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POVERTY ERADICATION PROJECT IN SABAH, MALAYSIA: NEW INITIATIVE, NEW CHALLENGES?

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Abstract

Since independence, the Malaysian government has invested billions of ringgits in the fight against poverty. Despite the national decrease in the percentage of the population living in poverty, the state of Sabah has had the highest poverty rate in Malaysia since 1997. Why has the poverty alleviation programme been less effective in reducing this social phenomenon among the poor communities in Sabah? To address this question, this paper discusses the issues and challenges confronting stakeholders involved in the poverty eradication programme in Sabah. The paper focuses on the implementation of the People's Income Initiative (PII) Phase 1 project in two communities: Penimbawan Village, Tuaran, and Bongkol Village, Pitas. This qualitative study reveals those participants, implementing agencies, and other stakeholders face issues and challenges when implementing poverty eradication projects. Furthermore, the issues faced by the poverty eradication project participants were found to include their own attitudes towards the project, such as a lack of focus on or interest in the project; the existence of a subsidy mentality; and the lack of clarity regarding the project's goals. However, the implementing agency was discovered to encounter issues with market support. The difficulties currently faced by these three parties could affect how long the PII Project can successfully eradicate poverty in both localities.

Keywords: Poverty; Hardcore Poor, Poverty Eradication Project; the People's Income Initiative; Sustainability

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INTRODUCTION

Reducing the incidence of poverty has become the aim of most countries, and this issue has been raised as an important agenda in national development plans. The commitment to the goal of eradicating poverty, especially extreme poverty, was translated to the global level when the United Nations listed it as the first item in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as a problem to be eradicated by 2030. In Malaysia, poverty eradication efforts are not new; in fact, they formed part of the national agenda included in the Malaysia Plan. For example, the First Malaysia Plan (1966-1970) stated that the government would continue all efforts to reduce poverty by providing the poor with facilities and opportunities. In line with that, many programmes were introduced to reduce this damaging social phenomenon. The introduction of the New Economic Policy (1970-1990) demonstrated the commitment of the Malaysian government to addressing the issue of poverty in Malaysia. Because of this policy, the percentage of those living in poverty dropped considerably, falling from 49.3% in 1970 to 12.4% in 1992, two years after the NEP ended (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). Since the government aimed to continue to achieve balanced development by eliminating extreme poverty and reducing relative poverty between the country's ethnic groups, the National Development Policy (1991-2000) was introduced after the NEP. The National Vision Policy (2001-2020) was the framework for Malaysia's programme to reduce poverty, which was to run until 2020 (Wan Nor Azriyati et al., 2011). The People's Income Initiative (PII) was recently launched with two main goals: (i) to raise the income of B40 and extremely poor families and (ii) to resolve every day financial issues through government-sponsored initiatives (Ministry of Economy, 2023) among ethnic groups.

Malaysia's success in reducing poverty demonstrates the benefits of the introduction of various programmes to combat poverty. When compared to 2016, the incidence of absolute poverty decreased from 7.6% to 5.6% in the year 2019 (12th Malaysia Plan, 2021–2025). The success of the government's nationwide development programmes correlates with the reduction of the poverty rate (Mohd Khairi, Chamhuri & Rospidah, 2018; Sharifah Rohayah & Khoo, 2016; Zulkarnain & Isahaque, 2013; Wan Nor Azriyati et al., 2011; Mohamed Zaini, 2010; Ishak & H. Osman-Rani, 1996). Despite this, the COVID-19 pandemic caused Malaysia's incidence of absolute poverty to rise once more to 8.4% in 2020 (12th Malaysia Plan, 2021–2025), according to the Department of Statistics Malaysia. However, the government's contribution to effective poverty reduction programmes should not be discounted (Sharifah Rohayah & Khoo, 2016). Government aid projects to reduce poverty can generally take top-down, bottom-up, or partnership approaches. Each method used to carry out a development project has particular advantages and disadvantages that can influence or guarantee the success of a newly introduced project.

