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University-Community Engagement Programme for Orang Asli Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Conducting a university-community engagement is challenging given the fact that there are many stakeholders involved, i.e. the local community, volunteers, the university, non-governmental agencies, private sector participants and government agencies. Nevertheless, the university-community engagement is an enriching process. It brings development for the local community (indigenous community / Orang Asli) and enhances the competencies of the volunteers. The various agency partners also experience a wealth of change in their networking and capacity building. Given the nature of this development, it is anticipated that university-community engagement can be captured in a web of processes that depicts the impact for all the stakeholders concerned. This paper discusses a course-based community engagement programme conducted at an indigenous community village in Simpang Pulai Perak, Malaysia, which covered medical and socioeconomic topics. The overall impact of the programme was that the Orang Asli are well receptive of programmes conducted at their village.

Keywords: Orang Asli, health camp, socioeconomic profiling, university-community programmes' impact, sustainable development

Background

The impact of the university-community programmes' need to be assessed to ensure that the positive impact outweighs any negative impact (if any). The first framework for measuring university-community engagement is the Holland Matrix (1997), nevertheless, the definition of evaluation, measurement and impact is often used interchangeably by many and the issue of measuring the university-community engagement has not been solved. There is not one perfect model, matrix or approach to assess the impact of university-community engagement. McNall and Foster-Fishman (2007) and Engagement Australia (2011) have compiled a literature review of many university-community engagement initiatives and explore the methods and impacts. The findings emphasise the importance of processes, using specific approach according to the needs of the programme and also having a triangulation approach of qualitative and quantitative and also looking at 360 degrees' impact. Therefore, it is important to detail the indicators of measurement and conduct a systematic research for each type of programme.

There are many partners in a university-community engagement. Each partner will emphasise their interest and objectives to achieve, but when dealing with the local community, it is important to include them as a partner in planning process of the programme. According to Barney (2003) the corporate sector has a role to invest and train human resources to help enhance local community's economic development. The objective of this paper is to evaluate the impact of university-community engagement programme of Indigenous Community health programme in Simpang Pulai, Perak.

Literature

Analysis study conducted by Kalsom Kayat and Nor Aishikin (2006) aimed to examine (i) the characteristics of community involvement in Homestay Kampung Relau and Homestay Kampung Raga, Orissa (ii) the level of community involvement in both the homestay, (iii) factors other factors, which may influence the involvement of community members in both homestay and (iv) there is a relationship between participation in power among community members. This study used two data collection techniques that the data include information published by the federal government, state and local data sources and snowball sampling techniques. Unstructured interviews were conducted among community members participating in the homestay program in their respective settlements. Results showed that the program will allow local communities to share the benefits of tourism which in turn empower them in the economic, social, and political psychology. The program also helps communities benefit as well as economic opportunity and increase the income. The findings of this study concluded that participation has to do with motivation and encouragement for communities to engage in community programs is held. Motivation and encouragement of the population may be explained by the availability of population awareness of the benefits of the program, the needs of the population (such as the need for additional income, maintain traditions, maintain the unity among the people and so on), personality population (whether they are passive or proactive), ideology (tendency in and political support to the pattern of government) and the government's insistence.

Mohamad Zaki and Johan Afendi (2011) aimed to investigate the possible of homestay as an agent of socioeconomic development for the local community. The study focused on socio-economic impact, the SWOT analysis, and the current development and discuss the definition and concept of homestay. The article uses a content analysis to obtain related information. Results showed that homestay has positive impact on local communities, particularly in terms of the economy as it offered employment opportunities to local people to generate income and improve household income. Profits earned will be enjoyed directly by the community without compromising their values and way of life. In addition, this homestay could indirectly help protect the environment, protect cultural heritage aspects and improve quality of life. Benefit of the project is not only in financial terms, but also in non-monetary aspect, as the spirit of cooperation, the relationship between members is enhanced. In the long term, it is hoped to be a method of eradicating poverty. Through the SWOT analysis of the study results, the factors can be expressed as rejection and attraction. Among the rejection factor in this study is the lack of marketing strategy, quality of facilities and poor infrastructure as well as competition. Meanwhile the attraction aspect is the unique culture and beauty of the environment. The location is strategically located in a rural area within serene surroundings of mother nature. The local community appreciates and respects the guests, and this attitude is the strength of the community in the village.

