Human Capital, Aspiration and Career Development of Orang Asli Youth in Peninsular Malaysia

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Abstract

Indigenous aspiration and human capital development of Orang Asli youth is often impeded by poverty and marginalization. Intrinsic and extrinsic domains affect human capital, aspiration and career development of Orang Asli youth. The purpose of the research was to explore the aspects that empower life and aspiration of Orang Asli youth at their remote villages. Surveys and interviews were conducted at Orang Asli isolated settlements in selected states in the Peninsular Malaysia. This article reports the findings of the study that indicate the variables that influence the human capital and career development of Orang Asli youth are complex.

Keywords: Orang Asli youth; education; human capital; career development; Peninsular Malaysia

Introduction

According to the United Nations' estimate, there are about 370 million indigenous peoples in the world and about two-thirds of them live in Asia (United Nations, 2007; UNDP, 2012). For the past few decades, indigenous peoples in Asia have been struggling to fortify their fight for their right to self-determination in order to protect their territories and resources. The International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (1994-2004) was established to recognize the existence and rights of indigenous peoples around the world (Corpuz, 2005). Admittedly difficult to provide precise definition, Barsh (n.d.) noted that indigenous peoples as kinship-based, non-industrialized communities that have traditionally relied on hunting, fishing, gathering, herding or gardening for their food and sustenance. They have shown to be self-sufficient and non-assimilated *persona*. However, they often have been labelled and treated as the "backward" or "primitive" peoples by the majority, and there were cases that indigenous people have been killed, dispossessed, or forced to assimilate in the name of "nation-building" and "modernization".

José Martínez Cobo (1984) defined indigenousness based on *aboriginality* (being the first on the land), *cultural distinctiveness*, and *self-identification*. The United Nations' International Labour Organisation, in its Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples,

1989 (No. 169), has adopted essentially the same three criteria. The ILO defines "tribal peoples" separately as *persistently culturally-distinct, marginalized societies* regardless of their aboriginality. According to the ILO, indigenous peoples and tribal peoples should have exactly the same special legal rights. The United Nations (2004: 2) working definition of indigenous people is as follows:

"…those people having an historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations, their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions, and legal systems."

Orang Asli are the aborigines of the Malay peninsula. Most of them were believed to be descendents from the hoabinhians, stone-tool-using hunter-gatherers who occupied the peninsula as early as 11,000 BC (Bellwood, 1997). Today, Orang Asli communities comprise at least eighteen culturally and linguistically distinct sub-groups (Lin, 2008). The 2004 Population Survey of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (JHEOA) estimated the total population of Orang Asli in Malaysia at 149,723 (JHEOA, 2006) – they represent less than one percent of the total Malaysian population of 27 million people. The Orang Asli are officially classified into three main ethno-linguistic groups, namely the Senoi, Proto-Malays, and the Negritos; each consisting of several dialectic sub-groups. Orang Asli communities are concentrated in selected states based on their ethnic groups, with the Senoi predominantly residing in Perak and Pahang, the Proto-Malays in Pahang, Johor, Negeri Sembilan and Selangor, and the Negritos in Kelantan, Perak and Pahang (Khor & Mohd Shariff, 2008). Orang Asli once were thinly scattered throughout the peninsula, but most were pushed backed into the interior montane forests as the Malay population grew on the coastal plains and in the major river valleys (AITPN, 2008). Since 1961, the Malaysian leadership has devised systematic plan to "integrate" Orang Asli into the "mainstream". This has come to mean bringing them into the market economy and assimilating them into the Malay ethnic category (Endicott & Dentan, 2004). Despite continuous efforts by the Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs *(Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli*, or JHEOA), most Orang Asli are among the poorest of the poor; they are still live on the fringes of Malaysian society, receive minimal social services, poorly educated, and making a meager living (Endicott & Dentan, 2004; Salleh, 1990; Siwar & Chamuri, 2007). The average life expectancy for Orang Asli is 53 years as compared to the national average of 73 years (Idrus, 2010).

