

MEDIA RELEASE

Empower local communities to restore and steward local mangroves for biodiversity conservation and environmental protection

MANJUNG, 10 March 2023: Global Environment Centre (GEC) and Yayasan Sime Darby (YSD) today marked the closure of a successful three-year venture between GEC and YSD on restoring degraded mangrove areas in Pasir Panjang Laut Mangrove Forest and Kuala Gula, and engaging local communities in social entrepreneurship since February 2020 through a Community-based Mangrove Conservation and Sustainable Livelihood Programme in Kuala Gula – Kerian and Sitiawan – Manjung, Perak.

The event held on 9 and 10 March, was inaugurated by Puan Sri Normah Binti Hashim, YSD Governing Council Member at Pasir Panjang Laut, Manjung, Perak, witnessed and participated by Dr. Hajah Yatela Zainal Abidin, YSD Chief Executive Officer; Mr. Faizal Parish, Director of GEC; Puan Nik Maziah Nik Mustapha, Regional CEO of Sime Darby Plantation; Puan Norhaidah binti Riboet, the representative for Manjung District Office; Chief Assistant Manjung District Officer (Land Management Division) and both Sitiawan Subdistrict Chiefs, Mr. Mukhtar bin Yaacob and Mr. Mohd Torib bin Abd Wahab.

The project utilised a bottom-up approach to mangrove restoration and conservation in Perak through the implementation of a community-driven mangrove conservation project. The aim is multifaceted, focusing on strengthening sustainable management of mangrove and coastal resources, enhancing community engagement in social enterprises for improved livelihood and building resilience to climate risks in Kuala Gula-Kerian and Sitiawan-Manjung in Perak.

The direct beneficiaries of this project are the Friends of Mangrove Pasir Panjang Laut (known as Sahabat Hutan Bakau Pasir Panjang Laut - SHBPPL) from Manjung District and the Friends of Mangrove Kuala Gula (known as Sahabat Hutan Bakau Kuala Gula - SHBKG) from Kerian District. Through these community-based organisations, the local communities are empowered to spearhead the mangrove conservation efforts locally via the creation of a sense of ownership, enhancement of skills and sustainable use and management of mangrove resources. The project also formed a partnership between the community and other stakeholders such as the government and private sectors to conserve the mangroves and root out accelerating coastal problems.

“YSD is proud to have been able to support GEC in the project that has successfully been implemented with the passionate community-based organisations here. We are encouraged to see the increased awareness of the importance of mangroves in climate adaptation towards reducing the impact of the rising sea level for the communities living in the coastal areas of Pasir Panjang Laut and Kuala Gula. Through this, we aspire for this project to continue promoting local initiatives in producing mangrove forest products to help sustain the livelihoods of communities that depend on these forests.” said Puan Sri Normah Binti Hashim, YSD Governing Council Member.

GEC’s Director, Faizal Parish believes that community participation is crucial to address environmental issues at grass root level. However, conservation activities that involve communities need to be complimented with the sustainable livelihoods option which can maintain the interest of the community to make this effort a success. “The three years programme provides a great platform for the communities to appreciate and protect their own mangrove ecosystem through the implementation of good mangrove management initiatives at the same time provide many opportunities to improve their livelihood.” Faizal also highlighted that the implementation of this 3-year programme has “proven that community involvement plays a pivotal role in the success and sustainability of mangrove forest conservation and rehabilitation programme in collaboration with federal, state and local authorities.”

Throughout the project, a total of 22,500 mangrove trees were successfully planted in Kuala Gula and Pasir Panjang Laut. SHBPPL planted 5,000 across 2 hectares, while SHBKG planted 13,500 *Rhizophora apiculate* trees across 7 hectares in Kuala Gula under this project and another 4,000 under the Ministry of Finance matching grant through YSD. The regular post-planting care by SHBKG and SHBPPL resulted in the survival rate of more than 70-85% among the planted trees, affirming the local communities' perseverance, credibility and success in restoring the degraded mangrove areas at both sites.

This project also provided a platform to transform SHBKG and SHBPPL into Social Enterprises by creating revenue-generation streams. Both SHBKG and SHBPPL have been nurtured and trained to produce mangrove plant-based beverage products, namely Mangroovist and Coolega. These products are produced from two locally-grown mangrove species: Berembang fruit (*Sonneratia caseolaris*) known as the Mangrove apple and Jeruju leaf extract (*Acanthus ilicifolius*). The inspiration is based on the traditional knowledge of the fishing and coastal communities, which has the potential to be expanded commercially as an alternative source of income.

The income generated from the project has developed some social capital for both SHBKG and SHBPPL to purchase assets and resources to continue their mangrove conservation efforts such as boats, nursery maintenance and the development of additional facilities for visitors. Besides ensuring the sustainability of their operation, a part of the income is also donated to the schools, mosques and spent on common village interests.

In terms of community development, the project improved the soft skills of both SHBKG and SHBPPL members through various training and activities such as wetland management forums, peer-learning visits, networking sessions, webinars and mangrove exhibitions. Mainstreaming community participation in the local mangrove conservation agenda is also indispensable to developing communities' self-resilience to face the effects of climate change.

Overall, the implementation of the project has successfully helped in restoring the degraded mangrove areas in Pasir Panjang Laut and Kuala Gula and engaged SHBKG and SHBPPL in social entrepreneurship. Importantly, the project has contributed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) below, that focus on the conservation and sustainable management of the mangrove and coastal areas as well as recognising the great value of mangroves to the local communities:

- SDG 1 (no poverty), 3 (good health and well-being), 5 (gender equality), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate action), 14 (life below water), 15 (life on land) & 17 (partnerships for the goals)

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