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Tajuk : Think Of Environment In Plans For Future Growth, Says Don.

Think of environment in plans for future growth, says don

AS Sarawak celebrates 50 years of independence within Malaysia, it should plan for future growth and development with sustainability in mind.

This is pertinent in view of the state's goal of achieving high-income, developed status through plans such as the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE).

According to Prof Dr Lau Seng (pic), an environmental chemistry professor at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas), development must go hand in hand with conservation.

"Most of the time we are talking about economic growth and SCORE, and it's a good thing. But we have to look at its sustaining power.

"If the environment is not being sustained, the economy will soon

collapse. The environment is the sustaining power of our livelihood," he told *The Star* in Kuching.

Prof Lau said the state had put in efforts to sustain the environment, such as through the Natural Resources and Environment Board's safeguards and monitoring activities.

However, there is plenty of room for improvement, especially in enforcement and public awareness.

"We have a lot of environmental laws but enforcement is a problem. It's just like a crocodile without teeth — it looks scary but it can't bite.

"But we cannot change this overnight. I think enforcement goes hand in hand with awareness programmes. People need to understand and adapt to a sustainable system.



"It's not that people don't want to abide by the law but that they do not know how. I think this is where the authorities need to think about ways to be more innovative in their approach."

Prof Lau suggested having discussions between the authorities and the community as a way to raise awareness and enhance compliance with environmental laws.

"We should have more frequent community dialogues. For example, you can have an open forum to talk about the function of rivers to a community living near a river. This will create more awareness and interest.

"At the same time the Government should be open and receptive to feedback from the public," he said, adding that social media could also

be a useful tool for the Government to promote sustainability.

In addition, he said there was a need for a clear-cut environmental policy in the state to back up the laws and regulations.

"Basically the policy is a roadmap. Without that, there is no guide. I think it is high time to come up with a policy, for instance with regard to waste management, because we are going to generate a lot of waste from SCORE, and also on what kind of industry we can bring in."

For his part, Prof Lau would welcome more research grants as he believed that research played an important role in contributing to sustainability.

"There are still a lot of natural phenomena that we do not understand and more research needs to be done.

But research is very expensive and only the Government has the means to support long-term research.

"Maybe the state can come up with a research foundation and all the big companies can contribute a certain amount annually. The state can then disburse research grants to the people. You can tailor-make the research or focus on niche areas that the state is interested in.

"This may be one way of attaining sustainability in the future."

Summing up, Prof Lau said the way forward was to consolidate efforts in education, awareness, public participation and research.

"This has to be initiated by the Government but each one of us has our role to play. We still have our environment, so let's preserve what we have," he concluded.