



Masidi with some of the SMJ Energy Education CSR Initiative recipients at SMK Kanibongan Pitas.

# SMJ Energy's CSR initiative brings hope to Pitas students

Mariah Doksil

**PITAS:** In a quiet corner of Sabah's interior, far from the noise and convenience of city life, a 15-year-old girl carries a powerful story that reflects the daily challenges of many children growing up in rural communities.

Alexa Grace Zulkeplee, a student at SMK Kanibongan in Pitas, faces more than just the usual pressures of school life. Her journey is marked by food insecurity and period poverty, struggles that often go unnoticed, yet weigh heavily on students like her.

But today, things are a little easier, thanks to the SMJ Energy Education CSR Initiative.

Through this programme, Alexa receives RM100 a month in aid. While that amount may appear modest to some, to her, it is a lifeline.

"It helped me a lot," she said with a quiet smile. "Not just for school things, but also for something important like pads," she added.

Living in the school's hostel with her younger sister, Alexa typically receives just RM10 a week from her family barely enough for small purchases, since meals are already provided. She shared that if she wants to buy something during recess, she might spend RM1 at the canteen, saving the rest for emergencies, especially to buy sanitary pads from the school's cooperative retail shop.

"When I found out about this assistance, I was so happy. Now I have enough to buy food at the canteen during recess and can also prepare for my period," she says.

Alexa is one of 2,261 students across the Pitas district who are receiving support from this initiative, which is funded by Sabah's state-owned oil and gas company, SMJ Energy. At her school alone, 680 students are expected to benefit from the programme until the end of the year.

Other schools involved in the initiative include SMK



Alexa Grace

Bongkol, SMK Telaga, SK Dallas, SK Kanibongan, SK Sosop and SK Datong. The initiative is implemented in collaboration with the MyKasih Foundation, which oversees the administrative aspects of the programme, and in partnership with the Sabah Education Department.

Secondary school students receive RM100 per month, while primary school pupils are given RM80.

Instead of handing out cash, the assistance is distributed through the MyKasih smart card system, allowing students to make purchases at their school canteen and cooperative retail shops. This ensures that the support goes directly towards food, school needs and personal essentials.

For 16-year-old Rioallwen Paul, the programme brings peace of mind. The Form Four student from Kg Boribi, Kanibongan, said the card gives him access to food even when his parents are unable to provide pocket money.

"I don't have to worry anymore if my parents can't give me lunch money.

"With this card, I can pay for food at the school canteen. This is the first time we've received this kind of support, and it really eases the burden of our parents," he shared.

During the launch of the programme at SMK Kanibongan on June 10, SMJ Energy chairman Datuk Seri Panglima Masidi Manjun explained why Pitas was selected for the pilot project.

Known as the most underdeveloped district in Malaysia, Pitas represents a community where the need is greatest.



Rioallwen Paul

Masidi noted that helping students with their daily necessities is a practical and meaningful way to encourage them to stay in school and pursue higher education. He added that if the pilot programme is successful, SMJ Energy may expand it to other underserved districts or continue strengthening its efforts within Pitas itself.

In an inspiring speech, Masidi also reflected on his own upbringing. As a kampung boy from the highlands of Ranau, he once walked three days and three nights to Tamparuli just to catch a bus to Kota Kinabalu to continue his secondary education. He spoke candidly about the hardships of his youth and how they motivated him to rise above poverty.

"For me, hardship was a challenge that pushed me to lift my family out of poverty," he said.

"God determines our fate, but it is up to us to decide how we respond to it and what we make of it. Don't be ashamed of coming from a poor family. Be ashamed only if you don't try to escape poverty," he continued.

Masidi also highlighted the achievements of SMJ Energy over the past three years, noting that its progress has been driven by capable local Sabahan talent.

Joining him at the launch event were SMJ Energy CEO Dr Dionysia Kibat and MyKasih Foundation deputy chairman Jeffrey Gerard Perera.

Through this initiative, SMJ Energy is not only addressing immediate needs but also sowing the seeds for a brighter, more hopeful future for Sabah's rural students.