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POVERTY CONVERSATIONS IN SABAH AND PENINSULAR MALAYSIA: THE APPGM-SDG FINDINGS FROM GROUND REALITIES

Edited by
Debbie Ann Loh & Hirzawati Atikah Mohd Tahir



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MySDG Academy

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Foreword

Hon. Isnaraissah Munirah Majilis@Fakharudy

*Chairperson, All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on
Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG)*

The MySDG Conference 2024 in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, marks a significant milestone in our collective journey toward addressing poverty in Malaysia. We are publishing two volumes of all the papers presented at the conference – Book 1: *Poverty Conversations in Sabah and Peninsular Malaysia: The APPGM-SDG Findings from Ground Realities* and Book 2: *Community Approaches to Poverty Alleviation in Malaysia*.

These books encapsulate the profound insights, research, and discussions that emerged from this pivotal event. Over two days, esteemed speakers and participants from diverse backgrounds came together to explore the multi-faceted challenges of poverty, particularly among Sabah communities, and to chart a path towards a more inclusive and equitable Malaysia.

The two volumes delve into the complexities of poverty, shedding light on the various dimensions beyond mere income levels. They emphasise the importance of infrastructure and basic facilities as foundational elements for alleviating poverty. The recognition that access to clean water, electricity, education, healthcare, and transportation are not just basic human rights but essential building blocks for sustainable development is a key theme throughout these two books.

Moreover, the need for improved Federal-State relations and better coordination between different levels of government emerges as a crucial factor in effectively addressing poverty. The discussions highlight how coordinated efforts between Federal, State, and local authorities can lead to more coherent and impactful solutions for local communities.

The role of Members of Parliament (MPs) in development work at the grassroots level is also a central focus. MPs are seen as vital advocates for their constituents' needs, facilitating the implementation of development programmes and initiatives. However, these books also candidly address the significant obstacles that hinder these efforts, such as the lack of resources and funds, and the scarcity of accurate data to identify social issues and challenges faced by local communities.

In response to these challenges, the recommendations presented empowered local authorities to make informed decisions for their communities' specific needs. This is seen as a pathway to more effective and sustainable outcomes. Additionally, the utilisation of accurate ground-level data to inform policies, resource allocation, design, monitoring and evaluation of development programmes are emphasised as critical strategies for uplifting the socio-economic status of the vulnerable.

These books also underscore the importance of empowering MPs in development planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Strengthening the capacity of elected representatives to engage with their constituents, advocate for their needs, and oversee the effective delivery of services are fundamental to ensure that no one is left behind in our pursuit of inclusive and sustainable development.

As you engage with the experiences, insights and recommendations within these pages, I hope you will be inspired to join us in translating these ideas into tangible actions. Through the power of collaboration, creativity, innovation and technology across sectors and communities, we can together create a future where poverty is alleviated, and every citizen has the opportunity to thrive and prosper.

These books are a testament to the unwavering dedication and passion of all those involved in the MySDG Conference 2024. They serve as a reminder that the journey towards a more just and equitable society is ongoing, and our commitment to building a Malaysia where every citizen can realise their full potential remains steadfast.

Introduction

Prof. Datuk Dr. Denison Jayasooria

Head of Secretariat, All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) and President of the Society for the Promotions of SDGs

It was a year ago that Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim announced at the National Economic Action Council (MTEN) meeting¹ that the government was helping people break away from the shackles of hardcore poverty. These hardcore poverty eradication programmes were being implemented by government agencies. These include programmes related to monthly cash assistance, upgrading homes, providing business capital, skills training, and income-generating activities.

The government has always provided targeted assistance to the poor in Malaysia resulting in reduced overall poverty over the years. However, as the APPGM-SDG parliamentary mapping reports will reveal, there are poor communities who are still unable to access essential services and programmes. There are also new dimensions of poverty being identified. There is a need for a new way of measuring poverty as well as undertaking new approaches in addressing the root causes of poverty both in rural and urban areas in Malaysia.

MySDG Academy hosted a two-day SDG Poverty Conference themed, *Poverty and Poor Communities* in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah on 11 and 12 May 2024. This was organised in partnership with IDS Sabah. We had a fruitful time listening to paper presenters share their research,

¹ <https://www.pmo.gov.my/2023/11/mten-agrees-to-proposals-to-end-hardcore-poverty-pm-anwar/>

interventions, experiences in addressing human need and in ensuring that no one is left behind.

During the mapping work undertaken between 2020 and 2024, we have reached out to local communities in 115 parliamentary constituencies. In all these communities, we recognised that there are poor communities needing assistance and opportunities for socio-economic development exists. They shared their struggles and challenges in accessing essential services and programmes.

This publication is entitled, *Poverty Conversations in Sabah and Peninsular Malaysia: APPGM-SDG's Findings from Ground Realities*. While all these 12 chapters were first presented at the 2024 SDG Poverty Conference, they capture the findings from the APPGM-SDG's ground experiences with a deeper understanding of poverty from a policy dimension as well as practical implications.

This book is a collection of 12 chapters written by 12 writers and divided into four parts, as indicated in the table below which also highlights key thoughts and implications for poverty in Malaysia.

Table 1: Key thoughts and implications for poverty

THEME	CHAPTERS	KEY THOUGHTS	IMPLICATIONS FOR POVERTY
<p>Part 1</p> <p>Understanding poverty and socio-economic development</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>National unity and focus on economic development - wealth creation and distribution.</p> <p>Multi-dimensional poverty rather than just income measurement.</p> <p>Alternative understanding of development.</p> <p>A needs-based plus group-based approach to socio-economic development.</p>	<p>A multi-dimensional poverty index captures deprivations better than just an income measurement.</p> <p>A need to revise the MPI indicators from the present 4 dimensions and 11 indicators to 5 dimensions and 24 indicators.</p>
<p>Part 2</p> <p>Poverty and Communities in Sabah</p>	<p>6</p>	<p>Sabah has the highest incidence of poverty in Malaysia.</p> <p>It has the largest number of poor districts in</p>	<p>Inadequate infrastructure, clean drinking water, lack of health care, education, employment and digital</p>

		<p>Malaysia (8 out of 10 districts).</p> <p>Multi-faceted intervention is essential.</p> <p>There is a need for targeted intervention including fishing communities, interior communities, and communities in small islands.</p> <p>Issues of youth in accessing educational and employment opportunities in rural Sabah.</p> <p>Multi-stakeholder involvement is necessary.</p> <p>There is resilience among the poor in overcoming adversity.</p>	<p>connectivity are impacting poverty negatively and hindering the poor from achieving wellbeing.</p> <p>The poverty situation of the communities demonstrates that their income-generating abilities are hinged on the deprivations that they are facing.</p> <p>Over-reliance on government aid can create a culture of dependency which is also a mindset of poverty. To overcome this, there is a need</p>
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		<p>Sustainable investments in education are essential for empowering marginalised populations.</p>	<p>for skills development and employment opportunities.</p> <p>Community-driven initiatives and partnerships play a key role in overcoming challenges and improving educational outcomes.</p> <p>Involving communities in remote areas and islands are key. These include planning, design and implementation.</p>
<p>Part 3</p> <p>Poverty and other communities</p>	1	<p>The Orang Asli community faces many socio-economic issues including</p>	<p>Understanding the nature of poverty among different vulnerable</p>

in Peninsular Malaysia		<p>education and economy.</p> <p>Over-dependence on government welfare assistance disempowers them.</p>	<p>communities is needed including recognising that specific targeting is needed. Building trust between outsiders and the Orang Asli community is key to effective implementation of interventions.</p>
<p>Part 4</p> <p>Poverty and economic empowerment</p>	2	<p>Capacity building and skills development including digital and financial literacy and basic business management.</p> <p>Building self-confidence and mindset development.</p>	<p>Impacting urban poor through economic empowerment programmes.</p>
Total: 12 Chapters			

KEY LESSONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

One can draw five key lessons with relevance for policy advocacy and recommendations from this book of 12 chapters.

Understanding socio-economic development

Poverty studies could take a narrow approach to determining poverty, focusing on household income. However, the chapters reveal, based on the SDGs, that a broader understanding covering economic and social dimensions including health, education, housing as well as water and sanitation are needed. We noted that in Sabah, the infrastructure development of roads as well as connectivity are key factors impacting quality of life, especially in rural Sabah and Sarawak.

Therefore, a more holistic approach is needed. There is a need to keep in balance individual interventions to assist the poor as well as ensuring the overall improvement in the quality of life of individuals, families, and local communities. This approach is consistent with Amartya Sen's capability building.² Sen stated that "poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of income".³ Lee Ken (Chapter 1) raises many of these concerns in his chapter linking development concerns to ethnic relations and national unity as the ultimate goal of national development.

Findings from the APPGM-SDG field studies are showing that grassroots communities are calling for a wider and deeper understanding and application of service delivery. This approach is consistently raised by most of the grassroots communities. This is well described by Sue Ann (Chapter 5), Lailah (Chapter 7), Fazlina (Chapter 8) and Lydia (Chapter 9) in their chapters.

² Amartya Sen (1999), Development as Freedom

³ Ibid. pg 87.

Therefore, there is a need for the public sector to recognise this and ensure poor communities have access to a cross-section of services which enables them to access and enjoy a good quality of life and wellbeing. Dato' Sri Mustapa (Chapter 4) acknowledges the top priority given by the government in addressing poverty at a national level. In this context, he advocates that poverty alleviation must adopt a holistic approach.

Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI)

The dominant poverty measurement instrument used by the Malaysian authorities is the Poverty Line Income (PLI).⁴ This approach is based on a basket of goods comprising a food basket and non-food basket. However, it is basically an income measurement which was revised in 2019, whereby everyone living below the PLI are poor and those who are living on half of the PLI are absolutely poor.

The food and non-food PLI at national level was revised based on 2019 PLI methodology and is measured as RM2,208 per household.⁵ More recently, the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2022 reported an increase in the national poverty line to a monthly income of RM 2,589.⁶

While the PLI is dominant, the government also introduced the multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI) in 2019. There are four dimensions, namely income, education, health, and standard of living and 11 indicators.⁷ Debbie (Chapter 2) provides a comprehensive analysis of the MPI with specific recommendations to expand the dimensions and indicators. This is a major contribution to poverty studies. There is,

⁴ <https://www.ehm.my/publications/articles/changing-perspectives-on-malaysias-poverty-line-income>

⁵ <https://rmke12.ekonomi.gov.my/en/information/faq/social>

⁶ https://storage.googleapis.com/dosm-public-publications/multi-year_2022_hies.pdf

⁷ *ibid*

therefore, a need for the government to have a hard look at the dimensions and indicators which provides a better analysis of human wellbeing in comparison to just an income measurement.

A well-constructed national MPI will reveal a deeper understanding of poverty and expose the deprivation experiences by poor families. It will provide a clearer picture of poverty which reflects the ground realities. In a similar way, the MPI could serve as a report card in evaluating the delivery of agencies in addressing poverty concerns among families and communities in a multi-dimensional way through inter-agency collaboration.

Breaking the overreliance on government welfare aid

Among ground communities, we see welfare assistance and handouts creating dependency and a high expectation for public sector assistance. This aspect is well-illustrated in a number of chapters where there is a focus on field visits and ground studies. Mc Jeanet Marx describes a cycle of poverty due to reliance on government aid. She describes this as a poverty mindset due to handouts which cripple independence and self-reliance based on her studies in Sabah.

Siti Noraiysah (Chapter 10) shares her experiences in undertaking a study in the Orang Asli village at Sungai Rual, Jeli, Kelantan. She states that, *"...persoalan timbul apabila mereka tidak dilibatkan dalam dan tidak dapat mengikut arus pemandaran dan tahap kebergantungan mereka terhadap bantuan luar masih ketara."* The translation reads, the question arises when they are not involved in (the discussions) and are not able to keep up with urbanisation and their dependence on external aid is still evident.

It is, therefore, imperative that both politicians and government agencies at both Federal and State levels review cash transfers and direct assistance, and institute more long-term measures which build self-help and self-reliance, including addressing the root causes which keep people poor. Exploring hurdles at the personal as well as structural levels are necessary, including undertaking empowering interventions as illustrated by Sridayu (Chapter 11) and Puvanesvari (Chapter 12) with a focus on competencies and skills for business development and management, digital and financial literacy. These micro-SDG solution projects contribute towards improving socio economic levels.

Listening to the voices of the poor from the grassroots

The research methodology adopted by APPGM SDG is one of going to the grassroots through field visits and focus group discussions⁸ to hear directly from the affected people at the grassroots. It is a small group and the researchers who serve as group interviewers, have a set of questions and their work towards receiving feedback. These discussions are taped and transcribed for analysis and report writing.

In this book the voices of grassroots communities are articulated especially that of poverty concerns in Sabah especially the challenges faced by indigenous communities living in the rural and interior locations. Likewise, there are documentation of views of the Orang Asli community. This target community approach has exposed the deprivation experienced by the people. A disaggregated approach further facilitates relevant and suitable intervention.

⁸ Focus Group Discussion in Qualitative Research
<https://ndpublisher.in/admin/issues/tlV6N1a.pdf>

In addition to the mapping field visits, there were the special survey undertaken. The FGD approach gives substance and depth to the issues and concerns of the poor as opposed to just statical data.

The art of hearing the voices is very important in articulating local needs. It strengthens grass roots democracy as it builds trust between the ordinary people and those in political leadership. It also builds confidence and a feeling that their views are being taken seriously. The approach of FGD must be used to complement the more statistical data.

Multi-stakeholder dialogue and engagement

The APPGM-SDG model demonstrates a good working relationship between State and non-state actors. The government needs to recognise that they need the support of non-state actors like universities, NGOs-CSOs and not-for-profit organisations. Likewise, non-state actors must effectively network with the government for effective delivery of services.

SDG 17:17 describes the partnership model and the APPGM-SDG field visits to the parliamentary constituencies and dialogues with agencies show their willingness to work together. There are challenges and hurdles. There is a need for greater cooperation among the agencies to address the SDGs which are cross-cutting although the agencies have their mandates and might be a singular focus. Poverty impacts education, health, employment and more, and therefore, greater inter-agency cooperation is needed.

This is where the newly launched project of the APPGM-SDG and Yayasan Hasanah in setting up SDG Policy Taskforce at 55 districts is a step towards enhancing partnerships and collaborations in solving local issues and concerns. This is to enhance poverty alleviation but

more so, improve the overall wellbeing of the people at the grassroots whether in rural areas or in cities.

WORD OF APPRECIATION

A special word of appreciation and thanks goes to all the 12 chapter writers for their valuable contributions in understanding poverty and how they illustrated the APPGM-SDG findings and interventions. Thanks also to the Communications team at the MySDG Academy as well as the two able co-editors of this volume, Debbie Ann Loh and Hirzawati Atikah Mohd Tahir.

Contributors

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engages in organising intellectual discussions within her community. She has arranged numerous seminars, workshops and roundtable discussions, playing a pivotal role in driving collaborative innovation and knowledge exchange.

Lydia Ann Bill is Policy and Research Officer at the MySDG Centre for Social Inclusion, APPGM-SDG. She also serves as a lead researcher for issue mapping visits to various Malaysian parliamentary constituencies. Lydia's background in social sciences with a focus on development studies has sharpened her ability to comprehend complicated issues relating to economic, social and political development, with the goal of understanding the underlying causes and consequences. She remains committed to promote the Sustainable Development Goals and improve the wellbeing of vulnerable communities. She holds a Master of Development Studies, Development Economics and International Development from University of Malaya.

Mc Jeanet Marx, is Sabah Regional Officer at APPGM-SDG. With a strong focus on research and project management, Mc Jeanet plays a vital role in advancing initiatives related to sustainable development in Sabah. Originally from Ranau, she is passionate about making a positive impact, bringing extensive expertise and a commitment to excellence in every project undertaken. Mc Jeanet is currently pursuing her Master of Business Administration.

Dato' Sri Mustapa Mohamed, also known as Tok Pa, is a prominent Malaysian politician. He has served in various ministerial roles within the Malaysian government. Over the years, he has held key positions such as the Minister of International Trade and Industry and the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Economy). Known for his expertise in economic policies and development, he has been

influential in shaping Malaysia's economic landscape. His contributions span across different administrations, showcasing his enduring presence in Malaysian politics. Tok Pa holds a Masters in Development Economics from Boston University.

Dr. Nurrul Fazlina Osman is Executive Officer leading APPGM-SDG's Sabah Regional Office. She recently obtained her PhD from Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) under the Borneo Marine Research Institute. Her research focused on Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries under the Potential Impact of Climate Change in Kudat, Sabah.

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Siti Noraiysah Binti Rohim is Constituency Officer at APPGM-SDG. She graduated in Administrative Science and Policy Studies from Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) and has been actively involved in research since 2017. Her expertise lies in social sciences and she has participated in several field studies related to street children, beggars and indigenous communities. In 2024, she led six of APPGM-SDG's issue mapping visits to parliamentary constituencies around Malaysia.

Sridayu Samsuri has an academic background in International Development Engineering from the Tokyo Institute of Technology. She has been actively involved in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) since 2007. She is also the founder of the Kuantan Women's Inspiration Association (2018) and Teja Station, a collective entrepreneurship company involving small and medium-sized entrepreneurs. Kuantan Women's Inspiration Association has been a solution partner for APPGM-SDG since 2022 and received the SDG Leadership Icon Award in 2023.

Dr. Teo Lee Ken is Assistant Director at the MySDG Centre for Social Inclusion, APPGM-SDG. His research interests include the fields of social research, sociology, culture and society, comparative politics and social policy. Previously, he has held research positions at institutions in Singapore, Australia, the Middle East and Malaysia. He holds a PhD in Malay Studies from the Department of Malay Studies in the National University of Singapore (NUS). His recent publications include SDG Policies and Practices in Malaysia (2023), and Everyday SDG Narratives from the Ground (2024).

Dr. Teo Sue Ann is Director of the MySDG Center for Social Inclusion. She is part of the APPGM-SDG Secretariat since 2021, when she began as a researcher for the northern region and subsequently, Research Director in charge of supervising the researchers, ensuring the quality of the mapping exercises, editing the situational analyses as well as case studies. She holds a PhD in Religion/Religious Studies from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Her research interests include ethnologies, Hindu studies, minority groups, diaspora, gender, migration and everyday politics in Malaysia.

Part 1:
Understanding Poverty and
Socio-Economic Development

Chapter 1

Muddling through Nation-Building? Redefining Development in Contemporary Malaysia

Dr. Teo Lee Ken

ABSTRACT

The agendas of economic development and fostering national unity has for a long time constituted the centerpiece of Malaysia's nation-building project. Both agendas are also intertwined in a complex way, with the political mantra in Malaysia being that national unity is not achievable without economic progress in the form of wealth creation and its fair redistribution among key sectors of Malaysian society. This political orthodoxy has been the dominant ideology in national and political circles until today. And yet in a post-pandemic Malaysia, there are many communities in Malaysian society that are still deprived of basic needs and economic prosperity, and are left out and behind in Malaysia's economic growth. This exclusion encompasses the dimensions of geographical location, identity, political ideology and class, and in many conditions also overlap. The 12th Malaysian Plan (RMK-12) has identified how out of the 10 poorest districts in Malaysia, 8 are in Sabah, 1 in Sarawak, and another is in Kelantan. I argue that orthodox and conventional approaches to nation-building are no longer adequate. Economic progress, while crucial, cannot be seen in only material terms, but has to be seen in a multi-dimensional perspective. The perspective of development has to be revived and renewed. To do this, the paper surveys the lived conditions of vulnerable communities in present Malaysian society. It focuses, in particular, on two minority communities, the Malaysian Indian community in Tasek Gelugor and the Orang Asli community in Sungai Rual, Jeli, and expounds their precarious economic and social

conditions. The paper then, guided by the ideas of Amartya Sen and Lee Hwok Aun, suggests how these conditions can be analysed through a redefinition and implementation of development, and focusing on the twin pillars of equality and basic needs for all, and fairness and diversity.

"For the master's tool will never dismantle the master's house."

- Audre Lorde

"If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail."

- Sourced

"I, therefore, call on the next generation of policy researchers and community development workers to build on what is undertaken here. May God bless these efforts for the betterment of humanity by ensuring that "no one is left behind – individual, family or community."

- Denison Jayasooria

SETTING THE CONTEXT, AND DEMARCATING THE PROBLEM

Economic development and national unity have always formed the center of Malaysia's nation-building project. More so after the events of May 13, 1969, economic development through wealth creation and the fair and equal redistribution of the wealth has underpinned Malaysia's national philosophy for national unity.¹ The wealth inequality that existed between the ethnic Malays and non-Malays was identified as the primary factor that produced the sense of resentment and injustice, which then caused the outbreak of ethnic conflict. The ethnic riots of 1969 led to the formulation and implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971, which

¹ Lee Hwok Aun, Malaysia's New Economic Policy: Fifty Years of Polarization and Impasse, p. 303

institutionalised the implementation of affirmation action for the ethnic Malay and bumiputra communities. As Abdul Rahman Embong observes:

“A major outcome of all of these was none other than the formulation of the New Economic Policy (1971-1990) to forge national unity through social engineering.”²

While scholars such as Shamsul Amri Baharuddin have argued that what is present and can be aspired towards is not national unity, but national integration and social cohesion, the former has nevertheless remained the overriding aim of successive national governments in Malaysia. I argue that those two pillars of economic development and national unity, and the pursuance of national unity through the creation and equitable redistribution of wealth, constitutes the political orthodoxy of identity politics that remains as the dominant ideology until today.

The use of identity politics as orthodoxy was meant to address the two fundamental questions that accompanied the independence of Malaya in 1957, and later formation of Malaysia in 1963: 1) the national question; and 2) the socio-economic imbalances covering ethnicity, class, and geographical region. These questions have not been addressed meaningfully even to this day, and have gained acute relevance.

In this context, the discourse of development or *pembangunan*, and economic development in particular, in Malaysia has been heavily dictated by the ideology of identity politics, and the New Economic

² Abdul Rahman Embong, *Fifty Years of New Economic Policy: Revisiting its Impact on Social Cohesion, National Unity and Creation of Bangsa Malaysia*, Policy Ideas, No. 74, IDEAS, 2021

Policy and affirmative action.³ Affirmative action is synonymous and understood publicly as referring to preferential treatment for the ethnic Malays and bumiputra in the spheres of the economy, governance, education and culture. The ethnic-based approach to development was influentially advocated by two key leaders who were also former Prime Ministers of Malaysia, namely Tun Abdul Razak and Mahathir Mohamad. The former presided over the formulation and implementation of the NEP in the 1970s. The latter is notably known for his work, *The Malay Dilemma*, where he forcefully argued for preferential treatment for the ethnic Malay community to uplift their economic status. In the same work, he also argued how the principle of equality cannot be applied in Malaysian society as it would further increase the inequality between the non-Malay and Malay ethnic communities.⁴

Still, other thinkers and writers such as Syed Hussein Alatas, Syed Husin Ali, Shahrudin Maaruf and Usman Awang have argued how a class and needs-based perspective is a better approach to resolving socio-economic deprivation and poverty, and to ensure the growth of a fairer Malaysian society.⁵

In view of the agenda to uplift the socio-economic status of the poor, and ethnic Malay and bumiputra communities, subsequent national agendas and policies have been directed to address the income and development imbalances. Among some of these include the five-year

³ Please see Syed Husin Ali, *Apa Erti Pembangunan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1976); Syed Husin Ali, *Orang Melayu: Masalah dan Masa Depan* (Kuala Lumpur: Adabi, 1979)

⁴ See Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma*

⁵ Please see Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Second Malaysia Plan*; Syed Hussin Alatas, *Siapa yang Salah*; Syed Husin Ali, *The Malays*; Shahrudin Maaruf, *Malay Ideas of Development*; Usman Awang, *Koleksi Terpilih Sasterawan Negara Usman Awang*;

Malaysia plans, and strategic industrial and trade blueprints and action plans.⁶

THE ISSUES: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION AND DEVELOPMENTAL THOUGHT STAGNANCY

Nevertheless, after 30 years of the implementation of the NEP from 1971 to 1990, and subsequent economic policies that aim to address the poverty among the ethnic Malay and bumiputra communities, and communities in the rural areas, inter-ethnic economic inequality persists.⁷ The wealth gap and inequality in terms of intra-ethnic relations have also not been adequately resolved.

Recent studies have also presented a familiar and grim picture of the existing conditions of poverty and deprivation in contemporary Malaysian society.⁸ Contrary to political and governmental orthodoxy, popular beliefs and public perception, these phenomena of poverty and deprivation cut across ethnicity, religion and geographical locations. Further, there are certain communities that are more vulnerable in comparison to others. These groups include the Orang Asli and Asal, the urban poor, persons with disabilities, the Malaysian Indian community, single parents, and those located in the rural and interior localities. Hence, in addition to the ethnic Malay and bumiputra communities, there is also present a wide spectrum of society that confronts the conditions of socio-economic deprivation and are mired in the cycle of poverty.

⁶ Please see Jomo K.S., *Malaysia@50: Economic Development, Distribution, Disparities* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2014); Mushtaq H. Khan and Jomo K.S., *Rents, Rent-seeking and Economic Development: Theory and Evidence in Asia* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

⁷ Please see Muhammed Abdul Khalid, *The Colour of Inequality: Ethnicity, Class, Income and Wealth in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: MPH Publishing)

⁸ See *Living on the Edge*, UNICEF, May 2024

A recent release this year illustrates how inter-ethnic income disparities remain wide.⁹ However, and in addition to that, the 12th Malaysia Plan (2021-2025) has also reported that out of the 10 poorest districts in Malaysia, 8 of these are located in Sabah. The 8 districts consist of Tongod, Pitas, Kota Marudu, Kota Belud, Beluran, Telupid, Nabawan and Kudat. Two other districts, Pusa and Lojing, are located in Sarawak and Kelantan respectively.¹⁰ In addition, the recent report by the Employers Provident Fund (EPF) also highlights how out of the total number of members who have savings with the EPF, 6.3 million members under the age of 55 years have less than RM10,000 in their savings.¹¹ What is most worrying and severe in this existing situation is that we are not only witnessing and grappling with the issue of present poverty and wealth inequality, but also future and intergenerational poverty and inequality. These issues are observed and exist at the macro level, and are critical and need to be addressed by policy and social planners.

The Work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on SDGs (APPGM-SDG)

At the micro and ground level, conditions of poverty and socio-economic deprivation are also captured and documented by the researchers of the APPGM-SDG team. For purposes of this paper and discussion, I will just cite two examples to illustrate the dire conditions and urgent needs of vulnerable communities on the ground.

The first relates to the Multi-Dimensional Poverty Study in Kampung Sungai Rual, Jeli, Kelantan that was coordinated by our researcher, Debbie Ann Loh. This study was carried out in 2023 from 8 – 14

⁹ DOSM Press Release

¹⁰ 12th Malaysian Plan (2021-2025)

¹¹ EPF: 6.3 million members under 55 have less than RM10,000 saving, The Star, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/11/20/epf-63-million-members-under-55-have-less-than-rm10000-savings>

October 2023 and included four villages, with a focus on assessing the socio-economic conditions of the Orang Asli in Kampung Sungai Rual. The details and framework of the study have been discussed at length over two chapters in this book, written by Debbie Ann Loh and her co-researcher, Siti Noraiysah Rohim.

The study, which covered 201 households, found that a sizeable number of those living in the locality are involved in the economic activity of gathering forest produce, and also agriculture. And in terms of economic status, again a large proportion or number are self-employed. The average monthly income spans approximately in the bracket of RM400 and below, and also RM800 to RM1200. If seen through the categories of gender, it was found that in proportion and percentage, men received higher wages and incomes in comparison to women.

The second example relates to the Malaysian Indian community in the parliamentary constituency of Tasek Gelugor, in the state of Penang. Empirical data and documentation of this community was derived from a site visit to the constituency undertaken by Siti Noraisyah and which was held from 19 – 22 December 2023. Two areas were visited, one in the locality of Taman Tasek Rethina Flats, and another in the Mayfield farm estate. Some of the issues faced by the Malaysian Indian community in the latter included the increase in prices of goods, the rise of housing rental prices, the rising cost of living, difficulties in gaining employment, and lack of decent living conditions and also house ownership. In the estate of Mayfield, notable issues confronted by the local Malaysian Indian community include: poverty, consisting of low income and intergenerational lack of decent income; lack of access to welfare services and protection, and the lack of access to schools and quality education.

The differences in the demographic profile of the communities in Kampung Sungai Rual and Tasek Gelugor are stark. However, what binds them is their marginalisation from mainstream and holistic development. The economic development landscape of Malaysia when seen as a whole has made great strides since independence. Nevertheless, these changes have come at the expense of those living in the rural and semi-rural areas, and also the interior areas of the country. As the wealth of the nation generated from natural resources and industry have concentrated in the urban centres and big cities, for instance in the Klang Valley.

The other overlapping thematic is the condition of abject poverty and socio-economic deprivation. The communities surveyed in Jeli and Tasek Gelugor suffer from the lack of access to economic resources and opportunities. As a result, while the economic sector may have expanded and generated increased profits, not all communities have opportunities to gained from this wealth. Decent work and employment are, therefore, also scarce. These gains in profits and wealth also do not extend to the societal peripheries.

There is thus, a need for a form of development that is multi-dimensional. One that encompasses the various facets of dignified employment and fair income, access to decent housing and living conditions, access to quality education, access to good healthcare services and facilities, and possession of clean and green spaces and environment. For many of these communities that have been identified as vulnerable have to grapple with and suffer the conditions of poverty, present and intergenerational, socio-economic deprivation, and social and political disempowerment.

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT: THE NEEDS- AND GROUPS-BASED PERSPECTIVE

There is an alternative to the political and governmental orthodoxy, and the conventional economic agenda and programmes that successive Malaysian governments have implemented over the decades. The development economist and political philosopher, Amartya Sen, has for a long time proposed an approach to development that focuses not only material growth and wealth accumulation, but emphasises on human development in a holistic manner. Such an approach would entail not only creating economic wealth and income, but also ensuring the construction of an inclusive ecosystem that ensures access to good and affordable healthcare, access to and retention in quality education, social and welfare support, civil and political rights, and decent living conditions and preservation of the environment. Development, therefore, is not seen merely in economic and GDP terms, but also in social, political and humanistic terms. It thus gives a human face to development. This approach to development, which Sen has elsewhere identified as development as freedom,¹² can also be termed as a human-centered development, or a human rights-based approach to development.

In Malaysia, there are many scholars, writers and activists that have called for an alternative approach to development. These alternative approaches vary from being class-based, to human rights-based, and to needs-based. Some of these individuals include Rustam Sani, Syed Husin Ali, KS Jomo, Abdul Rahman Embong, Nurul Izzah Anwar, Jerald Joseph, Lin Mui Kiang, Denison Jayasooria, and Lee Hwok Aun, just to name a few.

More recently and in particularly, the economist Lee Hwok Aun has written extensively on how the conventional way of understanding and implementing affirmative action has to be changed. This extends

¹² Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom

as well to the need to reformulate the New Economic Policy in line with present challenges and needs. Hwok Aun argues above all, for the need for inclusiveness in Malaysia's economic growth and sustainable development agenda.¹³ In order to do this, he calls for a refinement of the NEP's two focus areas. The initial focus of the NEP was one, poverty eradication regardless of race, and two, restructuring society to eliminate the identification of race with economic function. In improving these two pillars, Hwok Aun calls for a focus on, firstly, equality and basic needs for all where emphasis is placed on providing assistance and support regardless of identity, and secondly, the principles of fairness and diversity where emphasis is given to access to and building of capabilities in identified and suitable socio-economic spaces:

"This dual framework can be broadened systematically, with a focus on equality and basic needs for all – irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and other forms of identity – rather than the NEP's specifications of poverty reduction as the outcome and race as the only targeted population category. The principles of fairness and diversity constitute the second pillar; this corollary to social restructuring also broadens the perspective from racial imbalance to equitable representation, participation and capability development in relevant socio-economic sphere."¹⁴

And he further adds that both a needs-based approach and groups-based approach can be harmoniously reconciled:

"Rather than carving out domains where bumiputera quotas apply versus domains where they do not, the interplay of group

¹³ Lee Hwok Aun, Malaysia's New Economic Policy, p. 324

¹⁴ Lee Hwok Aun, Malaysia's New Economic Policy, p. 324

*preference and need-based preferences should be applied in a comprehensive manner.*¹⁵

The effort and importance of a combined approach has also been echoed and affirmed by the social activist and public intellectual, Denison Jayasooria. Working with minority and vulnerable communities ranging a span of over 3 decades in various fields and organisations and with the government, and at the ideational and policy as well as community levels, Denison has reiterated the call on various occasions the need for a needs-plus-groups based approach to development. His recent publication of a work attempting to explain the history of the establishment of the government institution known as MITRA, and the challenges faced by the Malaysian Indian community, is an attempt to reopen public discourse on the need for a more holistic approach to development to uplift communities on the margins who are mired in vicious cycles of poverty and confront inhumane living conditions on a daily basis.¹⁶

In addition, such an approach to development is also consistent and underpins the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs. The principles of leaving no one behind, and building inclusive communities, so central to the SDGs agenda, supports the broader paradigm of development as freedom based, guided by needs-plus-groups features and as multi-dimensional.

By adapting and implementing such an approach, the government will be better equipped, both in ideas and also institutionally, to reach vulnerable and marginalised groups such as those identified in Jeli and Tasek Gelugor. In the cases of Sabah and Sarawak, this will ensure that more funds are channeled, and delivery mechanisms are refined and

¹⁵ Lee Hwok Aun, Malaysia's New Economic Policy, 324-325

¹⁶ Please see Denison Jayasooria, MITRA: Past and Present (2008-2024), and Future Possibilities

established to address the conditions of socio-economic deprivation and poverty of vulnerable communities. For too long, development discourses and resource management have centered on the capital of Kuala Lumpur and other urban centers in Peninsular Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

The stakes are high. There needs to be a profound rethink and reorientation of economic planning and focus. This, as the Economic Minister Rafizi Ramli has mentioned, requires a change in the structure of the Malaysia economy. With structural change in the economy, comes the need for efforts to ensure the careful and efficient implementation of the policies and programmes through transparent and accountable institutions. These efforts fall within the domains of SDGs 16 and 17, and thus serve as a policy area that requires attention and reform in the Malaysian State and government.

