

MEDIA STATEMENT

IDEAS launches a report titled “Contextualising Education Policy for Orang Asli Children”

Kuala Lumpur, 17 December 2021 – The Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) today published a report titled “Contextualising Education Policy for Orang Asli Children.” The report was authored by Wan Ya Shin, IDEAS’s Acting Research Director, and Dr. Rusaslina Idrus, Senior Lecturer at Universiti Malaya.

The report examines and assesses the challenges faced by Orang Asli children in accessing education and reviews the policy, programmes and assistance for the Orang Asli children. The study interviewed Orang Asli parents, students, principals, teachers and stakeholders to understand their experiences and views.

The research found many evident challenges to Orang Asli education, whose implications are discussed in this report. The main issues raised by parents include poor accessibility to schools, racial discrimination, financial constraints, the absence of Orang Asli history and cultures in the school curriculum, and parental involvement.

With the launch of this report we hope to share these findings to diversify perspectives and facilitate further discussion around these persisting challenges to Orang Asli access to education. Among some of the policy recommendations put forth in the report:

- Indigenous cultures and history must be integrated into the mainstream Curriculum.
- Existing programmes must be monitored and evaluated to ensure their efficient and effective delivery and implementation.
- Teachers should be trained in innovative and adaptive pedagogies, and platforms for knowledge sharing could be established.
- Teachers and school leaders who are equipped and capable of delivering quality education for Orang Asli students need to be entrusted with greater autonomy and balanced accountability.
- A positive or strength-based discourse should be created to shift away from the deficit discourse on Orang Asli.
- Orang Asli communities should be empowered to be their own agents of change and participate in the process of Orang Asli-related policies.

Commenting on the release of the report, Wan stressed that “We want Orang Asli children to go to school, but that is not the end. It is just the beginning. Going to school needs to translate into learning. We need to contextualise and adapt education for the Orang Asli children according to the environment, needs and culture. The end in mind is that education would empower the Orang Asli children to achieve their full potential and be a voice for themselves and their communities.”

Dr Rusaslina reminds that “Orang Asli parents and students are often blamed for the students’ gap in educational achievement and high dropout rates. On the contrary, the parents we interviewed all strongly believed in the importance of education and invest time and resources to ensure their children can go to school. There is a need to focus on a strength-based framing and a culturally responsive approach where Orang Asli culture and identity are seen as positive assets.”

CEO of IDEAS Tricia Yeoh commented on the launch of the report, saying “IDEAS is privileged and honoured to have been involved in a project as important as this. The report released today reminds us that it is important to recognise the dignity and humanity of all communities, in this case to empower the Orang Asli community and ensure that they obtain equal opportunities to be provided with quality education. Overcoming the challenges and barriers will require concerted effort from the government, policymakers, NGOs, the corporate sector and the community. As the launch today emphasised, parents and teachers are of utmost importance. It is our hope that the paper reaches the right stakeholders who can make the necessary changes to support our Orang Asli children.”

IDEAS also launched part 1 of SekolahKita website via <http://sekolahkita.my/>

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About IDEAS

The Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) is a nonprofit research institute, dedicated to promoting solutions to public policy challenges, focussing on three overarching missions – advancing a competitive economy, ensuring trust in institutions and promoting an inclusive Malaysia. IDEAS is Malaysia’s first independent think tank, free of personal interests and partisan influences. For more information, visit www.ideas.org.my.

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