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Tajuk : Unimas, Formadat renew commitment to expand e-Bario

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**BARIO:** Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) and Bario community have renewed their commitment to expand the e-Bario project into a knowledge management hub.

The university was represented by its vice-chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Mohamad Kadim Suaidi while the heads of Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples of the Highlands of Borneo (Formadat) from Indonesia and Malaysia – Penghulu Lewi Gala and Penghulu Sigar Sultan respectively – represented the highland's Kelabit community at the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to further develop the project.

The simple ceremony was held at the recent Nukenen Bario Festival from July 27-29 which also marked the 10th anniversary of the food festival.

Murum assemblyman Datuk Gerawat Jala was also present.

According to a publicity release yesterday, Unimas researchers initiated a research project in the Kelabit highlands of Bario in 1986, but little did they know what was initially intended at bringing ICT into a remote and isolated site would eventually become a long-standing journey of discovery for both the research team and the local community.

Over the years, both the Unimas team and the Kelabit community have worked closely with one another to bring Bario onto the world stage through the multi-award winning e-Bario project.

This project has brought about significant changes to the landscape and livelihood of the Kelabit community as they moved from being a community with limited access to electricity and connectivity to becoming



Kadim (right) and Sigar exchanging MoU documents to renew their commitment to expand the e-Bario project.

a bustling sub-district as it is today.

e-Bario proves to be a flagship project which has effectively bridged the digital and knowledge divides and established itself as an example that has brought about policy change in marginalised communities.

It is also a model of development for other rural communities in Malaysia, as various sites have sought to replicate the multi-disciplinary research and participatory development approach.

Despite this, many are unaware of the significance of the e-Bario project in reshaping the ICT for Development (ICT4D) landscape.

It cannot be denied that the ripple effects of the project have broadened mindsets and innovated engagement with technology.

The lessons learned have shown that technology has to be introduced in a manner that is sensitive to the socio-

cultural-economic context of the beneficiary communities."

The presentation of three prestigious awards – the Equator Prize Award in Paris, the Gourmand Food Award in Yantai, China and the Bario Cultural Troupe to El-de Spirito in Milan, Italy – further reinforced the need for partnerships in continuing to move forward with the changing times and charting its own progressive directions and unique contributions to the world.

One new initiative would be the Bario Community Museum, which is the first step taken by the community towards the rebranding of e-Bario as a knowledge centre.

This new phase sees not only the forging of new relationships between the community, the university and also government agencies but also presents new opportunities for the expansion of this milestone project towards its transformation into a knowledge

management hub.

This will be an exciting development for both the Kelabit community and the Unimas team of researchers, who are poised to go forth in this new direction despite the many challenges, some even life-threatening, that they have faced over the years.

In the spirit of promoting research and working together with the community, Unimas has plans to propose the establishment of a research facility in Bario.

The MoU signing between Unimas and Formadat will help to collaboratively build local capacity with an awareness and understanding of highland communities.

It touches the lives of a trans-boundary group of communities in the Heart of Borneo which cuts across Sabah-Sarawak and Kalimantan regions.

The focus of the collaboration will be on community development, environmental protection, and cultural preservation.