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Sustainability and Transformation: Assessing the Success of Socioeconomic Development Programs for the Orang Asli in Enhancing Livelihood and Communities

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Abstract

For several decades, the Orang Asli community in Malaysia has been marginalized and deprived of socioeconomic opportunities. As a response, the government and non-governmental organizations have implemented various socioeconomic development programs with the aim of fostering sustainability and transformation within the Orang Asli community. However, the effectiveness of these programs in transforming the Orang Asli community still needs to be made clear. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the success of socioeconomic development programs in enhancing the socioeconomic status of the Orang Asli while promoting sustainability. The methodology of this study involved conducting interviews with members of the Orang Asli community in the state of Perak who reside in the Regrouping Plan (RPS). The findings revealed that some programs positively affected the Orang Asli community, contributing to both sustainability and improved livelihoods. Nevertheless, limitations and obstacles emerged during the implementation of these programs. Some hindrances include wildlife disturbance and no crops. The study proposed several recommendations to address these challenges and improve the effectiveness of socioeconomic development programs for the Orang Asli community with a focus on sustainability. Ultimately, this research contributes to the existing literature on the impact of development programs on marginalized communities. The insights provided in this study can help policymakers and practitioners design and implement more effective socioeconomic development programs that can enhance the lives and communities of the Orang Asli.

1. Introduction

The indigenous group known as the Orang Asli is found in Peninsular Malaysia, where the bulk of its members reside in forested areas. Most of them continue to live a traditional lifestyle that is strongly impacted by their surroundings and the legacy of their ancestors. They are a portion of the Malaysian community that has lived there

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for thousands of years, even though they are still having difficulty sustaining their way of life. The Orang Asli have persevered through all the trials and difficulties they have faced since beginning their migration to Peninsular Malaysia. Being the first people to live on the Peninsula Land, they should naturally be more progressive than the other races in Malaysia. In practice, however, the opposite situation frequently arises (Md. Adam & Yusop, 2020). As a result, the government has launched numerous development programmes since Malaysia gained its independence in 1957 to improve the quality of life for the Orang Asli. Public development and planned development are the two primary development programmes, according to Masron, Masami, and Ismail (2013). The first development initiatives sought to have an impact on the community, but the second development initiatives sought to specifically target the community (Mohd Asri, 2012). According to Mason and Arifin (2005), the government has offered the Orang Asli several development programmes that help the Orang Asli by, among other things, providing access to modern facilities, village resettlement initiatives, electricity and water supplies, and educational opportunities.

The purpose of this study is to assess how well socioeconomic development initiatives have fared in raising the socioeconomic standing of Orang Asli. The Sustainable Development Goals are congruent with the necessity for this study. The results of this study may help Department of Orang Asli (JAKOA), a division of the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Rural and Regional Department, plan strategies for raising the quality of life for the Orang Asli people by increasing education and public awareness. The literature review pertinent to this investigation is included in the next part, part 2. Section 3 that describes the study's research strategy is presented after this. The results are presented in Section 4, and the study's conclusion is given in Section 5.

2. Literature Review

It is estimated that there are approximately 300 million indigenous peoples (United Nations) representing 5,000 ethnic groups from over 90 countries worldwide (World Bank, 2018). Studies indicate that indigenous peoples across the globe, whether in Asia, America, Australia, or Europe, are significantly poorer than other communities (Walter, 2004). This same trend was also examined by the World Bank in 2004, which revealed that indigenous populations have the highest poverty rates.

In Article 160(2) of the Malaysian Constitution, the term "Orang Asli" is defined. According to Clause 3 of Act 134 of the Orang Asli Act 1954, a person is an Orang Asli if:

i. His father belonged to an Orang Asli clan, spoke the language of the Orang Asli, and adhered to the Orang Asli way of life and beliefs. This also applies to descendants of such individuals.
ii. Any individual of any race was adopted and raised by Orang Asli as a child, receiving an education as a Native and assimilating into the customary practices and lifestyle of the Orang Asli.
iii. A child is born from the union between an Orang Asli woman and a man of a different race. However, it is required that the child typically speaks the language of the Orang Asli, follows the customary practices and beliefs of the Orang Asli, and is considered part of the Orang Asli community.