Development and the process of nation-building should not be put on autopilot and undertaken in a manner of just muddling through, as the public intellectual, sociologist and writer the late Rustam Sani termed it. The project of nation-building and the national question, for so long buried and neglected, should be brought back to the centre of national conversations and reflection. The values of a shared history, and a common purpose and shared destiny is necessary. The sense of belonging can only be fostered if the idea of justice is cultivated and implemented.

The conditions of dissatisfaction and resentment that is occurring in the margins and towns and villages in the country, is a manifestation of the failure of development planning and vision. Thus, the thinking of development must change. As the writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer puts it: *seorang terpelajar harus sudah berbuat adil sejak dalam pikiran, apalagi dalam perbuatan.*

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Chapter 2

Reviewing the National Multi-dimensional Poverty Index Dimensions and Indicators: An Exercise by APPGM-SDG

Debbie Ann Loh

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is increasingly acknowledged as a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. Efforts to reduce poverty must firstly begin with understanding its existence, nature, scale and depth. Measuring and defining poverty unidimensionally using income-based measures such as gross domestic product (GDP) per capita or the poverty line has since proved inadequate.¹

Nobel Prize economist and philosopher, Amartya Sen uses the capability approach to bring about a paradigm shift in the understanding of human development and poverty. Sen argues that “poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely lowness of income.” Sen goes on to capture the essence of the multi-dimensional nature of poverty:

“Human lives are battered and diminished in all kinds of different ways, and the first task ... is to acknowledge that deprivations of very different kinds have to be accommodated within a general overarching framework.”²

¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2019). *Multi-dimensional Poverty Measures as a Policy Tool for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: A Review of MPI Measurement and Uses in Asia and the Pacific*.

² Sen, A. *Development as Freedom*. New York: Alfred Knopf; 1999.

The acknowledgement that various types of deprivations exist formed the bedrock of multi-dimensional poverty. Recognising that poverty is no longer income-based, SDG 1.2 states that "... poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions."

Rethinking poverty and how it is measured will potentially contribute towards more accurately understanding the vulnerabilities, deprivations and inequalities that the poor face. Since the poor may face multiple deprivations at a single time, considering the non-monetary nature of poverty and how that is measured is pivotal.

THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX (MPI)

A non-income measure of poverty known as the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) has been conceptualised and widely used in developing countries for intercountry comparison. Launched in 2010 by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and the Human Development Report Office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the MPI is calculated using the Alkire-Foster method. Measured based on a USD 1.90 a day poverty rate, the MPI allows nations the flexibility to revise dimensions and indicators and their weights in a context-specific manner and monitor global poverty in different forms.³

In 2018, the global MPI was revised to align the index to the SDGs.⁴ The MPI examines deprivations in developing countries across three dimensions (health, education and standard of living) and 10 indicators as illustrated in Figure 2.1. One is identified as multi-dimensionally poor if they are deprived in one-third or more of the 10

³ Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). (n.d.). *Global Multi-dimensional Poverty Index*. <https://ophi.org.uk/multi-dimensional-poverty-index/>

⁴ Alkire, S., Kanagaratnam, U., Nogales, R., & Suppa, N. (2022). Revising the Global Multi-dimensional Poverty Index: Empirical Insights and Robustness. *Review of Income and Wealth*, 68(S2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/roiw.12573>

indicators. Hence, the MPI is a product of the (a) *incidence* of poverty (the proportion of people who are poor) and the (b) *intensity* of poverty (average deprivation score of people). The deprivation score of a multi-dimensionally poor person refers to the sum of the weighted indicators that the person is deprived in. The MPI value ranges from 0 to 1 with higher values implying higher poverty.⁵

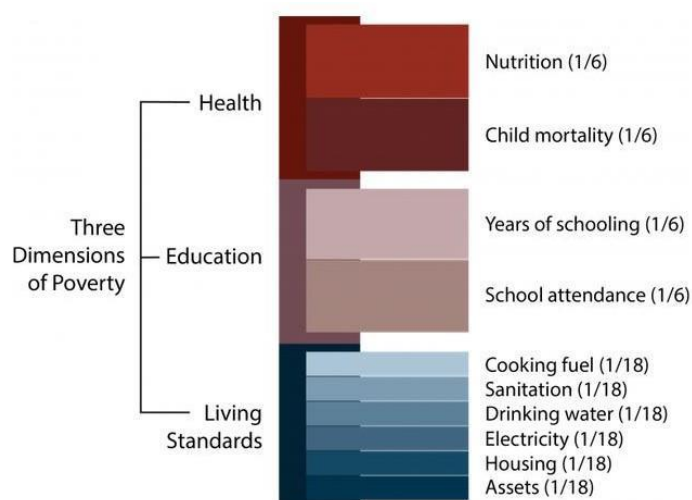


Figure 2.1. Global Multi-dimensional Poverty Index – Dimensions and Indicators of Poverty

Source: OPHI (2018)⁶

TRENDS IN MULTI-DIMENSIONAL POVERTY

The global MPI builds on 10 interlinked deprivations. This can be seen through the SDGs as the indicators are related to SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good health and wellbeing), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). A closer look at the SDG

⁵ OPHI. (n.d.). *Global Multi-dimensional Poverty Index*.

⁶ OPHI (2018). *Global Multi-dimensional Poverty Index 2018: The Most Detailed Picture to Date of the World's Poorest People*. Report. Oxford Poverty and Human Development Institute, University of Oxford.

targets and indicators will reveal the disaggregation according to gender, age, ethnicity, urban-rural divide and more. Hence, the SDGs demand a greater disaggregation of indicators in order to make visible the inequalities that exist across social groups.

The 2022 Global MPI report presented comparison data across 111 developing countries and identified 1.2 billion people as multi-dimensionally poor. Half of those (593 million) were children aged below 18.⁷ Importantly, it was observed that being multi-dimensionally poor often involves being deprived across several indicators, creating *deprivation bundles*.⁸ For example, Nepal substantially reduced poverty from a MPI value of 0.185 in 2011 to 0.075 in 2019. This progress was attributed to improvements in sanitation including increasing budget allocation for the WASH sector. This resulted in positive health outcomes in child nutrition and access to clean water; addressing deprivations in health and living standards simultaneously.⁹ Hence, from a policy perspective, identifying pairs or triplets of deprivation bundles are critical for these overlapping poverty indicators that can be addressed together.

In 2023, 1.1 billion out of 6.1 billion across 110 countries are poor. Of which, half of all poor people or 534 million live in Sub-Saharan Africa whereas 389 million people or over a third live in South Asia. Nearly two-thirds of all poor people (730 million) lived in middle-income countries while low-income countries were home to 387 million people or over one-third of all poor.¹⁰

⁷ UNDP and OPHI (2022). *Global Multi-dimensional Poverty Index 2022: Unpacking deprivation bundles to reduce multi-dimensional poverty*. <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdp-document/2022mpireporten.pdf>

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ UNDP and OPHI (2023). *Global Multi-dimensional Poverty Index 2023 - Unstacking global poverty: Data for high impact action*. <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdp-document/2023mpireporten.pdf>

Importantly, findings based on trend data showed that 25 countries halved their global MPI value within 15 years, suggesting that attaining SDG 1.2 at scale is achievable.¹¹ It was encouraging to note that at least one country from every world region, from small countries such as Sao Tome and Principe to large nations such as China and Indonesia, had halved their global MPI value.¹² In Cambodia, one in five Cambodians exited poverty in only 7.5 years, with 5.6 million poor in 2014, reduced to 2.8 million 2021/2022, notably in the poorest regions. Deprivations in 9 of the 10 indicators fell significantly, particularly in electricity, sanitation, cooking fuel, nutrition and years of schooling. This impressive performance affirms that progress in SDG 1.2 is feasible with the implementation of targeted approaches and pro-poor policies in the most deprived areas.

NATIONAL MPIS

National MPIS consist of dimensions, indicators, deprivation cut-offs or thresholds and weights. The indicators which are specific deprivations are the building blocks of an MPI. Thus, an individual or household is considered multi-dimensionally poor if they are deprived in a certain percentage of indicators. The number of indicators used and the weight accorded to them varies according to MPIS and can be aligned with priority areas of national development plans.¹³

National MPIS have to prioritise and integrate indicators that capture the most important deprivations experienced by the people in a specific country. The selection of these indicators will largely depend on the purpose of the particular measure and the process by which they are selected. In this case, a participatory process would generally

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). (n.d.) *How a National MPI measures poverty*. <https://ophi.org.uk/national-mpi/how-national-mpi-measures-poverty>

involve various public stakeholders, representatives, experts and voices of the poor.¹⁴

All existing national MPIs and the global MPI demonstrate a clear consensus on the importance of including dimensions of health, education and living standards. There is no national MPI without these three core dimensions, signifying their importance in the evaluation of human lives regardless of geographical location. Most national MPIs then consider at least one dimension related to employment and social protection. Others have also considered dimensions include social cohesion, livelihood shocks and quality of the environment. The exclusion of these dimensions in national MPIs does not necessarily reflect their subordinate importance, rather it may be difficult to justify inclusion from both a technical and normative perspective.¹⁵

Beyond being a measure of poverty, a national MPI is instrumental to inform the design, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of targeted interventions and resource allocation for the most underserved peoples and localities. Hence, a well-designed MPI can closely reflect national goals and priorities and identify types of deprivations.¹⁶ However, for the MPI to be effective, it chiefly requires the full buy-in from government leaders and policymakers. Importantly, governments must also generate good quality data with disaggregated estimates with regular rigorous and non-partisan MPI measurements.¹⁷

¹⁴ Multi-dimensional Poverty Peer Network (MPPN) (2021). *Which are the dimensions and indicators most commonly used to measure multi-dimensional poverty around the world?* <https://www.mppn.org/national-mpi-dimensions-and-indicators/>

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ UNDP. (2019). *Multi-dimensional Poverty Measures as a Policy Tool for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: A Review of MPI Measurement and Uses in Asia and the Pacific.*

¹⁷ UNDP and Economic Planning Unit, Malaysia (2022). *Improving National Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) as a Policymaking Tool for Poverty Reduction.* 16 June 2022.

POVERTY IN MALAYSIA

In Malaysia, poverty has traditionally been measured unidimensionally using an income-based measurement indicator, namely, the Poverty Line Index (PLI). The Government adjusted the PLI methodology after a 15-year period, increasing the PLI from RM 980 in 2005 to RM 2,208 in 2019 to better reflect current socio-economic needs and development levels.¹⁸ The PLI was at RM 2,589 in 2022, registering a 5.3 percent increase.¹⁹ Hardcore poverty was defined as a monthly income of RM 1,198. Absolute poverty refers to a condition where household income is insufficient to cover the cost of basic needs by using the PLI. In 2022, the absolute poverty rate was 6.2%. The highest incidences of poverty persisted in less developed states such as Sabah at 19.7 percent, Kelantan at 13.2 percent and Sarawak at 9 percent, as of 2022.²⁰

The multi-dimensional challenges the poor faced during the Covid-19 pandemic were substantial reduction in salaries and wages, elevated food insecurity, overcrowding in low-cost housing projects and absence of social safety nets.²¹ The poor and vulnerable were at higher risk of malnutrition with increased stunting and wasting among children reported.^{22,23} Households with children and youth in learning

¹⁸ Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (2020). *Household Income, Expenditure & Basic Amenities Survey Report 2019*.

https://v1.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=120&bul_id=TU00TmRhQ1N5TUxHVWN0T2VjbXJYZZ09&menu_id=amVoWU54UTI0a21NWmdhMjFMMWcyZz09

¹⁹ Ministry of Economy, Malaysia. *Mid-Term Review: Twelfth Malaysia Plan 2021-2025. Malaysia Madani: Sustainable, Prosperous, High-Income*.

https://rmke12.ekonomi.gov.my/ksp/storage/fileUpload/2023/09/2023091145_main_document_ksp_rmke_12.pdf

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Weerasena, B. and Ferlito, C. (2022). *Assessing and addressing urban poverty in Malaysia*.

²² United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Malaysia and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2020). *Families on the Edge (Issue 1) - The immediate impact of the Movement Control Order* period.

<https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/media/1441/file/Families%20on%20Edge%20part%201.pdf>

²³ Institute for Public Health, Ministry of Health, Malaysia (2022). *Fact Sheet - National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2022: Maternal and Child Health (MCH)*. <https://iku.gov.my/images/nhms-2022/5a.-fact-sheet-nhms-mch-english.pdf?t=1684481335>

institutions faced further predicaments of accessing online learning as they lacked digital devices with limited Internet access.²⁴ This inevitably widened the digital divide between urban-rural areas. In terms of household income, 2020 saw a substantial 580,000 households or 20% from those in the middle-40 (M40) group (with a monthly household income between RM 4,850 and RM 10,959) slide into the bottom-40 (B40) group, those with a monthly household income of below RM 4,850.²⁵

The MADANI government has repeatedly expressed their commitment to eradicate hardcore poverty, with a total of RM 1.5 billion approved for income generation programmes for target groups.²⁶ Poverty eradication has been the main agenda and the government seeks to combat poverty through raising income, enhancing living standards by providing access to basic services in both urban and rural areas.²⁷ There has been expressed interest to work with the Sabah State Government, in particular, with Sabah being the poorest state in Malaysia. Issues that include flooding, poor road conditions, lack of electricity supply and schools have been identified.²⁸ Citing success in eradicating hardcore poverty in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Penang, the Prime

²⁴ Gong, R. (2020). *Digital Inclusion: Assessing Meaningful Internet Connectivity in Malaysia*. Khazanah Research Institute (KRI). <https://krinstitute.org/assets/contentMS/img/template/editor/20200907%20Inclusion%20v4.0.pdf>

²⁵ Weerasena. B. and Ferlito, C. (2022).

²⁶ Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia (2023). Poverty Eradication: RM 1.5 billion approved for income generation programmes for target groups. <https://www.pmo.gov.my/2023/09/poverty-eradication-rm1-5-billion-approved-for-income-generation-programmes-for-target-groups/>

²⁷ Madani Directions in poverty eradication. 19 February 2024. Bernama. <https://www.bernama.com/en/thoughts/news.php?id=2268246>

²⁸ PM Anwar says Madani govt committed to eradicate hardcore poverty in Sabah. 20 April 2024. Malay Mail. https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2024/04/20/pm-anwar-says-madani-govt-committed-to-eradicate-hardcore-poverty-in-sabah/129854#google_vignette

Minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim emphasised that minority groups such as the Indian community will not be sidelined.²⁹

Malaysia's MPI

The Government introduced the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index measurement in the 11th Malaysia Plan (11MP). The existing Malaysia MPI has four dimensions and eleven indicators (Figure 2.2). Findings using the 2019 methodology showed a reduction in Malaysia's MPI from 0.015 in 2016 to 0.011 in 2019.³⁰ The intensity of poverty improved slightly, inching from 0.4154 to 0.4144 during the same period. Concerningly, only 1% of Malaysians were identified as multi-dimensionally poor implying that the indicators and thresholds used might be too low to adequately capture the actual realities experienced by Malaysians in poverty.³¹

²⁹ Unity govt has never neglected Indian community, says Anwar. 14 April 2024. The Star. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2024/04/14/unity-govt-has-never-neglected-indian-community-says-anwar>

³⁰ DOSM (2020). *Household Income, Expenditure & Basic Amenities Survey 2019*.

³¹ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2019). *Malaysia vastly undercounting poverty, says UN rights expert*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2019/08/malaysia-vastly-undercounting-poverty-says-un-rights-expert>

Dimension	Indicator	Deprivation cut-off	Weight
Education	Years of schooling	All household members aged 17-60 have less than eleven years of education	1/8
	School attendance	Any school-aged children (aged 6-16) not schooling	1/8
Health	Access to health facility	Distance to health facility is more than 5 kilometres away and no mobile health facility is provided	1/8
	Access to clean water supply	Other than treated pipe water inside house and public water pipe/stand pipe	1/8
Living Standards	Conditions of living quarters	Dilapidated or deteriorating	1/24
	Number of bedrooms	More than 2 members/room	1/24
	Toilet facility	Other than flush toilet	1/24
	Garbage collection facility	No facility	1/24
	Transportation	All members in the household do not use private or public transport to commute	1/24
	Access to basic communication tools	Does not have consistent fixed line phone or mobile phone	1/24
Income	Mean monthly household income	Mean monthly household income less than PLJ	1/4

Figure 2.2. Malaysia's National MPI

Source: *Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2015)*³²

Notably, several key challenges in the current MPI were acknowledged and highlighted by UNDP and EPU (2022).³³ Firstly, the current MPI dimensions are not reflecting the socio-economic situation in Malaysia post-Covid-19 pandemic. Secondly, gaps in gender inequality in the existing MPI are apparent, particularly for women-headed households. Thirdly, the availability and access to disaggregated data according to, for example, ethnicities and urban/rural areas are lacking. Fourthly, a consultative process involving multi-stakeholder engagements was not employed in the development of the current MPI.

³² Ministry of Economy, Malaysia. *Eleventh Malaysia Plan 2016 - 2020: Anchoring Growth on People*. <https://www.pmo.gov.my/dokumenattached/RMK/RMKe-11Book.pdf>

³³ UNDP and EPU (2022). *Improving National Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) as a Policymaking Tool for Poverty Reduction*.

This necessitates a timely review of Malaysia's MPI including its dimensions and indicators to more accurately reflect multi-dimensional poverty in an upper-middle-income country in a post-pandemic context. This two-stage study is an attempt to contribute to the national-level exercise by firstly, reviewing the current dimensions, indicators, thresholds and weightages of the Malaysia MPI employing a consultative process. Secondly, to examine the disaggregated levels of multi-dimensional poverty among vulnerable communities nationwide using the proposed, revised MPI tool.

METHODOLOGY

Study procedures

The design of national MPIs and the selection of the most appropriate indicators often involve engaging with multi-stakeholders.³⁴ Hence, this study attempted to review the structure of the national MPI through a multi-stage and consultative process. Beginning with a literature review, the review process followed recommended measures by the OPHI included looking at international consensus, participatory exercises and consultations with subject matter experts.

Inception Workshop organised by UNDP and Ministry of Economy, Malaysia

Preceding this exercise, APPGM-SDG was invited to participate in an inception workshop on “Improving National Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (NMPI) as a Policymaking Tool for Poverty Reduction” in August 2022. This workshop was organised and hosted by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), Ministry of Economy of Malaysia in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Malaysia.

³⁴ *ibid.*

Among the objectives of this workshop were to increase the stakeholder's understanding of this two-year project (July 2022 - June 2024) including the project strategy, to validate and review outputs, activities, indicators, assumptions and risks of the project, and to discuss project governance mechanism, roles and responsibilities of stakeholder engagement strategies.

International Consensus: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The current dimensions, indicators and thresholds of the Malaysian MPI were benchmarked against the SDGs. The aim here was to consider if and how these measures could be revised to more accurately capture the deprivations faced by the multi-dimensionally poor in Malaysia, using the SDGs as a reference point.

Participatory Exercises: Engagement with CSOs and Academicians

In November 2022, APPGM-SDG organised an SDG Conference themed, "A CSO & Academic Perspectives - Mid-Term Review of the Implementation of the SDGs in Malaysia (2015 - 2022)" with participants from around Malaysia. A pre-conference session was an opportune time to gather feedback from active stakeholders in the CSOs and academic sphere.

The objective of this session was to review the current Malaysia MPI which comprised 4 dimensions and 11 indicators, and to explore new measurable indicators or thresholds, in efforts to more accurately capture and measure deprivation in Malaysia. Thematic discussions comprised five groups focused on education, health, living conditions, income, and a new theme, social ills to explore associations with poverty.

Participants pre-selected their discussion groups that matched their experience and expertise. Each group was provided with a discussion

guide and presented a summary of their group's discussion. Five of APPGM-SDG's Resource Persons, highly qualified and experienced professionals in the fields of education, health, urban poverty, economics and law, were invited to lead the group discussions and share their expert opinion on the respective dimensions and indicators. These were Prof. Dato' Dr. Rashila Ramli (Principal Visiting Fellow, United Nations University International Institute for Global Health, UNU-IIGH) for *Education*, Dr Murallitharan Munisamy (Managing Director, National Cancer Society of Malaysia) on *Health*, Dr Jeffrey Phang (Chairman, MyPJ, Activist and Community Builder) on *Living Conditions*, Dr Lin Mui Kiang (Chairperson, Society for the Promotion of Human Rights, PROHAM) on *Income* and Mr Kiu Jia Yaw (Co-Chair, Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance) on *Social Ills*. The consensus from this session was that the 4 dimensions on education, health, living conditions and income remain, as social ills was an outcome of poverty rather than a measure of poverty, with further considerations given to revise the indicators and thresholds.

Consultations with Subject Matter Experts

Upon collating and analysing the findings from the pre-conference session, a list of revised dimensions and indicators were drawn out. This informed the design of the study instrument. The researcher then conducted 1:1 consultations with the abovementioned Resource Persons for Education, Health, Living Conditions and Income via Zoom or face-to-face meetings between January to February 2023. These consultation sessions were to delve deeper into the identified dimensions and indicators, and their relationships to poverty. This process thus, provided validation for the study instrument.

Study instrument

Following the multi-stage process, a consolidated version of the study instrument in the form of a survey was drafted. Forward and backward

translation of the survey was conducted. A proficient, bi-lingual speaker performed translations of the English version into the target language, Malay. The backward translation from Malay to English was undertaken by another proficient bi-lingual speaker. The drafts were reviewed, any discrepancies that arose were discussed and reconciled to a single Malay version.

FINDINGS

A summary of the existing and proposed dimensions and indicators for the Malaysian MPI are presented in Table 2.1. The overview suggests a revised structure with 5 dimensions and 24 indicators. The dimensions suggested comprise Education, Health, Living Conditions, Social Protection, and Social Cohesion and Safety. For each indicator in the respective dimensions, the review process suggests to retain, revise or to consider a new indicator.

Tables 2.2 – 2.6 details each existing or proposed dimension and their indicators along with suggested measures, deprivation cut-offs, justifications consolidated from the review process, weights and alignment with SDG targets.

Table 2.1. Summary Table of Existing and Proposed Dimensions and Indicators for Malaysia's MPI

NO.	MPI DIMENSIONS	EXISTING MPI INDICATORS	RETAIN	REVISE	NEW (TO CONSIDER)
1	Education	Years of schooling		✓	
2		School attendance		✓	
3		Literacy and numeracy levels			✓
4	Health	Access to healthcare		✓	
5		Non-communicable diseases			✓
6		Health insurance			✓
7		Subjective wellbeing			✓
8		Stunting / Wasting			✓
9		Access to clean water			✓
10	Living Standards	Overcrowding	✓		
11		Toilet	✓		
12		Garbage collection	✓		
13		Electricity supply			✓
14		Internet connectivity			✓
15		Digital poverty			✓

16		Transport	✓		
17	Social Protection	Social security			✓
18		Savings			✓
19		Government assistance			✓
20		Monthly bills			✓
21	Social Cohesion and Safety	Family / Friends			✓
22		Community leader			✓
23		Environmental shock			✓
24		Neighbourhood safety			✓
Total		24	4	4	16

Table 2.2. Proposed Revisions to the Education Dimension of Malaysia's MPI

DIMENSION	INDICATOR	SUGGESTED MEASURE	DEPRIVATION CUT-OFF	JUSTIFICATION	WEIGHT	SDG TARGET
Education	Years of schooling	Revise	<p><i>Previously:</i> All household members aged 17-60 have less than eleven years of education</p> <p><i>Proposed revision:</i> All household members aged 18 and above have less than 12 years of education</p>	<p>Increase the education benchmark for adults from 11 years to a minimum of 12 years of education to reflect at least a year of pre-school and Malaysia's public education system (6 years primary school and 5 years of secondary school). The various types of education should also be acknowledged.³⁵</p>	1/15	SDG 4.1 and 4.2

³⁵ Participatory Exercise: Engagement with CSOs and Academicians at the "A CSO & Academic Perspectives - Mid-Term Review of the Implementation of the SDGs in Malaysia (2015 - 2022)" SDG Conference, November 2022. Highlighted by subject matter expert, Professor Datuk Dr Rashila Ramli.

			(including formal, informal or TVET education)			
	School attendance	Revise	<p><i>Previously:</i> Any school-aged children (aged 6-16) not schooling</p> <p><i>Proposed revision:</i> Any school-aged children (aged 6 - 17) not attending school.</p>	Revise the age bracket of school-aged children from ages 6 to 16, to ages 6 to 17, to reflect Malaysia's public education system.	1/15	SDG 4.1 and 4.2
	Literacy and numeracy levels	New (To Consider)	All household members have self-assessed literacy and	Educational outcomes are important as learning poverty in	1/15	SDG 4.6

			numeracy levels as weak	Malaysia is at 43% ³⁶ where approximately 2 in 5 late school-going primary-aged children in Malaysia were not proficient in reading. Additionally, Malaysia's PISA scores declined sharply in 2022 across all three domains compared to 2018, and has been consistently below the OECD average comprising 23 countries. ^{37 38}		
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³⁶ World Bank. (2021). *Malaysia: Learning Poverty Brief*. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/249371624612646747/pdf/Malaysia-Learning-Poverty-Brief-2021.pdf>

³⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2023). PISA 2022 Results: Factsheet - Malaysia. <https://www.oecd.org/publication/pisa-2022-results/country-notes/malaysia-1dbe2061/>

³⁸ Participatory Exercise: Engagement with CSOs and Academicians at the "A CSO & Academic Perspectives - Mid-Term Review of the Implementation of the SDGs in Malaysia (2015 - 2022)" SDG Conference, November 2022. Highlighted by subject matter expert, Dr Lin Mui Kiang.

Table 2.3. Proposed Revisions to the Health Dimension of Malaysia's MPI

DIMENSION	INDICATOR	SUGGESTED MEASURE	DEPRIVATION CUT-OFF	JUSTIFICATION	WEIGHT	SDG TARGET
Health	Access to healthcare	Revise	<p><i>Previously:</i> Distance to health facility is more than 5 kilometres away and no mobile health facility is provided</p> <p><i>Proposed revision:</i> Distance to a hospital is more than 5 km away and no mobile</p>	Public healthcare facilities within a 5 km radius are often small healthcare community clinics that lack the facilities and expertise needed for healthcare needs beyond primary healthcare. ³⁹	1/30	SDG 3.8

³⁹ Consultation with Dr Murallitharan Munisamy, subject matter expert for Health (Personal Communication, 16 January 2023).

			health facility is provided			
	Non-communicable diseases	New (To Consider)	More than 2 types of NCDs present in the household	NCDs incurs healthcare expenditure associated with economic distress that aggravates poverty. ⁴⁰	1/30	SDG 3.4
	Health insurance	New (To Consider)	Household members have no health insurance	Only 22 percent of Malaysians are insured with personal health insurance, 36 percent claim that health insurance is unnecessary and almost half of Malaysians do not have health	1/30	SDG 3.8

⁴⁰ Ibukun, C. O., & Adebayo, A. (2021). Economic burden of non-communicable diseases and poverty in Nigeria: a cross-sectional study. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 425–444). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68836-3_37

				coverage and rely solely on public healthcare. ⁴¹ Increasing out-of-pocket (OOP) healthcare expenditures are associated with distress financing and poverty. ⁴²		
	Subjective wellbeing	New (To Consider)	Having self-assessed depressive or anxiety symptoms in the past 3 months	Multi-dimensional poverty increases	1/30	SDG 3.4

⁴¹ CodeBlue. (2020). *Nearly half of Malaysians lack health coverage beyond public care*. <https://codeblue.galencentre.org/2020/06/02/nearly-half-of-malaysians-lack-health-coverage-beyond-public-care/>

⁴² Hassan, N. Z. A. M., Kunusagaran, M. S. J. M. N. S., Zaimi, N. A., Aminuddin, F., Rahim, I. A., Jawahir, S., & Karim, Z. A. (2022). The inequalities and determinants of Households' Distress Financing on Out-of-Pocket Health expenditure in Malaysia. *BMC Public Health*, 22(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-12834-5>

⁴³ Consultation with Dr Murallitharan Munisamy. (Personal Communication, 16 January 2023).

				vulnerabilities to mental health struggles. ^{44 45}		
	Stunting / Wasting	New (To Consider)	Presence of child / children aged below 5 years with stunting / wasting.	Experiencing low height-for-age (stunting) or low weight-for-height (wasting) are forms of undernutrition, associated with food insecurity. ^{46 47} Around two in five Malaysian children are stunted. ⁴⁸	1/30	SDG 2.2

⁴⁴ Zimmerman, A., Lund, C., Araya, R., Hessel, P., Sánchez, J. a. H., Garman, E., Evans-Lacko, S., Díaz, Y., & Pabon, M. A. (2022). The relationship between multi-dimensional poverty, income poverty and youth depressive symptoms: cross-sectional evidence from Mexico, South Africa and Colombia. *BMJ Global Health*, 7(1), e006960. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2021-006960>

⁴⁵ Chi, X., Liu, X., & Ze-Zhong, Z. (2022). Measuring multi-dimensional health poverty in China. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.786325>

⁴⁶ Caulfield, L. E., Richard, S. A., Rivera, J. A., Musgrove, P., & Black, R. E. (2006). *Stunting, wasting, and micronutrient deficiency disorders*. Disease Control Priorities in Developing Countries - NCBI Bookshelf. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK11761/>

⁴⁷ Consultation with Dr Murallitharan Munisamy. (Personal Communication, 16 January 2023).

⁴⁸ Institute for Public Health, Ministry of Health, Malaysia (2022). *Fact Sheet - National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2022: Maternal and Child Health (MCH)*.

	Access to clean water	Revise	<p><i>Previously:</i> Other than treated pipe water inside house and public water pipe/stand pipe</p> <p><i>Proposed revision:</i> No treated pipe water inside house and public water pipe / standpipe and/or water shortages</p>	<p>Consider including water shortages as water poverty not only includes water quality but also water supply shortages as still experienced by many urban and rural communities in Malaysia,⁴⁹ and are significantly related to multi-dimensional poverty.^{50 51}</p>	1/30	SDG 6.1
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⁴⁹ APPGM-SDG (2023). Issue Mapping Reports

⁵⁰ Pandey, S., Mohapatra, G., & Arora, R. (2022). Examining the interstate variations and interlinkage between water poverty and multi-dimensional poverty in India: evidence from household-level data. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 49(10), 1551–1568. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijse-12-2021-0731>

⁵¹ Ambel, A. A., Muger, H., & Bain, R. (2020). Accounting for drinking water quality in measuring multi-dimensional poverty in Ethiopia. *PLoS One*, 15(12), e0243921. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0243921>

Table 2.4. Proposed Revisions to the Living Standards Dimension of Malaysia's MPI

DIMENSION	INDICATOR	SUGGESTED MEASURE	DEPRIVATION CUT-OFF	JUSTIFICATION	WEIGHT	SDG TARGET
Living Standards	Overcrowding	Retain	More than 2 household members in a bedroom	Remain as is.	1/35	SDG 11.1
	Toilet	Retain	No pour or flush toilet	Remain as is.	1/35	SDG 6.2
	Garbage collection	Retain	No municipal garbage collection services.	Remain as is.	1/35	SDG 11.6
	Electricity supply	New (To Consider)	Frequent disruptions to electricity supply	Rural communities in Malaysia still lack electricity supply or face power supply	1/35	SDG 7.1

				disruptions. ^{52 53} These interrupts daily activities including economic livelihoods, communication and health, affecting quality of life. ⁵⁴		
	Internet connectivity	New (To Consider)	No or lack of stable Internet access.	Internet coverage is still poor in many parts of the country, where poor, rural and remote communities face challenges in obtaining Internet access in their homes, although	1/35	SDG 9.c

⁵² More than 130 Orang Asli villages still have no electricity. The Star. 2 November 2023. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/11/02/more-than-130-orang-asli-villages-still-have-no-electricity>

⁵³ LDP urges better planning of power supply in Sabah. New Strait Times. 20 July 2023. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/07/932744/ldp-urges-better-planning-power-supply-sabah>

⁵⁴ Alegre-Bravo, A., & Anderson, C. (2023). Exploring the influence of multi-dimensional variables on access to electricity in rural areas of the Global South. *Applied Energy*, 333, 120509. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apenergy.2022.120509>

				they have a digital device such as a smartphone. ^{55 56} 57		
	Digital poverty	New (To Consider)	No access to digital device for learning.	Approximately 37 percent of Malaysian students (1.7 million) experience digital poverty, whereby they do not possess a computer, laptop or tablet and do not have access to a high-speed Internet connection, particularly in rural areas and more so in	1/35	SDG 9.c

⁵⁵ Gong, R. (2023). Connecting the Last Mile: Solutions for Rural and Remote Communities. <https://www.krinstitute.org/assets/contentMS/img/template/editor/230731%20rural%20connectivity%20v1.5.1%20pub%202.pdf>

⁵⁶ Internet coverage in Malaysia is still insufficient. The Sun. 6 July 2022. https://thesun.my/home_news/internet-coverage-in-malaysia-still-insufficient-EK9419798

⁵⁷ APPGM-SDG (2023). Issue Mapping Reports.

				Sabah and Sarawak. ⁵⁸ 59		
	Transport	Retain	All household members do not use public / private transport	Remain as is.	1/35	SDG 11.2

⁵⁸ 1.7 million students facing 'digital poverty'? The Sun. 23 November 2020. https://thesun.my/local_news/17-million-students-facing-digital-poverty-FF5272676

⁵⁹ Participatory Exercise: Engagement with CSOs and Academicians (2022).

