

Spending Habits of the Orang Asli in Kampung Sungai Berua, Hulu Terengganu, Malaysia



Norhayati Ab Manaf, Ramle Abdullah, Jumadil Saputra,
and Nurul Faezah Noor Azizan

Abstract Poverty eradication is an important agenda in developing countries like Malaysia. Although the government has implemented various development programmes, the indigenous community of wellbeing level is still low compared to other communities in Malaysia. The Orang Asli community in Kampung Sungai Berua, Hulu Terengganu, rely on forest resources as their income, which is unstable and plunges them into poverty. They have to struggle to gather resources just to feed their family for the day, and the concept of saving money is almost non-existent. This study aims to identify the patterns of Orang Asli expenditure. It is based on three questions; (i) what do the Orang Asli spend on? (ii) what are their daily expenditures? and, (iii) how is the attitude of the Orang Asli towards money? This study was conducted using a qualitative method and data were collected through observations and interviews with seven respondents. Their selection was organised using the purposive sampling approach, which consisted of three merchants and the remainder being Orang Asli villagers. The findings indicated that the Orang Asli spent most of their income on food, with the balance going to transport, bills, educa-

N. Ab Manaf (✉)

Institute of Tropical Biodiversity and Sustainable Development (Bio-D Tropika),
Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Kuala Nerus, Terengganu, Malaysia
e-mail: yati.manaf@umt.edu.my

R. Abdullah

Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin,
Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia

Research and Publishing Centre, National Academy of Arts Culture and Heritage,
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

J. Saputra

Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Studies, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT),
Kuala Nerus, Terengganu, Malaysia

N. F. Noor Azizan

Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin,
Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia

tion and communication. It was also noted that most of the Orang Asli spent all their money without allocating any for the future.

Keywords Poverty · Expenditure pattern · Savings · Orang Asli · Sustainable livelihoods · Semoq Beri

Introduction

Orang Asli are a minority in Peninsular Malaysia. According to the Orang Asli Development Department (JAKOA) under the Rural Development Ministry, the natives are divided into three main tribes, namely the Negrito, Senoi and Proto-Malays. The tribes are further divided into six sub-tribes each. The Negrito tribe consists of the Kensiu, Kintak, Lanoh, Jahai, Mendriq and Bateq, while the Senoi comprises the Che Wong, Mahmeri, Jahut, Semoq Beri, Semai and Temiar. The Proto Malays are made up of the Kuala, Kanaq, Seletar, Jakun, Semelai and Temuan people (Carey 1976). Their communities are scattered all over the peninsular, with some living in the fringe of the jungle near civilisation, while others live deep within the forests and highlands. Their occupations, cultures and beliefs vary among sub-tribes, and they even speak different languages (JAKOA 2011). In Terengganu, two aboriginal tribes may commonly be encountered, namely the Semoq Beri and Bateq, which belong to the Senoi and Negrito tribes, respectively (Ramle 2014).

Aboriginal communities are often afflicted by poverty and live a hard life. They choose to live in rural areas and practise a traditional way of life, and many have been left out from the nation's development (Ramle 2014). Based on the report by JAKOA (2014), the number of Orang Asli living in poverty in 2013 was 11,423 people out of 178,197 people. Of which, 4102 were categorised as poor and the other 7321 as extremely poor. This circumstance is brought about by numerous factors like absence of viable strategies to improve their lives, exploitation and threats to their way of living (Sabran 2003).

Poverty in Aboriginal Communities

The issue of poverty among the Orang Asli is not a new phenomenon. Previously, there were many studies conducted in relation to poverty issues of the Orang Asli (Mcgrath et al. 2006; Agostini et al. 2008). A study by Agostini et al. (2008) indicated that the poverty rate of the Orang Asli is higher than mainstream society, and there is a significant socioeconomic gap and quality of life.

The poverty issue among the Orang Asli has been studied by Jamiran et al. (2013), who directed hands-on work on the economy of the Orang Asli in Kampung Peta in the state of Johor, which is in the south of Peninsular Malaysia. They believed

that the Orang Asli is poor because of their choice to live in isolation from the rest of society. This is a similar circumstance with the Orang Asli in Terengganu state in the peninsula's northeast. In 2011, the poverty rate of the Orang Asli in the state was 32.45%, with 11.70% classified as poor and the other 20.74% as hardcore poor (JAKOA 2011). In 2014, 61 individuals were identified as living in poverty, with 22 classified as poor and 39 as hardcore poor (JAKOA 2014). Noor Zamani (1999) and Ramle (2014) identified the Orang Asli's way of life as a reason for their destitution. The natives are solitary people who do not readily embrace development and interaction with other societies, besides being reluctant to take risks.

