

Orang Asli Hulu Terengganu in Adaptation of Nature Changes in the Economic Perspective

Nik Nizam Hamdan¹, Ramle Abdullah¹, Atirah Rambli¹ & Iqbal Jumaat¹

¹Faculty of Applied Social Science, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, 20300, Kuala Nerus, Terengganu, Malaysia

Abstract-Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia is known for the community that has a close relationship with nature. However, in the era of development which leads to the destruction of habitat for varieties of flora and fauna, it makes Orang Asli harder and harder to live by. Development that is meant for Orang Asli or not, had changed their natural ecology and jeopardize their traditional way of living. Thus, the aim for this research is to analyse Semaq Beri in Hulu Terengganu in adaptation on changes of nature in their daily activities of economy and gathering food resources. Research Method: qualitative through ethnography approach. Research data are acquired via participant observation, interview and research documents. Researchers used QSR Nvivo to analyze data that are collected. Findings: From the research, we can conclude that Semaq Beri in Hulu Terengganu still has high dependency towards nature especially in terms of economic returns. Nevertheless, their manifestation changes to other methods of searching for side revenues such as searching for woods in new territory, subsistence agriculture, re-planting of Agarwood (gaharu) and manufacturing of economic equipment. For access to foods, on the other hand, compared to previously, they are 90 percent rely upon outside food resources. Hence, the degree of the dependency of Semaq Beri adaptation process with nature is decreasing. This shows that Semaq Beri is going through modern lifestyle transformation.

Keywords: Orang Asli, Economy, Changes Adaptation.

I. INTRODUCTION

A large segment of indigenous people still practices the old traditional way of life and live in the forest because they inherit their ancestors' way of life. For Orang Asli, their life is very depended with nature because they still depend on the resources in their environment. Initially, they need to fulfil their basic needs such as foods, drinks, and medicine. (Lye Tuck Po, 2002, Asmawi, 2013, Ramle, 2014). However, the usage of natural resources changes as well with current developments, and Orang Asli used natural resources for added value to improve their revenue and help them economically (Ramle, 2014; W. Amir Zal, Hood Salleh, Mustaffa Omar & Sharina Halim, 2014).

Therefore, natural resources are not limited to life sustainability of Orang Asli but also for them to gain potential in their community. The dependency of Orang Asli with natural resources is not restricted to foods and economy, but it is also involved in various aspects such as cultural, ritual, belief and such, and Orang Asli are more dependent with their nature if compare to other community. Their dependency with

nature is so crucial because their surroundings have influenced their sociocultural, this includes daily economic activities, community, belief and rituals, the norms, arts, symbolic system, traditions, and taboo, language, and communication system (Endicott, 1979; Hood, 1993; Ramle, 2014).

However, recently Orang Asli has difficulties to practice their traditional way of life as they are forced to join the mainstream. Orang Asli has a very close relationship with the forest and other natural resources. Unfortunately, their lifestyle is easily jeopardized because of modernization and developments as the former and latter need natural resources, thus affecting their ecosystems and living culture. For instance, Orang Asli Bateq in Pahang National Park are facing threats in their well-being as uncontrolled land clearing and loggings happens (Lye Tuck Po, 2005). Changes in their environments affecting their life as they dependent completely to nature.

Cultural and lifestyle changes also happen to Orang Asli Bateq in Pahang National Park as explained by Zuriatun Fadziah Sahdan, Rosniza Aznie Che Rose & Habibah Ahmad (2009) resulted from ecotourism that is applied to the community. According to them, ecotourism is a good tool for cultural preservation. Furthermore, Orang Asli is rich with a unique culture that can attract tourists to learn their lifestyle. Nonetheless, if ecotourism aim is not fulfilling, it may destruct the culture that has been practiced thousands of years ago because diffusion had happened. In four aspect of the research, the only clothing that undergo changes instantly without traditional culture retention. Foods, on the other hand, change parts and infuse with outside culture, while language and traditional craft are still unblemished.

Research that been done by Amir Zal et. al. (2014) regarding Orang Asli Lanoh concluded that Lanoh community in Lenggong Perak are facing difficulties with declining of natural resources and capacity to use them. He also mentions in his research that Orang Asli Lanoh encounter with three risks which are changes cause by developments, disease outbreak and changes of drastic weather. The study of the precedent researcher regarding the effect of development towards Orang Asli Lanoh such as Dallos (2011) and Hasan Mat Nor (2009) also explained the same conflict.

Subsequently, research that made by Hairul Nizam, Ramle Abdullah, Hafis Simin, Asmawi & Ibrahim (2016) found out

that the perils to natural resources in Kenyir Lake concerning wandering are of Orang Asli Semaq Beri in Hulu Terengganu as there is invasion by the local and foreign community which can be deduced to unsustainability to nature. Apart from that, the implication of Kenyir development project, land and field clearing, loggings and highway construction resulting in nature changes at Kenyir Lake National Park. This research focus on threatening of nature at Orang Asli Semaq Beri area and negative effects towards their economic developments as they are relying on nature.

