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Impacts of Resettlements on Orang Asli Community in Sungai Berua, Hulu Terengganu, Malaysia

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Abstract

Various studies on Orang Asli (indigenous people) of Malaysia found that the development and resettlements have benefited them while others found that there are many negative consequences to the socio-economy and socio-cultural of Orang Asli. The inundation of the land to create vast lakes for Kenyir Hydro electric Dam had forced the government to resettle the Orang Asli into a new settlement in 1977, called Sungai Berua. This paper evaluates the impacts of this resettlement to the Orang Asli 40 years later. Findings show that after initial problems in the first decade, the Orang Asli are now very satisfied in their new community, especially in terms of physical conditions and improved income.

Keywords: Orang Asli; Indigenous People; Resettlement; Socio-economic condition

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1.0 Introduction

The Orang Asli, literally means "original people," are the indigenous minority of Peninsular Malaysia. Due to their remote village locations, the Orang Asli tend to lag behind other ethnic groups in Peninsular Malaysia in terms of physical and socio-economic development. While Malaysia is considered to be an upper middle-income nation, most of Orang Asli are classified as extremely poor. Their settlements tend to consist of basic wooden houses which are of substandard quality compared to average Malaysian houses. In addition, they lack access to quality healthcare, education and basic amenities which most Malaysian take for granted.

Due to this, the Malaysian government has embarked on various programs to improve the livelihood of the Orang Asli and perhaps to try to assimilate them into the mainstream society of Malaysia. The resettlement of Orang Asli in a new location (ex-situ development) and the redevelopment of Orang Asli settlements (in-situ) are the two main strategies related to the improvement programs for Orang Asli. The main aim of these programs is to provide better government services especially health and education, to the Orang Asli and to improve their socio-economic conditions. Several studies have been done to evaluate the socio-economic conditions of the Orang Asli in their new settlements (see for example Jamalunlaili Abdullah et al., 2015; Jamalunlaili et al., 2016; and Jamalunlaili et al., 2017). While some have found positive socio-economic developments for certain Orang Asli groups, others have found that certain segments of the population are unable to cope with the new environment and have fared worse off.

This paper analyses one such program; specifically, the redevelopment of Orang Asli settlement in Sungai Berua, Hulu Terengganu, Malaysia. The aim is to analyze the physical patterns and socio-economic changes of Orang Asli before and after resettlement, and to provide recommendations for physical and socio economic development of Orang Asli.

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2.0 Literature Review

Orang Asli are the aborigines of the Malay Peninsula who are believed to have settled in as early as 11,000 BC (Bellwood, 1997). However, they are a very small minority of the population, accounting for 149,723 of the total population of 30 million people in Malaysia (JHEOA, 2006 cited by Jamalunlaili, 2015). The three main groups of Orang Asli (Aboriginal) in Malaysia are Negrito, Senoi and Malay Proto which comprise of 18 tribes. They tend to live in the interior of the peninsular, shying away from the rest of the population.

Resettlement or Regrouping of Orang Asli is a strategy embarked by the government since the early 1980s. Its main goal is to integrate indigenous people into mainstream Malaysian national community and improving their living standards. Through this program, it is envisaged that health, education and other socio-economic services for Orang Asli can be delivered more effectively and they can assimilate into the mainstream community more easily (Othman et al. 2012; Rusaslina Idrus, 2011).

Regrouping plan is adapted from Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) using the concept of in-situ development (Ibrahim Ngah, 2010). Resettling the Orang Asli into a smaller area would facilitate construction of infrastructure and save development cost while allowing them to receive services and development more easily.

In Malaysia, various studies have looked at Orang Asli resettlement schemes throughout the country. Lim (1997) judged that regroupment schemes in Bukit Serok involving 171 Jakun families and Keratong, 3 in Pahang involving 27 Jakun families were a success. He attributed the success to factors including Orang Asli's participation in the scheme on own accord, better housing and basic facilities, income from permanent agriculture, wage earning and ability to continue collecting forest produce. The resettled Orang Asli also became more confident and independent than before.