The Orang Asli in Malaysia are made up of many tribes and are not all one group. There are 18 tribes that are divided into the Negrito, Senoi, and Proto-Malays, three major umbrella groups. Specifically in Perak, Pahang, Kelantan, and Kedah in Northern Malaysia, the Negrito tribe is frequently found. They are distinct from the Senoi tribe and the Proto-Malays tribe and share traits with the African Pigmi. According to Ismail, Amini, Abdul Razak, Mohd Zaini, Farhour & Alwi (2013), there are five sub-tribes under this tribe: Batek, Jahai, Kensiu, Kintak, and Lanoh. Selangor, Putrajaya, and the federal territories of Kuala Lumpur are frequently inhabited by members of the Senoi tribe. The clan has recently relocated to Pahang and Perak, though (Bedford, 2018). The Senoi is Peninsula Malaysia's largest I Orang Asli (Nicholas, 2000). Although some claim that the Senoi tribe is descended from the Australoid from Australia and the Veddoid from South India, the Senoi tribe reflects the traits of the Mongoloid (Lim et al.,2010). There are several sub-tribes that fall under this tribe, including Semai, Temiar, Jahut, Chewong, Semoq Beri, and Mahmeri. On the other hand, the Proto-Malays are frequently found in Southern Malaysia, most notably in Johor and Melaka. There are six sub-tribes that fall under this tribe: Jakun, Kanaq, Seletar, Semelai, Temoq, and Temuan. This tribe is thought to have come from central Asia (Lim et al., 2010). Table 1 shows the Orang Asli Ethnic Groups in Peninsular Malaysia.

Table 1 *Statistic Orang Asli ethnic group in Peninsular Malaysia, 30 June 2022*

State	Malay-Proto	Negrito	Senoi	Total
Johor	15,773	3	49	15,825
Kedah	10	296	30	336
Kelantan	73	2,032	15,382	17,487
Melaka	1,809	1	23	1,833

Negeri Sembilan	12,107	4	110	12,221
Pahang	41,485	1,128	36,002	78,615
Perak	667	2,811	57,474	61,225
Selangor	15,532	4	5,425	20,961
Terengganu	85	43	944	1,072
Total	87,541	6,322	115,712	209,575

Source: Department of Orang Asli, 2023

3. Sustainable Community Development

Sustainable community development involves a collaborative effort between community members, government authorities, NGOs, and corporations to enhance present living standards without compromising the resources available for future generations. Aruma (2015) sees sustainable development as meeting present needs while ensuring the ability of future generations to meet their own. Todaro and Smith (2009) define it as development that enables future generations to maintain a comparable standard of living. The focus is on benefiting both current and future generations across different communities. Sustainable community development entails enduring initiatives aimed at enhancing the living conditions of both present and future community members.

Certainly, sustainable community development prioritizes the enduring enhancement of living standards for both current and future generations. It entails a process aimed at advancing community development while ensuring that present community needs are met across diverse contexts without impeding future generations' capacity to meet their own requirements. Aruma (2009) regards sustainable national development as the stimulation of initiatives that cater to current needs without undermining future generations' capabilities within a country's developmental framework. Segynola (2003) defines sustainable development as enduring progress that safeguards the human environment. Sustainable community development, as a community-driven initiative, addresses community concerns to uplift living conditions in participating communities, benefiting both present and future generations. The essence of sustainable community development lies in people living responsibly today while securing opportunities for future generations to fulfill their needs. Aruma (2015) emphasizes the importance of living in the present while safeguarding future opportunities. Effective sustainable community development necessitates a clear articulation of present-day needs to address current community challenges while preserving the ability of future generations to address their own concerns within society.

4. Socioeconomic Development Program

The socio-economic development program for the Orang Asli exists when the Orang Asli go through developmental phases and experience impacts in terms of economics, social, cultural, and environmental aspects. This program is designed to advance the economic status of the Orang Asli so that they do not continue to lag behind other ethnic groups (Suhaila Abdul Latiff, 2010). In Malaysia, the ethnic and cultural diversity prompts the government to remain committed and tirelessly strive to assist in enhancing the economic development of all communities in Malaysia, including the Orang Asli. In the 2019 Budget, the government allocated RM100 million to empower the development of the Orang Asli. For the purpose of enhancing the economic development of the Orang Asli, the government has also provided three main development programs:

a) The Planned Settlement Development Program (PPT) which includes Resettlement Scheme (RPS), Village Resettlement (PSK), New Village Scheme (RKB).
b) The Economic Development Program (PPE) which includes State Economic Development Program, Development Program (courses), Entrepreneur Guidance Program, Business Space Guidance Program, Income Enhancement Program, People's Welfare Development Scheme (SPKR).
c) The Social Development Program (PPS) includes educational assistance, housing for the poorest citizens, infrastructure and social amenities, mental development, family development, and health development.

4.1 Planned Settlement Program (PPT)

The main objective of the Planned Settlement Program (PPT) is to provide settlement facilities for the Orang Asli to ensure that their lives are more organized, comfortable, and safe from communist threats. JAKOA also carries out survey work to identify the boundaries and land ownership of the Orang Asli. The PPT provides facilities such as participant houses, treated and maintained water supply, electricity supply, tarred village roads, economic projects, surau facilities, and schools for the comfort of Orang Asli residents. The government allocation provided to JAKOA in 2018 for the Housing Assistance Program was RM6,260,000.00, with expenditure for this purpose amounting to RM1,717,000.00, covering 99 houses including 89 houses renovated and 10 newly built houses

(Ministry of Rural Development, 2018). The PPT is divided into two methods: the first method involves relocating residents to new settlements, and the second method involves restructuring existing villages and providing basic facilities and economic programs.

