

# Actors on the Ground: Mapping Orang Asli Education Stakeholders

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## Executive Summary

This policy brief offers a comprehensive analysis of the stakeholders involved in Orang Asli education, mapping their roles, initiatives, and the challenges they face. Through a combination of desk research, stakeholder outreach, and insights from the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS') Seed Community for Orang Asli (a network established in 2024), the brief identifies key barriers and scalable solutions aimed at improving educational outcomes for the Orang Asli community.

## Key Findings

- **Ministry-level efforts support Orang Asli students financially and through adaptive curricula, but patchy Member of Parliament (MP) engagement hampers locally-driven solutions.** The Ministry of Education (MOE) leads Orang Asli education through infrastructure expansion, adaptive curricula such as *Kurikulum Asli dan Penan*, and targeted support programmes such as K9 and K11 model schools. The Department of Orang Asli Development (*Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli [JAKOA]*) complements these efforts with financial aid and motivational initiatives. However, MP engagement remains uneven across the 63 Orang Asli constituencies, limiting the potential for responsive, locally-driven education solutions.
- **NGOs play a key role in Orang Asli education, but funding gaps and geographic disparities limit impact.** Implementers play a major role in Orang Asli education, with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) making up 69.5% of implementers in the ecosystem. However, funding remains a key gap as just 15.7% of stakeholders are funders, and none dedicate resources solely to Orang Asli communities. Additionally, only a minority of the organisations tracked focus exclusively on Orang Asli education. Most initiatives are concentrated in states including Pahang, Perak and Selangor, while states with large Orang Asli populations, such as Kelantan, remain underserved. Additionally, 62.1% of initiatives are long-term or continuous. While 75% of educational programmes are specifically targeted at Orang Asli students, the remaining 25% are broader in scope and do not explicitly identify Orang Asli as primary beneficiaries. Further research is needed to determine whether these programmes meaningfully incorporate culturally responsive approaches.
- **Culturally relevant, community-driven approaches are critical for engagement, but bureaucratic and legal barriers limit programme effectiveness.** Insights from the Seed Community emphasise that culturally relevant, community-driven approaches are essential for meaningful engagement with Orang Asli communities. Successful programmes often begin with trust-building, sustained relationships, and the inclusion of mother-tongue education. However, implementation is challenged by bureaucracy, limited political support, and unclear legal frameworks in the *Akta Orang Asli 1954* (Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954), which creates ambiguity around access and

engagement. Additionally, implementers face hurdles due to misalignment with funder expectations, and a lack of reliable, disaggregated data on Orang Asli students, all of which hinder the effectiveness and sustainability of education programmes.

## Policy Recommendations

To address these gaps and ensure the effective delivery of education for Orang Asli children, the brief makes the following policy recommendations:

1. Funders should consider developing targeted and coordinated funding instruments that address both educational and socioeconomic barriers, prioritising long-term commitments with culturally-adapted success metrics beyond academic scores.
2. Establish a cross-sector coordination mechanism between MOE, JAKOA and NGOs to streamline approvals and update implementation guidelines under a revised Orang Asli Act, with MPs working together with community leaders to serve as accountability champions in high-density constituencies.
3. Create an open, centralised Orang Asli education data platform to improve needs assessment and program targeting, coupled with digital inclusion initiatives to bridge technological divides in remote communities. Sensitive data can be protected and made available to stakeholders qualified by the government authority in charge of the database.
4. Comprehensively map focused educational interventions in all states, and identify more precisely the states where significant Orang Asli populations exist but receive less attention for education programmes. Efforts should include tailoring programmes to meet the unique needs of these regions.
5. Encourage private sector investment in long-term, holistic initiatives by offering incentives such as tax breaks or public recognition. Corporate partners should be motivated to contribute to sustainable education models that integrate cultural preservation, social services, and economic development.

## Conclusion

Achieving equitable education for Orang Asli children requires systemic reforms that overcome cultural, geographic, and socio-economic barriers. By aligning the efforts of the government, NGOs, and corporate stakeholders around long-term, community-driven solutions, Malaysia can transform education into a powerful tool for empowerment, creating lasting positive change for Orang Asli communities.

## 1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental right and a critical pathway to empowerment, especially in underserved communities such as the Orang Asli. Significant disparities, however, persist between policy intentions and on-the-ground realities for the Orang Asli communities in Malaysia (Nordin et al., 2020, Othman, 2022). Implementing effective educational policies to improve access and outcomes for Orang Asli students continues to face systemic challenges such as cultural and linguistic mismatches, limited resources, and marginalisation, which continue to hinder progress (Wan and Idrus, 2021). Addressing these challenges requires a holistic and inclusive approach that would require a collaborative effort between government entities, politicians, especially those elected as Member of Parliaments (MPs) and Member of the State Legislative Assembly (*Ahli Dewan Undangan Negeri* [ADUNs]), and the diverse groups of non-government entities, ranging from corporates, foundations, to civil society actors encompassing individual experts, civil society organisations (CSOs), academia and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

This brief aims to map diverse stakeholders who are involved in contributing to the betterment of Orang Asli education. Data for this aggregate view was gathered through desk research, followed by direct outreach to identified contacts, leading to snowball identification of other organisations. The compiled list was internally cross-checked by two reviewers for face validity. This process was designed not only to map the wide array of non-government actors but also to deepen the understanding of their diverse roles and contributions. The deeper insights into the initiatives of non-government actors are obtained through the Seed Community for Orang Asli Education, a network of non-government actors that the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) established in 2024 to connect a network of stakeholders dedicated to improving educational outcomes for Orang Asli children.

The Seed Community and this brief are part of IDEAS' Inclusive Education for Orang Asli Children project, which seeks to convene and empower civil society partners championing Orang Asli education initiatives. Additionally, the project pilots educational programmes that attempt to be culturally adapted for Orang Asli communities.

This brief is organized as follows: it begins with a snapshot of government entities involved in designing policy and delivering education services for Orang Asli. It then presents an aggregated view of the various non-government actors shaping the education landscape for this group, summarizing their initiatives and providing insights into their work and the challenges they face through sharings by the Seed Community. The brief concludes with key recommendations for scaling successful initiatives and addressing persistent challenges. The insights aim to highlight areas where coordination can be more effective to enable greater impact in this space.

## 2. Orang Asli Education: Policy Makers and Implementers

Policymakers and implementers play distinct yet complementary roles in advancing the Orang Asli education agenda. Their responsibilities include developing, implementing, and advocating for policies and programmes that address the unique needs of Orang Asli students. These efforts, driven by the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Department of Orang Asli Development (*Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli* [JAKOA]), and Members of Parliament (MPs), work together to shape and support policies and programmes from the national to local levels (Appendix 1). MOE plays a lead role by expanding infrastructure and services, designing adaptive curricula, and introducing preparatory and targeted interventions to support learning and retention. JAKOA complements these efforts by providing targeted motivational programmes and financial assistance, aimed at boosting school attendance, retention, and better transition rates. While the role of MPs remains less explored, they hold considerable potential to advocate and amplify the educational needs of Orang Asli communities. The roles of these key stakeholders are summarised below.

