

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Dear esteemed members,

It is with great pleasure that I provide you with updates on our Institute's recent happenings and activities undertaken for the past three months.

First of all, with the support and invaluable input from our Chairman, the secretariat has been diligently working on further refining the transformation plan for the Institute. We are currently in the finalization stages, and will be briefing the State Secretary soon. This transformation plan represents a crucial step in shaping the future of our Institute, and I look forward to share more details with everyone soon. We are also in the midst of preparing proposals for projects collaborations with the Ministry of Energy and Environmental Sustainability and also the Social Development and Performance Management Division, Economic Planning Unit, Sarawak.

In this volume, I am delighted to share with you an enlightening opinion piece by our member, Associate Professor Dr. Tariq Zaman, Head of the Advanced Centre for Sustainable Socio-Economic and Technological Development (ASSET), University of Technology Sarawak (UTS), on the digital connectivity statistics in Malaysia. In his piece, he sheds light on looking beyond the statistics reported in government reports. His insights are much welcomed amidst the continuing efforts to provide a meaningful connectivity for the community in Sarawak. We look forward to receiving more knowledge-sharing contributions from you all.

We are also pleased to share on some of the talks organised and updates on the on-going research in the Institute. I also wish to inform that we are carrying out a brief survey with members to gather feedback that could help enhance members' participation in the Institute. We look forward to hear from all of you.

Thank you for the continuous support and happy reading.

Lelia Sim
SDI

BRIEF SURVEY

SDI is on a journey to set a new course for the Institute, ensuring that it continues to play a valuable role in the development of the state while remaining aligned with its development agenda.

Therefore, we will be very grateful if you can respond to this short survey which aims to compile members' preferences and suggestions/opinions on being a part of the important and valuable resources of the Institute to achieve its vision and mission.

Survey link: <https://forms.gle/wyY8P3GbsJrqbn8T6>

NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Message from the CEO
- Feature: Numbers don't lie..or do they?
- Past Events
- Do you know? - ART Latest Update
- On-going Research
- Courtesy Visit from British High Commission Kuala Lumpur

Numbers don't lie...or do they?



By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tariq Zaman
School of Computing and Creative Media
University of Technology Sarawak (UTS)

As per MCMC data, Malaysia boasts a fixed-broadband penetration rate of 41.4%, while mobile broadband exceeds 128.2%^[1]. Mobile broadband data suggests that all Malaysians have access to mobile broadband, with a segment of the population using multiple mobile broadband services. However, this optimistic view of broadband penetration contrasts starkly with the reality of complaints from rural areas, where 40% of Sarawak's population resides. These complaints range from individuals climbing trees in search of better internet connections to trekking into the hills for improved reception. To address these challenges, the government announced the National Digital Network Plan which targets 100% of 4G coverage (populated area) by the end of 2025. According to JENDELA Q2 2022 report, the current 4G coverage is 96.9% (populated area). However, as acknowledged by the government^{[2], [3]}, local communities, especially in rural areas, are still facing lack of sustainable and meaningful internet connectivity, and the disparities between the official figures and user's experience contribute to the public's lack of trust on figures provided by the telecom regulators.

For all its fascination, the government reports and claims left questions which we (the consumers) most frequently ask ourselves. If all these statistics are accurate, why do individuals in Sarawak and Malaysia resort to climbing trees to access the internet? Do these reports and studies accurately reflect the situation, or do they reveal deeper structural inequalities concealed by macro-statistics?

In this article, I reflect on the situation and elaborate the challenges for digital inclusion faced by the rural communities of Sarawak which are threefold;

This is not the case of Malaysia alone. During a Panel discussion in the Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum (APriGF) 2022^[4], a participant highlighted the GSMA 2022 report which claimed that almost 96% of the population in Asia Pacific is covered by mobile broadband networks. In response, the panelists questioned the authenticity of the figure and counted it as "overestimated" due to the prevailing challenges of "unconnected" and "disconnected" population in Asia Pacific. These longstanding issues were also highlighted in the SDI Brown Bag Talk^[5] and gained heightened attention following recent media reports detailing the statement made by the Minister of MCMC, particularly highlighting the concerning matters surrounding the erection of naked towers^[6].



