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RECYCLING

Turning coconut shells into charcoal

KUALA LUMPUR: Heaps of discarded coconut shells caught the attention of a group of Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) students in Kedah, prompting them to take the initiative to recycle the “worthless” garbage into charcoal.

UUM’s Co&Coal project director Ho Cia Chen, 23, said coconut shells were usually discarded indiscriminately.

“We believe our initiative may help the rural community in Kedah to generate additional income and reduce environmental pollution.

“The project started in September 2014, and our team of 26 students from different streams conducted research and development for six months. We



Students from Universiti Utara Malaysia collecting coconut shells in Kedah. BERNAMA PIC

shared the information with experts from the United States and Australia.

“Co&Coal focuses on discarded coconut shells and transforms them into marketable products,” he said.

The project, run under UUM’s Enactus programme by international non-profit organisations in collaboration with about 1,600 higher education institutions in 39 countries around the world, aims to mobilise students to undertake community projects and build their social responsibility skills.

Ho said the process of producing coconut shell charcoal was easy, but required a lot of energy.

“There are four stages of production. We first heat the co-

conut shells for about two hours for the carbonisation process, and grind the shells to make fine charcoal powder.

“The charcoal powder then goes through a moulding process, where the powder will be blended with corn flour and put in the mould, and dried under the sunlight... it’s that easy,” he said.

The business administration student said Co&Coal was working with a woman from Lembah Bujang, Kedah, known as Mak Su, in a pilot project to help raise her family’s income.

“Mak Su has been successful as she can produce coconut shell charcoal and sell it for RM12 per three kilogrammes,” said Ho.

Bernama