

## DEVELOPMENT PARTICIPATION AMONG ORANG ASLI IN SUNGAI BERUA VILLAGE, MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The Orang Asli is one of the natives in Peninsular Malaysia lagging behind in rapid development, and has a high poverty rate. Although since the independence, Malaysian government has been implementing various development programs to solve the poverty problem, but the effect is not comprehensive. There are still tribes of Orang Asli less to participate in implementation of development programs. Instead, they are more focused on performing traditional economic activities especially hunting and gathering activities. Orang Asli from Semaq Beri tribes in the state of Terengganu are among the communities that are in the situation. Based on this problem a study was made with the objective; (i) evaluate the implementation of development programs such as agriculture and fisheries projects that have been implemented for the locals, (ii) understand the problems faced by residents in their programs. To meet this objective, data were collected through observation techniques and interview process. Observation technique used to find out people's reactions to the implementation of development programs, and interview techniques used to obtain information in the form of views and comments on the residents of the development. Studies of the documents were also made to get a clearer picture of the problem. The results showed that the implementation of development programs such as palm oil and fish farming cages less involving locals since the beginning of its implementation. Residents do not have sufficient information and skills to participate in this project. In addition, people also have trouble participating in the project on a number of factors such as lack of exposure, skills training, lack of guidance, leadership problems, culture and current financial problems*

**Key words:** *indigenous, Orang Asli, development, poverty, poverty eradication*

### INTRODUCTION

Orang Asli communities in Malaysia is generally known as the community who are dependent on resources from the natural environment. Economic activities are more self-sufficiency, such as shifting cultivation, hunting and collecting forest products and fishing (Kuchikura, 1987; Ramle, 2001; Lye, 2000, 2002). Economic relations with the outside world only in the business of forest products' marketing and some agricultural products (Dunn, 1975; Rambo, 1979), and in their efforts to obtain essential goods they could not hold their own (Endicott, 1974; Gomes, 1986; Kuchikura, 1988).

They are also known as the left behind community in the process of development, low socio-economic status and high poverty rates. Nicholas (1998) explains that in 1997 about 80.8% Head of Household (KIR) Orang Asli are under the national poverty line. Meanwhile 49.9% of them fall into the category of extreme poverty. A similar situation existed in 2003 estimated that 86.53% KIR Orang Asli was still the poorest group, the poor and vulnerable (Abidin, 2004). As of 2008 the rate of poverty among them is still high. Statistics from JHEOA showed that more than 50% of KIR Orang Asli was poor, consisting of 4,942 (17.75%) of KIR Orang Asli categorized as poor, while 9,004 (32.34%) heads of households classified as poor (JHEOA, 2008). However, in 2010 the poverty rate has dropped below 50%, of which only 31.16% or 11,423 of the 36,658 KIR Orang Asli categorized as poor and hardcore poor (JAKOA, 2011).

Similar poverty problems exists among Orang Asli in the state of Terengganu, especially Semaq Beri communities in Sungai Berua Village. In the 1980s the majority of families could be categorized as hardcore poor with an average monthly income of about RM150.00 (Ramle, 1993). Similar situation also existed in

the 1990s. More than 80% KIR Semaq Beri still earned between RM200.00 to RM300.00 per month (Ramle, 2001). Although since 2009 the income of most Orang Asli people in the state has increased by a large number of KIR earn a monthly income of more than RM2000.00, but it does not involve Semaq Beri in Sungai Berua village.

Poverty problems faced believed to be linked to several factors. Among the strongest factors is that Orang Asli involvement in the economy is not competitive (Lim, 1997; Ramle, 2010). On the human capital factor, it was associated with a low educational level, the limited knowledge of the environmental settlements and low skill levels (Hasan, 1997). While in terms of social capital, the factors associated with the ability to network with various parties at local and global levels also affect the situation.

Several cultural factors also influence the pace. Among Orang Asli being too tied to economic activity inherited from previous generations, and it is difficult to accept a development program initiated by the government (Abidin, 2004; 2008). On the other hand, poverty problem is associated with the effectiveness of implemented development programs (Wali, 1993). Most development programs do not fit your interests and skills possessed by members of the local community. No exception also affects poverty is a factor and access infrastructure that can help people develop themselves more rapidly as roads, problems of land ownership and capital.