The limited participation of poor communities in development can stymie efforts to lift them out of poverty. In contrast to the top-down approach to development, bottom-up and partnership approaches are seen to provide long-term benefits and foster active community involvement in poverty eradication projects (Asnarulkhadi, 2010; Haris & Abd Hadi, 2012; Haris, 2015). As a result, efforts to reduce poverty are the responsibility of not only the government but also the poor. The extent to which participants and implementing agencies can ensure the success of government-initiated poverty eradication projects has been questioned. Therefore, this study focuses on the issues and challenges encountered by participants and development agencies during the implementation of the People's Income Initiative-Eradication of the Hardcore Poor Project, Malaysia's most recent project of this type.

POVERTY ERADICATION PROJECTS IN MALAYSIA: HIGHLIGHTS OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Poverty is a social phenomenon that continues to capture the interest of academics, politicians, and the general public at both the global and local levels. Due to five significant events that occurred in Malaysia, this subject has once again become popular and openly discussed in the media as well as among academic researchers at local universities. First, a report was released by Professor Philip Alston, a special rapporteur for the UN, following his August 2019 visit to Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Kelantan, Sarawak, and Sabah. His findings revealed that the incidence of poverty in Malaysia was higher than had been reported in the government's official statistics. According to Alston, inaccurate poverty rate data had led governments to implement policies that were not specifically intended to end the poverty of particular groups (United Nations, 2020). Second, an assessment was conducted of the 2019 Poverty Line Income (PLI). The national PLI in 2019 was RM2,208 (12th Malaysia Plan, 2021–2025), according to the PLI methodology. Third, the COVID-19 pandemic hit worldwide at the end of 2019, and Malaysia introduced movement control orders. Malaysians were undoubtedly impacted by this pandemic (Fathullah, 2021), whether they lived in urban or rural areas. As a result, the poverty rate increased by nearly 3% in one year, rising to 8.4% in 2020 from 5.6% in 2019 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). The fourth event was Malaysia's response and actions regarding the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Malaysia must demonstrate its commitment to fighting hardcore poverty and achieve the elimination of extreme poverty by 2030. Finally, an event no less important was the introduction of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) in 2016, which aimed to measure poverty from a more inclusive perspective.

The implications of these five events not only invite academic-political-economic debate but also, more significantly, have caused changes in the government's approach to and actions against poverty. A holistic, comprehensive,

and inclusive poverty alleviation programme has come to be regarded as essential. Generally, poverty eradication projects in Malaysia can be divided into six main categories (Refer to Table 1). This category demonstrates that in Malaysia, such projects are not only ecocentric (focused on economic development) but also homocentric (human development-oriented) as they emphasise the formation of independent and informed communities (Asnarulkhadi, 2010). An important transition for this type of development is the inclusion of the target group in the planning, implementation, and decision-making processes. As a result, participation and community involvement in poverty alleviation projects including in agriculture (Siti Murni Wee & Kuppusamy, 2018) can increase incomes among the poor while also improving their skills and knowledge. The programmes listed in Table 1 are carried out by various federal and state agencies.

Table 1: Categories of Poverty Eradication Programmes in Malaysia

Name of Poverty Eradication Programme	
1.	Programme for the Provision of Basic Facilities, Social Infrastructure and Social Services
2.	Productivity Improvement Programme
3.	Land Reform Programme
4.	Income Increase Programme (in the Form of Financial Assistance)
5.	Special Programme for the Poorest People - Development Programme for the Poorest People
6.	Special Programme for the Poorest People - People's Welfare Development Scheme

Source: Modified from Asnarulkhadi, 2010

Studies of Malaysia's programme to eradicate poverty have revealed a variety of findings regarding the programme's accomplishments, problems, and difficulties. According to Zakiyah and Norzalinda (2021), the Launch Grant (LG) of RM2,700 provided by the Department of Social Welfare (JKM) was less effective in removing single mothers and disabled people from the hardcore poor. Their study found that even after participating in the LG programme, 84.0% of the respondents still had an income of RM1,000 or less. Financial issues (51.4%) and a lack of working capital (56.0%) were the two main issues experienced by the respondents either before or after joining the LG programme, according to the study. These problems were related to the absence of follow-up entrepreneurship programmes or LG participant monitoring.

