

Social Mobility and its Challenges Towards Orang Asli: A Conceptual Paper

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Abstract: *Due to the causes and effects of collective or individual movements resulting from changes in the social structure, social mobility exists (Aldridge, 2001). Malaysia was ranked 43rd in the World Economic Forum's Global Social Mobility Report released in 2020, meaning that people have fewer chances in health care, education, access to technology, working conditions, and social protection. In addition, social mobility impacts indigenous people's employment, education, and danger of exclusion. If the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is implemented with these ideals of equality and participation in mind, it can be revolutionary for indigenous peoples. Malaysia's government is dedicated to improving the indigenous people's socioeconomic well-being to attain the SDGs. Furthermore, the Malaysian government has established many development programmes, including the New Economic Policy, the Structured Placement Program, and others, to increase the social mobility of indigenous people. As a result, this conceptual paper will focus on a discussion of the paucity of research on Orang Asli's social mobility in Malaysia, factors influencing social mobility, difficulties impacting social mobility, and future studies in social mobility involving Malaysia's indigenous people.*

Keywords: Indigenous People; Orang Asli; Social mobility; Socio-economy

1. Introduction

The indigenous peoples of Malaysia make up a sizable component of the country's population. With a population of between 140,000 and 180,000 individuals, they constitute a tiny minority. The Orang Asli are classified into three ethnolinguistic groups: Senoi, Proto-Malay or Malay First, and Negrit (Masron, Masami, and Ismail, 2013). Indigenous peoples make up a small minority in Malaysia, accounting for less than 1% of the population (Department of Orang Asli Development, 2018).

The Orang Asli were the first to settle in the region. It is a group of people who were among the first to arrive in a new location and have supplemented their income by producing various crops. As a result, the Orang Asli's income, culture, spirituality, customs, and laws diverge from the dominant communities. The land, trees, rivers, and other natural resources of the Orang Asli people are still closely linked to their ancestral homelands.

They have resided in the exact location for centuries since they rely on natural resources. The Malaysian government has taken several initiatives to improve the living conditions of the Orang Asli. JAKOA, for example, has established many social development projects targeted at enhancing the Orang Asli community's well-being. JAKOA has worked on physical aid projects such as home renovations, public facility building, and infrastructure projects like halls, mosques, and water tanks (Manaf, Omar, Razali, Abdullah & Saputra, 2021). As a result, Orang Asli has primarily succeeded in sports, academics, business, leadership, and various other fields.

JAKOA is also dedicated to enhancing its collaboration with the Ministry of Education to increase the Orang Asli community's participation in ongoing education across the country (Maria, 2019). This is because education has been an essential part to which the Orang Asli people, who are still poor, can contribute meaningfully.

Nevertheless, the primary issue facing the Orang Asli people today is the high poverty rate. The Orang Asli community is still being left out of conventional economic progress. Orang Asli's other concerns include the loss and preservation of their culture and traditions, land rights, natural resource ownership and misuse, political and autonomous issues, pollution, health, and prejudice (Syed Hussain, Krishnasamy, & Golam Hassan, 2017). As a result, social mobility research is necessary to address this problem.

2. Problem Statement

According to the Global Social Mobility Report, countries that do not invest in the fundamental pillars of social mobility may suffer adverse effects for both their governments and the population. The negative repercussions include a weakened social fabric, loss of identity and dignity, the unpredictability of life without a stable and well-paid job, declining trust in institutions, and disillusionment with political processes (The Global Social, Mobility Report, 2020). Furthermore, high levels of social mobility among disadvantaged groups might lead to sentiments of isolation. This fosters distinct group identities and a split between those better off and those who are not (OECD, 2018).

Compared to the mainstream Malay, Chinese, and Indian groups in Malaysia, the Orang Asli have a narrow standard of living. According to the 2010 Malaysian Census, the percentage of households in the Orang Asli settlement area with incomes below the poverty line is 31.16 percent, or 11,423 Heads of Household (Abdullah, Azmah, Juli, and Rohana, 2019). As a result, the Malaysian government has designed and implemented many development policies and programs, including the New Economic Policy, National Vision Policy, Structured Placement Program, Housing Program, Economic Development Program, Community Development Project, Indigenous Entrepreneurship Development Program, Infrastructure Development Program, and a few others, through the Department of Orang Asli Development (Department of Orang Asli Development, 2018; Wee, Maryati, & Mohd Nur Syufaat, 2013).

