



RURAL development remains top of Datuk Patinggi Abang Johari Tun Openg's agenda as the head of the Sarawak government.

The 2020 Sarawak Budget, presented in November, saw RM4.141 billion or 63 per cent of the RM6.597 billion allocated for development going to rural areas.

This followed the RM6.049 billion or 67 per cent of the RM9.073 billion for Development Expenditure allocated for rural development in the 2019 Sarawak Budget.

Abang Johari has constantly reiterated that Sarawak will vigorously continue to pursue its development agenda towards achieving a high income economy by 2030 using "our own mould".

As such, there will be considerable allocations for the provision of basic facilities and amenities including roads and bridges, as well as rural water and electricity supply.

There are also other people-centric projects under the 11th Malaysia Plan (11MP) and this will continue under the 12th Malaysia Plan (12MP).

When tabling the 2020 Sarawak Budget, Abang Johari explained these development initiatives will open up new and larger areas, unlock the vast economic potentials of Sarawak, and create the critical mass required for greater private sector participation.

These initiatives, he stressed, would in turn then generate more jobs and business opportunities for Sarawakians.

On the proposed Development Expenditure Estimates for 2020, he said estimates have taken into consideration priority, high impact, and people-centric projects both in urban and rural areas.

The estimates also considered the Sarawak government's commitment to complete the implementation of on-going projects; capacity to implement projects during the year; and to fund the taking over of projects that have been cancelled and/or deferred by the federal government.

"For 2020 Budget, a sum of RM6.597 billion is proposed to finance various programmes and projects under the state's 11th Malaysia Plan including Rural Transformation Projects (RTP) and various people-centric projects known as Projek Rakyat as well as Program Perumahan Rakyat Miskin Sarawak.

"This allocation of RM6.597 billion provided for in the 2020 State Budget does not include the allocation for projects funded under state alternative funding," he said.

In driving Sarawak's development agenda forward in a more concerted and self-determining manner, he said the state cannot rely on the usual method of funding the development through the annual allocation from the state and federal budgets, both of which are far from sufficient to support the development



Abang Johari (second right) tests water from the Sarawak Alternative Water Supply (Sawas) project at Rumah Banta, in Sebauh, Bintulu. From right are Minister of Utilities Dato Sri Dr Stephen Rundi; Bintulu member of parliament Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing; Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture Datuk Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah; and State Secretary Datuk Amar Jaul Samion.

## People-centric projects to boost rural development

agenda, especially funding of infrastructure projects in the rural areas.

As such, this calls upon Sarawak to leverage on alternative financing models of tapping into funding provided by the Development Bank of Sarawak (DBoS) as well as opportunities in the capital market that offer competitive alternative funding.

"This is a sustainable platform to adopt in facilitating and providing the state with much-needed fiscal flexibility in strategising its development agenda as well as managing its cash flow moving forward. Thus, our much long-awaited infrastructure projects and basic amenities can be implemented expeditiously throughout the state and be enjoyed by the rakyat, particularly our rural community.

"This alternative funding coupled with the state's annual budget shall be the funding initiatives in financing the on-going 11MP projects going into 12MP," Abang Johari said.

On the distribution of Development Expenditure for 2020, he said allocations are provided for the implementation

of programmes and projects under three key strategic initiatives.

This included Accelerating Development in the Rural Areas, whereby a total sum of RM13.357 billion is proposed in 2020 for the implementation of high impact projects including RM1.526 billion for the Second Trunk Road and RM1.173 billion for the Coastal Road.

The others are RM1.148 billion for projects under the Regional Corridor Development Authority (Recoda); RM500 million for Projek Rakyat Sarawak; RM500 million for Rural Transformation Projects (RTP); RM343 million for projects under Integrated Regional Samarahan Development Agency (IRSDA); and RM236 million for Minor Rural Projects (MRP).

On the Projek Rakyat Sarawak, he explained most of these projects involve the construction of roads and bridges, provision of water and electricity supply, as well as development of housing and social amenities. The progress of these projects is monitored closely through the State Development Coordination Committee chaired by Abang Johari.

