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The Effectiveness of Resettlement of Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia

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Abstract

The Orang Asli may be considered the most marginalized ethnic group in Malaysia. This is due to their low education attainment, heavy dependence on subsistence agriculture and their locations in the interior of the country. This paper presents the preliminary descriptive comparisons of the redevelopment programs initiated by the government. The data are based on the works that have been done by the authors on some resettlement cases in Peninsular Malaysia. It summarizes those works to conclude the most effective program among the four studies done.

Keywords: Orang Asli; marginalization; resettlement program; PROSDET Pantos; Bukit Lanjan; Ulu Kluang; Sungai Berua; Malaysia

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1.0 Introduction

The Orang Asli, literally means “original people”, are the indigenous minority of Peninsular Malaysia. Despite its small number, 0.6% of the total Malaysian population, they have been living in the country for hundreds of years. Due to their almost dependence on agriculture and forests produce, they tend to be living within or adjacent to Malaysian tropical rainforest, in the remote area of the Peninsular Malaysia, away from the major human settlements. Thus, they are lag behind other ethnic's groups in Peninsular Malaysia regarding physical and socio-economic growth. While Malaysia is considered as an upper middle-income nation, the Orang Asli are classified very poorly. Due to this situation, the Malaysian government has initiated various programs to improve their well-being, thus integrate them into the mainstream Malaysian society. The program would group and resettle the scattered Orang Asli into a planned settlement whereby each family was provided with a free house as well as some land for cultivation. The aims for the resettlement programs remain the same; to provide better accessibility to the community, to improve their access to health and education facilities and services, and to improve their socio-economic conditions (Idrus, 2011).

2.0 Literature Review

Semang (Negrito), Senoi and Proto Malay (Aboriginal Malay) are among the main tribal groups of Orang Asli in Malaysia. Different language, ethnic, social organization pattern and mode of livelihood differentiate the Orang Asli. Orang Laut, Orang Seletar and Mah Meri who live close to the coast are mainly fishermen while Temuan, Jakun and Semai sub-ethnic groups have taken to permanent agriculture. The Temuan is the third largest of the nineteen sub-ethnic groups and are physically indistinguishable from Malays and have been much influenced by the culture of the Malay with whom they frequently are in contact (JAKOA, 2013).

Pahang state had the most number of Orang Asli at 63,174 followed by Perak (51,585), Kelantan (13,123), Selangor (10,399), Johor (10,257) and Negeri Sembilan (9,502). Most of them currently live in the interior of the Peninsular, either in traditional villages or in

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planned settlements built by the government. Almost all of them are engaged in agriculture activities or hunting and gathering forest product (JAKOA, 2013).

Since the early 1980s, The Malaysian government has embarked on resettlement or redevelopment of Orang Asli. Its primary goal is to integrate indigenous people into the mainstream Malaysian national community. Three major development programs were established; structured settlements program, economic development, and social development (Redzuan 2008). Regrouping plan is adapted from the 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 develop more efficiently.

There are various studies on the impacts of resettlement of indigenous community in other countries around the world. Resettlement of the highlander H'mong tribe in Luang Prabang, Laos has led to land conflict and land dispute with Khmu community which was already there as well as loss of bio-cultural diversity and traditional knowledge (SPERI 2012). In Australia, some of the impacts of resettlement include low self-esteem, poverty, homelessness, a poor sense of emotional dependency, suicide, high levels of family violence, and substance abuse (Memmott, 2000). In Phulbari, Bangladesh, key issues related to resettlement raised by the indigenous community includes employment opportunities, infrastructure and services, religious structures, sites and graves and community relations (Geerds, 2006).

In Malaysia, 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 participated in the scheme on own accord, better housing, and basic facilities, income from permanent agriculture and wage earning and ability to continue collecting forest produce. The resettled Orang Asli also became more confident and independent than before. A noticeable impact of re-groupment and resettlement of Orang Asli is the lessening linkage between the community and the natural forest environment (Lim, 2013).

3.0 Methodology

The commercial and services analysis is conducted to assess the current economic position of the Orang Asli community in the research areas. The purpose of this analysis is to present the effectiveness of the resettlement programs that have been implemented by the government. The main government's objective for the Orang Asli community resettlement program is to improve their life economically with multitudes of programs such as economic growth program, course development program, entrepreneurial mentors program, grocery area development program and income generation program.

The first study area examines the living conditions of The Desa Temuan resettlement village at Bukit Lanjan, Selangor, Malaysia. It is unique due to its location in an urban setting. Ninety-nine households were interviewed during the study period. The second study area consists of 183 Orang Asli household who were resettled at Program Bersepadu Daerah Terpencil (PROSDET), Pantos in Kuala Medang, Pahang. The third study area was conducted at the Orang Asli settlement in Ulu Kluang Village, Rawang. Seventy-three out of 92 households were interviewed during the study period. The fourth study area evaluates the impacts of the Orang Asli after 40 years of their resettlements called Sungai Berua, Hulu Trengganu, Trengganu. This is due to the inundation of the land to create vast lakes, had forced the government to resettle the Orang Asli into a new settlement.

The data are based on the findings of four redevelopment programs which covered:

- Site Visits
- Focus Group Discussion (FGD)
- Observation
- Fieldwork

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Resettlement program at Bukit Lanjan, Rawang, Selangor

A survey revealed that out of the 147 bungalows given, only 129 are occupied of which 15 are rented out to non-Orang Asli. Fifteen houses are vacant while a further five are used as kindergarten (Figure 1).

A high number of vacant houses is surprising considering that landed properties are very much sought after in the area. It was found that occupants of the vacant houses feel uncomfortable living in the modern environment and have moved out to live with other Orang Asli tribes in Gombak and Sungai Buloh. Meanwhile, all 130 apartment units are occupied with the majority of them being non-Orang Asli renters. It was also found that the museum no longer functions as an information centre while one shop lot is vacant. While the neighbourhood still looks decent, there was evidence that non-Orang Asli has moved into the development built exclusively for this tribe.

Only one-third of respondents feel comfortable with the new settlement; a majority would rather live in the original place. This is not surprising since these respondents, who are heads of households are used to the traditional lifestyle, and it was somewhat challenging to cope with a new and modern settlement. Another reason is the lack of land and space for them to cultivate their agriculture. About 9 percent, however, feel the settlement is comfortable but lack cultural elements in the design.

In terms of standard of living, the highest percentage (38 percent) feel that theirs has gotten worse while 33 percent feels that theirs have improved. Another 20 percent indicate their standard of living remains the same. Those who feel that life seems to be worse think it may be due to lack of education and a good paying job, they are unable to support their families in high-cost urban areas. Although 40

percent of respondents indicate they prefer to move out, the majority would stay in the current settlement due to the above reasons. Thus, there is a need to ensure that efforts are undertaken to ensure better living conditions for them. Results seem to indicate that the Orang Asli have not been able to capitalize on this assistance perhaps due to the high cost of living.

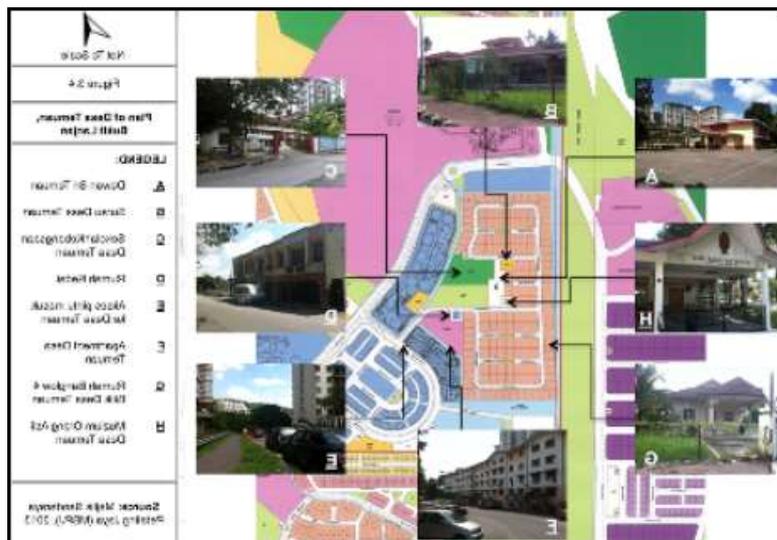


Figure 1. Housing arrangement layout of Desa Temuan resettlement area

4.2 Resettlement program at PROSDET Pantos, Pahang

The resettled Orang Asli previously lived in the old settlement villages located upstream of Telom River, Pahang and, and farming and hunting has been their daily activities and source of income. They lived in individual houses within their roaming area. At PROSDET Pantos, they are resettled in brick detached houses provided free by the government. However, a number of married Orang Asli continues to stay in their traditional villages due to insufficient quantity of houses built. A few families who were resettled have moved back to their traditional villages due to the lack of economic activities. In some cases, only families with school-going children stay there because of the school is located nearby. Some of the families allow their older children to take care of the younger ones while they moved back to their up streams villages to tend to their orchards and daily activities.

They are aware of the resettlement objectives but are reluctant to leave the traditional houses and daily economic activity possibly due to their attachments to the traditional land they had been resettled for generations. Sixty-eight out of 135 respondents (50.4%) were satisfied, and 61 out of 135 respondents (45.2%) were not satisfied with the resettlement.

Multiple reasons were given and the highest (21.1%) of the respondents were not happy and dissatisfied with the resettlement provided because they claimed to be unable to cultivate the land as the soil is not suitable for cultivation or even for the purpose of gardening. The resettlement is also not suitable for large families which is rather a norm in Orang Asli community, and it is evidenced where 19.9% acknowledged that they were not comfortable staying at the resettlement house. The third main reason is they lost their source of income from farming. Other reasons are the lack of infrastructure provided in the resettlement area. A small percentage claimed that it is due to the non-resemblance and reflection of the culture and heritage of Orang Asli and depriving them of their hunting activities.

The findings also reveal that 28.8% of the respondents reflected their hope and aspiration for a better quality of life and ability to secure a better and higher living status derived from any development project. They envisage the younger generation to secure a higher level of education besides being given opportunities to acquire tertiary education. Only a small number (6.8%) of the respondents did not envision any hope or aspiration from the development.

4.3 Redevelopment program at Ulu Kluang Village, Rawang, Selangor

A comparative analysis of before and after redevelopment are divided into physical and socio-economic developments. Respondents were given a 5 point Likert scale, ranging from very unsatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). Overall, their satisfaction had increased from unsatisfied (mean of 2.1) to satisfied (3.86). Three of the four aspects of housing showed a significant increase, especially housing arrangement and interior comfort. This is perhaps due to the arrangement of the new houses that follow proper housing layouts and each house located next to the road, allowing better accessibilities to occupants. Additionally, being made of bricks with a proper plumbing system, gave better protection from adverse weather conditions and better living for them. On the other hand, they were unsatisfied about the position and suitability (2.26), perhaps because they prefer their houses to face a certain direction and for the desire to have much larger compounds.

Figures 2a and 2b show the layout of the housing arrangement before and after redevelopment. There are no other amenities such as commercial, praying area, kindergarten and public hall for the whole community, in addition to open space for sports.

Overall, the finding indicates that the Orang Asli's satisfaction has increased from very unsatisfied (slightly above 1) to very satisfied (almost 5). For the commercial and services, and infrastructure and utilities specifically, this may be due to the fact that there were no such amenities provided before the redevelopment has taken place. However, they are unhappy due to no waste facilities provided. The

provision of public facilities has improved the respondent's satisfaction tremendously. This is expected since these provisions too were not found in the settlement before its redevelopment.

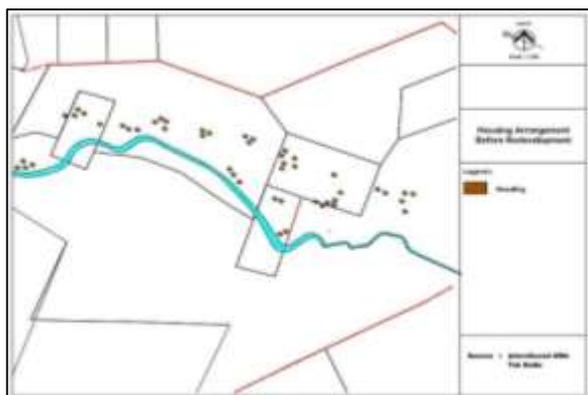


Figure 2a shows the layout arrangement before resettlement

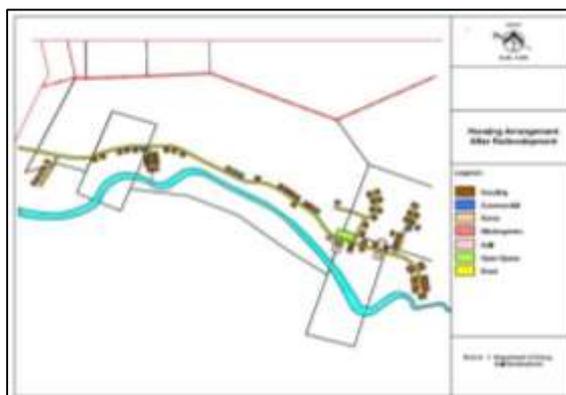


Figure 2b shows the layout arrangement after resettlement

4.4 Resettlement program at Sungai Berua, Hulu Terengganu, Terengganu

The overall changes from before and after the resettlement show that there is a significant increase in terms of position and suitability. Even though the community are initially wary about the resettlement provided by the government, this change after ten years of living in the resettlement as they are able to fit in and be able to show a positive attitude. Nevertheless, the community still possesses the original settlement in which they build huts in order to keep old traditions alive which is located in the forest area close to the resettlement area.

