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Living Conditions in Orang Asli Resettlement Project (PROSDET) of Pantos, Pahang, Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper examines the living conditions of 183 Orang Asli (aborigines) of six villages who were resettled at *Program Bersepadu Daerah Terpencil* (PROSDET), Pantos in Kuala Medang, Pahang, Malaysia. The research aims to analyze the resettlement project and to determine if it has improved affected Orang Asli's livelihood and quality of life. Household survey, descriptive analysis, observations and physical analysis of the settlements were used in this research. The findings disclosed dissatisfactions among Orang Asli for reasons which mainly related to their livelihood, traditional lifestyle and culture. The paper provides recommendations to ensure better future resettlement programs for Orang Asli.

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Keywords: Orang asli; quality of life; resettlement; prosdet pantos

1. Introduction

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

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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 comprises of 18 tribes. They tend to live in the interior of the peninsular, shying away from the rest of the population.

The existence of Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954 (Act 134) under the Aboriginal Peoples Ordinance No 3, 1954, which was amended in 1974, stipulating terms and eligibility to be regarded as indigenous communities have been described in detail. Aboriginal or Orang Asli is defined as follows:

- i. any of which his father was a member of the ethnic group of indigenous people, who speak the language of Aboriginal and ordinarily follow the way of life of indigenous peoples and traditional Aboriginal beliefs , and includes a descent through the male
- ii. any person of any race were adopted by Aboriginal and who was brought up as an Aboriginal , habitually speaks the language of indigenous people, according to the way of life of indigenous peoples and traditional Aboriginal beliefs , and become members of a indigenous peoples; or
- iii. children of any union between an Aboriginal woman with a man of another race , provided the child was habitually speaks the language of Aboriginal and Aboriginal beliefs and still be a member of an Aboriginal community .

Lack of infrastructure in villages, poverty, education and mindset change of Orang Asli has become a key issue given attention by community leaders and government agencies. Therefore, efforts to enhance the well-being and empowerment of human capital among the Orang Asli have become a major focus of Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA) through its Socio-Economic Development Division (PSE). It aims to achieve the goal of eradicating poverty and improving the mindset change among this community. In addition PSE continuously administers and develop infrastructure for Orang Asli settlements with the purpose of developing and providing comfort to the Orang Asli .

This paper investigates the living conditions of resettled Orang Asli. It is based on the socio-economic survey of Orang Asli from six affected villages namely Kampung Kuala Suar, Lanai Baru, Perangkap, Tisut, Nyentil and Harong, upstream of Telom River, who had been resettled under Integrated Program for Remote Areas - *Program Bersepadu Daerah Terpencil* (PROSDET) Pantos at Kuala Medang, Pahang, Malaysia by JAKOA in 2012. The purpose of the resettlement is to provide better integrated services to the Orang Asli who lived in remote villages accessible only through the river.

This paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

- i. to evaluate the current demography and socio-economic conditions of Orang Asli at PROSDET Pantos, Kuala Medang
- ii. to ascertain the satisfaction level of Orang Asli towards the new resettlement program
- iii. to determine reasons for dissatisfaction towards the new resettlement area

2. Literature review

The Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954 (Act 134) has provided the provision under S6 and S7 for any state authority to gazette any area on the state land to be declared as Aboriginal Areas or Aboriginal Reserves for the occupancy of aboriginal peoples. In addition, under S8 the state authority may also grant rights of occupancy of any state land for the aboriginal peoples, but only as a tenant at will. Cited from Ismail (2010), settlement areas for aboriginal people in Malaysia covers about 50,563 hectares of land throughout Malaysia. From that area, about 19,7013 hectares are gazetted under the Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954 (Act 134) and another 30,489 hectares were already approved by the State Government as the settlement area but not yet gazetted under Act 134. On the aspect of ownership, only 0.03% of the lands were owned individually by the aboriginal people. Most of the lands were occupied without proper

registration by this community, which in the case of any land dealings or acquisition, the rights of these aboriginal peoples were being denied.

Aboriginal people are known as very attached to their cultures and lands. These people live in a community and have their administration system led by the hereditary headman. They are using their land use system which differs from one tribe to another. There are at least 20 types of land usage which much related to the way of these peoples' life; the list are as follows (Aliran, 2010):

- | | |
|--|---|
| i. Settlement area | xi. Area for source of tools for house building |
| ii. water catchment area | xii. Herbs area |
| iii. sacred place | xiii. Trail area |
| iv. Graveyard | xiv. Traditional vegetables and side dishes |
| v. crops planting area | xv. Area for staple planting |
| vi. tapioca and vegetable area | xvi. Inherited orchard |
| vii. pond or lake for fish breeding and catchment | xvii. Area for arts (handcraft & musics) |
| viii. swamp area for water species breeding area such as turtles, fishes, etc. | xviii. Recreational area |
| ix. Plant area for ritual and traditional events | xix. 'melakik' area |
| x. Hunting area | xx. 'jeres' area |

The land usage might be different according to their living area or way of life, but the aboriginal people have traditionally followed the system for a very long time. Although these aboriginal people live a nomadic lifestyle, some have established their living area and stay within the area for generations. After the existence of Aboriginal People Act 1954 (Act 134), many settlement areas for aboriginal people have been gazetted, which become a proper and permanent aboriginal people village.