### 2.1 Ministry of Education (MOE)

MOE's role in Orang Asli's education spans three areas: expanding infrastructure and services into underserved areas, designing tailored policies and curricula for adaptive education, and introducing targeted programmes that address Orang Asli students' unique needs. A major turning point came in 1996 when MOE assumed management of all schools previously overseen by JAKOA (formerly known as the Department of Orang Asli Affairs, *Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli* [JHEOA]). This was followed by the enforcement of compulsory primary education in 2003 under the amended Education Act 1996, ensuring that all Malaysian children aged 6–12, had the right to schooling (Human Rights Commission of Malaysia [SUHAKAM], 2010). These milestones marked a shift from a broad-based educational provision to a more targeted approach to Orang Asli education.

One of the most tangible demonstrations of MOE's commitment to bridging educational gaps for Orang Asli students lies in its expansion of infrastructure and services in remote and underserved areas. This commitment is apparent with the establishment of Comprehensive Special Model Schools (K9 and K11) and national schools (*Sekolah Kebangsaan*) in Orang Asli settlements, along with the upgrades of boarding facilities to support access and retention. The K9 model integrates six years of primary and three years of lower secondary education within a single school compound, complete with full boarding facilities, to reduce dropout rates stemming from travel and accessibility barriers. In 2007, the first K9 school—SK Bandar Baru 2 in Paloh Hinai, Pekan, Pahang—was introduced as a pilot initiative (SUHAKAM, 2010). Since then, the programme has expanded to eight K9 schools dedicated to Orang Asli communities nationwide. In 2023, MOE also launched K11 pilot schools, which extend education to the upper secondary level, as seen in SMK Betau, Pahang, specifically catering to the Orang Asli community (BERNAMA, 2025).

Recognising the distinct educational needs of Orang Asli students, MOE has taken deliberate steps in adaptive curricula that promote both school retention and academic achievement, pertinently through Initiative 57<sup>1</sup> under the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB). These efforts are further supported by the integration of Orang Asli education under the Education for All (EFA) policy and its inclusion within the Special Education framework, which ensures sustained academic support. A key step in strengthening learning outcomes has been the introduction of culturally relevant curricula such as the *Kurikulum Asli dan Penan* (KAP)<sup>2</sup>, which embeds indigenous knowledge and pedagogy into mainstream education. To support this, MOE has prioritised the training of Orang Asli teachers at Institut Pendidikan Guru (IPG). Additionally, intervention measures like the Indigenous Pedagogy Strengthening Programme have been implemented to improve students' grasp of core subjects—Bahasa Melayu, English, and Mathematics—through culturally responsive teaching methods.

In addition to its broader mandate, MOE also provides targeted preparatory and retention programmes that strengthen academic support for Orang Asli students throughout their educational journey. Recognising the challenges faced at different stages of schooling, MOE has developed initiatives such as *Program Kelas Khas* (ProKhas) and *Chup Badui Sikulah* (CBS) to boost foundational literacy and numeracy, particularly at the early primary level. These programmes aim to improve academic readiness and reduce dropout rates by equipping students with the skills necessary to succeed within the national education system. Building on this progress, MOE works in tandem with JAKOA to support the continued development and effectiveness of educational programmes for the Orang Asli community.

## 2.2 Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli (JAKOA)

JAKOA's mandate to safeguard the welfare of the Orang Asli community is rooted in legal provisions, including the Federal Constitution and the *Akta Orang Asli 1954* (Act 134). In the education context, these legal provisions guarantee that Orang Asli children cannot be denied entry into any school. JHEOA was initially responsible for managing Orang Asli education and ensuring their right to schooling. However, systemic challenges such as resource constraints and a lack of culturally informed educators hindered its effectiveness (Othman, 2022). Recognising these limitations, the responsibility for Orang Asli education was transferred to the MOE in 1996 to ensure better management, improved infrastructure, and enhanced learning outcomes (SUHAKAM, 2010).

1 Inisiatif 57: Transformasi Orang Asli dan Peribumi initiative aims to ensure equity and fair access to education for Orang Asli and other Indigenous students. It outlines key aspects essential for the envisioned transformation, including network and collaboration, school leadership, teaching and learning, transition of Indigenous students from Year 6 to Form 1 and school attendance programme.

2 Indigenous and Penan curriculum is specifically designed to fulfil the unique needs of Orang Asli students.

Despite this transition, JAKOA still continues to play a supplementary role to address dropout rates and aspiring to improve Orang Asli students' academic success. Through the Pelan Strategik JAKOA (2018-2020) and (2023-2026), the department focuses on increasing access to quality education, fostering motivation, and providing financial support. Literacy programmes aim to combat illiteracy by strengthening reading, writing, and numeracy skills (3M) among Orang Asli students. Additionally, financial assistance is coordinated with the intention to help alleviate economic barriers to education, while motivational programmes are carried out to encourage school attendance and academic achievement. To support students' transition into mainstream education, JAKOA also conducts academic camps and performance research, ensuring that Orang Asli students receive the necessary guidance and support to thrive within the national education system.

Alongside these efforts, Members of Parliament (MPs) also play a pivotal role to represent the Orang Asli community interests within their constituencies to ensure equitable access to education.

