

THE “KELAB PENCINTA ALAM SEKITAR (PALS)” FOR SCHOOLS IN SARAWAK : AN EVALUATION

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Abstract

Natural Resources and Environment Board Sarawak (NREB) has embarked an environmental education programme for schools in Sarawak, particularly, with the establishment of Environmental Club or Kelab PALS since 1999. To date, a total of 277 schools throughout the State, including both primary and secondary, have been assisted by the NREB to form the Kelab PALS at their respective schools. The overall objective is to create greater awareness and to inculcate positive attitudes among the school children towards our environment.

This paper shares the experiences of NREB in establishing the Kelab PALS in the State. The benefits to the students and its schools are discussed. The successes and weaknesses of the Kelab PALS are reviewed, while measures to overcome its weaknesses will also be highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

Agenda 21 is the basis of internationally agreed courses of action towards sustainable development. Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 on Promoting Education, Public Awareness and Training focuses on the role of education in environmental decision making. In it, education has been considered critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of people to address various environmental and development issues. It is also critical for achieving environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behaviour consistent with sustainable development and for effective public participation in decision-making.

In Malaysia, at National level, there is a provision in the Environmental Quality Act 1974 (Section 3(1)(l)) "to provide information and education to the public regarding the protection and enhancement of the environment". The importance of environmental education in Sarawak is also being emphasised in the Natural Resources and Environment (Amendment) Ordinance, 1993 or NREO. The provision in Section 5(h) of NREO has given the Natural Resources and Environment Board (NREB) a clear mandate "to provide information and education to the public regarding the protection and enhancement of the environment".

Environmental Education (EE) is one of the strategies being used by the State of Sarawak for environmental protection and enhancement towards achieving sustainable development in the State. EE is critical for improving the capacity of people to address environment and development issues. It is used in its broadest sense to encompass:

- raising awareness;
- acquiring new perspectives, values, knowledge and skills; and
- formal and informal processes leading to behavioural change in support of a sustainable environment.

Environmental issues are frequently complex and contested. Issues on climate change, loss of biodiversity, littering, over consumption, over harvesting of our natural resources, land degradation, ozone layer depletion, generation of waste and pollution, trade in endangered species etc. require EE for a clear understanding and its ecological linkages.

Since the establishment of the NREB in 1994, various EE and awareness programmes targetted for school children have been organised statewide by the NREB. These programmes are normally one-off activities, and thus, not much venue for the student to develop and pursue their interests in environmental conservation and protection. Realising these, the NREB encourages the schools in the State to set up environmental club for their students. Numerous discussions to improve its establishment were held between the NREB and officers of related agencies, including the Ministry of Environment and Public Health Sarawak (MOEPH) and Education Department Sarawak.

ENVIRONMENTAL CLUB OR "KELAB PENCINTA ALAM SEKITAR (PALS)"

School Environmental Club is a brainchild of the former Minister of Environment and Public Health Sarawak, Yang Berhormat Datuk Amar James Wong Kim Min. It was realized that the Government needs to play a lead role in encouraging all schools to form environmental clubs, and NREB initiated the setting up of the Environmental Clubs in schools in 1999 with the grant from MOEPH. The club is called Kelab Pencinta Alam Sekitar or PALS.

It is expected that the establishment of Kelab PALS will help to strengthen the infusion of Environmental Education into the Malaysia School Curriculum, which were introduced in 1994. As such, the implementation of Kelab PALS programme has received good support from State Education Department, and they are the one responsible for selection of the schools concern.

The main objectives of the Kelab PALS are:

- to provide an organizational structure for students to develop and pursue their interests in environmental conservation and protection;
- to encourage and guide students in schools on types of activities which could be carried out by them to instill the love for our environment;
- to incorporate environmental education into the State's education system; and
- to generally raise the level of awareness and sense of responsibility of both students and teachers towards environmental conservation and protection.

Like any other Clubs, each participating school need to establish Kelab PALS Committee, which consists of the stakeholders of the school environment, namely students, teachers and school supporting staff, or even among the school higher management or parents of the students.

Kelab PALS was first launched in 1999 with only 30 secondary schools and 44 primary schools as pioneer schools that established Kelab PALS statewide. Among the criteria of selection of schools include:

- the schools have no existing environmental clubs;
- accessible by road or by telephone; and
- voluntarily joining the Kelab PALS.

Initially, each participating school was given a grant of RM500 for primary school, and RM1000 for secondary school to assist them in setting up the Kelab PALS at their respective schools. Schools are divided into Southern, Central and Northern Region for ease of monitoring and administration.

Based on the feedback from participating schools, the NREB has reviewed the amount of grant given to each participating school. In year 2002, the amount of Kelab PALS grant was increased from RM500 to RM1,000 for primary schools, and from RM1,000 to RM1,500 for secondary schools. The NREB also giving second grant for schools that active in implementing of Kelab PALS.