Table 2.5. New Dimension and Indicators Proposed: Social Protection

DIMENSION	INDICATOR	SUGGESTED MEASURE	DEPRIVATION CUT-OFF	JUSTIFICATION	WEIGHT	SDG TARGET
Social Protection	Social security	New (To Consider)	Household members do not have social protection (eg. EPF/SOCSO)	Social assistance in Malaysia is highly fragmented and remains inadequate. Many lack awareness of government assistance available. ²⁶	1/20	SDG 1.3, 10.4
	Savings	New (To Consider)	No savings (eg. cash, jewellery, etc)	Additionally, there are the 'missing middle' individuals who are neither poor nor rich. This category of people are not part of the retirement savings scheme and do not yet qualify for	1/20	SDG 1, SDG 8
	Government assistance	New (To Consider)	No access or receipt of government assistance		1/20	SDG 10.2 and 10.3

²⁶ APPGM-SDG (2023). Issue Mapping Reports.

	Monthly bills	New (To Consider)	Not able to pay monthly bills	old-age financial assistance. ²⁷ Rising life expectancy, low wages and a large informal sector who are outside the safety net compounded with income shocks, the lack of income security and insufficient savings are among challenges faced by the poor, ²⁸ that threaten them in the short-term as well as long-term.	1/20	SDG 1, SDG 8
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²⁷ Khazanah Research Institute. (2021). Building Resilience: Towards Inclusive Social Protection In Malaysia. <https://www.krinstitute.org/assets/contentMS/img/template/editor/Booklet%20-%20Building%20Resilience.pdf>

²⁸ Calls for an inclusive social protection system. The Sun. 24 April 2023. <https://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2023/04/24/calls-for-an-inclusive-social-protection-system>

Table 2.6. New Dimension and Indicators Proposed: Social Cohesion and Safety

DIMENSION	INDICATOR	SUGGESTED MEASURE	DEPRIVATION CUT-OFF	JUSTIFICATION	WEIGHT	SDG TARGET
Social Cohesion and Safety	Family / Friends	New (To Consider)	Do not have family members, neighbours or friends to reach out to for help, when in difficulty	Often overlooked in poverty research, ²⁹ social cohesion relates to the extent of integration among individuals in a group such as a neighbourhood, the presence of trust and practice of reciprocity and mutual aid.	1/20	SDG 3
	Community leader	New (To Consider)	Lack a good relationship with community leader / village	Through social connectedness, individuals are able to	1/20	SDG 1.4, 10.2 and 10.3

²⁹ Samuel, K., Alkire, S., Zavaleta, D., Mills, C., & Hammock, J. (2017). Social isolation and its relationship to multi-dimensional poverty. *Oxford Development Studies*, 46(1), 83–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2017.1311852>

			head or NGO leaders	access resources and support through social relationships. Those living in poorer neighbourhoods tend to be in isolation and lack familial support resulting in poorer quality of life. ³⁰		
	Environmental shock	New (To Consider)	Exposure to environmental disaster (eg. floods, landslide, etc)	The poor are more susceptible to environmental shocks, suffer disproportionately and tend to recover slower compared to wealthier	1/20	SDG 1.5 and 11.5

³⁰ Hong, S., Zhang, W., & Walton, E. (2014). Neighborhoods and mental health: Exploring ethnic density, poverty, and social cohesion among Asian Americans and Latinos. *Social Science & Medicine*, 111, 117-124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.04.014>

				individuals; ³¹ affecting their housing, livelihoods and health. ³²		
	Neighbourhood safety	New (To Consider)	Does not feel safe living in neighbourhood	Safety and security is a missing dimension of poverty. Lacking the sense of safety where one resides is linked to fear of violence or crime, which may impede movement and keep individuals trapped in poverty. ³³	1/20	SDG 11.1

³¹ Kimsanova, B., Umirbekov, A., Herzfeld, T., & Müller, D. (2023). Heterogeneous effects of weather extremes on different dimensions of poverty in Kyrgyzstan. *Environmental Research Letters*. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/ad1720>

³² APPGM-SDG (2023). Issue Mapping Reports

³³ Diprose, R. (2007). Physical Safety and Security: A proposal for Internationally Comparable Indicators of violence. *Oxford Development Studies*, 35(4), 431–458. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600810701701913>

LESSONS LEARNT

This chapter has provided a bird's eye view of the process undertaken and actors involved in reviewing the Malaysia MPI. The suggestions that arose, whether to retain, revise or consider new dimensions and indicators are aimed to identify and capture specific deprivations experienced by the poor and disparities among groups including gender, ethnic groups and urban-rural areas. This section discusses the three key lessons learnt from this study.

Prioritise multi-stakeholder engagement

Engaging with multi-stakeholders is a crucial first step in reviewing the national MPI. This serves as a key precursor to identify the characteristics and drivers of multi-dimensional poverty and potential enablers to reduce levels of multi-dimensional poverty, both broadly and specifically.

In this study, civil society, academicians and subject matter experts were involved in the consultative process of reviewing the current national MPI. While it was beyond the scope of this exercise, future studies could consider engaging with government actors at the ministry level, state and local council levels as well as grassroots communities to add depth and breadth to the multi-stakeholder engagement process.

Consider the basic needs of the furthest left behind

In the context of SDGs, the furthest left behind are individuals or communities who are the most disadvantaged or marginalised. They often lack access, resources and opportunities to essential services such as education, health, housing, water, electricity as well as Internet access, which has been recognised as a human right. These may include those living in extreme poverty, indigenous peoples, refugees and migrants and people with disabilities. Thus, this study

proposed new indicators on electricity supply, internet connectivity and digital poverty to capture deprivations in these basic services.

The call to reach the further left behind first has proven to be an effective strategy in reducing multi-dimensional poverty globally. Hence, identifying the specific deprivations that these vulnerable groups nationwide face is necessary to guide and prioritise targeted interventions. This is important so that these rights-based provision of basic services are accorded to these communities. If these deprivations are left undocumented, generations of these communities will be at greater risk of falling further left behind in the shadows of development and progress.

As forementioned, among the findings of this study was the need to include the internet connectivity and digital poverty indicators in the Living Conditions dimension. These interconnected deprivations became apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic for those in employment and those studying. For example, the learning experience of students especially the urban poor, the indigenous peoples and remote communities were severely affected. If left out of the measurement of multi-dimensional poverty, the education lag and gap among students will likely be unaddressed and further deepen inequalities.

Mainstream inclusive and consistent data collection

Data is more than facts and statistics collected for analysis and reference. Good and consistent data collection is instrumental to reveal patterns, trends and potential intervention points, in the case of the MPI. Needless to say, this will involve purposeful funding allocation, a rigorous instrument, capacity building, responsible data governance, clear reporting and a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism in the national effort of poverty alleviation.

In terms of the nature of data, granularity (disaggregation), regularity, inclusivity, comparability and transparency must be emphasised. Here, inclusive data is paramount to avoid groups being systematically excluded from the sample design and data collection, particularly women, minority and remote communities. In the case of Malaysia, this would involve not leaving the indigenous peoples in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak behind in capturing the daily realities through the MPI. With that, comprehensibility of the study instrument is of utmost importance in eliciting accurate responses, hence, language-appropriate, culturally-sensitive and gender-sensitive translations must be planned for.

Taken together, inclusive and regular data collection is fundamental to identify policy concerns, inform programme design and decisions as well as predict trends and allow for trends analysis, monitor and track progress of policy delivery, and evaluate programme impact and effectiveness towards accelerating poverty reduction.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that the findings of this study contribute helpful insights and considerations to the national level review process of the MPI. Here, piloting the revised study instrument among a nationally-representative sample would be crucial. While not without its limitations, this study hopes to serve as a catalyst for further conversations on multi-dimensional poverty. Future research on capturing the ground realities, spread, depth and nature of deprivation in Malaysia are warranted, to guide the design and implementation of targeted, cost-effective and contextual poverty reduction interventions.

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Chapter 3

Exploring Local Sustainable Solutions for the Poverty-Food Insecurity Nexus in Malaysia

Anugraha Gaikwad

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a vast and complex issue plaguing every country in one way or another. SDG 1 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals is eradicating extreme poverty for all people everywhere. The COVID-19 pandemic caused extreme poverty to rise in 2020 for the first time in decades, reversing global progress by three years. Since then, recovery has been uneven, with low-income countries lagging behind. By 2030, 590 million people may still live in extreme poverty if current trends persist.¹ In Malaysia, the poverty rate increased from 5.6% in 2019 to 6.2% in 2022.² Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, when tabling the 12th Malaysia Plan (12MP) Mid-Term Review (MTR) said that as of Aug 15, 2023, the government was still struggling to lift nearly 114,000 hardcore poor families out of poverty.³

Poverty and food insecurity are intrinsically linked. Many studies in developed and developing countries have shown that food insecurity

¹ United Nations Statistic Division. (2024). *No Poverty*.

[https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/Goal-](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/Goal-01/#:~:text=By%202030%2C%20590%20million%20people,halve%20national%20poverty%20by%202030.)

[01/#:~:text=By%202030%2C%20590%20million%20people,halve%20national%20poverty%20by%202030.](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/Goal-01/#:~:text=By%202030%2C%20590%20million%20people,halve%20national%20poverty%20by%202030.)

² Ministry of Economy. (2024). *Incidence of absolute poverty by ethnic group of head of household, strata and state, Malaysia, 1970 - 2022*. <https://www.ekonomi.gov.my/sites/default/files/2024-01/Jadual%208%20Insiden%20kemiskinan%20mutlak%20mengikut%20kumpulan%20etnik%20ketua%20isi%20rumah%2C%20strata%20%26%20negeri%2C%20Malaysia%2C1970-2022.pdf>

³ Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia Official Website. (2023). *Poverty Eradication: RM1.5 Billion Approved for Income Generation Programmes for Target Groups*. <https://www.pmo.gov.my/2023/09/poverty-eradication-rm1-5-billion-approved-for-income-generation-programmes-for-target-groups/>

is associated with poor health and nutritional status,⁴ and the impact of food insecurity is most keenly felt by those who are poor, and most often working in the agriculture and food production industries.⁵ In 2023, Malaysia ranked 56th on the Global Hunger Index, out of 125 countries with sufficient data to calculate GHI scores. Malaysia has a level of moderate hunger with a score of 12.5.⁶ According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), even moderate level of hunger is worrisome.⁷ Malaysia is a country with abundant land and water resources to cultivate and source food, yet there are hundreds of thousands of families struggling to get sufficient food and meet their daily dietary requirements.

The Malaysian government has taken various initiatives to address the issues of poverty and food insecurity in the country. The government has launched the People's Income Initiative (IPR) that focuses on household income and economic structural issues (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia Official Website, 2023). While, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (KPKM) is targeting 5,000 Civilian Agro Sales Programs (JAM) nationwide this year to deal with the cost of living of the people and increase the income of local entrepreneurs.⁸ However, there is a long way to go to completely eradicate poverty and achieve food security for all individuals in the country.

⁴ Mohamadpour, M., Sharif, Z. M., & Keysami, M. A. (2012). *Food Insecurity, Health and Nutritional Status among Sample of Palm-plantation Households in Malaysia*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3489945/#:~:text=There%20are%20many%20factors%20associated,and%20quality%20of%20food%20intake>.

⁵ Mahmood, J., Rajaram, N. N., & Guinto, R. R. (2022). *Addressing Food Insecurity and Climate Change in Malaysia: Current Evidence and Ways Forward*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9910369/>

⁶ Global Hunger Index. (2023). *Malaysia*. <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/malaysia.html>

⁷ Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. (2024). *Hunger and food insecurity*. <https://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>

⁸ Bernard, P. (2024). *KPKM targets 5,000 Civil Agro Sales Programs Nationwide*. https://www-astroawani-com.translate.google.com/berita-malaysia/kpkm-sasar-5000-program-jualan-agro-madani-seluruh-negara-472210?_x_tr_sl=ms&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc&_x_tr_hist=true

This paper discusses the interrelation of poverty and food insecurity, and the need for localised sustainable solutions. Given the vast number of factors influencing poverty and food security, this paper will focus on a few issues that exacerbate both the topics. The paper will highlight issues faced by food producers and consumers alike due to inflation, as well as those in the downstream supply chain. The paper will go on to understand policy gaps and give recommendations to various stakeholders. The data for these issues is collected through one-on-one interviews with practitioners in the agricultural sector and the parliamentary constituency findings reported by the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG).

METHODOLOGY

This case study paper is a combination of the issue mapping findings by the APPGM-SDG from the year 2022 to 2023, online and face-to-face interviews with agricultural practitioners, and desk research. The interviews provide insights from a business and a social enterprise perspective and compliment the in-depth grassroots research conducted by APPGM-SDG. As the researcher, I reached out via email to seven practitioners in the agriculture sector for interviews.

These days the term food security is used so often that sometimes there is a risk of losing its true meaning. To understand what food security means to an average Malaysian in their day-to-day life, I interviewed the practitioners to understand what food security meant in their respective fields of agriculture.

The following questions were used in the interview sessions:

1. What does food security mean for the common man in Malaysia?
2. What do you think people need to be able to afford and access nutritious food?
3. What are the global and national trends that influence the status of food security in Malaysia?
4. Do you think urban farming creates an impact in the agricultural sector? In your opinion, can urban farms contribute to food security for the low-income groups or the urban poor to any extent?
5. What are some ways in which prices of fresh vegetables and fruits can be brought down?
6. Where do you place food waste, at different stages of the supply chain, in relation to food security? Have you had the chance or any experience in taking up the issue of food waste in your projects or local communities?
7. In what areas can the government strengthen its policies on food security?
8. What is your biggest challenge in your line of work?

The findings of the interviews showcase how public and private sector can fill in the gaps between the food producers and the market as well as among different stakeholders in the supply chain. These seven practitioners are from different backgrounds within the agriculture sector such as urban farming, rural farming, indigenous heritage farming, surplus fresh produce stores, agricultural education and environmental academia. Therefore, the conversations helped visualise the entire supply chain and the possible solutions based on the social enterprises founded by some of the interviewees. The interviewees have graciously granted permission to use their inputs in this research paper and I am grateful for their time and knowledge.

Discussion

The paper focuses on issues such as production cost, impact on cost of living and dietary requirements, transportation and marketability, lack of knowledge of market demand, and food wastage, although the list is inexhaustive. Each issue is a vast topic in itself. Inputs from the interviews, findings by APPGM-SDG and desk research support the discussion, ranging from points such as the struggle of food production by small farmers, the subsequent result of rising food prices on the low-income and hardcore poor families, and management of surplus food produce.

High Cost of Production and Living

Cost of production in the agriculture industry has changed drastically over the years. With more demand for adhering to certification and export standards, farmers have a heavy capital investment. The increased cost of fertilisers and pesticides adds a financial burden on farmers all over the country. For example, farmers in Julau, Sarawak, are witnessing a decline in pepper production over the years. This is mainly attributed to the high cost of inputs such as fertilisers and pesticides. Subsidies from the government are insufficient to cover their capital and when the farmers do not profit from the harvest sale, it pushes them further into poverty.⁹

Small farmers, especially among indigenous communities face another set of challenges in the agricultural industry. Mr Kon Onn Sein from OA Organik mentions how big farming companies pump chemicals and pesticides into production to keep prices low which is impossible to compete with for the small farmers. However, in the organic market, small farmers at least get a premium price on their

⁹ Sait, E. K. (2023). *Julau Site Visit and Issue Mapping Report*.

own strength and the availability of labour.¹⁰ Though, not all farmers may get equal access to the training and education required to transition from inorganic to organic farming. It takes time, effort and resources to transition to organic methods of farming, and farmers need reliable infrastructure support and education on organic farming, which may not always be easily available to them.

The hurdles with cost of production are faced through all sectors such as livestock or poultry. Livestock farmers also struggle with increased costs of imported feed, low capital investment and rising labour cost, according to Sunway University Business School Professor and Economist, Dr Yeah Kim Leng. Centre for Market Education CEO, Dr Carmelo Ferlito also echoes that the main challenges for the livestock industry comprise rising raw material costs, labour restrictions and price controls.¹¹ These compounded challenges of food production aggravate the issues of poverty among farmers or herders.

On the other hand, rising food prices has a domino effect on the low-income consumer group as well, says Universiti Putra Malaysia's Dean of Faculty of Human Ecology, Prof. Dr. Mohamad Fazli Sabri. Malaysia's bottom 40 percent, the B40 group, are categorised as people earning an average monthly household income of below RM4,849. According to Academy of Sciences Malaysia fellow, Datuk Dr Madeline Berma, B40 families spend more than 40% of their income on food, with transportation being the second highest expenditure.¹² A healthy diet

¹⁰ Kon, O. S. (January, 2024). What does Food Security mean in Malaysia? (A. S. Gaikwad, Interviewer)

¹¹ Birruntha, S. (2023). *Livestock industry in the doldrums without incentives*. <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2023/01/24/livestock-industry-in-the-doldrums-without-incentives/>

¹² Wong, Z. L. (2022). *Rising food costs: Equip and empower B40 group, say Malaysian experts*. <https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/living/2022/08/19/rising-food-costs-equip-and-empower-b40-group-say-malaysian-experts>

is about much more than calories: we need a wide range of nutrient-dense foods to get all of the vitamins and minerals that are essential for good health. However, healthy diets are expensive; more than four times the cost of a basic, calorie-sufficient one.¹³ Unable to afford nutritious food that provides more than just calories, those with low incomes and from hardcore poor families also battle with nutritional insecurity or nutritional poverty.

Transportation and Marketability

Transportation of fresh produce and availability of an established market, are post-production challenges, for food producers in remote and rural regions. In Beaufort and Lahad Datu, in Sabah, farmers lack an organised market area to sell their products.¹⁴ Some of the challenges for the Orang Asli community is the fact that they are isolated, do not have good infrastructure, and are not well organised or well-connected into the supply chain. Kon states that food security exists when these challenges are overcome and farmers are supported with a strong value chain system.¹⁵ One of the reasons why farmers in regions of Sarawak and Sabah struggle with marketability is due to poor road conditions or lack of connectivity from the remote farms or the coast, to the markets. The lack of infrastructure in Saratok in Sarawak and Kalabakan in Sabah, are examples of where roads leading from farms and coasts, are in poor condition or lack proper transport modes. This can lead to unsold produce and hinder the farmers income.

Due to reasons such as lack of market spaces or improper transport modes and infrastructure, farmers and fishers rely heavily on middlemen to sell their produce. This often leaves the food producers

¹³ Ritchie, H. (2021). *Three billion people cannot afford a healthy diet*. Retrieved from Our World in Data: <https://ourworldindata.org/diet-affordability>

¹⁴ Yassin, J. (2022). *Beaufort Site Visit and Issue Mapping Report*.

¹⁵ Kon, O. S. (January, 2024). What does Food Security mean in Malaysia?

vulnerable to exploitation by the middlemen, and at their mercy for income from all harvest.¹⁶ Often, middlemen can extract a heavy price to transport the agricultural produce to the markets, leaving the farmers with a meagre earning and pushing them further into poverty. Lilian Chen, co-founder of Langit, laments the exorbitant amount of money being given to middlemen to transport indigenous rice from remote villages to the cities, leaving little margin for profits and fair wages to the farmers.¹⁷ The government needs to strengthen farmer and fisher unions to enable them to create their own market spaces away from the cartel. Food producers need to be enabled to engage directly with the consumers. This will increase their incomes, provide a smooth supply to small business owners, and assist low-income consumers to buy healthy, nutritious food.

Lack of Knowledge of Market Demand

Even if farmers have access to markets and road connectivity, lack of knowledge of market demand is another reason for unsold produce. Farmers are often unaware of the exact demand from customers or supermarkets, and they work hard to increase produce, sometimes overworking the land with fertilisers and pesticides.¹⁸ Clara Wan, co-founder of Graze Market that supplies surplus vegetables to the low-income or vulnerable communities, states that a lot of pre-planning, and a demand and supply study is necessary to calculate the amount of produce required. Farmers cannot predict what the future demand will be and many times even consumers do not know what they want. This will take a shift in behaviour if one wants to choose the route and plan in advance. Most of the unsold produce has to be ultimately thrown away, which further leads to the issue of food and resource

¹⁶ Chen, L. (November, 2023). What does Food Security mean in Malaysia? (A. S. Gaikwad, Interviewer)

¹⁷ Chen, L. (November, 2023). What does Food Security mean in Malaysia?

¹⁸ Wan, C. (2023). What does Food Security mean in Malaysia? (A. S. Gaikwad, Interviewer)

waste. Farmers can experience low incomes due to a low profit margin and many times, increased debts.¹⁹

Food loss and wastage occurs at various stages in the production cycle and is a huge global issue. According to the World Resources Institute, in 2023, more than 1 billion tonnes of all food produced globally by weight was lost or wasted between farm and fork. At the same time, 1 in 10 people globally remain malnourished.²⁰ While this is a tragic statistic, it also highlights the need for a robust supply chain to minimise this food lost, thereby increasing the productivity for farmers and fishers, and the availability of fresh produce for consumers. Wan mentions that Malaysia still has sufficient produce, but if a lot of produce is wasted then it hurts the environment, the farmers, and can hurt the economy too as food prices are increased to cover the cost of the potential food wastage. People expect food to always be present on the supermarket shelves. Therefore, the government and private sector need to work with the farmers to understand their production cycle and prepare the customers to buy the available harvest.²¹

Policy Gaps

Between all the above listed issues of poverty and food security, a few policy gaps have been identified.

1. *Tedious bureaucracy* – the need to obtain licences and certifications for quality standards end up becoming an obstacle to food production and distribution

¹⁹ Wan, C. (2023). What does Food Security mean in Malaysia?

²⁰ Goodwin, L. (2023). *The Global Benefits of Reducing Food Loss and Waste, and How to Do It*. <https://www.wri.org/insights/reducing-food-loss-and-food-waste>

²¹ Wan, C. (2023). What does Food Security mean in Malaysia?

2. *Insufficient information* – there is lack of information for farmers for a circular economy and an efficient demand-supply value chain
3. *Lack of corporate sector inclusion* – corporates can provide the essential financial and technical support system to small farmers and agri-businesses, thereby creating a major impact on the sustenance of the agriculture sector and ensuring optimum harvest cycles. This impact is still missing.
4. *Need for food loss and waste policy*. Many countries around the world, including neighbouring Singapore, have adopted different policies impacting the food or organic waste in the country. It is time for Malaysia to join the bandwagon and tackle the enormous issue of food loss and waste in the production cycle.

RECOMMENDATIONS WITHIN THE SDG FRAMEWORK

1. *Need for 'good' middle men and women in the supply chain* – networking is very important to the farmers and fishers, whether it is via people or infrastructure. Therefore, good middle men and women are needed along the supply chain to connect the food producers to the right people in the right places. Solutions must stem from the local communities for local issues and challenges. A bottom-up approach is required along with top-down policy changes. The SDG 17 that aims for partnerships calls for stakeholders from all walks of life, public and private, to collaborate and fill the gaps in the agricultural supply chain. One example is the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (KPKM) initiated Civilian Agro Sales Program (JAM), which aims to help the consumers get access to basic food items directly from producers and entrepreneurs. Deputy

Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, Datuk Arthur Joseph Kurup said consumers who come to buy at carnivals set up by the ministry can also enjoy up to a 30 percent discount because it does not involve middlemen.²²

2. *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)* – Malaysia can consider mandating the CSR policy to increase industrial involvement in the agricultural sector. Many countries make it mandatory by law for corporates to implement their social responsibility based on their turnover and profits. This reflects through SDG 11 and 12 based on sustainable cities and societies, and responsible consumption and production. When a company or organisation uses the resources, whether human or material, from the society, it is their responsibility to give back to build sustainable and resilient communities.
3. *Invest in infrastructure* for the day-to-day activities of the agro-sector, such as market forecast to understand the demand and supply. In addition to SDG 11, SDG 9 calls for industry, innovation and infrastructure. The targets specify how industry should research innovative methods to develop quality, reliable and sustainable infrastructure. Modern technology can be utilised to assist farmers in cultivating the produce demanded by the consumers and in-keeping with the climate crisis.
4. *Regulate food waste for a cradle-to-grave approach.* This approach is when one thinks of every step and its consequences in the entire supply chain. So that, nothing and no one is left behind. This point cuts across a few SDGs such as SDG 2, 11, 12 and 13. Cold storage facilities, and education to

²² Bernard, P. (2024). *KPKM targets 5,000 Civil Agro Sales Programs Nationwide.*

farmers and food producers on proper post-harvest processing should be implemented to ensure minimum loss of food. More available produce means more affordability and accessibility by low-income groups, thereby addressing SDG 2. Whereas, SDG 11 and 12 require strong policies that will tackle the issue of food waste and responsible consumption. SDG 13 that targets climate action deals with the environmental degradation that arises from land pollution caused by food waste in landfills. Countries such as Japan, South Korea and France, to name a few, have set excellent examples in terms of food waste policies and Malaysia can pick up the applicable measures to deal with food waste along the supply chain in the country.

CONCLUSION

We need practical solutions and a multi-pronged approach within the policy framework to help farmers and fishers, and all those involved in the agriculture demand-supply chain. First, there must be an open and transparent platform for farmers, fishers, small agri-businesses, government agencies, private sector and consumers to interact with one another. Second, there should be a minimum selling price for all basic vegetables as well as the fishing industry and not just for a few products. This will offer social protection to the farmers and will keep them from being pushed into poverty. The farmers and the fishers toil under harsh conditions and keep food on our plates. Therefore, all the profits should and must go to them. Government and private sector should only act as facilitators.

It is hard for small farmers to keep up with the trends and demands. Before jumping to technology or equipment that is often unaffordable, farmers must be provided with basic infrastructure such as good roads, reliable transport systems and cartel-free markets to

make a good income. They need the support of the government to make optimum use of their land and other available resources. The time when farmers themselves are unable to afford food or feed their own families is when the country would have truly reached a state of food insecurity.

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Part 2:
Poverty and Communities in Sabah

Chapter 4

Personal Experience in Policy and Practice in Addressing Poverty in Malaysia with Specific Reference to Sabah

Dato' Sri Mustapa Mohamed

INTRODUCTION

Sabah, one of Malaysia's largest and most resource-rich states, has long grappled with persistent poverty despite various development initiatives. As of 2022, Sabah reported a poverty rate of 19.7%, with 1.2% of its population living in hardcore poverty. These figures are significantly higher than the national average, highlighting the unique challenges faced by the state. The high poverty rate in Sabah can be attributed to several factors, including its geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, and a predominantly rural population reliant on agriculture and traditional livelihoods. Despite its abundant natural resources and potential for economic growth, many of Sabah's residents continue to live in deprivation, lacking access to basic necessities such as clean water, infrastructure, connectivity, healthcare, and quality education.

Efforts to address poverty in Sabah have been multi-faceted, involving both government and non-governmental organisations. Programmes targeting economic development, education, and healthcare have been implemented with varying degrees of success. However, the complexity of poverty in Sabah requires more than just financial assistance; it necessitates a comprehensive approach that addresses systemic issues and empowers communities to achieve sustainable development.

Given the state's high poverty rate, focused and sustained efforts are crucial. Effective poverty alleviation in Sabah demands a collaborative approach that leverages the strengths of various stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, and the private sector. Enhancing education and employment opportunities for the younger generation, improving infrastructure, and ensuring access to essential services are vital steps towards reducing poverty. Achieving these goals aligns with Malaysia's broader commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1, which aims to end poverty in all its forms by 2030.

POVERTY RATE IN MALAYSIA

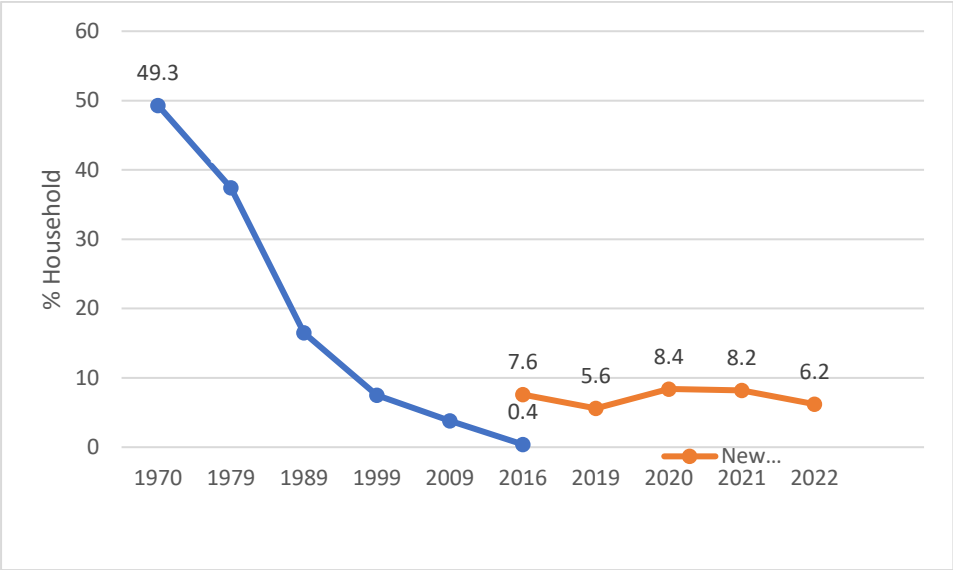


Figure 4.1. Poverty Rate in Malaysia

*Note: based on old methodology, monthly PLI = RM 980
 Based on new methodology, monthly PLI = RM 2,208
 Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM)*

The graph shows Malaysia’s poverty rate since 1970 (Figure 4.1). There has been a decreasing rate of poverty from 1970 to 2016 using the old methodology. In 2016, based on the PLI 2005 methodology, poverty rate was 0.4%. However, if PLI 2019 was used to measure the poverty rate in 2016, the percentage would be 7.6%.

This means that, if measured using the new PLI methodology, the national poverty rate has decreased by 2%, from 7.6% in 2016 to 5.6% in 2019. This clearly shows that the poverty eradication programmes and initiatives carried out by the government with the support of various parties such as non-governmental and private organisations have yielded good results.

Table 4.1. Poverty Rate in 2022 in Sabah

	Malaysia	Sabah
Poor	6.2 %	19.7 %
Hardcore Poor	0.2 %	1.2 %

Sabah has the highest poverty rate at 19.7% in 2022, with 1.2% experiencing extreme poverty. In 1970, when the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced, the national poverty rate was 49.3%.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) has received funding from the Ministry of Finance to deliver the mandate of localising SDGs in a number of parliamentary constituencies. As of 2024, APPGM-SDG has implemented programmes in 17 parliamentary constituencies in Sabah, out of 26 constituencies.

Table 4.2. Parliamentary Constituencies Completed in Sabah where Programmes and Projects have Commenced

YEAR	PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY
2020	Papar
2021	Pensiangan
	Tawau
	Kota Belud
	Libaran
2022	Beaufort
	Keningau
	Kalabakan
	Tenom
	Lahad Datu
2023	Kudat
	Beluran
	Sandakan
	Ranau
2024	Kota Marudu
	Sipitang
	Kinabatangan
Total	17

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN IMPLEMENTING POVERTY ERADICATION PROGRAMMES

The High-Level Committee Meeting for the Monitoring of the Twelfth Malaysia Plan, 2021-2025, on 6 December 2021 chaired by the then Prime Minister, YAB Dato' Sri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, had agreed that the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) and the Implementation Coordination Unit (ICU), Prime Minister's Department (JPM) should coordinate the programmes on eradicating hardcore poor families known "Program Pembasmian Kemiskinan Tegar Keluarga Malaysia (BMTKM)". This programme will focus on eradicating hardcore poverty among heads

of households (*Ketua Isi Rumah/KIR*) and members of households (*Ahli Isi Rumah/AIR*) throughout the country by the end of 2025 that is, over a four-year period. This article will highlight my personal experience implementing poverty eradication programmes in six localities.

Lata Kinjang, Tapah

Lata Kinjang Forest Eco-Park (*Taman Eko-Rimba Lata Kinjang*) in Tapah, Perak is managed by *Koperasi Orang Asli Lata Kinjang Berhad* (KOALKB). This *Orang Asli* community has 261 residents and the eco-park is one of Perak's popular eco-tourism destinations.

During COVID-19, this eco-park was closed. The community and the Northern Corridor Implementation Authority (NCIA) discussed the way forward in reviving the eco-park as an thriving tourism destination.

With the government's funding of RM 2.7 million, over a period of about two years, a cooperative (KOALB) was established under the supervision of NCIA and Department of *Orang Asli* (*Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli/JAKOA*). The cooperative now employs 27 locals. Its income is about RM 70,000 per month while expenses are of about RM 60,000 per month. These employees come from hardcore poor families. They used to earn RM 800 per person, and now their incomes have increased to about RM 2,000 per month. They are all out of hardcore poverty.

In getting the community out from poverty, there should be strong cooperation between government agencies, such as NCIA, and the Federal as well as State governments. This success demonstrates the importance of targeted interventions and collaboration with government agencies in increasing incomes.

Kampung Orang Asli Sungai Rual

Kampung Orang Asli Sungai Rual, located in Jeli, Kelantan, is home to the Jahai tribe with a population of 780 residents. Four projects have been initiated here at a cost of RM 650,000, focusing on the cultivation of mushrooms, vegetables, and stingless bee (*madu kelulut*). These projects are facing a number of challenges, including diseases, adverse weather conditions, and price fluctuations. Consequently, the returns have not justified the substantial investment. Furthermore, there was a lack of coordination and delayed intervention. Continuous monitoring and support are essential to ensure continued success of all poverty eradication projects.

Four People Housing Project (Program Perumahan Rakyat/PPR) in Kuala Lumpur

In partnership with the University of Malaya, the hardcore poverty eradication programme in Taman Muhibbah, Kampung Kerinci, Desa Rejang, and Taman Mulia have demonstrated progress in reducing hard poor poverty. Initially, 132 households were identified as hardcore poor in the four localities, but this number has been reduced to 89. Various projects, including the making of cakes and pastries, have been launched in these PPR localities. One important observation is the number of hardcore poor participants who opted out was, about 15 participants decided not to be part of this programme. This dynamic data highlights the necessity for regular monitoring and flexible strategies to effectively address poverty.

LESSONS LEARNT

Addressing poverty at the grassroots level has provided invaluable lessons that underscore the importance of accurate profiling, effective data management, community involvement, and sustainable programme design. These elements are critical for the success of poverty eradication initiatives.