In comparison to families under the current relocation scheme, a study by Kari, Masud, and Yahya (2016) shows that indigenous people are more likely to be poor if they dwell in environmentally sensitive and unprotected locations. Their lack of primary education and jobs exacerbated their terrible economic situation. The data also show that the indigenous group has difficulty accessing and obtaining support for fundamental requirements like housing, education, economic life, and other social infrastructure. Furthermore, the legislative structure for watershed management and the concentration on commodity crops such as palm oil and

natural rubber have indirectly contributed to the indigenous people's poverty. In order to provide individuals with adequate education, career opportunities, and social security in the future, the Malaysian government must ensure that the country's degree of social mobility remains low.

Besides, just a few studies look into the effects of socioeconomic programs on Malaysia's indigenous people (Saifullah, Kari, and Othman, 2018). Few studies on indigenous peoples have been conducted in recent years, particularly on land acquisition compensation (Anuar, Kamaruzzaman, & Daud; 2010), family planning (Rozniza Aznie, Lyndon, Sharifah Mastura, Selvadurai, Mimi Hanida, Syahiran, & Mazrin Rohizaq, 2018), poverty (Kari, Masud, & Yahya, 2016), education (Kamaruddin, 2006; Norwaliza, Ramlee, & Jasmi (2016); Rozniza Aznie, Lyndon, Vivien, Siti Norsakira, Syahiran, & Jali, 2018).

In 2017, Nor Hayati, Ibrahim, and Wan Mohd Zaifurin researched the socio-cultural shift and social mobility of estuarial communities on Peninsular Malaysia's East Coast. Their research is limited to employment, education, and cultural shifts in estuarial communities. As a result, new research is needed to fill in the gaps in the literature on indigenous people's social mobility so that it can be referred to by other researchers now and in the future. Furthermore, future research may look at elements that affect indigenous people's social mobility that has been overlooked in previous studies.

According to Nunn, Johnson, Monro, Bickerstaffe, and Kelsey (2007), governmental interventions to affect social mobility tend to be highly ineffective. They propose a "joined-up" approach involving federal departments, agencies, regional and local governments, and non-government organizations to address this issue. As a result, the target group for understanding the complexity of social mobility might be the implementers of the government's indigenous socioeconomic strategy and Indigenous Leaders and their communities.

Furthermore, research into social mobility focuses on themes of equality, opportunity, and the construction of a just society (Li, Zhang, & Kong, 2015). As a result, social mobility research can show patterns and trends in mobility outcomes among indigenous peoples to uncover the underlying causes of social inequality. As a result, future research could help to understand better the challenges of implementing socioeconomic development policies to improve indigenous people's social mobility.

3. Literature Review

Introduction to Indigenous Peoples

'Orang Asli' is based on the Arabic 'Asali,' which means 'original,' 'wellborn,' or 'aristocratic,' according to Iskandar Carey, while 'Asli' is derived from the Arabic 'Asali,' which means 'original,' 'wellborn,' or 'aristocracy,' according to Iskandar Carey (1976). Before the term Orang Asli was coined, "aborigines" were used. The Malaysian government feels the term "Orang Asli" should be used instead of "aborigines," which connotes "backwardness," "underdevelopment," and "primitiveness" (primitive). In no form does the name "Orang Asli" suggest "backward," "underdeveloped," or "primitive."

Aboriginal people are divided into three categories or primary groups, according to Carey (1976): Negrito, Senoi, and Proto-Malay. The Negrito ethnic group includes the Kensiu, Kintak, Jahai, Lanoh, Mendrik, and Batek sub-groups, whereas the Senoi ethnic group includes the Semai, Temiar, Jahet, and Che 'Wong sub-groups. Ma' Betis (Mah Meri) sub-groups

include Temuan, Semelai, Jakun, Orang Kanak, Orang Kuala, and Orang Seletar, whereas Ma' Betis (Mah Meri) sub-groups are Temuan, Semelai, Jakun, Orang Kanak, Orang Kuala, and Orang Seletar (Department of Orang Asli Development, 2018). As per the writer's encounter with the Indigenous population, each ethnic language or sub-group did not comprehend the other ethnic languages or sub-groups. As a result, Malay has become their predominant language, replacing English.