Poverty among Orang Asli get the attention from government since early of independence. In Terengganu, starting from 1960 to now various programs and projects have been implemented for the Orang Asli, whether in the context of economic development, structured settlements, as well as social development programs. The entire program is based on the goal of enhancing the development of the socio-economic status, and integrate them with main stream society (Ramle and Razak, 2007).

Development programs are generally carried out in collaboration between the various agencies, with the Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli (JAKOA) to act as a coordinating agency (Zahedi, 2007). Many economic development programs are carried out in cooperation with the Federal Land Development Authority (FELCRA) (Kamarudin, 2007). The program structured settlements and social development programs are carried out in cooperation with many Central Terengganu Development Authority (KETENGAH) and the Department of Social Welfare (KEMAS) (Mukhtar, 2007). At the same time higher education institutions (HEIs) such as Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA) and others also contribute to the academic and social programs. Objectives of this study were to evaluate the implementation of development programs such as agriculture and fisheries projects that have been implemented for the local population, to understand the problems faced by residents in the participating programs.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

Field work was conducted on Semaq Beri tribes in Terengganu, especially in Sungai Berua Village, Hulu Terengganu. The village is located on the west state, which is about 70km from Kuala Terengganu. The village was selected as a study area based on status as one of the village's economic development programs available including palm oil planting project and fish breeding in cages.

Study was performed using qualitative methods, where data were collected through observation techniques, interviews, individually and in groups (focus group discussions), and review of documents; included documents related to the lifestyle the Orang Asli, particularly in Terengganu, the traditional economic activities and development programs. Official administrative documents and the implementation of their development were also examined.

Each technique to collect data on its own significance in the context of the study. Observation techniques was used to observe and obtain information regarding current lifestyle patterns of the local community. The interview technique was used to obtain further clarification on the issues as stated in the objectives. Respondents interviewed across various parties, including residents, local leaders, staff and FELCRA, JAKOA. Document review techniques were used to obtain accurate and comprehensive picture of the secondary sources related to the issue being studied. Various earlier results, records of various departments and other related reading materials was also used in this context. In summary, the findings based on two sources of information, namely primary and secondary sources.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Performance development project*

The main goal of the project development, especially economic development projects such as the crops and fish breeding in cages in Sungai Berua Village was to increase income and socio-economic status of the population. Based on these objectives, the implementation of the project in general could be considered as a fail.

Caged fish breeding project only lasted for a few years. In the beginning of the project, there were signs of rather impressive achievement. Relatively smooth project management and relatively good annual revenue were observed. However, after five years of implementation, the situation began to deteriorate; implementation of the project was not managed properly, followed by declining annual revenue. Finally, at the end of 1998 the implementation of the project had been delayed by the accumulated losses of RM105,572.70 (JHEOA, 1999b).

Similar result was observed in palm oil planting project. Up to present, the project does not provide satisfied help in enhancing the socio-economic status of the population. In particular, KIR was still categorized as poor with monthly income only between RM200.00 to RM300.00. Involvement of people as workers in the palm oil plantation is not sustainable. In 2000, 66 people worked in the palm oil plantation developed by FELCRA, but in 2014, no more people participated in the farm. Overall people were back to hunting and collecting forest product as their main job.

### *Problems faced among Semaq Beri*

Williams-Hunt (1998) stated that there was opinion saying that the failure of development programs and the backwardness of the Orang Asli were due to their own attitudes. Among those, they were considered lazy society, firmly hold their tradition of the alleged anti-development, and fear of change. If this view matched to local Semaq Beri communities. It was implied that the failure of development programs and projects was associated with the attitude of those who was lazy and did not want to develop.

It may not be fair if only this factor to justify the failure of development programs implemented. It is not denied that these attitudes exist among the Orang Asli, including the local population. However, those emphasized by Williams-Hunt. (1998) is proper only to small number of community members.