Accurate Profiling and Data Management

Accurate profiling and comprehensive data management are fundamental to the success of poverty eradication programmes. Utilising databases such as eKasih and supplemented by feedback from local leaders ensure that assistance reaches those most in need. However, managing these data sources can be challenging due to sometimes conflicting data from various agencies such as the ICU, state governments, district offices, and local authorities. A dynamic and robust database is essential, as it allows for targeted interventions tailored to the specific needs of households and communities. Engaging local residents and community leaders in the profiling process can significantly enhance the accuracy of data, as they often have a better understanding of the local context and the true extent of poverty in their areas.

Holistic and Sustainable Approaches

Poverty alleviation must adopt a holistic approach, addressing not only financial needs but also the mindset and motivation of participants. Programmes/Projects should be designed to provide continuous support and monitoring to prevent beneficiaries from returning to the poverty category. This requires a dual strategy of welfare assistance for immediate relief and income-generating projects to elevate the socio-economic status of participants.

Ensuring the sustainability of projects and programmes is crucial. Programmes/Projects must be designed to ensure continuous income generation rather than one-off impact. This involves creating an environment where beneficiaries can become self-reliant over time. Establishing exit policies is essential to ensure that cash assistance is temporary, allowing resources to be optimized and beneficiaries to transition out of poverty successfully.

Cost Management and Efficient Resource Allocation

The administrative costs associated with profiling and data management can be substantial. It is important to balance these costs with the actual aid delivered to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. There have been instances where the administrative expenses exceeded the funds available for direct assistance, highlighting the need to revisit and streamline these processes. Some costs may be hidden and indirect. It is important to ensure that these costs are properly calculated and kept to the minimum.

Customised and Targeted Interventions

One size fits all was the approach in the earlier phases of poverty eradication programmes. This is now seldom the case. Programmes must be customised and targeted to address the specific needs of different communities and households. This customisation requires a thorough understanding of the local context and dynamic data management to adapt to changing circumstances.

Community Engagement and Motivation

Community engagement is vital for the success of poverty alleviation. A bottom-up approach that involves local residents in the planning and implementation of projects is important to ensure support and buy in. Motivation and mindset change are equally important. Financial aid alone is of course insufficient; it must be supplemented with efforts to motivate and encourage individuals to improve their lives. This often requires a long-term commitment and continuous interaction between government officials and the community.

Regular Monitoring and Flexible Strategies

Regular monitoring and flexible strategies are crucial in managing poverty alleviation programmes. The dynamic nature of poverty means that individuals' circumstances can change rapidly,

necessitating frequent reassessments and adjustments and timely interventions. Monthly reviews and close monitoring can help identify those who have successfully transitioned out of poverty and those who may need further assistance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, addressing poverty in Malaysia especially in Sabah requires a multi-faceted and sustained effort. The high poverty rates, particularly in rural and isolated areas, necessitate targeted interventions that factor in the unique challenges faced by these communities. Effective poverty alleviation strategies must involve coordinated efforts among various governmental and non-governmental entities, focusing on better access to education, improving infrastructure, and creating employment opportunities. Community engagement and a holistic approach to poverty eradication are essential to ensure that the initiatives are effective and sustainable. By aligning these efforts with Malaysia's commitment to all the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 1, Malaysia should be able to eliminate hardcore poverty and substantially reduce the poverty rate.

Chapter 5

Ending Poverty: Assessment by APPGM-SDG in Sabah

Dr. Teo Sue Ann

ABSTRACT

APPGM-SDG's issue mapping process has documented multi-dimensional poverty conditions at the grassroots from 2020 to 2024. In conjunction with the 2024 conference focusing on poverty in Sabah, this paper presents APPGM-SDG's issue mapping findings, especially within Sabah's context. By using Amartya Sen's proposal of measuring poverty that underscores the notion of deprivation, the author argues that one of the critical factors in considering the poverty conditions in Sabah is the poor infrastructure, which is hindering the grassroots communities, especially those living in the rural and remote areas in achieving wellbeing. The inadequate infrastructure, albeit the ongoing mega infrastructure project – the Pan Borneo Highway- has deprived communities of primary healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. The poor road conditions and limited modes of transportation hinder them from marketing their produce and curtailing their capabilities to improve their socio-economic wellbeing. More importantly, the author complements Sen's notion of poverty with the SDG framework to further emphasise the importance of a multi-dimensional perspective in studying poverty in Malaysia, especially in Sabah.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, many scholars, thinkers and policymakers have started to explore and expand their understanding of poverty from multiple dimensions. Many also identify the insurgent interests in

understanding poverty, and the urge to investigate the conditions from multi-dimensional perspectives was initiated by Amartya Sen in 1976, in which he urged to measure poverty through an ordinary approach. Sen's (1976) proposal of measuring poverty by identifying people experiencing poverty among the total population and by creating an index based on the available information about the poor (Sen, 1976). Sen's proposal underscores the fundamental importance of exploring poverty based on an array of available information from different aspects of realities for the poor. This paper contributes to the existing discourse on multi-dimensional poverty by focusing on the poverty issues that the APPGM-SDG maps from 2020 to 2023. In light of the MySDG Academy Poverty Conference in Sabah, the findings on poverty in the state are presented. Poverty in Sabah is multi-dimensional and context-specific. Therefore, policy discussion to eradicate poverty in the state should consider the distinctiveness of the social, economic and environmental conditions for any strategies and policy implementation to be effective and efficient.

POVERTY AND SDG 1

Amartya Sen's proposal for identifying and measuring people experiencing poverty is nuanced and contextual. He argues that poverty is a relative phenomenon beyond the mere income measurement between the rich and the poor. Poverty should be considered a shortfall, even among the rich and poor. The measurement of poverty should also consider income distribution among the poor. It should reflect the ordinary condition in which unequal income also happens among people experiencing poverty. A measurement of income distribution among people experiencing poverty would illuminate how many people experiencing poverty are deprived. Following this discourse, Sen has further argued that measuring deprivation could enable a nuanced understanding of the capabilities of people experiencing poverty. Sen (1990) argues that an

individual's capability consists of hers/his doings and beings – which equates to the functioning of the individual (Sen, 1990, 53). According to Sen (2005) capabilities and human rights are intimately related concepts that must be equally considered for an individual to have the essential freedom. Human rights and capabilities are also grounded on public reasoning and moral imperatives. Therefore, the concept of poverty must be gauged beyond income generation. Instead, to gauge the poverty condition of an individual, community, or society, one must investigate how they can actively improve their wellbeing. One must assess their geographical, social, cultural, religious, political, and economic background to understand their activeness. These aspects of their backgrounds shape the local context and often their moral obligations and conscience. This multi-dimensional understanding would determine their capabilities to obtain wealth and a good quality of life (based on the respective contextual standard).

It is noteworthy that one of the significant outcomes from the scholarly discourse about multi-dimensional poverty sprouted from Sen's poverty measurement is the multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI), developed by the UNDP and OPHI in 2010 (Thorbecke, 2013). The index is a tool to measure the degree of poverty through three significant dimensions – health, education, and standard of living. The MPI comprises ten indicators to measure these three dimensions. The indicators are nutrition (anthropometric measures) and child mortality for health; years of schooling and school attendance for education; and electricity, water, sanitation, cooking fuel, flooring, and asset ownership for living standards (Alkire, 2011).

The Malaysian government has also started to identify the usefulness of MPI in providing a more in-depth understanding of the conditions of poverty in society. Therefore, it is stated in the 11th Malaysia Plan (2015 – 2020) that the government will identify the poor by using MPI

to strategise for eradicating poverty in Malaysian society. Malaysia's MPI comprises four dimensions, with an added dimension for income. It also has eleven indicators – schooling years, attendance, healthcare access, clean water access, living place conditions, room crowdedness, toilet, garbage collection facility, transportation, essential communication tools, and mean monthly household income.

At the onset, it is noteworthy that the agenda of eradicating poverty is always the topmost priority of the Malaysian government. Therefore, besides the MPI, Malaysia is also one of the UN member states committed to the 2030 Global Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2019. The 17 SDGs are the UN's urgent call for eradicating all forms of poverty, leaving no one behind in achieving the goals by 2030. The first SDG is, indeed, to eradicate extreme poverty, to reduce poverty by at least 50 percent by 2030, to ensure the implementation of social protection systems, to ensure equal rights to economic resources and access to essential services, technology, and land, and to build the resilience of people experiencing poverty to environmental, economic and social disasters. The measurement for this SDG is based on 14 indicators.

The Issue Mapping by APPGM-SDG

One way the Malaysian government shows commitment to achieving the 17 SDGs is by forming the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG). The formation of the APPGM-SDG is a ground-breaking initiative for localising the 17 SDGs with a grounded approach. It is bi-partisan and calls for the direct participation of members of Parliament, federal and state government agencies, district offices, local councils, civil society, regional and community leaders, and grassroots communities. From 2020 until 2023, the APPGM-SDG has initiated the localisation process with 85 parliamentary constituencies.

The APPGM-SDG's localising process is based on the grounded approach to document the multi-dimensional aspects of each parliamentary constituency involved. We record the social, economic, and environmental issues, abiding by the principle of "leaving no one behind." Therefore, the grounded approach encompasses effective participation by multi- stakeholders. It maps each constituency's social, economic, and environmental issues. The issue mapping process comprises constituency profiling with the MPs, discussion with the district office, three days of fieldwork in the respective constituency, and interagency dialogues with the district office and local councils. The objective of the issue mapping is two-fold. First, it is to understand the issues through the lens of SDGs. Second, to understand the inter-relations of SDGs and the problems highlighted by the stakeholders.

The issues mapped by the APPGM-SDG are qualitative. They comprise narratives, explanations, perspectives and opinions from each focus group discussion with grassroots communities, including their leaders and representatives. We often met with at least ten participants for each focus group discussion. When we encounter a larger group, we would further divide the participants into more than one group. These conversations are audio recorded with consent from the participants and transcribed verbatim by the researchers. The findings are then categorised into short-, mid-, and long-term issues. We then strategise different interventions to resolve these issues. We recognise that mid and long-term problems require more extensive policy discussion, often requiring longer time and more careful strategies.

Nonetheless, for the short-term issues, the APPGM-SDG allocates RM120,000 for each involved constituency. The allocation is for the grassroots communities to find ways to resolve short-term problems. It is divided equally into at least three short-term solution projects. The

communities are guided in formulating their solutions to their issues. To date, there are about 1,000 local solution projects on the ground.

The APPGM-SDG findings help fill the gaps in data and knowledge of Malaysia's progress in achieving the SDGs. Indeed, the Malaysia Department of Statistics (DOSM) has prepared the SDG dashboard to track Malaysia's progress in achieving the SDGs. The DOSM statistical data provide a macro perspective in measuring the SDG achievement, while the APPGM-SDG's qualitative data demonstrate the dynamism and contour on the ground. The participants' narratives and explanations illuminate how the SDGs, as a global agenda, are vital for improving the local communities. Above all, their lived experiences give a nuanced understanding of the hindrances and gaps of policy implementation, which can complement the DOSM data in providing a comprehensive understanding of the issues. Together, stakeholders in the government and CSOs can formulate more effective, efficient, and sustainable strategies for resolving the issues.

THE APPGM-SDG FINDINGS ON POVERTY

The APPGM-SDG findings illuminate the notion that poverty is multi-dimensional and has various degrees of deprivation. By intersecting the multi-dimensional poverty dimensions and indicators with the SDGs, we can further analyze the poverty conditions by contextualizing the findings with the local lived realities. By situating on different regional contexts, the analysis reveals the political frictions, social dynamism, geography and topography, and the local economy that determine the aggregation of individuals and households. Therefore, the APPGM-SDG findings from across the 85 parliamentary constituencies are not limited to health, education, standard of living and income, and the 11 indicators of the Malaysia MPI measurement. The findings also illuminate the challenges and hindrances in eradicating poverty faced by government agencies and

local communities. They also document the existing unsustainable practices and limitations in localising SDGs on the ground. In general, the issues reported can be categorised into five significant aspects. They include accessibility challenges, limited opportunities, limited agri-food supplies, lack of information and bureaucracy, and the negative implications of local development.

Challenges of accessibility

One of the major findings from the APPGM-SDG is the challenges for grassroots communities in accessing basic infrastructure, amenities, education, healthcare, and connectivity. These are basic needs for individuals and households, and the deprivation of these basic needs has contributed to poverty conditions.

The accessibility challenges are diverse according to the locality. In Sabah, for instance, the poor infrastructure has been a prominent issue for the locals, especially those living in the rural areas. The communities identified the poor infrastructure as the fundamental factor that deprived them of education and healthcare. For instance, parents have become reluctant to send their children to school precisely because of the long hours of traveling and poor road conditions. Some of the children must use boats to attend school. Due to unsafe traveling, accidents have happened.

“... at that time the children were on the small boats. The school children’s boat sank, one of them died because the boat was capsized due to the strong wave.”¹

– Sandakan, 2023, Pulau Berhala²

¹ Translated from: “...masa tu budak sekolah naik bot kecil perahu kecil budak sekolah tu tenggelam. ada satu budak sekolah meninggal...bot karam, padahal ndada ombak...”

² Translate from: “...anak-anak bersekolah tidak lancar sebab kerja buruh kadang ada gaji kadang gaji tak cukup. kalau cukup, cukuplah..tapi kadang-kadang tida pegi sekolah sebab belanja tiada...”

The poor infrastructure has also imposed higher costs for the local communities to move from one place to another. The villagers living in the rural areas often must rely on co-sharing transportation, known as the charter car, to go to the nearby town. For farmers, the charter is an inevitable cost for their produce if they want to sell them in the market. For pregnant women, the charter is the only mode of transportation to travel to the nearby hospital. For the children, their parents must pay for the charter to send their children to school. The extra transportation costs had become one of the reasons that many of these children dropped out of schooling.

“The children attendance to school depends on the wages of their parents. Sometimes the parents’ wages are not enough. If they earn enough, they will send their children to school. If they don’t earn enough, then their children don’t go to school, because they don’t have enough money.” – Sandakan, 2023, Kampung Forest

Therefore, in these cases, the deprivation that the communities faced was not limited to a lack of financial means. On the contrary, they had the economic resources that could alleviate their situation of lacking income. Instead, poor road conditions deprived them of their economic capabilities.

Besides the poor road conditions, the lack of clean and treated water supply persists across different regions. Indeed, the Department of Statistics has shown that nearly all of Malaysia's citizens have a water supply. According to the Department's definition of water supply, it includes water from gravity, hills, rivers, and pipes. This also means that not all of these water supplies are treated, and more importantly, they are not necessarily clean. Often, the communities would have water disruption, especially during the rainy season. In Sarawak, the villages in the remote areas rely on gravity water from the hill. Among

the villagers, they have appointed a person in charge, locally known as AJK Pipe, to go up the mountain to clean the clogged pipe to give the villagers a water supply. Similarly, in Peninsular, many indigenous communities rely on the water from gravity and rivers for daily usage. Nevertheless, the weather and forest exploitation, such as logging and estate opening, would often disrupt their water supplies.

“Due to logging... when the development is not controlled, and logging activities become rampant will cause environmental pollution. The water source is there, during raining season, water will cause erosion which will risk the settlement of the indigenous communities.” – Gua Musang, 2022, Tok Batin Orang Asli

Although the murky water caused by rain was temporary, the pollution often caused the villagers to lose their source of water supply. These realities on the ground allow us to understand the Department's statistical data better. It is important to stress that the APPGM-SDG data complements the DOSM data to enable us to delve deeper into understanding the water supplies in different localities. According to SDG 6 for clean and treated water, the target and indicator clearly stated that clean water supply also include:

- Target 6.1.1 Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services
- Target 6.3.2 Proportion of bodies of water with good ambient water quality
- Target 6.4.1 Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources

The combination of data from the APPGM-SDG and DOSM would allow policymakers and the Malaysian government to strategise for more effective and sustainable solutions and subsequently achieve SDG 6.

One of the essential basic amenities is connectivity. The issue of connectivity become increasingly urgent, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Malaysian government took measures to beef up connectivity, particularly to address concerns about students' access to education. Over the years, the issue has become less urgent for many communities. However, based on the APPGM-SDG findings, this issue persists for many communities living in the remote areas in Peninsular, Sabah, and Sarawak.

“The first issue is connectivity. There are Wifi service over there, but no internet connection. Empty Wifi. All the towers are nearby, but no signal.”
– Betong, 2022, Rimbass³

The lack of connectivity implicates the economic capabilities of the communities and the accessibility of vulnerable groups to government welfare assistance. These two implications are intimately related. When the marketability of the communities' products is curtailed due to the lack of internet connection, they would continue to live with insufficient income and, therefore, remain financially poor. Many of them would resort to the government's welfare assistance. However, as many of these welfare aides require online applications, the communities living in areas with weak connectivity would not have access to the welfare aides that are meant to assist them.

Limited Opportunities

The discussion about the challenges of access to basic needs leads to the question of the employability of community members. The challenge of obtaining sufficient education and skills training and the inconducive environment for marketability of local products have further deprived communities of improving their living conditions.

³ Translated from: Isu pertama pasal connectivity. WiFi sudah ada di kawasan sana, tapi saluran internet tidak ada. WiFi kosong lah. ...tiang semua sudah ada dekat-dekat...tapi tiada kualiti.

Generally, youth living in rural areas are expected to leave their hometown and villages to look for employment opportunities in the urban areas. The youths who have decided to stay back often receive less sympathy for their inability to obtain stable employment. Based on the discussion with the youth, we found that the stereotype against the employed youths who chose to stay back hinders the investigation of the lack of employment in the suburb and rural areas. As one of the youths said, *“Working in Kota Kinabalu would incur extra cost, like house rental dll. So, we chose to work here (in Beaufort) because our home is here.”* (Beaufort, 2022, FGD with youth group).⁴

The persistent lack of job opportunities for the youths have forced many of them to migrate to the urban areas. Consequently, the imbalanced development between the rural and urban areas is stark. Such a phenomenon is unsustainable. As another youth participant said, *“Do you think KK (Kota Kinabalu) has unlimited jobs for all of us? Everyone is going there to look for a job, and they all tell us to go there to look for jobs. What makes them think that there are unlimited job opportunities there?”*

Due to the lack of job opportunities, the unemployed are often urged to explore income-generating activities. From the APPGM-SDG findings, there are diverse income-generating activities by the grassroots communities that are informal. These businesses are important as a local circular economy that provides the daily essentials for the local people. However, these economic activities have more significant income-generating potential. For instance, there is organic paddy production in Kedah, coffee production in Sabah and Sarawak, and fruits and vegetables in Sabah. These products not only have economic potential, but they also have the potential for

⁴ Translated from: *“...bekerja di KK perlukan kos tambahan seperti rental, etc... Jadi, kami pilih untuk bekerja di sini (Beaufort) kerana rumah di sini.”*

sustainable food production for local consumption. Arguably, the if we can rely more on locally produced products, we can alleviate the poverty among the local communities, including the farmers and fishers (Khor, 2008). More importantly, these farmers are playing important roles directly and indirectly contributing sustainable sources for Malaysia (Razak et al., 2013).

Lack of information

It is noteworthy that various welfare schemes are provided not only by the Welfare Department but also by the KPKT, KPDN, ICU, and the state government. Nevertheless, a prominent issue the communities raised is the need for more information about these various schemes. The lack of information could be due to various reasons, ranging from the communities' locations that are remote and far away, language barriers, lack of communication with the local district officers, and the weak communication system.

"If we go to JKM, they want to have certified documents. When they see us healthy and all, they will not give. They will say we are not qualified, because our children can support us. If we have the "single mother" status, everything become difficult for us. The society would stereotyping us, as though we have committed crimes. But its okay the God will know. Many single mothers failed to obtain welfare assistance from Welfare Deaprtment. But during the lockdown, yes we received the basic things such as foods, Batuan Sara hidup (BSH) only some succeeded in getting some are not." – Gua Musang, 2021, Perkampungan Kemubu⁵

⁵ Translated from: Kalau pergi JKM, JKM perlukan dokumen yang sah. Kalau dia tengok kita sihat semua, pegawai dia tak bagi. dia kata tak layak sebab ada anak boleh bantu. Kalau dapatkan status ibu tunggal nie susah serba tak kena. Pandangan masyarakat pun kadang-kadang serong kat kita. Macam kita banyak buat salah. Tapi tak apalah tuhan ada. Ramai juga ibu tunggal tak dapat bantuan daripada JKM. Ada ibu tunggal tu hidup sorang, tak khawin, tak ada anak tapi tak dapat bantuan JKM. Tapi masa PKP dapatlah bantuan barang-barang asas (makanan). Bantuan Sara Hidup (BSH) ada yang dapat tapi tak semua dapat. ada yang tak dapat.

The lack of information frustrates the communities that are supposed to be the target groups for welfare assistance and support schemes. One reason is that many of them need help understanding the bureaucratic system. Some were convinced they were entitled but not selected due to the lack of “cable” (connections) with the local representatives and politicians. The sense of being marginalised is particularly prominent among the groups who deemed themselves minorities in the areas, such as the Indian communities and other tribal communities in Sabah and Sarawak.

SABAH: THE LAND BELOW THE WIND

From 2020-2024, the APPGM-SDG conducted the localisation process with 17 parliamentary constituencies in Sabah. It is the second largest state in Malaysia, after Sarawak, with a coverage of 73,620 sq km. Its three largest districts are Tongod, Lahad Datu and Kinabatangan while three smallest districts are Putatan, Kota Kinabalu and Penampang. According to the Population Census of 2020, Sabah has a record of 3.4 million people. Notably, the Malaysian government declared that four of the eight poorest states in Malaysia were in Sabah. The map shows the border of Sabah parliamentary constituencies (Figure 5.1).

After five years of issue mapping in the region, the qualitative findings have shown emerging social, economic, and environmental trends. More importantly, the issues mapped continue to demonstrate distinctive dimensions of poverty compared to the conditions in the Peninsular and even Sarawak regions.

To anchor the discussion, the author will focus on Sabah's infrastructure to present the region's poverty conditions. Using Sen's framework of functioning, Sabah's conditions of poverty revolve primarily around infrastructure. The lack of and poor infrastructure has consistently deprived the local communities of access to basic

needs of education, healthcare, economic activities and employment. It is also the primary reason for imbalanced development within and between the region and other regions.

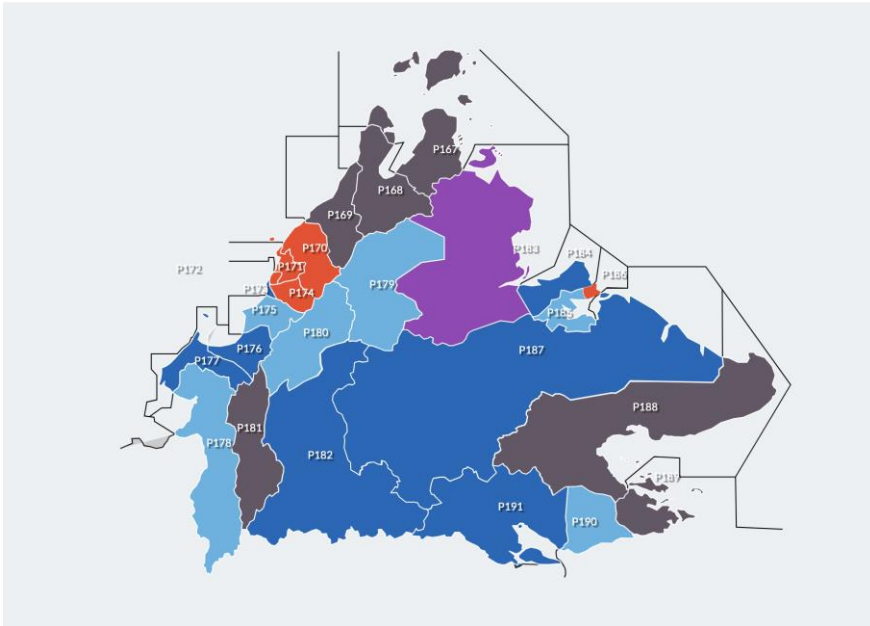


Figure 5.1. Parliamentary Constituencies in Sabah, 2023

Source: *The Star Online* (n.a)
<https://election.thestar.com.my/sabah.html> (accessed 1 June 2024)

Nevertheless, it is paramount to note that Sabah is also one of the regions involved in the Pan-Borneo highway mega project. The project, launched in 2016, aims to close the gap of imbalanced development between the East and West of Malaysia. The total length of the highway that links Malaysia and Indonesia – from Sarawak to Sabah and Kalimantan is about 1,663 kilometers. According to the plan, the Malaysian government aims to complete this mega infrastructure project by 2024. To date, the highway in Sarawak is nearly completed (about 99 percent completion, as announced by the Sarawak Work Minister) (Sallehuddin 2024). About 727 kilometer of the highway will

go across Sabah region, linking the state's major cities - Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan, Tawau and Keningau.

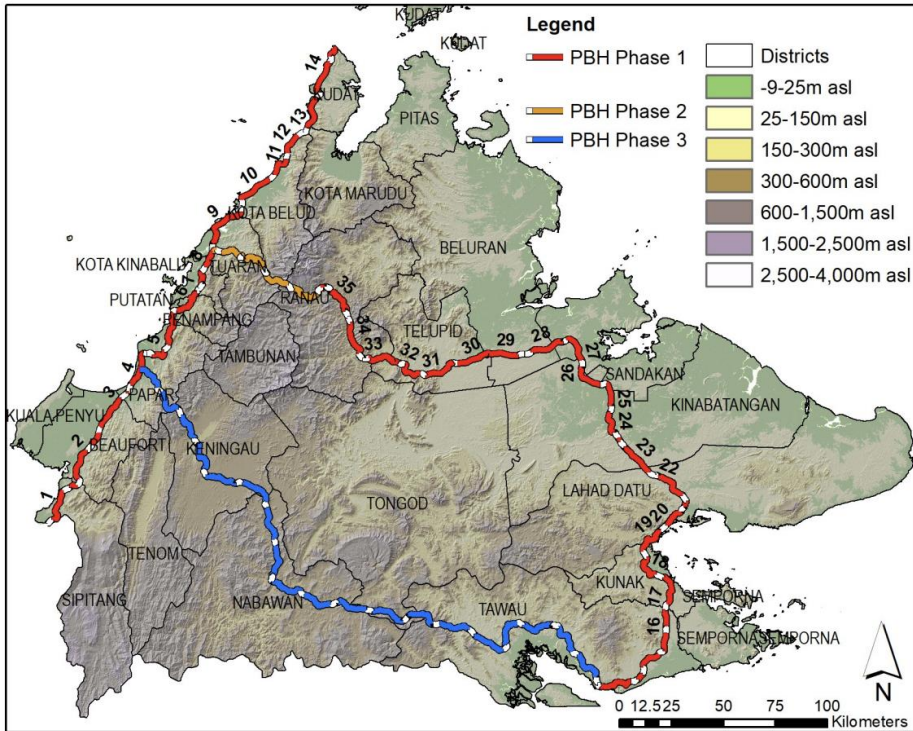


Figure 5.2. The Pan-Borneo Highway Project in Sabah

Source: Abram, Nicola Karen, Hong Ye Lim, Casey Keat-Chuan Ng, Sylvia Yorath, Mohamed Haleem Mohamed Razi, Cynthia Gaik Suan Ong, Kok-On Chen, and Kenneth Brockington Wilson. 2022. "The socio-economic and cultural impacts of the Pan Borneo Highway on Indigenous and local communities in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo." *Plos one* 17 (6): e0269890. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1371/journal>

As shown on the Sabah map above, this project is divided into three phases. The first phase is to complete the first 706 kilometers of the road. It involves upgrading the existing 2-lane roads to 4-lane dual carriage highways and a new 2-lane coastal highway in the northwest

of Sabah. The project is further divided into 35 packages, which involve five regional areas.

Since the project was initiated in Sabah, several setbacks have caused delays in its completion. According to the deputy Chief Minister (CM) of Sabah, the delay for the project is due to the changing of the project delivery partners as the Sabah government decided to take over the project in 2019 (Mu 2024). The decision entailed changes to the contractors and consultants for the projects which caused the inevitable delay. Besides, according to a study by Abd Malik et al. (2021), Sabah might not have sufficient skill workers and allocations for the completion of the project by 2024. Furthermore, according to the Sabah Works Minister, the land acquisition in Sabah is four times higher than in Sarawak (Chan, 2024). This has further delayed the project completion.

Nevertheless, in Sabah, the project promises economic growth, improving connectivity and forging bonds of unity across the region. Especially for Sabah's major cities such as Tawau and Lahad Datu, this infrastructure project may rectify the longstanding issues of poor road conditions as highlighted by scholars (Ladin et al., 2020). However, many remain skeptical about the cost-benefits that the project promises. According to Sloan et al. (2019), the project has compromised the protected-area integration across the northern Heart of Borneo region, fragmenting important conservation landscape. Moreover, despite the high cost that incur for the acquisition of land by the Sabah government, Abram et al. (2022) highlighted how the project directly implicates the local communities' landownership. According to the Sabah Land Acquisition Ordinance (Sabah Cap. 69), the Sabah government can gazette land for the project. If the landowners of the gazetted land can only challenge the amount of compensation, they could receive from the government.

For those with Native Customary Rights (NCR) and those who have yet to be recognised by the state, the government is not obligated to pay any compensation if the government gazettes the land for any development project. More importantly, Abram et al. (2022) argue that the government's acquisition of the land for this mega infrastructure project is in the expense of the indigenous people's livelihood.

The findings from the APPGM-SDG have further unraveled both the persisting issues and the new issues that emerged due to the construction and the delay of the Pan-Borneo project in Sabah. Indeed, these issues are derived primarily from the lived experiences, points of view, and knowledge of the local communities and may not necessarily be accurate. Therefore, their inputs may not qualify as definitive for the root causes of the problems. Nonetheless, these issues remain important as indications of more extensive policy and systemic issues that involve both the Sabah's state government and the federal government of Malaysia. Above all, the issues raised by the communities remain essential in understanding the multi-dimensional and dynamism of poverty in Sabah and in formulating effective strategies for sustainable development of the region. In the following, the author further addresses the emerging issues from the APPGM-SDG issue mapping, focusing mainly on the imbalanced development of infrastructure.

Multi-dimensional Poverty in Sabah

On 4 June 2024, the former Chief Minister of Sabah called for the Malaysian federal government to understand the contextual distinctiveness of poverty in Sabah. He argued that poverty in Sabah cannot be eradicated with the same policy measures implemented in the Peninsular. Hence, he urged the government to formulate strategies that tackle the poverty conditions in Sabah with specific measures and strategies.

With the APPGM-SDG's issue mapping findings, we concur with the former Sabah CM's argument. Indeed, the most pressing issue for people experiencing poverty in Sabah is not necessarily the lack of income. Instead, a more pressing issue for people experiencing poverty is often the deprivation they face to access education, employment opportunities, healthcare, and basic needs such as water and electric supply and connectivity. The imbalanced development between the urban and rural areas is stark. It is precisely through the imbalanced development that the multi-dimensional poverty conditions of Sabah are exacerbated through the narratives and experience sharing of the participants.

One prominent issue of imbalanced development is the accessibility of basic needs and services. Different target groups described their experiences of inaccessibility differently but closely related to their contextual needs.

"...if the parents have at least motorcycle, most of them would still send their children to school themselves. They would send their children there in the morning and take the children back in the evening. But when life gets desperate, they would choose to let their children to drop out from school... it is expensive for them to send their children to school. They must rent a car for return trio. RM10 per day." – Kampung Malinsau 3, Ranau, 2023⁶

The participant's rationale for not sending their children to school is practical, considering the mobility difficulties due to the poor road conditions. Moreover, they must pay extra for transportation. With their current lack of household income, the additional cost would

⁶ Translate from: *...Kalau itu parents at least ada motorsikal kebanyakan lah saya nampak sekarang dorang hantar anak dorang pakai motorsikal dorang pagi petang kadang-kadang yang saya nampak dorang sanggup lagi bia keadaan kehidupan mendesak terus terpaksa kasi berhenti anak sekolah sebab itu sewa kereta sangat mahal sini, RM10 satu 1hari pergi balik..."*

burden the family's financial situation. Their experience further shed light on the challenges to achieve SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Through the findings of APPGM-SDG, we have identified that by improving the infrastructure, particularly the road conditions, we can achieve:

- Target SDG 4.3: Equal Access to Affordable Technical, Vocational and Higher Education, and
- Target SDG 4.5: Eliminate All Discrimination in Education.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the sentiment of the parents needs to be more generalizable. The APPGM-SDG issues mapping also found parents willing to make extra efforts to ensure their children have a basic primary education. In Kudat, we found out that rural parents have built small huts outside of schools so their children can attend primary school daily. A transit house is a one-room unit, and it is known as a 'transit' home. It has no electricity or water supply, and the children are often left alone with minimum security. Despite the insecurity and the lack of basic amenities, the parents found the 'transit' home is a pragmatic solution for the lack of accessibility to primary education for their children. The fundamental issue here is the poor road condition, which is hindering the achievement of target SDG 4.2 to ensure that all girls and boys have equal access to quality early education.



Figure 5.3. Transit homes in Kudat, 2022

Source: Photos taken during fieldwork by Dr Nurrul Fazlina Othman, 2022

Besides education, poor road condition also hinders rural and remote communities from accessing primary healthcare. Indeed, the Malaysian government provides universal healthcare for all legal citizens. According to the Budget 2023, the government allocated RM7.6 billion to strengthen health and wellness programs, improve and repair healthcare facilities, increase the effectiveness of health treatments, replace critical and old medical assets, and digitalize healthcare services. Nonetheless, based on the APPGM-SDG issue mapping, the challenge of accessing healthcare services persists, especially for the communities living in rural and remote areas across Malaysia.

