were charged under the country's Freedom of Expression act. Six of the nine charged have since been arrested.



Vietnamese activist and Coconet II participant Dinh Thao, by artist and fellow participant Ivana Kurniawati



Participant Dhyta Caturani shared her experiences as a feminist-activist in Indonesia.

- 9 Dr. Adam Fish from the University of South Wales and Dr. Tan have received a [grant from Cambridge University](#) to conduct research on AI in the Asian context.
- 10 The [Hing Hoy Noy Foundation](#) of Thailand is working with artists Ivana Kurniawati of Indonesia and Ali Rafiq Ibrahim of Malaysia to release a book on the ABCs on gender and sexuality. The book will be translated into Thai, Bahasa Indonesia, and English. The three have also submitted funding applications to the Viva Girls grant, Young Feminist Fund, and Women's Fund for the project.

“ We are building a network with journalists, with other human rights defenders, activists, and people who really want to communicate issues and do campaigns in creative ways; not just in the physical space that we usually see, but also online as well. ”

Zack Lee
Voice, Philippines



Every night, participants were given the option to relax and have fun, along with additional opportunities for learning and relationship building.

Media Outputs: Engaging with the broader movement

Coconet II brought together a large number of journalists and media makers who collaborated extensively to document the camp, resulting in a number of key outputs.

Videos

- A [summary video](#) providing a top-level overview
- [Welcome to Coconet II \(teaser\)](#)
- [Communication and Collaboration at Coconet II](#)
- [Why Do We Need a Digital Rights Movement in Southeast Asia?](#)
- [Stories of Resistance and Resilience at Coconet II](#)
- [Security and Well-being of Activists](#)

Blogs and articles

- [Solidarity is what makes the movement go on](#) by Dhyta Caturani
- [“Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights: Notes from Coconet II”](#) by Dr. Tan
- [The use of internet memes for activism in Southeast Asia](#) by Carmen Ferri of APC
- [Statement of regional solidarity against attacks on digital rights activists in Southeast Asia](#) by APC
- A [Facebook post](#) by the Myanmar Environmental Legal Services amplifying the #StopTheAttacks campaign from the camp
- [“Digital Rights in Southeast Asia - Conceptual Framework and Movement Building”](#) by Dr. Tan
- A [Twitter thread](#) by a Nepali participant documenting how Coconet contributed to his work on children’s books
- [“Duterte, a deceased person, Christianity and journalist”](#) by Nontarat Phaicharoen

EngageMedia will also be releasing a podcast episode recorded at the camp, as part of an episode of the Coconet podcast that will be launched in April 2020.

Looking Forward

“

The first Coconet gave me hope and kept me moving forward, working and advocating for human rights, for digital rights. Coconet II also gives me hope. It's given me a sense of satisfaction that we are going to achieve more ... those who started before me and after me will also achieve progress. ”

Hija Kamran

Program Manager, Media Matters for Democracy, Pakistan

Coconet: Building a multi-platform network in 2020 and beyond

Too often, events generate great energy and ideas, only for that energy to slip away once everyone returns home. Coconet aimed to be different from the start. In the months prior to Coconet II, we began developing a range of platforms for communication and collaboration between participants. These included:

- Signal: An instant messaging group chat
- [Coconet.social](#): A website and blog regularly covering key digital rights issues and indexing active organisations in the region
- Mattermost: A Slack alternative that features both open and private chat groups

Coconet participants have also organised face-to-face meet-ups post-camp, including at the Open Technology Fund Summit in Taipei (November 2019) and Myanmar Digital Rights Forum in Yangon (February 2020). The bond between participants post-camp remains strong, with many expressing a keen interest to see each other on a more regular basis.



Coconet aims to foster collaborations among the region's human rights advocates, journalists, artists, and technologists in defense of digital rights.

The year 2020 is also set to bring the following new projects by and for the growing Coconet community, which will be hosted on [Coconet.social](https://coconet.social) and our other community platforms:

- The development of a podcast, including interviews with key digital rights actors
- The curation, creation, and aggregation of social media channels to publicise and promote digital rights issues
- The collection and curation of video content related to online freedom of expression
- A regional digital rights events calendar
- A collection of resources related to learning, communicating, and working on digital rights issues
- Live online events where the community can share progress about collaborations, encourage new ones, and participate in activities that build solidarity

Fortunately all these activities can be done online, and will not face severe disruption as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. We are also ensuring that these projects are addressing the critical digital rights issues emerging as a result of the crisis.



Coconet III: A city-wide digital rights festival

In 2021 EngageMedia, APC, and our partners are planning to host Coconet III, a city-based festival that aims to take the regional digital rights movement to the next level. This is of course very dependent on how the world responds to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the time being, we outline here our current concept, though we are also prepared to develop the festival into an online experience.

With previous camps both garnering over 400 applications, there is a huge amount of interest in digital rights in the region. With that in mind, we need to bring the spirit of Coconet to a wider audience. Coconet III will be bigger, but with the same emphasis on participation, community, creativity, diversity and collaboration. The primary aim is to bring an even broader range of allied actors from across and beyond the Asia-Pacific into the movement for digital rights and to create an event that shifts and frames debates by fostering relationships and collaborations. There will also be a more concerted effort to invite participants who are not based in the capital cities of their respective countries.

Coconet III aims to have a strong emphasis on media and creativity. Previous participants will be tapped to once again co-design the festival's program. But this time, key partners will be invited to host not only sessions, but also entire spaces, each with different themes that intersect in various ways with digital rights. For example, a partner organisation could host a feminist internet space at a café, while another can host a digital security hackerspace in a gallery. Filmmakers can host their own film festivals and conduct workshops in a theatre. The possibilities for learning, creativity, and collaboration grow with the space allowed by the festival format.

We believe this city-festival format can preserve the collaboration and relationship building of the camp model while achieving the necessary scaling and higher public profile digital rights issues. Should we need to, we are also considering a fully online festival. No matter the format, opening up Coconet and the digital rights movement to a wider audience will also more strongly translate into real social, cultural, and policy change.

We hope to see you, along with more changemakers, at Coconet III!

ORGANISERS



PARTNERS



FUNDERS





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