

My first travelling experienced covering the rural areas in Sarawak.

My name is Yusri Bin Jumat. I am a Research Officer in the Institute of Social Informatics and Technological Innovations (ISITI) before this being named as Centre of Excellence for Rural Informatics (CoERI). On 6th July 2015 until 11th July 2015, I went to Long Puah and Long Lamai that is around 700 km away from Kuching. These sites are located in Marudi, Miri near the Kalimantan, Indonesia border. There were 5 researchers including myself who went there and did the research of their expertise. The researchers were Associate Professor Dr Tan Chong Eng, Dr John Phoa Chun Leong, Mohd Azizul Hafiz b Jamian, Wong Siew Mooi, Sandy and myself. Dr John Phoa and Azizul did the research of GIS mapping for local paddy fields and also the hiking routes to go to attractive sites in the Long Lamai's jungle. Sandy did a survey to investigate the factors why people in urban and rural areas have differences in effecting their health results. Dr Tan, Ms Wong and I did an investigation on why the power system for solar system for telecentre in Long Lamai had failed. Besides that we also did an installation for solar system at Long Puah's kindergarten.

As this was my first experience travelling to rural areas in Sarawak, I felt very excited but at the same time felt worried too. I was excited and happy because I am the kind of person that is adventurous and likes to explore, learn and do new things. Since my background was in Electronics Engineering, thus to do research about power system such as solar or micro-hydro power system for rural areas will make my understanding of the system more expanding plus know how to handle the tough situation in rural areas if the systems encounter problems. Besides the excitement, I felt worried too because I was scared that I will loss contact with my family in Kuching since I am in rural areas. There, the myth that telecommunication services happen to be very poor was totally wrong as they actually have telecommunication services from 2 companies. Even though the majority there were Christians, food to eat was not an issue for me because they also had vegetables to eat and no non halal food was served to me. That means they respect me as a Muslim. Moreover as this was the Fasting Month for Muslims, they happened to serve me food to break my fast when Maghrib time has come. It made me very overwhelmed.

For the 6 days experience in rural areas, the most important thing was to need to prepare yourself mentally and physically fit. It will not be the same as your home in urban areas as the electricity was limited and sometimes no electricity at all. This was a good experience to feel how our ancestors live their life before with no facilities and also good opportunities to do

improvement for them to live in a good life such as installing the solar system will make their children able to study during night time. It is much safer and brighter than candle light.

Besides that, you also need to do planning such as Plan A, Plan B, until Plan Z and try to hit many birds with one stone. When you are in rural areas you will always need a backup plan when something unpredictable occurs such as when we tested the kindergarten's solar system after installing it, first the system was not functioning well, the battery did not supply the electricity but luckily Dr Tan brought an extra battery and also the battery boxes. When we replaced it, the system functioned well, thanks to Dr Tan is well preparation of backup plans.

As a conclusion, don't feel that you are more knowledgeable than the rural people because they lived there since they were young age. Take the opportunity to learn new knowledge from them and share also your knowledge with them. If you got problem during your visit, they are the one that help you. Be good to the people there and assist them in achieving the better live.



Diagram 1: The sites in red color (Long Lamai and Long Puah) in Sarawak map.



Diagram 2: The researcher with the local community at Longhouse



Diagram 3: The researchers with the local community after motorboat journey and continue with 4WD vehicle.



Diagram 4: The researchers with a local guide during jungle trekking.