Cultural transformation that disregards the indigenous root may pose a challenge for the government's effort to modernize the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia. Sustainable development of Orang Asli community requires them to participate in decision-making process at all levels. However, Orang Asli are perceived as incapable of making their own decision and are highly dependent on the state authority to provide the guidance, financial aids, and protection (Subramaniam, 2011). Imposition of uniform national curriculum for the mainstream and Orang Asli students has been criticized (Kamaruddin & Jusoh, 2008; Wong & Perumal, 2012). Indigenous curriculum and pedagogy should be put in place for Orang Asli students. In the Malaysian Educational Development Plan 2013-2025, the Ministry of Education (2012) has stated that a special curriculum for Orang Asli and Penan pupils known as KAP (*Kurikulum Asli & Penan)* will be implemented. Pending the KAP curriculum, the conventional curriculum and pedagogy is widely applied to Orang Asli schools. Malaysian national curriculum and teaching methodology have relied heavily on

the Western and Islamic epistemologies that are foreign to Indigenous epistemology. Miniscule number of teachers who are of Asli origins has compounded the problem of lacking the role model for Orang Asli students and invariably created a paucity of indigenous pedagogy in the classrooms. Teacher education programs in the teacher training institutes and universities in Malaysia have not included indigenous pedagogy in their curricula. Thus, almost all school teachers are not formally trained to teach and handle Orang Asli students.

High dropout among Orang Asli children has become an issue as it was reported nearly 32% of those who had completed their primary schooling did not pursue their studies at the secondary level in 2009 (Education and Research Association, 2011). This might be because they lack interests in academic subjects at the mainstream schools (Mustapha et al., 2009). The imposition of modern education has the potential of destroying the balance of social life and the ecological balance of indigenous community (Koentjaraningrat, 1993; May & Aikman, 2003). Indigenous learning system is a learning system used by native people in order to maintain and conserve their eco-social system for their continued existence. The indigenous learning system was traditionally used to fulfill practical needs and to perpetuate local socio-cultural heritage, skills and indigenous technology from one generation to the next (Coombs, 1973). As mentioned earlier, the imposition of outside system on native people may disrupt their socio-cultural legacy. Freire (1973) argued that imported education is a form of alienated or isolated culture. Moreover, Freire (1973) explained that such education lacks authenticity because it was not linked to the local context and did not have power to change reality. The indigenous learning system in a native society has its own power.

The Orang Asli was also identified as one of the most vulnerable groups in Malaysia, with a disproportionately high incidence of poverty and hardcore poverty (Endicott & Dentan, 2004; Salleh, 1990; Siwar & Chamuri, 2007). In 2006, 33.5% and 15.4% of the Orang Asli were identified as poor and hardcore poor, respectively (Economic Planning Unit, 2006). In the 9th Malaysian Plan covering 2006-2010, a total of RM 417.4 million was allocated for various strategies and programs to address the high incidence of poverty and hardcore poverty among the Orang Asli, including economic programs, resettlement initiatives, and programs aimed at the development of human capital (Bhuiyan et al., 2012). Focus was given to enhance access of the Orang Asli to income generating programs, such as cultivation of food crops, handicraft and tourism, as well as the provision of employment opportunities, infrastructure and other basic amenities.

In the JAKOA Strategic Plan of 2016-2020, there are seven core aspects that need to be improved in order to enhance the quality of Orang Asli lives, i.e., (a) land management, (b) facilities and infrastructure, (c) human capital and skills development, (d) sustainable economy, (e) arts, culture and heritage, (f) social security, and (g) efficient delivery system. In terms of the education of Orang Asli pupils at schools, the Ministry of Education wants a significant transformation in these five areas:

- to establish partnership with JAKOA, community, higher education
institutions and other stakeholders
- to transform school leadership especially in Orang Asli schools
- to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- to fortify the transition at the school

- to solve the problem of poor school attendance

In addition, as Malaysia enters the 11th Malaysia Plan (2016-2020), there is a critical need to take human capital development of young generation (minorities and indigenous groups included) in Malaysia seriously. A more aggressive strategy aimed at eradicating poverty, upholding full access to education and health services, and enhancing quality of life, particularly among the few remaining underserved communities in Malaysia, such as the Orang Asli, Penan, and other native groups are in dire need. Identification of their education and future career pathways is crucial because these marginalized groups often are at a disadvantage when it comes to obtaining decent careers because of their low academic achievement. Empirical study by Mohd Salleh et al. (2009) found that the awareness level of career planning among low achieveing students in Malaysia is very shallow. Thus, the present education system should not ignore the low achievers or at-risk students especially in career development.

