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Ulu Kinta ecotourism initiative helps Temiar folk improve livelihood

THE Orang Asli community at Kampung Sungai Tonggang in Ulu Kinta, Perak, has gotten together to develop a recreational and ecotourism site. The Temiar community is now managing the recreational and ecotourism site, called Kayuh D' Tonggang, which is located in the forest and about half an hour from Ipoh city.

This was a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused many folk to lose their jobs and income.

Kampung Sungai Tonggang Tok Batin Che Wan Alang said the initiative started in May 2023, with help from Global Environment Centre (GEC), Orang Asli Development Department, Perak Forestry Department, state Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) and funding from Hasanah Foundation and Finance Ministry.

"The Covid-19 pandemic affected the community's livelihood with many losing their jobs and income.

"The project aims to improve the locals' welfare through sustainable livelihood options," Che Wan said during a visit by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to the village.

"The community is also empowered to undertake river and forest monitoring," he said.

He elaborated that the community had established Koperasi Kampung Orang Asli Sungai Tonggang Bhd to manage the facilities and ensure that revenue generated would be used for the community's benefit.

Che Wan said the term "kayuh" to the Temiar folk means swimming while in Bahasa Malaysia it means "to cycle".

"Some of the nature-based activities here include swimming, walking, picnicking by the river, camping and riding the mountain bike trails.

"We are grateful for support from all groups involved in helping us implement this initiative.

"Since May, the site has started generating significant income, which has particularly benefitted the youth," he added.

Hasanah Foundation managing director Datuk Shahira Ahmed Bazari said the project was aimed at helping the community recover after the pandemic.

"Kayuh D'Tonggang is one of the successful examples that we are proud of that has achieved multiple outcomes including enhancing livelihood of indigenous communities, creating an ecotourism product while boosting environmental protection," she said.

GEC director Faizal Parish said creating sustainable livelihood options in the forests and rivers near the Orang Asli settlement would benefit the community, showcase their heritage and help maintain natural resources.

"In the future, we hope there will be a network of visitor sites and trails managed by the Orang Asli community linking rivers and mountains in Ulu Kinta," he said.

In his speech, Anwar had said that the government would look into making several improvements for the Kampung Sungai Tonggang community. These, he said, included improving the road into the village and Internet connectivity.

"We were given the task to govern the country, including interior locations.

"They also need attention and other basic amenities.

"We cannot resolve everything immediately but will try to resolve the minor ones. We do what we can," he added.