"To date, a total of 408 Projek Rakyat have been approved for implementation. These projects would enable the rakyat, particularly in the rural areas, to enjoy better public facilities and infrastructure that would ultimately benefit and improve their standard of living," he said.

Also under this same key strategic initiative, he said the Sarawak government has embarked on the Native Customary Rights (NCR) New Initiative Survey Programme and amended the Sarawak Land Code to recognise the usufructuary rights over Native Territorial Domain.

Under the NCR New Initiative Survey Programme, a total of 52,000ha of NCR land throughout Sarawak will be perimeter surveyed and another 15,000ha will be surveyed as individual lots.

"A sum of RM40 million has been approved by the state government to carry out these initiatives, of which RM7 million has been allocated this year while the remaining RM33 million will be allocated next year," he added.

The other key initiative is Improving Connectivity and Accessibility, as it is critical

that basic infrastructure be put in place to spur economic development and stimulate a higher level of economic activity as Sarawak is determined to become a high income economy by 2030.

Under this key initiative, various high impact projects with the aim of speeding up people-centric development in the rural areas are presently being vigorously implemented.

A sum of RM5.145 billion will be allocated for the implementation of various road and bridge projects including for the Coastal Road Network programme comprising major bridges such as Batang Kemena Bridge, Batang Lupar Bridge, Rambungan Bridge, Batang Lassa Bridge, and Batang Igan Bridge.

This allocation is also to build roads and bridges for the Second Trunk Road, which will serve to provide an alternative shorter route to the main trunk road, Pan Borneo Highway, and the Coastal Road Network.

There will also be various roads and bridges projects under IRSDA; road construction from Marudi to Mulu via Long Terawan, Miri; construction of Ulu Tubai Road to Mentawai/

Gunung Buda, Limbang; upgrading of Pakan Road, Sarikei; Proposed Nanga Menuan/Nanga Setepus Road, Kapit; Proposed Kampung Sebauh Road to Sebauh Hilir Road, Bintulu; Construction of Kampung Igan Road to Sungai Ilas longhouse and Kampung Sah, Kebuaw, Batang Igan, Mukah; and Construction of Ijok/Teguyo/Lempaong/Batu Pesok/Rantau Layang Road, Betong.

"This extensive road connectivity will serve as a catalyst for further economic development, especially in the rural areas, opening up new areas for agriculture and commercial development as well as other forms of socioeconomic activities," said Abang Johari.

Another key strategic initiative is Expanding Coverage of Treated Water Supply and Electricity Supply throughout Sarawak, as the state government is targeting 100 per cent coverage by 2025.

To achieve this objective, a sum of RM3.742 billion will be provided in 2020 for the implementation of on-going programmes and projects.

Abang Johari said for water supply, the state government will continue implementing the Sarawak Water Supply Grid Programme (Stressed Areas); and upgrading of treatment plants, reservoirs, water pumps, as well as pipe replacement projects.

The upgrading projects include Proposed Pipeline from Assyakirin Reservoir to Nyabau Water Treatment Plant Intake, Bintulu; raw water intake for Betong, Dalat Water Supply Phase II, Mukah; Upgrading of Berawan Water Treatment Plant, Limbang; Kampung Panchor Dayak, Serian; Long Lama Water Supply, Miri; and supply of treated water to schools throughout Sarawak.

As for electricity supply, he said the Sarawak Rural Electrification Masterplan is being taken up to increase the coverage of 24-hour rural electricity supply from 91 per cent in 2018 to 97 per cent by the end of this year.

A sum of RM1.45 billion is provided for this purpose, which will benefit about 13,000 rural households as well as another 7,000 households in the more remote areas where the connection will be stand-alone off-grid systems using renewable energy such as solar.

"Despite the challenging geographical terrain, we are committed to ensure that the rural population, especially those in the non-feasible area for grid connection, to be able to have access to 24-hour electricity.

"Under the Sarawak Alternative Rural Electrification Scheme or Sares, the rural community is provided with free electricity utilising stand-alone off-grid renewable systems. This interim approach benefits about 5,000 remote rural households at 192 villages or longhouses throughout Sarawak," said Abang Johari.