Orang Asli's activities include hunting and gathering agricultural commodities. The Orang Asli manner of life, on the other hand, has changed dramatically. Changes in the forest ecosystem are being caused by development, and government policies that encourage agriculture and resettlement are driving changes in the local economy. Agricultural sectors such as rubber, tea, oil palm plantations, and industry employ indigenous people (Nobuta, 2008).

Economical, physical, and capital growth and various forms of social development transformations have had a wide range of positive effects on indigenous people's lives. The government's policies have improved the economics, religion, education, communication, and health of these minorities (Masron, Masami, and Ismail, 2013).

Definition of Social Mobility

According to Korea Development Institute (2014), social mobility is a multifaceted term that refers to a person's standing within society. One's financial status influences one's social reputation and authority. It has something to do with economic mobility, which is based on earnings, profits, and wealth (Korea Development Institute, 2014).

Social mobility can also explain a scenario in which an agent's relative economic standing is not governed by baseline variables such as parental income or family history. As a result, we are looking at things like schooling, formal laws, skills, opportunities, and work ethic, to name a few, as well as the factors that influence an offspring's income mobility relative to its parents' (Galiani, 2010).

Poonwassie (1992) discovered that aboriginal people value and support education to achieve social mobility and a better standard of living. As a result, elementary schools require highly competent employees from inside the culture and community to provide a solid educational foundation. Additionally, according to Cunninghame (2017), maintaining funding for successful enabling, outreach, and scholarship programs are necessary to guarantee that the full diversity of Australia's population, especially aborigines, is reflected in higher education and that facilitation of social mobility is accessible to all.

Research also discovered a link between money and health. Men's self-rated health was aided by upward economic mobility. In contrast, women's self-rated health was harmed by downward educational mobility, and both women's and men's self-rated health was harmed by downward income mobility, especially between those living on reserves and other Aboriginal settlements (Veenstra & Vanzella-Yang, 2021). Wettasinghe et al. (2020) discovered that chronic health difficulties, social and emotional well-being, and healthcare access concern older Aboriginal Australians. As a result, the technology may be able to assist with the delivery of applications.

Australia's indigenous population has been concentrated in low-income metropolitan areas for more than two decades. Indigenous Australians are also isolated from the rest of the population in major Australian cities. The low level of work demand exacerbates the poor job results of the urban Indigenous population in locationally disadvantaged low socioeconomic status

neighborhoods and limited access to public transportation (Boyd, 1996). Consequently, this study shows that to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians living in low-income regions, the right combination of policies must address local issues while also attempting to enhance Australia's general macroeconomic employment performance.

As a result, the research on how Orang Asli is affected by social mobility might aid in the development of specific policies or initiatives by the Malaysian government or non-governmental organizations.

The Global Social Mobility Index

The Global Social Mobility Index (see Table 1) focuses on the policies, activities, and structures that collectively define the degree to which everyone in society has a reasonable opportunity to reach their full potential, regardless of their socioeconomic status, parent's origins, or birthplace. Moreover, the Global Social Mobility Index provides policymakers with a framework for identifying places where social mobility can be improved and fairly shared opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their stage of development. Thus, the Global Social Mobility Index is relevant and can be used to identify the area of social mobility that is lacking.

Table 1: The Global Social Mobility Index

The Global Social Mobility Index		
1st pillar	Health	The Health pillar evaluates a country's ability to serve its population with high-quality healthcare. Access to high-quality healthcare is a significant aspect that influences a person's capacity to advance up the social ladder for the rest of his or her life. Health-care provision varies widely among countries, and health disparities can have a direct impact on one's capacity to obtain job.
2nd-4th Pillars	Education <i>(Lifelong Learning, Access, Quality, and Equity)</i>	Education Access, Education Quality & Equity, and Lifelong Learning are the three pillars that assess a country's capacity to access education and ensuring that all individuals, regardless of socioeconomic level, have access to high-quality education throughout their lives. Governments should pursue human capital development programmes to address the plethora of structural challenges that prevent students from disadvantaged backgrounds from achieving their educational goals (e.g., insufficient school funding in rural communities, low-quality teaching, high student-to-teacher ratios, etc.).
5th Pillar	Technology Access	The population's degree of technology access and acceptability is measured by the Technology Access pillar. However, access to such resources via technology is frequently uneven, reinforcing past inequalities. Technology may help level the playing field even further by distributing knowledge to everyone, regardless of socioeconomic class. Furthermore, technology has the potential to blur these barriers and enable unrestricted access to data.