4.1.1 Resettlement Scheme (RPS)

The RPS was established in 1980 (Fourth Malaysia Plan) with the aim of containing communist influences on the Orang Asli in the interior areas. This scheme involves the mass relocation of Orang Asli from their original settlements to new settlement areas, involving 17 relocation sites: 6 in Perak, 7 in Pahang, 3 in Kelantan, and 1 in Johor. Orang Asli involved in this program are provided with residential houses, infrastructure development, and are engaged in commercial planting programs such as oil palm and rubber (the main crops), as well as other enterprises such as cocoa, banana, stingless bee honey, fish farming, cattle, and goat rearing. They not only receive dividends from these programs but are also given opportunities to directly participate as farm managers (Department of Orang Asli Development, 2018). The process of moving from interior areas to peri-urban areas to improve the welfare of the Orang Asli is the goal of the RPS, and it brings about changes, especially in economic, health, and educational aspects (Lee Hou Zei., et al 2018).

4.1.2 Village Resettlement (PSK)

In 1999, under the Seventh Malaysia Plan (RMK-7), a total of 217 Orang Asli villages were involved in this PSK program, comprising 12,264 Household Heads. The implementation of this program aims to upgrade village infrastructure, public facilities, basic necessities, and land development projects such as oil palm and rubber cultivation. Orang Asli involved in this program also receive incentives to ensure their comfort with the village resettlement carried out (Department of Orang Asli Development, 2018).

4.1.3 New Village Scheme (RKB)

Furthermore, the RKB aims to safeguard the welfare of Orang Asli residing on the Malaysia-Thailand border, involving their security and development (KESBAN), while at the same time, participants in this program also enjoy incentives and facilities similar to those in the RPS and PSK (Department of Orang Asli Development, 2018).

PPT is one of the settlement development programs for the Orang Asli specifically to ensure they have housing. When comparing the indigenous peoples in Canada with the Orang Asli in Malaysia, indigenous peoples in Canada are not provided with settlements like those obtained by the Orang Asli in our country, thus making them among the contributors to the high number of homeless individuals, and this situation arises from various reasons, including cultural oppression, government policies, housing markets, and other factors (Patrick, 2014).

4.2 Economic Development Program (PPE)

The goal of the Economic Development Program (PPE) is to enhance the earnings and alleviate poverty among the Orang Asli community while also introducing them to their own economic resources. This program encompasses four primary initiatives, including cash crop cultivation, livestock rearing, rubber and oil palm farming, and the promotion of indigenous entrepreneurs within the community.

4.2.1 State Economic Development Program

The State Economic Development Program is geared towards alleviating poverty within the Orang Asli community. Administered through organizations like the Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA) and the Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (FELCRA), it aims to establish oil palm and rubber plantations, focusing on farm expansion. For example, in the 2016 budget, a substantial sum of RM852 million was earmarked for RISDA and FELCRA to support income and productivity initiatives. Additionally, RM3.15 million was allocated to the Economic Development Program.

4.2.2 Development Program (courses)

The Development Program, particularly through courses, aims to equip the Orang Asli with training and knowledge about contemporary farming and agricultural practices. Key courses cover topics such as maintaining oil palm plantations, hydroponic farming techniques, rubber cultivation methods, and livestock rearing. The overarching objective is to effectively combat poverty among the Orang Asli by ensuring these programs meet their primary goal.

4.2.3 Entrepreneur Guidance Program

The Orang Asli are known for their ability to produce various handicrafts from rattan and bamboo. Hence, the entrepreneur guidance program was introduced to promote Orang Asli handicraft products to the public and provide related courses to them. Incentives provided include assistance with business equipment, input materials, and others. Additionally, through this program, the Orang Asli have the opportunity to explore other business sectors such as retail, food outlets, vehicle workshops, and fruit shops (Department of Orang Asli Development, 2018). There are approximately 1,000 entrepreneurs among the Orang Asli across Malaysia, and they engage in various business fields such as retail, livestock farming, transportation, salons, agriculture, services, textiles, handicrafts, workshops, boat manufacturing, contracting, food, manufacturing, tourism, cyber cafes, sweet potato cultivation, nurseries, fishing equipment stores, stingless bee honey, and wholesaling. Table 2.3 below shows the number of Orang Asli entrepreneurs by state in Malaysia.

4.2.4 Business Guidance Program

The Business Guidance Program provides financial support for building business premises tailored to Orang Asli entrepreneurs. These commercial spaces are constructed based on guidelines established for assisting Orang Asli entrepreneurship and industry development. The program covers the construction of various establishments including craft workshops, grocery stores, motorcycle repair shops, restaurants, and tailoring shops.

4.2.5 Income Enhancement Program, People's Welfare Development Scheme (SPKR)

The Income Enhancement Program, known as the People's Welfare Development Scheme (SPKR), is administered by the government under the Ministry of Rural Development (KPLB), through JAKOA. This initiative aims to reduce extreme poverty levels while offering the Income Enhancement Program (PPP). Assistance provided encompasses agricultural machinery, fisheries inputs, sweet potato and lime cultivation, village chicken and goat farming, among others.

