

SBC seals benefit-sharing deal with native communities on sustainable biodiversity

KUCHING: Sarawak Biodiversity Centre (SBC) yesterday officially sealed a Benefit Sharing Agreement (BSA) with five indigenous communities under the SBC Ordinance 1997.

The five participating communities are the Bidayuh of Kampung Kiding in Padawan, Lun Bawang of Long Telingan and Long Kerebangan in Lawas, and the Kelabit of Pa'Ukat and Pa'Langin in Bario.

The BSA breaks new ground for Sarawak in becoming the first in the country to implement the Nagoya Protocol on access and benefit sharing, a major landmark for governance of genetic resources and traditional knowledge (TK) with benefit-sharing for its indigenous communities through the sustainable use of their biodiversity.

Present at the ceremony were SBC chairman Tan Sri Datuk Amar Wilson Baya Dandot, SBC chief executive officer Dr Yeo Tiong Chia and representatives from the indigenous communities.

The best practice adopted in the BSA presents three-fold benefits to the participating indigenous communities – recognition and respect of the communities' right to their biological resources and associated TK; ensure fair and equitable sharing of monetary and non-monetary benefits arising from the utilisation of biological

resources and associated TK, as well as promote the importance of biodiversity conservation.

Baya said the Sarawak government has worked steadfastly to put in place access and benefit-sharing provisions in the SBC Ordinance.

"The official signing of BSA presents new avenues for wealth generation through alternative socio-economic activities for the participating indigenous communities," he pointed out.

In addition, the agreement aligns with Sarawak government vision to move beyond traditional industries and explore alternative economic growth resource through science that fully taps into the state's rich biological landscape, he added.

Dr Yeo, meanwhile, said the strong association between TK and ethnobotanical research offers new opportunities.

"This is evident especially with the rapid growth of global wellness industry worth US\$3.7 trillion which is now three times larger than the pharmaceutical industry, making a strong business case for Sarawak to protect its rich biological resources," he said.

He added that SBC flagship programme on documentation of TK aims at empowering the indigenous communities through greater recognition of their rights and access to their knowledge.



Baya (fifth left) with Dr Yeo (third left) and Peter Sawal (fourth left) representing the Ministry of Urban Development and Natural Resources, and village chiefs from the five communities in a photo call after the signing of the BSA.