A number of environmental and related activities were suggested to be carried out by the selected schools. However, the Kelab PALS members are given option to carry out their own projects based on their school's location and available natural resources.

Each Kelab PALS of the participating schools is required to produce yearly report on progress of activities, including its financial statement. Staff from NREB will do a regular monitoring to each school to monitor the progress of activities and provide technical support to the Kelab.

KELAB PALS ACTIVITIES

Based on the NREB monitoring and report from schools, there are numerous and various environmental and related activities that are being carried out by the Kelab PALS. Among the popular one beside the greening and beautification of the schools, include:-

- (i) Planting and maintenance of flower or plants
- (ii) Create 'hut' with environmental theme
- (iii) Fish pond project
- (iv) Create environmental garden, such as Herbal Garden, Bonsai Garden, Orchid Garden, Friendship Garden etc.
- (v) Mini pond or mini waterfall project
- (vi) Project hydroponic plant (jointly with MARDI)
- (vii) Gotong royong
- (viii) Mural with environmental theme
- (ix) Green house

- (x) Composting
- (xi) Collection of recycling items project, such as, old newspaper, aluminium cans, PET bottle etc.
- (xii) Labelling of plants or flowers

Other Kelab PALS activities are

- (i) Scrap book on environmental issues
- (ii) Competition of posters, quizzes, birthday card, bookmark etc. competition with environmental theme
- (iii) Environmental exhibition in conjunction with environmental-related day
- (iv) Craft from recycling items
- (v) Organise Environmental Day or Environmental Month at school level
- (vi) Environmental Scavenger Hunt or Environmental Games activities
- (vii) Environmental Talk
- (viii) Eco Camp (Environmental Camp)
- (ix) Survey on noise pollution, black smoke from vehicle, traffic etc
- (x) Rubbish or foodwaste trap
- (xi) Dust Chalk Box
- (xii) Environmental or Kelab PALS Corner
- (xiii) Cyber Plant Conservation Project (CPCP)
- (xiv) Study visit to environmental related place
- (xv) Environmental Trail

BENEFITS OF KELAB PALS PROGRAMME

Kelab PALS is a participatory programme that provides an excellent opportunity for students to experience active citizenship in school. It brings many benefits both to schools and the wider community. These include the followings:

- (i) **Increased Environmental Awareness**
The EE and awareness programmes organized by the NREB as well as by other agencies and non-governmental organization (NGOs) have been targeting at Kelab PALS (students and teachers). Students and teachers are encouraged to use their acquired environmental knowledge in the daily life of the school. This helps students to see the relevance of what they learn in the classroom. Other related agencies or NGOs that used to organize EE and awareness programmes in Sarawak for Kelab PALS are the Department of Environment, Sarawak Forestry, Marine Fisheries Department, Angkatan Zaman Mansang (AZAM), Local Authorities, Larian Mesra Alam Committee etc.

Among EE and awareness programmes organized by the NREB for students are Eco Camp, environmental talk and mini workshop, environmental exhibition, environmental study tour, environmental essay or drawing competition etc. The programmes for the teachers who are the Kelab PALS advisors, including school headmasters are train-the-trainers, facilitator workshop and Kelab PALS workshop. The schools are encouraged to organize or initiate environmental awareness programmes themselves with the support of the NREB, particularly, in term of facilitators and financial assistance.

- (ii) **Improved School Environment**
Students and teachers can work together on such issues as reducing litter and waste and run the school in an environmentally conscious way. Besides that, continuous monitoring by NREB staff will indirectly encourage the school to maintain cleanliness and avoid breaking environmental rules.

- (iii) **Environmental Materials**
Any environmental materials produced by the NREB are given to the schools concern to enhance their awareness and sustain the activities, as well as, reference for their Kelab PALS. The NREB can also be a reference for schools to gain environmental expertise from other organisations.
- (iv) **Involvement of the Local Community**
Local authorities, organizations and businesses have expertise in many areas of environmental management and may be willing to cooperate in the Kelab PALS initiative. Local authorities usually provide recycling bins, Sarawak Forestry or Agriculture Department provides plants, MARDI provides fertilizer etc. The result is a more integrated community and smart partnership.
- (v) **Monitoring by NREB Staff**
Continuous monitoring is done by the NREB staff to the school concerned. Assistance in term of technical advice for Kelab PALS activities and any other environmental issues are given direct to the schools.
- (vi) **Energy Conservation and Fund Generation**
Actions undertaken throughout the programme may lead to savings in the school's energy conservation, such as their electricity and water bills. On the other hand, reducing waste and collecting materials for recycling, for example, can help raise fund for the school to sustain the Kelab PALS activities.

