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True Value of Telecentre Contribution to Bario Community Development

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Abstract. Telecentres have been widely deployed worldwide particularly in the area of ICTD to bridge the gap between urban and rural development. This paper explores the value and impact of a telecentre on the community living in Bario, a small village in the highlands of Malaysia. The focus is mainly on the less studied tangible and intangible impacts of the telecentre on users and non-users. This topic is discussed based on stories collected through “Most Significant Change Technique (MSC)” providing facts from the insights of the local community. In nutshell, Bario community has greatly benefited from the use of the telecentre, whether directly or indirectly, particularly in the areas of connectedness, psychological empowerment, and financial improvement. Greater awareness and use of the telecentre shall continue to benefit this small rural community in their social and economic wellbeing.

Keywords: ICTD; Telecentre; ICTs, Users; Non-Users; Intangible impact; Tangible impact; Socio-Economic Impact.

1 Introduction

The emergence of ICTD interventions has played a crucial role in driving developing countries towards modernization particularly in the area of socio-economic development. The growing body of literature has further strengthens the impacts of ICTD interventions in measuring the tangible contributions of ICT, forgoing the intangible impact evaluation of ICTs especially on the non-user beneficiaries [27]. Thus, a question arises whether or not these unquantifiable intangible impacts such as self-esteem, sense of self-efficacy, self-confidence, enhanced capabilities, social cohesion, social capital etc. are important for community well-being and growth. Sey et al. [24] accentuate on the “impacts of public access to ICT” on users and non-users, stating that this issue needs to be put in focus to study the dynamics of public access impacts on non-users”. The assessment of public access impacts often neglects to examine non-users, although they could constitute past and potential beneficiaries [23]. Confirmation is made by studying the numerous benefits that ICT’s have given to both users and non-users beneficiaries in their respective socio-economic spheres. Grunfeld [14] claims that numerous ICT4D project appraisals frequently neglect to answer key inquiries