The Study

The present study was designed to explore the variables that affect life and career development of Orang Asli youth. The narrative discourse was based on the surveys and interviews conducted at Orang Asli settlements in Bera (Pahang), Gua Musang (Kelantan), Cameron Highlands (Pahang) and Pulau Carey (Selangor). There are various external and internal factors that could enhance or hinder individual's success. Based on the review of literature, indigenous resource management is only a part of an inter-linking system in governing the way of life of individuals that also ensures the continued survival of indigenous communities as a whole. Without doubt, indigenous systems – encompassing the judicial, social, economic, cultural, political, belief, agriculture, technology, health and the arts – are crucial in ensuring the holistic development and well-being of the community (Nicholas & Lasimbang, 2004).

In terms of land ownership and control, Orang Asli have little control over their ancestral lands due to the absence of definite land grant system for Orang Asli or other indigenous groups in Malaysia. There is no individual land grant for individual Orang Asli. They lived in the state government's gazetted reservation areas for Orang Asli without individual rights to the land. The reservation areas could be "reduced" or "taken back" by the government for mainly economic and developmental reasons. Unless there is a strong public sentiment for the recognition of Orang Asli land rights, it would be over optimistic to assume the state would initiate any reform toward gradual Orang Asli selective, self determination over their customary land and resources (Subramaniam, 2011). According to Nicholas and Lasimbang (2004), Orang Asli resource management is no longer being dictated merely by internal factors but are instead being increasingly affected by external ones. External conflicts, however, are more difficult to resolve as they involve outside actors who challenge the rights of Orang Asli communities to control and manage these resources. These outside actors encroach on Orang Asli land thereby posing a direct threat to the continuity and viability of their indigenous social systems and the sustainability of their traditional resources. Vast literature have been written on this critical issue (see for example, AITPN, 2008; Chupil & Joseph, 2003; Endicott & Dentan, 2004; FERN, 2006; Idrus, 2010; Nicholas, 2005; 2006; Salleh, 1990).

Orang Asli customary land should be protected as stipulated in the Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954 (The Edge, 2013). SUHAKAM (Malaysian Human Rights Commission) asserts the

need to amend legislations and policies including the National Land Code itself to ensure wider coverage for protected land based on the basic principle of upholding and recognition of *bona fide* indigenous peoples' customary land. The Edge (2013) also states examples of countries where land rights have been successfully granted to natives without compromising the sovereignty of the country that Malaysia could learn. In New Zealand, for example, The Waitangi Tribunal was formed as a permanent commission of inquiry with power to investigate and make recommendations on claims brought by the Maori. Canada was also drawn international praise in its move to issue land grants to its native communities.

The internal factors are related to belief, attitudes, self-esteem, and personal traits. Self-esteem is an affective reaction involving a person's evaluation of his or her competence (Woolfolk, 2005). Negative self–esteem refers to a person's feelings or perception about his or her incompetency. People with low self-esteem have a difficulty in assessing their strengths and weaknesses and often have an unrealistic, overall negative impression of themselves. They also tend to question their capabilities and they do not feel competent in areas they consider important (Bandura, 1994). People with low self-esteem tend to be pessimistic.

The narrative discourse in this article was based on an empirical research on factors that determine the life and career aspiration of Orang Asli youth carried out at five settlements in three Peninsular states. It involved 312 Orang Asli youth aged between 15 to 35, of various ethnicities (*Semelai* in Bera, Pahang; *Semai* in Cameron Highlands, Pahang; *Temiar* in Kuala Betis, Kelantan and *Mah Meri* in Pulau Carey, Selangor). Ages between 15 to 35 years old are considered youth by UNESCO definition (UNESCO, 2010). It is hoped that the findings of this research may produce a new model or framework which could enhance the Orang Asli's quality of life, especially their teenagers and youth who have the potential to become agents to bring changes into the community, in order to ensure their equality and rights as Malaysians.

Theoretical Contexts

Every person has his or her ambition or target to achieve success in life. To succeed, the "pushing" factors (internally and externally) must be stronger than the barriers. In contrast, if the hindrance factors are more dominating, then it will be harder for a person to be successful. According to Tomskin (1987), there are two scripts in human life which motivate an individual to become successful – the commitment script and the nuclear script. In the commitment script, the person is more likely to arrange and manage his own life. He is confident that it will provide him a positive output. This means he should be willing to sacrifice his short-term enjoyment for the sake of future benefits. As a person who has a clear purpose and target in life, he is likely to work hard, to be patient and to have strong determination to achieve his goals. Meanwhile, a person who possesses nuclear script often felt guilty, worried and lacked of confidence. Generally, they are said to be less successful in future life.

Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986) focuses on the concept of self-efficacy. It is assumed that individuals exercise control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to attain certain goals. Thus, the nexus between self-efficacy and motivation is pertinent in the sense that people with a high self-efficacy are generally believed that they are in control of their own lives. Nevertheless, it is also important to understand the

distinction between self-esteem and self-efficacy. Self-esteem relates to a person's sense of self-worth and self-efficacy relates to a person's perception of his ability to reach a goal. People with strong self-efficacy tend not to easily give up and persist longer on a task. A person with weak self-efficacy often believes tasks are harder than they actually are. This leads to poor planning and stress. People with high self-efficacy believe that their own actions and decisions shape their lives. On the other hand, people with low self-efficacy think their lives are determined by fate. Self-beliefs about abilities play a significant role in the career decision-making process.

Contextual factors and learning experiences are said to effect self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Self-efficacy and expectations in turn shape people's interests, goals, actions, and eventually their attainments. In addition, according to Schunk (1989), students who believe they will experience much difficulty comprehending a new concept are apt to hold a low sense of efficacy for learning it, while those who feel they are capable of learning it would feel more efficacious. A person's success also depends on how well he managed to overcome internal barriers or locus. There are two types of locus, internal and external (Rotter, 1966). A successful person is said to possess strong internal locus, as he would work to overcome internal obstacles in order to achieve his goal. He often evaluate himself and strive to overcome his weaknesses. In this context, a youth should take appropriate steps to improve, so that he could move himself ahead. This is different with a less successful person, who possesses strong external locus. This person will likely to blame others or external factors as causes of his failures. He refuses to evaluate his own weaknesses, but puts the blame on external factors like competitors, inefficiency of the authorities and poor facilities.

The Setting

The study was designed to identify factors that affect life and career aspiration among the Orang Asli youth at five Orang Asli reservations. The respondents were the youth at five settlements in the three states in Malaysia. The five settlements were the *Rancangan Pengumpulan Semula* (RPS) [Restructuring Settlement Scheme] Pos Iskandar, Bera; RPS Terisu and Kg. Sg. Ruil, Cameron Highlands, Pahang; Kg. Bumbum, Pulau Carey Selangor and RPS Kuala Betis, Gua Musang, Kelantan. A total of 312 Orang Asli youth aged between 15 – 35 years old were selected as respondents. A sample of 160 (51.4%) of them came from Pahang (100 from Bera and 60 from Cameron Highlands); 40 (12.9%) respondents from Pulau Carey Selangor and 112 (35.9%) from Kuala Betis, Gua Musang, Kelantan. Almost all of the respondents at Pos Iskandar, Bera were *Semelai* and those at Cameron Highlands were of the *Semai* ethnic group. At Kuala Betis, Kelantan the youth were of the *Temiar* origins and *Mah Meri* at Pulau Carey.

Based on gender, the respondents consisted of 55.6% male and the remaining 44.4% were female. Almost one-third (30.9%) were below 18 years of age (15 – 18 years); 38.5% were at early adulthood (19 – 25 years) and 30.6% were middle-aged youth (26 – 35 years). Majority (79.2%) of the respondents practised their ancestors' traditional belief, meanwhile the remaining 14.1% were Muslims and 6.7% were Christians. Majority of the respondents (66.2%) were single; 31.8% were married and 2.0% were single parent. Among those married, the mean age of marriage was 21.2 years whereas the minimum age at marriage was 14 and the maximum age was 30.

In terms of academic achievement, 12.6% of the respondents had never attended school; 36.9% finished their primary school and had the UPSR (Primary School) certificate; 19.2% had PMR (Junior High School) certificate and 30.7% had SPM/STPM (High School)

certificates. Only 0.6% of the respondents were diploma/certificate holders. Less than half (48.1%) of the respondents were members of an organizations and 51.9% of them did not join any organizations or societies. Majority of those active in organization were members of youth (28.8%), cultural (10.3%), or political (3.2%) organizations. Thus, in general, respondents possessed low education attainment and they were also not very active in social organizations. Mohd Noor (2012) also noted similar trend among Orang Asli youth.

This study employed a survey method. The instruments consisted of a set questionnaires and interview protocol constructed based on the research objectives and the input from the focused group of experts. Questionnaires and interviews were administered with the help from two Orang Asli research assistants and the JHEOA officers at the sites. They were briefed on how to collect the data. Apart from that, group interviews were also conducted with the selected respondents in each settlement participated in the research. The interviews were conducted to probe deeper into the core issues related to Orang Asli youth.