In Sabah particularly, the hurdles of poor road condition is further exacerbated by the long distance that difficulties to navigate through the terrains (Falcon, 2019). The government tried several efforts in the past, nonetheless, many of these initiatives were short-lived. One of the challenges for the Malaysian government is the need for more funding. The government has ensured that rural communities can

access general healthcare services in the clinics, but these services do not include non-communicable diseases (NCD) and pregnancy. NCD patients who require regular service still need to obtain the healthcare they need from the hospital. The poor road conditions, however, make their healthcare service access easier.

However, some villagers receive visits from mobile doctors only once a month, which is also subject to weather conditions. Pregnant women need to travel to the nearby hospital sooner to avoid delivery on the road. However, not all pregnant women can afford early boarding at the hospital, for it would incur more costs, which would be unaffordable for many mothers.

“Yes, here is difficult (to get healthcare services), the only hospital is in Tawau. The clinics here are just wooden huts. They must be changed. The facilities are lacking, harder on us who are sick. Here, we have normal sickness, but some of us have breast cancer. But here we don’t have hospital. Must make a trip to Tawau, about 20 minutes. We hope for a hospital here.”

– Kalabakan, 2022, Kampung Kuala Merotai⁷

The deprivation from the basic healthcare hinders the achievement of SDG 3 that ensure good health and wellbeing for all, especially the following SDG 3 targets:

- Target 3.1: By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births.
- Target 3.2: By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to

⁷ Translated from: “Ya sini susah juga hospital di tawau saja ada, klinik pun papan-papan saja.. mau tukarla tu. Itu la tuan kurang bah klinik sini kalau sakit susah kami. Di sini kalau sakit..macam biasa sajalah tapi ada juga yang ada kanser payudara. Tapi sini tiada hospital mau jalan 20 minit pergi Tawau. Kami mohon lah ada hospital di sini.”

reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births.

- Target 3.4 By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and wellbeing.
- Target 3.8 Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.

Furthermore, poor road conditions have been a primary hurdle to economic development for the communities, especially those in rural and remote areas. The obvious implication is the challenge that entails the inability of the rural communities to connect with the markets and income-generating activities in the nearby town. A farmer in Keningau lamented:

“The most pressing issue here is the road. As you may have know, the core economic activities here are agriculture. So, the agriculture here is tightly interlinked with the condition of the road. But our main problem is the poor condition of the road, which is our biggest hurdle. Actually, our farm is only about six to seven kilometres away, but whenever it rains, it is impossible for us to bring our produce out to the town. Sometimes, even our lives are threatened.”

– Keningau, 2022, Kampung Bagian⁸

⁸ Translated from: *isu-isu yang paling ketara di sini adalah jalan raya sebenarnya. Sebab apa? sepertimana yang tuan-tuan tahu, nadi utama penduduk di sini adalah pertanian. So, kami punya pertanian ini berkait rapat dengan perhubungan jalan raya di kebun. Jadi apa yang menjadi masalah utama kami di sini adalah penyelenggaraan ataupun kedaifan jalan raya yang menjadi tunggak utama kepada ekonomi kami. Sebenarnya jalan raya kebun kami ni dalam enam hingga tujuh kilometer dan kami menghadapi masalah di mana setiap kali hujan susah bagi kami mengeluarkan hasil pertanian dan kadang-kadang nyawa kamipun hampir sudah terbang.*

The poor infrastructure, such as roads and facilities, is intimately related to the socio-economic and wellbeing of all communities. However, the communities who are living in poverty often receive the hardest hit. More importantly, as the participant's response above indicates, poor communities have agencies for the country's sustainable development. Many of them could be farmers and fishers contributing to national sustainable food security. Therefore, the deprivation of their mobility due to the poor infrastructure becomes an urgent issue to be addressed.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter the focus and discussion is on poverty in Malaysia, specifically in Sabah, using Amartya Sen's concept of poverty and SDG 1: No Poverty. Poverty is a relative condition that responds to the poor population's social, economic, and environmental conditions. Here we saw that one of the crucial dimensions of poverty in Sabah is the lack of suitable infrastructure. As a result, the local communities living outside the major cities of Sabah need access to necessary education, healthcare and employment opportunities. The poverty of these communities demonstrates that their income-generating capabilities are hinged on the deprivations they face. Therefore, as shown in this chapter, the APPGM-SDG's qualitative data from issue mapping can complement the existing national statistical data by providing nuances to poverty. It is hoped that these nuances can demonstrate that strategies for eradicating poverty effectively in Malaysia should be contextual, fluid and match the local cultural framework.

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Chapter 6

Culture of Poverty and Reliance on Government Aid: A Case Study on Poverty Mindset in Sabah

Mc Jeanet Marx

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the complex dynamics of poverty in Sabah, Malaysia, focusing on the intricate relationship between the culture of poverty and reliance on government aid. Sabah, located on the northern edge of Borneo, is known for its natural beauty, but beneath this exterior lies a socio-economic landscape marked by high poverty rates. Several districts, including Pitas, Beluran, Kinabatangan, Kota Marudu and Ranau, suffer from geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, and a lack of economic opportunities. These conditions lead to dependency on government aid, which can create a poverty mindset associated with an attitude of helplessness and reliance on external support.

The study examines various factors contributing to this dependency, including simplified access to aid, limited economic opportunities, cultural and social factors, and misaligned aid programs. Simplified access to government aid, such as cash transfers, often becomes a primary source of support in rural areas with limited job prospects, leading to a cycle of dependency. Cultural and social factors, such as long-standing traditions and generational poverty, reinforce this mindset, while misaligned aid programs, lacking clear pathways to self-sufficiency, exacerbate the problem.

The paper also discusses specific examples of misaligned aid programs, such as cash assistance without skill development and housing programmes without job opportunities, which can further

entrench dependency. A comprehensive approach including improving infrastructure, promoting education and skill development, and ensuring that government aid programmes are designed to encourage self-sufficiency with an exit plan, rather than create long-term dependency, are necessary. The design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of these measures can potentially contribute towards Sabah breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering a more sustainable and inclusive socio-economic landscape.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty in Malaysia, particularly in the Sabah region, is a complex and multi-faceted issue influenced by a combination of historical, geographical, and socio-economic factors. Although Malaysia has made significant progress in reducing poverty and achieving economic growth, disparities remain, especially between urban and rural areas, as well as across different regions. Sabah, on the northern edge of Borneo, exemplifies these challenges, with certain districts experiencing persistent poverty despite national efforts to address it.

Malaysia has seen substantial economic development over the past few decades, lifting many out of poverty and transforming the country into an upper-middle-income nation. However, despite these advancements, pockets of poverty remain, particularly in rural and remote areas. The disparities between urban centres like Kuala Lumpur and rural regions such as Sabah are notable, with the latter facing unique challenges due to geographical isolation and limited infrastructure.

Sabah has a reputation for its natural beauty and biodiversity, but beneath this picturesque exterior lies a socio-economic landscape marked by high poverty rates. Several districts, such as Tongod, Beluran, Pitas, Kinabatangan, Kota Marudu, Tuaran, Ranau, and Lahad Datu, are notable for their high levels of poverty. This is often due to a combination of historical, geographical, and socio-economic factors.

The interior regions, with limited access to infrastructure like roads and utilities, face additional challenges, including inadequate education and healthcare, which further entrench poverty in these areas.

To address these challenges, the Malaysian government has launched several initiatives to reduce poverty, particularly in Sabah. These initiatives encompass a range of strategies, from direct financial assistance to infrastructure development and educational support. Among the programmes and initiatives implemented by the Malaysian government to address poverty in Sabah are the E-Kasih system, Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia, Bantuan Prihatin Rakyat, Bantuan Keluarga Malaysia, MyKasih, Program Perumahan Rakyat Termiskin (PPRT), and the Sabah Development Corridor (SDC).

Education and healthcare services have also been focal points of governmental aid efforts, with initiatives aimed at establishing schools, clinics, and healthcare centres in rural areas to improve access to these fundamental services. Agricultural support programs aim to boost productivity and diversification in the agricultural sector, a vital component of Sabah's economy, through the provision of resources, training and market access for farmers.

Community empowerment projects have encouraged villagers to take ownership of their development, fostering initiatives such as micro-enterprises, eco-tourism ventures, and environmental conservation efforts. Meanwhile, social welfare programs have provided critical assistance and support to vulnerable groups, including the elderly, disabled, and marginalised communities, through financial aid, healthcare subsidies, and housing assistance. Yet, Sabah continues to remain as the poorest state in Malaysia.

Overall, this paper delves into the intricate relationship between the culture of poverty and reliance on government aid in Sabah, focusing

on districts with high poverty rates to gain insights into Malaysia's broader poverty issues.

BACKGROUND

Poverty refers to the inability to afford to meet the minimum needs that are deemed reasonable by the standards of the society in question (Ravallion, 1992). This definition acknowledges that poverty is not only a matter of income but also involves the ability to access resources and opportunities that are considered essential within a specific societal context.

The "poverty mindset" refers to a set of attitudes and behaviours shaped by prolonged exposure to poverty. It encompasses a sense of helplessness, dependency, and a lack of hope for the future. In the context of Sabah, Malaysia, the "poverty mindset" refers to a set of attitudes and behaviours that are the result of long-term exposure to economic hardship and limited opportunities. This mindset can significantly impact individuals and communities, influencing their outlook on life, their motivation, and their ability to break out of the cycle of poverty.

METHODOLOGY

The districts chosen for this study are Beluran, Pitas, Kinabatangan, Kota Marudu, and Ranau because these districts are among the eight with the highest levels of poverty in the Sabah region. The methodology combines focus group discussions (FGDs) with villagers and direct observation to gain a deeper understanding of the community's perspectives and behaviours. It involves selecting participants representing diverse demographics, designing structured FGDs to explore topics such as reliance on government aid, conducting FGDs in comfortable settings while recording the discussions, observing community interactions and aid-related activities, and analysing the collected data using thematic analysis techniques.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Government aid can be a crucial tool for alleviating poverty and addressing immediate needs. However, it can also create a dependency among recipients, particularly in rural areas and in the context of Sabah, where socio-economic conditions present unique challenges. This discussion explores how government aid can lead to dependency and examines how these factors manifest in Sabah.

Simplified Access to Aid

Government aid is designed to provide immediate relief and support to those in need. However, when it becomes easily accessible, particularly in rural or underdeveloped areas, it can create a dependency. This happens when people view aid as a reliable source of support and consequently reduce their efforts to pursue other income-generating activities. Simplified access to aid can contribute to a poverty mindset, where reliance on government support becomes the norm.

Districts like Pitas, Kota Marudu, Beluran, Kinabatangan, and Ranau are among the poorest in Sabah. These places are remote and lack proper infrastructure, which makes it hard for residents to find jobs or access markets. For example, Pitas has high poverty rates and isolated villages, where government aid like food assistance or cash transfers becomes a key source of support. This can lead to a dependency mindset, where people prefer aid because it is easier to get than traveling for work.

Similarly, in Beluran and Kinabatangan, large rural areas offer few job prospects. Cash assistance programs can create a reliance on government aid, as people find it more accessible than seeking employment or learning new skills. The remoteness of these districts, along with low education levels, contributes to limited job opportunities and very low incomes. In Kinabatangan, residents often turn to local leaders, like the Member of Parliament, to help with home

repairs and other basic needs due to financial constraints. This reliance on external support further underscores the limited economic opportunities in these areas.

Therefore, when government aid is easily accessible, it can create a comfort zone where individuals are less likely to seek other income sources. This can lead to a decreased motivation to pursue education, skill development or entrepreneurial ventures. In districts with high levels of poverty, this dependency can become entrenched, making it harder for individuals to break free from the cycle of aid dependency.

Limited Economic Opportunities

In many rural areas, the lack of economic opportunities can exacerbate dependency. When there are few job prospects or business opportunities, government aid can seem like the only viable option. In Sabah, where remote locations and infrastructure limitations hinder economic development, this reliance on aid can be even more pronounced.

Consider a rural village in Sabah where job opportunities are few, and infrastructure like roads and transportation is underdeveloped. In such an environment, residents might find it easier to rely on government aid programmes, such as cash transfers or food assistance, for their daily sustenance. This reliance can become a habit, where people expect regular support rather than exploring new ways to earn a living or improve their skills.

Moreover, in these areas, educational facilities might be sparse, and access to vocational training or higher education limited. For instance, the villagers residing in rural communities and on islands mostly rely on agricultural and fishing activities, which offer low income. For example, those living in island areas are heavily dependent on fishing. This situation is exacerbated by a lack of development reaching their area. As a result, individuals might not see a clear path toward better

employment, reinforcing the perception that government aid is the best or only option. This dependency can create a cycle where the motivation to pursue education, training, or entrepreneurship diminishes, trapping people in a poverty mindset.

Cultural and Social Factors

Cultural and social factors can significantly impact the propensity for dependency on external support in rural communities. In places like Sabah, where traditional practices and community structures are deeply rooted, certain cultural and social dynamics reinforce a cycle of reliance on government aid or other forms of external assistance.

In some rural communities, a culture of relying on external support may develop. This can be influenced by long-standing traditions, societal norms, or experiences of prolonged hardship. If government aid has been a consistent source of support for generations, breaking this cycle of dependency can be challenging. This can lead to a sense of entitlement, where aid is expected regardless of efforts to improve one's circumstances.

Moreover, communities that have experienced prolonged economic hardship or natural disasters may develop a culture of dependency as a coping mechanism. If government aid has historically been a consistent source of relief during challenging times, it can become ingrained in the community's mindset as a reliable fallback. This can lead to a belief that aid will always be available, regardless of personal efforts to improve one's circumstances. Adding to that, when children grow up in households that rely on external support, they may perceive this as the norm and continue the pattern into adulthood. This generational dependency can be difficult to break, as it becomes embedded in the community's culture and expectations.

Misaligned Aid Programs

Government aid programmes can sometimes be designed in a way that inadvertently encourages dependency. For example, aid might be provided without clear pathways to self-sufficiency or without promoting skills development and education. If aid programmes are perceived as long-term solutions rather than temporary relief, individuals may not see the need to seek employment or other forms of income generation.

In Sabah, several districts, such as Beluran, Pitas, Kinabatangan, Kota Marudu, and Ranau, have high levels of poverty. Misaligned aid programmes in these districts can have significant effects, contributing to dependency and reducing the incentive to seek self-sufficiency. Consider a cash assistance programme that provides monthly stipends to low-income families without conditions. In districts with limited job opportunities, this aid might be seen as a steady source of income, discouraging recipients from seeking employment or additional training. Without conditions or support for skill development, individuals might rely solely on this aid for their livelihoods, creating a cycle of dependency.

Similarly, aid programs that focus solely on providing food or other essentials without addressing broader socio-economic issues can create a mindset where people expect support without considering alternatives. In districts like Pitas, which face geographical isolation and limited infrastructure, aid programmes might become a substitute for economic development, leading to long-term reliance on government support. Another example is housing programmes without job opportunities. Housing programmes such as Program Perumahan Rakyat Termiskin (PPRT) that provide free housing without considering local job opportunities can also be misaligned. If residents receive housing but lack access to employment or transportation, they might find themselves in an unsustainable situation, relying on government aid for longer than intended.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively tackle the issue of over-reliance on government aid in Sabah, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive strategy that focuses on empowering communities, enhancing their capabilities, and fostering sustainable development. One crucial aspect is *promoting economic diversification beyond traditional sectors* like agriculture and natural resource extraction. For instance, investing in tourism can create opportunities for local businesses and job seekers. Take the example of the Rungus community in Kudat, Sabah, known for its traditional longhouses and cultural heritage. By promoting eco-tourism initiatives in collaboration with local authorities and NGOs, the Rungus people can leverage their cultural assets to generate income, reducing their dependence on government aid.

Moreover, *supporting skills development and entrepreneurship* is vital for building self-reliance within communities. For example, the Bario community in the remote highlands of Sabah has benefited from programmes offering vocational training in agriculture and handicraft production. By equipping individuals with practical skills and entrepreneurial know-how, they can create sustainable livelihoods and contribute to the local economy independently.

Fostering local ownership and participation is another critical aspect. For example, the Kg. Tampasak community in Kota Belud, Sabah formed a cooperative to manage their eco-tourism initiatives. By taking ownership of their development projects and decision-making processes, communities can better address their unique needs and priorities, reducing their reliance on external assistance.

Furthermore, *strengthening local institutions and governance* is crucial for effective resource management and service delivery. For example, the Kadazandusun Cultural Association (KDCA) in Penampang, Sabah, plays a pivotal role in promoting indigenous rights and cultural preservation while also engaging in community development projects.

By enhancing the capacity of local organisations and leaders, communities can improve governance practices and accountability, leading to more efficient use of resources and better outcomes for residents. Additionally, *promoting innovation and technology adoption* can enhance productivity and sustainability in key sectors. For instance, the introduction of drip irrigation systems in agriculture can improve water efficiency and crop yields for farmers in the Pitas district of Sabah. By embracing technological advancements and innovative practices, communities can increase their resilience to external shocks and adapt to changing environmental conditions.

Facilitating access to finance and markets is also essential for empowering communities economically. Microfinance initiatives, such as those offered by organisations like Sabah Credit Corporation, can provide smallholder farmers and entrepreneurs with the capital they need to invest in their businesses and expand their market reach. By improving financial inclusion and access to markets, communities can reduce their dependency on government aid and achieve greater economic self-sufficiency.

Furthermore, *shifting the focus of government aid programmes towards long-term sustainability* is critical. Investments in infrastructure, social services, and capacity-building initiatives should prioritise building resilience and fostering inclusive growth. For example, the implementation of community-based disaster risk reduction programmes in flood-prone areas like Tawau can help mitigate the impact of natural disasters and build communities' capacity to respond effectively in the long run.

Lastly, *raising awareness and promoting behavioural change* are essential for fostering a culture of self-reliance, innovation, and community empowerment. Through targeted awareness campaigns and educational programmes, communities can understand the consequences of over-reliance on government aid and take proactive

steps towards building a more resilient and prosperous future. By implementing these recommendations in a coordinated manner and tailoring interventions to the specific needs and contexts of Sabah's diverse communities, the State can address the root causes of dependency on government aid, empower its residents, and pave the way for sustainable development and prosperity across the region.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, addressing the challenges of over-reliance on government aid in Sabah requires a holistic and concerted effort that prioritises community empowerment, capacity-building, and sustainable development. By promoting economic diversification, supporting skills development, fostering local ownership, strengthening institutions, promoting innovation, facilitating access to finance and markets, focusing on long-term sustainability, and raising awareness, Sabah can break the cycle of dependency and empower its communities to thrive independently. Through collaborative initiatives tailored to the unique needs and contexts of Sabah's diverse communities, the State can achieve inclusive growth, resilience, and prosperity for all its residents. By embracing these strategies and working together towards a shared vision of sustainable development, Sabah can build a brighter and more resilient future for generations to come.

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Chapter 7

Mengakhiri Putaran Kemiskinan: Komuniti Kg. Tundun Bohangin, Kg. Abai dan Kg. Sangau, Kinabatangan, Sabah

Lailah Chung Foh Sin

ABSTRAK

Penceritaan ini mengisahkan pengalaman menjalankan pemetaan isu di Parlimen Kinabatangan dan Kota Marudu, Sabah yang telah dijalankan pada Februari dan Mei 2024. Kisah ini memberi fokus kepada kekurangan infrastruktur iaitu jalan perhubungan sebagai penyumbang kepada kemiskinan di perkampungan nelayan seperti Kg. Tundun Bohangin, Kg. Abai, dan Kg. Sangau, serta perkampungan petani seperti Kg. Sonsogon Suyad dan Kg. Sungai Magandai, Kota Marudu. Penceritaan ini akan merentasi perjalanan penulis dalam menggali realiti kehidupan penduduk tempatan, terutama nelayan dan pekebun kecil, yang terhalang oleh kekurangan akses jalan yang baik dan memberi impak dalam aspek kehidupan lain seperti akses kepada kesihatan, pendidikan, kemudahan awam, kemudahan utiliti dan peluang pekerjaan. Dalam penceritaan ini, pembaca akan dibawa melalui perjalanan emosi dan fizikal penulis, serta dialog dan interaksi dengan penduduk tempatan. Ia akan menonjolkan keberanian dan ketabahan penduduk tempatan dalam menghadapi cabaran, sambil memberi tumpuan kepada usaha-usaha mereka dalam menuntut perubahan dan penambahbaikan infrastruktur. Melalui penceritaan ini, pembaca akan mendapat gambaran yang jelas tentang kehidupan di kawasan-kawasan pedalaman Sabah dan perjuangan untuk mengatasi kemiskinan melalui peningkatan infrastruktur jalan perhubungan.

PENGENALAN

Saya telah dilantik sebagai *Resource Person* bagi pemetaan isu di Sabah oleh pihak APPGM-SDG pada awal tahun 2024. Pelantikan ini merupakan satu pengiktirafan buat diri saya sebagai penyelidik di Institut Kajian Pembangunan (IDS), Sabah. Justeru itu, pengalaman saya sebagai penyelidik lebih 15 tahun dengan penglibatan dalam kajian sosioekonomi di peringkat akar umbi, sudah pasti saya memberi komitmen yang tinggi membantu para penyelidik dari pihak APPGM-SDG. Saya telah berpeluang bersama pasukan penyelidik APPGM-SDG yang hebat menjalankan pemetaan isu di perkampungan terpilih di Parlimen Kinabatangan dan Parlimen Kota Marudu pada Februari dan Mei 2024. Rombongan kami turut dibantu oleh kakitangan ahli parlimen dan pemimpin di peringkat kampung yang dedikasi.

Objektif pemetaan isu adalah mengumpulkan maklumat melalui sesi lawatan dan dialog di kawasan perkampungan yang terpilih dan seterusnya membuat analisis serta cadangan penyelesaian kepada isu-isu yang diutarakan oleh penduduk. Inisiatif pihak APPGM-SDG ini membantu pihak kerajaan untuk mendapatkan gambaran sebenar tentang isu-isu semasa yang dihadapi oleh rakyat, khususnya penduduk pedalaman Sabah dan seterusnya membantu mengatasi isu-isu berkenaan mengikut kesesuaian.

LAWATAN DAN SESI DIALOG BERSAMA KOMUNITI NELAYAN, PARLIMEN KINABATANGAN

Destinasi pertama kami terpanggil dari seberang air yang bersinar pada 23hb Februari 2024 — sepasang kampung nelayan, Kg. Tundun Bohangin dan Kg. Abai yang terletak di pangkuan pelukan sungai. Lawatan ini dijalankan bersama pengkaji dedikasi daripada pihak APPGM-SDG yang diketuai oleh Cik Nurrul Fazlina dan Cik Janet serta En. Shah dari SCENIC, Sabah. Kumpulan kami turut dibantu oleh Pegawai Khas Parlimen Kinabatangan, En. Amri dan Kumpulan beliau seramai lapan (8) orang.

Ketika bot kami meluncur melalui air yang tenang, saya tidak dapat menahan kagum pada keindahan yang menyembunyikan kesulitan di bawah permukaan. Sungai yang luas terbentang ini merupakan sumber pencarian utama bagi penduduk kampung di sekitarnya. Perjalanan ke Kg. Tundun Bohangin mengambil masa lebih kurang dua (2) jam melalui laluan sungai yang terbentang luas dengan sebuah bot peranginan yang disewa khas. Setibanya di kampung tersebut, kehadiran kami disambut dengan mesra oleh penduduk kampung yang telah sedia menunggu kehadiran kami sejak awal pagi lagi. Perbincangan melibatkan semua kategori umur dari yang muda ke tua, lelaki dan wanita. Mereka mengutarakan masalah-masalah yang dihadapi sejak perkampungan tersebut wujud sebelum zaman Merdeka sehingga hari ini di mana mereka masih bergelut dengan masalah kos pengangkutan yang tinggi kerana tidak mempunyai akses jalan raya. Mereka hanya bergantung sepenuhnya kepada pengangkutan air seperti sampan dan bot. Disebabkan ketiadaan akses jalan raya dan kos pengangkutan yang tinggi menyebabkan kawasan perkampungan mereka tidak dapat disalur dengan bekalan air bersih dan terawat, bekalan elektrik, perkhidmatan awam seperti klinik desa, bomba, sekolah menengah, sukar memasarkan hasil tangkapan laut dan sungai, dan akhirnya hidup dalam serba kekurangan.

Hal ini bukan sahaja dihadapi oleh penduduk Kg. Tundun Bohangin tetapi juga penduduk Kg. Abai yang tidak jauh terletak dari perkampungan ini. Begitu Kg. Sangau yang terletak di mukim Buang Sayang turut mengalami nasib yang sama. Ketika matahari terbenam pada hari ketiga ekspedisi kami, kami berangkat dengan hati yang berat oleh beban pengetahuan baru dan semangat yang terdorong oleh semangat ingin bawakan perubahan. Ekspedisi kami mungkin telah berakhir, tetapi bayang-bayang perjalanan kami masih membayang — sebuah bukti akan kekuatan abadi cerita dalam membentuk naratif kemajuan dan peluang.

LAWATAN DAN SESI DIALOG BERSAMA KOMUNITI PEKEBUN KECIL GETAH, KG. SONSOGON SUYAD, KG. SUNGAI MAGANDAI DAN KG. SAMPARITA, PARLIMEN KOTA MARUDU

Sementara itu, lawatan ke Kg. Sonsogon Suyad dan Kg. Sungai Magandai telah dijalankan pada 7hb Mei 2024. Kumpulan kami terdiri daripada Ketua Sekretariat, APPGM-SDG, Prof. Datuk Dr. Denison Jayaasoria, En, James Ryan Raj, Pengarah Jabatan Koordinasi Konstituensi dan Kebun Komuniti, Ketua Penyelidik, Nurrul Fazlina Osman, Mc Jeanet Marx, Pegawai Penyelidik, APPGM-SDG. Kumpulan kami telah dibantu oleh Wakil Rakyat Parlimen, YB Datuk Wetrom Bahanda dan isteri beliau serta pegawai-pegawai khas MP, En. Ari dan En. Steven Goh, Pegawai Perhubungan, dan pemimpin komuniti DUN Tandek.

Seawal jam 7:30 pagi, rombongan kami dengan penuh semangat bertolak dari pekan Kota Marudu ke Kg. Samparita untuk sesi lawatan dan dialog bersama penduduk kampung dan pemimpin komuniti. Sebanyak lima (5) buah kenderaan khas digunakan iaitu kereta jenis 4X4 kerana keadaan jalan raya yang tidak baik. Bermula dari kawasan Tandek, kami telah terputus hubungan dengan dunia maya apabila kesemua jenis telekomunikasi tidak mempunyai isyarat membuatkan kami menikmati sepenuhnya perjalanan yang mencabar dengan keadaan jalan raya yang baru dalam proses naiktaraf, berhabuk tebal dan berbukit-bukau. Pada lebih kurang 9:00 pagi, rombongan kami tiba di Kg. Samparita dan memulakan sesi dialog dan lawatan.

Seterusnya, pada jam 12:00 tengah hari, rombongan kami memulakan perjalanan yang paling mencabar iaitu ke perkampungan yang sangat terkenal dengan di Sabah dengan kisah kemiskinan tegar, terpinggir dan terletak nun di hutan belantara yang tidak mempunyai akses jalan raya yang baik. Hati berdebar-debar kerana selama ini hanya mendengar dan melihat kisah dalam media sosial mahupun surat-khabar mengenai kisah komuniti di perkampungan Sonsogon ini. Cuaca pada hari tersebut sangat baik seperti berkat yang luar biasa

diberikan oleh Sang Pencipta untuk kami merasai dan melihat kegigihan komuniti terpencil tersebut menjalani kehidupan dalam serba kekurangan.

Selepas dua jam bertarung dengan keadaan jalan raya yang berliku-liku seperti seekor ular yang bergerak, ditambah lagi bentuk muka bumi yang berbukit dan curam, membuatkan jantung kami berdegup laju seperti menghabiskan larian 100 meter, akhirnya kami tiba di Kg. Sonsogon Suyad yang disambut dengan mesra oleh penduduk yang telah setia menunggu kehadiran pihak YB dan APPGM-SDG. Di raut wajah mereka terpancar kegembiraan dan harapan setinggi gunung Kinabalu akan adanya khabar yang baik buat mereka.

Mendengar kisah mereka menjalani kehidupan di tengah hutal tebal dengan serba kekurangan memberi seribu keinsafan kepada saya bahawa betapa mereka telah menjalani kehidupan yang sangat “keras” bertahun-tahun lamanya sejak zaman Merdeka sehingga hari ini. Betapa ia mengajar saya untuk lebih bersyukur dan berterima kasih dengan Tuhan dengan anugerah kehidupan saya yang jauh lebih baik daripada komuniti terpencil ini. Mendengar mereka hanya mampu menikmati sajian nasi sekali-dua dalam seminggu dan selebihnya hanya mampu menikmati ubi kayu dan ubi manis membuatkan hati saya begitu sayu, seakan tidak percaya bahawa perkara sebegini masih berlaku di zaman moden ini.

Melihat anak-anak yang tinggal di asrama SK Magandai, hati saya menjadi sayu, mata dimasuki habuk, betapa pada usia mereka yang kecil telah berpisah dengan ibubapa mereka demi mencapai cita-cita menjadi seorang pelajar yang berjaya dan ingin membawa keluar komuniti mereka dari kepompong kemiskinan yang telah lama membelenggu kehidupan mereka. Saya juga sangat bertuah kerana berkesempatan bertemu dengan dua pelajar muda yang *viral* di media sosial baru-baru ini. Kisah kegigihan mereka ke sekolah walaupun berjalan kaki sejauh 10KM dan badan dipenuhi dengan lumpur dan

tanah. Mereka tetap berjuang dan tekad bersekolah demi menggapai cita-cita murni mereka.

Sebelum kami berangkat pulang, saya sempat memberi kata-kata semangat kepada mereka dan rakan-rakan mereka untuk terus berjuang dan tidak berputus asa. Betapa berat mata yang memandang, berat lagi bahu yang memikul. Semoga suatu hari nanti, komuniti ini pasti akan keluar dari belenggu kemiskinan ini.

DAPATAN LAWATAN DAN SESI DIALOG

Berdasarkan kepada lawatan dan sesi dialog yang dijalankan di dua kawasan parlimen iaitu Kinabatangan dan Kota Marudu, didapati ketiadaan akses jalan raya dan keadaan jalan raya yang kurang baik telah menyumbang kepada kekurangan kemudahan utiliti (bekalan elektrik, bekalan air terawat), talian telekomunikasi, kos pengangkutan yang tinggi, membantutkan pembangunan ekonomi setempat dan sekaligus penyebab kepada kemiskinan di kawasan tersebut.

Kedudukan Kg. Tundun Bohangin dan Kg. Abai yang terletak dalam kepulauan, Kg. Sangau di kawasan tebing sungai menyebabkan kebergantungan sepenuhnya kepada pengangkutan air seperti sampan dan bot kecil. Sehingga hari ini, penduduk di tiga (3) perkampungan tersebut bergantung sepenuhnya kepada pengangkutan air seperti bot kecil atau sampan dengan kos yang tinggi antara RM300-RM600 bagi perjalanan sehalu ke kawasan pekan terdekat. Kos ini sudah tentunya sangat membebankan para penduduk yang rata-ratanya hanya berpendapatan di bawah RM1,000 sebulan, dan hanya bekerja sebagai nelayan dan petani secara kecil-kecilan. Para penduduk turut bergelut dengan kos bekalan elektrik daripada ginset yang tinggi iaitu antara RM400 hingga RM500 bergantung kepada penggunaan bagi setiap rumah. Pihak Parlimen pernah membantu para penduduk dengan membekalkan ginset kepada penduduk kampung, namun ianya masih tidak dapat

memenuhi keperluan penduduk memandangkan kos penyelenggaraan ginsel dan kos minyak petrol yang tinggi.

Manakala, kedudukan kampung yang terletak jauh di kawasan perhutanan dan berbukit-bukau seperti Kg. Sonsogon Suyad, Kg. Sungai Magandai dan Kg. Samparita ditambah dengan keadaan jalan raya yang teruk telah menyebabkan kos pengangkutan yang tinggi dan membebankan penduduk kampung. Kos sewa pengangkutan ke pekan antara RM500 - RM1000 bagi perjalanan sehala bergantung kepada keadaan cuaca dan keadaan jalan raya pada masa tersebut.

Penduduk kampung hanya dapat keluar ke pekan apabila hanya ada keperluan terdesak seperti mengurus persekolahan anak-anak dan hal-hal kecemasan. Bagi penduduk Kg. Sonsogon Suyad dan Kg. Sungai Magandai, adakala mereka terpaksa berhutang bagi kos pengangkutan keluar ke pekan dan terpaksa bekerja sementara di pekan terlebih dahulu sekurang-kurangnya sebulan bagi menampung kos pengangkutan balik semula ke perkampungan mereka.

Disebabkan jarak kedudukan kampung yang jauh dan tidak mempunyai jaringan jalan raya yang baik menyebabkan kesukaran bekalan elektrik dan air terawat serta talian telekomunikasi disalurkan ke kawasan perkampungan tersebut. Ketiadaan kemudahan utiliti yang cukup dan stabil turut menjejaskan kualiti kehidupan penduduk dimana penduduk tidak mendapat maklumat semasa dengan tepat terutamanya maklumat peluang pekerjaan, latihan dan program kemahiran, pendidikan dan sebagainya. Ketiadaan bekalan elektrik turut menjejaskan masa belajar pelajar terutamanya di waktu malam seterusnya mempengaruhi prestasi pelajar yang hanya bergantung sepenuhnya masa belajar di sekolah.

Kemudahan awam turut sukar disediakan di kawasan yang jauh, berbukit bukau dan tidak mempunyai akses jalan yang baik. Penduduk

pedalaman ini kurang mendapat perkhidmatan kesihatan, kesihatan, pendidikan yang baik.

CADANGAN

Kedatangan pihak APPGM-SDG membawa satu harapan kepada penduduk kampung yang telah dilawati dan ditemubual. Mereka percaya pihak APPGM-SDG akan dapat menyuarakan rintihan mereka ke peringkat Parlimen dan seterusnya mendapat perhatian daripada pihak Kerajaan Malaysia bagi membantu kawasan terpinggir ini mendapatkan kemudahan infrastruktur dan kemudahan awam yang lengkap dan sempurna seperti mana yang telah diterima oleh penduduk bandar.

