

# 16 experts to present views on holistic approach to urban poverty

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Some 16 experts will present their papers at a one-day seminar hosted by the Federal Territories Ministry tomorrow to kick-start a year-long search for a comprehensive and holistic solution to the problem of urban poverty.

They include prominent policymakers, top administrators, former government thinkers and top civil servants such as Tan Sri Dr Sulaiman Mahbob and Tan Sri Dr Kamal Salih, former Kuala Lumpur mayor Tan Sri Ahmad Pheal Talib and media personality Tan Sri Johan Jaaffar.

Federal Territories mufti Datuk Dr Zulkifli Albakri will also give his perspective on urban poverty.

They will be joined by professors and researchers from several universities, social activists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

"Urban poverty has become a national issue," said Associate Professor Dr Doris Padmini Selvaratnam, a community development expert from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's (UKM) Faculty of Economics and Management.

Presenting a paper on "Social Holistic Entrepreneurship To Eradicate Urban Poverty", the UKM expert said giving them a means to earn was key.

"The approach we take is coupled with asset mapping, helping the urban poor to identify the products and services that can be commercialised and teach them the basics of entrepreneurship.

"In doing this, we need to offer a range of revenue-generating activities to suit the different skill-sets of the urban poor. These activities range from lessons on how to be a netpreneur by mak-

ing soap and candles, as well as growing a vegetable garden.

"It is crucial to create entrepreneurs who are self-sufficient. In line with this, we have introduced modules on financial management in order to grow their business and promote products digitally."

To start them young, UKM organised a young entrepreneur programme, targeting kindergarten and primary school pupils in Serdang, Selangor, recently.

Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad previously said Malaysia could not consider itself developed if some segments of the society had no access to basic amenities and jobs with sufficient incomes.

He identified the rise of rural-urban migration and limited self-development skills that contributed to the growing popula-



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tion of urban poor in the country.

NGO consultant Simpson Khoo said education and mental well-being of the urban poor went a long way in helping them climb out of the poverty cycle.

"I see the importance of literacy in life. It is the foundation and key to economic empowerment. Students in our programme have better attendance, attitude and achievement.

"It is a proud moment when the students are able to stay in school and complete their primary and secondary education. About 90

per cent of our students have shown improvement. Some of them have completed vocational training to learn new skills while a few had acquired tertiary education," he said.

The programme has helped more than 300 students in six locations since 2012.

Khoo said his studies showed the low-income group, especially those living in the low-cost public housing, needed better access to mental healthcare, awareness in self-care and knowledge to cope with the high prevalence of depression and anxiety.