[1] https://www.mcmc.gov.my/skmmgovmy/media/General/C-M-Q4_220331_BI_PDF_1.pdf

[2] <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/02/770369/sabah-still-needs-wait-another-20-years-enjoy-smooth-internet-access-says>

[3] <https://www.theborneopost.com/2022/10/23/sarawak-can-only-achieve-full-internet-coverage-by-2030-says-julaihi/>

[4] Connecting the Unconnected - Efforts from Private Sector and Policy Lessons from the APAC <https://forms.for.asia/proposal/?proposalform=NjJlNzRiODFiNWNIOS8vNS8vNTU0L y8w>

[5] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XueiWW4SdiQ>

[6] <https://soyacincau.com/2023/05/22/why-sarawak-has-nearly-500-naked-telco-towers/>



AMBIGUITY IN DEFINING TARGETS:

Regulators like MCMC and GSMA rely on reports from telecommunication companies, which only provide insights into digital connectivity in "populated areas." However, as we progress to the second and third stages of reference or mass media, the term "populated area" disappears, and the digital connectivity figures are generalized for the entire state of Sarawak or Malaysia^[7]. Furthermore, the definition of a "populated area" is absent from any publicly accessible document. In our interviews with regulators and government bodies, we discovered that even within the regulatory framework, the term lacks standardization and varies based on different criteria for the states of East and West Malaysia.

INADEQUATE STANDARDS:

MCMC assesses the performance of telecommunication operators using Quality of Standards (QoS) indicators for internet speed in the wireless broadband communication medium. The quality of wireless broadband speed for 2G, 3G, and 4G is measured primarily in terms of download speed, with upload speed often omitted. Telecommunication companies typically promote their products based on internet speed (e.g., 30 Mbps) without specific reference to upload and download speeds^[8]. Consequently, current internet packages cater to consumers who primarily use the internet for activities like "watching YouTube," but they may not meet the requirements for online schooling or eHealth, where users demand stable and the minimum required for both the upload and download speeds.

LACK OF MONITORING MECHANISM:

Sarawak made a significant stride as the first state to endorse JENDELA's plan, recognizing telecommunication as a public utility^[9]. This led to state-wide digital infrastructure initiatives like SMA-300. However, beyond the implementation phase, several crucial questions remain unanswered. These include inquiries about who will maintain the services, how consumers can report issues regarding service availability and quality, especially in villages where only one operator's channel is accessible. These questions await resolutions.

[7] https://www.mcmc.gov.my/skmmgovmy/media/General/pdf2/1Q-2022_C-M_220704_BI.pdf

[8] <https://mysr.bn.doxapps.com/registration/package?lat=>

[9] <https://www.pressreader.com/malaysia/the-star-malaysia-star2/20210719/281573768710544>

PAST EVENTS



SDI PUBLIC TALK: A GLOBAL SOUTH PERSPECTIVE ON DIGITAL INCLUSION AND RESILIENCE

24th JULY 2023 | AZAM CONFERENCE ROOM



The talk was delivered by Prof. Heike Winschiers-Theophilus from Namibia University of Technology, Namibia where she talked about the South-south cooperation effort in response to the Covid-19 crisis. She shared that these collective responses are evident in the areas of well-being collaboration, technology opportunity recognition, innovation inclusion and education diversity. She also elaborated on the collaboration to support physical, psychological, social, emotional, and economic well-being, and the opportunity to be included in the technology innovation.

Prof. Heike shared some examples on the usage of technology to improve the classroom environment such as music mirrors, arithmetic games, live streaming using holograms, and the creation of a virtual living museum tour. She also opined that the Penan tribe in Long Lamai, Sarawak and the community in Donkerbos, Namibia are similar, and therefore, the opportunity to learn from each other is vast in the area of technology design. She also emphasized the need for the South countries to be included in the design of technology.