Berdasarkan kepada isu dan cabaran yang dihadapi oleh penduduk kampung tersebut, terdapat beberapa Matlamat Pembangunan Mampan yang berkaitan iaitu 1. Tiada Kemiskinan, 3. Kesihatan Yang Baik dan kesejahteraan, 4. Pendidikan Berkualiti, 6. Air Bersih dan Sanitasi dan 7. Tenaga Berdaya dan Berpatutan.

Bagi mencapai lima (5) Kategori Matlamat Pembangunan Mampan tersebut, isu berkenaan dengan infrastruktur haruslah ditangani dengan segera bagi menyelesaikan isu-isu berkaitan dan sekaligus mengurangkan kadar kemiskinan di kawasan perkampungan nelayan dan pekebun kecil tersebut. Peruntukan dana yang besar diperlukan bagi memastikan infrastruktur jalan raya dapat dibina di kawasan perkampungan Tundun Bohangi, Kg. Abai dan Kg. Sangau. Manakala, menaiktaraf jalan sedia ada ke jalan berturap di perkampungan Samparita, Kg. Sonsogon Suyad dan Kg. Sungai Magandai.

KESIMPULAN

Isu berkaitan dengan kemudahan infrastruktur di Sabah bukanlah satu isu yang baru namun ia telah membelenggu sejak sekian lama sejak zaman merdeka sehingga hari ini, sama seperti yang diutarakan oleh penduduk kampung yang ditemui. Seiring dengan halatuju

Institut Kajian Pembangunan (Sabah), IDS iaitu memperkasa ekonomi akar umbi di Sabah, isu kekurangan infrastruktur sangat ditekankan bagi pembangunan ekonomi dan sosial penduduk Sabah.

Memetik ucapan CEO IDS, Datuk Dr. Ramzah Dambul semasa Kongres Ekonomi Bumiputera 2024, masalah infrastruktur di Sabah perlu ditangani terlebih dahulu sebelum sesebuah projek dilaksanakan. Lebih daripada 75% penduduk bumiputra Sabah tinggal di kawasan pedalaman. Oleh itu, aspek infrastruktur ini sangat kritikal, kerana apapun intervensi seperti aktiviti ekonomi (ternakan, pertanian, perikanan) tidak dapat dijayakan sepenuhnya kerana kesukaran mengeluarkan hasil dari kawasan tersebut disebabkan tiada akses jalan raya yang sempurna ditambah lagi dengan kos pengangkutan yang tinggi, akhirnya keuntungan tidak dapat diperolehi membantutkan motivasi mereka untuk meneruskan projek tersebut.

Chapter 8

Challenges to Education Access in Underdeveloped Communities: A Case Study of Banggi Island, Sabah

Dr. Nurrul Fazlina Osman

ABSTRACT

Pulau Banggi is the largest island in the north of Borneo, surrounded by multiple small islands between South China Sea and Sulu Sea. This island located in Sabah as one of the state in Malaysia, the impact of poor infrastructure reverberates deeply within both its educational institutions and the wider community. Despite its rich cultural diversity and natural splendor, this area grapples with the enduring consequences of inadequate roads, limited access to essential services, and a lack of modern facilities. These challenges intertwine to create barriers that impede educational progress and stifle community development, presenting a complex web of obstacles that demand attention and concerted efforts to address. The objective of this study is to know the challenge of access to education in poor infrastructure area and their resilience amidst adversity. The method used in this study are using the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), individual interview and document review. By understanding the multi-faceted effects of poor infrastructure on education and community in Banggi Island, Sabah, key stakeholders can help highlight the imperative for strategic interventions to foster sustainable growth and opportunity in the region.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a powerful tool that has the ability to lift individuals and communities out of poverty. Education plays a crucial role in breaking the cycle of poverty that has plagued many families for generations. Despite the commitment given by the Malaysian government to promote and ensuring quality education, however, the reality on the ground suggests differently, resulting in a huge disparity in quality education delivery between rural and urban schools. In Banggi Island, there are a lot of remote areas that face many challenges in promoting quality education. Although Banggi Island has captivating natural beauty and cultural richness, it grapples with the profound repercussions of inadequate infrastructure, which resonate deeply within its educational landscape and broader community fabric. Due to the impact of inadequate infrastructure, manifested in numerous ways, these constrain educational institutions and limits access to essential services. The island's roads are often unreliable and modern facilities are scarce, presenting formidable obstacles to educational progress and community development. The challenges posed by these deficiencies intertwine to create a complex web of barriers that hinder academic advancement and stifle overall community growth.

This study aims to delve into the challenges faced in accessing education within a context of poor infrastructure on Banggi Island, Sabah, while also exploring the resilience demonstrated by individuals and communities in the face of adversity. This study seeks to illuminate the multi-faceted effects of inadequate infrastructure on education and community wellbeing. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of these challenges and their impacts, key stakeholders can advocate for strategic interventions that prioritise sustainable development and foster opportunities for growth and prosperity in Pulau Banggi and its surrounding communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges in education access in remote areas

Rural or remote areas heavily rely on government-run schools or aided schools for education, and face barriers like long walking distances, lack of proper facilities and meagre incomes.¹ These students often demotivate themselves from attending school and are often forced to assist earning families instead of attending school. Compared to their peers in economically and educationally thriving locations, children living in areas of both economic and educational deprivation will have far less possibility of advancing socially and economically.²

There is ample evidence that exist in numerous nations that have significant disparities in higher education enrolment, with geographic accessibility being a potential obstacle due to direct and indirect costs.^{3,4} The geographical isolation can result in higher costs for educational services and limited opportunities for further education or vocational training. These challenges often contribute to disparities in educational outcomes between remote island communities and more accessible regions.

¹ Mahajan, A. (2021). Problems and Challenges in Secondary Education in Remote Areas of India. *Webology* (ISSN: 1735-188X), 18(6). [https://www.webology.org/data-cms/articles/20220224062447pmwebology%2018%20\(6\)%20-%20135%20pdf.pdf](https://www.webology.org/data-cms/articles/20220224062447pmwebology%2018%20(6)%20-%20135%20pdf.pdf)

² Odell, E. (2017). Lonely Schools: The Relationship between Geographic Isolation and Academic Attainment. *Educational Research*, 59(3), 257-272. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00131881.2017.1339285?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

³ Spiess, C. K., and Wrohlich, K. (2010). Does distance determine who attends a university in Germany? *Economics of Education Review*, 29, 470-479. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272775709001198>

⁴ Cullinan, J., Flannery D., Walsh, S., and McCoy, S. (2013). Distance Effects, Social Class and the Decision to Participate in Higher Education in Ireland. *The Economic and Social Review*, 44, 19-51. <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/100183/1/731866746.pdf>

Awareness of education in rural families

The awareness of the benefits of education and the factors influencing their decision-making among rural families are complex and multi-faceted. Existing studies has shown that rural schools may have different opinions about what is best for the kids, they find it difficult to build long-lasting relationships and communicate with families.^{5,6} Families who perceive education as a pathway to improved employment opportunities, increased social mobility, and enhanced quality of life are more likely to prioritise schooling for their children. According to Henderson and Berla (1994), children in rural schools who collaborate with families to enhance learning are more likely to succeed in school and in life.⁷ Thus, working collaboratively between parents and teachers is crucial, to make sure the children get the quality education they needed.

STUDY SITE

Banggi Island, located in the northern part of Sabah, Malaysia (Figure 8.1), is home to a diverse population of indigenous communities, primarily from the Rungus, Bajau Laut and Bonggi ethnic groups. Despite its natural beauty and cultural richness, Banggi Island faces significant challenges in providing equitable and accessible education to its residents, particularly in underdeveloped and remote areas. Banggi Island is characterised by its remote location, limited infrastructure and economic constraints, which collectively contribute

⁵ Jordan, P. A. (2016). An Evaluation of Educator Perceptions regarding the Level of Family Engagement in Appalachian Kentucky Schools with Middle Grade Students. DEd diss., Eastern Kentucky University. <https://typeset.io/papers/an-evaluation-of-educator-perceptions-regarding-the-level-of-4cqpm1cxc8>

⁶ Lin, S., J. Isernhagen, S. S., and Denner, P. R. (2014). Rural Educator Perceptions of Parent Involvement in Public Schools: Perspectives from Three States. *Rural Educator* 36 (1): 1–17. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1225578.pdf>

⁷ Henderson, A. T., and N. Berla, (1994). A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement. Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED375968>

to barriers in accessing quality education. The island's education system struggles with issues such as lack of basic school facilities (electricity and internet access), transportation difficulties, and socio-economic disparities among the population.⁸ There are two ways to reach SK Sabur on Banggi Island, Sabah. It can be accessed by boat from the Karakit town or taking a four-wheel drive around 2 hours depending on the weather conditions.

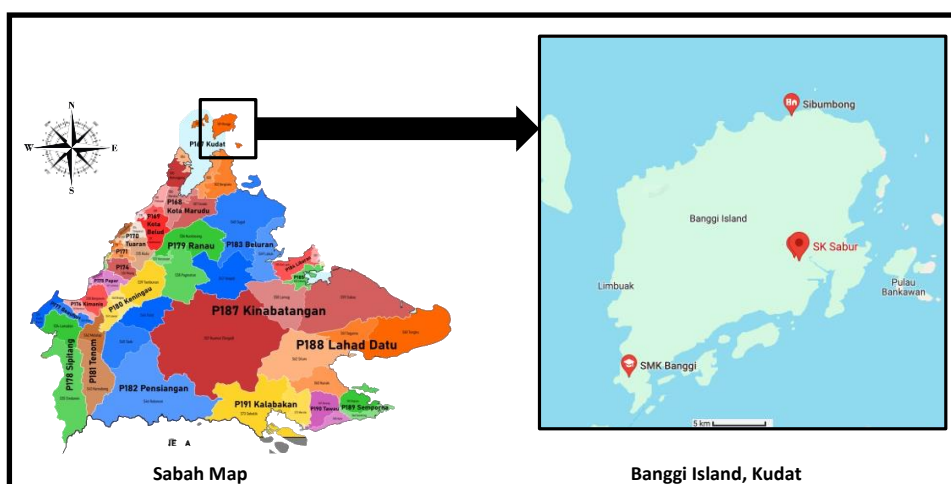


Figure 8.1. Map of Sabah to locate Banggi Island and SK Sabur

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative and descriptive data collection was applied in this study. A descriptive case study aims to characterise a phenomenon in its natural environment.⁹ The basic data was gathered by means of comprehensive interviews and observations. Secondary data came from papers written about the subject. The interviewees consisted of two teachers, one education officers and five parents that are waiting

⁸ Perman, A. A. (2021). Teaching Science and Mathematics in Rural Area: A Case Study of SK Sabur, Sabah, Malaysia. <https://ir.uitm.edu.my/id/eprint/45159/1/45159.pdf>

⁹ Yin, R. K. (2018). Case Study Research and Applications Designs and Methods (6th ed.). SAGE Publication.

their children to finished school. This serves as the triangulation effort for the data validation as well. This interview used a purposeful sample. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the transcriptions of the in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis is a research method that uses coding, detection, and theme identification to provide a subjective study and interpretation of the content of text data. For the thematic analysis, this study has determined three main aspects that contribute to the challenges faced by the community which is from the social, economic and geographical challenges.

Geographical	Infrastructure	Socio-Economic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote location • Distance • Floods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of basic amenities • Access to educational resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Lack of diversified economic activities

FINDINGS

Challenges due to geographical aspects

The island of Banggi, situated off the coast of Kudat, is home to several villages and communities. However, the rugged and steep terrain poses challenges for road construction, hindering the transportation of materials and supplies needed for infrastructure development. Accessing infrastructure for maintenance and repairs is also difficult due to the challenging terrain, resulting in delays and neglect of maintenance activities. One villager shared during the focus group discussion:

"Our solar power is unstable; its strength is inconsistent. It's being maintained but hasn't received proper maintenance yet."

- Villagers

Furthermore, frequent flooding has caused extensive damage to roads connecting interior towns, inconveniencing parents and teachers and impeding their ability to commute to work and access schools (Figure 8.2).

"During the rainy season, road issues become a problem. There are frequent floods." - Villagers

Banggi Island is also renowned for its crocodile population. During flooding or high tide, it is dangerous to play near the water. There have been instances of children being bitten while collecting shells near the river, as shared by one of the villagers during the dialogue.

"But you know, the kids at the high school...got bitten. Eight stitches. During high tide...when collecting shells...they were attacked in the river." - Villagers



Figure 8.2. One of the teachers and his friends had to walk through the flood that happened in early January 2023

Challenges due to poor infrastructure

Due to its remote location, certain villages like Kg Sabur on the island lack access to electricity and primarily rely on generators, which can be costly and unreliable. For instance, in Kg Sabur, located two hours away from Karakit and accessible only through plantations and forests, extending the electricity infrastructure to such areas poses significant challenges and expenses. Additionally, in Banggi Island, deploying subsea cabling for electrification would be prohibitively expensive, leading to the use of diesel generators or solar as a more economical option. However, this electrification system is unreliable as it cannot operate continuously for 24 hours. As shared by the villagers during dialogue:

"We don't have electricity here...not yet...we use solar...if there's no sun, there's no electricity."
- Villagers

Transportation is a major constraint on the island, as limited infrastructure makes it difficult for students, particularly those from remote villages, to travel to schools located far from their homes. This results in irregular attendance and high dropout rates. This sentiment shared by one of the officers that works for the Pejabat Pendidikan:

"It's not that they can't study because of school fees...but they can't afford transportation...the available transportation is also limited."
- Education Officer

During the school week, parents send their children to dilapidated Transit Houses near the school, or those living far from the school or nearest island construct makeshift houses or huts for their children to stay in to prevent dropouts. These houses lack basic amenities such as electricity, clean water, and internet connectivity. Children often fetch water from nearby wells or collect rainwater around their houses (Figure 8.3). The situation is similar in the nearest village to the school, as shared by villagers during interviews:

"Water is our main concern here, especially drinking water."
- Villagers

"We wait for rain, without rain, hopes are dashed...if it's a dry season...there's water but you have to wait a long time." - Villagers



Figure 8.3. The condition of the water in the well is questionable and do not have proper covers to prevent contamination

Challenges due to socio-economic aspects

Kudat has been consistently identified as one of the poorest districts in Malaysia for over a decade, as reported by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM). This longstanding designation underscores the deep-rooted nature of poverty in Kudat, necessitating sustained and comprehensive solutions. Our visits to various villages in Kudat revealed pervasive poverty across most communities, with noticeable deficiencies in basic necessities such as food, shelter, and healthcare. Many villagers struggle to meet their daily needs, let alone afford education for their children. The Kudat District Education Officer has emphasised the profound impact of poverty on children's access to education, citing issues such as student absenteeism.

"...The factor of poverty causes children to be unable to learn... issues with student absenteeism..." - Education Officer

Similar to many remote areas in Sabah, Banggi Island experiences a lack of diverse economic activities, with most villagers reliant on fishing as their primary income source and livelihood. Even though there were government aids given to them, it is not helping because

of limited resources were given in one area. As shared by one of the fishermen:

"...There are subsidies, but most of the goods are sold out within two or three days due to high demand..." – Villager

Bonggi represents a minority group in Sabah, with limited interaction with outsiders and engagement in small-scale farming, primarily selling fruits and vegetables for income. An interview with a member of the Bonggi tribe revealed that their income is very low:

"...Even here... the income is quite minimal... maybe around 10 ringgit a day... sometimes more on weekends..." – Villager

DISCUSSION AND WAY FORWARD

The implications and challenges associated with Kudat's status as one of the poorest districts in Malaysia are multi-faceted and deeply rooted in a combination of factors, including geographical challenges, inadequate infrastructure, limited economic opportunities, and dependency on traditional livelihoods. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies that prioritise investments in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic development. Despite the challenges face by the community, they demonstrate remarkable resilience and determination in prioritising education despite facing formidable obstacles.

During the focus group discussion with parents waiting for their children at the school entrance, it was evident that parents maintain a positive mindset, prioritising education above all else for their children. The school also demonstrates strong support for parents, fostering a positive parent-teacher relationship at SK Sabur. The quality and accessibility of educational institutions play critical roles in

shaping parental awareness and decision-making. While rural families may face challenges related to infrastructure, resources, distance to schools, transportation options, and safety concerns, parents' strong awareness of the importance of education bodes well for long-term outcomes.

"...The school's presence is very important... even when there's no fuel, we (parents and children) walk early from home... sometimes we row... even when there's no fuel, we will rowing to send them to school..."
– Villager

Community-driven initiatives and partnerships play a key role in overcoming challenges and improving educational outcomes. Sustainable investments in education are essential for empowering marginalised populations and fostering socio-economic development in underprivileged regions like Banggi Island.

CONCLUSION

Banggi Island exemplifies the educational challenges faced by underdeveloped communities in Sabah and emphasises the importance of holistic approaches to address these issues. By investing in infrastructure, promoting community engagement, and tackling socio-economic disparities, stakeholders can work towards ensuring equitable and inclusive education access for all residents of Banggi Island and similar underprivileged communities in Sabah.

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Chapter 9

Addressing Inadequate Road Infrastructure for Sustainable Development in Sabah

Lydia Ann Bill

ABSTRACT

Sabah, despite its natural resources, confronts challenges in achieving Sustainable Development Goals. Poverty in Sabah is defined by a complex interaction of circumstances, including little or no access to education, healthcare, food security and economic opportunities. Fundamentally, all these necessities require modes of transportation. Therefore, road infrastructure is crucial as it drives overall development in Sabah, supporting economic growth and social inclusion. Using qualitative data from APPGM-SDG issue mapping visits, this study investigates which essential amenities that the communities are deprived of owing to inadequate road infrastructure. In addition, it analyses the implications of such deprivation on the communities. By recognising the gaps in Sabah's basic services, this paper suggests recommendations to unlock the transformative potential of improved road infrastructure for poverty alleviation efforts and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

INTRODUCTION

Sabah boasts abundant natural resources, including timber, minerals, biodiversity, and marine resources.¹ The state's tropical rainforests, diverse ecosystems, and coastal waters contribute significantly to its economic potential and environmental value. However, despite its

¹ UNEP. (2020). Sabah State of Environment Report 2020. United Nations Environment Programme.

natural wealth, Sabah faces numerous challenges in socio-economic development. High levels of poverty, income inequality and unemployment persist, particularly in rural and indigenous communities.² These challenges hinder the state's overall progress in the SDGs.

Besides taking into account's the state's overall economic progress or gross national income (GNI), one must also consider the SDGs at the micro level. Where individuals are evaluated based on their subjective deprivation. This deprivation refers to the lack or absence of essential resources and opportunities that are necessary for individuals to lead a decent and fulfilling life. This deprivation can encompass various dimensions, including access to basic amenities such as education, healthcare, food, clean water, housing and sanitation. This paper seeks to understand the major deprivation that communities in Sabah face and how modes of transportation is a major obstacle.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a desktop research methodology based on 2023 available data from the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG). There were four issue mapping visits conducted in Sabah in the year 2023, namely, Sandakan, Kudat, Beluran and Ranau. These districts were selected with a mixture of sub-urban, rural and remote, allowing for a representative sample of different socio-economic settings in Sabah in that year.

The study used Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to collect qualitative data and acquire insights into community members' viewpoints,

² UNDP (2020). Sustainable Development Goals Progress Report 2020: Sabah, Malaysia. United Nations Development Programme.

experiences, and perceptions. On average, 10 FGDs were held in each district over three days, with participants coming from a variety of backgrounds, positions, and roles in society, allowing research to collect a wide spectrum of viewpoints on the difficulties communities face. The qualitative data were then examined by identifying repeating themes, emerging issues, and contextual nuances connected to socioeconomic challenges experienced by communities as a result of transportation barriers.

DISCUSSION

Transportation infrastructure is the lifeblood of socio-economic development

From rural villages to bustling urban centers, transportation networks play a pivotal role in shaping economies, societies, and individual livelihoods. In the context of Sabah, based on the APPGM-SDG's findings in 2023, there are 3 major socio-economic needs that the communities are deprived of. These are access to education, health centres and agriculture market. The next section will further explore how communities in these 4 districts are further marginalised from their socio-economic importance due to the lack of transportation.

Access to education

The lack of transportation infrastructure in Sabah poses significant challenges to accessing education, particularly for students in rural and remote areas. One of the challenges due to the costs associated with commuting to school can be prohibitive for many families in Sabah, particularly those living below the poverty line. According to the Sabah Economic Development and Investment Authority (2020), high transportation costs may deter parents from sending their children to school regularly, leading to low attendance rates and dropout rates, especially among marginalised communities. This is further evidence during the fieldwork conducted in Ranau where

parents could not afford to send their children to school due to high transportation costs that students had to walk for hours to reach schools.

“Ada juga anak2 disini yang tidak dapat menghabiskan spm.. pertama cabaran ekonomi keluarga kedua perjalanan ..dari sini ke smk timbua saju jam kalau ikut kereta kalau berjalan kaki tu sekitar 5-6 jam...” - Penduduk Kg. Nawanon A

Besides that, issues such as limited transportation options impede students' ability to attend schools, affecting their educational opportunities and outcomes. The Sabah Department of Education (2021) also asserted that the lack of modes of transportation, particularly for students in the rural areas deprived students from further education or even embark on primary school education. In certain instances, children had to rely on boats as means of transportation to pursue their education.³

However, perseverance alone is not enough because safety concerns is another factor that students face when traveling long distances to school, especially if they have to walk or use precarious modes of transportation such as boats. Poor road conditions, inclement weather and inadequate lighting pose risks to students' safety, further exacerbating barriers to accessing education.⁴ In Sandakan, it was recorded that there are no schools in Pulau Berhala and that students have to travel using boats to travel to the nearest school.

³ Sabah Department of Education. (2021). Education in Sabah: Challenges and Opportunities. DOE.

⁴ UNESCO. (2017). Education for Rural Development: Towards New Policy Responses. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000132994>

Consequently, bad weather and heavy wave pose risk to school children on boats.

Access to healthcare facilities

Access to healthcare in Sabah faces significant challenges, particularly in rural and remote areas where geographical barriers, limited infrastructure, and resource constraints impede the delivery of quality healthcare services.

Many remote villages are located far from healthcare facilities, making it difficult for residents to seek medical attention when needed.⁵ Data collected in 2023 also presented similar experiences where pregnant mothers who need urgent delivery or care had to give birth before reaching nearby clinics or hospitals. In another words, inadequacy in effective transport system or condition of roads in rural and remote Sabah heavily affects maternal and child health outcomes. This issue was found in all 4 districts.

Communities in remote districts such as Beluran experience different constraints as they have to pay higher transportation costs to reach the nearest healthcare facilities. This poses a concern because out-of-pocket expenses for transportation, medical fees and hospitalisation can be prohibitive for low-income families; forcing them to forego essential healthcare services or delay seeking treatment until complications arise.

Modes of transportation for economic activities

The lack of adequate modes of transportation in Sabah poses significant challenges to economic activities, particularly farming,

⁵ Wong, H. S., et al. (2022). Accessibility to Healthcare Services in Rural Sabah: The Role of Transport Infrastructure. *Malaysian Journal of Public Health Medicine*, 22(1), 87-97.

which heavily relies on efficient transportation networks for the distribution of agricultural produce.

Many rural areas are underserved by transportation infrastructure, making it challenging for farmers to transport their produce to urban markets or distribution centers. This limited market access restricts farmers' ability to sell their products and earn a sustainable income.⁶ This is particularly evident for farmers in the rural areas (Ranau, Beluran and Kudat) where they are distant from market centers and rely heavily on good roads and transportation to reach the market.

Additionally, transportation constraints exacerbate post-harvest losses for farmers in Sabah. Delays in transporting perishable agricultural produce to markets or processing facilities lead to spoilage, deterioration in quality, and ultimately, financial losses for farmers. Inadequate transportation infrastructure and services contribute to inefficiencies in the agricultural value chain, reducing farmers' incomes and overall productivity.⁷ This was illustrated in all 4 districts' reports.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving potholes and road conditions in Sabah requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses both short-term repairs and long-term infrastructure upgrades. Here are two strategies to improve potholes and the road conditions in Sabah:

Utilise High-Quality Materials

Ensure that road maintenance and rehabilitation projects use high-quality materials that are suitable for Sabah's climate and terrain.

⁶ Ting, S. H., et al. (2019). Rural Infrastructure Development and Poverty Alleviation in Sabah, Malaysia. *Borneo Journal of Resource Science and Technology*, 9(1), 1-14.

⁷ Wong, H. S., et al. (2022). Accessibility to Healthcare Services in Rural Sabah: The Role of Transport Infrastructure.

Utilise durable asphalt mixes, aggregates and construction techniques that can withstand heavy rainfall, temperature fluctuations and natural wear and tear over time.

Community Engagement and Participation

Include and involve communities in the remote areas and islands in the planning, design and implementation of road infrastructure projects to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed. Consult with local stakeholders, village leaders and community organisations to gather input, solicit feedback, and prioritise infrastructure investments based on local priorities and preferences.

In this way, implementation of road infrastructure projects can promote sustainable development while protecting the natural environment. Minimise ecological impacts by incorporating green infrastructure, habitat conservation measures and environmental mitigation strategies into project design and implementation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the urgent need for investment and prioritisation of road infrastructure development in Sabah. By addressing the inadequate road infrastructure, Sabah can improve access to essential services, foster economic growth and promote social inclusion, thereby advancing its progress towards achieving the SDGs and improving the wellbeing of its communities.

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Part 3:
Poverty and Other Communities in
Peninsular Malaysia

Chapter 10

Kajian Sosioekonomi Masyarakat Orang Asli Suku Kaum Jahai di Perkampungan Orang Asli Sungai Rual

Siti Noraiysah Rohim

PENGENALAN

Pada September 2023, saya telah mengikuti satu perbincangan yang dilakukan bersama Bekas Wakil Rakyat dan pasukan dari APPGM-SDG yang menjurus kepada perancangan dalam mengadakan satu kajian sosioekonomi dan kajian impak projek di Perkampungan Orang Asli Sg. Rual yang kebanyakannya daripada suku kaum Jahai. Terdapat beberapa proses, prosedur dan libat urus yang telah saya lalui bagi memastikan perancangan pelaksanaan kajian tersebut dapat dijalankan dengan lancar. Bertitik tolak daripada hal ini, saya ingin berkongsi pengalaman dan proses yang melibatkan kolaborasi antara individu, organisasi dan entiti yang berbeza sebelum dan sepanjang pengalaman berada di lapangan. Saya akan mengetengahkan kepentingan Matlamat Pembangunan Mampan 17 (SDG 17) yang melibatkan kerjasama pelbagai pihak berkaitan. Seterusnya, saya akan berkongsi hasil dapatan dengan merumuskan corak kehidupan masyarakat Orang Asli dan cabaran-cabaran yang dihadapi di kawasan tersebut.

Pengalaman saya terlibat dengan kajian ini adalah penting sebagai suatu rujukan kepada penyelidikan baru pada masa hadapan yang melibatkan Orang Asli, terutamanya mereka yang tinggal di Semenanjung Malaysia. Hal ini demikian kerana, pengalaman ini akan memberikan pemahaman yang mendalam tentang konteks sosial, ekonomi dan sensitiviti terhadap keperluan dan keunikan mereka.

Natijahnya, satu kajian yang berlandaskan pendekatan penyelidikan yang inklusif akan terhasil dan bermanfaat kepada masyarakat tersebut.

LATAR BELAKANG KAJIAN

Penglibatan APPGM-SDG bersama penduduk-penduduk Sungai Rual bermula sejak tahun 2020, apabila pasukan APPGM-SDG telah turun ke Parlimen Jeli bagi pemetaan isu. Pada tahun tersebut, pasukan penyelidik hanya mendapatkan maklumat minima berkenaan isu-isu setempat melalui perbincangan secara berkumpulan (FGD). Fasa perintis ini menjadi tunjang utama untuk kajian lanjutan walaupun data yang diperoleh masih rendah. Tambahan, walaupun terdapat beberapa kajian yang berkaitan dengan Orang Asli, namun kajian yang mendalam terhadap Orang Asli, khususnya di Sungai Rual masih lagi kurang. Hal ini turut dibincangkan dan disuarakan oleh Bekas Wakil Rakyat semasa mesyuarat perancangan pelaksanaan yang mana ketiadaan satu kajian yang terperinci berkenaan penduduk-penduduk di Sungai Rual yang merupakan masyarakat Orang Asli sepanjang tempoh 18 tahun berkhidmat di Jeli. Justeru, kajian lanjutan ini memberi fokus kepada pemetaan profil penduduk-penduduk di Kampung Sungai Rual untuk mengenalpasti dan mendapatkan maklumat serta status terkini penduduk ini bagi memahami keadaan dan intervensi lanjut yang dapat diberikan untuk meningkatkan taraf hidup mereka.

Secara amnya, penduduk-penduduk di Sungai Rual, Jeli, Kelantan adalah masyarakat Orang Asli daripada suku kaum Jahai. Jahai merupakan suku kaum daripada suku Negrito. Selain dikenali sebagai Jahai, mereka juga dirujuk sebagai orang Semang dan Semang bagi sesetengah sarjana merujuk kepada suku Negrito seperti pengkategorian yang dibuat oleh Rambo (1988). Selain dieja 'Jahai', mereka juga dirujuk sebagai Jehai atau Jahay (Carey, 1976). Menurut

Keat dan Siew Hua (2014), Jahai disahkan mempunyai genetik yang dikaitkan secara langsung dengan Semang. Selain dari Jahai, suku kaum Orang Asli dalam suku Negrito adalah Bateq, Mendriq, Lanoh, Kintaq dan Kensi. Bagi komuniti Orang Asli di sini, mereka ditempatkan di kawasan yang disediakan oleh pihak kerajaan melalui pendekatan program tertentu, khususnya pendekatan Rancangan Kampung Baru (RKB) di RKB Sungai Rual Jeli. Perkampungan Sungai Rual ini juga mempunyai empat buah kampung iaitu Kampung Pentadbiran, Kampung Seberang, Kampung Kalok dan Kampung Manok. Justeru, untuk memastikan kajian ini dapat dilaksanakan dengan lancar dan merangkumi semua kampung yang terlibat, beberapa proses yang telah dilalui saya dan penyelidik lain.

Pada perancangan awal pelaksanaan kajian sosioekonomi ini, kajian merupakan inisiatif yang dibuat oleh Bekas Wakil Rakyat. Namun, pihak APPGM-SDG turut berpandangan bahawa kajian ini adalah penting sebagai suatu inisiatif untuk mendapatkan gambaran yang menyeluruh tentang suatu kampung Orang Asli di Semenanjung Malaysia. Ini kerana kajian-kajian Orang Asli masih kurang dan ketiadaan satu bancian yang menyeluruh tentang masyarakat tersebut daripada aspek sosioekonomi mereka.

Walaupun APPGM-SDG mendapat sokongan dan dorongan daripada Bekas Wakil Rakyat yang berpengaruh, kami turut mematuhi sistem pentadbiran rasmi bagi mendapatkan persetujuan dan kelulusan bermula daripada peringkat Persekutuan, negeri dan daerah sebelum pelaksanaan kerja lapangan soal selidik di Kampung Sungai Rual bermula. Perkara ini termasuk penghantaran surat permohonan ke setiap peringkat pentadbiran, bermula daripada peringkat Persekutuan sehingga tempatan.

Pihak APPGM-SDG juga mendapat sokongan dan kerjasama penuh daripada Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli (JAKOA), Kementerian Kemajuan Desa Dan Wilayah, seterusnya persetujuan daripada Pengarah JAKOA Negeri dan dilanjutkan bersama mesyuarat awalan bersama JAKOA di peringkat daerah. JAKOA pada awalnya dinamakan sebagai Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli) berperanan penting untuk melindungi cara hidup Orang Asli (khususnya di Semenanjung Malaysia sahaja) daripada kepesatan pembangunan terasing dan eksplotasi masyarakat luar di samping menyediakan kemudahan dan bantuan pendidikan, kesihatan dan pembangunan sosioekonomi¹. Ini bertepatan dengan pengiktirafan formal terhadap Orang Asli melalui Akta Orang Asli 1954 (Akta 134) yang merupakan perundangan bertulis yang digubal khusus untuk masyarakat Orang Asli di Semenanjung Malaysia berdasarkan *The Aboriginal Enactment 1939* yang diwartakan di seluruh Negeri-negeri Melayu Bersekutu.

MATLAMAT PEMBANGUNAN MAMPAN 17: KERJASAMA DEMI MATLAMAT PENGLIBATAN AGENSI KERAJAAN DAN PEMIMPIN TEMPATAN

Proses kajian APPGM-SDG di Kampung Sungai Rual ini menonjolkan kepentingan SDG17 dengan membawa sasaran 17.17 iaitu menggalakkan perkongsian awam, awam-swasta dan masyarakat sivil yang berkesan, dan membina pengalaman dan strategi sumber perkongsian. Aspek perkongsian ini menjadi teras utama melalui penglibatan agensi kerajaan dan pemimpin tempatan melalui dua fasa utama sebelum pelaksanaan kajian berlangsung. Perkara ini penting dalam memastikan objektif utama kajian ini dapat mengenalpasti dan memperolehi maklumat serta status terkini masyarakat di Perkampungan Sungai Rual ini bagi memahami keadaan dan intervensi lanjut yang dapat diberikan untuk meningkatkan taraf hidup mereka.

