



Applying territorial approach to rural agribusiness development in Malaysia's aboriginal (Orang Asli) settlements: A comparative study of Pos Balar, Kelantan and Pos Sinderut, Pahang

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Abstract

Multiple factors may contribute to poverty among Orang Asli, namely, traditional, consumption oriented ways of crop cultivation which depend largely on family labour, inconsistent returns of cash cropping, the presence of middle traders which prevent their direct access to market, lack of transportation network and information, lack of access to basic infrastructure, low education, insufficient skills and limited opportunities to change. The Territorial Approach to Rural Agribusiness Development (TARBD) envisages eight stages of meeting the twin goal of food security and poverty reduction, viz. 1) planning and initiation by building strategic partnership 2) mobilization through participatory diagnosis and community visioning, 3) formation of participatory market research, 4) participation programmes, 5) evaluation of enterprise options, 6) design and implementation of agro-enterprise projects, 7) support services for enterprise development, and 8) strengthening of local institutions. This study compared the situations in two Orang Asli settlements - Pos Balar in Kelantan and Pos Sinderut in Pahang - with respect to the TARBD's eight stages. The findings revealed some real limitations with the TARBD approach and pointed to the need to adapt it to actual local conditions and contexts of the Orang Asli settlements.

Keywords: agribusiness, food security, Orang Asli, poverty reduction, rural development, Territorial Approach to Rural Agribusiness Development (TARBD)

Introduction

The Orang Asli in Pos Balar and Pos Sinderut reside within the vicinity of thick rainforest in Kelantan and Pahang respectively. Farming, gathering and hunting jungle produce are inevitably the backbone economic activities of those indigenous people. However, due to the geographical isolation and lack of access to market, every household in the village practices agriculture and focuses on growing staple food to meet consumption of the individual family. As farming activity is predominantly subsistence in nature, income earned from farming and collecting activities is limited. According to the findings from a baseline study in Pos Balar and Pos Sinderut, it was found that more than 90% of the surveyed male farmers earned less than RM300 (USD 75) a month. The fact is that about 66% and 74% of farmers in Pos Balar and Pos Sinderut respectively received cash income of less than RM60 (USD 15) from agricultural activities (EPU, 2012). Based on the indicator of cash income earned, it is suggested that Orang Asli are mired in chronic poverty. It is worth noting that poverty encompasses not only economic and material resources deprivation derived from income, it is also a violation to human rights (Education and Research Association Consumer, 2001).

Essentially, what make Orang Asli poor? Does the poverty arise as a result of lacking in initiatives among themselves or a lack of opportunities? What should Orang Asli do in order to break the poverty