4.3 Social Development Program (PPS)

The main objective of the Social Development Program (PPS) is to improve the living standards of the Orang Asli in both rural and peri-urban regions, assisting them in adjusting to societal changes and fostering a shift in their mindset. Moreover, the PPS offers diverse assistance, including educational support, housing provisions for the economically disadvantaged, infrastructural development, social amenities, mental wellness initiatives, family strengthening programs, and healthcare improvements.

4.3.1 Housing Assistance Program (PBR)

The Housing Assistance Program (PBR) aims to provide housing solutions to impoverished Orang Asli families throughout Peninsular Malaysia. Eligibility for this program is determined based on the criteria established in the Housing Assistance Program Guidelines under the People's Welfare Development Scheme (SPKR) during the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010). The assistance typically includes three-bedroom houses constructed according to the technical standards set by the Ministry of Rural Development (currently known as the Ministry of Rural Development (KPLB)). Additionally, support is offered for the renovation of existing PBR houses.

4.3.2 Infrastructure and Public Facilities Project

The Infrastructure and Public Facilities Project involve various initiatives such as providing water and electricity supply, as well as constructing and improving essential amenities like village roads, multipurpose halls, community centers, bridges, and other necessary infrastructure.

5. Research Design

The subjects in this study were the Orang Asli living in Perak, Malaysia. The Orang Asli from this area were picked because they are the most numerous in northern Malaysia. According to the Annual Report of the Department of Orang Asli (JAKOA), there were about 209575 Orang Asli in Malaysia and 61225 Orang Asli living in Perak (JAKOA, 2023). To help with achieving the study's research goals, thirty Orang Asli involved in socioeconomic development were contacted.

This study uses qualitative methodology, a semi-structured interview questionnaire is created. To have a problem-focused approach and enable more individualized dialogue with the survey, the interviews were performed using a semi-structured survey format. Face-to-face interviews give researchers the freedom to modify and clarify their questions while still learning the participants' perspectives (Curran & Blackburn, 2001). The participants were given freedom to respond whatever they saw fit to gather additional pertinent data. The

interviewees also get the chance to express their opinions and highlight their areas of competence and interest (Horton, Macve, & Struyven, 2004).

The participants were approached at a time that worked for them, frequently in the evening. The meeting time for the interview with the candidates was scheduled in advance. Each interview lasted between an hour and two hours, during which questions were put to the participants. The interviews were taped after the data collection was finished and later transcribed. The text results were then grouped and classified into major theme, after which a particular coding was employed to organize and direct the data review process.

Before commencing the data collection phase, interview protocol questions undergo rigorous scrutiny by a panel of experts to validate the integrity of the interview protocol. Additionally, the interview questions are formulated to elicit comprehensive responses aligned with the research inquiries. The instrument undergoes an initial pilot phase and subsequent revisions in accordance with the conceptual and research framework objectives, aimed at investigating the perspectives of stakeholders (such as Aboriginal development departments) on Socioeconomic Development Programs for the Orang Asli in Enhancing Livelihoods and Communities.

Thirty informants were purposefully selected for their involvement in aiding indigenous communities and those directly engaged in socioeconomic development programs. For this research, interviewing 15 informants is deemed adequate for inclusion. Data saturation denotes a phase in the research where no further new information is gleaned, and the data analysis consistently yields repetitive outcomes (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022).

A meticulous research methodology has been devised to integrate viewpoints and key stakeholder input, such as that of The Orang Asli Development Department, in addressing critical aspects of the subject matter. During the fourth phase of data analysis, primary data gathered from thirty informants engaged in semi-structured interviews are merged with content analysis derived from a literature review. The research employs a case study approach to analyze the qualitative data collected. This involves establishing codes, categories, and themes pertinent to representing informants' perspectives on matters crucial to the success of the Orang Asli Socioeconomic Development Program.

6. Finding

The research's findings, which are based on interviews with thirty Orang Asli representatives, are presented in this section. After the interviews were transcribed, a category system was used for coding analysis, which produced three key themes; successful (engagement in business and helping to reduce poverty) and obstacles (no crops and wildlife disturbance).

Qualitative data is utilized to address all research inquiries in this study. A total of 15 study informants were selected for interviews. The study was conducted in three Resettlement Schemes (RS) namely RS Legap, RS Ulu Kinta, and RS Air Banun. Qualitative data was obtained through interviews with staff from the Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA), namely RS managers and assistants, as well as Village Chiefs and Orang Asli directly involved in three Orang Asli socioeconomic development programs: the Organized Settlement Program (OSP), Economic Development Program (EDP), and Social Development Program (SDP). Table 1 below illustrates the demographic characteristics of the 15 study informants for qualitative data.

Using qualitative data, this study explores the perspectives of JAKOA staff, Village Chiefs, and Orang Asli, which may vary among them. During the qualitative interview sessions, informants were asked about their capabilities, changes observed after participating in socioeconomic development programs, and the effectiveness of these programs. Responses obtained from study informants were recorded in note form and audio recorded. After the interview sessions, conversations were transcribed into textual form for analysis using content analysis techniques. The obtained data was categorized according to the main themes determined by the researcher based on the research objectives and conceptual framework.