On the other hand, Forum Asia contends that resettlement programs of Orang Asli have led to increased poverty, malnutrition, a higher mortality rate and a general deterioration of the health of villagers. They also have negative impacts to the environment, negating the aim of conservation initially envisaged (Ab Hadi, Roddin, Razzaq, Mustafa & Baser, 2013). Jamalunlaili and Mohammad Al-Aiman (2015) find that almost half of the Orang Asli resettled and surveyed in Bukit Lanjan prefer to move out of the new modern settlement despite given comfortable bungalows. Some of the houses were found to be abandoned.

The above analysis of the literature shows that resettlement of Orang Asli into various new planned developments have brought mixed results. For some, modernization and development have resulted in socio-economic advancement and lower incidence of poverty among the settlers. Site selection, greater economic opportunities and involvement of participants in decision-making are some of the contributing factors. For others, resettlements have brought misery and a lower standard of living especially if they are unable to cope with the new environment in the settlements.

3.0 Study Area

Orang Asli Sungai Berua village is located in the rural areas of Hulu Terengganu district and close to Lake Kenyir, Peninsular Malaysia. The village was opened in November 1977. Their old village was inundated by the Kenyir Dam. The closes town is Kuala Berang. The population comprised of 104 families of which more than 90 percent are from the Semoq Beri tribe.

