



Please check upon delivery

Closing Remarks

EC-UNDP SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMME FOR OPERATIONS TO PROMOTE TROPICAL FORESTS (SGP PTF) NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON SUSTAINABILITY

Richard Leete, Ph D
United Nations Resident Coordinator,
UNDP Resident Representative for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam, and
UNFPA Representative for Malaysia

15 December 2006
Miri, Sarawak

Yang Berhormat Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui, Minister of Plantation Industries and
Commodity,
His Excellency Thierry Rommel, EC (European Commission) Head of Delegation
to Malaysia,
Yang Berbahagia Professor Dato' Dr. Hood Salleh, Chairman of the National
Steering Committee for SGP-PTF,
Datu' Aloysius Dris, Chief Executive Officer of AZAM,
Distinguished Guests, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen,

Selamat petang dan salam sejahtera kepada semua para hadirin sekalian.

A warm welcome to all. It gives me great pleasure to once again be back here in Sarawak, this time to Miri.

Malaysia has achieved rapid developed progress, and for the first time this year, made the transition to high human development in UNDP's HDI league table. In 1970, about half of Malaysia's households were living below the national poverty line: in 1990 this figure had declined to 17 per cent and fell to 6 per cent in 2006.

Nevertheless, there are still 1.2 million people living in poverty. Poverty rates in Sarawak are relatively high with 7.5 percent of households living below the national poverty line and the rate is much higher in the rural areas of Sarawak. Large numbers of Sarawak's poor live on the margins of the forests, many of whom live through subsistence agriculture and who have little or no access to roads, electricity and safe running water.

Just a few months ago, UNDP, together with the Sabah State Government through the Sabah Forestry Department, launched a social forestry project in Mangkuwagu, in Tongod district of Sabah. UNDP was able to experience first hand the deprivation of this community, and the need for urgent measures to lift the community out of hardcore poverty.

Since 2004, UNDP Malaysia, in partnership with the EC and together with NRE and EPU, have been implementing a Small Grants Programme in Malaysia. While the PTF is a regional programme, through programme design and the leadership of the National Steering Committee, the PTF in Malaysia is specifically designed to target these pockets of extreme poverty.

This collaboration symbolises how the UNDP itself operates in many countries – in partnership and through alliances with the government, civil society organisations, and most importantly, the communities themselves in helping to improve lives and livelihoods.

PTF promotes sustainable community forestry, and aims to bring communities living in the margins of forests out of poverty.

PTF has disbursed twenty three grants in two years. The programme has given NGOs and community-based organizations the opportunity to implement innovative projects tailored specifically for indigenous communities.

In Sabah, for example, a Dusun community is replanting trees indigenous to the forest and selling the surplus to other projects and to the Sabah Forestry Department.

In Sarawak, the Penan of Long Belok are creating small vegetable gardens to ensure food security.

And a Jakun community in Pahang is creating a heritage park that will contain the plants they need for traditional medicine and handicrafts.

As partners in PTF, these grantees are supported by UNDP's Coordinating Office, not just to ensure successful implementation of the projects, but to ensure that these grantees continue to have the support and encouragement that they need.

Today's Workshop is evidence that these participants, most of whom are first time grantees, are able to grow from being project recipients to being full participants in the process of sustainable development.

I am glad to be able to bear witness to their growth and congratulate them on successfully planning for their own sustainability.

Thank you.