Table 2 *Demografi (N=15)*

Informant	Category informan	Occupation	Code
1.	JAKOA	Assistant	R1
2.	JAKOA	Assistant	R2
3.	JAKOA	Assistant	R3
4.	JAKOA	Assistant	R4
5.	Village head	Unemployed	R5
6.	Village head	Farming	R6
7.	Village head	Farming	R7
8.	Village head	Government	R8
9.	Orang Asli	Boat driver	R9

10.	Orang Asli	Business & Assistant to Islamic Affairs	R10
11.	Orang Asli	Farming	R11
12.	Orang Asli	Farming	R12
13.	Orang Asli	Farming	R13
14.	Orang Asli	Farming	R14
15.	Orang Asli	Farming	R15

6.1 Engagement in Business

Success in business refers to those who are actively engaged in businesses like grocery stores and the manufacturing of kelulut honey, as well as those who have taken entrepreneurship courses and have achieved success in their sectors. The success of the socioeconomic development programmes, according to the informants contacted during the study, is attributed to the Orang Asli's ability to conduct business operations within their communities, such as opening food stores under the Regrouping Plan Scheme (RPS). To improve their respective firms, they are given support, business training, and financial education. The Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA) also keeps track of how the Orang Asli's economic endeavors are doing throughout time. The following are the interview findings addressing this issue:

"In this RPS, there are also grocery stores owned by the Orang Asli. There are 2 successful grocery stores managed by the Orang Asli themselves."

(Informant, R2)

The interview with the representatives of the Orang Asli involved in the entrepreneurship program is as follows:

"Like my wife and I, we run a grocery store in this village. I also have my own job. It has been very helpful for us, and our economy is Alhamdulillah (thank God) doing well. The youth in this village also work in the state park, some work as guides for tourists. It means that some work with the government, private sector, and NGOs."

(Informant, R10)

In addition to being involved in retail sales at grocery stores, the Orang Asli are also engaged in commercial kelulut honey production carried out in the RPS. This enterprise is seen as successful due to the profits generated from the kelulut honey business. Below is an interview with the Tok Batin representative and the Orang Asli involved in kelulut honey production:

"We are grateful and thankful to the government for giving us the opportunity to run this kelulut honey production. We were taught business methods such as registering with the Companies Commission of Malaysia (SSM) and managing company accounts, but it was quite simple. We were also provided with capital."

(Informant, R7)

Subsequently, discussions with Orang Asli representatives engaged in the cultivation of stingless bee honey yielded the following testimony:

"The respondent affirmed their involvement in managing the stingless bee honey enterprise, stating that they oversee its operations. They explained that they are responsible for selling the honey to customers who visit the village, with the proceeds subsequently deposited into an account."

(Informant, R15)

The interview findings underscore the efficacy of government-implemented programs in bolstering the income of individuals engaged in business endeavors (R2, R10, R7, R15). This suggests a positive impact on economic empowerment within the targeted communities. Furthermore, the success of these programs highlights the potential for sustainable socioeconomic development through strategic government interventions. These insights underscore the significance of continued support and investment in such initiatives to foster long-term economic growth and prosperity among participating individuals and their communities.

6.2 Reduce Poverty

Successfully reducing the level of poverty in this study refers to the Orang Asli who have a stable monthly income and have managed to improve their economy after participating in development programs provided by the government. The interview findings in the study also found that these programs can help reduce the level of

poverty, as they are involved in the Economic Development Program in the RPS. This success is attributed to government assistance such as providing plants, organizing courses, and monthly dividend payments.

"If we look at the programs organized by the government for the Orang Asli here, we can say that they have been successful. Houses are provided, facilities are complete, except for the telephone line, which is a bit challenging. The economy in this RPS can be considered successful. Here, we have kelulut honey production and receive monthly dividends from oil palm."

(Informant, R4)

Similarly, noted that:

“I am grateful to the government for not neglecting the Orang Asli. We are assisted by the government. The Economic Development Program that has been implemented truly helps us in improving the economy of the Orang Asli in this RPS. The provision of rubber plants, oil palm, and kelulut honey truly helps in boosting the economy of the Orang Asli in this RPS.”

(Informant, R7)

The socioeconomic development program contributes to the enhancement of household heads' income in the study area, with this income supplemented by dividends received monthly. This contributes to the Orang Asli's ability to meet their living expenses compared to before participating in this development program, where their primary occupation was forest harvesting (Yusmarwati Yusof, 2017).

