



FELDA Chini

A Connected Community

Rural communities are being empowered by the setting up of Community Broadband Centres. Md Rusli has the story of how one such community is being introduced to the possibilities of a connected world.

About 86 km from Kuantan on the way to beautiful Tasik (Lake) Chini, Malaysia's second largest freshwater lake on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia, is a Community Broadband Centre (CBC) or Pusat Jalur Lebar Komuniti (PJK). This CBC serves a 22,800 strong community of mostly smallholder oil palm growers in the Federal Land Development Authority's (FELDA) cluster of development schemes in Chini, Pekan, Pahang.

Located in the village of FELDA Chini 1, the centre established in January 2009 also serves settlers in Chini 1 and those in the neighbouring Chini 2, 3, 4 and 5, Chini Timur 1, Timur 2, Timur 3 schemes, as well as outsiders.

The air-conditioned centre which is open from 9am to 6pm, seven days a week has two rooms, with nine networked PCs each and a 3 Mbps fibre connection to the Internet provided by Telekom Malaysia (TM) and WiFi access for those who bring their own notebook. Telekom Malaysia also pays for the electricity and water bills, and Internet access charges.

Centre manager Wan Safie bin Wan Omar and his assistant manager Mohd. Redzuan bin Abu Ghaffar each take different sets of two rest days during the week but are there in full force during the weekends.

The centre charges non-members RM1.50 per hour for use of the PCs, while members who pay a one-time fee of RM5 for life get two hours free usage per day for the first three months, after which they pay RM1 per hour. The system monitors their logon time and automatically logs them off after the free two hour limit, after which they pay to log on again if they need to.

Casual users usually stop after two hours, while students doing their research assignments and others using the PCs for business or other work usually extend the usage.

More PCs needed

Still demand is overwhelming and Ahmad Hamidi, the Tok Empat or village chief of FELDA Chini 1, himself also an oil palm grower, feels there is a need for more PCs to meet the demand.

"The centre is great as it provides settlers with an opportunity to benefit from the use of information and communications technology and it's a great convenience for them. While the children can learn about ICT and primary and secondary school students can use this facility to obtain information, to conduct research, their parents can come in to gain knowledge and most parents are delighted to have this ICT facility here," said Ahmad Hamidi.

"However, there aren't enough PCs to meet the demand and I hope there could be more," the village chief added.

The first room is for people to use to access the Internet, write letters, create spreadsheets, presentation slides and so on using Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox and Microsoft Office 2007 on the PCs running Windows XP. It also has a networked colour and black and white laser printer, document binding and laminating equipment for public use.

The centre charges 20 sen for each black and white print-out and RM1 per colour print-out plus other fees for binding and lamination.

The second room is used to conduct training about PCs and their use, though when there are no training sessions, it is also available for those who want to surf the Web or do other work when PCs in the first room are all occupied and it often fills up quickly too.



People accessing the Internet in the FELDA Chini 1 Community Broadband Centre

Rather interestingly, the language used on the PCs and applications is English. Even though few settlers, who are all ethnic Malay and not that fluent in English they are more comfortable with using English on the PCs since they find Bahasa Malaysia translations by the software more difficult to understand, according to Wan Safie.

“Most Web surfers use the PCs to access social networking sites such as mySpace and Friendster, use Yahoo! Messenger to chat and to read the online editions of the Berita Harian, Metro and Kosmo newspapers,” he said.

Secondary school students use electronic-learning websites such as Guru.Net.My for trial examinations, Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations for their school work. They also use the Internet to do their school assignments, while diploma students use the Internet to conduct research, and school leavers use them to find a job.

Primary school students access electronic-learning sites such as Edufunclub.com and CyberMelayu.com. Small business owners use Microsoft Word to create price lists for their produce, while senior citizens use the PCs to chat online with their children in other states.

While most people in the FELDA Chini schemes are oil palm growers, there are small business owners, teachers and Government clinic nurses there.

However most cannot do Internet banking because they need to obtain a PIN from their bank in Kuantan, some of which give them only two hours to activate it and by the time they get back to Chini, a journey of about one hour, the PIN has already expired.

