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The impact of top-down policy changes on socioeconomic status of Orang Asli

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Abstract

This study is written to investigate the impact of top-down policy change on the socioeconomic status of Orang Asli. The study design is quantitative research through a survey questionnaire. Total 49 head of households were participated and collected using simple random sampling. The data were analysed using descriptive (e.g. frequency and percentage) and inferential statistical analyses and assisted by SPSS-23. The results showed that the household income of respondents do not significantly different based on their age and education levels. In other words, the top-down policy changes do not give a significant impact on increasing socioeconomic status of Orang Asli.

Keywords: Orang Asli, top-down policy change, and socioeconomic status.

El impacto de los cambios en la política superior en el estado socioeconómico de Orang Asli

Resumen

Este estudio está escrito para investigar el impacto del cambio de política de arriba hacia abajo, en el estado socioeconómico de Orang Asli. El diseño del estudio es la investigación cuantitativa a través de un cuestionario de encuesta. Se participaron y recolectaron un total de 49 jefes de familia utilizando un muestreo aleatorio simple. Los datos se analizaron mediante análisis estadísticos descriptivos (p. Ej., Frecuencia y porcentaje) e inferenciales y con la asistencia del SPSS-23. Los resultados mostraron que el ingreso familiar de los encuestados no es significativamente diferente según su edad y nivel educativo. En otras palabras, los cambios de política de arriba hacia abajo no dan un impacto significativo en el aumento del estatus socioeconómico de Orang Asli.

Palabras clave: Orang Asli, cambio de políticas de arriba hacia abajo y estatus socioeconómico.

1. INTRODUCTION

In many democratic countries, the process of improving a civilian's well-being, including one of the aborigines, has been vulnerable to the political elites or influential political leaders who have the authority to formulate and endorse policy decisions at the legislative level (Ameen et al., 2017; Vahedi & Arvand, 2016). In Malaysia, civilians, as well as aboriginal peoples like Orang Asli (OA), is of concerns to various writers for their inferiority and dependency issues, not only in the mainstream education but also in the socioeconomic and health realms. Their academic achievement is poor (Rabahi & Awang 2015) and their socioeconomic condition is also low that led to exposures to diseases, infections, and

malnutrition (Lin, 1994; Schratz et al. 2010). For the Malaysian government, OA is a reluctant group (Aiken & Leigh 2011). On the contrary, Orang Asli perceived the government as less democratize than its treatment to other ethnic groups when it comes to their relationship to the government (Idrus, 2010; Colfer, 2011). For the government, a perceived needs to improve the well-being of the community is through changes in the structure of policy affecting the community.

This is a common top-down practice of development policies in Malaysia (McCourt 2012). In the case of OA, the government perceives that they require rebuilding and adaptation with the majority society of the country (Aiken & Leigh 2011). The position reflects the power of the government is above the community, which is to provide for the security in all aspects of life, including the community's socioeconomic position. With regard to the socioeconomic status of OA, a top-down policy change took place in 2010 as during the annual Budget presentation in 2010, the sixth Prime Minister - Mohd Najib Bin Tun Abdul Razak declared restructuring of the department in charge of the Orang Asli, from the Department of Orang Asli Affairs to the Department of Orang Asli Development. According to the former prime minister (FPM), changes had to be introduced in the structure for the sake of streamlining all development works in the name of inclusiveness "to improve the socio-economic status of the OA community" (Kou & Zang 2013).

This modification began to take effect in 2011 and led to introductions of some new development programs for the OA to tailor the perceived needs of the political elites. However, as the policy decision passed through the government, the question is "what was the effects of

the top-down policy change on the socio-economic status of Orang Asli in pre and post-2010 period?" So far, no comprehensive study has been done to reveal the effect of the top-down policy change. Thus, this paper compares the perceptions of the socioeconomic status of OA in pre and post-2010 period and analyzes whether the top-down policy change derived from a political elite has an effect on the Orang Asli's socioeconomic position.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The top-down refers to a decision-making process that converges from the institutional-choice level to public-choice level. Policy change refers to replacement in policy towards effective implementation and enforcement. The top-down policy change means different thing to different people. This is because there are many mediating factors that support such top-down policy change. There are four common mediating factors affecting changes in policy. They include problems that pressure policy change, actors' preferences, institutional capacity and discourse that enhance capacity for change. This paper refers to a top-down policy change to convergence with preferences of political elite actors. In democratic countries, elite politics and political elites are two different but related things. The former is about processes in the form of interactions among political elites to quest power and influence (Kou & Zang 2013; Fraser et al., 2006). On the other hand, the latter refers to formal actors, i.e political leaders elected by the people and who can exert influence on citizens because of their legitimate prerogative positions in the government institutions (Farazmand 1999; Chen 1975).

