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Programme to give ex-offenders a second chance

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PUTRAJAYA: Former convicts, ex-drug addicts and people living with HIV will receive help to get them back on their feet when the Government expands the scope of its Akhiri Zaman Miskin (Azam) Tani programme starting next year.

Agriculture and Agro-based Industry deputy minister Datuk Chua Tee Yong said the Government has already started broadening its scope on focus groups to help single mothers and the disabled in addition to the poor and hardcore poor households.

"Starting next year, we will expand the focus groups to include former drug addicts and those released from jail.

"This is to help them get out of their old habits and reintegrate into society," he said, adding that the

number of people who will be receiving grants under the programme was yet to be decided.

The decision to include ex-convicts, former drug addicts and people living with HIV was made during the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) 2.0 lab, which ended late last May, as part of the implementation of projects under the National Key Results Area (NKRA) for Low Income Households from 2012 to 2015.

Chua said the Government felt it needed to cast a wider net after realising there were some poor Malaysians who missed out on the Azam Tani programme as they were not registered under the e-Kasih national poverty data bank.

"We are now looking at focus groups so that we can include more people in need. If someone is in a

focus group we can ask e-Kasih to check on their current status," Chua told a press conference here.

Under the Azam Tani programme, successful applicants are eligible to

receive grants of up to RM10,000 to purchase what is necessary for their chosen sector, such as fish fries and cages for fish rearing business, or an oven and mixer for those looking at food processing.

A total of 7,632 applicants had registered for Azam Tani grants from the time of the programme's launch until the end of last year.

Based on records provided by e-Kasih, some programme participants had successfully bumped up their monthly earnings and were now making as much as RM3,500 compared to their earlier income of RM550 before taking part in Azam Tani programme.