

Executive Summary

Actors on the Ground: Mapping Orang Asli Education Stakeholders

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.