## Aiming to be a net food exporter by 2030

UNDER the leadership of Datuk Patinggi Abang Johari Tun Openg, the Sarawak government has sought to turn the state into a net food exporter by 2030.

In line with this objective, Abang Johari has said the Sarawak government will focus on developing and transforming agri-food sector into a modern and competitive sector through the application of precision farming and smart technologies.

Under the 2020 Sarawak Budget, a sum of RM797 million has been allocated to implement various agriculture programmes and projects.

Strengthening Agriculture Development is also one of the key strategic initiatives under the Development Expenditure for 2020.

Amongst the key programmes and projects to be implemented include Agriculture Facilitation Fund (AFF); Sarawak Reef Ball Project; Cash and Equipment assistance for fishermen during the monsoon; establishment of Agro Park in Sungai Sian and Sungai Baji, Sarikei and Sadong Jaya, Samarahan; Collection, Processing and Packaging Centre (CPPC) in Serian, Betong, Lawas, Limbang, Samarahan, and Miri; and project development for food crops, fisheries, and livestock.

Also included are various



Abang Johari (second left) picks fresh produce during Sarawak Agrofest 2019. From front left are Deputy Chief Ministers Datuk Amar Awang Tengah Ali Hasan and Datuk Amar Douglas Uggah Embas, as well as Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture Datuk Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah.

agriculture irrigation projects under the Integrated Regional Samarahan Development Agency (IRSDA) and establishment of Pig Farming Areas in Sibul, Samarahan, and Bintulu.

Abang Johari explained that for the AFF programme, a sum of RM265 million will be allocated this year.

"In order to boost agricultural productivity and to cushion

the negative impact of the weakening in commodity prices, the state government has introduced the Agriculture Facilitation Fund (AFF) Programme.

"This programme will provide facilitation fund as an incentive to rural entrepreneurs, smallholders, and farmers for their involvement in agriculture projects," he said in his budget

speech at the State Legislative Assembly.

On the Special Assistance for Fishermen during the monsoon, the forms of assistance comprise a cash allowance of RM300 per month per fisherman with a total allocation of RM9.1 million and equipment assistance with an allocation of RM20 million.

Abang Johari said this assistance would help to ease

their financial burden during the period of inactivity and improve their productivity with better equipment.

He added another initiative by the Sarawak government to increase the income of local fishermen is through the implementation of the Sarawak Reef Ball Project.

This initiative, amongst others, will enhance fishery resources by protecting them from illegal trawling activities, hence creating new fish aggregating devices (FADs) for local fishermen.

"This will increase fishery resources that will ensure better catches for local fishermen. For the year 2020, a sum of RM60 million will be provided to deploy reef balls along the coastal waters of Sarawak," he said.

Abang Johari also said that modernisation of agriculture will be one of the key focus areas to be given priority by Sarawak under the 12th Malaysia Plan (12MP).

On a related matter, the establishment of the Sarawak Trade and Tourism Office Singapore (Statos) in June had also contributed to the increase of Sarawak agriculture produce last year.

Abang Johari said this includes overwhelming demand for

tilapia.

"Since we set up the Sarawak Trade Office in Singapore recently, we have been interacting with the various industries in Singapore. And recently we have exported about 12 tonnes of our Batang Ai tilapia to Singapore – the first in Sarawak's history.

"Then one minister of Singapore approached me and Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Amar Douglas Uggah Embas, and said to increase the volume of export of tilapia to Singapore. I asked why, he said Sarawak tilapia is much better than the Peninsular Malaysia tilapia," he said during the 'Berambéh Ngan Abang Jo' town hall session in Betong on Dec 15.

In relation to that, he called on Sarawakians to take part in the government's efforts to turn Betong, Sri Aman, and Sarikei into the food basket of the region.

He said if Sarawakian farm produce could penetrate the Singaporean market, then it could penetrate any other market globally because Singapore has very high and stringent quality requirements when it comes to food products.

"That is why we work with Singapore because they have the best standards in the world," he said.