Some Orang Asli was resettled due to their traditional villages being acquired for various development purposes (Alias et al, 2010). However, most of these people were not happy or satisfied with the acquisition and resettlement by the government. Among the reasons highlighted in that study include encroachment on rights and heritages which affects the cultures, beliefs and heritages of the tribe, inadequate compensation, unfulfilled promises to protect these aboriginal people interests, unsuitable resettlement location, loss of place to practice traditional lifestyle, loss of traditional jobs and skills, integration problems, difficulties in adjusting to new environment and short evacuation notice. Table 1 shows the summary of some land acquisition and resettlement resulting from project development.

Table 1. Some of the land acquisition cases of traditional land in Malaysia

Settlement Area	
1	Kampung Teiji, Ulu Jelai, Pahang Kampong Leryar, Ulu Jelai, Pahang
2	Sungai Temir, Lembah Klau, Raub, Pahang
3	Kampung Bukit Lanjan, Selangor (256.44 hectares) 1995
4	Kampung Bukit Tampoi, Sepang, Selangor (38.477 acres) 1996
5	Kampung Sayong Pinang, Kampung Pasir Assam and Kampung Semanggar Dalam (total 53,000 acres)

(Source: Anuar Alias, 2010)

Resettlement of Orang Asli by the Malaysian government is a strategy to integrate them into mainstream national community and to improve their livelihood. Safety is another main reason of this exercise (Jamalunlaili, 2015). Some argue that health, education and other socio-economic services for Orang asli can be delivered more effectively as well (Othman, Lamin, Sihab & Said , 2012; Rusalina Idrus, 2011). Regrouping, following the model of in situ development adopted from Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) allows for saving in infrastructure and development costs while allowing for services to be provided more easily (Ibrahim Ngah, 2010).

The resettlements of Orang Asli have brought mixed results, judging by various studies conducted in Malaysia. Lim (1997) argues that regrouping exercise of Jakun families in Bukit Serok and Keratung 3 in Pahang was a success due to voluntary participation of Orang Asli, income from permanent agriculture and wage earning as well as better housing and basic facilities. Orang Asli also became more confident and independent.

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 and 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.

3. Methodology

Research methodology is a method or approach used in any qualitative and quantitative research. This study employs various data collection approaches. This survey adopts both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to grasp more accurate findings for more informative findings. The following is the data collection stages involved in this study.

3.1. Site visits

A preliminary study of the area has been conducted to determine the problem and issues of the area which would help to determine the aim and objectives, scope and methodology of the study. The information for this stage was gathered through site visits and informal interviews with the Orang Asli. This site visit involves close observation of the affected location on ground and the land use around it. A casual conversation with a few affected families was carried out to retrieve preliminary responses with regard to the new resettlement area.

3.2. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Several discussions with the Heads of the identified villages were executed. The objective of this focus group discussion was to further reconfirm information assembled at the preliminary study and to allow the Orang Asli to express their opinion in a transparent manner. The in-depth interview and discussion were conducted where respondents were asked about the current state of resettlement houses, surrounding areas, daily activities, and amenities provided by JAKOA.

3.3. Observation

Observations were also done during the site visits at the old village and new resettlement areas on various indicators such as the physical conditions (house, community facilities and recreation), infrastructure (road, basic necessities and utilities), economy (job and daily activities) and socio-culture (culture and lifestyle).

3.4. Fieldwork

The sample in this study consisted of all 183 households who were resettled at PROSDET Pantos. While JAKOA lists of 2003 indicated there were 198 families from 6 villages as listed in Table 2, the survey found only 193 houses were built. Although researchers approached all households, only 135 (73.8%) respondents were able to be surveyed and analyzed. These respondents are head of households of each family.

Table 2. Classification of Samples at the PROSDET Pantos

No	Village	Household
1	Harong	47
2	Lanai	48
3	Nyentil	42
4	Tisut	14
5	Perangkap	38
6	Suar	9
Total		198

(Source: JAKOA, 2013)

4. Findings

The resettled Orang Asli previously lived at the old settlement villages located upstream of Telom River. They lived in individual houses within their roaming area. Farming and hunting have been their daily activities and source of income. The lands have been cultivated with rubber and fruit trees such as durians and rambutans. At PROSDET Pantos, these Orang Asli 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 at PROSDET Pantos.

