Polly Poon's Blog: Hackathon against Modern Day Slavery in Hong Kong

Posted by Polly Poon Sep 25, 2017

On the weekend of 23rd and 24th September 2017, around 35 high schools students coming from all parts of Hong Kong gathered at Thomson Reuters office in ICBC building in Hong Kong to participate in a hackathon. The event was in partnership with Liberty Asia, a Non-government organization aim to prevent human trafficking through legal advocacy, technology interventions and strategic collaborations with NGOs, corporations and financial institutions in Southeast Asia.

How did it work?

We have had volunteers from GGO ANA, Liberty Asia, Morgan Stanely and the Chinese University of Hong Kong coming to the hackathon to help to mentor the students with their research. "Hackers" were divided into 5 groups working together around the clock to investigate on case studies prepared by Liberty Asia utilizing open source intelligence. These case studies are reports on exploitation of basic labour rights found across Asia to the middle east. Some of these case studies simply meant horrific crime for many of us who live in places where legislation are well established. Unfortunately, the local jurisdiction and law enforcement of the victims in the case studies simply lack the fundamental infrastructure to protect them. It's NGO like Liberty Asia and many others, through thorough investigative work to bring these crimes to light, and ultimately put enough pressure to the local authority to take actions.

The Hackathon

Volunteers and participants from Discovery College, HKIS, ICHK, Shenzhen Middle School, Li Po Chun UWC and The Harbour School gathered at ICBC office at 9:30 am on Saturday. We were extremely fortunate to have Sanjeev Chatrath to give a very inspiring opening remark to start the Hackathon. Archana Kotecha from Liberty Asia has given the students a mind provoking introduction about works of Liberty Asia on modern-day slavery and how it is relevant to every individual in the society. If you come to think of it, product sourcing from poorer countries ranging from the piece of garment an ordinary individual may have purchased from a high street store to that seafood cocktail one may have enjoyed the weekend before at a restaurant. Impact of modern-day slavery is ubiquitous. The introductions have set a great stage for the students to kick off with their work.