Therefore, we can conclude based on past research that biodiversity exploration aiming for development and modernization effecting Orang Asli acceptance of attitude and perspective that involve with development projects that are for them directly or indirectly. Due to the restructuring of the economic development plan to improve that standard of living of Orang Asli, thus it changes their lifestyle, culture and new economic system. However, development did not give negative implication but for the better change.

Hence, this article will explain the adjustment of lifestyle due to their environmental changes, in economic and food resources aspects, through an adaptation process, also we want to discuss Semaq Beri adaptation with nature threats and to occupy the inadequacy of Hairul Nizam et. al. (2016) research.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher chooses to use the qualitative method as an approach to answer research objective as it seems suitable to the focal point of the research because the research is leaning towards natural environment and it is a suitable instrument to collect data. It is suitable to use a qualitative approach for the researcher to obtain comprehensive, meticulous and evident data and the researcher can come out with descriptive that wanted to be examined (Ramle, 2001). Qualitative research is also relevant for this research to understand Orang Asli Semaq Beri community, in accordance with Morrow (2007) and Cyntia et. al, (2010) that qualitative research gives researchers the space and time for researcher to examine, understand and interpret in depth every phenomenon or situation that happen in natural environment and determine the nature of their social practice, relationship and belief through participant observation in the community.

Data collecting are carried out through field research, participant observation, in-depth interview with 10 residents of Orang Asli Semaq Beri in Hulu Terengganu. This research was completed by the researcher in two sessions, the first session was from July until September 2017, and the second session was from July until September 2018. The researcher was one of volunteer teacher taught students of primary six in preparation on Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) in Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampung Sungai Berua which located in the area.

The researcher used an unstructured interview to the residents of the community because it is convenient with social settings of Orang Asli in Kampung Sungai Berua who are timid, enigmatic and distrustful towards outsiders. The researcher chose to ask a spontaneous question yet still guided by issues raised. Document analysis is also carried out to identify the exact form of community dependency.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Engagement of the Economic Development Program

JAKOA is responsible to tend to Orang Asli well-being had planned and administer various economic development programmes to improve Orang Asli community and reduce Orang Asli on their dependency on forest and nature as their revenue resources. Government acknowledge that the changes with nature with regards of Orang Asli main revenues and because of that, the government had introduced programmes such as Commercial Replanting (TSK), Entrepreneurship Programme, agriculture projects and Income Increasing Programme (PPP) as initiatives to new job opportunities to Orang Asli Semaq Beri, such as in palm oil and agriculture sectors.

The results of the study discovered that the adaptation of Orang Asli in new economic projects was still mediocre. According to JAKOA personnel, when the programme was first started, only 25 percent of the population are interested in palm oil plantation in their area. The decreasing of their involvement corresponding to years, due to that, there is no more TSK programme, because they only receive a dividend from the profits and now it is managed by a foreign worker. Orang Asli did not accept economic agriculture as they still seek economic resources from jungle produce and other issues rises.

Entrepreneurship Programme, on the other hand, a resident had given financial assistance for him to establish a grocery store. His interest to run his own business had helped him and also his community to get everyday goods such as sugar, milk, and flour. JAKOA had provided other premises however it does not withstand. The second application was not approved as a shortage of financial from JAKOA and past failure.

Apart from that, PPP's banana planting project was also a failure as a lack of commitment from the community wanted to be farmers as aimed by PPP. In accordance with JAKOA, only four residents who join the project, but only one had sold his harvest. The reasons said banana plantation are slow to produce if compare to Agarwood. Now all of them had stopped and back to searching jungle produce.

Involvement in the economical project mentioned that participate by the first generation and the findings showed that senior residents have low interest in these projects thus all of them was a failure. According to Faizol (2019), selling forest products can generate their revenues hence their dependency on the traditional economy is higher if compare with the modern economy. Nevertheless, changes in nature had forced

Semaq Beri community to adjust with their environment through these activities:

B. *New Territory Exploration*

Destruction of the area which have abundant of natural resources continuously had change ecology. This gave considerable impact on economic activities to the local community (Sham Sani, 1986). Consequently, the changes in nature also change wander area for Orang Asli. Formerly, they used to wander around their residential area because they can find things that they needed. Since development and ecology changes that had destructed forest area, they have to adjust themselves with the changes in the traditional economy which they need to go further in the jungle. Although National Park and Kenyir Lake are still the places they went to find jungle produce, however, they need to go further such far as Merang, Kemaman, and Besut, to find other produce. Some will go to as far as GuaMusang. One of the informants stated that:

“Kayusemakinsusahsekarang. Kita sampajalansampai Merang, Besutmacam- macamlah. Kita terpaksajalanjauh la carikayu”

(Informant 8)

“Kalu masukponbalikhari je anak-anok. MasukMarang, tasik (Kenyir), Besut rata rata la kitamasuk. Saya dah lama dah takmasukdekattahun dah. Setahunlebihsebabanakanaktakbagimasuk (kerana fakorkesihatan). Demo (mereka) bagisiyaduacukup dah”.