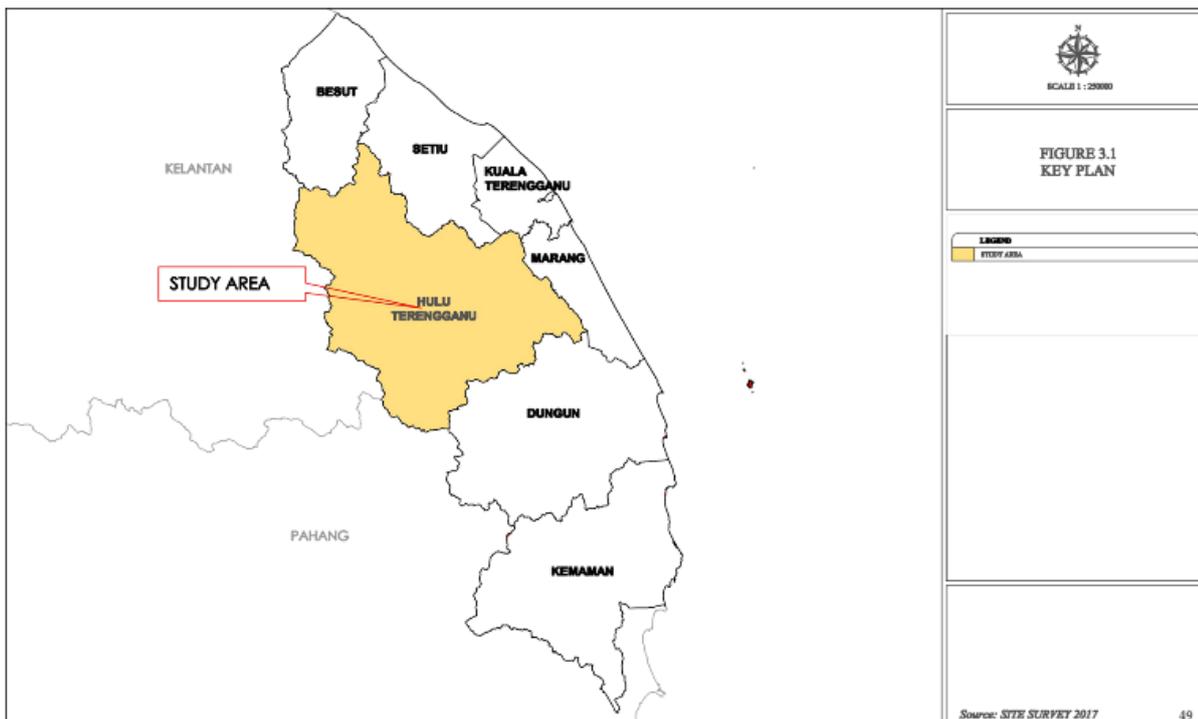


Figure 1. Study area

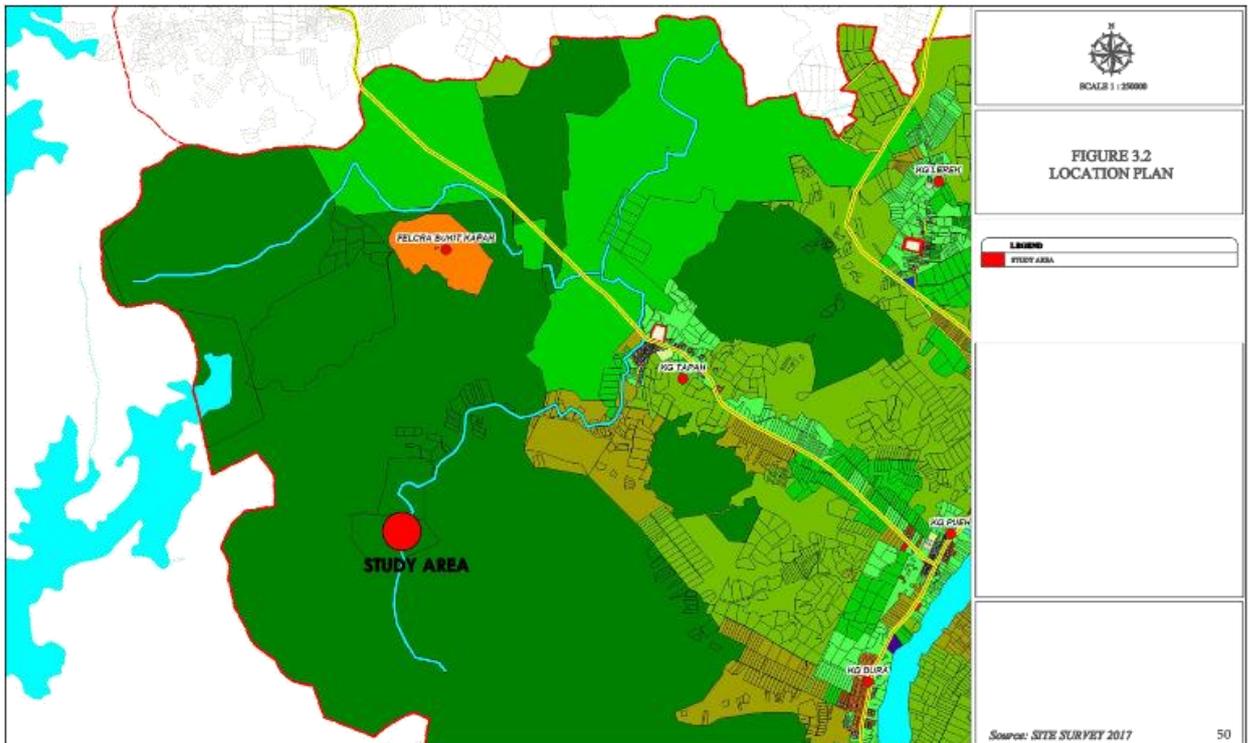


Figure 2. Location area

4.0 Methodology

The methodology of this research included observation on the socio-economic and physical condition of the study area, in-depth interview with Orang Asli head, Tok Batin, a questionnaire survey on socio-economic and their level of satisfaction before and after resettlement. A Likert scale questionnaire from 1 to 5 in which 1 is for very dissatisfied and 5 is for very satisfied was also employed. This research was conducted in October and December 2017. In conducting this research, the total sample was 50% of all households participated by heads of household in the research area which involves 50 houses. The data collected were analyzed using two main techniques, namely descriptive and comparative analyses of their conditions before and after the resettlement. The scope of analysis are the physical characteristics of the settlement and the socio-economic conditions of the Orang Asli inhabitants. An interview was also conducted with Tok Batin Ali Bin Ganjung to gain as much as possible basic information about Orang Asli community in Sungai Berua, Hulu Terengganu because there is no written documentation regarding the history and background of the community. Besides that, the purpose of the interview is to find out the views towards the Resettlement Program.

