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Eight goals to lift people's wellbeing

BY HARUN JAU

KUCHING: Sarawak is fully committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the Malaysian government, said Chief Minister Pehin Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud.

However, he said all the relevant stakeholders in both the public and private sectors would be required to collaborate to create synergised efforts to achieve the targets.

The MDGs were adopted by world leaders in 2000 and have become the shared global commitment for both local and global communities in eradicating poverty and improving the quality of life of the people by 2015.

The MDGs have set eight development targets to improve the social and economic conditions in different dimensions.

The goals are to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, to achieve universal primary education, to promote gender equality and empower women to reduce child mortality, to improve maternal health, to combat HIV/ AIDS, malaria and other diseases, to ensure environment sustainability and to develop 'Global Partnership for Development'.

"The state needs to ensure all Millennium Development Goals set are achieved in the next four years," said Taib, whose text of speech was read by Housing and Urban Development Minister Datuk Amar Abang Haji Johari Tun Openg at the launching of the seminar 'Malaysia: The Millennium Development Goals 2010' at Riverside Majestic Hotel here yesterday.

According to the Chief Minister, under the MDG 1, Malaysia achieved the target of halving the poverty rate.

Of significance, the poverty rate in Malaysia was reduced from 16.5 per cent in 1990 to 3.8 per cent in 2009. Sarawak has also registered a drastic drop in poverty rate from 21 per cent in 1990 to 5.3 per cent in 2009.

However, rural poverty remains the key challenge to the state, with a record of 8.4 per cent rural poor.

He revealed that under the MDG 2, 99 per cent of school children completed their primary education in 2009.

However, the dropout rate for rural schools is still significantly higher than that for urban schools.

In the case of Sarawak, he said the completion rates of school children at primary school level had improved and dropout rate fell from 5.2 per cent in 1999 to 2.1 per cent in 2009.

He added that while Malaysia successfully reduced poverty at national level, the rural-urban and regional gaps remained a challenge, particularly in Sarawak.

Furthermore, as the indigenous communities make up most of the poor population residing in the most remote and difficult-to-reach areas, they definitely require the full attention of the government.

"The e-Kasih database system for the poor, which was introduced in 2008, has helped to identify the poor and it is the duty of all of us to ensure that the information captured in the database is comprehensive and accurate," he said.

At the same time, he pointed out, various poverty eradication programmes such as 1AZAM (Akhir Zaman Miskin), Agropolitian and micro-credit facilities were already available and still ongoing.

Under these programmes, poor and low-income households are assisted through provision of job opportunities, and opportunities to start up small-scale home businesses or farming projects with focus on generating sustainable income for these households.

"For Sarawak to be successful in reducing the disparity, we need to fully enforce the implementation of these programmes and projects, and to reach out to the people," he said.

Under the Government Transformation Programme (GTP), the Chief Minister said improving the infrastructure in rural areas was also one of the agenda and hence, it was also a commitment for Sarawak to making sure that more roads were built and houses were supplied with electricity and clean water to fulfil the rural basic needs.

"By end of this year, it is estimated that 442.68 kilometres of accessible rural roads will be completed, 22,283 houses will be provided with electricity and 26,192 homes with clean piped water supply," he revealed.

Taib said accessibility to education

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would be the key to alleviate poverty among the rural poor and the way forward would be to ensure that all poor students from rural areas would be able to enjoy quality education and thereby reduce the disparity in performance between rural and urban students.

He said improving the accessibility to health care system, especially for the rural community, remained the key challenge to the government, and geographical isolation, sparsely populated rural areas and inaccessibility often caused delays in providing medical and health care services to the people.

The Chief Minister also disclosed that the state government was now implementing the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE) to propel Sarawak towards a high-income and advanced economy by 2020 through the establishment of high-tech industries and creation of high value jobs.

“SCORE is our major development initiative that will help to achieve the MDGs through the following objectives - to create new sources of wealth; to move the state’s economy up the value chain; to achieve higher per capita income; to enhance quality of life; to achieve bal-

anced regional development; and to eradicate poverty,” he said.



UNITED Nations’ Resident Coordinator Kamal Malhotra (left) presents a memento to Abang Johari after the launching of the seminar. PHOTO: T.H. LU