

# UMS looking forward to working closely with EHA in multi-discipline fields

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Exchange...Peter (right) and Harun (left) exchange the MoU, watched by the delegates

## By VESTA VANESSA JSOL

KOTA KINABALU: Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) is looking forward to working closely with EcoHealth Alliance (EHA) and make sufficient progress to enable the expansion of research in multi-discipline fields.

To achieve the objective, UMS and EHA signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) yesterday that marks the official launching of the Development and Health Research Unit (DHRU).

Vice-Chancellor of UMS, Datuk Mohd Harun Abdullah representing UMS while EHA was represented by its president Dr. Peter Daszak during the signing at the Canselor building UMS.

"DHRU is a training and resource sharing platform, convening roundtable dialogues between government, industry and non-governmental organizations on economic relationship between land use change and disease emergence," said Harun.

The DHRU is supported by the Infectious Disease Emergence and Economics of Altered Landscapes (IDEEAL) programme that is funded by the United State Agency for International Development (USAID).

Harun said the IDEEAL programme promotes robust and sustainable economic development while preserving ecosystems and protecting health of the society.

"The DHRU will work to make the model and findings of IDEEAL programme accessible to all stakeholders, and the unit will be housed at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences buildings with research fellows from this faculty and the Faculty of Business and Economics," said Harun.

Meanwhile, Dr Peter said that over 60 per cent of emerging infectious diseases over the past six decades—from SARS to Ebola and HIV, have originated from animals, with nearly half linked to land use change, agricultural intensification or changes in food production.

"Land alterations accelerate the pace and diversity of human and animal contact, enabling pathogens to spill over from animal populations, a first spark in the chain of events that ignite global pandemics," said Peter.

Simultaneously, deforestation and forest degradation account for between 14 to 17 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, equivalent to the entire global transportation sector.

A key strategy in reducing the dual threats from both disease of pandemic potential and climate change is a robust evidence base that accurately captures the value of ecosystems.

"The IDEEAL programme, a three-year, USD 2 million USAID initiatives, investigates how changes to landscapes contribute to the emergence of diseases. The impact that the emergence of these diseases on the economy presents an opportunity for us to promote sustainable land use policies, to mitigate these treats," said Peter.

This programme builds upon USAID investment in pathogen discovery and characterization of disease emergence risk.

Leveraging on the available data sets, the programme can help to characterize the risk of diseases emergence as well as coming up with ways to prevent these emergences.

Ensuing the signing of the MoU, the DHRU will host its first conference: The Links Between Land Use Change, Development and Health on May 14. Participants will include government, industry, non-profit organizations, the faculties in UMS and students. There will be guest speakers from Australia, United State as well as Malaysia.