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Orang Asli Resettlement in Urban Environment at Bukit Lanjan, Selangor, Malaysia

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Abstract

Orang Asli, the aborigines of Peninsular Malaysia, tend to live in the interiors and engaged mainly in agriculture activities. Many have been resettled in Regroupment schemes with the hope of providing better services and improving their socio-economic conditions. Some resettlement programs have been a success while others face some problems. The Desa Temuan resettlement village at Bukit Lanjan is unique due to its location in an urban setting. Analyses based on the survey found that many in the community face difficulties in coping with life in the new environment despite receiving initial assistance from government and the developer.

1. Introduction

Orang Asli is the aborigines of the Malay Peninsula who is 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). They tend to live in the interior of the peninsular, shying away from the rest of the population. To ensure they are provided adequate access to health, education and other services, the Malaysian Government through the Department of Orang Asli Development (JKOA, 2013) has

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embarked on the Regroupment Schemes (Rancangan Pengumpulan Semula - RPS) to resettle them in an orderly settlement. Most of these settlements are located in the rural areas near the forests where they can still forage for their livelihood.

The resettlement of Orang Asli in Desa Temuan, Bukit Lanjan, Selangor is unique though since it is located within the conurbation of Kuala Lumpur; specifically 17 kilometers from the city center. Due to the area where they have settled for generations was acquired for high density development by a private developer, the Temuan Orang Asli were given a rather generous assistance to live a settled life in an urban environment.

This paper analyzes the current condition of Temuan Orang Asli in Bukit Lanjan after almost 20 years being resettled in a planned community amidst the bustle of the city. It aims to determine if the Orang Asli have been able to cope with living in the new environment and if they currently encounter any socio-cultural problems in the new settings. Among its objectives are to explore the concept and approach used in developing the Orang Asli resettlement in Bukit Lanjan and to analyze their current living and socio-economic condition.

2. Literature review

Orang Asli, who constituted only 0.6 percent of the Malaysian population, are grouped under three main tribal groups – Semang (Negrito), Senoi and Proto Malay (Aboriginal Malay) and consists of 10 sub-ethnic groups. Different ethnic, language, mode of livelihood and social organization pattern differentiate the Orang Asli. Orang Laut, Orang Seletar, and Mah Meri, who live close to the coast, are mainly fishermen while some Temuan, Jakun and Semai sub-ethnic groups have taken to permanent agriculture. The Temuan, which this paper focuses on, 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).

In terms of population distribution, the 2010 census shows that 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 planned settlements built by the government. Almost all of them are engaged in agriculture activities or hunting and gathering (Department of Statistic, 2010)

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 to improve their living standards. This strategy was further enhanced after the Pos Dipang tragedy that inundated an Orang Asli settlement in Perak in the 1990s. 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. A few are located in major urban centers while most are located in rural areas and close to the forest edge.

While some quarters argue that resettlements of Orang Asli have brought better living conditions to them, some argue otherwise. Forum-Asia contends that resettlement programs of the Orang Asli community have led to increased poverty. Malnutrition, a higher mortality rate and a general deterioration in the health have affected villagers. They also may have negative impacts to the environment, negating the aim of conservation of forests as initially envisaged (Ab.Hadi et. al., 2013).

There are various studies on the impacts of resettlement of indigenous community in other countries around the world. In Australia, some of the impacts of resettlement include poverty, low self-esteem, a poor sense of emotional dependency, homelessness, high levels of family violence, suicide and substance abuse (Memmott, 2000). 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 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 (Geerdts, 2006).
In Malaysia, various studies have looked at Orang Asli resettlement schemes throughout the country. Lim (1997) judged that regrouping 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. An obvious impact of re-grouping and resettlement of Orang Asli is the lessening linkage between the community and the natural forest environment (Lim, 2013).

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 has resulted in socio-economic advancement and lower incidence of poverty among the settlers. Many Orang Asli became confident during their interaction with others. 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 lower standard of living especially if they are unable to cope with the new environment in the settlements. This paper will analyze the condition in Desa Temuan, Bukit Lanjan community.

3. Background of Desa Temuan, Bukit Lanjan resettlement area

Desa Temuan (Fig. 1) was set up in 2002 after MK Land Development acquired the land traditionally used by the Temuan tribe for urban development comprising of mostly high-rise residential and office development. The Temuan had moved to this area for agriculture and forest roaming activities after they moved from Bukit Nenas in the middle of Kuala Lumpur.

![Fig. 1. Site plan of Desa Temuan.](image)

To ensure the Orang Asli be able to continue their livelihood in the area, MK Land, and the Selangor State Department allocated 18 hectares of land for their new settlements. It consists of 147 units of bungalows, given to each household, with community facilities such as multipurpose hall, shop houses, surau, and school and Orang Asli mini museum. Besides, 130 units of an apartment were given to eligible children who were still single. Some lands were provided to the Orang Asli while MK Land also provided for trust funds and scholarships to the community.

Despite losing a big chunk of forested areas to new developments, the compensation given to the Temuan Orang Asli is considered very generous compared to other resettlement programs (Anuar Alias, 2013). This is because since this Orang Asli did not have title to the land they are not considered as land owners under Malaysian laws. It should be noted that although the tribe has moved a few times earlier which has caused some changes to their lives, the relocation to Desa Temuan was most profound in that they have moved from traditional into a modern, planned housing estate surrounded by high rise modern development (Karim & Hashim, 2012)
4. Methodology

The main methodology of this paper is through the socio-economic survey of the community in Desa Temuan, Bukit Lanjan. Although all 99 houses were approached, only 45 households decided to participate in the survey. Also to descriptive analysis of the questions, comparative analysis, specifically on their living conditions before and after moving into Desa Temuan, was also conducted. An in-depth interview with the Batin (leader of Orang Asli community) and government representatives from Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ), JAKOA and MK Land Holdings were carried out. Besides, site analysis of the settlement was also conducted.