<p>The development of online learning has made educational options more accessible. In addition to established education institutions, online learning is crucial for offering access to lifetime learning.</p>		
6th-8th Pillars	<p>Fair Work Opportunities (<i>Work Opportunities, Equal Salaries, and Working Standards</i>)</p>	<p>Work Opportunities, Equal Salaries, and Working Standards are three pillars that may be used to assess an economy's capacity to provide people with employment, acceptable working conditions, and fair salaries regardless of their educational or socioeconomic background. Occupational structures, abilities, and competency requirements are shifting as a result of technology, globalisation, and the global economy's ongoing green transition. Emerging technology would undoubtedly result in a widespread alteration of practically all currently existent work functions as it spreads across sectors. In many industrialised economies, the failure to convert education into work opportunities has resulted in reduced growth rates and a serious problem of long-term unemployment and inactivity.</p>
9th-10th Pillars	<p>Social Security & Inclusive Institutions</p>	<p>These two pillars, Social Protection and Inclusive Institutions, are used to assess an economy's ability to offer social security, inclusive institutions, and effective public services to its citizens. Evidence suggests that job insecurity is on the rise as skill needs evolve, potentially increasing the number of job changes over the course of a person's career. Social safety nets aid in the reduction of disparities in living standards across regions or classes, as well as support with job changes, ensuring that people's long-term chances are not jeopardised. To be inclusive, a community must have fair and equitable access to the legal system and institutions, as well as safeguards against mistreatment of traditionally oppressed groups. Corruption has a high societal cost since it allows for greater hoarding of resources, both in terms of higher education and job opportunities.</p>

Sources: World Economic Forum, 2020

Challenges of Social Mobility Among Indigenous People

Indigenous peoples around the world are exposed to a variety of social and economic conditions that impede their ability to exercise their human rights. They are less likely to have access to education, to live in areas prone to natural catastrophes, to have insufficient or no sanitation, and to have limited access to health care, all of which contribute to poorer productivity (United Nations, n.d).

In addition, based on the findings of the study by Mustapha, Omar, Hassan, Yasin, and Salleh (2010) the variables impacting the development of Orang Asli youth are complicated. The most significant suppressive element is local leaders' inability to change among the Orang Asli

youth. Local public servants, such as teachers, were likewise constrained in their ability to make meaningful improvements in the lives of young people.

Furthermore, indigenous peoples who relocate to cities confront unique challenges. Additional problems, most notably unemployment, are frequently encountered. In metropolitan locations, indigenous peoples may face prejudice and struggle to maintain their language, identity, and culture and teach future generations, leading to a loss of biodiversity indigenous values and heritage (United Nations, n.d).

In term of culture, when a language becomes extinct, it loses its link to an indigenous tribe's cultural and historical heritage. Typically, indigenous culture and history are passed down down the generations through oral history and narrative Karim, Kamarudin, Zaidi, Rashdi, Ghani (2021). These indigenous people will lose their identity and belonging if they are not connected to their language and cultural past.

4. Conclusion

A fresh study is needed to fill in the gaps in the literature on indigenous peoples' social mobility so that other scholars can refer to it now and in the future. Future research should also look into factors that affect indigenous people's social mobility that has been missed in past studies. As a result, the factors impacting social mobility identified by the World Economic Forum's Global Social Mobility Index, 2020, can be used to construct questionnaires and interview questions for future studies. Research involving governments and non-governmental organizations can also be conducted to understand better the complexities of implementing policies for indigenous people from their perspective. More social mobility research that focuses on equality, opportunity and the creation of a just society is also needed. As a result, social mobility research can disclose the fundamental causes of social inequality by revealing patterns and trends in mobility outcomes among indigenous peoples. As a result, future research could aid in better understanding the challenges of adopting socioeconomic development programs to increase the social mobility of indigenous people.

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