

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THE CASE OF NYEGOL OF UPPER BENGOH

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Abstract: Drawing on anthropological observations, this paper throws its focus on the Nyegol community in Upper Bengoh, Sarawak, to examine how and what the community did to negotiate and adapt to the disruptions as a result of COVID-19. In a world changed by COVID-19, the importance of understanding community resilience to health security has garnered the attention and interests of scholars, health practitioners, and policymakers worldwide. There are increasing attempts to understand, measure disaster preparedness, and examine the ability of communities to negotiate the spread of the disease itself as well as to adapt to the disruptive effects of the mechanisms put in place to halt the transmissions of the virus. Based on Chaskin *et al.* (2001), this paper elaborates on the four characteristics of a community in dealing with the pandemic, namely, a sense of community, commitment to the community, ability to solve problems, and having access to resources. The community has effectively mobilised mechanisms and resources, namely their social capital, and social organisation, located within the locality. With that this paper suggests that it is important to consider rural communities' adaptive strategies and especially their own autonomy when designing policies that affect their livelihoods.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, community resilience, nyegol upper bengoh, community adaptive capacities, movement control order.

Introduction

One of the concepts developed as a theoretical framework to understand how communities are able to cope with change or disturbance as a result of stressors/triggers is community resilience. Like many other concepts in social sciences, there is yet to be a consensus on what community resilience is, with different definitions emerging in academic literature, policy, and practice. However, in this paper, it is invariably viewed as positive and there is growing recognition that resilience is seen as critical to a community's ability to withstand and mitigate the stress of disturbance or disruption. Recent studies have identified several strategies and interventions as components of community resilience. These include an increase in adaptations and system transformations (Nelson *et al.*, 2007), strong social/institution factors (Schwarz *et al.*, 2011), the importance of addressing and facilitating recovery (Alonge *et al.*, 2019) and rehabilitation (Jamshed *et al.*, 2019).

Drawing on the concept of community capacity, this paper explores how the displaced community in Nyegol negotiate and adapt to the effects of disruption due to COVID-19. The concept of community capacity has been used to theorize the context of change and it is also a component of social organisation (Mancini & Bowen, 2009). Chaskin *et al.* (2001) outline four action bases of community capacity: "(1) a sense of community (2) commitment to the community among its members (3) the ability to solve problems and (4) access to resources" (p.14). Resilience is attained through these adaptive capacities. In contrast to an earlier understanding of resilience as a measure of "stability" (Holling, 1973), this paper argues it is a process that leads to community's adjustments and adaptation. The question we want to explore is how and what the community has done in response to government efforts to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This is important because the success of government decisions and