Understanding the External Influence to Career Aspiration

This section discusses about the factors contributing (or hindering) to the lives and career aspiration of Orang Asli youth. Focus was given on both internal and external factors. It is hoped that these findings will help related agencies in planning strategies for the betterment of Orang Asli's life. Data on supportive aspects show that there were two main sources contributing to the upgrading process of Orang Asli youth standards of living, which were family support and JHEOA. Roles played by the local leaders such as *Tok Batin* (Village Headman), *JKKK* (Village Committee) and youth organizations were at moderate level. These local leaderships manage local welfare and daily affairs but were unable to act as transformative leaders in bringing significant changes among the Orang Asli youth. The roles of the local public servant like teachers were also limited in bringing significant changes in the youth's life. Similar situation also happened with supra local leadership involvement, especially among political leaders. Their contribution in enhancing the youth's quality life is perceived as minimal. In line with this finding, Nicholas (n.d.) argued that Orang Asli leadership did not foresee a change in the status quo and therefore did not put in place mechanisms by which individual or the community could address outside influences and forces.

Family Roles

The majority of the respondents (93.2%) agreed that family was the main and essential factor supporting them. They felt that their family have helped them in upgrading their living standards. However, the Mah Meri youth were less dependent on their family. This might be because their settlement was nearer to the town, and they were influenced by the urban people's independent way of life. However, there was no difference between gender in determining the family roles. Youth below 25 years thought that their family had assisted them (94.6%) as compared to those aged 26 and above (89%). These older youth were more matured and could lead their own life, so they did not need family help as much as to those younger ones.

Types of settlement also influenced their perception. Youth at the RPS were more dependent on family compared to those at youth at PSK (*Penyusunan Semula Kampung)* [Village Restructuring Scheme] or Traditional Village. As the youth became more matured or once they got married, they needed less support from the family. Those having parents of

different ethnics thought that they received little support from family (89.3%) in upgrading their life, compared to those having similar ethnic parents (93.5%). This shows that parents of different ethnicity gave more freedom to their children to let them build their self-confidence. This helped the youth to be more independent. Actions to upgrade Orang Asli standards of living also depend on the assistance and contribution from the related agencies. It does not only apply on those closer to them, but also government as well as private agencies including non-governmental organizations. Apart from this, efforts to improve the people's standards of living also depend on local leadership as it is similar with the supra local leaders' responsibilities in the district and at the national level. To determine the contributing factors leading to the improvement of Orang Asli youth's standards of living, the following research findings were presented.

Village Leaders

Slightly more than half (55.2%) of the respondents believed that the leaders at the village had contributed to the youth career development. Female respondents thought that village leaders did influence their career development (64.2%) more than the male respondents (49.1%). Teenagers below 18 years old relied more on outside help as compared to those older than them. Meanwhile, the RPS settlements needed proactive and reliable leaders more than the PSK. Finally, youth working outside the villages (51%) did not see the importance of village leadership compared to those working at the villages (58.1%).

Teachers

Like village leaders, the youth did not think that the government servants, such as teachers, were important in upgrading their living standards. Only 45.7% youth agreed that teachers had helped the villagers. The data show that teachers' influence became less effective as the youth grew older. The Muslim/Christian youth (51.6%) had more positive perception on teachers as compared with others (44.1%). Youth at the PSK and Traditional Village also believe that teachers have contributed for their life betterment, compared to those at the RPS. This might be because at the PSK and traditional villages, the teachers stayed together in the village whereas at the RPS, majority of the teachers stayed outside. Lastly, the youth involved in societies and organizations thought that teachers did have roles in improving their standards of living.

Political Leaders

Most of the Orang Asli youth (66.3%) in this survey thought that political leaders did not really assist them in improving their living standards. Only 33.7% respondents agreed that political leaders did help. The Mah Meri (45.9%) admitted that the help given by local and supra local political leaders, but the other three ethnics denied it. This shows that local and supra local political leaders did not contribute much on the Orang Asli youth career development. Both male and female respondents agreed that political leaders did not help them. Meanwhile those at PSK and Traditional village as well as at the RPS did not put high hope on the political leaders to help them.

The Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JHEOA)

Generally, majority of the respondents (80.9%) admitted the roles played by the JHEOA in helping them. A more detailed analysis found that the Semai youth in Cameron Highlands and the Temiar in Kuala Betis, Gua Musang thought the the JHEOA had helped significantly

in improving their standards of living. However, only 59% of the Mah Meri youth in Pulau Carey agreed with the statement. This might be because of their settlement, which is nearer to the town, had made them not to rely that much on government agencies like the JHEOA. Data on gender show that female youth (88.7%) relied more on the government agencies like the JHEOA compared to the male (75.8%). This situation happened probably because more often, male youth left the settlements and went working in towns where they were less dependent on the JHEOA. Female youth relied more on the JHEOA because they spent more time at the settlements. Those converted to Islam or Christianity believed that the JHEOA had helped them (85.9%) compared to those practising Animism (79.5%). The difference existed most probably because the Muslim/Christian had different views on what could and could not be helped by the JHEOA. The phenomenon happened might be because the values in the religions had taught them that they must be willing to work and improve their standards of living. Religion also taught them to be thankful and grateful of the help given. Youth working outside the villages admitted the JHEOA played roles in upgrading the living standards, as compared to those working in the villages. Most probably those working in the villages hoped that they were assisted by the JHEOA but at the same time they were upset with the red tapes from the JHEOA.

Private Sector and the NGOs Contribution

Only few respondents (16.1%) said that private sector contributed to the betterment of their living standards. The majority felt that the private sector has failed to fulfill their corporate social responsibility (CSR) toward Orang Asli communities. This may be due to the insignificant numbers of Orang Asli who were employed by private companies. Majority of Orang Asli youth are either unemployed or self-employed. Similar situation also happened with the NGOs (24%) and Welfare/Religious Associations (19.9%) entering the settlements to help the Orang Asli youth. As these volunteers seldom stay longer in the settlements, their contribution was not really significant. Their "touch-n-go" approach may not have a long lasting effect.

Overall, two main factors influencing the youth's improvement were their families and the JHEOA. Other factors were not really helping the Orang Asli youth such as the leadership and external factors. Local and supra local political leaders did not really assist the youth to participate in the national development. These leaders, especially the supra local leaders, have the power and resources which could be used effectively in order to improve the Orang Asli living standards. However, they lacked concern of these people and thus, not much was done to assist the Orang Asli youth. Participation of the NGOs, religious/welfare and private organizations in upgrading the Orang Asli youth standards of living was also low. This shows that their concern toward the youth was far below our expectation. Consequently, the youth complaints on their future were justified as there was nothing much that could be expected from the leadership as well as inside or outside organizations in developing their career.

Negativities to the Orang Asli Youth's Career Development

It has been concluded from previous research (World Bank, 2001; Sachs, 2005) that poverty in poor countries was influenced by various factors such as meagre assets, inaccessible markets and scarce job opportunities. In the Orang Asli's case in Malaysia generally, and specifically among their youth, the influence of the hindrance factors is widely aware. The basic issue in this survey is that the main hindrance factor to the Orang Asli youth success is related to the lack of capitals to enable them to develop and improve themselves and their families.

The capitals referred here are those three capitals needed in the process of developing the Orang Asli youth themselves. First, human capital is associated with knowledge, skills and personal traits that can enhance output and productivity. Second, institutional and infrastructure capitals are related to services given by the government and government agencies' efficiency (such as schools, clinics, JHEOA) in providing facilities to upgrade the quality of life. Last, social capital is based on support and help from various groups like families, communities, government and private sectors. This can widen the relation and confidence between the public and Orang Asli youth. The combination of these capitals is very crucial in developing the career pathways of Orang Asli youth, consequently upgrading their standards of living.

The three capitals which function as hindering or contributing factors to the process of enhancing the Orang Asli youth living standards. Analysis has shown that the youth are still far behind in all these capitals. Their involvement in the human capital was still at a nascent stage. This was reflected in few factors hindering their self-development, like having negative attitudes, shyness, lacking self-confidence, having low technical skills, as well as lacking of generic skills especially in communicative aspects and knowledge of certain career. Apart from these human capital barriers, the situation is further exacerbated with institutional capital barrier. An example of this particular hindrance is the lack of support and less effective approach to provide financial assistance from banks or coops. In addition, less rigorous administration of the JHEOA, including multi-layered bureaucracy may also impede the development of Orang Asli youth.