5.0 Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Observation

The observation is focused on their living condition after the Resettlement Program was implemented. Findings on the physical condition have been analyzed through observations made in the study area (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Site plan

The surroundings support the study area in terms of development, whether in physical, social, economic as well as environmental. Due to that, the surrounding area taken is estimated to be around 2 kilometer radius. There is a freshwater farming area located near the Orang Asli settlement. The farming area is Sungai Como which is located in Tasik Kenyir area. Figure 4 below shows the freshwater farming area which is a governmental effort to provide Orang Asli people with opportunities to earn income.



Figure 4: Aquaculture Project, in Sungai Chomo, Tasik Kenyir

There is a palm oil plantation near the road leading to the Orang Asli settlement owned by FELCRA. Revenue from the palm oil is used to provide additional income to the Orang Asli. Aside from that, there are two Malay villages 900 meters away from the Orang Asli settlement which are Kampung Tapah and Kampung Felcra Bukit Kapah. Shops in these Malay villages allow Orang Asli to fulfill their basic daily needs.

5.2 Demography

Table 1 below shows the gender and age composition among the respondents of the survey. The gender of the respondents in this study leaned more towards the male respondents. The questionnaire also showed that most respondents that participated in the interview were of the age range of 38 to 48 years old.

Table 1. Gender and Age of Respondents

Gender	Age						Total	Percentage (%)
	<5	6-15	16-26	27-37	38-48	>49		
Male	-	-	3	17	21	9	41	82
Female	-	-	-	2	5	2	9	18
Total	-	-	3	19	26	11	50	100

Based on Table 2 below, most of the respondents in the research area consisted of Semoq Beri with 90% while the other 10% are from the Batiq ethnic group. Meanwhile, in the religious belief aspects, all the respondents are Muslims. From the interview, they have converted to Islam from Animism in 2010.

Table 2: Religion of Respondents

Religion	Ethnic			
	Malay	Semoq beri	Batiq	Other
Islam	0	45	5	0
Christian	0	0	0	0
Animism	0	0	0	0
Total		50		

Gender ratio for the people in the study area is nearly balanced with a ratio of 95 men to 100 women.

Table 3: Structure and Gender Ratio

Study Area	Male	%	Female	%	Sex Ratio
Resettlement in Sungai Berua	129	52	136	48	95

Table 4 below shows that the average size of households in the Orang Asli community is 5.3 person per house which is higher than national average of 4.5 persons per house. The larger household size is due to a high number of children and the inhabitants of the house being multi-generations. A few houses consisted of 3 families which is rather crowded for a three-bedroom house. This is because most of the youngsters who are married still live in the same house with their parents. They have no space or money to build other houses or to add more rooms. Based on Table 4 the number of married people are about the same as the singles. The Orang Asli tend to get married at an early age.

Table 4: Age Group and Marital Status

Age	Marital Status			Total
	Single	Married	Divorced	
Below 5 years old	22	0	0	22
6-15 years old	66	2	0	68
16-26 years old	33	30	0	63
27-37 years old	11	41	2	54
38-48 years old	1	35	5	41
>49 years old	0	13	4	17
Total	133	121	11	265

Table 5: Education Level of Orang Asli

Gender	Education Level						Total	(%)
	Kinder- garten	Primary	Secondary	University	Never Attend School	Still School		
<5	-	-	-	-	13	9	22	8.3
6-15	5	19	8	-	4	32	68	25.7
16-26	16	25	6	-	9	7	63	23.8
27-37	14	23	-	-	17	-	54	20.4
38-48	2	-	-	-	39	-	41	15.5
>49	-	-	-	-	17	-	17	6.4
Total	37	67	14	0	99	48	265	100
(%)	14	25.2	5.3	0	37.4	18.1		

Table 5 shows that the Orang Asli community's level of education is very low. A high percentage of 37.4% consists of residents who never attended school. Older generation did not get formal education which was too far from their original settlement. Meanwhile, 25.2% of the respondents consist of those who have completed primary school education. The availability of a primary school in the settlement allows these children to receive a basic education. However, the number who attended secondary school is rather low due to high drop

outs of Orang Asli school children. This is partly due to the fact that in secondary school these Orang Asli students have to mix with students from other communities in a school located away from their community. Due to their shy and inferiority complex nature, they have difficulty adjusting to the new situation. The government tries hard to reduce the dropout rate by providing fees, food and school allowance.

