

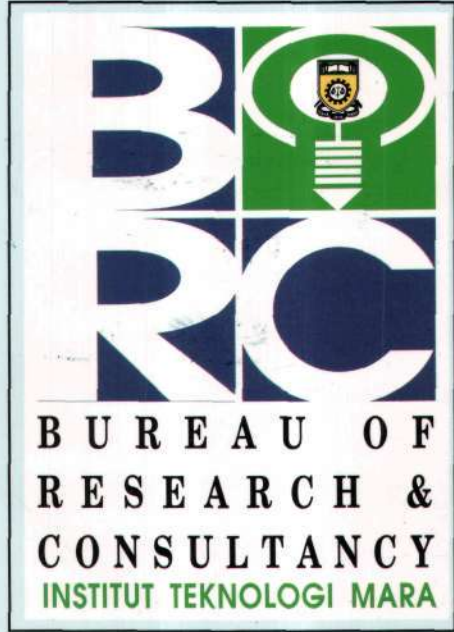
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# MULTI-DIMENSIONAL ASPECTS OF POVERTY AND THEIR LINKAGES AMONGST SQUATTERS IN KAMPONG BARU STUTONG, TABUAN JAYA, KUCHING

by  
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## ABSTRACT

This is a study on a multi-dimensional aspects of poverty. It attempts to find out the linkages amongst squatters in Kampong Baru, Kuching and their relationships with expenditure, nutrition, housing and access to piped water, electricity, sewage and income.

**Keywords: Poverty, Kampong Baru Stutong, Squatters, Linkages.**



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## INTRODUCTION

The study on multi-dimensional aspects of poverty and their linkages amongst squatters in Kampong Baru Stutong, Kuching was done in 1988-90, viz towards the end of the NEP, during which the eradication of poverty was the first national objective. The official incidence of poverty is defined as the percentage of households below the poverty line income (PLI), viz the income for a minimum basket of food for nutritional health and other necessities such as clothing, footwear, rent, fuel, power, transport, communication, health, education and recreation. However, this approach assumes educated spending and easy access to amenities, usually lacking in the increasing number of poor urban squatters. Thus, this study aimed to determine the incidence of poverty amongst the squatters and the relationships amongst more aspects such as expenditure, nutrition, housing and access to piped water, electricity and sewage in addition to income. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- (1) determine household income, and the effect of education and length of stay at the squatter area on income and incidence of poverty,
- (2) study expenditure pattern and the effect of income on expenditure,
- (3) evaluate nutritional status, and analyse impact of income and expenditure on nutritional status,
- (4) assess accessibility to piped water, electricity, housing and sanitation as well as correlation between accessibility and income; and
- (5) obtain feedback on resettlement programmes.

Kampong Baru Stutong was chosen as the study area because it was the largest (0.1 sq. km.) and newest squatter area in Kuching (within 3.2km radius), growing when other areas are stabilising or decreasing due to resettlement programmes.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, a squatter is defined as:

*"any person who occupies/erects any building on state land or claims/ploughs/digs/encloses/cultivates any such land/part thereof without lawful authority, and shall be guilty of an offence" (Sarawak Land Code).*

A pre-tested questionnaire was used in a household survey in May-June 1989, in which a household refers to:

*"persons living together and sharing food and other necessities or a person, whichever is applicable" (Statistics Department).*

The households were ethnically stratified based on Statistics Department's information, and randomly sampled to include all Malay households (8), all Bidayuh households (31), half of the Iban households (58 were sampled) and half of the Chinese households (97 were sampled).

## LIMITATIONS

Good enumerators were difficult to find and some left half way for permanent jobs. The surveyed sample was smaller than designed due to respondents working outstation or on irregular shifts, but the sample was large enough for the purpose of the study.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

### Perception of Squatting

The Land and Survey Department attempted to evict the squatters in 1986. Eviction stopped after the squatters appealed to the Minister of Land Development. The squatters expressed their need to squat in the area, which they felt the government-owner should permit. People in nearby housing estates complained of the squatters' indiscriminate disposal of rubbish, perhaps confusing the squatter issue with cleanliness.

### Social setting

The earliest Iban squatters were headed by a village committee, which built the village church. The area became multiracial and the Welfare Association was registered in 1988 to continue welfare work initiated by the village committee. The Association got the support of 327 member-households or 70% of the population. It built the community hall and successfully requested for municipal rubbish disposal service and piped water. There was good ethnic interaction. The villagers were homely, spending most of their free time listening to radio, watching television, reading and gardening. Women's activities by the Association's Women's Wing and the Dayak Women's Association were minimal, taking the form of cookery classes and handicraft making.