¹ <https://www.jakoa.gov.my/soalan-lazim/>

Fasa Pertama: Mesyuarat Awal

Proses pelaksanaan kajian lapangan ini dimulakan dengan satu mesyuarat awal yang melibatkan pelbagai pihak. Pertemuan fasa pertama ini telah menghubungkan kerjasama antara pihak APPGM-SDG bersama agensi kerajaan di peringkat daerah dan pemimpin tempatan. Mesyuarat yang berlangsung di Pejabat Tanah Jajahan Jeli pada 14 September 2023 bertujuan untuk memberi taklimat awal kepada pihak kerajaan tempatan dan agensi tentang pelaksanaan kajian sosioekonomi yang akan dijalankan di Kampung Sungai Rual. Pada tarikh tersebut, sesi mesyuarat ini telah dipengerusikan oleh Ketua Jajahan Jeli, En. Mohd Shaifudeen Bin Md Salleh dan dihadiri oleh Pegawai Lapangan daripada Pejabat Tanah Jajahan Jeli, JAKOA Daerah Jeli, INSPEK, Guru Besar Sekolah Orang Asli, Pegawai-Pegawai daripada Pusat Khidmat Parlimen Jeli dan Ketua-Ketua Masyarakat Orang Asli.

Elemen perkongsian pelbagai pihak ini menepati sasaran 17.17 dengan menggalakkan kerjasama berkesan dengan memperlihatkan penglibatan mereka yang hadir dalam berkongsi maklumat, penambahbaikan dan ketepatan senarai soalan dalam soal selidik yang disediakan oleh APPGM-SDG. Perkongsian dua hala ini sangat penting bagi memastikan soalan-soalan yang ditanya bersesuaian dengan norma dan corak kehidupan masyarakat, penggunaan bahasa yang mudah difahami dan bersifat komprehensif. Maklumbalas tersebut bukan sahaja diberikan oleh agensi-agensi yang hadir, malahan daripada pemimpin tempatan yang sehati dengan corak kehidupan penduduk-penduduk di Sungai Rual. Saya juga mendapat gambaran awal tentang corak kehidupan masyarakat tersebut daripada segi kehidupan, keadaan perumahan, kemudahan asas dan juga isu-isu utama yang lazimnya dihadapi oleh mereka. Pada pandangan saya, gambaran awal ini sangat berguna dalam memahami dan berkomunikasi dengan masyarakat tersebut. Sebagai

contohnya, salah satu perkara yang menarik perhatian saya semasa mesyuarat tersebut adalah ketidakselesaian masyarakat Orang Asli dengan panggilan “Orang Asli” oleh masyarakat luar terhadap mereka. Oleh yang demikian, satu pesanan semasa mesyuarat adalah supaya kami mengelakkan panggilan “Orang Asli” kepada penduduk-penduduk di Sungai Rual. Dengan itu, dalam penerangan yang selanjutnya, saya akan merujuk Orang Asli di Sungai Rual sebagai “penduduk-penduduk” Sungai Rual.

Pertemuan pada peringkat awal ini juga membantu para penyelidik mendapatkan pengenalan awal berkenaan status sosioekonomi penduduk di Sungai Rual. Para penyelidik diberi pendedahan berkenaan program dan projek pembangunan sosial dan ekonomi untuk membantu penduduk-penduduk di Sungai Rual seperti projek tanaman kontan (sayur-sayuran), projek ternakan haiwan dan sebagainya. Pelbagai inisiatif pembangunan telah dilaksanakan oleh kerajaan melalui JAKOA dan jabatan lain untuk menaik taraf sosioekonomi masyarakat tersebut setanding dengan masyarakat lain. Namun, program ini tidak mampu bertahan lama dan tahap kerjasama antara masyarakat di Sungai Rual masih rendah. Malahan, penduduk-penduduk di Sungai Rual dikatakan mempunyai sifat dengki antara mereka. Wakil pemimpin tempatan juga turut menekankan keperluan dan kepentingan bantuan (*handouts*) semasa kajian lapangan dijalankan kelak.

Menerusi mesyuarat awalan ini juga, pihak APPGM-SDG juga mendapat kerjasama daripada pihak kerajaan tempatan, terutamanya JAKOA untuk perancangan kajian lapangan. Seperti mana sasaran utama SDG 17 yang melibatkan perkongsian, pihak APPGM-SDG memerlukan sokongan daripada pihak berkepentingan bagi memastikan kelancaran proses kajian lapangan ini. Kesediaan pihak JAKOA juga dapat dilihat apabila mereka turut berkongsi senarai

Ketua Isi Rumah (KIR) di Perkampungan Orang Asli Kampung Sungai Rual yang memudahkan para penyelidik sewaktu kajian lapangan dijalankan.

Fasa Kedua: Pra Soal Selidik dan Latihan kepada Pembantu Penyelidik

Fasa kedua adalah fasa lanjutan yang memberi fokus kepada kerjasama antara para penyelidik dengan individu-individu yang terlibat secara aktif sepanjang pelaksanaan kajian lapangan. Sehubungan dengan itu, saya dan penyelidik APPGM-SDG yang lain telah berjumpa dengan wakil peserta projek cendawan di Kampung Sungai Rual pada 14 September 2023. Pertemuan ini diadakan bertujuan untuk mendapatkan kerjasama dalam menjalankan pra-soal selidik bersama wakil daripada lima buah rumah di Sungai Rual. Kemudian pada 15 September 2023, kami telah menjalankan satu pra-soal selidik bersama lima wakil keluarga atas saranan Puan Wati (Peserta Projek Cendawan) yang mana hasil kajian ini telah dijadikan panduan bagi menambahbaik instrumen kajian.

Di samping itu, keperluan mendapatkan pembantu penyelidik (*enumerators*) tempatan penting sewaktu di lapangan. Daripada sudut pemerhatian saya, pembantu penyelidik ini perlu memiliki beberapa kriteria khusus seperti pernah terlibat dengan kajian lapangan, mampu berkomunikasi secara baik dengan masyarakat setempat dan mempunyai rasa empati yang tinggi. Kriteria-kriteria ini diperlukan kerana apabila melibatkan masyarakat Orang Asli, pendekatan yang sesuai akan melancarkan proses penyelidikan. Tambahan, saya telah mendapat gambaran awal berkenaan sifat penduduk di Perkampungan Sungai Rual ini yang berperwatakan pemalu dengan masyarakat luar. Perkara ini turut disuarakan oleh penghulu-penghulu dan Guru Besar semasa mesyuarat fasa pertama dan Puan Rusrina (Pegawai dari Pusat Khidmat Parlimen Jeli) pada mesyuarat

fasa kedua. Justeru, pemilihan *enumerators* mustahak kerana mereka orang yang terlibat secara langsung dalam pengumpulan data di lapangan.

Seterusnya, saya juga telah berhubung dengan pihak JAKOA, Pejabat Tanah Jajahan Jeli, Pusat Khidmat Jeli, Guru Besar SK Sungai Rual dan INSPEK bagi mendapatkan cadangan calon-calon pembantu penyelidik yang sesuai. Penglibatan kelima-lima agensi tersebut adalah tepat kerana tahap keterlibatan mereka yang rapat dengan penduduk-penduduk di Sungai Rual. Sebagai contohnya, JAKOA sebagai satu agensi khas yang bertanggungjawab sepenuhnya kepada komuniti ini. Penglibatan Guru Besar juga wajar dengan melibatkan guru-guru di sekolah yang sememangnya mendidik anak-anak penduduk di Sungai Rual. Projek-projek untuk pembangunan ekonomi masyarakat di Sungai Rual turut dijalankan oleh INSPEK, Pejabat Tanah Jajahan Jeli dan Pusat Khidmat Jeli.

Kerjasama antara pelbagai pihak ini juga telah menjadikan proses mendapatkan *enumerators* berjalan dengan lancar. Pada awalnya, 25 calon *enumerators* telah menunjukkan minat. Namun, selepas tapisan hanya 14 orang *enumerators* telah dipilih. Ia merangkumi pelbagai latar belakang dan yang mempunyai hubungan rapat dengan para penduduk di Sungai Rual. Sebagai contohnya 2 orang *enumerators* merupakan pegawai yang bertugas di *Program Community Feeding* (PCF), seorang guru SK Sungai Rual dan 2 orang yang pernah menjalankan projek ekonomi melalui Wilayah Ekonomi Pantai Timur (ECER).

Walaupun saya tidak lagi turun ke lapangan pada waktu ini, satu perkara baru yang saya perolehi adalah kewujudan PCF di Perkampungan Sungai Rual. Objektif utama PCF ini adalah untuk meningkat dan mengekalkan status pemakanan kanak-kanak Orang

Asli / Pribumi yang berumur antara enam bulan hingga enam tahun.² Secara umumnya, program ini telah dilaksanakan di beberapa negeri sebagai usaha kerajaan untuk meningkatkan taraf pemakanan kanak-kanak daripada keluarga miskin tegar. Melalui program ini juga kes-kes kekurangan zat makanan yang tinggi seperti di kalangan kanak-kanak Orang Asli juga dapat dikurangkan. Sehingga Disember 2021, sebanyak 49 buah Pusat *Community Feeding* telah beroperasi di tiga buah negeri iaitu sebanyak 33 buah PCF di Perak, 8 buah PCF di Kelantan dan 8 buah PCF di Pahang.³

APPGM-SDG telah menjalankan dua sesi latihan bersama *enumerators*. Tujuan utama sesi latihan ini adalah untuk memastikan setiap *enumerator* memahami bidang tugas, etika dan tujuan penyelidikan ini. Para *enumerators* yang terlibat adalah masyarakat tempatan yang tinggal di Jeli. Persediaan dan latihan ini sangat penting agar *enumerator* bersiap sedia dengan sebarang keberangkatan yang akan berlaku di lapangan dan gambaran awal dapat dirasai. Sewaktu sesi latihan tersebut, saya juga mendapat beberapa informasi tambahan berkenaan corak dan kehidupan penduduk-penduduk di Sungai Rual. Sebagai contohnya, mereka tidak menyukai panggilan Orang Asli, keperluan menyediakan *handout* dan penerimaan mereka terhadap masyarakat luar. Sesi latihan *enumerators* tersebut telah dijalankan pada 29 September 2023 sebagai persediaan untuk projek kajian dan sesi kedua adalah pada 6 Oktober 2023, sehari sebelum kajian lapangan.

METODOLOGI KAJIAN

Kajian ini menggunakan dua kaedah penyelidikan iaitu soal selidik berpandu dan perbincangan secara berkumpulan (*Focus Group Discussion*, *FGD*). Penyelidikan ini bermula dengan kaedah

² <https://www.perlingkansosial.gov.my/program/RplzD42wv7k4v3NjPeyG>

³ <https://hq.moh.gov.my/nutrition/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Laporan-Tahunan-Bahagian-Pemakanan-2021-271222.pdf>

penyelidikan berbentuk soal selidik berpandu yang mana ia melibatkan soal selidik dari rumah ke rumah yang mana ia melibatkan soal selidik isi rumah atau *household questionnaire*. Soal selidik dari rumah ke rumah ini telah mengambil masa selama tujuh hari, iaitu bermula daripada 8 hingga 14 Oktober 2023 yang melibatkan empat buah kampung.

Secara asasnya, satu borang soal selidik yang digunakan sepanjang kajian lapangan adalah berdasarkan pendekatan dan kemiskinan pelbagai dimensi (*multi-dimensional poverty*). Borang ini juga telah disesuaikan berdasarkan keperluan masyarakat setempat, saya dan pasukan penyelidik telah bersama-sama dengan Bekas Wakil Rakyat turut mengadakan beberapa siri perbincangan bagi memastikan setiap soalan yang ditanya adalah bersesuaian dengan keadaan semasa. Hasil daripada perbincangan, antara indikator yang telah digunakan adalah seperti demografi isi rumah, pendidikan, kesihatan, taraf kehidupan, kewangan dan perlindungan sosial, dan hubungan sosial. Kaedah ini dikira bertepatan dengan matlamat utama kajian iaitu untuk mengetahui status sosioekonomi masyarakat Orang Asli secara menyeluruh yang mana melibatkan Ketua Isi Rumah (KIR). Menerusi kaedah ini, terdapat 203 daripada sejumlah 217 ketua isi rumah di Kampung Sungai Rual yang telah terlibat dalam kajian soal selidik.

Kaedah perbincangan secara berkumpulan (FGD) juga telah diadakan pada 14 hingga 16 Oktober 2023, yang telah melibatkan wakil daripada golongan lelaki dan golongan wanita dari setiap kampung yang telah hadir secara sukarela. Menerusi kaedah ini juga, saya juga berpeluang untuk bertanya soalan dengan lebih mendalam dan secara terperinci berkenaan budaya hidup, keunikan dan harapan mereka. Saya juga mendapat persetujuan daripada komuniti untuk

mengambil gambar-gambar dan perbincangan juga telah direkodkan setelah mendapatkan kebenaran dari peserta.

Pada pertemuan awal bersama pemimpin tempatan, saya telah mendapat gambaran tentang kepentingan menyediakan “buah tangan” semasa berada di lapangan. Walaupun begitu, para penyelidik terikat dengan etika dalam penyelidikan yang bersifat sukarela dan tidak menggunakan elemen paksaan. Perkara ini bertepatan dengan etika dan prosedur kajian iaitu penglibatan responden dalam sesuatu kajian hendaklah berdasarkan persetujuan mereka. Justeru, kesemua 201 daripada 217 KIR yang terlibat dalam kajian ini adalah secara sukarela dan identiti mereka turut dirahsiakan. Tambahan, penggunaan “penduduk-penduduk di Sungai Rual” turut digunakan bagi menggantikan perkataan perkataan “Orang Asli”. Hal ini adalah untuk bagi menghormati dan menjaga sensitiviti masyarakat tersebut sepanjang pelaksanaan kajian berlangsung.

CORAK KEHIDUPAN MASYARAKAT ORANG ASLI DI SUNGAI RUAL

Pada bahagian ini, terdapat beberapa perbincangan yang akan memberi perhatian kepada hasil dapatan berbentuk soal selidik, perbincangan berkumpulan dan pemerhatian. Saya akan mengetengahkan beberapa aspek seperti pentadbiran tempatan, keperluan asas dan sumber ekonomi utama penduduk-penduduk di Sungai Rual. Perbincangan ini akan menunjukkan sama ada keunikan atau persamaan masyarakat di sini dengan kawasan-kawasan lain.

Pentadbiran Tempatan

Pemimpin tempatan bagi suku kaum Jahai adalah penghulu. Terdapat beberapa aspek bagi pelantikan penghulu iaitu keturunan, seorang yang dipercayai, mempunyai pengaruh dan merupakan pentadbir di sesebuah kampung. Sedikit perbezaan dengan masyarakat lain, di Kampung Sungai Rual ini tidak menggunakan istilah Tok Batin, tetapi

penghulu. Sebagai pentadbir bagi setiap kampung, Penghulu memainkan peranan dalam menyelesaikan sebarang masalah berhubung dengan adat, aktiviti harian dan keluarga di samping menyampaikan dan menerima maklumat semasa. Di Perkampungan Sungai Rual, bilangan penghulu pada masa ini hanya dua orang walaupun mempunyai empat buah kampung. Sepanjang berada di lapangan, saya telah beberapa kali bertemu dengan salah seorang penghulu iaitu penghulu bagi Kampung Kalok dan mendapat beberapa maklumat penting berkenaan masyarakat di sana. Salah satunya, Penghulu mengatakan terdapat beberapa pertubuhan, agensi dan badan bukan kerajaan (NGO) yang telah turun dan memberi sumbangan kepada masyarakat di sana.

Dalam pada itu, penduduk-penduduk di Sungai Rual juga mempunyai satu Jawatankuasa Pembangunan dan Keselamatan Kampung Orang Asli (JPKKOA) yang dilantik untuk memberi khidmat bakti kepada masyarakat. JPKKOA ini merupakan sebuah organisasi peringkat akar umbi bagi mentadbir dan menguruskan sesebuah kampung Orang Asli di Malaysia. JPKKOA juga merupakan perantara di peringkat akar umbi yang akan menyalurkan sebarang permasalahan atau aduan kepada pihak-pihak yang berkuasa dan berkaitan terhadap sesuatu isu yang timbul di kawasan kampung masing-masing. Pada pandangan saya, pemimpin-pemimpin tempatan juga dilihat mempunyai kerjasama yang erat bersama JAKOA Daerah Jeli. Hal ini kerana, selepas beberapa siri komunikasi antara saya dengan Pegawai dari JAKOA, nama JPKKOA tidak pernah lekang disebut dan sentiasa menjadi rujukan saya apabila menghadapi sebarang permasalahan sepanjang saya di lapangan. Sebagai contohnya, apabila saya ingin mendapatkan pertolongan wakil komuniti untuk menjadi pemandu arah ke rumah-rumah Ketua Isi Rumah.

Keperluan Asas

Pada asasnya, masyarakat Orang Asli hidup secara nomad dan berpindah randah demi kelangsungan hidup. Bagaimanapun, seiring perubahan masa, sebahagian daripada mereka mula menetap di kampung selepas kerajaan melalui JAKOA menyediakan bantuan rumah dan penempatan untuk masyarakat Orang Asli melalui Rancangan Penempatan Semula (RPS) Orang Asli.⁴ Pada pemerhatian, penempatan penduduk-penduduk di Sungai Rual dilihat tersusun berbanding kawasan lain khususnya di Kelantan. Pada awalnya, mereka juga hidup secara terpencar dan masih ada pondok-pondok kecil yang dijadikan sebagai tempat berteduh. Namun, perkampungan ini boleh dikatakan sebagai satu penempatan yang mempunyai kemudahan serba lengkap, termasuklah kebanyakan tinggal di dalam rumah batu, sekolah, tadika, surau, beberapa dewan komuniti dan kemudahan elektrik. Penduduk di sini juga turut mendapat bekalan air bersih daripada air graviti / bukit, air paip dan sebagainya walaupun masalah bekalan air terputus masih berlaku terutamanya apabila hujan lebat. Di samping itu, terdapat PCF yang membolehkan pihak pegawai kesihatan untuk mengenal pasti kanak-kanak yang mengalami tumbesaran terbantut. Sepanjang di lapangan, para penyelidik berpeluang melihat sendiri para ibu mengendong dan membawa anak-anak mereka ke Pusat PCF tersebut seawal 8 pagi.

Sektor Ekonomi Utama

Kehidupan di hutan banyak dikaitkan dengan masyarakat Orang Asli. Pada asasnya, sektor pekerjaan mereka adalah berbentuk sara diri dan tradisional yang berkait dengan pertanian dan mencari hasil

⁴ Mohd Yusoff, R., Abdul Halim, S. dan Pereira, J. J. (2019). Impak Rancangan Pengumpulan Semula (RPS) ke atas Komuniti Orang Asli Jahai di Rancangan Pengumpulan Semula Air Banun, Perak (The Impact of a Resettlement Programme on the Jahai Community in Rancangan Pengumpulan Semula Air Banun, Perak). *Asian Journal of Environment, History and Heritage*, 3(1), 175-182. <https://spaj.ukm.my/ajehh/index.php/ajehh/article/view/116>

hutan. Penglibatan mereka dalam aktiviti ini masih kekal, namun bagi masyarakat di sini, terdapat sebahagian kecil sahaja yang masih ke hutan untuk mencari rotan dan akar kayu. Tambahan, penglibatan anak muda ke hutan semakin berkurangan dan memilih untuk mengusahakan sektor pertanian dan sumber ekonomi lain yang bersifat lestari. Perkara ini juga turut diketengahkan oleh Khairuddin dan Hanafiah (2021) yang mengkaji perubahan budaya masyarakat Orang Asli Suku Temiar yang menunjukkan sebahagian ahli masyarakat suku Temiar yang sudah bekerja di kilang-kilang dan di syarikat swasta terutama golongan muda. Perubahan ini juga berlaku disebabkan oleh faktor jaringan pengangkutan yang menghubungkan perkampungan dengan bandar.⁵ Sejak beberapa dekad ini juga aktiviti ekonomi masyarakat tersebut telah mengalami perubahan, iaitu daripada mencari sumber hutan semata-mata kepada penglibatan dalam sektor kerajaan dan swasta.⁶

Sepanjang pemerhatian dan temubual yang dijalankan, hanya beberapa keluarga sahaja yang masih ke hutan selama beberapa hari. Sebagai contohnya di Kampung Manok, mereka yang ke hutan selalunya golongan yang lebih berusia. Hal ini juga menjadi cabaran kepada saya dan penyelidik yang lain untuk bertemu dengan Ketua Isi Rumah tersebut dengan mendapatkan temujanji awal atau pun hanya menjalankan soal selidik bersama isi rumah yang lain. Namun begitu, pada pandangan saya perubahan sosioekonomi ini dapat membantu masyarakat Orang Asli untuk berkembang dengan mengekalkan adat resam dan tradisi mereka. Hal ini kerana, generasi muda dapat menggunakan peluang yang ada untuk membantu ekonomi keluarga

⁵ Khairuddin, M. H. A. dan Hanafiah, M. G. (2021). Perubahan Budaya Masyarakat Orang Asli Suku Temiar di Kampung Bukit Cermin, Kuala Kangsar, Perak. *Malaysian Journal of Society and Space* 17(2),298-312. <https://journalarticle.ukm.my/17641/1/46583-156793-1-PB.pdf>

⁶ Er. A.C., Ariffin, Z. C. M. dan Pereira, J. J. (2010). Sosioekonomi Masyarakat Orang Asli: Kajian Kes di Hutan Simpan Bukit Lagong, Selangor, Malaysia. *Jurnal Melayu*, (5)2012, 295-314. https://journalarticle.ukm.my/3034/1/01ADNAN_JUSOH.pdf

dan seterusnya sedikit sebanyak dapat meningkatkan taraf hidup dan berusaha keluar daripada kepompong kemiskinan. Walaubagaimanapun, untuk memastikan Matlamat Pembangunan Lestari 1 (Tiada Kemiskinan), pelbagai pihak harus membantu dan menjadi penunjuk jalan disebabkan oleh faktor geografi, peluang pekerjaan di Jeli masih lagi rendah. Justeru, walaupun golongan muda ingin mengubah corak kehidupan mereka, sekiranya ketiadaan peluang, natijahnya mereka akan berada di takuk yang sama.

CABARAN

Perbincangan ini menjurus kepada cabaran-cabaran yang berlaku sepanjang pelaksanaan kajian sosioekonomi di Kampung Sungai Rual. Beberapa cabaran yang saya hadapi adalah dari segi kesukaran logistik, mengenalpasti Ketua Isi Rumah dan berinteraksi. Namun begitu, kesukaran-kesukaran ini berjaya diatasi dengan bantuan, komunikasi dan sokongan daripada pelbagai pihak.

Pertamanya, adalah kesukaran daripada segi logistik yang mana pihak kami memerlukan satu tempat perjumpaan yang strategik, mudah diakses sebelum proses soal selidik dijalankan. Tempat perjumpaan ini sangat penting bagi memastikan *enumerators* dapat berkumpul, berbincang, menyemak dan memasukkan data yang diperolehi dari setiap isi rumah pada setiap hari. Pihak kami dengan bantuan Wakil Pusat Khidmat Jeli berusaha untuk menyelesaikan cabaran ini dengan mendapatkan cadangan daripada JAKOA Jeli. Hasil daripada perbincangan dan sokongan daripada Encik Mohd Zamzuri Anuar, selaku Pegawai Kemajuan Orang Asli Daerah Jeli, pihak kami mendapat tunjuk ajar untuk membuat permohonan menggunakan kemudahan di kampung tersebut. Seterusnya, kami berjaya mendapat kebenaran menggunakan dewan untuk perjumpaan bersama semua *enumeratos* sepanjang pelaksanaan kajian tersebut.

Dalam pada itu, saya juga turut berhubung dengan pemimpin-pemimpin tempatan atas rekomendasi JAKOA seperti Pengerusi dan ahli jawatankuasa bagi JPCKOA bagi urusan kunci dan kemudahan tersebut. Pada awalnya, saya menghadapi kesukaran dalam mendapatkan kebenaran menggunakan kemudahan. Namun, menerusi sokongan dan kerjasama yang diberikan oleh Pegawai Kemajuan Orang Asli Daerah Jeli tersebut, Pengerusi dan Ahli Jawatankuasa JPCKOA akur dan turut memberi sokongan yang penuh bermula daripada penyerahan kunci dewan sehingga ke akhirnya.

Keduanya, saya dan penyelidik lain turut menghadapi kesukaran dalam mengenalpasti setiap Ketua Isi Rumah dan lokasi rumah peserta, walaupun pihak JAKOA telah menyediakan satu senarai nama lengkap Ketua Isi Rumah. Bagi memastikan perancangan sepanjang tempoh kajian ini berjalan lancar, Puan Rusrina daripada Pusat Khidmat Parlimen Jeli telah memperkenalkan beberapa wakil penduduk dari setiap kampung seperti Siti (Kg Pentadbiran), Imey (Kg Kalok) dan Wati (Kg Manok), penglibatan *key person* ini wajar disebabkan oleh mereka lebih mengenali penduduk-penduduk setempat. Pada pemerhatian saya, *key person* memainkan peranan besar sepanjang tempoh kajian ini dilakukan yang mana mereka bukan sekadar menajadi penunjuk arah di lapangan sahaja, namun pendekatan yang diguna seperti memperkenalkan *enumerators* kepada responden sebelum sesi soal selidik patut dicontohi. Malahan, penglibatan Puan Rusrina wakil daripada Pusat Khidmat Jeli yang sangat aktif membantu di lapangan juga menyempurnakan kerja-kerja di lapangan. Mengikut pemerhatian, penglibatan wakil daripada Pusat Khidmat atau Ahli Parlimen sangat penting dalam menghubungkan masyarakat luar dan penduduk disebabkan oleh tahap penglibatan mereka dengan masyarakat tersebut yang telah terjalin lama. Pada pemerhatian saya juga, rata-rata penduduk di Kampung Sungai Rual turut mengenali susuk nama Puan Rusrina dan

keperibadian beliau yang sangat ramah dan senang didekati turut membantu pihak kami dalam mendekati masyarakat di sini, walaupun pemerhatian awal dilihat mereka agak malu dan seperti tidak selesa kerana kurang bercampur dengan masyarakat luar.

Ketiganya, kesukaran dalam berinteraksi bersama penduduk juga berlaku. Walaupun kebanyakan mereka boleh bertutur dalam Bahasa Melayu, namun terdapat beberapa individu yang kurang fasih dan selesa berbahasa Jahai. Malahan, saya juga mendapat gambaran awal dan dimaklumkan bahawa tahap penerimaan penduduk di Kampung Sungai Rual terhadap orang luar amat rendah. Tambahan, penduduk di sini terutamanya wanita dikatakan sebagai mempunyai sifat malu dan tidak mahu menonjolkan diri. Mengambil kira faktor-faktor ini, proses permulaan soal selidik dari rumah ke rumah dibuat secara beretika tanpa memaksa responden untuk terlibat dengan soal selidik tersebut. Semasa di lapangan, cabaran ini berjaya ditangani apabila terdapat beberapa *enumerators* dan *key person* yang dipilih menjadi penterjemah secara langsung. Hubungan rapat antara *enumerators* yang dengan penduduk turut menjadi satu daya sokongan yang tinggi sepanjang penyelidikan ini. Saya, penyelidik APPGM-SDG, dan *enumerators* turut mendapat layanan baik daripada penduduk dan boleh beramah mesra sepanjang sesi soal selidik berlangsung. Tidak dinafikan beberapa golongan wanita kurang menonjol, namun penglibatan mereka sepanjang pelaksanaan kajian sangat tinggi.

PERBINCANGAN

Pendidikan dan Kemiskinan

Pendidikan sangat berkait rapat dengan taraf atau kualiti hidup sesebuah masyarakat. Menurut Mohd Yusoff, Abdul Halim dan Pereira (2019), Program RPS memberi impak dan implikasi yang besar kepada masyarakat Orang Asli terutamanya dari aspek kebersihan, kesihatan, keselamatan dan pendidikan didapati menjadi lebih baik dan terjamin

dengan adanya akses kepada kemudahan asas yang disediakan seperti jalan raya, sekolah, bekalan elektrik, air paip.⁷ Jaringan dengan masyarakat luar juga semakin mudah dan selamat dengan adanya jalan raya yang menghubungkan Kampung Sungai Rual dengan Bandar Jeli. Keadaan ini secara tidak langsung mendedahkan mereka kepada cara hidup desa dan bandar dengan cepat. Selain itu, kewujudan Sekolah Kebangsaan Sungai Rual (SKSR) pula membolehkan anak-anak mendapat pendidikan tanpa perlu keluar daripada penempatan mereka. Namun begitu, majoriti penduduk masih hidup dalam keadaan miskin. Pada pandangan saya, kemiskinan ini berkait rapat dengan aspek pendidikan yang mana majoriti masyarakat Orang Asli masih lagi tercicir dalam pendidikan. Perkara ini juga turut disokong oleh Khairuddin dan Hanafiah (2021) yang mendapati sebahagian kecil sahaja yang berjaya menamatkan pendidikan di peringkat sekolah rendah.⁸ Menurut Wan Hanafi, Ahmad dan Ali (2014), proses pembelajaran bagi murid-murid Orang Asli hanya sebagai memenuhi tuntutan kehidupan yang telah ditetapkan oleh kerajaan dan anak Orang Asli tidak berminat untuk pergi bersekolah.⁹ Perkara ini turut dibangkitkan lagi apabila hasil perbincangan dengan Guru Besar SKSR, salah satu kesukaran yang dihadapi oleh pendidik di sana adalah kehadiran pelajar ke sekolah rendah dan kadar literasi masih rendah.

Sepanjang di lapangan juga, saya mendapati perkembangan pendidikan masih lagi kurang bagi penduduk-penduduk di Kampung Sungai Rual. Perkara ini berkait rapat dengan keciciran pendidikan

⁷ Mohd Yusoff, R., Abdul Halim, S. dan Pereira, J. J. (2019). Impak Rancangan Pengumpulan Semula (RPS) ke atas Komuniti Orang Asli Jahai di Rancangan Pengumpulan Semula Air Banun, Perak.

⁸ Khairuddin, M. H. A. dan Hanafiah, M. G. (2021). Perubahan Budaya Masyarakat Orang Asli Suku Temiar di Kampung Bukit Cermin, Kuala Kangsar, Perak.

⁹ Wan Hanafi, W. A., Ahmad, S. dan Ali, N. (2014). Faktor Budaya dan Persekitaran dalam Prestasi Pendidikan Anak Orang Asli Malaysia: Kajian Kes di Kelantan. *Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*, 10(5), 107 - 122. <https://journalarticle.ukm.my/7867/>

dan perlu dititikberatkan. Pada pemerhatian dan perbincangan yang saya hadiri, tindakan buli, diskriminasi dan penerimaan masyarakat luar terhadap rupa fizikal antara faktor yang menyebabkan anak-anak masyarakat itu tidak berminat untuk ke sekolah. Kesannya, tahap pendidikan yang rendah dalam kalangan masyarakat Orang Asli menyukarkan mereka untuk mendapat pekerjaan yang stabil.¹⁰ Akibatnya penglibatan mereka dalam sektor ekonomi hanya terbatas kepada sektor tradisional sahaja dan seterusnya tidak mampu menarik mereka keluar daripada kitaran kemiskinan dan kemelaratan hidup. Pada masa sama, peluang pekerjaan untuk penduduk di Kampung Sungai Rual sangat sukar disebabkan faktor geografi kawasan itu sendiri. Kesukaran ini juga disebabkan oleh penerimaan masyarakat luar dalam memberi peluang pekerjaan kepada Orang Asli adalah rendah. Perkara ini turut disokong oleh Hassani dan Ramli (2020) yang menjelaskan bagaimana kehidupan boleh menjadi terasing daripada masyarakat luar disebabkan beberapa faktor seperti geografi, kadar literasi yang rendah, pandangan negatif masyarakat sekitar dan sikap tertutup masyarakat Orang Asli.¹¹

Masyarakat Orang Asli dan Persoalan Pembangunan

Pada pandangan saya, penduduk di Kampung Sungai Rual sedikit sebanyak telah menyesuaikan diri dengan perubahan semasa. Mereka telah didedahkan dengan pembangunan dalam pelbagai bentuk, sudut dan sistem, termasuk sudut pendidikan, fizikal dan ekonomi. Kerajaan turut memberi pelbagai insentif dalam pelbagai aspek seperti perumahan, kemudahan asas, jaringan dan perubatan.

¹⁰ Omar, M. (2008). Rancangan Pengumpulan Semula (RPS) Masyarakat Orang Asli: Pencapaian dan Cabaran. In Ma'rof Redzuan & Sarjit S. Gill (eds.). *Orang Asli: Isu Transformasi dan Cabaran*. Serdang: Unversiti Putra Malaysia.

¹¹ Hassani, P. dan Ramli, M. A. (2020). Isolasi Sosio-Budaya Masyarakat Orang Asli di Malaysia dan Kesannya Terhadap Pentafsiran Hukum Islam. *Jurnal Pengurusan dan Penyelidikan Fatwa*, 20(1), 1-20. <https://jfatwa.usim.edu.my/index.php/jfatwa/article/view/304>

Insentif berkenaan telah mengubah pelbagai aspek kehidupan mereka. Sebagai contohnya, generasi muda telah mula menggunakan telefon yang lebih canggih, mempunyai kenderaan sendiri dan tidak lagi bergantung kepada sumber ekonomi/kaedah tradisional. Dalam kata lain, pembangunan telah mempengaruhi dan mengubah gaya hidup mereka. Namun begitu, persoalan timbul apabila mereka tidak dilibatkan dalam dan tidak dapat mengikut arus pambandan dan tahap kebergantungan mereka terhadap bantuan luar masih ketara. Mereka juga berhadapan dengan keadaan sumber pendapatan yang tidak stabil dan tetap.

Namun, persekitaran dan perjalanan kehidupan harian mereka masih terasing, dan penerimaan masyarakat luar terhadap mereka dalam sektor pekerjaan masih rendah. Untuk meneruskan pekerjaan tradisional nenek moyang mereka juga satu cabaran disebabkan oleh masalah untuk akses kepada sumber yang semakin berkurangan. Dan lebih gawat, generasi baru sudah tidak minat dan tidak banyak memiliki pengetahuan tradisional yang diperlukan untuk kerja-kerja tradisional. Keadaan itu turut menjadikan mereka ragu-ragu, atau tidak pasti, bagaimana untuk meneruskan kehidupan harian mereka. Seterusnya mereka diletakkan dalam kedudukan yang mana terpaksa untuk menerima apa sahaja yang ada di hadapan mereka samada berbentuk pertolongan daripada agensi kerajaan atau agensi luar. Ini mempunyai perkaitan dengan peluang untuk membangunkan tahap kemahiran dan pengetahuan diri mereka yang tidak mencukupi di Sungai Rual. Kesannya, masyarakat Orang Asli tidak mampu keluar daripada kepompong kemiskinan atau *cycle of poverty* yang memerlukan intervensi berterusan daripada pelbagai pihak yang sistematik.

