

Full Length Research Paper

The rationale behind the Penan Kubaan Ethnic Group's refusal to seek wage employment in the mainstream economy of Malaysia

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Penan ethnic group in Sarawak, Malaysia are assumed to be lagging in development flows since Brooks' administration. The Kubaan Penan ethnic group resides in the remote area of the forest and their daily activities are planting vegetable and hunting for food. Many of them refuse to go out to improve their quality of life financially. It is in contradiction to the Malaysian nature which works 15 hours extra than workers in Hong Kong, Australia and Singapore in a week. Study uses semi-structured interview and questionnaire were implemented. The findings show that the ability to master the Malay language is the major reason why the Kubaan Penan ethnic group refuses to go out from their village to find job. Various parties have to participate in order to equip Kubaan Penan ethnic group with the national language of Malaysia to increase their self-confidence and enable them to enter the labour market.

Key words: Penan, labour market, remote area.

INTRODUCTION

Kubaan is located under Baram District Office administration at Baram District, North of Sarawak Malaysia in Borneo Island. There are four Penan villages in Kubaan named Kampung Pak Tik A, Kampung Pak Tik B, Long Lobang and Long Medamut. Penan ethnic group in Kubaan live in the forest which is a journey of two days walking in the jungle by using the ordinary speed from Bario to Kampung Pak Tik B. Bario is a small town which can be accessed by land vehicle to other area. There are seven houses in Kampung Pak Tik B, two of which were vacant as the owners of the house have migrated to another place. Economic activities are not so obvious and

the villagers engage in daily activities like picking vegetable and cooking for their lunch and dinner.

Previously, Penans ethnic groups are largely known as nomadic people. In 1970, there were 13,000 nomadic Penans ethnic groups living in the forest especially in the northern part of Sarawak. They move from one place to another to find food. In the early 1990s, only an estimated 350 Penan ethnic practised nomadic lifestyle. In twenty years' time, couple of thousand Penans ethnic groups has transformed their lifestyle from nomadic to being settled or semi-settled in up-river villages. The Penans' activities are farming rice, banana and tapioca as well as

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hunting-gatherer for food (Jeffrey, 2015).

Problem statement

The villagers tend to stay at home rather than going out to look for cash. They appear different compared to other town areas with people who are struggling to survive. Workers in Malaysia are working 15 hours extra than workers in Hong Kong, Australia and Singapore in a week looking for cash (Astro, 2018). This study aims to find out the reason why Penan ethnic group in Kubaan do not fancy going for work looking for cash, in contradiction to Malaysian labor in general. In this context, according to Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Malaysia (2019) work means acting as employee, employer or an entrepreneur.

Objective

The objective of this research is to find out the reason on the refusal of Penan ethnic group in Kubaan to enter labour market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Penan ethnic group in Sarawak consists of two main groups: The Eastern Penan and the Western Penan. In the Eastern Penan, the Penan ethnic group population in Baram Forest is less than 10 people per square kilometer (Sercombe, 2010). According to James (1994), Penan ethnic group was claimed as low hierarchy ethnics in human civilization, eat without cooking, lives in tree and were being hunted by another tribe by James Brook in Brooks administration.

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Previously, as nomadic people, Penan ethnic group builds basic structures that resemble a makeshift hut which is used from a few weeks or some months until their food supply around the area runs dry especially the wild sago palm which is their staple diet (Journey Malaysia, N.D).

Economics activities among the ethnic group in the same villages are merely none. Once a week or once in a fortnight, they go for hunting in the forest in groups, only for food in the forest such as, big snakes, wild pigs, monitor lizards, monkeys and mousedeer. The hunting

tools are blowpipes, equipped with poisoned darts and spears. Some of them use firearms to hunt but it is not popular since the loud sound scares other animals in the jungle. The products of hunting activities are divided equally among them. According to this ethnic group, the hunting activity is essential and is done only for the purpose of obtaining food (Fact and details, n.d).

Malaysian government is trying very hard to improve the Penans ethnic group in term of their economic ability. The Penans' refusal of settling down in a specific area becomes a huge constrain. The nomadic lifestyle practiced by the ethnic group causes the Malaysian government to face difficulties in delivering assistance to them. Support and aids such as foods, medication and education are difficult to deliver (Bernama, 2009).

