

Bario Community Radio:

Engaging People Making News

Mus Chairil Samani¹, Poline Bala², Jamilah Maliki³ and Roger Harris⁴

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)

94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak

Malaysia

{¹smchairil, ²bpoline, ³mjamilah}@fss.unimas.my, ⁴roger.harris@rogharris.org

Abstract— Bario Community Radio went on air in October 2011. Its intended public is the Kelabit people who are living within the 25-kilometer radius from the broadcast facility located at e-Bario telecentre. The station is administered by a manager who also serves as the broadcast journalist and radio announcer. He is assisted by two other broadcasters. The radio is broadcasted twice each day: two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening. A survey was conducted to assess the impact of the radio on the Kelabit community living in Bario. A total of 61 people participated in a survey that was conducted in December 2012. The findings indicate that the radio broadcast is well received by the community. Most of them are tuning in to the morning radio broadcast. The most sought information by the listeners on the radio is the national and community news. The national news read over the radio are obtained from the mainstream online newspapers. The community news is provided by the listeners who would pass the information to the station manager for broadcast.

Keywords—radio; community; media; impact; news

I. INTRODUCTION

Operating a radio station without a license is an offence under the Communication and Multimedia Act 1998 (Act 588) [1]. Broadcasting licenses granted under the act are currently given to government agencies or big commercial entities. Thus, the success of a small remote community located in the hinterlands of Sarawak, gaining a radio license has created much news in the local mass media. There are no proper roads linking Bario with the nearest major town which is Miri. Access to Bario overland is only through the rugged logging road. The best mode of transportation is using the daily flights provided by MASWings linking Bario with Miri. The remoteness of Bario and high cost of transport has made delivery of printed newspapers unaffordable. Thus, there is a need for a radio service for this remote community.

Bario Radio is Malaysia's first community-run radio servicing the Kelabit highlands. It was officially launched on 13 October 2011 after obtaining the necessary license from Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC). Anyone wishing to operate and manage a radio or television stations in Malaysia will have to obtain the

The study is funded by a grant from Indigenous People Assistance Facility of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Institute of Social Informatics and Technological Innovation, the Centre of Excellence for Rural Informatics (ISITI-CoERI), UNIMAS.

necessary license from the commission.

Bario Radio as a community radio, it is a low-powered small scale FM broadcasting that is run by and for the community it serves [2]. The radio is an extension of the e-Bario project initiated by Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS).

It operates from a small studio located behind the e-Bario telecentre. The Bario Radio is assigned by MCMC to transmit their programs using the 94 MHz FM spectrum. The radio has an effective range of 25 kilometer. It is not possible to cover the 25 kilometer radius because of two limitations: antennae and limited electrical supply. The radio is run using solar powered batteries which limit the amount of power supplied to radio equipment. With the limited electrical supply, its effective radius is 16 kilometers serving the various longhouses and farms within the vicinity. Power is generated from a solar panel located adjacent to the radio station. The amount of stored electrical power limits the range and amount of time for each transmission slot. The limited electrical supply means that the radio can only be operated for two-hours each time. Thus, Bario Radio is on air for two slots each day, except on Sunday. The morning and evening broadcast starts from 7 am and 7 pm respectively.

The equipment to set up the community radio was made possible with a grant from the Indigenous People Assistance Facility of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) which was administered by Institute of Social Informatics and Technological Innovation, the Centre of Excellence for Rural Informatics (ISITI-CoERI), UNIMAS. The radio was set up with the help of RadioActive Limited of United Kingdom.

RadioActive volunteers, led by Max Graef conducted several workshop to train selected members of the Bario community to operate the radio. The Bario Radio station team is headed by a station manager. The station manager is assisted by five other broadcasters who run the radio in two shifts six-days a week. The Bario Radio is managed by Stanley Isaac, a former school teacher who also acts as the radio broadcaster for the station. In the beginning, he was assisted by Connie Aping, Lucie Trang, Seluma Stewart, Stewart Beroak and Scott Apoi. These allow for the rotation of staff to take the different shifts to operate the radio station [3].