Yahaya Ibrahim and Abdul Rasid discusses the concept and evolution of the Malaysian Homestay Program, its growth, institutional framework of planning and implementation as well as its contribution towards rural community development in Malaysia. The homestay program will improve the quality of life of the host family as well as the community as a whole. The findings of this study concluded the program is an added support to the rural socioeconomic development, social capital development, as well as contribution to conservation and enhancement of the rural areas by developing public understanding pertaining to life in rural areas and environmental issues generally.

Article by Olajide Oloyede discuss about components for a framework for the development of a sustainable community. This paper suggested components of a framework for the development of sustainable communities in Africa such as cultural, ecological, economic and socio-political. They are important components of sustainability and provide a baseline for sustainable communities. Overall, this article argues that for the development of sustainable communities, we must begin to take seriously the use of practices and systems which maintain or enhance the ability of people to provide for their social and cultural well-being, the economic viability of agriculture, the natural resource base of agriculture, the ecosystems influenced by agricultural activities and the quality and safety of food and fibre.

Haslina and Regina (2009) discusses about the issues of community participation with special reference to the Rural Growth Centre (RGC) programme in Sarawak. This article examines the community perceptions regarding their participations in RGC development. The article also looks at the extent to which the community participates in the implementations of RGC Gedong and its impacts in terms of improving the community's quality of life. The result shows community participation is very low. This discrepancy exists due to lack of transparency in decision making, lack of information given to the community as well as the lack of control (or power) on the part of the community in the decision making process. The study also found it can be considered as a failed initiative as it did not achieve all its goals and one of the contributing factors is the failure to involve the community in the development process.

Nur Hafizah and Rahimah (2010) discuss about sustainable Langkawi Geopark. Objective for this study is about community participation as an important component of Langkawi Geopark. And to identify the participation of Kuala Teriang community in ensuring the success and subsequently the sustainability of Langkawi Geopark. Survey method was employed as well as non-structured interview and non-participant of Langkawi Geopark. A total of 200 people were sampled to be respondent using stratified and snowball sampling techniques. The results show as stakeholders in Langkawi, respondents indirectly contributed to the sustainability of Langkawi through their involvement. This is because, one of the important components of a Geopark is community involvement. therefore, the respondent not only benefit from the activities in which it participates, but also help in their daily lives.

Article by Ross Prizzia (2005) discusses about the exploration of innovative community-based approaches to environmental management that focus on citizen participation. Provided is a description of community involvement in the context of environmental protection, focusing on the role of community-based Restoration Advisory Board (RABs). Also provided is an overview of the role the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the development and evolution of community involvement plans and citizen demands for increased participation in communities directly affected by environmental degradation and contamination. There are many important positive outcomes from community involvement and citizen participation in the public decision-making process. In the context of environmental protection, there exists a significant and growing

interest at the local, state and national levels in strengthening community involvement in environmental management. environmental policy implementation is generally improved when affected community members are part of the decision-making process.

Methodology

The impact will be based on the local indigenous community, volunteers and the various partners involved to make the programme a success. The methodology used for the Indigenous Community health development programme in Simpang Pulai, Perak are as follows:

The university community engagement was part of the course-based research activity at the Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia for the Masters level Economics of Social Policy subject, that proceeded to involve multi stakeholders to help the local community. The students learn the theory and critical analysis part as cited by (Francisco Ibáñez-Carrasco and Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, 2011). The community programme involved various stakeholders, namely the Orang Asli, the town council, district medical team, sponsors like Yayasan Sultan Yussuf, Red Crescent Society of Malaysia Batu Gajah Chapter and CIMB Bank Batu Gajah. Firstly, the indigenous community of Kg. Sg Lalang and Kg Kerawat was approached and asked if they would like to be part of a community programme. The university consisting of researcher and students made pre-activity social visit to the village, had discussion with the village head (*tok batin*) and also members of the community. The discussions were aimed to gather information on the needs of the local community and to investigate the type of programmes that they would like implemented for the development of the local community.