Malaysian government has been contributing financially to build houses for Penan ethnic group. These include the Long Urun long house and Long Tegulang long house in Belaga District. In this area, Malaysian government has built wooden long house using painted sawed plank along with electricity and fresh water supply. Roofing are made with corrugated steel sheet. Proper road has been provided from the existing main road to this long house. Online news reported that Malaysian government has spent around RM2 million to provide long houses and generator for electricity power supply for the Penans in Beluluk Chen, District of Mulu Sarawak (BorneoPost, 2016). Nowadays, Penan lifestyle has changed. Most of them are staying permanently in the village, in contrast to their previous nomadic lifestyle (Malaysiakini, 2010).

At the same time, some even built their own house. For instant, the Penan ethnic group in Long Leng of Baram District built their long house without any subsidiary from the Malaysian government. Long Leng long house was built by using modern concept with concrete as the structure. Long Leng long house has been occupied with electricity supply, telephone line and fresh water supply (Utusan Borneo Online, 2016). Besides, Malaysia government has introduced adult classes to Penan ethnic group for free. In addition, the adult students are given lost income allowance, food allowance, dress allowance, books and learning tools, health allowance and visiting package allowance (Ministry of Education, n.d). The class aims to teach the adult students on basic reading and writing skills and at the same time to reduce illiteracy among the Penan ethnic group.

Finding by Jobstreet.com (2018) concluded that 58% of Malaysian workers feel happy in their workplace. These are due to comfortable workplace as well as great reputation among colleagues and employers.

It can be concluded that the Malaysian government has tried various ways to help the Penan ethnic group in improving their standard of living. Unfortunately, the Penan ethnic group in the research area is not willing to go out of their village to find jobs which has been done by majority of the Malaysians.

Table 1. Respondent's feedback

	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Respondent A	1	4	3	2	6
Respondent B	6	2	4	7	1
Respondent C	2	4	6	7	3
Respondent D	1	2	5	4	7
Respondent E	3	2	6	5	1

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at Kampung Pak Tik B, Kubaan, in Bario District, Sarawak, Malaysia. Malaysia is located at the South-East of Asia with the population of 27 million people. To get to Kampung Pak Tik from Kuala Lumpur which is the capital of Malaysia, researcher took a flight to Miri town. From Miri town researcher took another flight called twin otter containing 16 seater to small town called Bario. From Barrio, researcher takes a walk in the canopy rainforest guided by one of Penan people for two days to reach this village. Data was collected through interview and the use of questionnaire. The entire five heads of the family at Kampung Pak Tik B were chosen as the sample. Semi-structured interview was conducted to achieve the study objectives. Two session of interviewed was done. In the first session, samples are required to come out with the need if he/she has huge number of cash in hand. In this session, samples were asked to list down three things on cash that he/she is going to spend. Sample is also required to state how he/she will get money to fulfill his/her needs. In the second session, the samples were given a set of questionnaires and asked to rank the factor that causes his/her refusal of going out from the jungle to get a better life, economically and socially. Other information consists of the age of respondent, the number of family member, educational background, the ability to speak/write in Malay language and the frequency of his/her journey to the nearest town.

The interview was done in Malay language as the national language of Malaysia. Unfortunately, some of them were not able to speak in Malay fluently. To overcome this situation, the head of villagers became a translator. The interview was done in three sessions. The first session aims to identify the sample's need and that of his/her family. The second involves the factors that influence the respondents' refusal to go out from their existing location to get a better life and obtain their needs. In this session, seven factors were obtained from the discussion. Thirdly, the respondents were requested to rank the factors from major to minor, regarding the influence on their refusal of migrating to another place and achieve his/her ambition. Here, samples were interviewed one by one accompanied by the head of the villager. The data collection sessions took two hours to complete. The data were analyzed by calculating the higher ranks to the lower ranks. The first rank was multiplied by 5, the second was by 4, third was by 3, fourth was by 2, and the last was multiplied by 1 for every respondent. The accumulated score by each factor was sorted with the higher ranking showing the main factor of the Penans ethnic group' refusal to go out from the existing kampung to achieve their ambition.