The importance of a positive attitude in determining the success of a poverty eradication project was evident in the study by Azlina et al. (2019) of Orang Asli participants in the Income Enhancement Project (PPP) in Perak. This study showed that a positive attitude among respondents had the effect of increasing their income after their participation in the PPP. In fact, 48.2% of the

respondents admitted their income had risen since they had started to follow their respective projects. An important point from the same study (Azlina et al., 2019) was the existence of active projects lasting over two years (20.9%), with some active even for four years (20.9%). This demonstrates that a project can experience durability and sustainability if the participants have a positive attitude because this influences their active involvement in the project, which in turn raises the standard of living among both participants and households.

Participants' knowledge about a poverty alleviation project is a factor of active participation and an important determinant of the project's success. According to Kwok and Haris (2014), knowledge is directly related to the level of involvement. These researchers asserted that if local community members are unaware of a poverty eradication programme, they are unlikely to participate in making it a success. Despite that, the same study (Kwok & Haris, 2014) revealed the lack of a relationship between knowledge of the SPKR project and the level of respondents' participation in the study location.

Participation in projects aimed at reducing poverty requires ongoing effort from both participants and poor communities. According to a study by Jalihah, Diana, and Rohana (2021), a marsh clam farming project in Kopunadan Village, Kudat, Sabah enjoyed active participation as soon as the programme was launched. Each project implementation process involves participant participation and allows participants the freedom to become involved in project planning and decision-making. Participants were given sufficient project information so that they could prepare to address any project constraints. The study discovered that participants built and strengthened networks with the project stakeholders to ensure the project's sustainability.

A gap analysis study conducted by Nor Aini and Doris (2012) on single mothers in Peninsular Malaysia discovered four major issues related to projects in which this group was involved. First, project forms were incompatible with the participants' ages. Second, the short duration of the programmes made it difficult to deliver information effectively. Third, non-attendance at organised programmes was due to participants' lack of social support to manage the care of their small or chronically ill children. Finally, participants were uninterested in participating in the programmes due to a lack of knowledge about the programmes that had been introduced. The previous studies discussed in this paper clearly demonstrate the importance of participants' involvement in any project introduced to them. Participant involvement is more meaningful and effective when they understand a project in which they are involved. Thus, each participant's commitment and caring attitude must be fostered so that they can be better prepared to face challenges, as well as maintain and develop the potential of the project in which they participate.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative method was used in this study. Data was gathered through interviews and field observations. Interviews were conducted with two field officers and an eKasih officer, all of whom were directly involved with the PII-HEP project, using a structured interview framework. Each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. The interview data was then manually transcribed and analysed to enable an in-depth interpretation of the data as well as an exploration and search for meaning (Othman, 2009). Because the interviews were conducted in a structured manner, the main themes of the conversations were identified in advance; these included (i) the role of agencies in implementing poverty eradication projects; (ii) the challenge of implementing a project; and (iii) experience with previous poverty alleviation projects. Recognising that sources from documents can support, add evidence to, and confirm information obtained through interviews and observations, documents were also employed as data. A review was carried out of documents such as written reports prepared by field officers, poverty statistics in Sabah from the Tuaran eKasih Unit, and the Malaysia Plan. In this study, the PII-HPE poverty eradication project was discussed in reference to the issues and challenges faced by two localities - Penimbawan Village, Tuaran and Bongkol Village, Pitas - from the perspective of the implementing agency. These two areas were chosen because the PII-HPE project participants in these areas had been working on the project for over five (5) months at the time the study was conducted. Additionally, these two study areas were among the first places in Sabah to receive this project, which aimed to increase incomes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion of the study's findings is divided into two main sections. The first discusses poverty and the history of the PII-HPE project in Sabah, Malaysia. Then, the second focuses on the issues and challenges linked to PII-HPE in this state, with particular emphasis on two locations: Penimbawan Village, Tuaran, and Bongkol Village, Pitas.

POVERTY AND THE BACKGROUND OF THE PII-HPE PROJECT IN SABAH, MALAYSIA

Poverty is a serious issue in Sabah, especially given that this state had the highest absolute poverty rate in Malaysia in 2019 and 2020. As shown in Figure 1, the incidence of absolute poverty in Sabah increased from 19.5% in 2019 to 25.3% in 2020. According to records, Sabah has had the highest incidence of absolute poverty in Malaysia since 1997 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). Meanwhile, eight of the ten poorest Malaysian districts in 2019 were in Sabah, with an average poverty line income of RM2,537 (12th Malaysia Plan, 2021-2025). Many poverty eradication projects have been implemented in Sabah, but

the question remains why poverty remains prevalent in the state. According to Ragayah (2002), this high poverty rate is due to several factors, including a lack of infrastructure, the presence of foreigners, and the difficulty of accessing the geographical interior.

