The 12th Malaysia Plan (12MP) tabled on 27th September 2021 outlines Malaysia’s commitment to reducing its economy-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) intensity (against GDP) by 45% in 2030 compared to 2005 levels. This represents Malaysia’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), a national priority according to Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob.

Malaysia’s NDC was also highlighted by the Minister of Environment and Water, YB Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man, during the recent UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, where he announced a national plan in progress for attaining 31% and 40% of renewable energy in 2025 and 2035, respectively.

12MP also highlights Malaysia’s aspirations to achieve net-zero GHG emissions by 2050; reduce the rural-urban income and development gap; and transition the nation towards a low carbon, climate-resilient economy.

The Sabah Renewable Energy Rural Electrification Roadmap (Sabah RE2 Roadmap) initiative aligns well with this, navigating towards a future of energy equity, right livelihood, and wellbeing for Saba-
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The Sabah Renewable Energy Rural Electrification Roadmap (Sabah RE2 Roadmap) initiative aligns well with this, navigating towards a future of energy equity, right livelihood, and wellbeing for Sabahans by strengthening political and societal will to implement renewable energy mini-grids for at least half of the state’s unelectrified remote villages by 2027.

12MP states that Malaysia’s rural electricity coverage has reached 98% while Sabah’s has reached 96.3%, based on 2020 statistics. Estimates from Sabah RE2 Roadmap research show that Sabah is currently home to 72% of unelectrified rural Malaysians, a number that—while shocking—makes sense, as 12MP highlights that Sabah is home to eight of the ten poorest districts in Malaysia: Tongod, Pitas, Kota Marudu, Beluran, Kudat, Nabawan, Telupid, and Kota Belud.

Lack of electricity, road inaccessibility, and unpredictable weather conditions in Sabah’s remote regions have made income opportunities scarce. Many rural communities leave their ancestral homes in search of work, driving the local economies further down. Those who remain find their livelihoods constrained by high expenses.

Learn more about Sabah RE2 Roadmap
www.sabahre2roadmap.org
www.facebook.com/sabahre2
www.instagram.com/sabahre2

(Location of Ten Poorest Districts in Malaysia, 2019 Source from 12MP)

(Kampung Sungai Magandai, Kota Marudu CREDITS TO PACOS TRUST)
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“I have children working in Kota Kinabalu. They are hardly ever able to return, even less so now with the COVID-19 pandemic,” said the village chief of Kampung Sumabi, Pensiangan in Nabawan district. “Whatever income they make is only enough to sustain themselves.”

Most interior villages in Sabah rely on diesel generators for electricity, which bears a heavy financial burden on its users who can typically only afford to power the generator for four hours a day.

Diesel for the generator costs about RM15 per gallon, according to the village chief, but that is not the only cost to consider. “To go back and forth from here to Nabawan [for fuel] costs about RM80.”

While the cost of powering a generator in off-grid regions is high, the cost of generation and distribution of electricity from the main grid is even higher. According to 12MP, Sabahans pay 34.52 cents per kilowatt hour of electricity while the cost of generating it stands at 47.85 cents per kilowatt hour, the balance of which is subsidised by the Federal Government. In pivoting towards renewable energy, it not only lessens the financial burden of rural communities but of governing bodies as well.

Most villages in Sabah are connected to the main grid but their connection lacks stability due to their remote locations in the interior regions. It is this same factor that has made regular maintenance of power lines a challenge.

To connect these lower income and hard-to-reach households to reliable energy—stable 24/7 electricity—clean off-grid solutions are essential to consider to grow and sustain indigenous livelihoods.

(Kampung Sosogon Paliu, Kota Marudu CREDITS TO PACOS TRUST)
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The Sabah RE2 Roadmap initiative supports Sabah’s rural communities to design and implement community-managed solar and micro-hydro mini-grids in their villages. This not only shifts dependencies away from the financial and environmental impacts of fossil fuels but also enables rural communities to manage and maintain their own energy supply without outside support. This makes room for them to generate more income and develop their village economies, no longer needing to look outside to sustain themselves.

Kampung Sabibingkol, Pensiangan, for example, has been powered by a hybrid micro-hydro solar grid since 2017. Sabibingkol youth Ejai Ensos says that access to electricity has had a positive impact on his education. “My exam results used to be terrible. Studying at night, I wouldn’t be able to see. Now with electricity, my results have improved as I have a lot more time to study.” Ensos now has aspirations of becoming a teacher in his village, sharing, “I want to one day be able to help my siblings and relatives in the village with their education.”

By opening a path towards clean, accessible energy for Sabah’s rural villages, the Sabah RE2 Roadmap initiative aims to align with the aspirations of 12MP and Malaysia’s NDC commitments.

Renewables have the potential to move the carbon needle and address poverty in Sabah, with indigenous and local communities leading a shift towards sustainable livelihoods and low-carbon economies and a cleaner, more equitable future for all Malaysians.