

SYMPOSIUM HIGHLIGHTS KEY AREAS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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KUCHING: Key areas of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were among the highlights of a symposium organised by the Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples in the Highlands of Borneo (Formatat) which was held at Hilton Hotel here yesterday.

Presented by UNDP Malaysia assistant resident representative Asfaazam Kasbani, among the selected key SDG references mentioned were to achieve food security, ending malnutrition, doubling agricultural productivity and income of small scale food producers.

“SDG is also for the protection, restoration and promotion of the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, the sustainable management of forests, counteracting desertification and the halt and reversal of land degradation and biodiversity losses by 2020,” said Asfaazam during the symposium which was held in conjunction with Formatat receiving the UNDP Equator Prize 2015 Award in Paris on Dec 7, 2015.

He also said under SDG, calls are made to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy can be achieved by 2030 as well as increasing the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.

Among the challenges faced by UNDP, he revealed, is climate change which can reduce agricultural productivity, heightened water insecurity, increased exposure to extreme weather events, collapse of ecosystems and increased health risks.

“There are three distinctive characteristics of the 21st century climate change. It is cumulative, the effects are irreversible and large time lags of today’s emissions are tomorrow’s problems,” he added.

Also speaking at the symposium was Formatat advisor Jayl Langub, who talked on Safeguarding Community Homelands and the Importance of Sustaining Community Livelihoods in the Highlands – Rivers and Forests.

In his talk, Jayl highlighted the need to sustain the rivers as the highlands water source for domestic and agricultural uses.

“Seventy one rivers and streams have been adopted by seven villages to ensure the sustainability of their cleanliness,” said Jayl, who is also an associate research fellow (Institute of Borneo Studies) in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

The rivers, he further said, are the main source of water for paddy and other cash crops in the highlands, making them a vital part of the whole ecological and agricultural system.

He warned that if the highland folks fail to sustain the cleanliness of the rivers, those living downstream would be affected.

“People living at the lower level will suffer more if the river is disturbed (polluted),” he said.

Other points he touched on were potential for the Formadat area to be turned into an eco-tourism spot as well as the abundance of salt springs where salts are harvested and processed for the export market.

“Currently, 33 salt springs have been identified in Kalimantan and several others in Bario and Ba Kelalan,” he added.

Formatat is a trans-border community forum established by the main ethnic groups in the highlands of Borneo comprising the sub-districts of Bario, Ba Kelalan and Long Semadoh in Sarawak; Long Pa’ Sia’ in Sabah and; Krayan Selatan and Krayan in North Kalimantan.