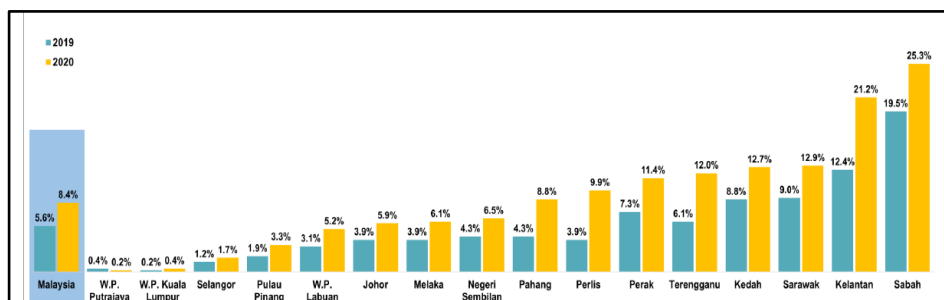


Figure 1: Absolute Poverty Incidence by State in Malaysia, 2019 & 2020

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020

The data also shows that the number of poor and hardcore poor heads of households in Sabah has increased in recent years. In 2019, for example, a total of 16,938 heads of households were listed as hardcore poor, while 21,373 heads of poor households were recorded in the eKasih system (Implementation Coordination Unit, 2019). However, as shown in Table 2, this number had increased by more than 100% by 2023, bringing the total number of heads of poor households to 48,277. The number of heads of hardcore poor households also increased, rising to 23,260 in the same year. The eKasih officer explained the increase in this number as follows:

To get help, people now apply and fill in eKasih form. Everyone is rushing to complete eKasih. Even we discovered cases of falsified information. Following COVID-19, the government intends to provide assistance in the form of cash money. Many people are applying. There may not be many if there is no COVID-19.

As a result, the increase in the number of both poor and hardcore poor heads of households in this state appears to be related to the perception that eKasih registration entitles people to government assistance, including financial assistance. Table 2 shows the number of poor and hardcore poor heads of households by district in Sabah. Over 1,000 people were recorded as hardcore poor heads in 11 districts. As recorded in Table 2, the Pitas district had the most hardcore poor with 1,761 (7.6%) such heads of households, followed by Kudat with 1,735 (7.5%). Both these districts are in the northern region of Sabah.

Kalabakan, on the other hand, had the fewest hardcore poor, with only 70 heads of households.

Table 2: Total of Poor and Hardcore Poor Heads of Households by District in Sabah, 2023 (Until 31 May, 2023)

Number	District	Poor	Hardcore Poor	Total
1	Beaufort	2,111	793	2,904
2	Beluran	1,710	1,114	2,824
3	Kalabakan	379	70	449
4	Keningau	2,445	1,478	3,923
5	Kinabatangan	1,258	487	1,745
6	Kota Belud	3,194	1,322	4,516
7	Kota Kinabalu	2,408	811	3,219
8.	Kota Marudu	2,972	1,309	4,281
9.	Kuala Penyu	790	368	1,158
10.	Kudat	2,727	1,735	4,462
11.	Kunak	759	324	1,083
12.	Lahad Datu	1,569	935	2,504
13.	Nabawan	1,955	776	2,731
14.	Papar	1,893	676	2,569
15.	Penampang	635	254	889
16.	Pitas	2,725	1,761	4,486
17.	Putatan	396	95	491
18.	Ranau	2,101	1,345	3,446
19.	Sandakan	2,622	1,361	3,983
20.	Semporna	2,490	1,543	4,033
21.	Sipitang	767	221	988
22.	Tambunan	1,027	349	1,376
23.	Tawau	2,900	995	3,895
24.	Telupid	501	268	769
25.	Tenom	1,772	1,118	2,890
26.	Tongod	1,332	661	1,993
27.	Tuaran	2,839	1,091	3,930
Total		48,277	23,260	71,537

