



Case Study II

ICT and the Orang Asli in Malaysia

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Orang Asli means the “Original People” in the Malay language. Nowadays, they are classified into three large groups: Senoi, Negrito and proto-Melayu, which further break down into various tribes. Although many still live in the rural areas, some youth have been fortunate enough to venture life in the city by pursuing higher education or seeking employment. A few information technology undergraduates from the Orang Asli community of Malaysia were interviewed via e-mail on the subject of information and communication technology (ICT) among the local indigenous peoples.

Senyeorita, Rubycca, Jeneta, Zue and Khairol were all born in Peninsular Malaysia. They came from different Orang Asli tribes, namely the Semelai, Temuan and Semai. The culture, lifestyle and beliefs of their communities had an impact in shaping their identities. Seneyorita described the Orang Asli people

as shy due to limited exposure to the outside world. As for Khairol, having lived near the forests surrounded by nature, the Semelai culture had shaped him to appreciate nature which gave him a feeling of harmony.

The Orang Asli in Malaysia are socio-economically and culturally marginalised, although most respondents felt that the development of indigenous peoples in Malaysia was fairly good considering Malaysia is one of the developing countries. Besides the digital divide, there are other issues which have led to an erosion of their cultural identity. The respondents stated that the land problem was one of the issues faced by the Orang Asli. Other major problems include the poor education system, health, poverty, sanitation and clean water supply. According to Khairol, some conservative Orang Asli were unwilling to accept development and disregard the significance of education for the younger generation. A high dropout rate also contributes to low participation in education among the Orang Asli children (Mokshein, 2004).

With regard to the digital divide, Jeneta explained that besides being computer illiterate, the high cost of computer gadgets were among the technological issues faced by the Orang Asli. Rubycca also commented that it was impossible for the people to use the latest technology, as some of the villages do not even have basic necessities, including power supply and education. Khairol, Senyeorita and Zue agreed that the lack of exposure to ICT among the people could contribute to the wider technology gap.

ICT is a growing industry in Malaysia. Over the years, the industry has provided employment opportunities for its citizens, which also explicitly explains the increasing number of higher institutions offering ICT-related courses to encourage more students into this stream. While Zue, Senyeorita and Rubycca got involved in ICT because courses were offered at the university, Khairol and Jeneta chose ICT for other reasons. Jeneta was encouraged by her family and friends to get involved in ICT. Khairol was inspired by the rapid growth of technology globally, and he believed that ICT plays an important role in every aspect of life. In response to the opportunities offered by ICT to further the goals and interests of the Orang Asli community, the IT undergraduates were confident that it would improve the quality of life, knowledge and work performance of their people. ICT will also help to bridge the gap in education and economic status between Orang Asli and other ethnic races.

None of the respondents thought that ICT would pose a threat to their community. In fact, they were positive about the Orang Asli willingness to accept new technologies. However, Zue emphasized that the acceptance of technologies among the people without seeing it as a threat was greatly dependent on their exposure and the way technology was presented to them. Khairol said that some Orang Asli from the Semelai tribe were still unwilling to accept advancement in their lives because they assumed that it will threaten the chastity of Semelai

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