SDI PUBLIC TALK: TECHNOLOGIES, TOOLS, AND TECHNIQUES FOR ONLINE DESIGN BASED ACTIVITIES WITH CHILDREN

25th JULY 2023 | AUDITORIUM, IPG BATU LINTANG



The public talk was held in collaboration with University of Technology Sarawak and *Institut Perguruan* Batu Lintang on the usage of technology to facilitate children's learning. The speakers were Dr. Naska Gaogoses from Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg, Germany, Prof. Heike Winschiers-Theopilus from the Namibia University of Technology, Namibia and Associate Professor Dr. Tariq Zaman from UTS.

The speakers shared on their personal projects and collaborations that revolve around co-designing technology learning platform with children. Prof. Heike provided the introduction where she stressed on the importance of inclusivity and how end-users are usually not consulted in the creation of technology that they use, especially during the design stage. She emphasized how important participatory design is for children particularly those from developing South countries.

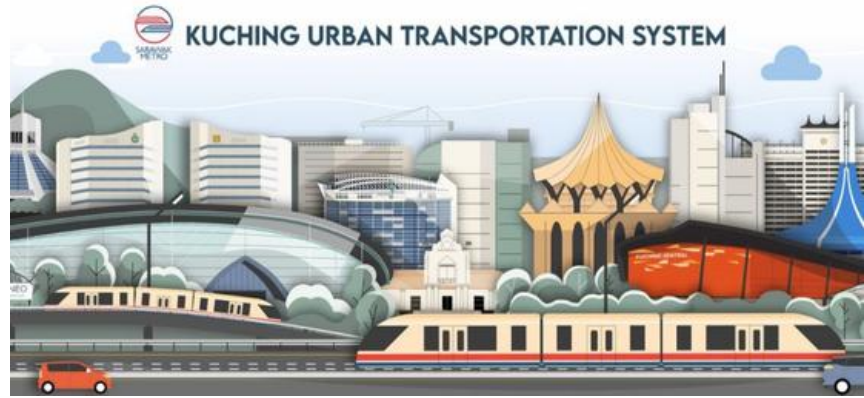
The talk continued with Dr. Naska and Dr. Tariq taking turns to share their collaboration project involving children from Namibia, Malaysia, and Finland. The children co-designed an online interactive learning space to interact with their peers from around the world. Dr. Tariq also shared with the audience on an upcoming 18th Participatory Design Conference which will be happening on 12-14 August 2024 in Sibiu. The talk was attended by more than 350 participants from the IPG Batu Lintang comprising students and lecturers, from government departments, the private sector, universities and colleges, and members of the public.





SDI PUBLIC TALK: AN UPDATE ON KUCHING URBAN TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM (KUTS)

28th JULY 2023 | VIA ZOOM APPLICATION



Ts. Mazli Bin Mustafa, Chief Executive Officer of Sarawak Metro provided an update on the Phase 1 of the KUTS project that was launched last December and informed that the advanced construction works for the ART Depot at Rembus, Samarahan is progressing well. Various community engagement activities such as promotion and marketing on the ART project were also organized at the local universities and schools, not only in Sarawak but in West Malaysia as well. He also informed that following the success of the prototype trial in Suzhou, China, the prototype would be arriving in Kuching in August for a tryout period. The talk was conducted via zoom and on SDI's live Facebook, and was attended by more than 250 participants from the government and private sectors, universities and colleges, and the public.

Recording of the talk is available here: <https://sdi.com.my/events/past-events/>



BRIEFING ON PCDS 2030 FOR COUNCILLORS

1st SEPTEMBER 2023 | PENVIEW CONVENTION CENTRE (PCC), DEMAK



The Briefing on PCDS 2030 for Councillors was held on 1st September 2023 at PCC, Demak by the Ministry of Public Health, Housing, and Local Government, Sarawak in collaboration with SDI. The aim of the briefing was to provide councillors with an overview and a deeper understanding of the focus areas and initiatives under PCDS 2030.

