

# Planting entrepreneurial skills to uplift the poor

PETRONAS Foundation and its partners have rolled out an entrepreneurship programme, "Sentuhan Harapan - Planting Tomorrow" to tackle poverty.

It is aimed at harnessing the skills and improving the financial strength and livelihood of those in the B40 bracket.

More than 460 low-income families in Sabah and Terengganu have participated in the programme since it started in 2017.

And the results have been promising, with some gaining a three-fold increase in their household income.

The foundation's acting chief executive officer Lita Osman said the Planting Tomorrow programme was in support of the Government's efforts to alleviate poverty in Malaysia.

"It has delivered positive impact, increasing the household income of the poor and improving the local economy in several states."

The programme includes six months' training in financial management, product marketing, motivation and personal grooming.

Participants also received monthly food aid worth RM80 for a year through a partnership with non-profit organisation MyKasih Foundation, via its cashless payment system.

Petronas Foundation provided various amenities, including a water gravity-feed supply, homestay development, agricultural equipment and seeds to



Villagers carrying out gotong-royong to enhance their village and homestay environment. (Right) Justa is among those who benefited from Petronas Foundation's entrepreneurship programme.

help these communities cultivate a sustainable income.

In Sabah, for example, villagers who used to walk four hours to fetch water are now able to spend this time growing crops and on other productive enterprises after the installation of water gravity-feed supply.

Justa Dahlan, 32, from Pitas, Sabah, said: "We finally have water flowing into the village through the gravity-feed system. Before, we had to walk to the river three times a

day to fill up our bottles and buckets and carry them back to our homes."

Her sister, Ritah, said Planting Tomorrow opened her eyes to the benefits of working together.

"Previously, we used to work on our individual land. Now, we help each other and reap more profit. We also work faster together."

The sisters now earn between RM1,500 and RM3,300 a month, compared with their previous earnings of RM150 to RM500.

"Social progress is inclusive and



"As soon as I returned from one of the programme sessions, my daughter and I decided to rebrand our products from 'Kerepek Megi' to 'Keropok Megi Linda Homemade'. We applied what we learned from the programme to improve our product packaging to suit consumer preferences."

Haslinda also distributed her business cards to the surrounding areas, among other promotional efforts. Consequently demand for her products has increased, generating RM790 a month from between RM100 and RM200 previously.

Single mother of four, Wan Maznah Othman, is proud to have surpassed her own business targets. The 58-year-old runs a small kuih business that now includes frozen products.

"When I started the programme, I was only aiming to earn about RM1,000 a month but I am getting RM1,500 in the first six months!"

Homestay operator Haina Sapah, 33, said setting up the business was challenging initially.

"I had to come up with funds in addition to the provisions from Petronas to equip my house with the required facilities.

"But I enjoy running a homestay. It helps supplement our main income from palm oil.

"As long as Imbak Canyon is here, I think our homestay will thrive," said Haina, who has three children and is one of 22 registered operators of homestays in Kampung Imbak.

we are encouraged that more Malaysians will have a better quality of life through these programmes," said Lita.

She said Petronas Foundation planned to roll out the Planting Tomorrow programme across a few states in Malaysia this year targeting 600 in the B40 group, based on the success and impact of the programme so far.

Haslinda Abdullah, 38, started a snacks business about two years ago in Kuala Nerus, Terengganu.