

## KERATAN AKHBAR

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### Soon Koh: 67,000 households in Sarawak live below poverty level



PSB president Dato Sri Wong Soon Koh said about 67,000 Sarawakian households live below the Poverty Line Income Level based on Household Income and Basic Amenities Survey Report by State and Administrative District. – File photo

SIBU (July 21): About 67,000 Sarawakian households live below the Poverty Line Income Level based on Household Income and Basic Amenities Survey Report by State and Administrative District, Sarawak 2019, says Dato Sri Wong Soon Koh.

However, the government's Development Strategy claims that 20,000 households would be lifted out of poverty by 2030 without mentioning the remaining 47,000 poor households, said the Parti Sarawak Bersatu (PSB) president.

“According to report, 10.7 per cent of the 625,400 households in Sarawak earn less than RM2,000 a month,” Wong told reporters at his office here yesterday.

The Bawang Assan assemblyman said he had mentioned this in his speech during the State Legislative Assembly sitting in May.

He was responding to questions posed by a reporter from an online news portal, following disclosure by Special Functions Minister Abdul Latiff Ahmad in parliament, citing the e-Kasih database, that more than 97,000 households in Sarawak are living in poverty.

Among the questions asked were: What does the federal government need to do to help alleviate this problem. The state government, which has reserves of RM30 billion, should do something about this but it is taking a long time for them to address this issue and why this problem has been going on for years but nothing has really changed.

According to the online portal, the minister in a written reply to a question from Anyi Ngau (GPS-Baram), said the three districts that showed the highest poverty rates were Kuching, Simunjan and Serian.

Kuching had the highest number of households living in poverty, with 2,631 considered ‘hardcore poor’ and 4,866 ‘poor’; Simunjan had 2,417 ‘hardcore poor’ and 2,529 ‘poor’, and Serian had 1,585 ‘hardcore poor’ and 2,583 ‘poor’.

In June, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department (Economy) Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed, was quoted as saying that Sabah and Sarawak were among states that had the highest increases in poverty rates.

Mustapa reportedly said this was because of inequality and imbalanced development across the country in terms of wealth, income, education and infrastructure.

Wong further asked if the 2030 Development Strategy projects the median household income to increase from RM4,544 to RM15,047 per month, representing an average increase rate of 21 per cent per annum over the 11-year period, was realistic or possible.

“It may be too ambitious to claim that Sarawak could achieve such an unprecedented high rate of increase in household income, amidst the current pandemic when historically, the figures are much lower under regular non-pandemic circumstances.

“All said, in a country that is well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of, in a country that is not well governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of.

“This is the challenge which the state government must seriously look into to shed its image and perception of being ‘a rich government, but with poor Sarawakians’,” he said in response to the questions posed, which was also his speech in the May sitting.

Wong also recalled mentioning in his speech at the sitting, where he pointed out the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in the state has been below five per cent per annum for the past few years.

“They (state government) say they want to achieve an annual average growth of GDP by eight per cent. This is not realistic.

“In 2020, it was – (minus) 2.1 per cent, 2.5 per cent (2019), 2.2 per cent (2018), 4.5 per cent (2017) and 2.4 per cent (2016).

“In the national context, the GDP growth rates were also below six per cent per annum, where it was – (minus) 5.6 per cent in 2020, 4.3 per cent (2019), 4.8 per cent (2018), 5.8 per cent (2017) and 4.5 per cent (2016).

“In fact, before the Covid-19 pandemic, Sarawak’s economy grew by an average of 2.9 per cent from 2016 to 2019.

“It is just too glossy, unrealistic and far-fetched,” he said.