

HELPING TURTLES AND WOMEN

Empowerment programme boosts income, conservation project

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A GROUP of 10 women in Kampung Pasir Gajah, Chukai, is turning its hobbies into activities to save endangered terrapins from extinction.

Turtle Conservation Society and project co-founder and leader Dr Chen Pelf Nyok said it started with the terrapin conservation project in 2011 involving local men, together with turtle awareness programmes among children in the village.

“What’s missing was a programme for women. So the community empowerment programme was born.”

Dr Chen said a year ago, local women started making lotion and soap for sale, followed by organising sewing classes. They contributed a small portion of the money to the terrapin and turtle conservation project.

“We started the community empowerment programme in Kampung Pasir Gajah last year with lotion-making classes. Then we initiated Group Menjahit, because not all the women wanted to make lotion, and commissioned them to sew our batik-themed merchandise.

“We developed the products

with them, including bags, bandanas and straw pouches. Three women formed the project’s nucleus, but the group grew and we now have 10.”

“Some are skilled seamstresses and wanted to be involved in the project. We got some women to make hairbands using batik cloth from bags.

“These ladies are sewing our merchandise using terrapin-motif batik, which we’re selling on our website and Facebook. They also get paid for sewing.”

Last month, the group rolled out its soap-making programme where the women were taught the basics of soap-making using the melt-and-pour technique and were briefed on the importance of being a smart consumer.

“We started with a do-it-yourself lotion-making classes. It is a simple process and the products can support village functions, such as wedding and birthday party gifts.

“Most toiletry products in the market contain a lot of chemicals and water, and come in a single-use plastic packaging.

“We are empowering them to make smarter choices for their families,” she told the *New Sunday Times*.

She said homemade soaps had no preservatives, no chemicals, no expiry dates and no synthetic fragrances.

“They last just as long and produce zero waste. The ladies can earn an income too,” she said, adding that shampoo, shower gel and facial cleanser contain high amounts of water.

“Essentially, you’re buying water in the bottles. But with home-



Turtle Conservation Society and project co-founder and leader Dr Chen Pelf Nyok (left) measuring a river terrapin in Kampung Pasir Gajah in Terengganu. FILE PIC

made soaps, there is no water in it. Soap bases are cheaper, with a block of 1kg pre-made soap costing RM15 to RM18, and you can make so many soaps out of it.”

Dr Chen said Kampung Pasir

Gajah was chosen because it is the ground zero for the group’s terrapin research and conservation efforts.

She said the village’s womenfolk had put the terrapin conser-

vation on the world map and the products, especially the bags and straw pouches, were sold at resorts, such as the Club Med Cherating, and a few zero-waste stores in Kuala Lumpur.