### Demography

The population increased from 8 households in the early eighties to 233 in 1986 and about 500 in 1989, in-migration being due to high rent elsewhere (52.3% followed their families to the area and 37.3% gave high rent as the reason). There were 55.1% Chinese (69.9% Kuching-born), 33.6% Ibans (49.6% from Kuching and 38.8% from Sri Aman looking for better employment in Kuching), 9.5% Bidayuh and 1.4% Malays. Household size averaged 4.4, probably constrained by poverty compared to Sarawak's 5.2. 46.8% were 15-36 years old and 37.8% were less than 15 years old. The male-female ratio was 100.2. 59.4% were married and a high 65.5% were nuclear families,

characteristic of modern society. Formal educational status was low (18.4% – no education, 49.2% – primary, 22.2% – lower secondary), finance stopping education for 41.8% and examination failures stopping 26.7%. Literacy was 64.2% and semi-literacy 15.6%. 63.3% of the 15-64 age group were in the labourforce, with 26.9% of the employed working as labourers in nearby construction sites, 15.8% as waiters/waitresses, 12.4% as salespersons, 15.5% in other services such as tailors/hairdressers, and 8.1% as factory workers. Unemployment was 9.01%, highest amongst the oldest (66.7% for 60-64 years old) and youngest (22.4% for 15-19 group, 7.0% for 25-29 group, 4.7% for 30-39 group, 2.8% for 40-49 group, 2.5% for 50-59 group and 1.9% for 20-24 group).

### **Income**

Gross monthly household income viz monetary value of all recurrent receipts of frequent intervals (Statistics Department) averaged RM689.73 (RM1141 for Sarawak in 1987), with 82.3% from paid employment and 9.1% from imputed rent of owner-occupied houses. 34.9% had less than RM500 per month (PLI) and 10.8% had less than RM250 per month (hardcore poor), unfavourable compared to 24.7% incidence of poverty for Sarawak (1987). An ANOVA confirmed differences in household income (Iban – RM706.64, Bidayuh – RM695.64, Chinese – RM691.38) and per capita income by ethnicity (Iban – RM158.86, Chinese – RM154.16, Bidayuh – 148.01), but a Chi-square test showed no difference in poverty by ethnicity. Neither education nor length of stay in the area affected income.

### **Expenditure**

Monthly household expenditure, based on acquisition irrespective of actual use and recorded at the time of purchase, averaged RM513.20, less than Sarawak's RM277.50 in 1982. The Engel coefficient for these poor was high (50.5% for food compared to Sarawak's 39.0%). Other items assumed the state's ranking – imputed rent for owner occupied houses, fuel and power (19.9%), followed by transport and communication (11.9%), recreation, entertainment, education and culture (5.9%), footwear and clothing (5.3%), household equipment and operation (1.4%), medical care and health (1.0%), remittance to other households (1.6%), loan repayment (1.3%), and hire purchase (1.1%). The hardcore poor had the highest marginal propensity to consume and resort to borrowing for their needs. The larger Bidayuh households (4.7 persons) spent more (RM591.60) than the smaller (4.4 persons) Chinese (RM545.13) and Iban households (RM463.21).

### **Malnutrition**

Malnutrition is a pathological state resulting from absolute/relative deficiency of one/more nutrients and manifested in leanness and stunting. Malnutrition of the 0-12 age group by the NCH (National Center for Health Statistics, USA) and Jelliffe and Nelson weight standards were high (36.1% moderate/60-79% of standard and 12.7% severe/

<60% of standard) compared to Sarawak's (22.4% moderate and 0.3% severe) and Kuching's (10.6%). It is higher amongst older children (54.2% for 2-12 years and 31.9% for <2 years), with baby girls faring better (baby girls – 24.4%, baby boys – 41.9%, older boys – 51.6%, older girls – 57.3%). Malnutrition was highest amongst Iban children (59.8%), followed by Bidayuhs (45.8%) and Chinese (43.8%), in the reverse rank of household income, although a Chi-square test showed no effect of income on malnutrition. Malnutrition was a recent problem, with malnutrition by height (45.8% had heights less than 95% of standards) lower than malnutrition by weight (48.8%).

### **Water**

69.7% of the squatters had access to piped water, while others used rain water, and this is unfavourable compared to Kuching's 73.2% access to piped water. Access to piped water was directly related to income (Percentage of piped water for households with income less than RM250/mth – 42.9%, income RM250-500/mth – 59.6%, income exceeding RM500/mth – 78.0%).

### **Electricity**

Access to electricity was 89.3%, better than Sarawak's 41.6% and Kuching's 67.5%. Electricity was purchased from three owners of generators within the area (82.1%) for 6pm-midnight daily, own generator (2.1%), own vehicle batteries (4.1%) and connected from neighbours (1%), while the rest was from kerosene (9.2%) and gas (1.5%) lamps. A hypothesis testing showed that the hardcore were particularly deprived of electricity (71.4% access compared to 91.5% for households with income of RM250-500/mth and 91.3% for those exceeding RM500/mth).