The next obstacle is the lack of social capital from related groups to help the youth develop themselves. This could be seen from the negative perception the outsiders have on the Orang Asli youth capabilities. This condition is made worse as there are not much help given by the outsiders in helping the youth to improve themselves. Besides that, some cultural and customary beliefs as well as traditional working culture may also hinder the youth from transforming themselves. Nearly half of the respondents (46.5%) agreed that negative attitudes within themselves, such as, laziness has retarded their progress. A further analysis shows that the Semai youth admitted that their laziness has became a barrier to their progress. However, married youth (or had been married) were more hardworking (63.6%) compared to those single (47.9%). Youth from mix-parentage were found to be more hardworking (71.4%) than those having parents from the same tribe (51.1%). Other researchers have also discovered that mixed-blood Orang Asli are more dynamic and progressive in their thinking than the pure-blooded Orang Asli (Abdul Jamak et al., 2010). Nevertheless, religious belief and type of settlements were not among the factors determining the laziness attitude.

The lack of education and skills was seen as one of the reasons for their poor living standards. This was admitted by almost half of the respondents. Specifically, the Mah Meri youth (60%) said that lack of academic credential had hindered them from improving themselves. Both male and female Mah Meri youth agreed that education is crucial to raise their standards of living. In term of skills, the Semelai youth (60.4%) dominated the other ethnic group in admitting that skills are very important to secure jobs. Thus, it was hard for the Orang Asli youth to obtain decent jobs as they did not have relevant skills required by the employers. Based on gender, there were more female (60.9%) than male (46.7%) respondents who realised that the absence of skills did affect their prospect of getting hired. According to Mat Nor (2009), low proficiency in basic literacy (3Rs – Reading, Writing, and

Arithmetic) and poor interest in schools are among the main reason that Orang Asli youth is having problem in furthering their education or obtaining higher-paid jobs.

The next suppressive factor was lack self-confidence within the youth themselves. Most respondents (56%) agreed that low self-confidence had resulted in low competitiveness among Orang Asli youth. Shyness and low self-esteem have also limited the youth opportunity to compete with other mainstream youth. Similarly, the respondents agreed that their low self-confidence is one of the factors hindering their career development. Lack of self-confidence might be resulted from language proficiency among the Orang Asli youth. Most respondents (58.4%) believed that their communicative skills were at the minimum level. There were a number of youth that could not speak Bahasa Melayu (National Language) fluently and even worse in English. Perhaps, the poor communicative skill made the Orang Asli youth left far behind than the mainstream youth. Finally, majority of the respondents (80.9%) thought that lack of knowledge about business also hindered their progress. Abdul Jamak et al. (2010) also found in their study, in general, Orang Asli may not have business and entrepreneurial mind set to boost their economic activities.

Institutional Capital

Institutional capital like infrastructure, financial capital and others were stated as critical factors which could slow down the transformation process of the native communities. Nevertheless, most native youth (except for the Mah Meri) did not totally blame the red tapes or non-efficiency of the JHEOA. Most respondents (61%) disagreed that bureaucratic procedures were the barriers for their progress. However, the Mah Meri youth had different opinion. When asked about the efficiency of the JHEOA in helping the Orang Asli youth, it was found that the Mah Meri youth (69.2%) claimed that the department was not efficient. However, youth of other ethnic groups had said it differently. Majority of them (67.1%) denied that the JHEOA was not efficient. Further, the location of the settlements did affect the Orang Asli youth's judgment toward the JHEOA. The more educated and live close vicinity to the sub-urban areas, the Mah Meri youth were critical about the role played by the JHEOA. Majority of the respondents (80.9%) agreed on one similar constraint, which was financial problem to start their own business. Almost all of the youth said they did not have the capital to start their own business, which appeared to be the main constraint to their progress. Almost all of them were not eligible for bank loans as they did not have jobs and properties to be mortgaged. Thus, they totally relied on the government to give them subsidies or soft loans. Abdul Jamak et al. (2010) supported this finding when they also found similar result that Orang Asli are heavily dependent on financial aids from the government to jump-start their businesses.

Social Capital

Humans are social creatures. Social interaction, particularly among family members is very important. Close family ties among the Orang Asli communities might have hindered the youth from moving out to study or work. Is family a constraint to the career development of the Orang Asli youth? Majority of the youth (78.9%) denied the claim. They admitted that families did not affect their success. Stereotypes and images of Orang Asli might be viewed by the outsiders (for example, the Malays) as constraints to the Orang Asli progress. More than 40% respondents agreed on this. Negative perception of the outsiders on Orang Asli could enlarge the ethnicity gaps among them. Outsiders might think that Orang Asli youth lacked courage to deal with people in towns and finally this made them (the youth) went

back to their settlements even though they have already had education, training and job in town.

