Community-Led Research as Service Learning

Dr. Roger Harris,
Visiting Professor, Institute of Social Informatics and Technological Innovations, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (ISITI-UNIMAS)

Dr. Shorna B. Allred,
Associate Professor and Associate Director, Human Dimensions Research Unit, Department of Natural Resources, Cornell University

Introduction

• **ISITI-UNIMAS** has been researching the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by remote communities in the Heart of Borneo for 17 years.

• **Cornell’s Public Service Center** has been engaging students, alumni and faculty with communities since 1991.

• **Cornell’s Department of Natural Resources** creates knowledge and facilitates learning to improve society’s stewardship of the environment and promote a conservation ethos for a sustainable planet.

• **Cornell’s Global Citizenship and Sustainability Program** works to learn and take action collaboratively in addressing issues relating to climate change. It fosters engaged research, cross-cultural learning experiences, student leadership and social responsibility.
Community Resilience

**Drivers of Change**
- Tourism
- Education
- Modernization
- Indigenized development
- Energy development
- Migration: in & out
- Modern agriculture
- ICTs

**Dimensions of Resilience**
- History
- Memory
- Social capital
- Resource robustness
- Community competences
- Economic development
- Energy development
- Adaptive capacities
- Religion
- ICTs

**Threats**
- Brain drain
- Natural disasters
- Waste management
- Loss of traditional knowledge
- Orthodox development: dams, plantations
- Water availability
- Climate change
- Deforestation
- Language loss

---

**The Roots of Our Work**
- Community-Based Participatory Action Research
- Service-learning expertise
- CBR/PAR skills and experience
- Local knowledge
- Community resilience expertise
- ICTD expertise
- Relationships with the communities
- UNIMAS-Cornell partnership
- Cornell and UNIMAS students
- Human dimensions of natural resources expertise
How can community resilience be enhanced?
Student – Community Activities

1. Interviews
2. Workshops
3. Site visits
4. Cultural activities
5. Visual charting
6. Walking tours
7. Research projects
8. Feedback
9. Reflection
Long Lamai Research Projects

Information Technologies
• Access, use, sustainability, UNIMAS support, impact

Potable Water
• Dam and pipe maintenance, assistance (government, others), household delivery, rainwater harvesting.

Community-based Eco-tourism
• Carrying capacity, homestay standards, access, marketing, organisation, handicrafts, trails, culture.

Electricity
• Hydro efficiency, household delivery, demand & supply, solar alternatives.
• 4 teams were formed to investigate the root causes of the issues, document the history, and identify alternatives for future inquiry
  – Teams included both students and community members
Visual Chart of Long Lamai Community

Developed jointly by Long Lamai elders and UNIMAS and Cornell students, January 2016
Observations

- Earlier research and the pre-visit preparation identified many potential and valid topics for research, but when communities were facilitated towards their current concerns, a different set of topics emerged.

- Communities can be readily facilitated to voice their immediate requirements and concerns, provided appropriate approaches are adopted.

- Accordingly, the findings from the research projects, which were conducted together with residents, had immediate relevance for the communities.

- When results emerge from community-led research, tangible benefits become possible.

- That solutions should be relevant and practical for genuine benefits to emerge. Too often, externally-driven development interventions aren’t always like this.

- Students learn the right lesson when communities take the lead.
Outcomes

Students’ Digital Story