

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT  
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# Environment Education certification programme to improve conservation efforts

**KUCHING:** Malaysia kicked off the second Best of Both Worlds Conference (BoBW) 2010, by announcing the offer of an Environmental Education (EE) certification programme next year. Geared towards interested schoolteachers and EE facilitators, the programme comes as the latest collaborative effort between Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) and University of South Africa (Unisa) and will provide training on effective instructional methods. In his welcome address at the opening of the conference, FRIM director general Dato' Dr Abd Latif Mohmod said, the best way to promote awareness for biodiversity conservation and environmentally responsible behaviours is through EE.

Unisa, one of the largest distance-learning universities in the world will award certificates to participants upon completion of the course, of which FRIM and another collaborative partner, Edutree Services, will conduct the practical components.

"In Malaysia, we have not yet had a complete EE programme. For many of us working in the government sector, we know the science of environmental conservation but we do not know how to package it and make it relevant to the ordinary layman," said Dr Noor Azlin Yahya, head of Ecotourism and Urban Forestry Programme at FRIM.

The EE certification programme aims to fill the gap in Malaysia's training needs, especially for pre-service and in-service teachers and environmental practitioners by providing them with a strong foundation in EE. According to Dr Noor Azlin, communication



Dr Noor Azlin Yahya

and networking is a crucial part behind conservation awareness.

"Everybody is getting involved in tree-planting campaigns, but we rarely educate them about the technical aspect. It's not just about the greening but how to make them understand how this contributes to the environment as a whole.

"The teachers need a lot of help. We come out with the activity kit and tally it with the curriculum. But we have to help the teachers learn how to teach EE with other subjects. It doesn't just have to be a science subject, but also a moral or a geographical topic too."

The first programme will be launched in March next year and will serve as testing grounds for the first prototype of the EE programme.

"Due to our collaboration with Unisa, we are using their syllabus as a model, but we still need to modify it to suit our needs. As such, we will be training and receiving feedback from our future trainers to fine-tune our syllabus."

Even as EE has been part of the formal school education curriculum in South Africa over

the last 30 years, it's only been a part of Malaysia's curriculum for less than 10 years. While Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC) has already been practicing EE in its conservation programmes, the focus now is on the younger generation through after school activities like the Wildlife Awareness programme.

"Since we first implemented it in 2007, 64 schools in rural and urban parts of Sarawak have taken part in it on a voluntary basis," stated Wilfred Landong, general manager of SFC. He related that the SFC provided the material for the extra curricular activities, which were taught in both the classroom and on the field. So far, the response had been encouraging, as more schools had put in requests for the programme.

"We'll be starting the Junior Wildlife Ranger Programme and piloting it with the children of our staff," he added, explaining that it would be a two year programme.

"When they have completed the modules, they will be very well equipped on the basic knowledge of biodiversity and impression of conservation in general.

"Running from Nov 8 to 10, the two-day BoBW Conference is themed,

"Effective Environmental Education for Biodiversity Conservation" and is jointly organised by FRIM and SFC with the support of the Education Ministry, Dewan Bandaraya Kuching Utara and Sarawak Convention Bureau.

It registered 100 participants, mainly teachers, park and recreation area managers, academicians, NGOs as well as interested individuals, including from Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore.