

Enhancing Housing Awareness and Knowledge: The Malaysia Indigenous Community Outreach Project

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ABSTRACT: This research examines the housing challenges faced by the Indigenous community in Malaysia and implements an outreach initiative implemented by the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The aim of this project is to improve living conditions and address issues such as overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of essential amenities through educational programs and active community engagement. By closely collaborating with local leaders and members, this program offers specialized courses on residency rights, sustainable practices, and practical skills. Furthermore, it sheds light on economic barriers, health risks, and cultural assimilation challenges experienced by these communities. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive policy measures that integrate economic empowerment with residential improvements while reinforcing legal support for land ownership and residential rights to promote culturally sensitive development policies.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous communities, Malaysia, Orang Asli, housing challenges, community outreach project, sustainable development.

1. INTRODUCTION

In many parts of the world, the housing of indigenous communities is a matter of great concern. For such communities, securing and improving their housing situation plays a crucial role in promoting regional economic development. However, owing to various historical problems and disputes over land rights and uneven economic development, the housing situation of many indigenous communities is far below the national average. These communities often face problems of overcrowding, poor infrastructure and lack of access to clean water and sanitation. For instance, the 852 indigenous villages in Peninsular Malaysia are home to persistently impoverished and marginalized populations. Due to the dearth of social infrastructure, work prospects, and educational resources in the area, their economic status is insecure. The challenges posed by historical marginalization and discrimination, coupled with large-scale deforestation driven by commercial interests, have further exacerbated their situation.

As a result, the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) has launched the Indigenous Community Outreach Project (ICOP), which aims to increase indigenous housing awareness and knowledge. A number of focused educational programs and information-dissemination initiatives, including the teaching of fundamental home modification skills, have been developed and put into action in close collaboration with local leaders and community members in an effort to actively support indigenous communities in improving their living conditions and, eventually, to encourage self-management and sustainable development. The program aims to improve the living conditions of indigenous communities and, in the long term, to promote their self-management and sustainable development.

This paper will elaborate on the design and implementation process of the project, assess the impact of the project on the target community. It will also explore the challenges and limitations encountered during the implementation process. This paper aims to provide meaningful experiences, insights and strategic recommendations for future similar projects in order to realize the social and cultural benefits of meal replacement in the future. Through our research, sustainable solutions for housing improvement in Indigenous communities are sought, thereby enhancing the overall well-being and sense of security of Indigenous community residents.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The indigenous population of Malaysia is known as Orang Asli, and as of 2019, Malaysia has a total population of 33.45 million people, of which 210,611 are indigenous, or about 14 per cent of the total population. Over time, the government's housing policy for Orang Asli, or indigenous people, has changed significantly, as various studies and government initiatives have been reflected in various studies and government initiatives:

Initially, the Government's main objective was to relocate the Orang Asli community to organized settlements to facilitate their integration into the national system and at the same time ensure better access to facilities and services. This resettlement model was modelled after the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), which pooled resources to ensure that local residents enjoyed better infrastructure and services by concentrating communities in designated areas (Ngah et al., 2010). The resettlement programs have not been without their hitches. Indeed, several studies have shown that some Orang Asli villages have posted infrastructural development and high standards of living, while others are almost impossible to be transplanted and give up the old ways of subsistence in other ways. (Abdullah et al., 2018). As time passed, policy processes were continuously developing towards total involvement and people's inclusion. For instance, in the process of the Village Action Plans (VAPs), it is a probable situation where the Orang Asli community is put in a better position in which they can participate fully in the development of a plan or the implementing of regional development projects. This is in a bid to ensure that the wants and goals of the community systematically get structured and integrated into the development process (Ngah et al., 2010). Above all, the present policy agenda has to focus on sustainable development, cultural sensitivity, and economic empowerment of the Orang Asli. A mean should be sought between economic growth and maintaining the traditional homelands and ways of life. It should do so to provide an avenue where the Orang Asli will have a voice and stake in its development. (Abdullah & Ahmad, 2019; Ngah et al., 2010; Abdullah et al., 2018).

This would reveal that the housing conditions of the indigenous peoples in Malaysia would be determined by several factors of a social economic nature in addition to the mean family's household monthly income including the educational level of the person, the work status, and the existence of poverty. With the existence of poverty, it means that the conditions of dwelling cannot be improved for the indigenous peoples. The many attempts that the government has initiated with respect to improving the livelihoods of the persons who dwell in these communities fail to put into consideration the rights of the interests of the indigenous persons with respect to land, hence making the situation that is realized for these people even worse (Celesistinus & Zakaria, 2021). On jobs, most of the indigenous populations have the challenge of not only the jobs being poorly remunerative, but also the jobs are a bit insecure. Their employment situation denies them financial independence and further complicates the saving of money for other needs, like housing. (Celesistinus & Zakaria, 2021). Indigenous people's communities almost unilaterally experience extremely high rates of student dropout and inadequate educational standards. Their ability to improve their housing or living conditions is fettered by the lack of resources that are in their education, thereby reducing their employment opportunities and socio-economic mobility (Kamaruddin & Jusoh, 2008).

These factors interact in complex ways with each other to create a nuanced web of socio-economic barriers. Consequently, comprehensive policy measures addressing education, employment, and land rights are necessary to considerably enhance the housing conditions and general welfare of Malaysia's indigenous communities. Studies have indicated that through resolving health concerns, encouraging dietary consumption, and raising perceptions of safety, better housing infrastructure is crucial to enhancing well-being (Memmott et al., 2022). Memmott and colleagues, 2022). Nevertheless, throughout the past few decades, despite large government investment, there has been little improvement in the prevalence of homelessness, overcrowding, subpar living conditions, and unemployment. Research in Australia, such as that by Mark et al. (2016), has shown the importance of using these culturally competent interventions. Since the year 2017 up to 2020, the isolated Kimberley Aboriginal community of Bawoorrooga and the Foundation for Indigenous Sustainable Health have been in an agreement to work in partnership to advance housing that is climate- and culturally-tailored. The facility integrates the delivery of education, health provision, and systems, governance, a justice system reform program, and land reform. The community members implemented the design plan of their own community and also constructed the facility. The impact of the project is not only represented by the reduction of juvenile imprisonment but also higher performance on issues concerning academics and mental health and improving community growth.

Besides that, it has been shown that the most critical aspect of developing better housing conditions for the indigenous people is

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when students get to engage in and with the community from which they come. To illustrate, results demonstrate that there indeed improved housing securities, cultural awareness, and community livelihood assets in the Anishinini Reserve when students of Mino Bimaadiziwin were involved (Oni et al., 2023). Then, it is not by accident that the Foundation for Indigenous Sustainable Health (FISH) succeeded in breaking ground for culturally sensitive housing in an Aboriginal community within the Kimberley. This project was supposed to have an impact on mental health, community development, and energy efficiency in the Aboriginals (Sartori da Silva 2022). The project significantly improved the health and overall well-being of the residents and at the same time addressed the cultural needs of the Aboriginals, ensuring social justice and opportunity for self-determination and capacity building. All this was achieved through the participation of the people, right from the process of designing the project to its construction. This participatory action research methodology has proven beneficial in reducing health disparities, of which tuberculosis is a significant danger, through betterment of lifestyle and improvement of housing and consumption of high-quality food. These projects are successful in increasing the educational level, as the studies by Berg R. (2005) showed, for better mental health, and reduce the number of young people in jail. This was to know the overall living standards around which geographical variables around weather patterns, customarily housing structures, and ways of settlement are taken into considerations other than the case. Based on this, the study went to recommend on-ground visits of the indigenous people to live healthier and therefore improve in their dwelling conditions.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Demographic and geographic details of the targeted indigenous communities

Over half of the 29,990 indigenous households in Malaysia are below the poverty line. Among these, 5,700 households, or 19 percent, are categorized as hardcore poor. This figure is significantly higher compared to the national poverty rates, which stand at 3.8 percent, with only 0.7 percent being hardcore poor, as recorded in the Tenth Malaysia Plan 2011-2015 (Economic Planning Unit, 2010).

Our study focuses on Kampung Orang Asli Kolam Air Bangkong, a village located in Dengkil, Selangor, Malaysia. The majority of the houses in this village are made of wood or bricks. Most residents earn their livelihood by working in oil palm or rubber estates or at construction sites. To assist the Orang Asli community, it is crucial to raise awareness about job security, promote permanent employment, and develop employable skills relevant to the job market, while ensuring that these jobs are sustainable and align with their lifestyle. They are probably goals that cannot be achieved overnight. It is therefore imperative to engage them in constant dialogue in order to realize what their goals are and then develop habits or traits that will be enhancement of economic and social development.

3.2 Strategy of Outreach Project

Collaboration between universities and other stakeholders has facilitated the implementation of indigenous housing projects in Malaysia. In this respect, teachers and students facilitated a health talk carried out by school groups to enhance the level of awareness among the villagers concerning health issues. University professors did a demonstration to the villagers in filtering sewage and using simple implements. The students also distributed knowledge items, such as brochures, which were entailed with diagrams, educating the indigenous on nutrition and eating habits. These activities increased the importance of public health activities to the indigenous populations, indirectly increasing their desire and motivation to improve their living environment. For instance, during the study, Aboriginal home cleaning was done and the students provided their guidance to continue with the cleaning. This type of direct involvement increases the students' understanding and commitment in providing service, the level of residents' awareness of the long-term impact of regular maintenance of the home, and how it could improve their quality of living and health promotion.

During our interactions with the residents, we noted several challenges that the Aboriginal communities go through as far as their living environment is concerned. Health issues are aggravated by the lack of clean drinking water. Most families have long histories of using unfiltered water sources, increasing the risk of contamination for the drinking water. The second is the problem of mosquitoes multiplying, where indigenous communities do not have long-term effective measures to kill mosquitoes to reduce the transmission of diseases like malaria and dengue fever. A further problem is that of mosquitoes multiplying, and here, the indigenous communities do not have proper long-term effective means of killing mosquitoes to reduce the transmission of diseases like malaria and dengue fever. In addition, they encounter problems associated with improper waste disposal, such as incineration, resulting in

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air pollution and the associated health hazards. Finally, many houses in Aboriginal communities continue to exist in a sorry state of disrepair—some are just there, wrecked, while others have a firm propensity to insecurity. The above observations from our qualitative research are helpful because they shed light on the practical challenges faced by indigenous Aboriginal communities and how these affect the residents' lives and general well-being.

This study primarily utilizes triangulation as a method to validate the findings and ensure the robustness of the conclusions. The method integrates data from multiple sources. Specifically, it does so by utilizing extensive survey data, in-depth interview insights and meticulous observation records. By cross-validating across different data sources, the methodology enhances the credibility and reliability of the findings. The study comprehensively captures the characteristics and fluctuations of the study population while providing sufficient evidence to support the final conclusions, effectively mitigating biases and errors that may arise from relying on a single data source.

3.3 The implementation of tangible measures

A total of 17 respondents among the members of the community were interviewed with the aim of gaining comprehensive knowledge of the housing conditions of indigenous communities in Malaysia and the impact on the quality of life of the residents. Of paramount importance in the interviews was getting insight into the housing conditions of the aboriginal population with a focus on the health status, economic status of the people in each category as well as the specific needs of housing improvement. A mixed approach of data collection with closed-ended questions and an open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data to ensure data accuracy and coverage. The closed-ended questions had applicability since the nature of the questions was well aligned with giving well-structured quantitative responses, while the questionnaire opened up good avenues for qualitative analysis. Regular visitation to their neighborhoods and direct observation help provide an insight into the living conditions of local residents and an assessment of the implementation of the proposed housing improvement measure. This multidimensional approach to data collection ensured that the understanding created in regard to the real needs and difficulties of the aboriginal communities creates a very comprehensive understanding of the same, hence forming a strong basis for subsequent policy recommendations and improvement measures. We did the questionnaires and interview guidelines in the local language and brought a team of local students and international students together to ensure cultural misunderstandings and language problems were sorted out, thus capturing the views and experiences of the participants genuinely in the process of data collection.

4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Result of the Research

4.1.1 Socio-Economic Challenges and Housing Conditions

A significant amount of them lack the experience of a tertiary education setting, directly affecting their employment choices or resulting in their engagement largely in agricultural labor or in grassroots service work. The monthly average income for all of the respondents falls below 1,500 Malaysian ringgits and below the country's minimum set requirement for an income. This general low-income status greatly restrains them from making house repairs and improvements that are necessary. A significant amount of the respondents live in deficient conditions, which not only make their daily living poor in quality but also pose a safety threat and health risk. The most common problems in the buildings are on matters related to stability, leaking roofs, old electrical, and sanitary facilities. It also highlights the very urgent need to address this failure to some of the most basic needs of the indigenous community through comprehensive interventions that integrate economic empowerment and housing improvement.

4.1.2 Health Risks and Environmental Hazards

This study established an association between poor living conditions and health hazards. Use of an inadequate sanitation measure and unclean drinking water significantly increases the risk of gastrointestinal transmission and respiratory diseases. Inadequate measures for mosquito control are furthering the spread of epidemics like dengue fever and malaria, affecting abnormally high numbers of the adult and children populations. Therefore, the health and environmental issues need to be alleviated in order to uplift the well-being of the community people.

4.1.3 Integration of cultural values and modern facilities

The results of this study demonstrate that an overwhelming majority of the residents reported great value for the remaining traditional architectural styles of their houses, while at the same time, they have been observant about the role of modern conveniences such

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as efficient electricity and plumbing systems that will contribute to the improvement of quality of life. The Aboriginal community herein is a community that is quite staunch in its views when it comes to the preservation of its remaining architectural traditional style. At the same time, it recognizes the role of modern amenities in the improvement of quality of life. In this respect, the community draws a strong connection with the strong desire of the community for the preservation of customs and tradition and the ability to move on and take up new challenges. It is, in fact, very important that housing programs, development projects, etc., find a sort of delicate balance so that the implementation makes the projects acceptable and successful. It is sensitivities toward respective cultures that need to be understood to make the projects acceptable and to be actively participated in by the community.

4.1.4 Policy and community support

The findings from the interviews show that, though quite a good number of laws and policies are enacted as safeguards for the land rights, there are still a lot of weaknesses in practical implementations, leading residents to have perceptions of limited support in their daily life. At the same time, community residents expressed a strong desire for the Government to take concrete measures, such as the construction of affordable housing and the provision of targeted financial assistance to low-income families, in order to genuinely improve their living conditions.

4.2 Limitations and Discussion

First, it is quite apparent that this research is geographically based on only two selected indigenous communities; hence, any diversity in the experience of the groups' communities in Malaysia is not rather likely captured. Second, caution should be taken to note that, with time constraints, the data was collected over a relatively small time frame and may not reflect the long-term impact of housing improvement or policy changes. The third one is the possible response bias of this study; the informants have been in the participatory project.

5 POLICY IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Policy implication

In this manner, it is the policy that is of the highest importance with regard to the improvement of the indigenous housing of Malaysia. Economic empowerment, therefore, shall be connected with the housing improvement efforts. The special financial aid, along with affordable housing scopes, shall make sure that effectiveness can be achieved regarding the land rights and housing laws. The health, along with the environment protection measures, shall also be enhanced, taking into consideration the modern housing policy along with the traditional cultures. There shall be community-based development and governance-oriented housing programs. An all-inclusive strategy shall be developed for the monitoring and evaluation of policies. The educational outreach programs, along with the capacity-building, shall also be enforced. These shall help the communities of the indigenous sector to decrease morbidity concerns by providing the people the option to be economically powerful.

5.2 Conclusion

Education and development programs through outreach to indigenous communities across Malaysia is opened to provide an effective remedy to the many problems of housing faced by the indigenous community. Publicizing responsible local collaborative outreach with the indigenous community has the advantage of realizing success and securing housing rights of the community, in addition to promoting awareness of sustainable living conventions. The project therefore further ensured that integrated curricula being integrated into skill training was a proper tool for enhancing self drive among community members to take more initiative for better living, promoting the indigenous self-management approach to development. This study illustrated how poor housing status were associated with a number of socio-economic upset and ill-health. These will remain a very important point since these will require multifaceted interventions to address the multifaceted housing related problems. The experience of this project is an illustrative of immense potential for community-led initiatives to improve quality of life and holistic well-being of Indigenous housing with students as part of participation. In addition, the study has shown the policy implementation gap, thus revealing that government led by community-driven structures will require stronger government measure if continued improvement is to be ensured. There was also recommendation for future policy, including inclusion of economic empowerment strategies within housing improvements among different other strategies, implementing culturally development sensitive policies and further legislative support of land tenure as well as access to adequate housing among others.

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Strategic framework offers an excellent study into the housing needs of the indigenous community in Malaysia and acts as a torch guiding future efforts to realize broader social, cultural, and economic benefits. In blending modern conveniences and culture, a harmonious approach will make such a great difference between sustainability of cultural heritage and the birth of new communities.

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