FINDINGS

Based on the findings from the first session, it can be concluded that the Penans ethnic group in Kampung Pak Tik B wanted a comfortable life. They desired the following:

1. House complete with all the facilities and electrical equipment,
2. Vehicle,
3. Vacation.

The answer on how to get cash is as follows:

1. Get job in town (six samples)
2. Sell as many hunting animal as he/she can (one sample)

In the second session, respondents gave their reasons for the refusal to go out and achieve their ambition. These include:

1. I want to stay in my village
Saya mahu tinggal di kampung saya
2. I am unable to speak/write in the Malay language fluently
Saya tidak boleh berbahasa Melayu dengan lancar
3. I feel uncomfortable to live in urban environment
Saya merasa tidak selesa tinggal di persekitaran bandar
4. Jobs offers do not suit me
Kerja yang ditawarkan tidak sesuai dengan saya
5. I don't want to be an employee
Saya tidak mahu menjadi pekerja kepada orang lain
6. The income is not enough to survive in urban area.
Pendapatan tidak mencukupi untuk kelangsungan hidup di bandar
7. I face difficulty to find food in urban area.
Saya menghadapi kesukaran untuk mendapatkan makanan di bandar.

The third session's results, which include ranking of the factors that influence the Penan ethnic group in Kampung Pak Tik refusal to go out from their existing village and obtain their needs, are shown in Table 1.

Data analysis

The data analyses are given in Table 2.

DISCUSSION

The Penan ethnic group in Kampung Pak Tik uses the

Table 2. Data analysis

	Rank1	Rank2	Rank3	Rank4	Rank5	Total	Ranking
Reason 1	2x5=10				2x1=2	12	3/4
Reason 2	1x5=5	3x4=12		1x2=2		19	1
Reason 3	1x5=5		1x3=3		1x1=1	9	5
Reason 4		2x4=8	1x3=3	1x2=2		13	2
Reason 5			1x3=3	1x2=2		5	6/7
Reason 6	1x5=5		2x3=6		1x1=1	12	3/4
Reason 7				2x2=4	1x1=1	5	6/7

Penan language in their daily communication. Based on the researcher's observation, most of them cannot speak Malay language fluently. During the data collection, the head of villagers assisted as a translator for the researcher. One of the factors which cause their inability to speak or write in Malay fluently is the low educational level of the respondents (the highest among the respondents is the Standard 6 primary school).

The second reason is the samples' presumption that he/she is not suitable to live in the urban area. Traditionally, Penan ethnic group in the research area live deep in the jungle where they are as free as possible from noise pollution due to traffic. Furthermore, the village life is very different from that of urban areas which is full of vehicles, with some premises gated, guarded and prohibited from strangers. It is due to the contradiction of his/her nature life and urban life.

The third factor is the Penans' strong desire to stay in the village. Meanwhile, the fourth reason is that the sample respondents presume that the income at urban area will not be enough for their daily needs. The score for the third and fourth reason is the same, indicating that the two factors are related to one another. The sample remained in the existing kampong due to the presumed inability of income in urban area to fulfil his/her daily needs. According to the sample, it makes sense to stay in the village as one may not need to pay the house rental, electricity and water bill. Furthermore, ample food such as vegetable and fish can be freely found in the surrounding area.

Fifth, the job in urban area is not suitable for him/her. This response is in relation to the sample's educational background. The sixth reason is that he/she is not willing to work for other people; but is accustomed to working for him/herself daily. Lastly, it is very hard to find food in urban area unlike in the village where they can easily find food for free.

Conclusion

To boost their ability to speak the Malay language, the government needs to take into their consideration regarding the confidence level in using the Malay

language among the Penan ethnic group. The Penans' Relocation and Affairs division, under the State Planning Unit, Sarawak has to come up with a solution to overcome the challenges in speaking and writing among the Penan ethnic group. Penan ethnic group presume that they are unable to stay and work in urban area due to economic factors. In order to help the Penan ethnic group in Kubaan to increase their quality of life economically and socially, something must be done by the government and non-governmental organisations, such as giving skills and business capital to these ethnics group for example raising fish for commercial, plantation in agriculture field.

Effort from a few private sectors such as Sarawak Energy, who organised an adult class called Kelas Dewasa Penan (KEDAP) to enhance the reading ability among the Penans ethnic group in 2014, did not totally reach its objectives. Continuous commitment must be made to increase the Penans ethnic group ability to speak, read and write.

The ability in communication by using Malay language is a must for each and every Malaysian citizen due to Malay language is a national language. Failure to do so results in failure of Malaysian government's effort in uniting the citizen in language aspect.

Concerted efforts must be made by all parties to increase the quality of the Penans ethnic's life socially and economically. Hopefully, this will make the Penans ethnic group lead a better life, especially in the economic, social and cultural aspects, thus enhancing their contribution to the wellbeing of the nation.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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