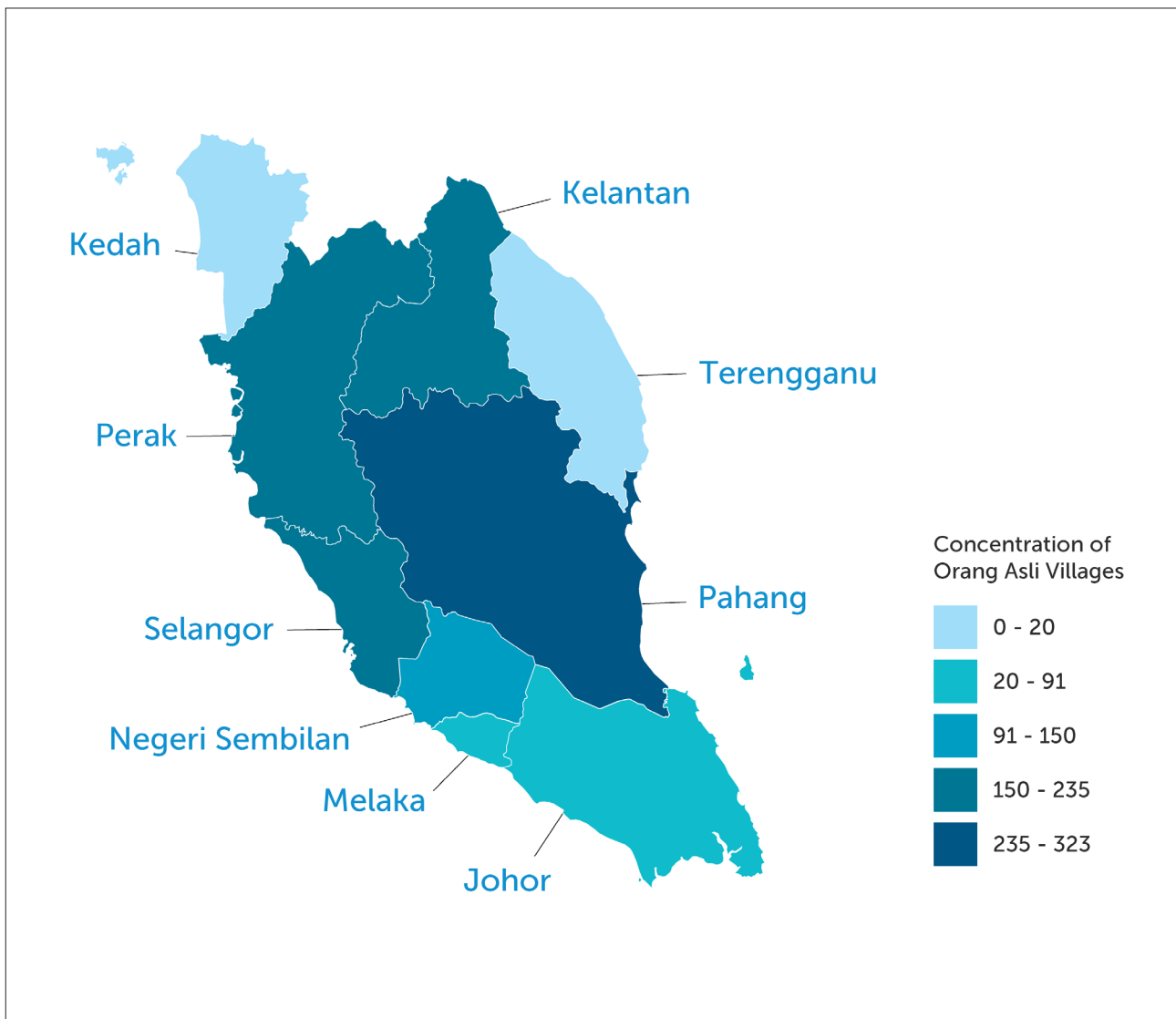
## 2.3 Members of Parliament (MPs)

Members of Parliament (MPs) play a crucial role in advancing educational opportunities for the Orang Asli community by advocating for policies. For example, in 2017, Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, then Minister of Rural and Regional Development and MP for Bera, a constituency with at least 33 Orang Asli villages, pushed for the construction of more Pusat Intelpek Pelajar Orang Asli (PIPOA) (Marzuki, 2017) in every zone to improve Orang Asli education access. Similarly, Datuk Ramli Mohd Nor, the first Orang Asli MP for Cameron Highlands in 2024, advocated for a quota for Orang Asli students in residential boarding schools (*Sekolah Berasrama Penuh*) and *Maktab Rendah Sains* MARA (MRSM), ensuring better access to quality education (Bernama, 2024). These efforts demonstrate the role MPs can play in improving education outcomes for the Orang Asli community.

The Orang Asli community is spread across nine states, 63 parliamentary constituencies, and 1,198 settlements, with varying levels of representation (Appendix 2). Pahang has the highest concentration of Orang Asli villages, with 323 settlements. Meanwhile, Kedah has the lowest concentration of Orang Asli villages, with only 2 villages. Johor has the highest number of parliamentary constituencies covering Orang Asli communities, with 13 MPs representing these areas, with 81 villages. In contrast, Kelantan has only 3 parliamentary constituencies covering all the Orang Asli communities within the state; these constituencies encompass 235 villages (Figure 1).

Given the significant presence of Orang Asli communities across multiple constituencies, MPs representing areas within the Orang Asli community must take a proactive role in addressing educational challenges. Beyond the efforts of MPs and government entities, non-state actors also play an essential role in complementing these initiatives and furthering the cause of Orang Asli education, which will be looked at next.

**Figure 1: Concentration of Orang Asli Villages across Peninsular Malaysia**



**Note:** The map is an estimate of the concentration of Orang Asli villages across Peninsular Malaysia and does not depict the exact concentration.

### 3. Orang Asli Education: Non-State Actors Involvement

Globally, civil society plays an influential role in contributing to better education outcomes of Indigenous children. A special session of the involvement of civil society for inclusive education convened by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2001 highlighted the limitations of governments in undertaking all education goals due to constraints in resources, thus necessitating broad-based participation especially to cater to the needs of disadvantaged groups. NGOs and coalitions have been cited in other countries as playing a role in advocating for more equitable education for their respective Indigenous communities (Saunders & Hill, 2007; Yoorook Justice Commission, 2024). For example, First Nations groups in Canada leverage on strengths of partnerships with likeminded actors to lobby ministries to accept recommendations for education policy changes.

Thus, Malaysia is not an exception, as civil society fills in the need gaps of the education and welfare sector whether through direct implementation of initiatives or collaboration with government agencies (Zainal Abiddin, 2024). They not only contribute to essential services such as education, but also influence public policy reform (Ahmad et al., 2024). For example, Malaysian NGOs have documented success in providing education to groups often overlooked by the mainstream education system (Khairi et al., 2023). In the context of the Orang Asli, well-known entities including the Orang Asli-led Jaringan Kampung Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia (JKOASM) and its umbrella network Jaringan Orang Asal SeMalaysia (JOAS) work in tandem with NGOs such as the Center for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC) in continuously advocating for Orang Asli children's education.

This section aims to provide an overview of stakeholders that support Orang Asli education in Malaysia, based on desk review and stakeholder engagement, to identify organisations involved in this area. By exploring the landscape of diverse stakeholder involvement, this section highlights the various actors working to enhance educational outcomes for Orang Asli children, summarizing their roles, locations, programmes and how their role fits in the effort to improve the socioeconomic inclusion of the Orang Asli.

## 4. Methodology

To map the diverse stakeholders involved in Orang Asli education, a multi-step data collection process was employed. The first step involved conducting desk research to identify key actors and programmes contributing to the education landscape for Orang Asli communities. This was followed by direct outreach to these identified contacts, leading to snowball identification of additional stakeholders. The compiled list of stakeholders was then reviewed for face validity by two independent reviewers uninvolved with the research.

Data on entities involved in Orang Asli children's education was systematically compiled and organized into two datasets. The first captures organisations working directly or indirectly in this space, categorized by type of organisation, target beneficiaries (Orang Asli or broader groups), focus area (education or wider focus), and their role as either funders or implementers. The second dataset documents education-related programmes by these organisations, including programme objectives, target groups, geographical location, and duration. Further details on data structure and categorization are available in the appendix.