From the interview with the Orang Asli indicated that most of them desired for development. Achom Luji, a leader of the Orang Asli viewed that to be a nation was not possible, a named human community did not want development (Zawawi, 1996). Similarly, the views of another Orang Asli leader, Arif bin Embing stated that the development of Orang Asli was fine but sometimes Orang Asli was scared to development. Because of that development, Orang Asli at the edges of the road or in the suburbs will be thrown even further into the interior (Zawawi, 1996).

Indeed such views are not only coming from Orang Asli leaders, but also among ordinary members of the community, including local Semaq Beri people. In general, they need development and change. One informant stated that *'We have developed, developing, if not difficult for us. Previously they may not matter, but now they can not, we need a new forward as others we can live.'* Results of previous studies such as those produced by Lim (1997), Howell (1997), Hood (1989) and Karim (1995) also showed the Orang Asli required development., even though, there were several barriers to enable them to do so.

What is clear from this study that there are two different views, one party's failure to development projects and programs due to the attitudes of local people themselves who do not want development. While at the same time local people themselves say they need development. Indeed, conflict opinion this issue can be solved if seen in the context of a comprehensive and based on existing cases and experienced by the Orang Asli, such as in the Semaq Beri communities. Result of this research showed that the failure of development programs and projects were the result of several interrelated factors. These factors included the question of implementing the development, land issues, approaches and implementation of development programs surrounding communities as recipients of development. More clearly it can be shown by the following table.

*Development participation among Orang asli in Sungai Berua village*

Table 1. Problems of Semaq Beri development in Sungai Berua Village

Categories	Problem	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development Aims</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals to be achieved through the development projects are too high for the local population. Examples of caged fish breeding project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents feel the goal is beyond their ability.</li> <li>• Residents consider the project is not suitable for them.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Implementation (JAKOA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of staff</li> <li>• Ability of staff; knowledge and skills.</li> <li>• Lack of cooperation of other agencies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too often that implemented projects have ceded only to the local population without such monitoring, and ultimately failed.</li> <li>• Project monitoring cannot be done with care. At the same time problems also cause local residents do not get the information and guidance they should be, until finally they were upset and did not want to get involved with the project is implemented.</li> <li>• Population does not have access to knowledge that may help them to actively participate in projects. Example, the contribution and role of the department in the fish breeding project is too small, especially in terms of advice and guidance on managing projects.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land Problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The land for palm oil cultivation is too narrow compared to the amount of KIR</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The results are too small.</li> <li>• People get frustrated, and they had to continue the tradition of economic activity inherited from previous generations.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Implementation Approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of projects in clusters</li> <li>• Lack of clear information</li> <li>• There is no proper monitoring system</li> <li>• Lack of training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents are not sure who should be responsible for implementing the project.</li> <li>• People do not know their rights specifically in the project.</li> <li>• Only individuals who have worked hard. Whereas other individuals as well as project participants showed no interest.</li> <li>• The project implementation is disrupted, leading to the failure.</li> <li>• Project is too cold or not unfavourable.</li> <li>• Participants do not quite understand about the project, especially in relation to the goals, potential projects in their lives, and what should be done to achieve those goals.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Environment Community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History of the failure of previous projects</li> <li>• The problem of local leadership</li> <li>• Attitude is less concerned with the development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents take caution and keep a sense of disbelief when the connection with the outside world but in any situation whatsoever, including in the course of development.</li> <li>• There was speculation that the new projects will not yield results.</li> <li>• Residents do not receive appropriate encouragement from leaders to participate in the project.</li> <li>• Implementation of the project is not getting proper participation.</li> </ul>

## CONCLUSION

There has been a lot of development programs and projects implemented in order to achieve the goal of socio-economic upliftment of Semaq Beri tribe in Sungai Berua village, but the aim has not been achieved. Although local residents indicated they need development, but it did not guarantee the success of development projects. In contrast, some interrelated problems caused development projects fail. The failure of the development should become a reference to the various parties for the implementation of development projects next to the Orang Asli. Among other things, comprehensive planning is required in the implementation of such projects. Some problems were encountered, leading to the failure of the project, therefore, they should be evaluated thoroughly, ensuring that similar problems do not recur.

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