

Sarawak community benefits from price control scheme and subsidies
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MIRI: Former soldier Siang Ra'ung used to gripe about how difficult it was to make ends meet with a meagre monthly income.

As a farmer and canteen operator at his Iban longhouse in Kuala Suai Niah, about 100km from here, the 67-year-old head of Rumah Siang said he had no fixed monthly income.

"Yet, we were paying more — for almost everything. It was a painful situation then," he said, relating the days before the E community drumming and price controls, along with the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) came to his remote area.

"Community drumming" involves selected operators of small fuel stations that sell the fuel to points of sales (referred to also as PoS) comprising village development committees, individuals and longhouse cooperatives. The fuel can only be sold to longhouse residents.

The Government has also appointed 133 contractors in Sarawak as transporters to carry subsidised goods — sugar, rice, cooking oil and flour — to 423 rural locations.

Under the ETP, about RM105mil was allocated to Sarawak last year to subsidise the cost of transportation so that prices of essential items in the interiors remain low.

Siang, who has six children and 18 grandchildren, told *The Star* that before November 2010, he had to work hard to fork out RM1,000 to support his large household.

"My monthly expenses were always in the red," he said, adding that the situation had since changed.

Siang, an appointed PoS agent who serves about 3,000 villagers in 10 longhouses, said he had not only been able to save on his

monthly expenses but also thrived on his sundry business.

He has extra money now to spend as his household expenses have been reduced by at least 50% since 2010.

Another ETP beneficiary is Mansyur Mohd Hussain, 36, from Kampung Madinah Suai.

He agrees with Siang that community drumming and government subsidies had had a direct impact on the rural folk in Sarawak.

Grateful for the projects, he said: "They help our pockets from going bust."

Transporter George Thien Chin Sen, 41, of the TTL group of companies, serves four areas — Suai, Niah, Bekenu and Sarimas (Jambatan Suai) — with an estimated population of about 70,000.

"I have a good working relationship with my 50 PoS agents in the areas," he said.

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