

BRINGING ELECTRICITY TO RURAL FOLK

BY [STORY](#)
PHOTOS BY ANDY CHUA

THE STAR



THEIRS' is not the biggest of dams but residents of longhouse Rumah Suing Ensan can still enjoy round-the-clock electricity following the completion of the iM Sarawak micro-hydro generator.

Located in rural Julau, about three and half hours from Sibu town, the 14-door longhouse is only accessible via a logging road.

Before the dam project came to fruition, the 82 residents had to rely on individual diesel generators for electricity.

Each family had to fork out between RM250 and RM350 a month on diesel for only three to four hours of electricity a night.

The diesel cost was a huge burden to them as they were all farmers.

Not only that, they also had to bear the high cost of transporting the diesel to their longhouse.

Having uninterrupted supply of electricity to their longhouse, the residents could now use all their electrical appliances, except the air-conditioning unit.

The women folk of the longhouse are now able to carry out traditional activities such as beading (*marek empang*) and weaving at night.

This will help hone their skills in making these traditional handicrafts and preserve a part of their culture.

Their school-going children are now able to have more time to do their school work and revisions during weekends and public holidays.

“We are very grateful to iM Sarawak for this 8KW micro-hydro generator. We now have free electricity round-the-clock,” said Tuai Rumah Suing Ensan.

Suing jested that with the new dam, the money saved on diesel could be used for their children’s education, house repairs and to purchase daily necessities.

Suing, who looks much younger than his age of 64, said they had constructed the dam on a *gotong-royong* basis with guidance from iM Sarawak technical assistants.

The project started in June 2014 and was completed in December that year.

“Our wives and children were also involved in one way or another in building the dam.

“We worked from dusk to dawn three times a week. We had to carry 700 bags of cement laboriously from the longhouse to the dam site.

“It was a tough job but at the end of the day, it was worth the effort,” he said.

As the village headman, Suing delegates two residents to look after the running of the dam each day.

If problems crop up, they would have to report to him.

Housewife Junai Gimán, 50, does not need to wash her clothes in the stream anymore as the women could use their washing machine now.

“I can also keep our food fresh in the refrigerator. Previously, we had to consume perishable food such as meat, poultry and fish immediately,” she recalled.

The longhouse has three university students. Rose Tuba, 23, a social science student at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) majoring in social work, remembered what it was like when she was in primary and secondary schools.

“I could only do two hours of revision nightly before this micro-hydro dam came along.

“Our juniors are luckier than us as with electricity round-the-clock, the sky is the limit for them,” she said.

Rose was a former student of SK Ulu Entabai and SMK Pakan. Like any youth, she had to trek more than three hours every morning to primary school. Getting to SMK Pakan was another hour on foot.

“Because of this, I had to become one of the boarders and only went back home on weekends.

“With a timber road built two years ago, life is easier now as we can travel on wheels,” she said.

For her, the micro-hydro dam is the biggest success story for her longhouse “built through our sweat.”

Chairman of 1Malaysia Sarawak Advisory Council (1MSAC) Datuk Joseph Salang Gandum, who launched the project last Thursday, commended the longhouse folk for their effort in building the dam.

“Finishing the dam was challenging as the longhouse had less than 20 male adults.

“However, everyone worked together on the project and managed to complete the work on time,” he added.

“We at iM Sarawak are committed to helping the communities in the state improve their quality of life and with everyone actively engaged in this project, we believe the residents of Rh Suing Ensan will have a sense of ownership and responsibility, which in turn will encourage proper use and maintenance of the system,” he concluded.

Micro-hydro dam is the way forward for rural folk populated in the very remote area of the state. 1MSAC has completed eight out of 10 such dams since 2013.