YB Dato Sri Prof. Dr. Sim Kui Hian, Deputy Premier and Minister for Public Health, Housing, and Local Government officiated the closing of the event, which was also attended by YB Datuk Dr. Penguang Manggil, Deputy Minister for Public Health and Housing, YB Encik Michael Tiang Ming Tee, Deputy Minister for Local Government.



The briefing featured three speakers namely Ms. Mildred Voon from Economic Planning Unit Sarawak, who presented an Overview of the PCDS 2030; Dr. Kho Lip Khoo from the Ministry of Energy and Environmental Sustainability Sarawak, who spoke on the Environmental Sustainability Pillar; and Dr. Zufar Yadi Brendan Bin Abdullah from the Sarawak Social Development Council, Ministry of Women, Early Childhood and Community Wellbeing Development, who gave an overview on the social inclusivity pillar.



The briefing was viewed positively by most councillors, providing them with much needed information on the PCDS 2030.



DO YOU KNOW?

ART

LATEST UPDATE



The **Kuching Urban Transportation System (KUTS)** is an **autonomous rapid transit (ART)** system network in Kuching which is still under construction. The ART smart tram has been named '**Bulan**' by the Premier of Sarawak, which was the name of one of the three locomotives used in the Sarawak's old railway line from 1915 until 1946. It is the first metro rail system to be built in the state of Sarawak and is touted as one of the methods to ease traffic congestion in the city of Kuching.

SPECIFICATIONS ON THE KUCHING AUTONOMOUS RAIL TRANSIT (ART)

- The Prototype ART vehicle measures **30.2 metres in length, 2.65 metres in width and 3.7 metres in height.**
- It can reach **speeds of up to 70 km/h**
- It will be able to accommodate **300 passengers.**
- It is a **hydrogen fuel cell-powered trackless vehicle**