As most of the settlers have no PCs in their homes, the training centre conducts training to familiarise them in the functions of different parts of the PCs, how to use the

Internet to obtain knowledge and information, how to use e-mail and how to use office applications.

“Whilst most primary school children start without even knowing how to use a mouse, they soon become very adept at electronic-learning and at playing online games,” Wan Safie added.

To resettle the landless poor

FELDA was established on 1 July 1956, just over a year before Malaysia’s independence, with the mission to carry out and implement development projects.

One of its objectives was to resettle the landless poor and provide them with opportunities and today 813,313 hectares of land are under FELDA and 530,000 persons benefited from it. Its new generation programmes include skills training for youth up to diploma level.

It also implements activities which can help modernise the agricultural sector in areas where FELDA has administrative authority, especially in activities related to the production, processing and the marketing of agriculture and livestock product, as well as to assist, guide, advise, manage and coordinate social, settlement, agriculture, industrial and commercial activities in FELDA areas.

Since April 2004, FELDA was placed under the Prime Minister’s Department and the minister responsible for it is Y.A.B. Dato’ Sri Mohd Najib Tun Haji Abdul Razak, Malaysia’s Prime Minister, whose father, Tun Haji Abdul Razak (Malaysia’s second Prime Minister) conceived the idea of FELDA.

Connecting communities

Community Broadband Centres such as the one at FELDA Chini 1 are the result of the Connected Communities

approach under the Universal Service Provision (USP) Broadband Community project initiated by SKMM, with the aim to provide collective access to broadband services for rural and remote communities living in the rural or underserved areas, which most privatised telecommunications service providers find not profitable to provide service to.

Compared to urban dwellers who can almost take the availability of telephones, computers and broadband Internet access for granted, people living in rural and remote areas lack such information and communications technology (ICT) facilities, services, and applications resulting in there being a digital divide between the ICT “haves” in the urban areas and the ICT “have-nots” in the rural areas, in terms of their access to telephones, computers, Internet and related services.

The main goal of the Connected Communities project is to have Community Broadband Centres (CBC) and Community Broadband Libraries (CBL) in rural and remote areas.

In addition, the Connected Communities project also includes providing individual broadband access to the households within the community of the rural areas with the aim to increase broadband penetration rate per household in accordance with the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

These will ensure that communities living in underserved areas are connected to mainstream ICT development to enable and empower them and bring about socio-economic development for these communities in the various sectors such as agriculture, education, health, business, amongst others.

The Connected Community approach will enable the communities to access new knowledge and information

that can be incorporated into their local knowledge and context, such as, provisions of information on employment opportunities, educational resources, government services (for example, providing links to e-Government, e-Learning, e-Commerce, e-Health, e-Agriculture, etc.) and technical information on agriculture for their daily lives, such as information on new varieties, planting techniques, and disease prevention.

The CBC initiative was developed by SKMM to develop and to implement a collaborative programme that has a positive social and economic impact to the community in terms of human capital development and capacity building through dissemination of knowledge via communications services.

It also provides the platform to raise awareness, enable the promotion, marketing and point-of-sales for individual broadband access service.

The facilities provided for the CBC project may also be used as training centres for local people to learn computer and ICT skills, to provide access to distance education, employment opportunities, human resource training and business ventures amongst others.

So that the CBCs can realise their full functionality in terms of building capacity whilst taking advantage of the socio-economic impact of the communities, several enhanced features have been incorporated into these centres to achieve their goals. These are :-

- a) The CBC as e-transaction centre where it supports various applications for e-Government, e-Learning, e-Commerce, employment opportunities, online banking transaction and so on;
- b) In lifelong learning, the CBC will function as a learning

Not enough PCs says Ahmad Hamidi - the Tok Empat or Village Chief of FELDA Chini 1



academy, which is owned and operated by the community, where multiple capacity building activities and enrichment training programmes can take place, and also continuously promote and raise awareness for education;

- c) In social networking, the CBC will enable social collaboration with other connected community within the ecosystem, provide opportunities to learn about services and techniques used in other e-communities, which are then adapted for use in one's own centre;
- d) To enable the monitoring and evaluation of e-community activities and the sharing of lessons learned across e-community centres and across networks;
- e) To enable advocacy and policy related activities to support the growth of the connected community movement;
- f) The CBCs will enable value creation through access to knowledge and information which include the development of local content such as Internet portal applications, the creation of digital opportunities through ubiquitous, affordable, equitable, and quality access to ICT, research and documentation, as well as a repository for education materials;
- g) The CBCs will also serve as a catalyst to moot broadband access service adoption in USP target areas and enable the promotional, awareness, and marketing activities for individual broadband subscription by the designated universal service providers.