6.3 Successfully Enhancing a More Comfortable Livelihood

A more comfortable livelihood refers to the provision of government-provided housing, infrastructure facilities such as roads, mosques, schools, community halls for social activities, and mobility facilities. The success of socioeconomic development programs is assessed when the Orang Asli can improve their livelihood towards a more comfortable standard. One Orang Asli out of 15 study informants stated that the socioeconomic development program had successfully enhanced their livelihood towards a more comfortable standard. The impact of Orang Asli poverty arises not only from low income but also from low quality of life. The following is an excerpt from an interview with an Orang Asli representative:

"We have many people working on oil palm plantations here in the village. We only work half a day until noon. We are paid RM40 a day. Participating in the program and moving here has indeed helped us. This program has helped me to achieve a more comfortable life. It can elevate our standard of living."

(Informant, R13)

6.4 Obstacle of Socioeconomic Development Program

The failed economic development programs do not encompass all the programs organized. Informants stated that the failure of the programs they participated in was due to wildlife disturbance and the lack of plants to cultivate. The following is an interview with a representative of Tok Batin regarding the failure of the Economic Development Program.

"This program has not succeeded in assisting us in overcoming poverty because we lack the capital for trading and have no crops. Although JAKOA provided seedlings, they were destroyed by elephants. We struggle to even obtain food; sometimes our neighbors provide it. Moving here, our living conditions remain the same. Many Orang Asli have returned to their original villages because it is not suitable to stay here. In our old villages, we could cultivate various crops such as yams and bananas without the threat of elephants or wild boars damaging them."

(Informant, R7)

Next is an interview session with Orang Asli representatives who indicated that elephant disturbances in their RS have ultimately thwarted the Economic Development Program (EDP) being implemented:

"The Economic Development Program, such as rubber tree cultivation, is not successful in our RS due to elephant disturbances."

(Informant, R10)

Due to wildlife disturbances such as elephants destroying Orang Asli-owned crops, rendering them unable to cultivate any crops, the Economic Development Program (EDP) in RS Air Banun is deemed unsuccessful. Orang Asli grievances regarding this issue are frequently conveyed to JAKOA in hopes of resolving the problem.

"Many Orang Asli have returned to their original villages because it is not suitable to stay here. In our old villages, we could cultivate various crops such as cassava and bananas without the threat of elephants or wild boars damaging them."

(Informant, R5)

The success of socioeconomic development programs implemented for the Orang Asli depends on their ability to fulfill the responsibilities entrusted to them. Therefore, collaboration between all parties, including JAKOA and the Orang Asli, is essential to the success of government-sponsored programs. There have been changes in the lives of the Orang Asli because of participating in these programs, which can be considered to have a positive impact on increasing the income and economy of the Orang Asli in RS Air Banun, RS Ulu Kinta, and RS Legap.

Success, according to the perceptions of the Orang Asli in this study, lies in their involvement in entrepreneurial programs. Entrepreneurial programs have successfully increased the income of the Orang Asli, but they require capital and support from the government. Interviews with this community indicate that despite their interest in entrepreneurship, shops and cooperatives they attempted to run failed due to a lack of financial injection. This contrasts with the view of JAKOA representatives, who stated that business capital had been provided to the Orang Asli, but their failure to manage finances resulted in the inability to sustain their businesses. Successful ventures such as stingless bee honey enterprises in RS Ulu Kinta received assistance from JAKOA, and those involved were sent for entrepreneurship courses including financial management.

Furthermore, the failure of programs, especially the Economic Development Program (EDP) in RS Air Banun, is attributed to wildlife disturbances that threaten and destroy Orang Asli crops, thereby crippling economic activities based on rubber and oil palm cultivation there. However, JAKOA continues to provide assistance to the Orang Asli in the form of other entrepreneurial courses such as sewing, makeup, vehicle workshops, and others to help increase their income. Each RS was found to experience different effects because of the implementation of Organized Settlement Program (OSP), Economic Development Program (EDP), and Social Development Program (SDP).

7. Capability of the Orang Asli Community in the Government-implemented Socioeconomic Development Program

The Orang Asli need to understand the objectives of the economic development program implemented for them. They also need to engage and support each other to familiarize themselves with the program and the challenges they face. They should implement the program by participating in activities provided by JAKOA; subsequently, they should strive to embrace the provided programs to ensure that the program's objective of enhancing the economic income of the Orang Asli is achieved.

Overall, not all Orang Asli communities are capable of actively participating in the government-implemented socioeconomic development programs. Despite their efforts to engage in JAKOA-sponsored programs, these programs often fail to garner interest due to factors such as health issues, family commitments, and activities conducted outside of the Organized Settlement Scheme (RPS) areas. Orang Asli in RS Air Banun, Legap, and Ulu Kinta still find it difficult to leave their villages. Moreover, a high sense of inferiority stemming from low educational attainment discourages many Orang Asli from participating in JAKOA-sponsored programs.

Although research findings indicate that many Orang Asli are involved in JAKOA-sponsored courses, in reality, a significant portion of them are reluctant to participate. Only a few individuals consistently attend JAKOA-sponsored courses. Factors contributing to the low turnout for JAKOA-sponsored courses include the distant locations of the courses and their lengthy durations, as Orang Asli are unwilling to leave their families for extended periods. However, recreational activities in the village, such as community cleanup events, feasts, and religious ceremonies, are popular in these RSs.

