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### **Mini-HEP the way to power up remote areas, says Manyin**

KUCHING: Researchers and engineers are urged to come up with a solid proposal to build mini-hydroelectric projects to provide energy for the rural population that are cut off from the electricity grid.

Also extending the challenge to the academic fraternity and higher learning institutions, Infrastructure Development and Communication Minister Dato Sri Michael Manyin Jawong said mini-hydroelectric dams would benefit longhouses in the interiors until such a time when the government could build roads for them and connect them to the power grid.

"We have vast rural areas. Considering the likes of Baram and such, to connect the electricity grid is very costly. Due to the non-existence of road infrastructure, we just cannot simply connect these areas to the grid.

"While waiting for the road to come in, the mini-hydro projects would enable the interior population to enjoy electricity," Manyin told reporters after officiating at the Sixth International Engineering Conference (EnCon 2013) organised by the Faculty of Engineering of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) at Hilton Hotel here yesterday.

Also present were Unimas vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Mohamad Kadim Suhaidi, deputy vice-chancellor Prof Dr Peter Songan, Faculty of Engineering dean Prof Dr Wan Hashim Wan Ibrahim and Assoc Prof Dr Andrew Ragai Henry Rigit who is EnCon 2013 local organising committee chairman.

The Tebedu assemblyman pointed out that to build roads and connect a longhouse to another in the interiors could cost up to RM100 million, considering the state's geographical terrain and scattered population.

He cited Australia as a country which has successfully introduced mini-hydro projects for its rural population.

In his speech earlier, Manyin said about 23 per cent of the state's population, including more than 700 longhouses and villages, have yet to be connected with roads.

"Some of these interior areas might not have road access within the next 10 years. People in places like Bario, Ba Kelalan, Baram might not be able to see the electricity grid within the next decade. In this sense, we are calling for experts and engineers to produce proposals for the implementation of mini-hydroelectric projects to benefit those outside the power grid."

Manyin also highlighted the need to close the digital gap between the rural and urban population.

Anticipating that illiteracy might increase in rural communities without access to internet and electricity, he feared the matter would become a political issue if the communities continued to be left behind.

Source: **Borneo Post Online**