

Malaysia's first community radio station to broadcast from Kelabit Highlands

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MIRI: Bario Radio, the first community radio to be established in Malaysia, will broadcast in the Kelabit language by the end of next month.

This non-profit radio station will be managed by eBario Sdn Bhd, the operator of the award-winning eBario rural telecentre.

A dialogue organised by Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) to discuss the station's policies and practices here yesterday garnered the participation of 20 interested parties from Bario and Miri.

The dialogue was aimed at stimulating public debate among the stakeholders on policy formulations and related practices that would allow further applications of community radio stations in Malaysia.

The station has received a RM50,000 funding from the International Fund for Agriculture Development and Centre of Excellence for Rural Informatics and will be managed by volunteers.

Bario Radio will be implemented next month with the installation of equipment followed by training of local Kelabits in the operation of the station.

The programmes will be conducted in Kelabit by volunteer broadcasters drawn from the community.

According to UNIMAS Institute of Social Informatics and Technological Innovations director Professor Alvin Yeo, the station would reach out to people in remote areas in Sarawak, initially around Bario.

"The dialogue was to raise awareness and understanding of guidelines for implementation among potential adopters of community radio stations.

"It was also an effort to initiate momentum for the wider deployment of community radio stations in Malaysia as a means of achieving the national development goals.

"Hence, it will create awareness among policymakers on the need of Malaysia's indigenous people, particularly the Kelabits, to have their own media to overcome their vulnerability and marginalisation," said Yeo.

The eBario project was started by the local university in 1998 to provide computers and the Internet to the remote and isolated highland community in Bario.

The project has had a considerable impact not only on the residents but also on the development of Government policies to provide similar facilities for the rest of rural Malaysia.

In 2002, the eBario facilities were handed over to the people of Bario and eBario Sdn Bhd was established as a vehicle to continue its operations and management.

The eBario telecentre was meant to provide communication technology for Bario to reach out to the world.

Under a new policy by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), other communities in Malaysia, especially isolated kampungs and ethnic groups that are starved of information, are assured of enjoying similar benefits.

Under this policy, MCMC granted the licence for the first community radio station to be operated as Bario Radio.