A key representative from High Technology Crime Investigation and Association APAC has shown the students tools, plug-in and techniques to help with their investigation. Hackers were also introduced modelling tools to help them to build up the topology linking the allegation based on the ILO indicators, victims and alleged corporations or individuals. The hackers have shown their meticulous effort in their research over the two days. The team worked really well together and it was truly amazing to see their quality of work.
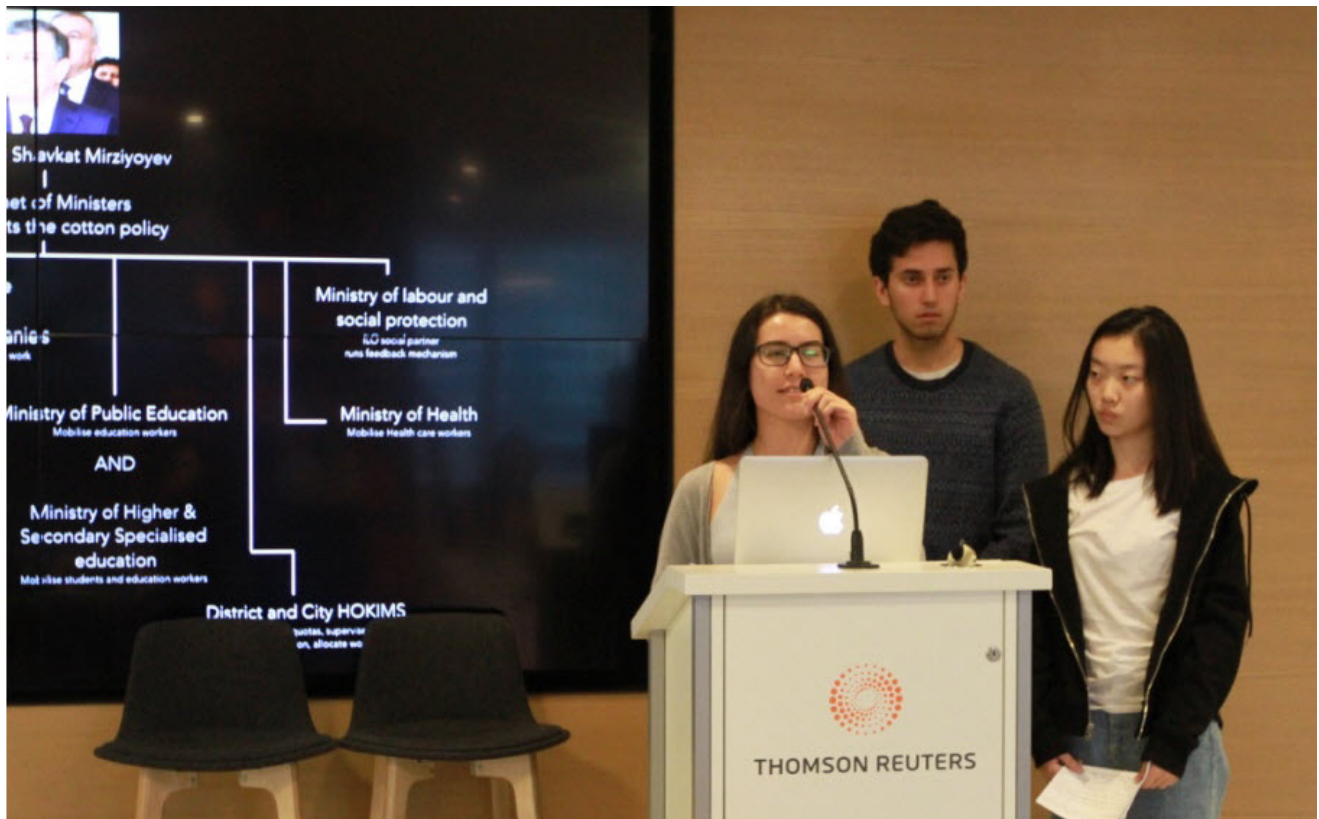
The show time

Rolling into the second day, everyone got back to the ICBC office early in the morning to continue with their investigation and to prepare their presentation. Each group are given 15 minutes to explain their work plus 5 minutes of Q&A. Jane Lewis from GGO ANA has kindly spared her Sunday morning to give a remark for us before the presentation and also to be part of the judging panel.

The presentation took place over a working lunch. Each group rocked up in front of everyone to present their investigations. The judging criteria were based on their presentation and narratives, source and visual presentation. The presentations were of very high quality and professional. It was a reflection of hard work that they have put in over the two days. I was not part of the judging panel but I know how difficult it was for them to decide which team to win.

After moments of closed-door discussion, two teams were selected to be the winners. The runner-up team was made up of students from Discovery College, Shenzhen Middle School and The Harbour School. Hong Kong International School was the winner of the event.

What legacy and impact does the Hackathon leave behind?
Today, slavery is sustained by the fast-paced economic competitions. Globalization has decrease prices but at the same time improve the availability of products to average customers, these effects have been reflected by the ever-increasing number of slavery we have today. To some of the participants, we truly hope this is just one of the first steps towards combating modern-day slavery in their future. It could simply be making an informed choice through everyday purchases, supports at the NGOs or playing a part in the combat against slavery in their future career.

Sponsors and support to the event
All in all the event was a great success. Though it wouldn't have happened without the sponsors of GGO ANA and GGO Technology. Kimberley Cole has been a great mentor and has provided continued to provide support and connections in and out of TR. Richard Weir, Rob Head, Jane Lewis, Abdul Azeem Ali, Tracy Li, Michelle Ma from GGO had given tremendous support and advice on the preparation and actual running of the hackathon. Marla Alvarez (Garin-Alvarez), Dawn Emling and Rebecca Larpent have been instrumental in their support from CR&I perspective. Kermit Yau, Hamish Backhouse, Calum Watson has also helped to promote the event. Last but not least, Micky Kuljinder has shown how the office is operated so I can manage over the weekend.

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