

ICT Adoption in Communities Based Tourism in Bario, Sarawak: Improvements on Social Economic Development

ABSTRACT

The eBario pilot project has demonstrated a people-centred approach in providing ICTs to an isolated rural community in Bario, Malaysia. By engaging the community prior, during, and after the deployment of ICTs, Bario now has access to telephones and the Internet, and are applying ICTs to enhance their livelihood. The results indicate that ICTs are able to increase the number of visitors and demonstrate the important dimensions that contributed to tourists' satisfaction. The findings revealed that most of the visitors were aware of Bario because of its visibility in the website. Statistical results have also shown that ICTs have helped to increase the number of visitors, enhanced service quality provided, and generate more repeat businesses. In addition, tourism was found to have a positive relationship with poverty alleviation by enhancing the economic level, improving the socio-cultural aspects, and preserving the environmental conditions. The case of eBario has been acknowledged at the local and international levels as a successful bridging-the-digital project. This paper highlights the project's background, the approach employed, as well as lessons learnt from the project.

Keywords: ICT Adoption, Communities Based Tourism, eBario, Bario, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The society in general has acquired valuable knowledge through the birth of "information society" i.e. the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and this has generate many new opportunities and choices for the general public as ICTs has changed their learning, working and personal lives. The emergence of ICTs played a key role in alleviating poverty as it has the capacity to generate employment opportunities. However, in this day and age, there are some pockets of the world's population that are unable to enjoy the benefits of ICTs as a result of the existence of access barriers, high costs and minimal human resources. This is even more evident in an environment of isolation, relative deprivation, and dependence that there are insufficient attention given to the indigenous people towards ICTs usage.

Studies conducted by Briedenhann and Wickens, (2003) and Ruiz-Molina, Gil-Saura, and Moliner-Velázquez, (2010) found that the financial health and job opportunities of the local residents may depend on tourism. Ecotourism, being a subset of the tourism industry, is growing in its importance as it is apparent that the economic growth, socio-cultural development, protection and improvement of both natural and built environment and infrastructure are the significant contributors. Taking these into consideration, the local community involvement is vital as their participation is naturally related to how groups and individuals are empowered and have control over