The Orang Asli's ability to implement these programs in the future is well received by the villagers. They are becoming more comfortable with their settlements and the job opportunities provided by the government. Most Orang Asli can carry out government-sponsored programs with the assistance of JAKOA and other government bodies, aiming to aid in the economic development of their communities so they can progress alongside government-planned developments. Government-implemented programs have been in place for a long time, and the newer generation of Orang Asli has become accustomed to programs tailored for them.

8. The government-implemented Socioeconomic Development Program Brings About Changes to the Orang Asli Community

Based on the research findings, various changes in the lives of the Orang Asli community have been observed following their participation in the government-implemented programs. These transitions are assessed based on the four most dominant changes experienced by the Orang Asli communities involved in these programs.

According to interviews conducted, socioeconomic development among the Orang Asli community occurs with the distribution of aid, job opportunities, educational facility funding, and vehicle ownership. However, the study results indicate that the programs only bring about minimal changes for the Orang Asli, as the majority of the community still lives below the poverty line, with incomes not exceeding RM880 per month, and 30% earning between RM401 to RM600 per month. Only 30.70% earn above RM801 per month, even after including irregular dividends received monthly. The overall poverty rate among Orang Asli in Malaysia is 31.16%.

The Orang Asli in the study areas still struggle to sustain themselves despite relying on dividends from oil palm and rubber plantations and gathering forest products. However, their incomes are still insufficient to cover the costs of basic necessities, especially with rising costs of food, clothing, and housing. The Orang Asli in the remote areas are indeed plagued by poverty issues, yet they persist in sustaining their livelihoods for the sake of future generations. Suitable programs to encourage economic change among the Orang Asli, particularly in terms of household income, include economic enhancement programs for impoverished household heads and youth entrepreneurship programs. As discussed in chapter two, as per a study by Lee Hou Zei (2018), the development programs implemented for the Orang Asli community, along with the provided assistance, have the potential to enhance their capabilities to transform the community's economy in the future. This aligns with the Orang Asli community's involvement in economic programs such as businesses, farming, and restaurants.

Besides providing programs to help improve the Orang Asli's economy, education is also crucial in transforming their lives for the better and ultimately lifting them out of poverty. However, Orang Asli parents need to be stricter regarding their children's school attendance, so more Orang Asli students successfully pursue higher education. They need to change their modest attitudes, a sentiment also agreed upon by JAKOA management overseeing the community. The tendency to be lazy and overly reliant on government assistance also needs to be discarded, as the Orang Asli need to progress with the nation's development and compete healthily with other communities. Most Orang Asli, including youth in the study areas, prefer to stay in their villages despite the lack of income compared to seeking more secure livelihoods or jobs outside their communities. Factors contributing to the preference of Orang Asli youth in the study areas to remain in their villages rather than work in urban areas include influence from peers who have previously worked in urban areas but returned to the village due to unwillingness to be separated from family.

They are more comfortable living in the village, leading a simple, impoverished life deep in the hinterlands, surrounded by forests. This lifestyle choice suggests that their lives seem to be intertwined with nature, a sentiment also echoed by the Orang Asli themselves. They feel peaceful and serene in the forest, especially due to the cooler temperatures compared to urban areas. Although government-provided houses have been provided, some Orang Asli still build traditional bamboo dwellings behind their homes because the conditions in the provided homes are too hot. For them, traditional homes are more comfortable, easier to construct, and less crowded compared to the shared government-provided homes.

This study finds that the Orang Asli still rely on government assistance to improve their community's lives for the better. This includes assistance in terms of economic development projects and livelihood support to increase their income. Despite the various aid provided to the Orang Asli, including related courses for their youth, it receives limited uptake due to the majority of job opportunities being offered in urban areas. This complicates matters for Orang Asli youth seeking employment, as they find it challenging to leave their families and hometowns to work elsewhere.

9. The Effectiveness of the Socioeconomic Development Program in Improving the Socioeconomic Status of the Orang Asli Community

The third objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of the socioeconomic development program in enhancing the socioeconomic status of the Orang Asli community. The program's effectiveness is assessed based on the perceptions of the Orang Asli and the changes that occur after their participation in the program. Among the changes observed among the Orang Asli are assistance, employment, education, vehicle ownership, and other changes such as health, savings, and income changes. The study findings indicate that this program did not have a positive impact on all Resettlement Scheme (RPS) areas except for RPS Ulu Kinta and RPS Legap. The findings differ for RPS Air Banun, where the effectiveness of the Economic Development Program (PPE) in the village was perceived as less successful. However, based on the research findings obtained, this program succeeded in involving the Orang Asli in businesses, reducing poverty, and improving the Orang Asli's quality of life to a more comfortable level.