Further insights into the roles and contributions of non-government actors were obtained through the Seed Community for Orang Asli Education, a network established by the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) in 2024. This network connects a range of stakeholders dedicated to improving educational outcomes for Orang Asli children, providing a deeper understanding of their initiatives and challenges.

It is important to note that the stakeholder landscape for Orang Asli education is dynamic. New stakeholders continuously emerge, and the roles and engagements of existing stakeholders evolve over time. Stakeholders' level of participation in a specific programme may also vary depending on the nature and duration of the project. As such, this mapping represents a snapshot of the stakeholder ecosystem at a particular point in time and should be viewed as a living document that requires periodic updates to remain relevant.

In addition, the limitation of overlooking programmes, especially community-led ones that are undocumented in the online space is acknowledged. To address this gap, the perspectives of community members such as Orang Asli parents, teachers, and leaders separately through IDEAS' participatory research initiative, *Voices from the Ground*. This initiative highlights the lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations of Orang Asli communities through methodologies such as photovoice and sharing circles. By focusing on external stakeholders in this mapping, the findings from *Voices from the Ground* are *complemented*, providing a holistic view of the Orang Asli education ecosystem.

## 5. Insights from the Orang Asli Stakeholder Dataset

This report presents an analysis based on a compiled dataset comprising 70 organisations and 110 programmes found through online data that contribute directly or indirectly to Orang Asli education outcomes. Of the organisations identified, 15.7% function as funders while the remaining 84.3% are implementers. The analysis that follows explores both types of stakeholders by first examining the characteristics of the organisations involved, followed by an overview of the nature and scope of the programmes they conduct. This aggregated mapping aims to provide a clearer understanding of the current landscape of support for Orang Asli education and to highlight gaps or opportunities for more coordinated, targeted, and sustained efforts. The following sections explain how different stakeholder sectors contribute, the types of educational initiatives being delivered, and the broader socio-economic interventions that intersect with education to support Orang Asli communities.

### 5.1 Stakeholders by Sector

A comprehensive ecosystem mapping of funders and implementers with their beneficiaries can prompt more targeted funding and support as well as enable efforts to coordinate implementers for collective impact. The dataset as summarized in Table 1 below highlights the large ratio difference of organisations implementing initiatives (84.3%) that directly or indirectly contribute to Orang Asli education compared to funders (15.7%) making up a smaller portion. It highlights a potential gap between implementers contributing to Orang Asli students and the financial backing required to sustain them.

**Table 1: Percentage of stakeholder by role and sector from the present dataset**

Role	Sector	Definition	Example	Percentage
<b>Implementer</b> (84.3%)	NGOs	Non-governmental organisations (NGOs).	Center for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC)	69.5%
	Government-linked entities	Public or ministry-linked entities and foundations, typically under government departments or ministries.	Yayasan Inovasi Malaysia	11.9%
	Tertiary education institutions	Universities or higher education institutions.	IIUM	11.9%
	Social enterprise	Organisations that operate with a social mission, balancing both business and social impact objectives.	The Asli Co.	6.8%

Role	Sector	Definition	Example	Percentage
Funder (15.7%)	Corporate foundations	Foundations or corporate social responsibility bodies associated with profit-making companies.	Yayasan Sime Darby	81.8%
	Government-linked entities	Public or ministry-linked entities and foundations, typically under government departments or ministries.	Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa	18.2%

In the current dataset, none of the identified funders exclusively support programmes targeting Orang Asli communities. This is likely because these funders, whether corporate foundations or government-linked entities, typically operate with broader mandates, sponsoring a wide range of initiatives across different communities. As a result, Orang Asli-focused programmes are often just one part of their larger portfolio of social impact efforts.

Of the funders captured, 81.8% are corporate foundations, and the remaining 18.2% are government-linked organisations. Among the corporate foundations, two-thirds (66.7%) are philanthropic arms of government-linked companies (GLCs), while the rest are associated with fully private corporations. Government-linked funders, on the other hand, comprise a diverse set of actors: some are tied to domestic ministries or public agencies, others are funded by foreign governments that support international development work, and a few are collaborative coalitions between NGOs and parliamentarians receiving public or semi-public funding for social programmes and research.

Given this diversity and broad focus, a more comprehensive and transparent reporting system, particularly one that details the specific beneficiaries of funding, would be beneficial. It would not only help stakeholders understand the true scale of investment reaching Orang Asli communities but also guide future funders who may wish to support initiatives in a more targeted and sustained manner. Enhanced tracking of funding outcomes would ultimately strengthen accountability, coordination, and impact within the Orang Asli education ecosystem.

Among implementers, NGOs make up the largest stakeholder group working on initiatives that benefit Orang Asli education whether directly through education-specific programmes or indirectly through broader development efforts. Within the dataset, 23.7% of implementers focus primarily on educational initiatives. Of these, a small subset (5.7%) exclusively target the education of Orang Asli children. The remainder work on education for a broader range of vulnerable and high-need communities, with Orang Asli children included among their beneficiaries.

