

# Empowering the Orang Asli community

**THE** living standards of the Orang Asli communities in the East Coast Economic Region (ECER) have vastly improved following the federal government's introduction of the human capital development plans in their villages.

The schemes included education and skills empowerment programmes as well as job creation through sustainable tourism growth initiatives.

A case in point is that of 118 Orang Asli students from Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK) Tasik Cini in Pekan, Pahang, who are benefiting from the ECER-MyKasih programme, a joint project between the East Coast Economic Region Development Council (ECERDC) and MyKasih Foundation.

Launched by Pahang state executive councillor and Pahang Felda (Federal Land Development Authority) affairs committee chairman Datuk Seri Abu Bakar Harun in the presence of MyKasih Foundation trustee Datuk Yaacob Md Amin and ECERDC chief executive officer Datuk Seri Jebasingam Issace John, the programme saw the upgrading of the school's Villa Gumum hostel in 2017.

This made for more comfortable accommodation for its Standard 6 pupils who are currently housed later in preparation for their UPSR examinations.

On top of that, the classrooms at the school were also kitted out with the necessary digital learning equipment such as computers, laptops, printers and other teaching materials to enhance the Orang Asli pupils' learning experience to a fun and interactive level.

The students are also provided with a monthly allowance of RM60 using the MyKasih "Love My School" student bursary smartcard to purchase meals from the school canteen as well as learning materials from the bookstore.

MyKasih Foundation chairman and co-founder Tan Sri Dr Ngau Boon Keat, who is also executive chairman of Dialog Group Berhad, a non-profit organisation set up to feed and educate economically-challenged households through food aid, student bursaries, academic scholarships and training programmes, stated that the former is a huge supporter of MyKasih.

"We share ECERDC's vision of empowering households including those of the Orang Asli to attain better living standards. We are also pleased that our partnership with this organisation has brought about meaningful change to the students in Tasik Chini," he said.

The programme will be extended later this year to include 13 more Orang Asli schools, especially those in



**Abu Bakar (fourth from left) and Jebasingam (third from left) visit a classroom in SK Tasik Cini equipped with digital learning equipment.**

Pekan, Bera, Raub, Bentong, Cameron Highlands, Lipis and Rompin in Pahang. More than 2,600 pupils are expected to benefit from the initiative aimed at improving their future.

In addition to the ECER Academic Training Programme, ECERDC has initiated the empower ECER Skills and Entrepreneurship Training Programme specifically for the Orang Asli adults

and youths in Tasik Chini.

Courses offered such as handicraft weaving and motorcycle maintenance works are specially designed to suit the Orang Asli way of life while providing them with an avenue to earn a higher income from tourism activities in their neck of the woods. Twenty-four 24 participants from the area are currently attending the courses.