The main source of income of the Orang Asli in Kampung Sungai Berua, Hulu Terengganu, are forest products, such as rattan (*Calamus spp.*) and dividends from palm oil companies for the use of their land (Ramle 2014). From these sources of income, this study tries to track how they spend it to satisfy their daily needs.

Literature Review

The indigenous communities live in isolated regions and some of the members still practised their traditional beliefs and lifestyle (Ramle 2014). According to Todaro (1977), development is defined as an arrangement process and reorienting of social and economic systems. This opinion is in the line with Frank (2004), which indicated that development involves a change in the structure of the economy, society, politics and culture. In addition, according to Seers (1979), development results can be seen from a decrease in poverty, unemployment and inequality. Five indicators are commonly used to measure progress among the Orang Asli i.e. poverty indicators, education achievement, occupation status, housing and facilities (Khor 1988).

In the structure of a national improvement programme, particularly for the urban network, data would be acquired for consumption design. Studying consumption trends like family expenditure is vital to improve lives in an economic sense. Family income is usually limited and will be utilised proficiently to satisfy needs and prerequisites (Masud 1982). According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, people will prioritise expenditure on basic needs, for example, sustenance, clothing and housing for their family and themselves, before being able to satisfy psychological and self-fulfillment needs. This is bolstered by the study by Nordin (1976), who found that family needs, in order of importance, are nourishment, lodging, transport and clothing.

Methodology

The qualitative method had been selected to drive this research. This method was suitable for understanding a phenomenon. It delivered a form of social inquiry that focused on how to clarify an individual's belief, which was logical to their life

experiences and environment (Yeap 2000; Holloway 1997). Marshall and Rossman (1989) also stated that qualitative methods are capable of depicting and clarifying information in detail and profundity.

This inquest was planned as a case contextual investigation regarding cases that included observing individuals or units as a family, in class, school, social network and occasions (Merriam 1998; Burn 1995; Yin 2014). The design of this research was aimed as acquiring in-depth understanding about the respondents, focusing on the process rather than the output, and accentuating new findings and not verification of the theory or outcome (Merriam 1998). This approach also reflected the real life of respondents, which depicted a detailed overview on how they interacted in life (Patton 1990). Case data included interviews details, observations, records and statements, which could be obtained from any source. Fieldwork was conducted from August 2016 to July 2017 in the Semoq Beri village of Kampung Sungai Berua in Hulu Terengganu, Terengganu state. The ATLAS.ti software Version 7 was used for qualitative analysis of data gathered from fieldwork (Lewins and Silver 2007).

Results

Socio-economic survey found that the Orang Asli in Kampung Sungai Berua earned their income through the sale of forest products like rattan and agarwood, as well as receiving dividends from oil palm plantations for the use of their land (Ramle 2014). Table 1 shows the employment details of villagers in 2017.

Furthermore, this study also found that the Orang Asli spent most of their income on rice, eggs and sugar. When buying assets such as motorcycles and cars, they usually pay cash and did not utilise loans. The pattern of the Orang Asli family expenditures are stated in Table 2.

Moreover, the purchasing patterns of the Orang Asli were mostly dependent on what the suppliers, who were willing to travel far to their village, could offer them. Sometimes, they would make orders through the suppliers if they had a specific need. This study observed the suppliers coming to the village daily between 7.30 am and 7.30 pm. Majority of the traders had been doing business with the villagers

Table 1 Semoq Beri community employment details in Kampung Sungai Berua, Hulu Terengganu, in 2017

Type of employment	Percent %
Management/administration	1.0
Agriculture	2.9
Collecting forest resources	90.4
Traditional medicine practitioner/ midwife	1.9
Unemployed	3.8
Total	100.0

Table 2 Spending habits of the Semoq Beri community in Kampung Sungai Berua, Hulu Terengganu

Matter	Description
Expenditure	Buying basic needs and assets by cash.
Buying method	Mostly paid cash in one transaction.
Items often bought	Basic food items like rice, sugar and tea, besides household items like detergent, soap and mobile phone reload cards.