The top-down policy change is not new to the Malaysian government and its policy structure as decisions of the political elites play prominent roles in its international policies as well its domestic programs (Meseguer, 2005; Siddiquee et al. 2017; Lima et al., 2018). According to McCourt (2012) policy structure at various levels in public services domain in Malaysia is shaped mainly by top-down decisions of the political elites. This may include changes in government policies whenever new regimes take over the administration. The exercise of policy processes, from the levels of policy formulation to the policy change, have a significant impact on the public issues, including the socioeconomic position of the civilians (Adler & Newman 2002). In terms of policy change and its relations with socioeconomic position, little consensus exists on the impacts of top-down policy change derived from the political elite's decisions on Orang Asli's socioeconomic position in Malaysia. Most studies favour the general dimension of policy processes impact. For instance, Howell et al. (2006) indirectly considered the subject in their study on the deprived community of Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia. They argued that the state of a socioeconomic pattern of the aboriginal groups is mainly a consequence of the government policy.

3. MATERIALS AND METHOD

As a novel strategy, the design of this study is quantitative analysis through a survey questionnaire was distributed to Orang Asli at Sungai Berua, Hulu Terengganu, Malaysia. Total 50 head of households participated in this study and collected using the simple stratified random

sampling. The data analysed using two types of statistical analysis that is, descriptive and inferential statistics. First, the descriptive statistic is conducted to identify the sample distribution among respondents participated and seconds, the inferential statistics are used to investigate the impact of top-down policy changes on the socioeconomic status of Orang Asli in Terengganu, Malaysia. The descriptive statistic involves the frequency and percentage and inferential statistic includes the independent sample t-test and Analysis of variance (ANOVA). The data were analysed by assisted by statistical software i.e. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS-23). To introduce the area of Kampung Sungai Berua, we presented through the map as seen in Figure 1 below:
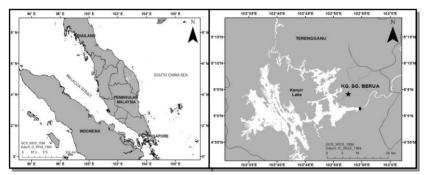

Figure 1: The area of Kampung Sungai Berua, Hulu Terengganu, Malaysia

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the result of data analysis which consists of descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics analysis will report in the form of the demographic profile including frequency and

percent. It aims to identify the respondent's distribution and characteristics. Further, this study will report the result of descriptive statistics involving mean and standard deviation. Besides that, as aforementioned in the previous discussion, we analyze the data using 2 types of inferential statistics analysis namely test of independent sample and Analysis of variance (ANOVA). Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents participated in this study.

Table 1: The distribution of respondents

Demography	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	49	100.0
Age	< 30 years	15	30.6
	31-40 years	16	32.7
	41-50 years	4	8.2
	51-60 year	9	18.4
	61 and above	5	10.2
Ethnic	Bateq	4	8.2
	Semaq Beri	45	91.8
State	Terengganu	34	69.4
	Pahang	12	24.5
	Kelantan	3	6.1
Marital status	Single	1	2.0
	Married	45	91.8
	Divorced	3	6.1
Duration of resident	< 5 years	4	8.2
	6-10 years	2	4.1
	11-15 years	3	6.1
	16 and above	40	81.6
Education	No Formal Education	21	42.0
	Primary School	23	46.0

	Secondary School	6	12.0
Healthy	Good health	45	91.8
	No chronic illness	4	8.2

From Table 1 above, we can be identifying the majority of respondents were participated as head of household is male. Further, most of them aged less than 40 years old as much as 31 respondents or 63.3 per cent. There two ethnic live in this area namely Bateq and Semaq Beri whereas they come from three states of Malaysia e.g. Terengganu, Kelantan, and Pahang. Next, the respondents have married as much as 45 or 91.8 per cent. Only one respondent as the head household was not married yet and three of them or 6.1 per cent is divorced. Most respondents stay up and live in this area is more than 16 years as much as 40 or 81.6 per cent. Further followed by respondents were stayed less than five years as big as 4 or 8.2 per cent.

There three respondents stay up ranged 11 to 15 years or 6.1 per cent and remain only two respondents, or 4.1 per cent were staying up in this area. The education level of majority respondent is a primary school, i.e. 23 or 46 per cent. Further, there 21 respondents or 42 per cent do not attend a school or no formal education and the respondents were educated at the level of secondary school as big as 6 or 12.2 per cent. Also, following their health, most of the respondents are good healthy condition and only 4 respondents were unhealthy but do not a chronic illness. Besides that, this study discusses separately concerning the respondent's occupation and their activities as seen in table 2 below:

Table 2: The result of the descriptive statistic using two ways tabulation

Activities	Retired	Self-employed
Forest product	1	49
Hunting the Animals	1	27
Fisherman	0	21
Palm employer	0	0
Seller of goods	0	1

Table 2 shows the respondents daily activities, either as for retired and self-employed. In the above table, we found that there three activities which are the major occupation employed by the community of Orang Asli i.e. forest product, hunting the animals and fisherman. Only one who chosen worked as a seller of goods. It means the Orang Asli still much dependent on the forest product or natural resources for fulfilling their daily needs and changes their socioeconomic status. However, the government policy also plays important roles to increase their wellbeing but cannot change the whole of their life which are very dependent on natural resources as their main livelihood. Later, this study also employs the inferential statistics including independent sample t-test and Analysis of variance. It aims to investigate the differences in the level of income among a group of respondents participated (Ihsan & Tanaya, 2019).