5. Analysis

Analysis of the Desa Temuan Orang Asli is divided into a few sections below.

5.1 Physical and socio-economic analysis

A survey of the areas revealed that out of the 147 bungalows given, only 129 are occupied of which 15 are rented out to non-Orang Asli. 15 houses are vacant while a further five are used as kindergarten (Fig. 2).

The 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. Figure 3 shows the layout of the houses in the study area.
Meanwhile, all 130 apartment units are occupied with a 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 evident that non-Orang Asli have moved into the development built exclusively for this tribe.

A survey of all 99 houses still occupied by Orang Asli was conducted on three different days. However, only 45 households agreed to participate in the survey, giving a participation rate of 45 percent; 84 percent (38) of respondents were male while 16 percent were female. An overwhelming percentage of respondents are in the age group of 45 to 54 years old.

In terms of employment of respondents, 40 percent work as laborers such as gardener, construction worker and the guard followed by self-employed (27 percent) and unemployed (17 percent). This indicates that the Orang Asli in the community does not hold high-skilled employment such as in professional and managerial positions.

From the 45 households surveyed, there are a total of 567 people living in the homes, giving an average household size of 12.6, a number which is much higher than the Malaysian average household size of 4.5. This is because Orang Asli tends to live as an extended family whereby married children with kids tend to live with their parents due to cultural and economic necessities. Age wise, an overwhelming majority (85 percent) of the people are below 34 years old, indicating a very large young population in the village. 57 percent is below the age of 24 while 22 percent is less than ten years of age indicating the families having many children.

In terms of education, the biggest percentage (37 percent) holds a Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia certificate (equivalent to 11 years of schooling) with only 4.6 percent without any formal education. Those with tertiary education (certificate/diploma and degree) constitute 5.1 percent of the population, below than the Malaysian average of about 15 percent. However, the education level of Orang Asli here is much better than other Orang Asli settlements perhaps due to its location in the urban area where education facilities are relatively more accessible. Employment of this group of 567 people is better than that of their parents in that 12 percent worked in factories while another 9 percent work in offices. The unemployment rate of 14.7 percent, though, is much higher than Malaysian unemployment rate of about 3 percent that might a rather big problem for the community.

In terms of individual income, an overwhelming percentage (77 percent) of workers earn less than RM900 which is considered as a minimum wage in Malaysia. Compared to surrounding areas that are considered affluent, the community of Desa Temuan consists of many under the poverty level. This is one area that needs to be addressed if the Temuan Orang Asli is to be able to live comfortably in the high-cost area of Damansara Perdana.

5.2 Opinion of respondents analysis

Questions were posed to the 45 respondents about their opinions with their new settlements. Important ones are listed in the tables below.
Table 1. Respondent’s opinion of the new settlement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>No. of Respondent</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A modern settlement that are not comfortable for the Orang Asli and away from the forest prefer to go back to original settlement</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlements that don’t have cultural features in design development and too modern</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern, comfortable and organize settlement for Orang Asli to step towards modernization</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 rather difficult 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 (Fig. 1), 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 that due to lack of education and good paying job, they are unable to support their families in high-cost urban areas.

![Fig. 4. Conditions of standard of living after relocating.](image)
Table 2. Main problems at the resettlement scheme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>No. of Respondent</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic</td>
<td>Limited job opportunities</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education – underdeveloped &amp; backward, youth not keen to pursue study</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orang Asli didn’t have special skills such as computer, etc.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Uncomfortable due to new settlements surrounded by urban areas and away from the forest</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unhygienic settlement</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Social problems such as drunk, gambling, illegal racing, etc.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health problem</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The answer is more than 45 because respondents provide multiple answers

Table 3. Preference for staying at Desa Temuan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>No. of Respondent</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because there is no other place to live</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This new resettlement has a positive impact on community</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need more government aid</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncomfortable with modern life/back to the original settlement</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

MK Land had provided some assistance including free apartment, land for farming, education scholarship, and ASB Trust funds. Results of the survey seem to indicate that the Orang Asli have not been able to capitalize on these assistance perhaps due to the high cost of living.

6. Recommendation

Survey of respondents 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 are of the utmost importance.
Table 4. Suggestion from respondents on how to reduce the problem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>No. of Respondent</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic</td>
<td>More program and help from the government</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give extra educational program &amp; skills training to the community</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More job opportunities for the Orang Asli</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>New settlement with cultural features &amp; characteristics</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Back to the original settlement, near the forest</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Health aid for the community</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>126*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The answer is more than 45 because respondent gives multiple answers

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 Desa Temuan. 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.

7. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the current conditions of Orang Asli, who resettled in their community within an urban environment. It was found that despite given rather luxury accommodations in urban settings, the Orang Asli had difficulty in coping. A more holistic approach that provide for their socio-economic needs and ensure they can live comfortably in new urban settings need to be considered.

References

Ibrahim, N. (2010). Rural Development in Malaysia, Monograph no.4 December 2010, Centre for Innovative Planning and Development Monograph 4, Faculty of Built Environment Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.