THE KUTS ROUTES

• RED LINE

Begins at **Kuching Sentral** and ends at **Pending**

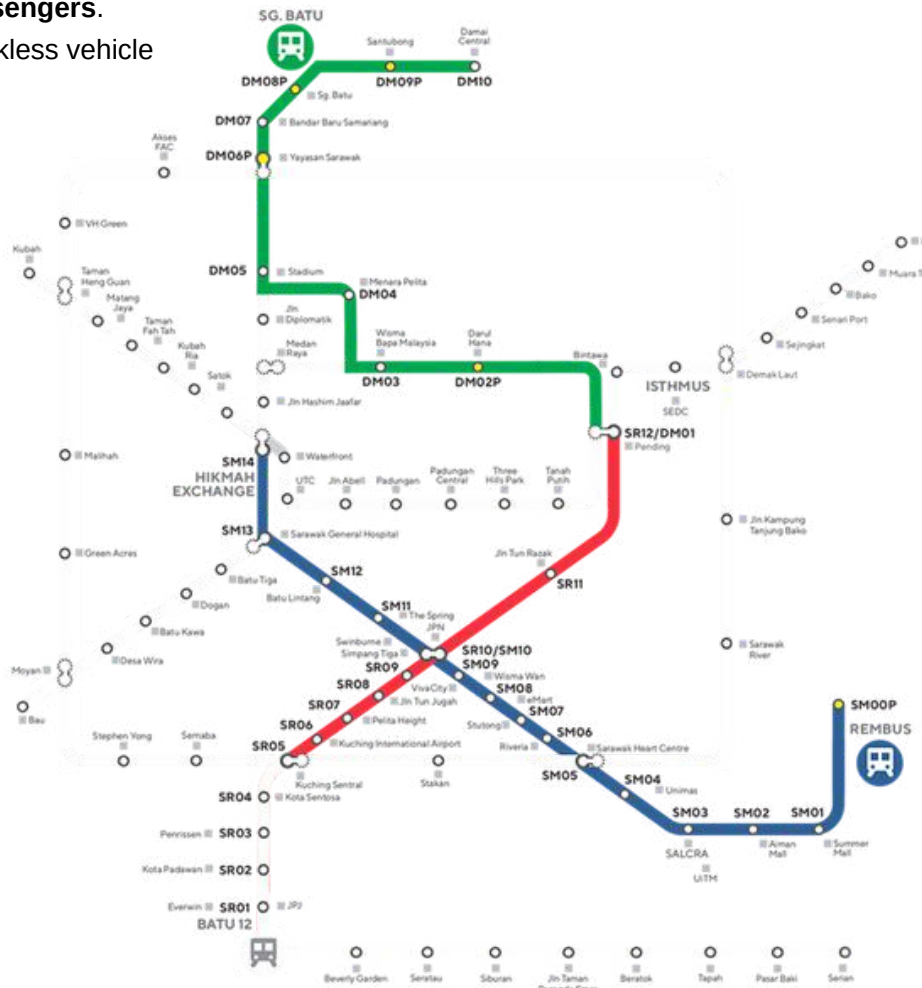
• BLUE LINE

Begins at **Rembus, Kota Samarahan** and ends at **Hikmah Exchange**

• GREEN LINE

Begins at **Pending** and ends at **Damai Central**

- It is understood that 90% of the Blue and Red lines will be at grade with barriers to separate the ART from other traffic. Elevated lanes will be build where there are space constraints especially in the city area. The details for the Green Line is still at the detail draw stage, but is expected to be at grade as well except at river crossings.



FIRST PHASE OF KUTS

- The first phase is the development of **two lines**, namely the **Samarahan Line (Blue Line)**, which covers a distance of about 28km from Rembus to the city centre with 14 stations and the **Serian Line (Red Line)** (24km) from the 12th Mile Kuching-Serian Expressway to the Kuching Isthmus.
- This phase is scheduled to be completed by 2027.

Source from:

1. <https://www.mysarawakmetro.com/kuts>
2. <https://kuchingborneo.info/sarawak-art-project/>
3. <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2023/08/05/sarawak-closer-to-public-transport-transformation-with-arrival-of-art-prototype/>
4. <https://www.newsarawaktribune.com.my/autonomous-rail-rapid-transit-art/>
5. <https://dayakdaily.com/lets-save-repurpose-our-fascinating-railway-heritage-urges-ngq/>



MASTERPLAN FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE RESETTLEMENT AREAS 2050



The study is still ongoing. As part of the study team in charge of the socio-economic section on Batang Ai and Bengoh Resettlement Schemes, SDI submitted the Interim Report 2 in September 2023 to Chemsain Konsultant Sdn. Bhd, the main consultant for the project. This report presents a comprehensive analysis of the demographic and socio-economic profile of the study areas. The overall Interim Report 2 has been submitted to the Economic Planning Unit, Sarawak. The study team will next proceed to draft the development plan for all the study areas.



CULTURAL RESOURCE MAPPING



The Cultural Resource Mapping project is a project that aims to inventorise and document all the significant tangible and intangible cultural heritage present in the Kuching Division. It is powered by a web-based digital platform called the Crowd-sourced Heritage Automation Mapping Platform for Sarawak (CHAMPS). Entries into CHAMPS will be crowd-sourced from the public, culture and heritage organisations as well as participating heritage experts. The digital platform is heading to its final stages of development, with back end and front end development nearing its end. Software testing is also being conducted, as well as marketing planning, which is crucial for post release engagement via social media and roadshows. Launch of CHAMPS is expected during the fourth quarter of 2023.



PUBLICATION ON SARAWAK CIVIL SERVICE - ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT: REFLECTIONS AND REMINISCENCES OVER 60 YEARS