### **Housing**

The simple houses were of milled wood and zinc, with basic furniture (beds, cupboards, meat safe) and household items (ownership of radio and TV – 80%, fan – 60%) and vehicles (motorcycle – 50%, car – 20%). 84.1% of the houses were sound (no structural/slight defects eg. lack of paint, worn and slightly damaged steps, small cracks, cracked windows, which can be corrected in the normal course of maintenance), 12.3% were deteriorating (lack of proper upkeep, high structural defects and need repairs eg. sections of rotten floor/broken wall, missing materials) and 3.6% were dilapidated (critical defects, provide inadequate shelter eg. damaged by storm/flood/fire). 79.49% built their houses and 12.31% bought them, both at an average cost of RM3726.70. 4.59% inherited them and 3.57% rented. The per capita housing cost of RM771.01 was less than that of RM5333.33 for low cost single storey terrace houses for families of six (Housing Commission). While higher income facilitated house ownership (85.7% for income less than RM250/mth, 91.5% for income RM250-500/mth and 92.9% for income exceeding RM500/mth), ethnicity determined willingness to pay for housing (Table 1). In fact, the squatters would prefer bigger houses with 2-3 bedrooms (Table 2).

## Sanitation

Toilet amenities were better than for Kuching and Sarawak (Table 3), the pourflush toilets being provided by the Medical Department, though the higher income groups had better amenities (% flush toilet for income <RM250/mth – 76.2%, income RM250-500/mth – 87.2%, income >RM500/mth – 89.0%). Garbage disposal was unhygienic (31.8% through drainage system and clogging the drains, 15.9% dumping without cover, 2.1% threw indiscriminately, 8.2% dumping with cover, 14.9% burning, 25.6% through district council), perhaps explaining the serious insect/rodent problems for 43.2% of the sample and 49.2% of minor infestation (7.7% infestation-free).

**Table 1 Willingness to Pay for Housing by Ethnicity**

Race	Household Size	Monthly Household Income	Willingness to Pay Instalment for Housing Under Resettlement Scheme	Monthly Expenditure on Rent, Fuel and Power (% expd)
Chinese	4.4	RM691.38	RM99.69/mth	RM122.08 (22.4%)
Bidayuh	4.7	RM695.64	RM95.48/mth	RM103.04 (17.4%)
Iban	4.4	RM706.64	RM50.16/mth	RM 73.26 (15.8%)

**Table 2 Preference for House Size**

Floor Space	Squatter Houses	No. of Households Preferring Specified Size
0 – 49 sq m	50.9%	36.4%
50 – 99 sq m	34.9%	44.1%
Total	91.8%	70.5%
=> 100 sq m	8.2%	29.7%
Grand Total	100%	100%

**Table 3 Toilet Type, Stutong Squatters, Kuching and Sarawak, 1989**

Toilet Type	Squatters	Kuching	Sarawak
Flush/Pourflush	87.3%	14.2%	19.3%
Pit	11.7%	20.3%	20.3%
Jungle	1.0%	8.5%	24.8%
Open Drain, River	0%	70.6%	35.6%

## **Resettlement**

95.3% of the squatters intended to stay in the area because they felt that they could not afford higher rent elsewhere. 93.92% would accept resettlement, with 38.2% wanting to be resettled near the town, 32.8% had no preference and the rest wanted specific locations in Kuching Division. Most wanted neighbours of the same ethnic group.

## **CONCLUSION**

The squatters squatted in the area because they could not afford rent elsewhere and they intended to stay there, though they were willing to be resettled to larger houses. They were poor, with incidence of poverty higher than the state's. Poverty was all the more serious in view of the fast growth of the squatter area and their persistence – the length of stay in the squatter area had no effect on income. Poverty confined household expenditure, most of which was spent on food in keeping with Engel's law. Income affected access to amenities such as water, electricity, house ownership and toilet facilities. Sanitation was poor because of the indiscriminate disposal of rubbish, perhaps explaining insect or rodent infestation.

Malnutrition was serious and constituted a recent problem in view of the prevalence of leanness over stunting, though unrelated to income. Together with the sanitation problem, malnutrition indicated the need for health programmes.

The squatters had struggled to improve their life by opting for cheap housing in the area and successfully appealing for piped water, as well as working together irrespective of ethnicity. Given support and education programmes such as awareness on nutrition and cleanliness, they can be dignified participants in our society. We are glad that the Bureau of Research and Consultancy of ITM is currently sponsoring a study on child nutrition amongst urban squatters in Kuching.