Statistics show that there are a total of 66 entrepreneurs among the Orang Asli in Perak state. This study found that the number of Orang Asli involved in business in RPS Air Banun, RPS Ulu Kinta, and RPS Legap is relatively low. The main issue they often raise is the lack of capital to start a business. The Orang Asli's involvement in business aimed at transforming their economy is still new. Although the government has provided various opportunities and assistance to the Orang Asli community to engage in this field, the number participating remains low (Rohayu Roddin, Yusmarwati Yosof, Anizam Mohamed Yusof, Mariana Ibrahim Mukhtar & Nurfirdawati

Muhamad Hanafi, 2017). Government-sponsored entrepreneurship programs for the Orang Asli community have led some of them to engage in business, but the number is still small. They need to be exposed to more in-depth business knowledge to increase and develop the number of Orang Asli entrepreneurs (Rohayu Roddin et al., 2017).

Although interview results indicate that the socioeconomic development program successfully reduces poverty, it does not represent the entire Orang Asli population involved. This is because only a few Orang Asli have permanent jobs. For those who are entirely dependent on the government, they face challenges in changing their way of life and achieving a better standard of living when the projects undertaken do not have a positive impact on them. This has led to complaints and concerns among the Orang Asli community involved as to whether to continue with the program or not. Some of them also contemplate returning to their hometowns in the hope of continuing their lives by gathering forest products as a food source. To improve the quality of life of the Orang Asli, JAKOA provides four programs, including the Food Assistance Program; Agricultural Input Assistance Program; Student Transportation Allowance Program to School; and High School Student Pocket Money Incentive Program, with a total allocation of RM20 million.

10. Enhancing Program Effectiveness: Recommendations

Several suggestions can be made to improve the socioeconomic development programmes' efficacy and address the difficulties. These suggestions emphasize changing attitudes and entrepreneurs.

10.1 Changing the Attitude of the Orang Asli in Remote Areas Who Are Overly Dependent on the Government

Based on the study findings, the Orang Asli heavily rely on assistance and subsidies from the government to the extent that some individuals hold negative views if they do not receive the desired aid. They should align themselves with the development initiatives implemented by the government since all the socio-economic development programs specifically designed for the Orang Asli aim to enhance their economic well-being to be on par with other communities in Malaysia. They should realize that every allocated assistance should be fully utilized to ensure positive outcomes from the development programs they engage in. Therefore, a study on the attitude of the Orang Asli, who are excessively dependent on the government, needs to be conducted to discourage ongoing reliance on assistance and encourage them to take initiative in improving their family's economic situation.

10.2 Indigenous Entrepreneurs

Future studies should assess the entrepreneurial aspect among indigenous communities. As of April 2018, there were a total of 66 indigenous entrepreneurs in the state of Perak. This number not only indicates a significant presence of indigenous entrepreneurs but also reflects their successful involvement in this field, resulting in positive economic progress. The success can be attributed to the indigenous individuals receiving relevant business courses and financial support to realize their entrepreneurial projects. Entrepreneurship courses are provided to interested indigenous individuals, and JAKOA (Department of Orang Asli Development) offers funding for proposed projects. Indigenous communities have the potential to produce various products, such as crafts made from bamboo and rattan, medicinal roots, traditional customs, and cultural performances like sewang dances, traditional food, and more.

10.3 Implications for Development Program Implementation

The socioeconomic development programs for indigenous peoples are divided into three programs: the Resettlement Program (PPT), Economic Development Program (PPE), and Social Development Program (PPS), aimed at improving the economy and quality of life of indigenous peoples. However, findings from interviews conducted in the study indicate that some indigenous peoples have provided negative feedback on the socioeconomic development programs implemented for them. This is because the indigenous communities in the study area have yet to experience the impact of the programs designed for them. Therefore, information needs to be repeatedly conveyed to ensure that indigenous peoples are ready to embrace changes in their lives.

In the context of poverty, indigenous peoples have been continuously provided with various forms of assistance by the government. Dividend payments ranging from RM450 to RM500 per month have helped indigenous peoples meet their daily needs. However, the indigenous population in RPS Air Banun is still seen as poor due to the failure of the PPE, caused by disruptions from wildlife. This problem further complicates the lives of indigenous peoples who rely heavily on natural resources to sustain their livelihoods. As a result, indigenous peoples tend to rely solely on assistance from JAKOA and their peers. At the same time, development planning should involve indigenous representatives to ensure that the intended development objectives truly meet the needs of indigenous communities.

11. Conclusion

The Orang Asli Resettlement Programme (RPS) is a sincere initiative that demonstrates the government's dedication to fostering the Orang Asli community's growth and ensuring that it does not lag the nation's quick speed of development. Continuous observation is vital, nevertheless, as these communities continue to lag other ethnic groups in several important respects. To keep them from living in marginalized and unsafe conditions, they should be given room, opportunities, and care.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

Author Contribution

*Author Rosfaraliza Azura conducted the **study, composed, and edited** the article. Author Mohamad Shaharudin formulated the **primary research concept and established the theoretical foundation**. Author Ayodeji Emmanuel Oke oversaw the **research advancement, directed the review, modifications, and endorsed** the article submission.*

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