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KUALA LUMPUR: It was a highly fulfilling experience for a group of business students from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) who applied what they learnt in economic management in their lectures to help an Orang Asli community at Bukit Lagong in Selangor supplement and raise their income from eggplant farming.

Some 70 per cent of the revenue was channelled to the community residing in Selangor, Selangor and 30 per cent donated for the upkeep of the Hidayah Al-Hijrah orphanage in the area from the community-based social enterprise programme undertaken by the students.

The programme was initiated by the Masters in Business Administration (MBA) students from the Graduate School of Business at UKM with cooperation from Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB) and Treat Every Environment Special (TrEES), a non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting environmentally sustainable lifestyles in Malaysia.

"It was a win-win situation

as we not only initiated an agricultural project but built a business model linking the community through various aspects of entrepreneurship, education and welfare via the 'shared value' concept.

"Through this business strategy, both the business enterprise initiated by the students and the Orang Asli community gained as a result," Mohd Khairuzzaman Kamaruddin, the leader of the 'Lestari Team' which undertook the corporate social responsibility project, said in a statement.

He said the eggplant farming project not only gave an opportunity to the Bukit Lagong Orang Asli community to explore new areas to generate revenue via agriculture, but also enabled the students to apply economic management principles learned from their MBA programme in real life business ventures.

"What we have initiated is not just an eggplant planting project but a business that links the community here with entrepreneurship, education and social welfare through the

shared value concept," he said.

Economic principles applied in the venture included skills in project planning, stakeholder management, finance, leadership, as well as communication and risk management.

As for the residents, they were actively involved in making available the tract of land for cultivation, planting and maintenance of the crop and harvesting, he said, adding that TrEES was tasked in coordination and providing technical assistance.

The shared value economic model aimed to ensure that economic benefits by the orang asli community also accrued to other residents in the area.

TNB, through the Business Support Office in Selangor, contributed RM10,000 towards the implementation of the project, including supplying agricultural equipment, planting materials, facilitated operations and provided human resource support. — Bernama