Table 3 Pattern of Orang Asli expenditure gathered from interviews with suppliers

	Informant 1	Informant 2	Informant 3
Pattern of spending	Frequent buying	Frequent buying	Frequent buying
The style of buyer	Likes to buy individually	Likes to buy individually	Likes to buy individually
	Buying only for current need.	Buying only for current need.	Buying only for current need.
Buyers' attitude	Customers will purchase on credit when they don't have enough money	Customers will purchase on credit when they don't have enough money	Customers will purchase on credit when they don't have enough money
Financial education	Understands the amount of money	Understands the amount of money	Understands the amount of the money
Type of items sold	Rice with gravy, sweet drinks, fried chicken, fried bananas, tobacco, detergent and soap	Rice with gravy, fried noodles, fried chicken and sweet drinks	Rice with gravy, sweet drinks, fried chicken, fried bananas, fried fish, snacks, spices, jewellery, tobacco, phone reload cards, detergent, soap, school clothes and rice.
Item in demand	Fried chicken	Fried chicken	Detergent

since 2010. As usual, they would supply products individually to families and the average daily expenditure of the villagers was RM10.00. But that depended on how much money they had on the particular time. This study also found that the Orang Asli frequently bought breakfast and lunch instead of cooking their own meal. Table 3 describes the Semoq Beri villagers buying habits gathered through interviews with three suppliers. All respondents described a similar pattern of expenditure.

The Semoq Beri villagers in Kampung of Sungai Berua frequently lived by the day, in which they spent all their income at once. Most of them spent on food, and the remainder was used for transport, bill payments, education and mobile phone reload cards. Figure 1 shows the business activities taking place in the village.

Fig. 1 Selling and buying activities in Kampung Sungai Berua, Hulu Terengganu



Conclusion

The Orang Asli community spent most of their income on basic needs, and the balance for expenditures such as transport, bill payments, education and communication. Moreover, most of them habitually spent their income all at once without saving any for future. But some of them were observed trying to make an effort to save their money. Thus, from the results of this study, we suggest an initiative by the government to help the Orang Asli by setting up mobile financial services in their village, and encouraging the villagers to open bank or investment accounts. In addition, the government could also teach them financial planning for future endeavours. However, the most important aspect is still to uplift the economic status of the Orang Asli. In order to save money, the villagers must be given opportunities to earn decent income so they would have more purchasing power, besides surplus money to set aside as savings.

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Norhayati Ab Manaf is a lecturer at Institute of Tropical Biodiversity and Sustainable Development, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. Before this, she worked as Social Research Officer in this Institute from 2011. She is a Ph.D. holder in Social Anthropology. Her Bachelor's degree in Business Administration at Universiti Utara Malaysia and completed her degree in 2008. She continued her study for a Master's degree in Integrated Coastal Zone Management at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu and completed her studies in 2010. On September 2016, she registered for a Ph.D. program in the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin. Her field of interest is Anthropology, Sociology, Indigenous Studies (Orang Asli) and Community Development.

Ramle Abdullah is a Professor at Research and Publishing Centre, National Academy of Arts Culture and Heritage, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Before this he is a Professor at Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin. His expertise is in Social Anthropology and Indigenous Studies (Orang Asli).

Jumadil Saputra is a senior lecturer at Department of Economics, School of Social and Economic Development, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. He is a Ph.D. holder in Financial Economics. He studied from the elementary school until senior high school in Aceh and finished his studies in 2003. Further, he continued his Bachelor's degree in the Faculty of Management and Economics at Malikulssaleh University and completed his degree in 2008. He continued his study for a Master's degree in Economics at Syiah Kuala University, Aceh and completed his studies in 2012. At the end of September 2013, he registered for a Ph.D. program in the Faculty of Social Development and Economics at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia. He is a member Indonesian Operations Research Association (IORA). His research areas are Insurance and Takaful, specifically financial economics (Islamic) and mathematics and modelling finance (Actuarial).

Nurul Faezah Noor Azizan is a masters degree holder in social sciences at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin. Her bachelor's degree in Anthropology and Dakwah at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin and completed her degree in 2013.