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Siti Hasmah: Our success due to proper organisation

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Rural development programmes in Malaysia have been more successful compared with other countries, International Steering Committee on the Advancement of Rural and Island Women's president Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali said today.

The programmes for the economic uplifting of rural women coupled with infrastructure development programmes were successful due to proper organisation, she said.

"We can see that the success of the programmes is more obvious than other member countries of the ISC.

"This is because the poverty eradication programmes in rural areas under the Rural Development Ministry and the National Unity and Social Development Ministry started since the 1970s," Dr Siti Hasman told a Press conference at the National Unity and Social Development Ministry today.

Dr Siti Hasmah, wife of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is ISC president from November 1996 to 1998, said Malaysia would host the third ISC meeting in the Palace of the Golden Horses from Oct 22 to 24.

ISC comprises 16 member countries from five regions and it meets once in two years.

Themed "Poverty Amongst Rural Women, the Families and Communities", the meeting will be opened by Dr Mahathir.

Dr Siti Hasmah said one of the successful programmes was the Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia where more than 50,000 rural women had benefitted from micro-financing programmes.

"Some rural women who started micro-scale enterprises have scaled up to small-scale enterprises which shows that they are now confident to expand their businesses.

"Their repayment rate which stands at 95 per cent also indicates that women are credit-worthy."

She said the committee had organised projects to upgrade the status of rural families, the community's health and the women's enterprises in Kemaman, Terengganu.

"The projects are now in progress. The committee, with the assistance of the Terengganu State Government, will hold an international workshop to present the success of the health project in June next year.

"Meanwhile, Jaica (Japan International Co-operation Agency) has organised a five-week training from Monday on scaling up micro-enterprises to small-scale enterprises for third world countries including Nepal, Maldives, Iran and Pakistan in Universiti Putra Malaysia."

She added that the projects received grants from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and Jaica.

On whether the regional economic situation was affecting the committee's projects, Dr Siti Hasmah said the United Nations Children's Fund was conducting a study on the matter.

"In general, there may be some effects as the projects are dependent on assistance from the Government and non-governmental organisations as well as the private sector.

"If the sources are affected naturally the effects will be passed on to the rural areas but we would not know how much the projects are affected until the study is completed."

Dr Siti Hasmah said the ISC meeting would bring together 150

participants from Asia-Pacific (Malaysia, Tonga, China and Uzbekistan), Africa (Angola, Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia and Zambia), America (El Salvador, Paraguay), Europe (Belgium, the Republic of Slovakia and Turkey) and the near East and North Africa (Egypt, Jordan and Morocco) regions.

They will assess the success of the implementation of the action plan for the Geneva Declaration to upgrade the lives of rural women in their respective regions and share their views, information, experience, problems and successes.

Participants are also expected to propose more effective strategies for poverty eradication among rural women.

Those who have confirmed their attendance include ISC founder Queen Fabiola from Belgium, and First Ladies from Senegal and Nigeria.

Dr Siti Hasmah will present a report on the activities which had been carried out following the Geneva Declaration and the Beijing Action Plan.

Working papers will be presented by First Ladies and envoys representing First Ladies from Jordan, Krygyzstan and Egypt. The meeting will be attended by personal advisers to the First Ladies, observers from international and local institutions and representatives for rural women from each member country.

Two working papers will be presented by the International Fund for Agricultural Development and United Nations Development Fund for Women.

Ifad will present a paper entitled Issues on Gender, Access to Sustainable Technology and Environment while Unifem a paper entitled Issues on Gender, Micro-Enterprise and Mobilising Women Through Smart Partnership between Government and Non-Governmental Organisations and Private Sectors.

Aside from that, exhibitions about rural women's activities would also be held in conjunction with the meeting.

"We will also celebrate the World Rural Women's Day on Oct 15 and World Food Day from Oct 16 to 18," she added.

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