Source: eKasih, Implementation Coordination Unit, 2023

The People's Income Initiative (PII) project began on December 6, 2021, with an announcement by the ninth Malaysian Prime Minister, and was then known as the *Keluarga* Malaysia Hardcore Poverty Eradication Programme (BMTKM). This programme was renamed as the Eradicate Hardcore Poverty Programme (EHPP) on December 20, 2022. To ensure the improvements were then made to the existing programme, the name was changed again on February 24, 2023, to the People's Income Initiative (PII). This was due to a change in the Malaysian government between 2021 and 2022. Despite this, the government has

continued to fund the poverty-aid programme. Under the PII, four main initiatives to eradicate poverty and increase income were introduced: the Agricultural Entrepreneur Initiative (INTAN), the Food Entrepreneur Initiative (INSAN), the Service Operator Initiative (IKHSAN), and the Eradicate Hardcore Poor (EHP) Project. According to the tenth Malaysian Prime Minister, this initiative was implemented to empower the poorest to increase their income in a sustainable manner.

The eradication project, which is being led by the Ministry of Economy as coordinator and facilitator, is the first to include public universities as strategic partners. There are various parties have collaborated in the PII project, including ministries and implementing agencies, the private sector, government-linked companies (GLCs), civil society organisations (CSOs), and community-based organisations (CBOs). This strategic collaboration aims to ensure the long-term viability of the implementation of the PII by taking into account the target group's exit policies after the project's initial two-year period. The appointment of field officers in each locality/district is another intriguing strategy. Their presence is anticipated to benefit the official monitoring and sustainability of projects aimed at reducing poverty. The direct involvement of public universities in the IIP-PII-HPE project at the grassroots level is also important in ensuring that the responsibility of poverty eradication is shared by all parties, including academics. Their role as strategic partners shows academic contributions begin at the early phase of a project rather than being limited to researchers assessing a completed project.

In general, this project employs a new approach to eradicating poverty that is whole-of-nation, bottom-up (local problem, local solution), and targeted, rather than one-size-fits-all, through integrated action at the federal, state, and district levels. This new approach, introduced through the implementation of PII-HPE, is critical because each state and district in Malaysia is at a different level of development (Ishak & H. Osman-Rani, 1996). In Sabah, a total of ten localities were identified as potential participants in the PII-HPE pilot project, with priority given to districts listed as Malaysia's poorest (12th Malaysia Plan, 2021-2025). Table 3 shows that six of these pilot PII-HPE localities are villages in Sabah's poorest districts: Pitas, Tongod, Beluran, Kota Belud, Nabawan, and Kota Marudu. In total, 322 hardcore poor heads of households are involved in the pilot project in Sabah. Of the total hardcore poor heads of households involved in this pilot project, 39 (12.1%) were from Bongkol Village, while 23 (7.1%) were from Penimbawan Village.

PII-HPE participants from Penimbawan Village, Tuaran, are involved in three types of projects, while those in Bongkol Village, Pitas are involved in and eight projects. However, for the purposes of this study, three projects in Bongkol Village are highlighted: the Goods Delivery Service Project (nine

participants), the Vegetable Sales Project (three participants), and the Standard Chicken Sales Project (six participants).

Table 3: Number of PII-HPE Pilot Project Participants by Localities in Sabah (Phase 1)

Localities	Name of District	Number of Participants (%)
1. Kg. Bongkol	Pitas	39 (12.1%)
2. Kg. Pinangah	Tongod	42 (13.0%)
3. Kg. Sembirai	Kota Belud	36 (11.2%)
4. Kg. Tetabuan	Beluran	19 (5.9%)
5. Kg. Lima	Nabawan	38 (11.8%)
6. Kg. Tandek	Kota Marudu	22 (6.8%)
7. Kg. Kaingaran	Ranau	35 (10.9%)
8. Kg. Pelakat	Sipitang	24 (7.5%)
9. Kg. Binsulok	Membakut	44 (13.7%)
10. Kg. Penimbawan	Tuaran	23 (7.1%)
TOTAL		322 (100.0%)

Source: iBox System, 2022

However, the discussion of Penimbawan Village emphasises the Fishing Equipment Project (13 participants). These PII-HPE projects are one-off schemes. Since the project participants are the hardcore poor heads of households, the overall poverty eradication project provides all project participants with a complete package, including a physical business site, capital, equipment, and training/courses related to the project.

