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Getting those under-40 to know about forestry

Mardinah Jikur

SANDAKAN: Sabah Forestry Department's Deputy Chief Conservator of Forests (Research and Development), Dr. Robert Ong, said, youth need to play an important role in maintaining or implementing environmental conservation so that related efforts can be carried out in the best possible way.

"They definitely have creative ideas and are able to promote and act as guardians of the environment in their respective locations," he said this, here, on Saturday.

Among those present were RDC Manager and Chief Secretariat of the programme, Bernadette D Joeman and others.

Also at the ceremony were Group M participants comprising Mohammad Yunus Kasim (SK Pitas Sandakan), Siti Maryam Norhan (SMK Muhibbah), Owais Al Qarni Abdullah Sidek (Sarawak Forestry Department), Christal Chong Siau Teng (SK Merpati), Mohd Fikri B Mohd Bakri (E-Hijau Millenium Explorer), Calvin Jenneh Legada (Reef Check Malaysia) and Ong Soon Yeong (SJKC Pulau Betong) were announced the best group while Wan Nor Izzati Wan Mohamad Din from Sandakan Vocational College was the best participant.

He said the EERace which is a course with a race concept (Ala Amazing Race) to obtain information about the environment, through experiential learning, is not a new for the Sabah Forestry Department.

Since 2006, the Forestry Department in collaboration with members of the Sabah Environmental Education Network (SEEN), as well as several private agencies have organised 25 EERace courses including three trials.

In 2011, in line with the implementation of the Heart of Borneo (HoB) Initiative, EERace was improved to emphasise conservation issues in the HoB area.

This year's EERace is unique because for the first time its participation is not for teachers, but it targeted youth aged between 21 and 40.

Moreover, the youngest participant at 19



Robert (sixth from right) and Bernadette (fifth from right) together with members of Group M and facilitators after announcement of the winners.

years old also took part.

The theme for this year is "Youths as Guardians of the Environment".

"The selection of these youth is clear because they are vital in carrying out environmental conservation efforts," he said.

"Youth are a group that has the potential to innovate in dealing with problems and environmental issues that have yet to be resolved."

The course was attended by 42 young people comprising teachers and representatives of various governments, NGOs and private agencies with 33 in all and with two each from the Sarawak Forestry Department, two each from the Malaysian Forestry Research Institute (FRIM) and Brunei Darussalam Forestry Department, 13 teachers from 13 schools in Sabah, teachers from two schools in Penang, two each from Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Sandakan campus, Tawau Campus Teacher Institute, Kent and Gaya with four people, private agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Sandakan Borneo Honey Bear Conservation Center (BSBCC) Reef Check Malaysia, E-Hijau Millenium Explorer, Sawit Kinabalu, Safoda and KOPEL, government departments including the Wildlife Department, Sabah Parks, Sandakan Polytechnic, Sandakan Community College and Sandakan Vocational College.

Some 16 main locations were involved in EERace this time, namely Tawai Forest

Reserve, Taviu Forest Reserve, Tuaty Memorial, Sg Kun Kun, Forest Reserve Deramakot, Kg Baru Timbang Island, Kg Bambangan, Mangrove Discovery Centre, IOI Ladang Sabah, Tropical Rainforest Living Collection, Bukit Piton, Batu 8 Sandakan landfill, Sepilok Orang Utan Rehabilitation Center, Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Center (BSBCC), Bornean Elephant Sanctuary, Kg Sukau, Kinabatangan and others.

Every task and activity carried out by the participants during the EERace has been designed together by the RDC Secretariat, resource persons and facilitators several months before the EERace.

"This EERace planning is not easy tasks," he said.

"However, due to cooperation and commitment from all parties, the results are great and thanks to all parties who equally ensure that this programme runs smoothly.

He called on the youth to make the best use of the knowledge and experience they have gained through it.

He expressed his appreciation to the Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Climate Change (NRECC) which continues to provide the department with allocations to support public awareness programmes through the Heart of Borneo project.

"Thank you also to SEEN's friends, namely the Sabah State Education Department, Wildlife Department, Sabah Biodiversity Center (SaBC), Environmental Protection Department, Bornean Sunbear Conservation Center (BSBCC), Tropical Rainforest Conservation & Research Center (TRCRC), Seratu Aatai and Hutan KOCP. We greatly appreciate your commitment and contribution," he said.

IOI Plantation Services Sdn Bhd, apart from sharing knowledge with the participants about the good practices of the oil palm plantation industry, they also helped in terms of accommodation, transport, food and activities for the participants at their locations.

"Thank you also to the Sandakan Municipal Council (MPS) for giving the participants the opportunity to visit the waste disposal centre at Batu 8, Sandakan," he added.

"Not everyone has the opportunity to visit a garbage disposal centre and I don't think anyone thinks to visit, but the fact is, we are all garbage generators every day," he quipped.

He said the visit to the waste disposal centre aims for the participants to see for themselves the urgent need for everyone to reduce waste production, making recycling a practice to deal with the garbage problem in the country.

Appreciation was also given to the community in Kg Baru Timbang Island, Kg Bambangan and Kg Sukau for their involvement in EERace this time as instructors such as tying crabs, making traditional confectionery, making lekor crackers, planting trees, getting to know wildlife and others.