Most of them (70%) are very satisfied with the housing arrangement of the settlement. The systematic arrangement of the resettlement area allows them to communicate with each other easier as the distance between each house is not too far from each other as compared to before the resettlement where they have to live in a nomad way and scatter all around. The position of the housing area also plays a vital role in terms of the suitability of the resettlement. It shows that 72% are very satisfied with the position of the housing area after the resettlement with an average of 4.64 means as compared to before the resettlement. Based on the interview with the community, the home space in their previous settlement is small and uncomfortable, especially with the 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. However, a few respondents are not satisfied in home space for the families in resettlement consist of an elderly generation because that still running this activity such as gardening and rearing farm animals.



Figure 3: Housing arrangement layout after redevelopment program

The average mean shows an increase from 2.58 to 4.65. This is because the resettlement program brings a good impact. Nevertheless, through observation and interview with the community, the commercial and services provided do not likely fit with the norm of traditional lifestyle. Thus, the implementation of the economic growth program such as the market is very much needed. They used to easily get supplies at the neighboring area in which the distance does not reach 10 minutes as compared to the new distance after the resettlement.

However, this does not seem to give a problem to them. The modes of transportation and good accessibility enable them to commute easily. This, in turn, will bring a positive impact in terms of the relationship with the people outside the redevelopment area as well as enables them to blend with other population. Surprisingly, before the resettlement program most of them acquire their basic consume from fishing and farming. Unfortunately, most of the fishing area is now polluted with waste materials from the palm oil factory which

causes river pollution. Due to that, many of them prefer to acquire raw necessities from nearby stores. So, good market accessibility allows them to acquire their basic necessities easily.

Public facilities are considered as one of the priorities in the resettlement program in which the purpose is to them to be able to use public facilities, thus improve their quality of life. Overall, they rate their level of satisfaction of the public facilities at an average of 4.77, which is a significant increase of about 2.44 after the resettlement. Most of the public facilities provided are able to satisfy them as well as fits the Malaysian standards. As an example, from the religious aspect, it fulfils the benchmark that represents 220 Muslim families, in which 550 people in the community are Muslim. In term of secondary school and, health and safety services, most of the people in the community use the current services nearby in which the distance is only 2 kilometres away from their settlement.

The finding shows the level of satisfaction of the Orang Asli which is very satisfied with a min average of 4.77, an increase of 2.44. It is seen that the infrastructural developments provided in the redevelopment area follow the Malaysian standard. Nevertheless, in term of provision of waste disposal and waste collection services, it is still far from the standards (mean is 1.02). They burn the waste instead. Some are disposed into the nearby rivers causing water pollution, thus affecting the nearby village especially disposal of used diapers into the river has sparked the anger of the nearby villagers. In a nutshell, it can be concluded that the overall infrastructural development that has been implemented does not cover every aspect. Nevertheless, basic necessities such as water supply and electrical supply have helped to improve their quality of life.

Socio-economic achievement shows an increase of 1.7. This means that the programs help them owning their transportation and this proves that high chances of job opportunity and a stable monthly income, leading to allowing them to own property and improve their economic status.

5.0 Conclusion

The findings show 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.

In terms of the resettlement program at Bukit Lanjan, Selangor, it is found that an overwhelming majority feel socio-economics programs and help from the government are very much needed. To them, an educational program and skills training is of the utmost importance. Through the survey and after some interviews with government officers it is proposed that programs encompassing socio-economy, education, health, and infrastructure elements be implemented in the resettlement program. This includes advancement of human capital development through better education, skills training and entrepreneurship, increasing health awareness, improvement of facilities and more effective JAKOA, a more effective public-private partnership to help this community can be adopted and implemented.

As for the resettlement program for PROSDET Pantos, nearly half of them are not satisfied with the new living conditions. Their main concern is the loss of income from their daily activities like farming, hunting and fishing. Although they were given detached houses and amenities such as school, futsal court and a mosque, many of the Orang Asli are still longing for their old villages - the freedom of the traditional lifestyle. Although they were provided with palm oil cultivated land, the management of the palm oil is carried out by RISDA, a government agriculture agency. Without a stronger sense of belonging it could not be a settlement that the Orang Asli can proudly call home.

As for redevelopment program at Ulu Kluang Village, it seems that compared to the other Orang Asli communities especially those in very rural areas, they seem to have embraced the improvements to their community much more positively. The redevelopment is done in-situ, reducing the negative impacts of resettlement which happened to many resettled communities. Improved accessibility has also made it easier for them to participate in socio-economic activities within the area. They now find it easier to go to work and earn a better living.

Sungai Berua, redevelopment program has highlighted the most positive impacts of the redevelopment scheme for the Orang Asli community. Perhaps, similar to the Ulu Klung Village project, this is because Orang Asli was not moved to new locations, thus providing continuity in their life.

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