Table 6 shows the employment of residents in the research area. 82 percent of respondents are involved in traditional trades of farming, animals hunting, searching for forest resources, and fishing. The lack of education and the location of their settlement in the rural area play a big role in influencing them to continue with the traditional agriculture and hunting and gathering activities. The existence of FELCRA palm oil plantation near their settlement has allowed some of them to venture into commercial crop production which helps to improve their economic condition.

Table 6: Type of Occupation of Respondent

Type of Occupation	Number	Percentage (%)
Felcra(Settlers)	9	18
Hunting Forest	41	82
Total	50	100

In terms of income as shown in Table 7, 92% households earn monthly income of RM581-RM870 per month. This is below the poverty level. The fact that most of them are involve in hunting and gathering, farming, and breeding of livestock in small scale have caused them to survive in low income. Based on the interview conducted with the community, the Orang Asli cited that forest resources currently are low in stock due to competition with forest invaders from came illegally from outside the country to look for cengal and agar woods. This has forced the Orang Asli to seek forest resources in faraway places such as in Dungun and Setiu to support their income. However, the income from the palm oil plantation has helped to increase their monthly income.

Table 7. Monthly Income of Residence

Income	Number of Family	Percentage
<RM580	2	4
RM581-RM870	46	92
>RM870	2	4
Total	50	100

5.3 Satisfaction towards Physical Environment

Various components of physical environment are evaluated in the research. In the assessment of housing (Figures 5(a) and 5(b)), the components assessed are housing arrangement, home space for family activities, comfort, location and suitability. Based on the tables, the overall change from before and after the resettlement shows that there is a significant increase of satisfaction. The percentage significantly increased in terms of position and suitability. Even though the community were initially wary about the resettlement provided by the government, this changed after 10 years of living in the resettlement as they were able to fit in and adjust accordingly. Nevertheless, the community still possesses the original settlement located in forests close to the new settlement on which they built huts in order to keep old traditions alive.

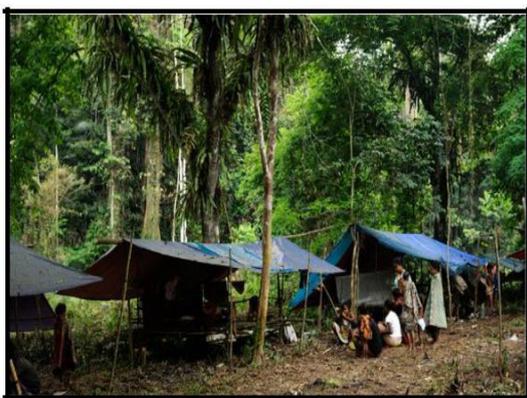


Figure 5 (a). Orang Asli Huts near the Forest



Figure 5 (b). Provision of Housing by the Government

Table 8. Overall Satisfaction Level of Housing Aspect

Aspect	Mean		Satisfaction Scale
	Before Resettlement	After Resettlement	
Housing	1.8	4.7	From Very
Arrangement			Unsatisfied
Home Space for			to Very Satisfied
Family	1.8	4.68	From Very
Activities			Unsatisfied
Position and	1.8	4.64	to Very Satisfied
Suitability			From Very
Average Mean	1.8	4.67	Unsatisfied
			to Very Satisfied

Table 9 explains the satisfaction of residents before and after resettlement. Most of the Orang Asli community (70 percent) are very satisfied with the housing arrangement of the settlement that has been provided by the government. The systematic arrangement of the resettlement area allows them to communicate with each other easier as the distance between each house is not very far compared to

before the resettlement where they have to live in a nomad way and scattered around. The housing arrangements in the new settlement follows a linear pattern.