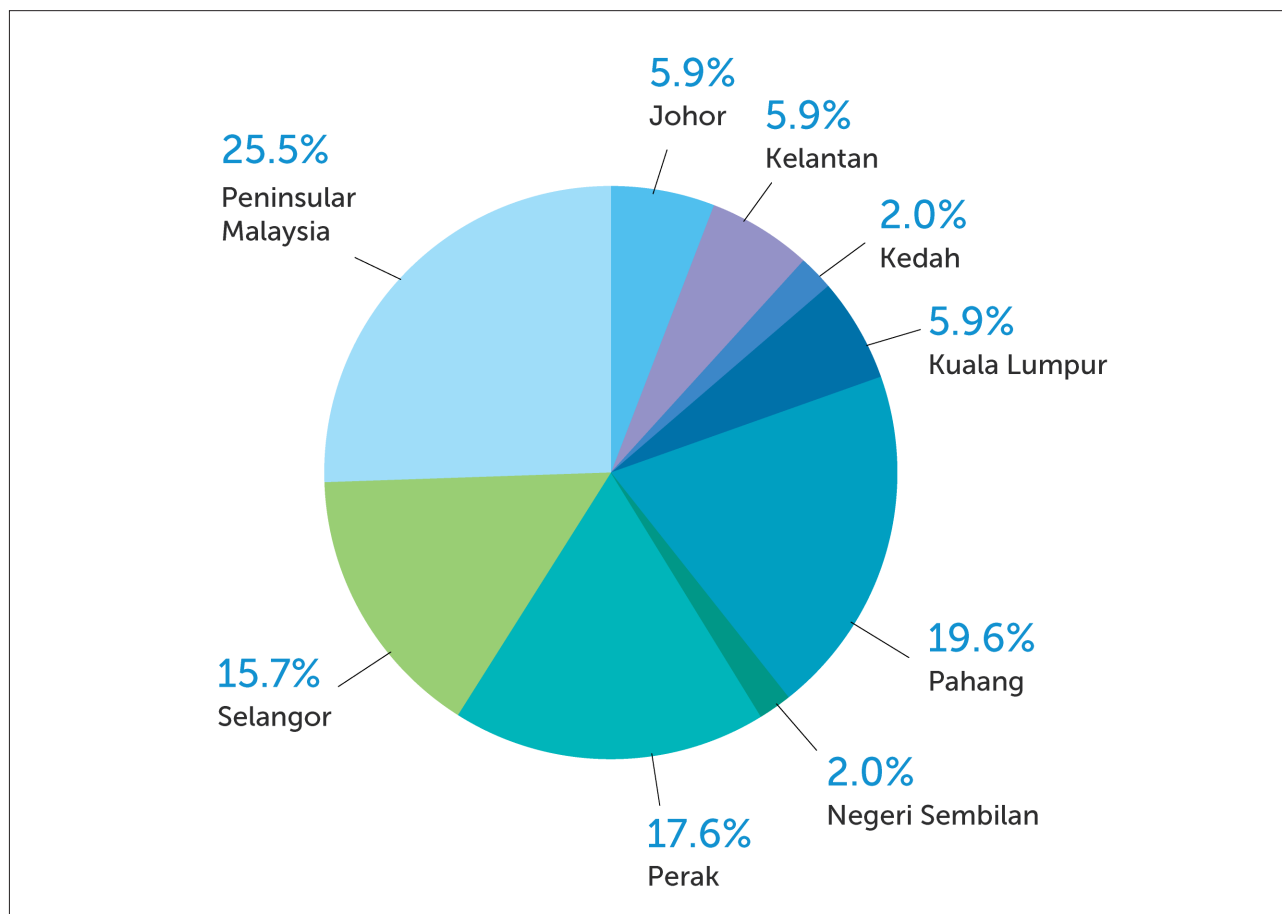
At first glance, the relatively small percentage of implementers solely focused on Orang Asli education may appear concerning. However, this finding reflects the broader scope of this analysis, which intentionally includes organisations addressing the wider social determinants that impact Orang Asli students' access to quality education. This approach aligns with previous policy literature (Wan, 2020; Wan & Idrus, 2021), which emphasises the interconnectedness of socio-economic, structural, and infrastructural barriers in shaping educational outcomes. Indeed, issues such as unsafe road conditions (Kamarudin & Mohd Said, 2022), lack of reliable internet access (Shanmugam et al., 2023), and limited access to clean water (Sawalludin et al., 2020) continue to affect Orang Asli communities and hinder their children's ability to attend and succeed in school. As such, many implementers operate with a more holistic lens, which involves delivering programmes in areas such as health, infrastructure, and community development because these are deeply intertwined with education outcomes.

Thus, this mapping will be elaborated further in the next section on the type of initiatives conducted by these stakeholders in order to provide a snapshot of a holistic view of Orang Asli educational initiatives.

## 5.2 Programmes Conducted

Variance in the number of educational programmes carried out by stakeholders with Orang Asli students as their beneficiary can be observed in the dataset. The state of Pahang has the greatest number of educational programmes, followed by Perak, and Selangor. A detailed summary is illustrated in Figure 1 below. Notably, educational programmes targeting specific Orang Asli students in Terengganu, Melaka, Penang, and Perlis, are absent.

The greater number of programmes in specific states such as Pahang, Perak and Selangor can be mapped to the larger number of Orang Asli villages existing across parliamentary constituencies in those states as mapped in Appendix 2. However, states such as Kelantan, Negeri Sembilan, and Johor stood out for the disparity in the number of educational programmes for Orang Asli children despite having a large number of Orang Asli villages. For example, there are 235 Orang Asli villages in Kelantan, but only 5.9% of identified educational programmes were carried out in Kelantan. Possible explanations include there being grassroots initiatives taking place that are not captured in the dataset due to a lack of an online presence. Alternatively, while some states may have fewer programmes, they could be more efficient or streamlined. However, IDEAS' past consultations with MOE representatives as reported in *Voices from the Ground* revealed that Kelantan and Terengganu received the least attention from non-MOE actors. The dataset is also complemented by data from JAKOA (2018) on there being higher dropout rates among Orang Asli students in Kelantan and Terengganu. These figures underline the pressing need for a more concerted effort in these regions.

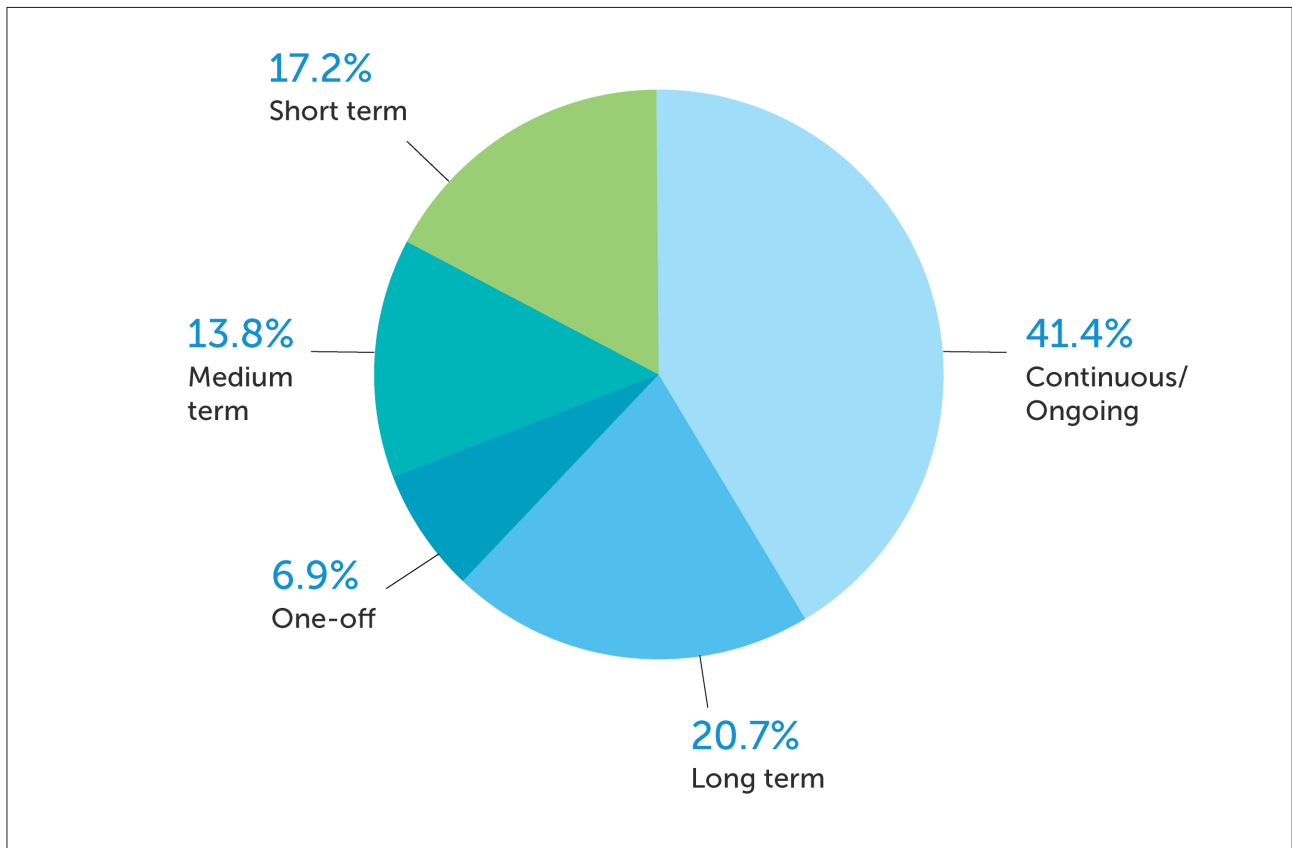
Figure 2: Spread of Orang Asli Educational Programmes by State<sup>3</sup>

