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# HOLISTIC APPROACH IN DEVELOPMENT OF A RURAL TELECENTRE (LESSONS LEARNED FROM EBARIO PROJECT)

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## ABSTRACT

*The development of a rural ICT project involves three main components which are the technology (hardware, software, network communication), power requirement (hydro, solar), and also the social requirement and impact. However, not many rural ICT projects take into consideration these three aspects in the implementation of the project. This paper describes a holistic approach (taking into consideration the three aspects above) in planning and implementing rural ICT project in Bario (a remote area in Sarawak, Malaysia). This project is an extension of the ongoing eBario Rural ICT project to bridge the digital divide in rural areas. This paper will describe the planning and implementation steps, challenges in the project, lessons learned from the implementation, and, community acceptance in using the system.*

**Keywords:** Rural ICT, eBario.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

There are many Bridging Digital Divide Initiative (BDD) in Malaysia such as Medan Info Desa (MID), Pusat Info Desa (PID), Universal Service Provision (USP), state-based initiatives (E-Desa in Johor, etc) and also from academic institution such as the eBario project by Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). Each of the initiatives has its own objectives to serve certain quarters of the population according to the 9 groups of the underserved population as outlined and agreed by the SITC (Strategic Thrust and Implementation Committee) (Harris et. Al., 2007). There are many challenges in deploying a BDD initiative especially projects in the rural areas.

The development of a rural ICT project involves three main components which are the technology (hardware, software, network communication), power requirement (hydro, solar), and also the social requirement and impact. However, not many rural ICT projects take into consideration these three aspects in the implementation of the project. This paper describes a holistic approach (taking into consideration the three aspects above) in planning and implementing rural ICT project in Bario (a remote area in Sarawak, Malaysia). This project is an extension of the ongoing eBario Rural ICT project to bridge the digital divide in rural areas. This paper will describe the planning and implementation steps, challenges in the project, lessons learned from the implementation, and, community acceptance in using the system.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND ON EBARIO PROJECT

The eBario project is one project that has successfully engaged the community to employ ICTs and is sustaining the telecentre through revenue generated through activities of the telecentre. In the first part of this paper, we will provide details of the project, how the community was engaged and also the efforts employed in sustaining the telecentre. In the second part, the paper will provide the roles in which the libraries and ICTs can play in a key area in preservation of the local culture and languages in Sarawak.