In relation to customs and cultures, only few respondents (35.5%) thought that customs and tradition hindered their progress. This finding is similar to the research result obtained by Abdul Jamak et al. (2010) that *"pantang-larang"* (Orang Asli customs and superstitions) may have less effect on Orang Asli's strive for better livelihood than it was before. Only the Temiar respondents thought that customs had become barriers to improve their standards of living (63.3%) compared to the other ethnics (below 27%). Based on gender, 38.4% male and 31.3% female respondents said that customs and cultures hindered their progress. In general, most of the youth thought that customs and cultures were not barriers to their development. Only half (50.5%) of the teenagers agreed that social ills among the Orang Asli youth like loitering, drinking, gambling, addiction to entertainment and others had hindered their progress. More Muslim and Christian youth (70.3%) admitted this fact than those practising animism (45.1%). In addition, there were more RPS youth (53.5%) agreed with this assertion than the youth at the PSK or traditional villages (43%).

Most of the Orang Asli youth (64.4%) claimed that since there was no business training provided for them, it was difficult for them to be successful. Based on the research findings, there were main factors hindering the career development of the Orang Asli youth, which were: lack of knowledge about business, no financial capital to start business and no consultation. Moderate-level hindrance factors included: lack of education, communicative problems, having no skills, low self-confidence, laziness, social ills and outsiders' negative perception. The least affecting factors were: the JHEOA, bureaucracy, and families. Hence, it can be concluded that the main hindrance factors among the Orang Asli youth were weaknesses in human capital, followed by institutional and social capitals.

Concluding Remarks

Lands, forests, mountains, rivers, the flora and fauna have significant "spiritual" meanings to Orang Asli. Indigenous people have their own identity; their very existence is based on the extent to which they preserve their cultural heritage and legacy. Thus, the imposition of modern education to indigenous society may be detrimental to their value system. It could lead to cultural contamination that would destroy the indigenous pride of the native societies. Even though Orang Asli youth have their own career aspiration, in general, the findings of this study have shown that there are several external factors hindering the success of the Orang Asli youth. The most outstanding factors are competition, prejudice and stereotypical attitudes of the outsiders on Orang Asli communities and the inefficiency of the related agencies which are given mandate to take care of Orang Asli's welfare. Psychologists have identified several internal factors hindering one's success. Among the factors are personal factors such as negative attitudes and weak self-esteem. Cultural factors can be related to rules, cultures, customs, and tradition that may influence one's thoughts and behaviours.

Further, I could conclude that variables influencing the self and career development of Orang Asli youth are complex. Data on supportive factors show that there were two main sources contributing to the transformative process of Orang Asli youth's standards of living, which were family support and government agency (JHEOA). The study also found the main suppressive factor is the incapacity of local leaders in bringing changes among the Orang Asli youth. The roles of local public servant like teachers were also limited in bringing significant changes in the youth's life. Similar situation also happened with supra local

leadership involvement, especially among political leaders. Their contribution in enhancing the youth's quality life is perceived as minimal. This was reflected in few factors hindering their self-development, like having negative attitudes, lacking self-confidence, lacking technical knowledge and skills, as well as lacking of generic skills especially in communicative aspects and knowledge of certain career. Apart from these human capital hindrances, the situation is further exacerbated with institutional capital hindrance. Examples of this particular hindrance are lacking of financial support from banks or coops. In addition, ineffective administration of the JHEOA, including the red tapes also hinder the Orang Asli youth from developing themselves and their career.

Action Plans to improve human capital among the youth should be seriously drafted, especially in inculcating self-confidence, changing negative attitudes to proactive and progressive attitudes, broadening their knowledge and improving their self and technical skills. Actions to improve the effectiveness of administration by the related agencies also should be highlighted, especially on the inefficiency and bureaucracy one has to deal with. The private sector should carry out their corporate social responsibilities for the indigenous community, by assisting the Orang Asli to improve their critical skills. Consultation, training schemes and loans from banks, financial institutions and coops should be made easier. The public and the non-government agencies should also play parts in exposing the youth with the outside agencies. The public should realize that they should not have negative perception or become stereotypical toward the Orang Asli youth, especially in offering job opportunities and advising on technical and generic skills. Promoting entrepreneurship related to indigenous arts and crafts is also crucial. Finally, integration of indigenous knowledge systems and practices into the curriculum development and skills training of the young Orang Asli generation is essential. For sustainable development, indigenous-driven framework should be put in place, especially with regard to education, training, developing social competence and career development.

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