After discussion with the local community, the findings show was that the local community needed basic health camp and awareness on health and hygiene maintenance. Using this information, the researchers proceeded to enlist local partners who would like to help the local community. The local partners consisted of Red Crescent Society of Malaysia Batu Gajah Chapter, (Ministry of Youth and Sports) Department of Youth and Sports Kinta District, Sultan Yussuf Foundation, Batu Gajah; Department of Orang Asli Development Perak; Department of Orang Asli Development Kinta District and CIMB Bank Batu Gajah. As meetings and discussions progressed with the various stakeholders, other interested parties also volunteered to give support in finance and kind. At the completion of the programme a total of 150 volunteers had assisted at various stages from Nov 2009 till Julai 2010.

Impact of Indigenous Community Medical Camp Program

A total of 50 percent of 29,990 indigenous households live below the poverty line. And from this number, a total of 5,700 households or 19 percent are hardcore poor. This number is very high when compared to the national poverty rate of 3.8 percent and 0.7 percent hardcore poor recorded in the Tenth Malaysia Plan 2011-2015 (Economic Planning Unit, 2010). To help the Orang Asli, it is important to raise awareness of job security, having permanent employment, having employable skills, relevant to the job market and doing job that is also sustainable to their lifestyle. It is not possible to achieve all these overnight. It is important to have regular dialogue, discover their aspirations and cultivate habits or traits that are conducive to economic and social development.

The local community at Kg Kerawat are 155 residents and Kg Sg. Lalang has 182 residents. There are a total of 67 household heads. Kg. Sg. Lalang is located 10 km from Kg Kerawat, and while these two villages are less than two kilometres from the main road heading towards a famous hillside tourist destination, Cameron Highlands, the local community rely heavily on generators to power their lights at night and water from the wells and river as their main source of water for daily consumption. Only Kg Sg. Lalang has a muslim religious centre mempunyai surau, a community hall, and the nearest health clinic is ten kilometres away. Most of the houses in both the villages are either wooden or bicks based. Majority of the residents receive wages from working in oil palm or rubber estates or at construction sites.

Since November 2009, contact has been established with the Department of Orang Asli Development Kinta District (JAKOA Kinta District), to discover how we can meet with the local community leader and the local community. The JAKOA Kinta District took us to the village to introduce us to the local people and have an informal discussion. We made our first formal visit to the village in Feb 2010. Together with student volunteers, we conducted a basic medical check-up and profiled their socioeconomic status. A total of 70 household heads were given 10 kilograms of rice, 1 kg cooking oil, bihoon biscuits, 3in1 milo fuze drink and milk. The children were provided stationary items, hand soap, tooth brush and tooth paste.

Rural Development Officer, Batu Gajah Town Council officiated the event on 4th July. After the formalities, the local community was broken into three big groups. One consisting of male household heads and some adults who were not household heads (77 participants) and the second group was of female and their children (total 150 participants). The medical Camp was participated by all the Orang Asli community members aged 16 years and above, totaling 200 members.

The activities carried out were:

1. **Medical Camp** by the Red Crescent Society of Malaysia Batu Gajah Chapter
2. **Morbidity and Socioeconomic Profiling** by researchers and students from the Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia led by Dr. Doris Padmini Selvaratnam
3. **Medical Talk on “One First Aider per Home”**– Lecturer/trainers of the Red Crescent Society of Malaysia Batu Gajah Chapter
4. **Keeping Fire at Bay Talk** - Tn. PPgB Mahandran Muniandy PKT., PSB, Head of the Malaysian Fire and Rescue Department, Batu Gajah and Simpang Pulai, Ipoh
5. **Financial Planning and Development of Cooperative Initiative** - Dr. Doris Padmini Selvaratnam, Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
6. **Herbal Medical Remedies** – Mr. Bala Chandran, Agricultural Department Officer, Herbal Park Perak.

Benefit for the local community was assessed based on the participation in all the activities conducted at the two villages. Participation during the planning process is also taken into consideration in this assessment. The indigenous community are a polite, friendly and simple people. Nevertheless, they are shy and can be timid in voicing their opinion. Therefore, it is important to have regular contact and establish a good rapport, trust and understanding with

them. Although they have their own ethnic dialect, they understand the national language. This made communication much easier with the local community.