Next, Orang Asli-specific educational programmes make up 75% of the dataset on educational initiatives conducted. For the rest of the 25%, the educational initiatives do not specifically mention Orang Asli students as their main beneficiary, but rather a community that also benefited from their initiative. While this is not generally a problem, more tailored educational programmes are encouraged for the Orang Asli community due to the unique cultural practices and challenges lived by them (Wan and Idris, 2021). These programmes should be designed with a deeper understanding of their distinct traditions, languages, and socio-economic contexts, ensuring that the education provided is both relevant and respectful of their heritage.

<sup>3</sup> Locations categorized as 'Peninsular Malaysia' refers to programmes conducted across multiple states but with no defined specific states.

Zooming in on Orang Asli-specific education initiatives, programme duration varies with there being greater long-term or continuous programmes (62.1%) compared to one-off and short term programmes (24.1%) cumulatively. The breakdown of the programme durations is illustrated in Figure 2, with Table 2 detailing the breakdown of programme duration definitions. This captured data signifies a promising acknowledgement towards sustained engagement, which is critical for addressing systemic barriers faced by the Orang Asli community. Long-term programmes enable trust-building, consistency, and adaptability, which are factors that are central to meaningful impact. While this finding is encouraging, to ensure their effectiveness and resilience, these initiatives must be backed by sustainable funding models and robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks. Stable financial support allows programmes to grow and respond meaningfully over time, while ongoing M&E ensures they remain accountable and culturally relevant, bearing in mind that lack of evaluation of education programmes for the Orang Asli is counterproductive to addressing the community’s challenges (Kamarudin & Mohd Said, 2022).

**Figure 3: Count of Orang Asli Education Initiative Duration**



**Table 2: Definition of Programme Durations**

Duration	Description
One-time	Programmes or initiatives that last for a single day, event, or occurrence. Typically, these are one-off occurrences, often for awareness, workshops, or specific events.
Short-term	Programmes or initiatives that last from a few days to a few months. These may include pilot projects, workshops, training, or any initiative that runs over a few months but not more.
Medium-term	Programmes or initiatives that span 6 months to 2 years. These could include ongoing workshops, capacity-building projects, or medium-length community outreach efforts.
Long-term	Programmes or initiatives that last over 2 years. This includes continuous educational support, multi-year community development efforts, or advocacy programmes that require sustained effort.
Continuous/ Ongoing	Initiatives or organisations whose work does not have a defined end date and is part of their core mission or ongoing commitment to the Orang Asli community. These initiatives may involve continuous advocacy, systemic changes, or long-term infrastructure support.

In mapping the broader ecosystem, a range of community-based initiatives was also documented. While not explicitly focused on education, these programmes included Orang Asli beneficiaries. These include programmes aimed at poverty alleviation, social development, water and sanitation, healthcare, and infrastructure. Although not the core focus of this analysis, such initiatives are critical to the overall well-being and learning conditions of Orang Asli children, reflecting widespread recognition of the role social determinants play in shaping educational access and outcomes. However, it's important to note that the dataset may not fully capture the breadth of these broader community initiatives, especially smaller or grassroots efforts with limited online presence. Conversely, it is also possible that Orang Asli-focused educational initiatives may be underrepresented due to similar data limitations. As such, while the current data suggests a strong presence of non-education-specific programming, it should be interpreted with caution.

Moving forward, funders, government bodies, and other stakeholders are encouraged to coordinate more intentionally across both dimensions: by supporting adaptive, culturally grounded education initiatives and by reinforcing the foundational social supports that enable children to thrive in school. A dual focus on targeted educational interventions alongside broader structural improvements offers the most holistic pathway to achieving equitable education outcomes for Orang Asli communities.

## 6. Insights from Seed Community for Orang Asli Education

Translating framework into practice, victories in policy advocacy occur with greater ease through a network of stakeholders working together for a shared broader goal (Hoefer, 2023; Sabatier, 1988). With that, the Seed Community for Orang Asli Education was established by IDEAS in 2024, encompassing 13 members selected from diverse backgrounds which includes representatives from the Orang Asli community, academic institutions, corporate foundations and NGOs to ensure rich insights and representation. Through three rounds of focused discussions throughout 2024, shared insights were gathered from the lived experience of the Seed Community members.

### 6.1 Insights from Seed Community

The Seed Community members shared general insights of working with Orang Asli communities. These include taking into account the cultural identity upheld by the Orang Asli communities, and approaching the communities through a collaborative mindset for greater trust and relationship building. The following themes summarise key insights and challenges shared by Seed Community members based on their direct experiences working with Orang Asli communities. These reflections offer practical considerations for implementers designing and delivering education programmes in these contexts.

#### Cultural Understanding

The Orang Asli communities practice a diverse set of traditions, even in and amongst their own tribes, and thus a more culturally relevant approach must be taken into account, rather than applying the same understanding from a small sample to the community at large. It is essential to understand that one community liaison does not represent all community members, highlighting the need for inclusive and participatory approaches.

Implementers must also be aware that Orang Asli communities take great pride in their culture and identity, such as language that plays a vital role in their cultural preservation. The passing down of indigenous languages that form the basis of their traditions and culture allows them to be safeguarded for future generations. In relation to that, the Orang Asli communities showed a strong desire for educational programmes that incorporated their native languages, such as the Sekolah Batek initiative, a teaching module aimed at educating the isolated Bateq Tribe, and the continued inclusion of Semai language programmes in schools in Peninsular Malaysia.

#### Building Trust and Relationships through a Collaborative Approach

Trust and authentic relationships between implementers and the Orang Asli are key to successful collaboration, and communities have expressed a need to build genuine relationships that are not just limited to specific programmes, but rather sustained over

time. The Orang Asli communities are in turn more open to sharing and collaborating with implementers once this trust has been established, allowing for more successful programmes to be carried out. These reflections by the Seed Community echo the earlier analysis highlighting there being an awareness by implementers to plan for more long-term or continuous Orang Asli-specific education initiatives, as identified in the dataset. This reinforces the need for more sustained funding in addition to long-term M&E for accountability of programme outcomes.