(Informant 4)

The adaptation of Semaq Beri community to the changes of ecology that are happening around them are searching for jungle produce in a new area. On top of that, they need to have a car or boats to ease their burden. The car has been the necessity for Orang Asli in Hulu Terengganu as it helps them to explore the depth of the jungle in Marang, Besut, and area in between.

On the contrary, buying glass fibre boats can help in economic activities in Kenyir Lake. Even though they are skilled in making a raft, it is impractical for them to use it at Kenyir Lake. Orang Asli exploring in Kenyir Lake which is almost 300 000 hectares, it is impossible to use a raft, thus glass fibre boats are more pragmatic to be used.

There are increasing in revenue as they explore further from their residential area however, because of fuel for their vehicles are expensive, the revenues are just enough for them.

C. *Subsistence Agriculture*

Formally, Semaq Beri community in Kampung Sungai Berua are nomadic people. The nomadic lifestyle is only depending on natural resources and far from agricultural activities. Even though now they still are depending on jungle produce, some of them had started to plant rubber tree and fruits to gain more revenues. The changes in their lifestyle as a response to ecological changes are alarming. Initially, fruits are planted

for families but if there is demand, they will sell them. However, rubber plantation has a very slow process which distressing few communities. One informant is worried because the rubber plantation had given them nothing and the scarcity of jungle produce. His respond was:

“Hasil hutansekarangnipayah la tapibuleh la nakmakan. Sekarangnihasilpayahkitaadetanamitutanamgetahkatatastu. Tu mbuh-tumbuhanpokok-pokokbuahtidaklahbergantung pada hutansaja la, Getahbesar dah tapitakmenorehlagi. Ade la sikit je dalamduaekar je. Memangtuanahsendiritakkongsi”.

(Informant 4)

“Dulu JAKOA bagitanahkebunnitapidapatke lima orang je. Ade lahpetaisikit durian sikitgetahsikitcempedak pun adejugak. Kat atastuadegetahadebuohsetorsatuekarlebih la. Akujualjugok durian tudapatlah 1000 lebihjugok. Enambijisepuluhriya. Orang kampong luar sane jual kilo. Akutakmboh (takmahu). Kulitdiabuangjugok. Orang maribelisini la akutokkeluar pun. Kebunkebunnibagianakpakatmakan. Takdokkebunnisusohbud ok-budokninakamekmakankebun orang nanti deme maroh.”.

(Informant 2)

Some of the community aware of the importance to develop agricultural activities that are managed by themselves. It shows that they did not need to depend on others or nature resources anymore, even though their plantation activates are not very systematic and well planned. By selling fruits to have a source of revenue, it helps them to lessen their worries about the changes in the environment and nature. The image below shows orchard that is cultivated by the community, they are selling it at a cheaper price. The fruits are durians, jackfruits, and *rambutan*. They also planted bitter beans and cassava.

Replanting trees also one of the efforts to increase their revenues as they are aware of the changes in nature. Some of the resident’s replant Agarwood at their orchard. Through the interview, only one resident who replanting Agarwood.

“Akubukan lain tanampokokgaharunisebabaku rasa kayunimakin lama makintakdokdalamhutansana. Biarlahkaluakutanamanakcucubolehkenalbolehpakaisama-samananti. Anokpokokniambek (ambil) denganni, Orang yang bagikayuniamekdenganmatakayu. Esok la nakjumpadiadia duduk dekatbawahJenagortu.Candanakutanamtakhidupbawahtugahar usajetu. Kalu terascomel (elok) besar-besarni (besarbetis). Gaharututunggubesar 10 11 tahun la barumolek. Akutanamuntucucu-cucusaja la. Dohhabissinitoloksinitolaksana. Ni simpananuntukesok-esok”.

(Informant 2)

D. *Manufacturing Economic Equipment*

With the changes in nature, Orang Asli in Kampung Berua had come out with few efforts. The community is skilled in

making economic equipment such as wood scraper. The wood scraper is used for the cleaning process of Agarwood and *candan*. This skill learned from the Malay community that is not far from their area.

The wood scraper will only be made when there is demand for it. According to one of the informants, he is one of the experience makers of the wood scraper. For one wood scraper, it will be sold for RM 100. His skill in recycling had made the product is worth selling because it is made from metal from bicycle and the tip is made from dead wood that he got from the jungle. According to him:

“Akubuatjugakbenda lain-lain untuk tamping duit. Kadangkadangkaharutokdapatkubuatlatkikiskayu. Ada orang Melayutempahdapatlah serratus. Benda ninibuatdaribesibasikal. Kayuhulupulakgunakayumati”.

(Informant 1)

IV. CONCLUSION

In the nutshell, the community of Kampung Berua had to adapt to the changes in nature. Constrains of getting resources for free which for their revenue resources had altered their lifestyle. The adaptation that we witness shows that their eagerness to integrate with the mainstream. In addition, youngsters of Orang Asli Semaq Beri in Hulu Terengganu had shown their potential and acceptance towards the modern economy and we should focus on visions and be optimistic so that they can be the catalyst for ideal community.

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