SELECTION OF BEST KELAB PALS

As a form of recognition and incentive for the schools to remain active and creative, Best Kelab PALS Award is organized for the participating schools throughout the State. Selection is made every year and the Award is divided into both primary and secondary school categories.

The criteria of selection for Best Kelab PALS are:

- Project undertaken must be unique, simple and practical;
- Environmental friendly;
- Cost effective;
- Sustainable and beneficial; and
- Regular progress report.

Among the project that won Best Kelab PALS are:

- (i) **'Rubbish/Waste Traps'**
Locally designed traps are installed at end of the drains. Rubbish and food wastes, especially from kitchen and dining hall are trapped and prevented from entering into the storm drains.
- (ii) **Traffic Pollution Survey**
This survey is done by one of the primary school students, whose school is located in the midst of busy town.
- (iii) **Planting of 'cover plant'**
This project is done by one of the school to avoid soil erosion at the slope within school's compound.
- (iv) **'Dust Chalk Special Box'**
The box is specially designed to store the dust from used chalk, so as reduce air pollution from chalk dust.

In year 2004, SERASI Award¹ or Environmental Friendly School Award (“Anugerah Sekolah Rakan Alam Sekitar”) was introduced in Sarawak. Since then, the Best Kelab PALS Award has been stopped to avoid duplication. Besides, overall SERASI Award, there are four other categories of Awards, including Best Environmental Management, Best Green School, Best Environmental Awareness Activities, and Clean and Beautiful Landscape School.

As the SERASI Award is open to all primary and secondary schools, it is an advantage for the school concern having Kelab PALS. The school with environmental-related projects and programmes can always organize environmental awareness programmes with the assistance from the NREB.

Many schools are requesting to register their school as members of Kelab PALS. This is because of the advantages for schools participating in SERASI Award or the advantages of the Kelab PALS itself.

KELAB PALS EXPANSION PROGRAM

The number of schools registered as Kelab PALS member is expanding every year. From 74 pioneer schools, now there are 277 schools. The advantages of having Kelab PALS and other factors, especially with the introduction of SERASI Award and Sekolah LESTARI Award² make the Kelab becoming more popular.

However, like any other clubs or associations, not all Kelab PALS are active, while some are even “dying”. This depends very much on the support and commitment of higher management of the schools concerned and the teacher incharge, who will be the main driving force.

EVALUATION OF KELAB PALS PROGRAMME’S ACHIEVEMENT AND SUCCESS

Evaluation is a judgement the merit or worth of an EE strategy, programme or activities, leading to more informed actions for the benefit of the environment. The evaluation of Kelab PALS here focuses on overall perspective of the programme and each entity of activities conducted to strengthen the programme. There are few approaches used to evaluate Kelab PALS programme, including summative evaluation, formative evaluation, process evaluation and outcome or impact evaluation.

Participating schools have strived and successfully achieved to improve their school’s environmental projects and objectives. Some schools have come up with unique, simple, practical and commendable projects, whereas a number of schools are still focusing on conventional and common projects.

Some schools are very active and shown excellent achievement in environmental education, while a number of schools requested to pull back their membership as Kelab PALS.

Many schools have produced teachers that are excellent in promoting environmental education and always find ways to instill interest among Kelab PALS members through their networking with the NREB and other environmental related agencies. Some schools are very eager with environmental project at their school such as Environmental Education Trail project.

¹ SERASI Award is an environmental excellent Award for schools at State level. The Award is organized by various agencies with Ministry of Environment and Public Health Sarawak is leading the Main Committee.

² Sekolah LESTARI Award is an environmental excellent Award for schools at National level. The secretariat for the Award is Department of Environment.

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PLAN OF KELAB PALS

Various challenges have been highlighted in my paper such as Kelab PALS “dying” or not active or want to pull back their membership. Among the major reasons are:

- (i) Inadequate time for the Kelab PALS advisors to organize the activities;
- (ii) Schools are giving more priority on academic achievements rather than co-curriculum activities; and
- (iii) Lack of fund to carry out the projects or activities.

These are all challenges and constraints that need to be tackled.

There are a few plans, some already started and some not, in order to strengthen of implementation of Kelab PALS programme. The aim is to achieve target such as internationally Eco-Schools, if not Eco-Club in Japan. Eco-Schools programme was initiated by Member organizations of the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) with the support of the European Commission.

Future plan for Kelab PALS are:

- (i) Standard logo for all Kelab PALS at each participating schools.
- (ii) Kelab PALS identity in term of fauna or flora
- (iii) Produce complete Kelab PALS guidance and modules
- (iv) Provide venue to share experiences and ideas among Kelab PALS members, in term of Bulletin PALS or Website
- (v) Exchange programme with Junior Eco-Club in Japan, through organization such as Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, Kelab PALS is one of the valuable venues to nurture and instill love for environment among our younger generation. As such, its establishment deserves continuous support from all the related agencies including the private sectors and the NGOs.