Table 9: Satisfaction Level of Housing Arrangement

Frequency	Housing Arrangement			
	Before Resettlement	Percentage	After Resettlement	Percentage
Very Unsatisfied	13		26	0
Unsatisfied	34		68	0
Moderate	3		6	0
Satisfied	0		0	15
Very Satisfied	0		0	35
Total	50		100	50
Average Mean			1.8	4.7

Table 10 shows the community's level of satisfaction towards the home space for family activities. It shows that 72% of the people in the community are very satisfied with the home space for family activities. Based on an interview with the community, the home space in their previous settlement were small and uncomfortable, especially with the high number of people in the households. Moreover, most of the people stated that they lived in huts before the resettlement and did not own a comfortable home space.

The position of the housing area also plays an important role in terms of suitability of the resettlement that was built by the government. Based on the Likert scale analysis, most of the people in the community are very satisfied with the position of the housing area after the resettlement with a mean of 4.64 mean as compared to 1.8 before the resettlement.

The commercial and services analysis is conducted in order to assess the provision of commercial and services in the new settlement. It is found that in terms of location and placement of commercial area and accessibility to the market, the Orang Asli indicated that they are very satisfied in the new resettlement area. The commercial and market area is located in the neighboring Malay village which is only 10 minutes away by motorcycle.

Table 10. Satisfaction Level of Home Space for Family Activities

Frequency	Home Space for Family Activities			
	Before Resettlement	Percentage	After Resettlement	Percentage
Very Unsatisfied	13	26	0	0
Unsatisfied	34	68	0	0
Moderate	3	6	1	2
Satisfied	0	0	13	26
Very Satisfied	0	0	36	72
Total	50	100	50	100
Average Mean	1.8		4.68	

Table 11. Satisfaction Level of the Position and Suitability of Housing

Frequency	Position and Suitability			
	Before Resettlement	Percentage	After Resettlement	Percentage
Very Unsatisfied	14	28	0	0
Unsatisfied	32	64	0	0
Moderate	4	8	1	2
Satisfied	0	0	16	32
Very Satisfied	0	0	33	66
Total	50	100	50	100
Average Mean	1.8		4.64	

Table 12. Overall Satisfaction Level of Commercial and Services

Aspect	Mean		Satisfaction Scale
	Before Resettlement	After Resettlement	
Location and Placement of Commercial	2.38	4.54	From Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied
Accessibility to Market	2.82	4.86	From Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied
Average Mean	2.58	4.65	From Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied

The respondents were asked about their satisfaction level of public facilities. Generally, they have indicated that their levels of satisfaction have increased from unsatisfied to very satisfied after moving into the new settlement in all six components of public facilities. These include placement of public facilities, recreational area, educational, religious, security and health facilities as shown in Table 13.

Table 13. Satisfaction Level of Public Facilities

Aspect	Mean		Satisfaction Scale
	Before	After	
	Resettlement	Resettlement	
Placement of Public Facilities	1.84	4.86	From Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied
The Level Of Provision Of Recreational Area Provided	1.8	4.82	From Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied
Education Facilities	1.82	4.86	From Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied
Religious Facilities	1.8	4.88	From Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied
Security Facilities	1.8	4.42	From Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied
Health Facilities	1.96	4.78	From Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied
Average mean	2.33	4.77	From Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied

The Orang Asli were generally very satisfied with most of the infrastructure and utilities provided for their community (Table 14). These include the provision of water and electricity supplies, road facilities, accessibility and network communication. For these, their satisfaction levels have improved from very unsatisfied to very satisfied. However, in terms of provision of dumps and services of garbage collection, the Orang Asli are still very unsatisfied because these services are not provided due to their very remote location.

Through the survey, the people of the community have taken the initiative to burn the waste instead. Most of them dispose their waste on the nearby rivers. The act of disposing the waste on the nearby rivers has caused water pollution, thus affecting the villagers of the nearby Malay village. The disposal of used diapers onto the river has sparked the anger of the nearby villagers as the flow of the river is contaminated with the used diapers. Other than that, the waste that is accumulated near the river banks can lead to unwanted diseases. In a nutshell, it can be concluded that the overall infrastructural development that is implemented in the research area does not cover every aspect. Nevertheless, basic necessities such as water supply and electrical supply have been provided by the government in order to help the people in the Orang Asli community in terms of improving their quality of life in which basic needs are essential.