On 8 May 2009, SKMM issued an invitation to interested parties to register their interest in becoming universal service providers of the Connected Community project.

SKMM wants to deploy CBCs in FELDA settlements throughout Malaysia and the SKMM hopes that through Connected Communities project, it will be able to synergise its objectives with those of FELDA. It also hopes the community will benefit from the provision of broadband within the 1Malaysia concept.

The current Prime Minister who introduced the 1Malaysia concept wrote in his blog which is found at www.1malaysia.com.my:-

1Malaysia is intended to provide a free and open forum to discuss the things that matter deeply to us as a Nation. It provides a chance to express and explore the many perspectives of our fellow citizens. What makes Malaysia unique is the diversity of our peoples. 1Malaysia's goal is to preserve and enhance this unity in diversity which has always been our strength and remains our best hope for the future. I hope this Website will initiate an open and vital dialogue exploring our Malaysian identity, purpose, and direction. I encourage each of you to join me in defining our Malaysia and the role we must play in its future. Each of us — despite our differences — shares a desire for a better tomorrow. Each of us wants opportunity, respect, friendship, and understanding.

As such, SKMM wants the Connected Communities project to provide benefits for Malaysia's various ethnic communities, including the Malays, Chinese, Indians, indigenous and others.

FELDA Chini 1 is one example of a CBC which has already been implemented.

However, while the CBCs enable community members to appreciate the value of Broadband Internet, it is still not enough until they start to use broadband for the fulfilment

■ The classroom is used to accommodate excess demand for Internet access at FELDA Chini 1 Community Broadband Centre when not used for training





Users working on own notebooks with WiFi connection at FELDA Chini 1 Community Broadband Centre

of their daily routines such as to market their produce, their handicraft or to create websites such as the Chini 1 website <http://chini1.pjk.com.my> and in the Malaysia spirit of “People first, Performance now,” the supervisors’ key performance indicators (KPIs) will be based on how well they achieve these objectives.

MSD Technology Sdn Bhd, a training service provider which specialises in community-based development was contracted by Telekom Malaysia Berhad (TM) to manage all of the CBCs which were awarded to the latter by SKMM. The pilot CBC projects which were tasked to TM comprised 12 CBCs in 2007 and the project was further expanded to include new 73 CBCs under the first phase of expansion in 2008 including FELDA Chini 1. The second phase of expansion followed suit later in Q1 2009 comprising new 89 CBCs with the involvement of other USP operators such as Celcom, DiGi and Maxis.

One of the key challenges in implementing the CBC lies in the operational management which tantamount to its effectiveness. Previous experiences from other telecentres have demonstrated for instance, in the absence of proper and scheduled operational handling, the PCs will end up being left idle after a while.

As such, specific development programmes have to cater for the training of supervisors (or train-the-trainer) to implement programmes for different groups within the community’s user-bases and their different types of content requirement. For instance, programmes for children to create their own websites using currently available

applications as well as usage of core applications such as electronic government, in making applications to local universities, how to use the Lelong.com, e-Perolehan and e-Commerce sites.

In addition, the children can use the PCs for their folios, to do their homework, play games – which is the easiest to get them to do on PCs.

As for the senior citizens, it takes more time for them to use the facilities, since they are quite resistant to change. Senior citizens in rural areas tend to describe use of the Internet as ‘main Internet’ in Malay, which means to play the Internet, and one of the option to bring them onboard is by getting them to read newspapers online. The CBC subscribes to online newspapers available through Streamyx, TM’s ADSL service, which users can read for free.

In summary, there is no limit in terms of creativity and innovativeness in pushing the community to acquire basic ICT skills rather the CBC (or telecentre) provides the ideal platform to validate novel approach in training people on desktop publishing and other computer skills in response to the communities’ needs and expectations. my

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