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# BOOSTING SURROUNDING COMMUNITY

**WHILE** rankings are the most common measure used to determine a university's worth, its heart or essence can be measured only by the way it engages with the community.

At Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP), corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an important initiative with the people and community at the heart of its agenda.

Vice Chancellor Datuk Ir (Dr) Abdul Rahim Hashim said the university's CSR initiatives were centred on three areas: education, economic impact to surrounding communities and environment.

While remaining committed to its goal of becoming a renowned institution of higher learning, the university believes that serving the community is its civic duty and responsibility as good citizens.

Abdul Rahim said over the past year, the university had refocused its CSR approach on going beyond philanthropy and moving towards structured initiatives that emphasised long-term

and sustainable change in the lives of target communities.

"This holistic approach involves equipping target groups and communities with skills, knowledge, confidence and market access to be economically active."

In its CSR project in Kampung Aji in Perak Tengah, the university played the role of a facilitator to bring about change at the community level. It did so by identifying target groups, identifying resources and by gathering resources from local partners.

This pilot project which was initiated last year, is now seeing early results. A chilli sauce factory has been set up and

has started production. The factory will supply its product to a hypermarket.

Groups of single mothers have been aided with sewing skills and sewing machines while groups of elderly folk received medical assistance.

Youth received training in skills and farmers were assisted by government agencies.

This model is also aimed at shifting the mindset of communities from that of a recipient to one that is involved in their own income generation.

In the area of education, UTP is involved in improving the academic performance of students in surrounding schools and in promoting interests in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. It also encourages the involvement of UTP students and academics in community projects.

In the area of the environment sustainability, UTP realises its social responsibility given the fact that there are four endangered tree species in and around its campus.

As it continues to expand, it realises that preservation is vital and is working with the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) to promote sustainable forest management.

Abdul Rahim said UTP is working with FRIM to rehabilitate seven ex-mining ponds located within the university's 400 hectare campus in Bandar Seri Iskandar.

"There are four species of endemic trees which grow within our area and we are working to protect them from being extinct," he said.

The trees are the *Vatica flavida*, *Shorea hemsleyana*, *Shorea macrantha* and *Aquilaria malaccensis* which are

considered part of the country's natural heritage.

Recently, more than 200 bicycles were donated to underprivileged school children from 17 selected schools and one orphanage in Perak and students at Kg. Aji in Bota, Perak during Convoride 2014, a CSR programme held in conjunction with UTP's upcoming 14th convocation ceremony.

This year saw the largest number of bicycles donated since Convoride was first organised in 2012. In 2012, 20 bicycles were donated while 25 bicycles were donated in 2013.

For this CSR programme, UTP received sponsorships and donations of more than RM65,000 and 40 per cent of the donations will be channeled to Yayasan UTP bursary fund to provide financial aid for UTP students.

As a cycling event, Convoride 2014 covered a distance of 100km involving areas of Seri Iskandar, Bota, Tanjung Belanja, Manong and Parit. This year's Convoride attracted more than 500 cyclists from all over Malaysia such as Penang, Kedah, Selangor, Kedah and including cyclists from as far as Terengganu and Kelantan.

The bicycles were sponsored by UTP and PETRONAS staff at RM 300 each.

Besides Convoride, other CSR programmes initiated by UTP to continuously engage with its surrounding community are 'Menggapai Impian' (a project to assist underprivileged children by sponsoring their basic school necessities), 'Majlis Berbuka Puasa UTP' (giving donations to and breaking of fast with the less fortunate people) and a community development project in Kg Aji, Bota to assist the villagers in their socioeconomic well-being and education.