

Community-run centres bridge education gap in Sabah

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The screening of "Mongingia" at Universiti Malaysia Sabah here yesterday. Pic courtesy of Third Rice Culture

KOTA KINABALU: In today's modern world, there are often doubts about the quality of education provided by unofficial learning institutions.

However, Pacos Trust executive director Anne Lasimbang said the organisation's initiative to establish Community Learning Centres (CLCs) had brought significant changes to children's lives.

Before the community-based organisation started the CLCs in 1993, Anne found that many pupils in rural areas were falling behind.

"When they entered primary school, they were often still unable to read and write. Because of this, they lost interest in learning.

"For them, going to school was very difficult. Their homes were far from school, and when they were in class, they struggled to understand what teachers were saying.

"One of the ways to address this was through early childhood education," she said in a 30-minute documentary titled "Mongingia", produced by local production company Third Rice Culture.

"Mongingia", which means "teacher" in the Kadazan-Dusun language, traces three decades of community-based early education in rural Sabah.

To date, 25 CLCs have been established across Sabah.

Apart from the basic formal education syllabus, the centres also incorporate additional learning such as native languages, local food, traditions, and community skills, including weaving and jewellery-making.

Gloriana Jacob is among the success stories, having become a teacher at Sekolah Kebangsaan Kuamut in Kinabatangan.

"Without the CLC intervention, I don't think I would have become a teacher. I was inspired by my CLC teacher," she said in the documentary.

Although the CLCs were initiated by Pacos Trust, they are largely run by the communities themselves, particularly women with basic education, often operating from makeshift buildings.

One such educator is Norlizah Stephen, 41, who has served at CLC Saguon in Tongod since 2012.

"I never thought I would last this long, especially as I faced a lot of criticism throughout the journey, particularly about my educational background.

"But what kept me going is turning those negative words into motivation to prove that we can do it," she said during a sharing session after Yayasan DayaDiri (YDD) hosted the screening of "Mongingia" at Universiti Malaysia Sabah here yesterday.

YDD partnered with Pacos Trust from 2010 to 2019, expanding CLCs from six to 25 centres across Sabah and Sarawak, benefiting thousands through training, leadership development and community ownership.

To date, CLCs have yet to receive recognition from the government.

Also present at the screening was YDD chairman Shahrin Merican.