In terms of economy, majority of the respondents are wage earners and their income is less than RM200 (USD) per month (more than 60%) and their savings is RM1-RM100 (USD) per month (only 13 %) and the balance do not have any savings. More than 80 percent of the respondents are still reliant of the government in receiving financial assistance. This very logical considering their monthly income is very low and the cost of living in Malaysia has risen in the past few years, also affecting the rural communities. A small number of residents who had converted to Muslim religion also receive assistance from the Muslim organisation in the form of zakat. Since the location of the village is about 20 kilometres from the nearest Simpang Pulai township, not much activity and assistance were received by them from private companies or NGOs. The local community are very community based and self-reliant. If they are planning for any celebrations (wedding, funeral, birth of a child, healing of a sick person), then they will pool the community members' resources and also get vegetables, wild berries, tapioca, fish, deer, wild boar, wild birds, monkey or other animals from the forest or the river that flows by their villages. The talk on financial management and cooperative initiative was conducted in a very informal manner, encouraging feedback and opinion from the local community. The interest shown in forming a cooperative was passed on to JAKOA and the Ministry of Domestic Trade, Consumerism and Cooperatives.

Reference to voicing their grievances, the local community rely on their village headman known as *tok batin*. The tok batin is the point of contact with the outside world. The local community have also given their views that in recent years, the traditional method of appointing their own tok batin is being changed. Today, the JAKOA can appoint a tok batin in a village. This information from our discussion with the local community while they were preparing for wedding ceremony of one of their young couples, showed a new challenge in the local community. There is now a possibility of having two tok batin in a village – one appointed by the local community through their traditional cultural system, and the other one appointed by the local government agency of JAKOA. The tok batin is often consulted to solve problems encountered by the local community – health issues, neighbourly disputes, quarrels, any misunderstandings, marriage, funeral arrangements, etc.

A total of 27 women participated in the pap smear testing. Usually, the married women are encouraged to have the pap-smear test done at the local clinic, but the distance (between 10 – 20 kilometres from either side of the villages) and lack of awareness of monitoring their personal health had not motivated them to do it on a regular basis. Since the Medical Camp provided health awareness information, many of the women underwent the pap-smear test which was conducted in one of the resident's home which was partially converted as a medical examination room. The women were also empowered to do self-breast examination, in fact their spouses were also encouraged to be supportive and take care of the women's health.

The “One First Aider per Home” session by the lecturer or trainers of the Red Crescent Society of Malaysia Batu Gajah Chapter managed to train 60 youths and also impart awareness to 150 adults. The Orang Asli youths were also assisted by peers from schools. They learnt of rendering first aid for minor casualties that might occur at home, when they are trekking or collecting supplies from the jungle. The youths were all able to repeat the various bandage styles.

The “Keeping Fire at Bay Talk” and “Herbal Medical Remedies” are topics very close to the Orang Asli's hearts. They are very linked to nature and take only what is need for the present moment.

The Orang Asli are not greedy, accumulate wealth for tomorrow. Nevertheless, knowledge on caring for the forest and learning to combat fire was essential for them. Since some of the community members still use firewood for cooking and also kerosene. As much as the Orang Asli knew about the herbal remedies, there were also new varieties that they learnt about. Knowledge sharing was two way. This was very important as it showed that they were willing to share information for healthcare purpose.

The volunteers, who had participated in the entire programme, explained that the experience was enriching, many of the professional volunteers expressed that it was good to know that they can impart their expert knowledge directly to the marginalised community at the grassroots. The exercise of the various discussions held made them realise that it does matter rank, power or expertise to have knowledge. Anyone can share their ideas and opinion. Participation and sincerity in the whole process is more important. In fact, having the local community voicing their opinion on what they need also opened a platform for the local community to have their say heard. In fact, the local community were sad when we had to leave the community when the programme was over. But the result, report of the overall programme was also delivered to the local government and the JAKOA to ensure that the benefits and continually enhanced for the sustainability of the indigenous community. As noted by Ennis (2013), the social network analysis is important to establish links with various organisations for the benefit of the sustainable development by and for the indigenous community. Furthermore, this is also important for bonding social capital (enhancing ties and trust) and bridging social capital (connecting the various stakeholders) as noted by Milton, et al (2012) in their study.

