



PROFESSOR Dato' Dr Mohamad Kadim Suaidi delivering a speech before the signing of the MoU.



THE signing of the MoU in progress.

Unimas and Formadat sign MoU

BARIO: The recent Pesta Nukenen Bario, held from 27-29 July 2016, marked the 10th anniversary of the food festival.

The event was made even more memorable as it served as a platform for the renewal of friendship between Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) and the Bario community.

When the Unimas researchers initiated a research project in the deep Kelabit highlands of Bario in 1996, little did they know that 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 towards bringing Bario to the center stage of the world 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 the bustling sub-district as it is today.

e-Bario has thus proved to be a flagship project which has effectively bridged the digital and knowledge divides and establishing itself as a demonstrator that has brought about policy change in marginalised communities.

e-Bario is also the 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, there are many who are unaware of the significance of the e-Bario project in reshaping the ICT for Development (ICT4D) landscape, especially as the direct impact of telecentres are vastly decreasing. However, it cannot be denied that the ripple effects of the project broadened mindsets and innovated engagement with technology.

The lessons learned have shown that technology had 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 Gourmed Food Award in Yantai, China and the Bario Cultural Troopie to El-de Spirito in Milan, Italy, further reinforces 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.

A new initiative is the Bario Community Museum, which can be seen to be 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 expanding 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 have been faced by them 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 at Bario.

The MoU signing between Unimas and Formadat is meaningful as it helps 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.

Formadat was represented by its heads from Indonesia and Malaysia, Penghulu Lewi Gala, and Penghulu Sigar Sultan while Unimas was represented by its Vice Chancellor Professor Dato' Dr Mohamad Kadim Suaidi.