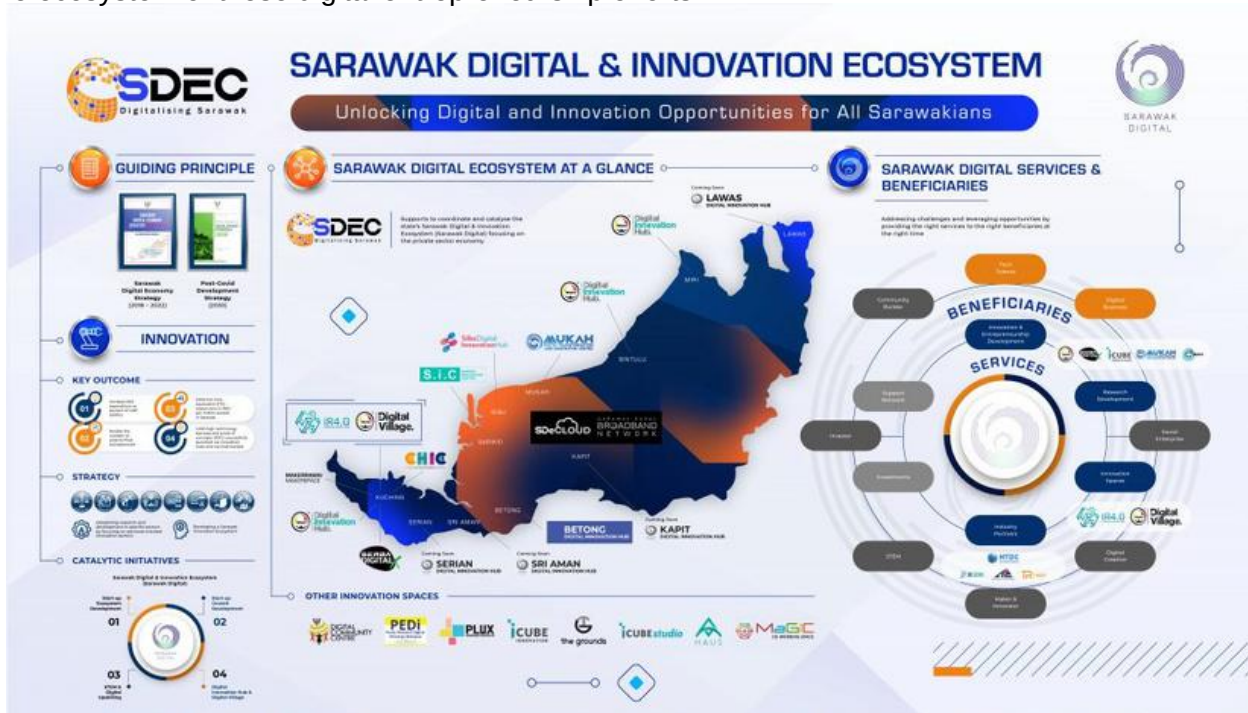
This book project aims to compile the reflections and reminiscences of civil servants in the Sarawak Government. It is aimed at preserving these experiences, reflections and reminiscences for posterity and to inspire the younger generation of civil servants. The title of the publication has been finalized by the Project Committee as above after examining the first draft content of the publication from the interviews that have been conducted. It is researched and written by Faradale Media-M Sdn Bhd. There is a delay in the scheduled publication due to issues faced with the scheduled interviews and the unavailability of interviewees. The publication is now expected to be out in December 2023.



MAPPING THE ECOSYSTEM OF SARAWAK'S DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP INITIATIVES

This project, initiated by UTS and in collaboration with the Institute, aims to map out the digital entrepreneurship initiatives run both in Sarawak to understand the digital entrepreneurial support ecosystem, and to examine the coverage, opportunities and efficacy of these initiatives.

Due to state-level digital economy aspirations, governmental departments and agencies across ministries (both State and Federal) in Sarawak have funded various digitalisation efforts, with digital entrepreneurship being one of the primary foci. The government encourages Sarawakian businesses to move online by putting in place digital economy policies, establishing market platforms, fostering entrepreneurship culture, developing human capital, providing support and infrastructure, and creating access to financing. To date, there has not been a consolidated approach in mapping the ecosystem of these digital entrepreneurship efforts.



COURTESY VISIT FROM BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION KUALA LUMPUR



The secretariat received a visit from the British High Commission Kuala Lumpur on 15th September 2023, represented by the Political Counsellor, Mr. Tom Shepherd and the Economic Adviser, Ms. Adelene Teo. During the exchange with them, SDI shared its insights on development in Sarawak and state policies, particularly our plan to advance the Post-Covid Development Strategy 2030 (PCDS 2030). The visit also explored avenues for future collaborations especially in socio-economic research.