KESIMPULAN

Masyarakat Orang Asli adalah masyarakat yang sering dikaitkan dengan kemiskinan dan tahap penerimaan mereka oleh masyarakat luar masih rendah. Hal ini mungkin disebabkan oleh tahap kebolehterlibatan mereka dalam pembangunan ekonomi dan sosial yang sangat terhad. Malahan, taraf hidup dan pendapatan Orang Asli yang rendah memang terkekang terutamanya jika perkampungan mereka jauh dari pusat pembangunan tempatan (pekan atau bandar). Daripada sudut pandang kepelbagaian inisiatif bantuan kerajaan, variasi program pembangunan telah dilaksanakan oleh kerajaan bertujuan untuk meningkatkan taraf hidup rakyat dan sekali gus mengurangkan dan membasmi insiden kemiskinan. Namun, persoalannya adakah bantuan atau program tersebut bersifat jangka panjang yang mampu membantu mereka dalam memastikan kelangsungan hidup pada masa hadapan terus terjamin. Justeru, penglibatan aktif setiap agensi berkaitan dan buah fikiran mereka juga sangat penting untuk masa depan masyarakat ini. Ia juga bersesuaian dengan Matlamat Pembangunan Mampan 17. Ini melibatkan kerjasama demi matlamat iaitu dengan mengukuhkan cara pelaksanaan dan menghidupkan semula kerjasama global demi pembangunan mampan. Kelak, isu kemiskinan dalam kalangan masyarakat Orang Asli dapat dikurangkan.

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Part 4:
Poverty and
Economic Empowerment

Chapter 11

Program Pemerksaan Ekonomi Komuniti Bandar (PEKB): Inisiatif Menangani Kemiskinan Bandar

Sridayu Samsuri

LATAR BELAKANG

Pengenalan

Pahang Darul Makmur mempunyai keluasan tanah seluas 35,965 kilometer persegi dan merupakan negeri ketiga terbesar di Malaysia. Pada tahun 2019, berdasarkan statistik yang dikeluarkan oleh Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia (DOSM), jumlah penduduk negeri Pahang berjumlah 1.7 juta orang di mana 67.8 peratus penduduk berusia 15 hingga 64 tahun, 25.0 peratus dalam lingkungan 0 hingga 14 tahun dan 7.2 peratus penduduk berusia 65 tahun dan ke atas. Dari jumlah penduduk ini, seramai 719.5 ribu adalah tenaga buruh yang terdiri daripada pekerja mahir (20.6%), pekerja separuh mahir (62.8%) dan pekerja berkemahiran rendah (16.6%).

Perubahan demografi dan sosioekonomi di Pahang yang didorong oleh perubahan komposisi penduduk secara keseluruhan memberi kesan kepada pola taburan penduduk mengikut kumpulan umur, jantina, negeri, taraf pendidikan, pekerjaan dan perbandaran. Sosioekonomi negara yang kukuh amat penting bagi menghasilkan kehidupan yang selesa dan harmoni. Justeru, perancangan dan pembangunan sosioekonomi perlu dilaksanakan dengan teratur dan berstrategi. Kemakmuran dan kesejahteraan hidup perlu dinikmati oleh segenap rakyat. Dalam usaha mencapai matlamat pembangunan lestari, pertumbuhan dan kejayaan ekonomi perlu dizahirkan melalui peningkatan pendapatan dan corak perbelanjaan isi rumah. Oleh yang demikian, amat penting pengukuran dan pemantauan dapat

dikenalpasti dari aspek taburan pendapatan, kemiskinan, pekerjaan dan sebagainya.

Semenjak Rancangan Malaysia Ke-10 (RMKe-10) yang dilancarkan pada tahun 2011, kerajaan telah menetapkan aspek inklusif dan prinsip keadilan sosial bagi mengukuhkan konsep pengagihan. Aspek inklusif merujuk kepada memastikan tiada golongan yang terpinggir atau terlepas peluang dalam menikmati arus pembangunan negara. Prinsip keadilan sosial pula merujuk kepada bantuan yang akan diberikan kepada setiap golongan masyarakat selepas mengambil kira tahap pencapaian mereka. Sehubungan itu, kerajaan juga telah memperluas fokus utama di dalam pengagihan bantuan kepada kumpulan isi rumah dengan turut mengambil kira isi rumah berpendapatan 40 peratus terendah, bukan hanya golongan miskin sahaja.

Sistem eKasih ialah satu sistem pangkalan data keluarga miskin yang diwujudkan di peringkat nasional di bawah Jabatan Perdana Menteri (JPM) bagi membantu merancang, melaksana dan memantau program membasmi kemiskinan. eKasih mengandungi maklumat mengenai kemiskinan bermula dari profil individu, program/bantuan yang diterima oleh Ketua Isi Rumah (KIR) dan Ahli Isi Rumah (AIR) daripada agensi pemberi bantuan sehinggalah kepada permohonan bantuan dan pemantauan keberkesanan program/bantuan yang diterima.

Komponen data eKasih terdiri daripada maklumat asas Ketua Isi Rumah (KIR) dan Ahli Isi Rumah (AIR), Maklumat Lokasi, Kediaman, Pendidikan, Kemahiran dan Pekerjaan, Pemilikan Harta, Kesihatan, Pendapatan serta Bantuan.

Pada tahun 2024, daerah Kuantan merekodkan seramai 8,046 Ketua Isi Rumah dan 56,116 Ahli Isi Rumah berdaftar di bawah eKasih.

Inisiatif PEKB Di Bawah Kementerian Perumahan Dan Kerajaan Tempatan (KPKT)

Program Pemerksaan Ekonomi Komuniti Bandar (PEKB) merupakan program yang telah dijenamakan semula daripada Program AZAM Bandar yang dimulakan pada tahun 2013 oleh Kementerian Perumahan dan Kerajaan Tempatan (KPKT). Program ini bermatlamat untuk meningkatkan kemahiran kumpulan sasar iaitu golongan miskin di bandar supaya mampu mengusahakan perniagaan yang boleh memberikan pendapatan yang lebih tinggi, dan seterusnya meningkatkan kualiti hidup dan keluar daripada kemiskinan.

Program ini dilaksanakan dengan kerjasama Pertubuhan Bukan Kerajaan (NGO) yang berdaftar dengan mana-mana Pendaftar atau kuasa undang-undang negara. NGO yang dilantik adalah bertanggungjawab untuk melaksanakan perkara-perkara berikut:

- I. membuat bancian dan pencarian peserta;
- II. melaksanakan kursus kemahiran dan keusahawanan (selama 7 hari) berdasarkan senarai kursus yang ditetapkan
- III. membekalkan peralatan mengikut bidang kursus yang dihadiri oleh peserta;
- IV. menjalankan bimbingan, pemantauan dan bantuan pemasaran kepada peserta; dan
- V. menyedia dan mengemukakan laporan pelaksanaan kursus, pembekalan peralatan dan pemantauan kepada Kementerian Perumahan Dan Kerajaan Tempatan (KPKT).

Pelaksanaan PEKB di bawah WINK

Persatuan Wanita Inspirasi Kuantan (WINK) telah dilantik sebagai NGO Pelaksana bagi Program Pemerkasaan Ekonomi Komuniti Bandar (PEKB) bagi tahun 2023 untuk 25 peserta berdaftar eKasih dari seluruh negeri Pahang. Bidang kemahiran yang diberikan adalah kemahiran makanan dan minuman atau F&B.

WINK telah mengambil peluang ini untuk melanjutkan bantuan pembangunan kemahiran serta bantuan modal perniagaan untuk peserta-peserta Projek Pengupayaan Wanita dan Ibu Tunggal di bawah APPGM-SDG yang dilaksanakan bermula November 2022. Seramai 4 peserta di kalangan wanita ibu tunggal telah layak untuk menerima manfaat PEKB ini dan telah berjaya menamatkan kursus serta menerima bantuan peralatan perniagaan bernilai RM4500 seorang.

Seramai 21 peserta lagi dikenalpasti menerusi kaedah bancian berdasarkan senarai daftar eKasih yang dikeluarkan oleh KPKT serta penerima bantuan di bawah WINK dan Pusat Khidmat Rakyat Parlimen Kuantan. Kesemua peserta ini juga meneruskan perniagaan di bawah bimbingan berterusan daripada WINK termasuk melalui Bengkel Keusahawanan Digital APPGM-SDG serta bantuan pemasaran melalui platform perniagaan Teja Station yang ditubuhkan melalui projek Keusahawanan Berkelompok APPGM-SDG.

PELAKSANAAN PROGRAM

Kursus telah dijalankan bermula 3hb hingga 9hb Julai 2023, bertempat di Pusat Latihan Kemahiran Teja Skills, Bandar Putra, Kuantan, Pahang melibatkan 25 peserta.



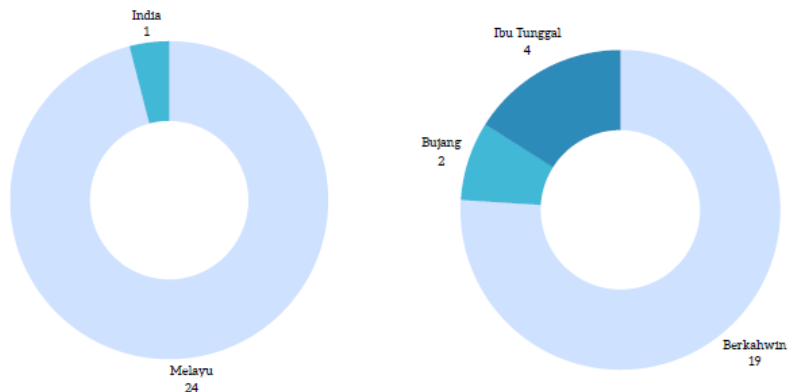
Bidang Kursus : **Makanan & Minuman**

Komponen Kursus :

1. Pembangunan Minda Insan
2. Pembangunan Keusahawanan dan Cellk Kewangan
3. Bina Upaya Kemahiran



Jumlah Peserta : **25 orang**



Gambar rajah 12.1 Rumusan Info Demografik Peserta Kursus

Rumusan Pencarian Peserta (Pahang)

WINK telah menerima sejumlah 442 nama daripada senarai bancian pertama dan sejumlah 509 nama daripada senarai bancian kedua.

Daripada jumlah tersebut sebanyak 311 rumah telah dibanci dan hanya 105 dapat dihubungi dan ditemui. Daripada jumlah tersebut, jumlah yang berminat dan telah dihantar untuk semakan adalah seramai 24 orang. Namun begitu sejumlah 14 orang telah menarik diri dan NGO terpaksa mengambil peserta daripada senarai luar yang

telah disemak dan diluluskan oleh KPKT untuk melengkapkan jumlah peserta seramai 25 orang.

Antara sebab-sebab utama penolakan program PEKB ini dikalangan peserta di dalam senarai bancian KPKT adalah :

1. Sudah mempunyai pekerjaan tetap
2. Tidak berminat dalam bidang yang ditawarkan
3. Tidak boleh memberikan komitmen kepada kursus 7 hari 6 malam kerana perlu menguruskan ahli keluarga

Jadual 12.1 Data daripada Senarai Bancian KPKT

	JUMLAH RUMAH YANG DIBANCI	JUMLAH YANG DAPAT DIHUBUNGI DAN DITEMUI	JUMLAH YANG BERMINAT & DIHANTAR UNTUK SEMAKAN	JUMLAH YANG MENGIKUTI KURSUS
Dari Senarai Bancian KPKT	311	105	24	10

Jadual 12. 2 Senarai Peserta Dan Status

NAMA PESERTA	STATUS TAMAT PROGRAM	STATUS PEMBEKALAN PERALATAN	STATUS PENGGUNAAN PERALATAN
Mohd Zain Bin Abdullah	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Norawati Binti Mohamed	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
M.Vasantha Kumari A/P maniam	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Rohayu Binti Johar	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Shah Rina Wati Binti Shafie	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Ahshuzanawati Binti Abdullah	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan

Nor Faidatul Akma Binti Abdul Majid	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Norzuwita Binti Mohamad Taib	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Saifful Fikry Bin Shamsuddin	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Sh Hamizi Bin Sh Abdul Hamid	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Amin Bin Mamat	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Laila Binti Taha	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Nordiyana Binti Abdul Aziz	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Nurhawa Binti Mohd Safie	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Fauziah Binti Othman	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Noriyati Binti Senan	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Zeti Nurshima Binti Salim	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Anuar Bin Salehuddin	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Nor Aklima Binti Abdul Majid	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Suhaimi Bin Mohamad	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Zulkifli Bin Yusof	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Norozi Binti Abdul Malek	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Siti Hawa Binti Yusof	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Wan Rosidahyati Binti Wan Awang	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan
Aizamrina Binti Razali	Lulus	Dibekalkan	Digunakan

Bilangan peserta mengikuti program: 25 orang

Bilangan peserta yang berjaya menamatkan program: 25/25

Bilangan peserta yang dibekalkan peralatan: 25/25

Bilangan peserta yang disarankan ditarik peralatan: 0/25

Jadual 12.3 Statistik Penjanaan Pendapatan

JUMLAH PENDAPATAN	BULAN KE-1	BULAN KE-2	BULAN KE-3
Tidak menjana*	1	1	1
< RM600	0	0	0
RM600 - RM1000	16	17	11
RM1001-RM2000	8	5	9
RM2001-RM3000	0	2	4
JUMLAH	25		

*Seorang peserta menghadapi kemerosotan kesihatan dan belum berupaya meneruskan perniagaan. Beliau kini sedang mendapatkan rawatan dan berharap dapat memulakan perniagaan sebaik sahaja sembuh. Pihak NGO tidak menyarankan peralatan beliau ditarik kerana peralatan itu dapat membantu beliau dan keluarga menjana sumber pendapatan.

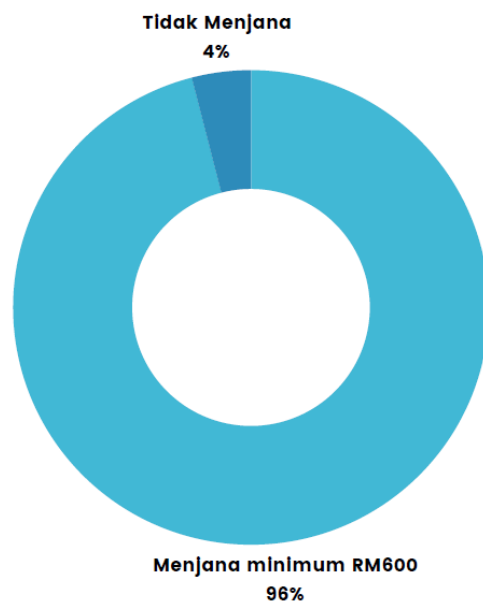
Rumusan Hasil Pemantauan

Bilangan peserta mengikuti program: 25 orang

Bilangan peserta yang menjana minimum RM 600 sebanyak 3 kali pemantauan: 24/25

Bilangan yang menjana tetapi tidak mencapai KPI minimum Kementerian: 0/25

Bilangan yang tidak menjana: 1/25



Gambar rajah 12.2 Peratusan Peserta Yang Menjana Pendapatan

Jadual 12.4 Masalah dan Penambahbaikan

BIL	ISU DAN MASALAH	PENAMBAHBAIKAN
1	Masalah untuk menyuai-padan solusi kepada peserta sasaran yang bersesuaian dengan kemahiran, kecenderungan dan minat mereka. Antara factor ketidaksediaan peserta sasaran (daripada senarai bancian KPKT) untuk menyertai program ini adalah kerana kursus yang ditawarkan tidak bersesuaian dengan kecenderungan mereka.	NGO wajar diberikan kepercayaan untuk mencari peserta sendiri yang tertakluk kepada syarat kelayakan yang ditetapkan oleh Kementerian. Cara ini lebih mudah untuk mendapatkan peserta yang betul-betul cenderung kepada bidang yang ditawarkan oleh NGO dan seterusnya memberikan impak yang lebih tinggi terhadap program ini.
2	Untuk mendapatkan 25 peserta daripada senarai bancian yang	Mengkaji semula prosedur dan kos pencarian peserta dan

	dihadkan oleh Kementerian, NGO telah berusaha menghubungi lebih 500 nama daripada senarai banciaan dan melakukan lebih 300 pencarian rumah, daripada jumlah ini hanya sekitar 100 peserta dapat ditemui dan ditawarkan. Ini melibatkan kos yang amat tinggi.	peruntukan senarai banciaan kepada setiap NGO
3	Ramai peserta, khususnya yang didapati daripada senarai banciaan KPKT menarik diri apabila dikenakan syarat untuk bermalam oleh pihak penganjur. Mereka tidak dapat memberikan komitmen sekiranya perlu bermalam ditempat kursus dalam jangka masa yang lama kerana mempunyai komitmen untuk menjaga ahli keluarga.	Tidak menetapkan syarat wajib bermalam atau memberikan keringanan kepada peserta. Yang perlu diutamakan adalah kehadiran penuh peserta di dalam semua sesi yang diadakan.
4	Peserta dalam senarai akhir menarik diri	Budi bicara daripada urusetia KPKT untuk menerima peserta daripada senarai tambahan NGO amat membantu memudahkan urusan. Terima kasih.

Impak kepada Peserta

Rumusan impak kepada peserta dari segi *Deep Impact (Personal)*, *Wide (Network)*, *Clear (Skills)* dan *High (System)* dirumuskan dalam gambar rajah di bawah.



Gambar rajah 12.3 Rumusan Impak Kepada Peserta

KESIMPULAN

Rumusan Pelaksanaan Program

Program PEKB bagi NGO WINK telah diadakan seperti berikut :

Tarikh: 3hb Julai sehingga 9hb Julai 2023

Tempat: Pusat Latihan Kemahiran Teja Skills, Bandar Putra, Kuantan

Peserta: 25 orang

Peserta telah memberikan komitmen yang amat baik dan dapat membina keyakinan diri dan semangat berpasukan melalui aktiviti Pembangunan minda insan yang disusun di permulaan program.

Modul pengurusan kewangan juga amat berkesan bagi mendidik peserta melakukan perancangan kewangan dan menguruskan kewangan dengan lebih sistematik. Setiap peserta dibekalkan dengan buku tunai untuk mencatat aliran kewangan perniagaan dan catatan ini telah disemak oleh NGO semasa pemantauan dilakukan.

Pelaksanaan program yang dijalankan di bengkel masakan yang mempunyai peralatan yang lengkap amat memudahkan jurulatih dan peserta untuk membuat tugas praktikal. Peserta juga dapat dibimbing secara langsung cara menggunakan alat-alat berteknologi tinggi. Peserta juga lebih mudah membuat keputusan dalam pemilihan peralatan yang diperlukan untuk perniagaan.

Peserta-peserta juga mendapat bimbingan yang berterusan daripada jurulatih sehingga kini. Beberapa peserta turut terpilih mengikuti program Keusahawanan Digital di bawah WINK dan dibekalkan peranti untuk perniagaan. WINK juga berterusan membantu mereka memasarkan produk melalui platform pemasaran WINK, Teja Station.

Kesimpulannya, Program Pemerksaan Ekonomuni Komuniti Bandar (PEKB) ini wajar diteruskan kerana telah berjaya memberikan impak terhadap komuniti miskin bandar dalam aspek peningkatan sosioekonomi.

Chapter 12

Economic Empowerment of B40 Women through Digital Entrepreneurship: A Pathway to Poverty Alleviation and Inclusive Economic Growth

Puvanesvari Subramaniam

ABSTRACT

From Zero to Hero: Digital Entrepreneurship Women Incubation (DEWI) training programme aimed to empower ten women who reside in the PPRs at DUN Lembah Pantai, Kuala Lumpur. These women, from the B40 category, are confronted with the challenges of poverty and forced to find ways to elevate their businesses to support their families. As relying only on one stream of income for their families has proved challenging. By providing them with the essential digital literacy skills, this programme strategically addressed the issue by enabling them to expand their businesses through online platforms. The programme enhanced their income-generating opportunities through online promotion and built their brand online to reach out to new potential clients. Through the provision of training, coaching and monitoring, the project equipped these women with the necessary knowledge and skills to leverage digital platforms for business growth. By increasing their income levels and potentially expanding their businesses, the project directly contributed to poverty reduction (SDG 1) among this marginalised group. Additionally, by focusing on women's empowerment in digital entrepreneurship, it is also contributed to gender equality (SDG 5) and sustainable economic growth (SDG 8). This programme supported these women in building resilient livelihoods and breaking the cycle of poverty. Additionally, the focus on reaching broader markets and networking opportunities through digital platforms suggests a pathway for economic

empowerment beyond local boundaries, along with partnership with local authorities (SDG 17), which is crucial for sustainable poverty alleviation.

INTRODUCTION

From Zero to Hero: Digital Entrepreneurship Women Incubation (DEWI) programme is a transformative initiative fully-sponsored by APPGM-SDG. This programme was conducted from July to September 2023 aimed at empowering B40 women residing in Lembah Pantai, Kuala Lumpur, to navigate and excel in the digital landscape as digital entrepreneurs. In this paper, we will discover the profound impact of the DEWI programme, showcasing its significance in fostering economic empowerment and social inclusion among its beneficiaries.

By equipping B40 women with essential digital literacy skills, this programme went beyond traditional barriers, offering digital pathways towards economic resilience and prosperity for this vulnerable community. This programme aligns with SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere, SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, SDG 8: Sustainable economic growth and SDG 17: Partnership for the goals.

We will uncover how DEWI programme addresses these global objectives at the grassroots level, fostering tangible change within the community. Through the lens of beneficiary success stories, we will illuminate the transformative journey undertaken by B40 women, highlighting their triumphs, challenges and the profound impact of digital entrepreneurship on their lives.

BACKGROUND

In Malaysia's diverse socioeconomic landscape, B40 women encounter formidable challenges, including limited access to education, resources, and economic opportunities. The DEWI programme emerges as a vital intervention, aiming to empower these marginalised women and foster inclusive growth. To overcome the household economic constraints, these women face the dual pressures between generating income and managing household responsibilities hence, they are operating primarily as home-based entrepreneurs with cottage-style businesses for some. However, they are lack awareness and digital marketing skills and strategies as well as face barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, limited government support and childcare responsibilities. These challenges underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to uplift these marginalised communities. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing effective interventions to promote economic empowerment and social inclusion among B40 women in Malaysia.

The DEWI Programme: Women Empowerment Towards Digital Inclusivity

The DEWI programme emerged from a recognition of the digital illiteracy among B40 women entrepreneurs in the DUN Lembah Pantai area, constraining their potential to reach local and global markets. These women, despite their entrepreneurial spirit, face challenges in sustaining their businesses while trying to balance family responsibilities. They were also not exposed with the upper hand of digital entrepreneurship due to limited and lack of exposure to digital knowledge. In response, the programme aims to equip these women with essential digital skills to expand their businesses online, allowing them to reach for wider audience while enhancing flexibility while managing family duties.

Through digital literacy, this programme enabled them to transition their businesses into the digital realm. By providing training, coaching, and monitoring by industry experts, beneficiaries learned to leverage social media for marketing, establish an online presence through e-commerce platforms and explore opportunities for international market expansion. The programme emphasises lifelong learning and effectiveness, aiming to create income sustainability for beneficiaries through digital empowerment.

TRANSFORMATIVE TALES: BENEFICIARIES' STORIES AND IMPACT

The success stories of beneficiaries in the DEWI programme highlight the transformative impact of digital entrepreneurship on marginalised women in Lembah Pantai. Through this section, we delve into the journeys of three selected beneficiaries, each representing resilience, determination and growth. These stories illustrate how the DEWI programme has empowered women with digital skills, enabling them to overcome challenges, expand their businesses, and achieve economic independence. These narratives exemplify the programme's role in fostering inclusive economic growth and poverty alleviation in the community.

BENEFICIARY 1: NURUL SAFINAH BT ZAITON (FIFI)

Background

Before attending the training programme, Fifi faced significant challenges in her entrepreneurial journey. Fifi is a mother of 3 children who owned a small food business which she operates with her husband. Her husband works as a security guard on a part-time basis hence, their household income is not stable. Starting from scratch, she lacked knowledge of essential digital literacy and tools such as Google Business Profile and graphic design. With no prior experience in online marketing, Fifi struggled to expand her customer base beyond her local network.

Transformation

Following her participation in the DEWI programme, Fifi experienced a remarkable turnaround in her business prospects. Implementing the strategies taught by the coaches, she optimised her Google Business Profile and established a strong online presence. As a result, Fifi received a surge in orders for her specialty, *apam balik mini*, with customers discovering her business primarily through Google searches. Notably, she secured lucrative catering contracts for various events, including prestigious gatherings like those organised by corporate clients such as Sime Darby.

Impact

The programme enabled Fifi to elevate her business to new heights, significantly boosting her household income. Prior to the training, her monthly sales struggled to reach RM400, but post-programme, she consistently surpasses this target, with monthly sales exceeding RM 2,500 during events. Fifi's success demonstrates the transformative power of digital entrepreneurship in empowering women like her to achieve financial independence and contribute to their families' wellbeing.

BENEFICIARY 2: JURAINI BINTI KULOP (KAK YONG ZHURA)

Background

Kak Yong Zhura, a homemaker and entrepreneur, faced challenges in scaling her food business due to limited visibility and marketing know-how. Despite offering a variety of culinary delights, including murukku and frozen snacks, she struggled to attract customers to her physical stall.

Transformation

Through the DEWI programme, Kak Yong Zhura acquired essential digital marketing skills and optimised her Google Business Profile, significantly increasing her business's online visibility. This newfound digital presence opened doors to government tenders and large-scale catering projects, propelling her business to new heights. During the training, we outlined a SOP for the beneficiary to create a digital portfolio in both PDF and slide presentation formats for them to present and market their products and services, especially when they were bidding for government tenders. Consequently, she received grants and support from organisations like Baitulmal and MAIWP, further fueling her entrepreneurial journey.

Impact

As a result of the training, Kak Yong Zhura secured numerous projects and collaborations, including supplying murukku to government agencies and conducting cooking classes under the KEMAS programme. During festive seasons, she would get clients who are looking for catering services such as open houses, wedding and charity events. Most of them find her through her Google Page as well as words of mouth. Her success highlights the transformative impact of digital empowerment, empowering women entrepreneurs to thrive in competitive markets and access new opportunities.

BENEFICIARY 3: NORARSIKIN BINTI MAAKIM (KAK KIN)

Background

Kak Kin is an award-Winning photographer who had won several competitions overseas but she struggled to find new clients. She entered the programme with limited knowledge of digital marketing, artificial intelligence (AI) and video editing. However, through personalised coaching and hands-on learning opportunities provided by the DEWI programme, she experienced significant growth in her skills and confidence, as well as expanded her client pool.

Transformation

Post-training, Kak Kin's proficiency in AI and video editing improved significantly, leading to her participation in prestigious competitions and coaching opportunities. Leveraging her enhanced skills, she attracted clients through digital platforms, expanding her clientele and business prospects. She was contacted by several potential clients nationwide from Sarawak, Perak and Penang who found her primarily through Google Business and WhatsApp Business.

Impact

Within two months of completing the programme, Kak Kin secured multiple photography projects, earning substantial income from client photoshoots. Most of her clients found her through Google Search and WhatsApp Business. She is very grateful for the guidance provided by the coaches throughout the training especially in optimising her brand's presence online. Her success underscores the programme's effectiveness in equipping women with the tools and knowledge needed to thrive in digital industries, positioning them as champions of economic resilience and innovation in their communities.

ALIGNMENT WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

This section elucidates how the Digital Entrepreneurship Women Incubation (DEWI) programme aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). By showcasing how the DEWI programme directly contributes to these goals, it highlights the significance of targeted interventions in fostering inclusive economic growth and advancing the global agenda for sustainable development.

SDG 1: No Poverty

Target 1.3: Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.

Indicator 1.3.1: Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, disaggregated by sex, distinguishing between those living in urban and rural areas.

Through the DEWI programme, beneficiaries like Fifi, Kak Yong Zhura and Kak Kin have experienced significant increases in their income levels, contributing to the reduction of poverty within their households. This aligns with Target 1.3 by enhancing their economic resilience and decreasing their vulnerability to financial instability through government initiatives and organisations like APPGM-SDG and Pusat Sebaran Maklumat Nasional (NADI).

SDG 5: Gender Equality

Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

Indicator 5.5.2: Proportion of women in managerial positions

The DEWI programme has empowered women like Fifi, Kak Yong Zhura and Kak Kin to become successful entrepreneurs, demonstrating their capacity for leadership and economic participation. They regained confidence to speak up to digitally promote their products and services more consistently. By enabling them to thrive in digital entrepreneurship, the programme contributes to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, as outlined in Target 5.5.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Target 8.3: Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation.

Indicator 8.3.2: Unemployment rate, by sex, age, and persons with disabilities

DEWI programme equips beneficiaries with digital skills and entrepreneurial knowledge, enabling them to create sustainable livelihoods through their businesses. By fostering entrepreneurship and economic growth among marginalised groups, such as B40 women, the programme contributes to achieving Target 8.3 and reducing unemployment rates.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Target 17.16: Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilise and share knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources, to support the achievement of the SDGs in all countries, in particular developing countries.

Indicator 17.16.1: Number of countries reporting progress in multi-stakeholder development effectiveness monitoring frameworks that support the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

The success of the DEWI programme is made possible through partnerships with organisations like APPGM-SDG and Pusat Ekonomi Digital PEDi PPR Sri Pantai under Pusat Sebaran Maklumat Nasional (NADI). These partnerships provide crucial support, including sponsorship, training facilities, and resources, to empower B40 women with digital entrepreneurship skills. By fostering such partnerships, the programme exemplifies collaborative efforts toward achieving SDG 17 and advancing sustainable development globally.

CONCLUSION

The Digital Entrepreneurship Women Incubation (DEWI) programme has emerged as a transformative initiative, empowering B40 women in Lembah Pantai, Kuala Lumpur, to navigate the digital landscape and excel as digital entrepreneurs. Through targeted interventions and comprehensive training, DEWI has not only equipped beneficiaries with essential digital skills but has also transformed their lives by fostering economic resilience and prosperity.

As we reflect on the transformative tales of Fifi, Kak Yong Zhura and Kak Kin, it is evident that the DEWI programme has catalysed a paradigm shift in how these women perceive and engage with entrepreneurship. From overcoming digital illiteracy to thriving in the competitive digital landscape, each beneficiary's journey exemplifies the programme's profound impact on poverty alleviation and inclusive economic growth.

Moving forward, it is imperative to build upon the success of the DEWI programme and expand its reach to empower more women across Malaysia. To achieve this, we propose the following next steps:

Implement E-commerce Excellence

It is crucial to enhance beneficiaries' e-commerce capabilities to compete on a global scale. By providing advanced training in e-commerce strategies and international market access, we can empower beneficiaries to promote their products and services globally, driving economic growth and fostering sustainable livelihoods.

Scale and Replicate

The success stories of Fifi, Kak Yong Zhura and Kak Kin serve as testimonials to the effectiveness of the DEWI programme. To amplify its impact, we must scale up the programme and replicate it in other communities facing similar challenges. Through strategic partnerships and collaborations, we can extend the reach of DEWI and empower more women to embark on their digital entrepreneurship journey.

Policy Advocacy

Advocate for policies that support and promote digital entrepreneurship among marginalised communities. By engaging policymakers and advocating for inclusive policies, we can create an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs to thrive, contributing to poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Community Engagement

Foster a supportive community ecosystem for women entrepreneurs, providing networking opportunities, mentorship, and access to resources. By nurturing a culture of collaboration and knowledge-

sharing, we can empower women to overcome barriers and achieve their full potential in the digital economy.

In conclusion, the DEWI programme represents a powerful catalyst for change, driving economic empowerment and social inclusion among B40 women in Malaysia. By harnessing the momentum generated by this programme and embracing the proposed next steps, we can pave the way for a more equitable and prosperous future, where all women have the opportunity to thrive as digital entrepreneurs.

Poverty Conversations in Sabah and Peninsular Malaysia: The APPGM-SDG Findings from Ground Realities, edited by Debbie Ann Loh and Hirzawati Atikah Mohd Tahir offers valuable insights into the multi-faceted nature of poverty in Malaysia and presents practical recommendations for socio-economic development and poverty alleviation. It emphasises the importance of grassroots involvement, multi-stakeholder engagement and breaking the dependency on government aid by fostering self-reliance through skills development and economic empowerment.

The book, divided into four parts and comprising 12 chapters, offer a deep dive into the specific needs and experiences of poor communities in Sabah and Peninsular Malaysia, advocating for holistic and inclusive poverty alleviation strategies.

- **Part 1**, *Understanding Poverty & Socio-Economic Development*, redefines Malaysia's development, reviews the National Multidimensional Poverty Index, and examines the link between poverty, food security, and the SDG framework.
- **Part 2**, *Poverty and Communities in Sabah*, offers personal accounts and assessments of poverty alleviation efforts in Sabah, exploring cultural mindsets, educational challenges, and infrastructure issues in various communities.
- **Part 3**, *Poverty and Other Communities in Peninsular Malaysia*, provides socio-economic studies of the Jahai indigenous community.
- **Part 4**, *Poverty and Economic Empowerment*, discusses urban poverty initiatives and the role of digital entrepreneurship in empowering B40 women.

This book does not only highlight the real-world challenges faced by impoverished communities in Malaysia but also provides evidence-based strategies and policy recommendations to address these issues, making it a crucial resource for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners committed to sustainable development and poverty reduction.



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