The stakeholders, who participated in the programme, were happy that their role and function in the whole programme was respected. They were often involved in programmes for targeted communities in the urban area and did the programmes alone. Having a multi-stakeholder event helped to pool in various resources and expertise for the benefit of the local community. Emphasising on links, the network can help the local community focus on their strengths and resources and how the external network can enhance their attributes or impact their livelihood (Ennis, 2013). In fact, the method of engagement that encouraged open discussion in an informal setting was empowering the local community to let the wider group know the types of programmes they wanted and how immediate social needs can be met, i.e. provisions for their daily needs and medical check-up.

For the researchers and the students at the university, it has also been an enriching process. For the students, they get to see in reality the play of politics, decision-making process, the process of engaging various stakeholders and the knowledge that they can share with the local people. The local community also shared their indigenous knowledge on decision-making, the art of communicating in an informal setting and imparting information of social structure that the students have only learnt in theory and in the classroom. For the researcher, it is an opportunity to collaborate with various stakeholders and encourage discussions and continuous communications. The researcher takes on a neutral role so as to ensure that local community and the other stakeholders will share and learn from each other in the whole process. The researcher acknowledges that knowledge is not just learnt from the classroom teachings but the wealth of real life experiences and expertise shared by all the participants of the programme from the beginning to the completion of the programme.

Discussion on Important Elements to be Included for Evaluating Impact of University-Community Engagement Programmes.

The above discussions have provided some information on the impact of university-community engagement, nevertheless the elements of evaluation is not exhaustive. Although the researchers recognise that each university-community engagement may have different objectives and different stakeholders, nevertheless, some of the common elements that should be evaluated for assessing the university-community engagement are

1. Local Community – level of participation, level of power in decision making, ownership of programme, socioeconomic and political impact on the community and sustainability of the programme;
2. Volunteers – skills and communication level, competencies developed useful for future employment, knowledge imparted and lessons learnt from local community;
3. Stakeholders – NGO partners, private sector and local agencies – networking skills, bonding and bridging with all participants of the programme, imparting expertise in an informal manner and new skills learnt; and
4. University – collaborative skills, consultation with local community, sharing knowledge with local community, lessons learnt to improve delivery of course-based community-engagement programme, monitoring progress of programme at all stages, improving programme evaluation methods.

Policy Implication and Conclusion

The university-community outreach programmes are important as they provide a platform to exercise the knowledge gained at the university. While the intervention programme is a result of several discussions and preparations with various stakeholders, the implementation phase is important with all parties playing their roles. Outlining the whole process gives the students and also the volunteers a sense of direction, planning ability and also good decision-making skills. Communication and negotiation skills are also built along the way.

The roles and duties of the various stakeholders may be outlined in detail, but there still needs funding to ensure that the programme runs smoothly. Equally important is the funding for the community programme. Funding is important to ensure the medical supplies are sufficient, socioeconomic profiling is conducted, prepare toys and snacks for children, goodies of household daily food supplies for each household and also to provide the meals for the day.

The programme manager took the lead to get everyone working to source for funding. Regular meetings, networking and communications are important to keep everyone updated and all of the stakeholders clear of their roles in the programme.

Community programmes are a platform for volunteers to converge. Often the volunteers come from different backgrounds, but the programme manager has to keep all informed of their task and expected outcomes. This is important to avoid overlay or clash of duties and also to ensure smooth transition between schedules. The local community has empowered all players of the community programme. On the other hand, they have also benefited through the health camp,

medicinal herbs, fire-fighting and socioeconomic profiling and financial planning and cooperatives awareness talk conducted all conducted in interactive and hands on session was very participative and managed to have impact for the Orang Asli and also everyone involved.

Stakeholders appreciative of the fact that imparting knowledge to the Orang Asli community is different yet challenging, but very interesting compared to workshops conducted for mainstream community members. New teaching modules may be derived for different communities addressed through the university-community programmes. It is important that the needs of the community are addressed from the start with consultation and engagement with the community.

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