PII-HPE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN SABAH: A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

According to the findings of this study, the issues and challenges related to the implementation of PII-HPE in Sabah occur at multiple levels and involve participants and stakeholders. A study of the PII-HPE participants in the two localities revealed two distinct groups of participants, based on their commitment to the project. Some had actively carried out the PII-HPE project immediately after it was distributed, whereas passive participants had postponed its implementation.

Fostering a Poverty Culture

Cultural factors have long been believed to play a significant role in amplifying the negative aspects of the lives of the poor. Lewis (2010) argued that the nature, behaviour, and practices of the poor include giving up, being indifferent, and surrendering to fate, causing them to remain in poverty (Lewis, 2010). Although understanding poverty from a cultural perspective has been criticised on a global

scale, the issue of poverty remains closely related to culture in Malaysia (Asnarulkhadi, 2010; Chamhuri, 2004). According to research in the two localities mentioned in the current study, some participants had yet to begin their respective projects, despite the equipment having been handed to them nearly a month before. One participant was even yet to remove the outboard engine from its packaging, as discovered during a mapping project in Penimbawan Village. When asked why he had not been out to sea, the participant cited the uncertain weather, even though other participants were already using the same fishing equipment a day after it was handed to them. A key determining factor in the success of a poverty alleviation project is the attitude and commitment of the participants. Procrastination and/or refusal to start a project without reasonable cause should be avoided. A poverty of attitude is evident (Asnarulkhadi, 2010), which necessitates a positive attitude shift (Chamhuri, 2004).

Prioritise and Focus on Existing Jobs

Since the projects differ in comparison to the prevalent economic activities performed by the participants, the latter tend to prioritise their respective main occupations. This was identified among the Goods Delivery Service Project participants in Bongkol Village, all of whom used PII-HPE motorcycles to perform jobs linked to tapping rubber and palm oil. As a result, no income was recorded for the participating project. According to a field officer informant:

Yes, it [using the motorbikes] has an impact on income from the PII-HPE project, but they earn income from their existing job. Some, like the Goods Delivery Service Project participants, are employed as rubber tappers and labourers in palm oil estates. These participants do not have time for the PII-HPE Project. Most of the participants have jobs other than the PII-HPE Project, so they are unable to focus solely on PII-HPE.

Nonetheless, the usage of motorcycles facilitated participants' travel to their primary work. This was because before participating in the PII-HPE Project, some did not have their own automobile and had to ride in vehicles belonging to other villagers. Even though this behaviour does not comply with the PII-HPE goals, this initiative adds value in terms of participant property ownership and transportation to the workplace.

Lower Participant Commitment in the PII-HPE Project

Seriousness, commitment, and interest are essential components for overcoming the problems that arise when working on a project. Previous research has shown that these three characteristics can help participants to avoid a project's difficulties. Furthermore, the three factors assist participants in exploring new

options to ensure the survival of the project in which they are involved. However, an interview with one informant revealed that most participants in the Goods Delivery Service initiative were less dedicated and less interested in putting the initiative into action. According to the informant:

We prepared a schedule for Goods Delivery Service participants, at least once a week if they are extremely busy. However, they found the schedule difficult to follow... [and] they do not collaborate.

The Uses of Project Equipment for the New Income-Generating

The usage of project equipment to generate new income was discovered in the first phase of the PII-HPE projects. This study found that equipment misuse occurred among the participants of the Fishing Equipment Project in Penimbawan Village, Tuaran. Boats and engines for the PII-HPE project had been utilised for water transportation that earned up to RM300 per day. The field officer revealed that transporting passengers by boat was carried out when the participants did not go out to sea. This was confirmed through income reports submitted to field officers which showed that within a week, participants went fishing as well as boatmen for water transportation ('grab water') around Penimbawan village to Serusup Jetty. Despite that, rumours also revealed that some participants had sold project equipment, but the validity of this information cannot yet be confirmed.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES

This study discovered three issues and challenges faced by the implementing agencies in regard to the PII-HPE project in the two localities.