As a complement to long-term trust-building, programmes must be designed with a collaborative tone, ensuring community engagement and buy-in rather than prioritising “directives”. The involvement of the community plays a vital role in shaping the educational experiences of Orang Asli children, and in creating a safe place for the Orang Asli to express their honest opinions and have a community voice on the programmes. This enables a more holistic approach to be taken during implementation.

## 6.2 Implementation Challenges

Additionally, the coordination of education programmes for Orang Asli communities is not without challenges. During the Seed Community meetings, stakeholders identified several systemic and operational issues that need to be addressed to ensure the success of Orang Asli educational programmes. These challenges point to a need for more open and effective collaboration between government and non-government stakeholders, funders and implementers, and the need for a key stakeholder role in collecting, evaluating, and publishing data.

**Difficulty in obtaining programme approvals:** Miscommunication and lack of coordination are factors that hinder effective collaboration. Lack of coordination between government agencies (e.g., JAKOA, Ministry of Education) often delay the approval of permits and programme implementation needed to carry out the education programmes. Delays are exacerbated through misunderstandings around the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for programme approvals and renewals, with processes sometimes taking 2–4 months, particularly for new initiatives, creating missed opportunities for funders.

An additional layer of complexity arises from the outdated provisions in the *Akta Orang Asli 1954* (Act 134), which continue to shape how engagement with Orang Asli communities is regulated. Several sections of the Act lack clarity and have been flagged by Seed Community stakeholders as creating uncertainty in programme implementation. For example, Section 15(1) allows authorities to remove individuals from Orang Asli areas if their presence is deemed “detrimental to the welfare” of the community. However, the term “detrimental” is not clearly defined. Similarly, Section 14(1) grants the Minister power to exclude individuals or groups from entering Orang Asli areas if their presence

is seen as inconsistent with the community's welfare, yet the term welfare is also vague and not contextualised within Orang Asli cultural values. These ambiguities leave room for arbitrary interpretation, potentially restricting access for NGOs, researchers, or programme implementers seeking to collaborate with Orang Asli communities even when their intentions align with community interests.

In addition, the Seed Community shared that there is room for improvement for MPs to be more accountable to their constituents by ensuring better accessibility for intervention programmes. This can be done by supporting processes that need to be navigated by stakeholders to have their programmes approved. Without political will and support for long-term educational interventions to be carried out, the sustainability of programmes risk being limited.

**Data Inaccessibility:** Public data on Orang Asli education is often outdated, incomplete, or difficult to access, making it challenging to identify and prioritise schools and districts for interventions. Data and information regarding the Orang Asli students is crucial, especially regarding determining the right programmes to be carried out. The lack of accurate and up-to-date data hampers evidence-based decision-making and the ability to tailor programmes to the specific needs of different Orang Asli communities.

**Issues of Programme and Funder Alignment:** A key challenge in programme implementation lies in the misalignment between funder expectations and the practical realities faced by implementers. For example, concerns have been brought up about funders often expecting measurable academic growth within short timeframes such as a one year period, which may not align with the long-term nature of educational interventions required to address systemic issues. This creates pressure on implementers to deliver immediate results, even when programme objectives such as cultural integration, trust-building, and skill development require extended engagement. These issues with the programme direction are exacerbated by difficulties faced in aligning programme modules with the diverse needs of Orang Asli communities, particularly given the varying cultural and socioeconomic contexts of the different tribes and their native lands. With the data suggesting that implementers are aware of the importance of long-term programmes, greater support is needed by equally long-term and sustainable funding models, as well as robust and culturally sensitive M&E mechanisms. Without these structural supports, even well-intentioned long-term programmes risk falling short of their transformative potential.

## 7. Conclusion and Policy Implications

This brief provides a mapping of the stakeholders involved in Orang Asli education, aiming to address the gaps between policy intentions and the challenges faced on the ground. Utilising a multi-method approach combining desk research, stakeholder outreach, and validation through the Seed Community for Orang Asli established by IDEAS in 2024, this brief attempts to map the diverse ecosystem of stakeholders working to improve Orang Asli education while highlighting areas where coordination can be more effective to enable greater impact in this space.

The findings reveal three key insights: first, the Malaysian government has prioritised education for the Orang Asli community through the MOE and JAKOA. MOE has implemented policies to improve enrollment, retention, and academic outcomes, including culturally relevant curricula and initiatives to increase school accessibility. While JAKOA initially managed Orang Asli education, it now plays a supplementary role in addressing dropout rates and providing financial support. Members of Parliament (MPs) also contribute by advocating for policies that enhance educational opportunities for Orang Asli students. These efforts highlight the importance of coordinated government action, targeted policies, and local advocacy in addressing the educational needs of marginalized communities

Next, non-state actors, including NGOs, civil society groups, and corporate foundations, play a vital role in improving educational outcomes for Orang Asli children in Malaysia by filling in gaps in the education and welfare sectors. The stakeholder dataset identifies a disparity between programme delivery and sustainable financial support. Most funders operate with broader mandates and do not exclusively target Orang Asli communities. Among implementers, many adopt a holistic approach that addresses interconnected socio-economic issues such as infrastructure, healthcare, and digital access. This reflects a growing recognition that improving educational outcomes requires addressing the broader conditions that affect Orang Asli children's ability to access and benefit from schooling.

Whilst there is encouraging evidence of there being many long-term and continuous programmes for Orang Asli education, challenges remain in ensuring the equitable distribution of educational programmes across different states, with some areas like Kelantan and Johor showing a disparity in initiatives despite a high concentration of Orang Asli villages. The lesson learned from this landscape is the importance of long-term, sustainable funding and M&E plans in place for programmes that address both education and the broader socio-economic needs of the Orang Asli in states with less attention and programme support on these issues. Future interventions should focus on greater collaboration between government agencies and non-state actors, with tailored interventions that respect the cultural and socio-economic contexts of the Orang Asli to achieve lasting improvements in education.

Moreover, the Seed Community for Orang Asli Education convened by IDEAS emphasises the importance of culturally grounded, trust-based, and community-driven approaches.

However, challenges such as poor inter-agency coordination, unclear legal frameworks under the *Akta Orang Asli 1954* (Act 134), data inaccessibility, and misaligned expectations between funders and implementers hinder effective programme delivery. A key lesson is the need for culturally sensitive, inclusive, and sustained efforts, with policymakers focusing on better interagency cooperation, streamlined processes, and addressing the information gap.

