

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Malaysia has achieved significant progress in terms of education for the people since the country's independence. The Ministry of Education has implemented various education policies and programmes, including those for the Orang Asli communities. Specially targeted for the Orang Asli children were education policies and programmes, such as Pensiangan-Salinatan and Orang Asli Transformation Plan, which have been implemented since 1995. Despite continuous efforts and investments over the years, education gaps continue to persist between Orang Asli children and non-indigenous children till the present day.

This policy paper aims to understand the challenges faced by Orang Asli children in accessing education and to analyze if their unique needs and challenges have been met through education policies and programmes designed for them. Based on the findings, recommendations and proposals have been made to strengthen existing policies and programmes.

In accessing education, Orang Asli children face many challenges, including socio-economic factors and geographical barriers due to poverty and the location they live in. After overcoming these challenges, they also face a different set of challenges in school due to language and cultural differences that lead to difficulties in interacting in school, causing them to be left behind in their studies.

The key takeaways of this policy paper are:

- There needs to be a shift of focus of the educational policies and programmes to address the underlying causes rather than the symptoms. The underlying causes of dropouts and low academic performance are due to the many challenges faced by the Orang Asli students. The focus of the existing programmes, such as K9 school model and PIKAP, need to be sharpened in order to address the challenges and provide effective solutions for the students.
- Impact analysis and adjustment of specific policies and programmes are needed to ensure that they address the challenges and new issues that arise. The Ministry of Education has implemented policies and programmes to help reduce dropouts and low proficiency in basic literacy and numeracy skills since 1995. However, current programmes, which are the extension of the previous programmes, have not taken into account the weaknesses of previous programmes due to the lack of impact analysis and evaluation. Evaluation needs to be done periodically, and adjustment must be made to learn from the past and improve on these programmes.
- Monitoring and evaluation must be strengthened by having a clear target and consistent comprehensive monitoring. The education indicators selected have to reflect an accurate and complete picture of the situation on the ground. Although there is consistent tracking of indicators, such as transition and attendance rates, there are some other important indicators, including enrolment and completion rates, which are not tracked consistently in the MEB Annual Reports. The focus on certain indicators diverts the effort on other aspects that are equally important to address the challenges.
- There are gaps between the policies and programmes with the implementation on the ground. In order for a policy or programme to reach its objectives successfully, the implementation gaps need to be bridged. Some of the recommendations to bridge these gaps include pre-posting

teachers to undergo appropriate training so that they will understand the culture of the Orang Asli; incorporating indigenous pedagogy in the teaching and learning; continuous training and support network for teachers; and sustainable funding for the programmes.

- The Orang Asli children who have never been to school are not given sufficient attention in the policies and programmes. The major policies and programmes focus on two main objectives: reduce dropouts and improve proficiency of basic literacy and numeracy skills. These are important in the efforts to enhance the Orang Asli students' access to quality education, but the initiatives neglect the most vulnerable group, which are Orang Asli children who have never enrolled in a school. The reasons why they are not in school needs urgent attention and policies must be formulated to address this issue. The enrolment rates will be an important indicator to keep track of the progress.
- Voice of the Orang Asli communities and their right to self-determination must be respected and included in the formulation of policies and programmes. Consultation from and participation by the Orang Asli in these policies and programmes need to be increased at all levels: national, state, district, school and community. Feedback and consultation are important to evaluate the policies and programmes that will support and localize the indigenous context.
- The mismatch of the Orang Asli values and culture with mainstream education might suggest a re-examination of the current education system of competition and competency. It leads us to reflect on the broader society – do the non-indigenous students face the same challenges as the Orang Asli students? Are our students, who are more physically active, face the same challenges as the Orang Asli students, where long hours of sitting in classes and rote-learning are hindering their learning? Skills, such as creativity and critical thinking, are cultivated through exploration and experimentation. An education system that is fixated on examinations would crowd out the space to explore and experiment.

It is hoped that the observations and recommendations made in this paper will lead to more extensive mapping, as well as effective implementation and monitoring of future policies and programmes for the benefit of the Orang Asli communities in general and the Orang Asli children in particular.