5.4 Satisfaction towards Socio-Economic

Based on Table 15, most the Orang Asli community are satisfied with the social-economic programs that are held with an average of score of 3.32 which is higher than the score of 2.15 before the resettlement. The significant improvement is in terms of employment, income and standard of living. The cultivation of palm oil through FELCRA has provided employment to them, in addition to a steady income through the cash crop. In addition, the ability to own their own houses provided by the government have increased their standard of living. However, improvement in educational status is rather marginal due to the fact that many Orang Asli children tend to drop out in the secondary school, retaining only basic education at primary school level.

It should be noted that the Orang Asli of Sungai Berua were relocated to the new settlement in 1977. An interview with 10 longtime residents indicated that during the first decade the Orang Asli were not happy with their new settlement. They had difficulty adjusting to life in a new and modern setting. This continued until the year 1990.

However, in mid 1990s, their satisfaction level improved tremendously due to the cultivation of palm oil crop for their community which provided them with steady income. From a satisfaction level of 2 (unsatisfied) through 1990, the satisfaction level had increased to 4.0 (satisfied) in the 1990s and continues to the present.

Table 14. Overall Level of Infrastructure and Utilities

Aspect	Mean		Satisfaction Scale
	Before Resettlement	After Resettlement	
Water Supply	1.74	4.78	From Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied
Electric Supply	1.7	4.78	From Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied
Road Facilities	2.52	4.46	From Unsatisfied to Satisfied
Accessibility	2.56	4.92	From Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied
Network Communication	1.74	4.7	From Unsatisfied to Very Satisfied
Provision of Dumps	1.02	1.7	From Very Unsatisfied to Unsatisfied
Services of garbage collection	1.02	1.46	No Change
Average mean	1.76	3.82	From Unsatisfied to Satisfied

Table 15. Overall Satisfaction Level of Socio-Economic

Aspect	Mean		Satisfaction Scale
	Before Resettlement	After Resettlement	
Employment	2.58	3.78	From Unsatisfied to Satisfied
Monthly Income	2.58	3.78	From Unsatisfied to Satisfied
Educational status	1.46	2.6	From Very Unsatisfied to Unsatisfied
Standard of Living	2.0	3.14	From Unsatisfied to Satisfied
Average mean	2.15	3.32	From Unsatisfied to Satisfied

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper has highlighted the positive impacts of the redevelopment of Orang Asli settlement in Sungai Berua, Hulu Terengganu. It was found that the new settlement provides basic physical and infrastructure facilities that have improved the standard of living of the Orang Asli communities. This is rather different compared to resettlements programs of Orang Asli in other areas. Perhaps this is due to the fact that these Orang Asli were resettled not very far from their original settlement which was inundated, thus providing continuity and reducing abrupt disruption in their life. In addition, the cultivation of palm oil crop by FRELCRA has improved their sources of income. It

was found that the biggest improvements in terms of satisfaction are in terms of housing, followed by commercial and services, and public facilities. There were some rather significant improvements in infrastructure and socio-economic conditions as well.

Despite the marked improvements in their level of satisfaction and higher standard of living, the research proposes some recommendations to improve their standard of living. For physical development, it is recommended that road condition in the community be improved due to damaged and potholes roads. In addition, the two rivers that flow near the settlement needs to be cleaned up of rubbish and waste. Most importantly, housing for newly married couples who still live with their parents should be provided in the community.

In terms of socio-economy and socio cultural, perhaps the establishment of Orang Asli Island in Tasik Kenyir may bring tourists to experience their unique lifestyle. This is feasible since the settlement of these Orang Asli is close to Tasik Kenyir. To improve the socio-economic condition, it is recommended that free tuition classes for Orang Asli children and skills trainings for school leavers be provided. This will hopefully improve their standard of living significantly.

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