These findings yield key policy recommendations:

1. Funders should consider developing targeted and coordinated funding instruments that address both educational and socioeconomic barriers, prioritising long-term commitments with culturally-adapted success metrics beyond academic scores.
2. Establish a cross-sector coordination mechanism between MOE, JAKOA and NGOs to streamline approvals and update implementation guidelines under a revised Orang Asli Act, with MPs working together with community leaders to serve as accountability champions in high-density constituencies. To further enhance this process, trusted providers could be pre-approved, with a streamlined reporting process for their projects to reduce delays and improve efficiency. This would ease regulatory burdens, ensuring that projects meet the needed timelines and scrutiny while focusing on outcomes.
3. Create an open, centralised Orang Asli education data platform to improve needs assessment and program targeting, coupled with digital inclusion initiatives to bridge technological divides in remote communities. Sensitive data can be protected and made available to stakeholders qualified by the government authority in charge of the database.
4. Comprehensively map focused educational interventions in all states, and identify more precisely the states where significant Orang Asli populations exist but receive less attention for education programmes. Efforts should include tailoring programmes to meet the unique needs of these regions.
5. Encourage private sector investment in long-term, holistic initiatives by offering incentives such as tax breaks or public recognition. Corporate partners should be motivated to contribute to sustainable education models that integrate cultural preservation, social services, and economic development.

By addressing these structural challenges while building on existing successful models, stakeholders can move closer to realizing the holistic, inclusive approach envisioned in Malaysia's education policies that truly empowers Orang Asli children through culturally-responsive, sustainably-funded interventions. The stakeholder mapping and community insights presented here provide deeper understanding on evaluation and coordination gaps, and point to the need to build a stronger network for collaborative action.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Key initiatives by MOE and JAKOA to Support Orang Asli Education

Education Phase	Initiatives by MOE	Details	Initiatives by JAKOA	Details
Preparatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program Jom Belajar utilises two models: Program Khas Murid Orang Asli (ProKhas) and Chup Badui Sikulah (CBS) (or Moh/Jom Pergi Sekolah)</li> </ul>	Provide access to basic education, particularly in mastering reading, writing, and counting (3M) skills, for Orang Asli children who have yet to attend school.	Program Literasi Fungsian Orang Asli	To improve literacy and numeracy skills of Orang Asli community
Special Model School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>K9-K12 schools</li> <li>Sekolah RPS Bawong</li> <li>Pusat Intelek Pelajar Orang Asli (PIPOA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>K9 and K11 schools aim to reduce dropout rates by enabling students to remain in the same school from Year 1 to Form 3, eliminating the need for transitions or transfers after Year 6.</li> <li>Pusat Intelek Pelajar Orang Asli (PIPOA) serves as an alternative pathway for Orang Asli students who achieve 3As and below in the now-discontinued UPSR exam, particularly for those who missed out on placements in residential boarding schools.</li> <li>SMK Bawong, a fully Orang Asli school designed to foster academic excellence and cultural identity among Orang Asli students.</li> </ul>	Program Motivasi di PIPOA	Providing motivational support and engagement sessions to Orang Asli students living in PIPOA hostels, as they often reside far from their families.
Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program Intervensi Khas Murid Orang Asli dan Peribumi (PIKAP)</li> </ul>	An Indigenous pedagogy strengthening programme involving three main subjects in Level 1, namely <i>Bahasa Melayu</i> , English, and Mathematics.	Pembelajaran Murid Orang Asli (Peningkatan Ilmu)	To provide extra learning sessions to improve their academic performance through remedial and enrichment programmes.

**Appendix 2: Distribution of Parliamentary Constituencies and Orang Asli Villages**

State	Parliament Constituencies	No of villages
Selangor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sungai Buloh</li> <li>2. Hulu Selangor</li> <li>3. Gombak</li> <li>4. Petaling Jaya</li> <li>5. Hulu Langat</li> <li>6. Sepang</li> <li>7. Kuala Langat</li> <li>8. Klang</li> <li>9. Selayang</li> <li>10. Subang</li> <li>11. Shah Alam</li> <li>12. Puchong</li> </ol>	154
Negeri Sembilan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jelebu</li> <li>2. Port Dickson</li> <li>3. Seremban</li> <li>4. Rasah</li> <li>5. Rembau</li> <li>6. Kuala Pilah</li> <li>7. Tampin</li> <li>8. Jempol</li> </ol>	133
Melaka	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Alor Gajah</li> <li>2. Masjid Tanah</li> <li>3. Tampin</li> </ol>	28
Johor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Muar</li> <li>2. Johor</li> <li>3. Ledang</li> <li>4. Kota Tinggi</li> <li>5. Batu Pahat</li> <li>6. Mersing</li> <li>7. Kluang</li> <li>8. Segamat</li> <li>9. Parit Sulong</li> <li>10. Tebrau</li> <li>11. Pasir Gudang</li> <li>12. Sembrong</li> <li>13. Simpang Renggam</li> </ol>	81
Pahang	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bentong</li> <li>2. Bera</li> <li>3. Jerantut</li> <li>4. Kuantan</li> <li>5. Paya Besar</li> <li>6. Maran</li> <li>7. Pekan</li> <li>8. Rompin</li> <li>9. Temerloh</li> <li>10. Kuala Krau</li> <li>11. Cameron Highlands</li> </ol>	323

State	Parliament Constituencies	No of villages
Terengganu	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Besut</li> <li>2. Hulu Terengganu</li> <li>3. Kemaman</li> </ol>	7
Kelantan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gua Musang</li> <li>2. Jeli</li> <li>3. Kuala Krai</li> </ol>	235
Kedah	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Baling</li> </ol>	2
Perak	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gerik</li> <li>2. Lenggong</li> <li>3. Sungai Siput</li> <li>4. Pasir Salak</li> <li>5. Tambun</li> <li>6. Kampar</li> <li>7. Gopeng</li> <li>8. Kuala Kangsar</li> <li>9. Tanjong Malim</li> </ol>	235

### Appendix 3

The entities involved in working directly or indirectly in Orang Asli children's education are collected in the first dataset (ORGANISATION). It records the name of these stakeholders and a description of what they do based on publicly available information online. The dataset also categorises the organisations with four features: the organisation's overall beneficiary group (BENEFICIARY) either only for the Orang Asli community or wider groups, their organisation focus whether targeting education for students specifically or for the betterment of other outcomes (FOCUS), their roles (ROLE) either as a funder or implementer, and the sectors these organisations can be classified under (SECTOR) which are narrowed down to NGOs, tertiary education institutions, social enterprises, corporate foundations and public or ministry-linked entities or foundations.

The second dataset (PROGRAMMES) collected data on the programmes initiated by organisations listed in the first dataset up to the cut off date of 27th March 2025. Similar to the first dataset, the initiative names and their descriptions were listed based on publicly available online data, while also recording the attributes of these programmes such as the first dataset in terms of the specific programme's beneficiary (BENEFICIARY) and their outcome focus (FOCUS). Additionally, the dataset also noted on these programmes locations in Peninsular Malaysia (LOCATION) and the duration these programmes were carried out (DURATION) whether it is a one-time programme, short-term, medium-term, long-term or one that cannot be quantified due to the organisation's nature of continuously working with Orang Asli communities.









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