Currently, a few Orang Asli families who were resettled have moved back to their traditional villages due to lack of economic activities at PROSDET Pantos. In some cases, only families with school-going children stay at PROSDET Pantos since the school is located nearby. A number of Orang Asli families allow their older children to take care of the younger ones while they moved back to their up streams villages to tend their orchards and continue their economic activities to earn daily income.

The Orang Asli is aware of the resettlement objectives but is reluctant to leave their traditional houses and daily economic activity. This is due to their attachments to their traditional land which had been resettled for generations. It was found Orang Asli from Lanai are those that tend to go back often to their traditional villages due to their short distance from PROSDET Pantos compared to Harun and Nyentil.

The survey outcome on the level of satisfaction of the Orang Asli on the resettlement is depicted in Table 3. The results indicate that 68 out of 135

Table 3. Level of satisfaction on the Resettlement at at PROSDET Pantos

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	68	50.4
No	61	45.2
Not Sure	6	4.4
Total	135	100.0

61 out of 135 respondents were not satisfied with the resettlement due to the reasons summarily provided in Table 4. Multiple reasons were given by the respondents where the highest (21.1%) of the respondents were not happy and satisfied with the resettlement provided by JAKOA at the PROSDET Pantos because they claimed to be unable to cultivate the land as the soil it 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 provided by JAKOA. The third main reason for dissatisfaction towards the resettlement house is losing their source of income from farming. They also claimed that they were not satisfied with the lack of infrastructure provided by JAKOA at the resettlement. A small percentage claimed that the reason for dissatisfaction of the resettlement is due to the non-resemblance and reflection of the culture and heritage of Orang Asli and depriving them of their hunting activities.

Table 4. Reasons for dissatisfaction on the new resettlement area

	Response	
	Frequency	Percentage
No roaming area	19	11.4%
No suitable land to garden/farm	35	21.1%
Loss of income from crops	31	18.7%
New resettlement area lack of traditional characteristics	22	13.3%
New resettlement house is not suitable for extended family	33	19.9%
Inadequate basic amenities	26	15.7%

This research also reported on the perception of Orang Asli at PROSDET Pantos towards the development project within their vicinity. The findings reveal that 63.3% 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 also have the aspirations for the younger generation to secure a higher level of education besides be given opportunities to get tertiary education. Only a small majority (15.0%) of the respondents did not harbour any hope or aspiration from development. The research outcome is reported in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Aspiration of Orang Asli towards development

		Respond		Percentage
		N	Percent	
i.	Pursue higher education	66	25.0%	55.0%
ii.	Work in the public sector	36	13.6%	30.0%
iii.	Work in the private sector	19	7.2%	15.8%
iv.	Run own business	14	5.3%	11.7%
v.	Continue family tradition - farmer	35	13.3%	29.2%
vi.	Not expecting anything	18	6.8%	15.0%
vii.	Secure and better standard of living	76	28.8%	63.3%
Total		264	100.0%	220.0%

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The outcome for this study is based on the 137 questionnaires used to analyze the living conditions of Orang Asli under the PROSDET project by JAKOA. Nearly half of the respondents are not satisfied with the new living conditions at Kg. Pantos. Main concern of these people is the loss of income from their daily activities like farming, hunting and fishing. Besides that, they can no longer roam in the new resettled area. This is due to the distance between the new settlement area and the old villages is quite far and require long boat ride to go back to these area. Besides that, the landed area around the houses is not suitable for farming. In addition, there are some Orang Asli with big families. The houses allocated for them are not suitable for extended families, leading to overcrowding in the houses.

Despite given detached houses and amenities such as school, futsal court and a mosque, many of Orang Asli still long for their old villages. The freedom of traditional lifestyle is still pursued by these Orang Asli. At this stage some are still able to do that due to short distance to their traditional villages while others have stopped going back altogether. While the olds still go back to their traditional villages and treat their new homes as transit, the young, especially the school going children tend to be more permanent at PROSDET Pantos since their primary school is located here.

The PROSDET Pantos can still be improved to make it into more comfortable modern settlements. Topsoil should be laid out on the current barren and rocky soil to allow villagers to plant vegetables or rear livestock. In addition, employment opportunities especially in agriculture sector would likely entice the Orang Asli to stay permanently in the new settlement. Although the Orang Asli was provided with palm oil cultivated land, the management of the palm oil is carried out by RISDA, a government agriculture agency. With a stronger sense of belonging PROSDET Pantos could be a settlement that the Orang Asli can proudly call home.

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