Table 3: The differences in household income level based on the age group of respondents

Variable	Age group	N	$\overline{INC}$ (RM)	Std. Dev.	Levene's Test	df	t-stat	$d\overline{INC}$ (RM)
Household Income (INC)	< 40 years	30	403.10	243.96	1.313	48	1.479	100.77

≥ 40 years	20	302.33	223.593

Note: ** Sig. at level 5 % , *** Sig. at level 1%

Ho: Equal variances assumed (Levene's test)

Table 3 demonstrates the result of differences the household income following the respondent age categories which comprises two groups i.e. < 40 years and ≥ 40 years using independent sample t. Using the above Table, this study found that there 30 respondents were classified as < 40 years old with the average income is RM403.10 and remain 20 respondents are ≥ 40 years old with the average income as much as RM302.33. The differences in average income for both groups are RM100.77. It indicates that the average income of group < 40 years old upper than average income group of ≥ 40 years. In addition, using Levene's test for equality of variance, the result indicates that the variance of the sample participated in this study is equally assumed with the value of Levene's test is 1.333 and level of significant above the cut off value (prob. >0.05). Thus, we can conclude that there is no significant difference the household income based on age groups of the respondent with the value of *t*-stat is equal to 1.476 and level of significant above the value of alpha 5% or (prob. >0.05). Further, this study also examines the impact of top-down policy changes with testing the differences in the level of income based on its education levels (Rahmanto & Aminwidigdo, 2018).

Table 4: The result of the descriptive statistic of ANOVA (level of education and household income)

Level of education	N	$\overline{INC}$ (RM)	Std. Deviation	Household income (RM)

				Min	Max
No Formal Education	21	292.11	161.04	100	800
Primary School	23	429.01	295.78	50	1000
Secondary School	6	356.32	172.32	229	600
Total	50	362.79	238.954	50	1000

Table 4 shows there three groups of respondents were classified which consist of no formal education, primary school, and secondary school. The result of the analysis shows that 21 respondents with the average income level that categorized as no formal education is RM 292.11 per month. Further, a total of 23 respondents earned an average income level as much as RM 429.01 and only 6 respondents had the average income is RM356.32 per month. Using the minimum and maximum household income, we found the average income of respondents are the primary school is higher than no formal education (RM 429.01 – RM 292.11 = RM 136.90) but another issue is the variation value within the group is large i.e. RM 295.78. It can be seen in the minimum household income is RM 50.00 and maximum income as big as RM1000.

In addition, comparing between primary and secondary school, this study found the average income level of primary school also upper than secondary school (429.01 - 356.32 = RM 72.69) but it does not mean that the respondents were schooling at the primary level with high-income level monthly is better in the economy compared to secondary school. In clear, the minimum household income for a group of secondary school is highest compared with others e.g. no formal education and primary school

as much as RM229. After discussing the result of descriptive statistics, we also provide the result of ANOVA as seen as follows:

Table 4: The result of Analysis of variance (ANOVA) of household income and level of education

Household income	Levene's Test	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	5.784***	206000.67	2	103000.34	1.868
Within Groups		2591847.47	47	55145.69	
Total		2797848.15	49		

Note: ** Sig. at level 5 %, *** Sig. at level 1%
Ho: Equal variances assumed (Levene's test)

Table 4 above indicates the variance of the sample participated in this study is not equally assumed with the value of Levene's test is 5.784 and significant at the level of 5% ($p < 0.05$). Further, using the ANOVA test, the result of this study displays the value of F-statistic is equal to 1.868 and level of significant above the cut off value (prob. > 0.05). It indicates the household income of respondents does not significantly different following their education level.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As aforementioned, this study focused on the impact of a policy change towards the level of wellbeing among Orang Asli in Terengganu. Using the result of this study, we can conclude that there are three main activities as a major profession of the community of Orang Asli in Kuala

Terengganu i.e. forest product, hunting the animals and fisherman. Further, we also examine the differences level of income among the age group of this community and found that there is no significant difference the household income based on age groups of the respondent which comprises of two groups i.e. < 40 and ≥ 40 years. Besides that, this study using the ANOVA test, the result of this study displays the value of F-statistic is equal to 1.868 and level of significant above the cut off value (prob. > 0.05). It indicates the household income of respondents does not significantly different following their education level.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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