Field Officers

An important approach in the newly introduced IIP Project is the appointment of field officers, who help to coordinate and monitor the project, as well as conduct engagement sessions in designated localities. In other words, the field officer is the point of liaison between the District Office-Ministry of Economy-IIP participants. They are also knowledgeable about every aspect of the IIP project in a specific locality/district. Although the PII-HPE projects are still in the early stages of implementation, this study discovered that participants were less obedient to the orders given by field officers. For example, some participants had not commenced the project despite being asked to do so by a field officer. The presence of field officers is projected to result in significant changes in project monitoring and the achievement of the goal of eliminating hardcore poverty. Field officers, on the other hand, are typically fresh graduates with minimal work experience. One field officer described the situation as follows:

Sometimes it's hard because we are young, so they [the project participants] do not listen and follow our instruction

During the mapping hardcore poor process, the researchers discovered that the field officers have varying levels of expertise and ability. The majority of them are dedicated and sincere in their work. However, on average, they lack the ability to approach participants and address issues that occur at the local level. As a result, training is needed to improve the skills of field officers and thus establish a group of trained personnel.

Insufficient Supply of Sale Goods

One duty of the agency partners in the PII-HPE projects is to supply products for sale by participants. Aside from selling materials, agencies also assist in offering advice, guidance, and assisting the marketing of products generated by participants. The Rural Development Cooperative (KPD) is a state partner agency for the Standard Chicken Sales Project in Bongkol Village, Pitas. This agency sells chicken at a lower price to participants so they can profit from selling the chicken. However, this study revealed that participants were faced with an intermittent supply of chicken from this state partner agency, which prompted the latter to obtain chicken stock from other sources. One field officer described the problem as follows:

The Rural Development Cooperative chicken supply is inconsistent. As a result, participants acquire stock from other sources and are forced to sell at a premium. When the partner agency restocks, participants sell cheaply. Customers can be confused for a long time because prices alter in an instant.

Since the chicken supply is purchased at a higher price, this affects the profit received by the participants. A field officer explained the difficulties in profiting from the agency's limited chicken stock:

If supplies are obtained from KPD, the participant sells at RM27 per kilogram, making an RM5 profit. Taking stock from other places is expensive; yet, it is often lucrative for participants to take it for only RM1 per kilogram.

Sustainability of Projects without Agency Monitoring

The ability of poverty eradication project participants to sustain their project without the supervision of implementing agencies has been questioned. This study demonstrates that PII-HPE projects participants in both Penimbawan Village and Bongkol Village started to focus less and limit their involvement in their respective projects. Concerns about project sustainability have emerged as

major challenges in all forms of development programmes, including poverty reduction initiatives. The capability of development projects to survive and move forward independently is frequently questioned in development studies. One argument is that the community or participants could not continue a post-monitoring project due to a lack of financial resources to procure supplies and independently market their goods/products. Participants' motivation and dedication also fluctuate, which can cause them to lose focus and interest in the project. As a result, a project might come to a halt and fail.

CONCLUSION

The heads of hardcore poor households involved in the PII-HPE projects consist of those who inherited a poor lifestyle from their respective families. Therefore, lifting this group out of the poverty trap requires a comprehensive approach that must include developing and improving their capacity as project participants. Hard work, determination, devotion, and competitiveness must be nourished and cultured from the early stage of any project. All these positive behaviours can produce individuals who value government aid, which can impact the increase in their household incomes and lift them out of hardcore poverty. It is believed that, based on this study, the presence of field officers specifically designated to oversee and administer IIP initiatives can benefit PII-HPE project participants by guiding, supervising, and ultimately increasing their involvement. The implementation stage of a project to eradicate poverty is just as vital as the other stages. At this point, active participation and monitoring of participants are essential to ensure the success of the project.

Moreover, the implementing agency must address the issues and challenges encountered by participants, field officers, and agency partners from the start of all PII-HPE projects in Sabah. This is critical to ensuring that concerns that could stymie a project's success and sustainability are addressed from the outset. If participants' attitudes and commitment are not wisely and properly dealt with, the government's investment in poverty eradication projects, particularly among Malaysia's hardcore poor, may be unsuccessful. A monitoring team comprised of field officers also needs ongoing training to function effectively in the field and engage constructively with hardcore poor communities. Poverty eradication efforts are the responsibility of all parties, not just the impoverished.

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