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EVALUATING AND ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS OF URBAN IMPOVERISHED GROUPS IN KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The sustainable livelihoods of urban impoverished groups in Kuala Lumpur have emerged as a critical emphasis due to the ongoing challenge of urban poverty faced by cities worldwide. Accelerated urbanization has exacerbated the socioeconomic divide, resulting in numerous urban impoverished individuals grappling with challenges related to housing, work, and access to essential services. To tackle these difficulties, sustainable strategies, such as community-driven initiatives and partnerships with local authorities, are essential for empowering citizens and equipping them to endure economic disruptions. This study assesses and improves the sustainable livelihoods of impoverished urban neighbourhoods in Kuala Lumpur. The study, grounded in the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF), involved a survey of 394 participants, with data gathered via questionnaires and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 and Microsoft Excel. The results demonstrate that governmental actions substantially contribute to improving the sustainable livelihoods of urban residents in Kuala Lumpur. Mean analysis indicates that impoverished areas in Kuala Lumpur exhibit high well-being only in terms of environmental factors.

Keywords: Sustainable livelihoods; urban impoverished groups; Kuala Lumpur

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INTRODUCTION

Urban poverty continues to be a significant issue for cities globally, including Kuala Lumpur. Recent urbanization has exacerbated the socioeconomic divide, with several urban poor confronting difficulties in housing, employment, and essential services (Kamal et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2021). Sustainable and resilient living for these communities entails addressing immediate necessities such as food, shelter, and healthcare while establishing avenues for long-term stability and self-sufficiency through inclusive policies and community-based initiatives (Shah et al., 2023; United Nations, 2019). Community-driven initiatives and collaborations with local authorities are vital for empowering communities and enabling them to adapt to economic shocks or disruptions, which are increasingly prevalent due to global crises and climate change (World Bank, 2020). Resilience is essential, as it allows communities to recuperate and flourish in the face of challenges. Researchers indicate that urban impoverished populations with access to education, skill enhancement, and support networks are more adept at confronting economic difficulties and enhancing their quality of life over time (Mokhtar & Rahman, 2022). Initiatives to promote sustainable and resilient living for Kuala Lumpur's urban impoverished groups must adopt a comprehensive strategy encompassing financial aid, skill development, healthcare, and housing assistance to achieve enduring transformation and improved welfare (UN-Habitat, 2020). This introduction establishes the framework for examining effective methods and policies to attain sustainable and resilient urban living for low-income residents of Kuala Lumpur.

Furthermore, current research indicates a lack of empirical studies about the sustainable and resilient living conditions of urban impoverished groups in Kuala Lumpur. Despite extensive studies on global urban poverty and resilience, studies concentrating on sustainable and resilient living among the poor urban in Kuala Lumpur are limited. Current research frequently focuses on overarching concerns such as urban poverty, affordability, and access to basic needs. However, it is deficient in empirical studies that investigate holistic frameworks for sustainable and resilient living specifically adapted to the distinct socioeconomic context of Kuala Lumpur (Zainal et al., 2019; Ariffin & Yusof, 2021). This gap constrains our comprehension of how these communities address economic and environmental issues and the prospective impact of governmental interventions on bolstering their resilience. This project assesses and improves the sustainable livelihoods of impoverished urban neighbourhoods in Kuala Lumpur.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Figure 1 depicts the modified conceptual framework of the study, based on the Department for International Development (DFID) (1999). The conceptual

framework comprises five primary components: vulnerability setting, assets, structures and processes, tactics, and livelihood outcomes. Vulnerability has three dimensions: economic, social, physical, and environmental. Economic hazards encompass the loss of money sources or work opportunities. Social and physical risks pertain to the physical state of the residence, including insufficient furnishings and inadequate basic amenities.

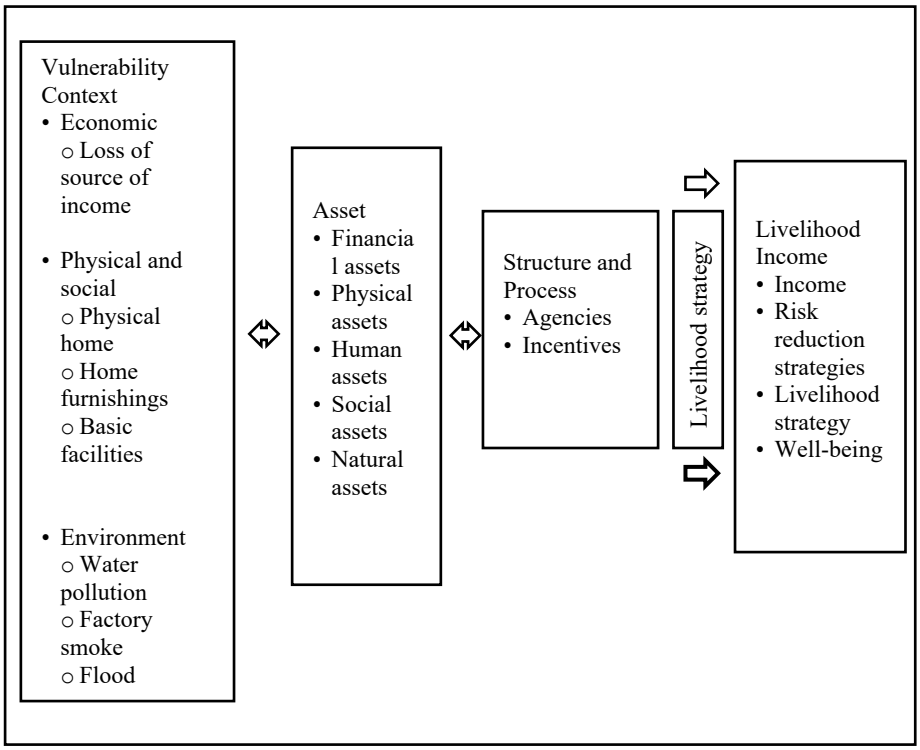

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study: Sustainable Livelihood Framework of the urban poor communities in Kuala Lumpur
Source: Modified from DFID (1999)

Environmental concerns encompass water contamination, industrial emissions, and flooding. Institutional aspects denote entities that guarantee the execution of legislation and policies, deliver services, facilitate exchanges, and perform specific duties that impact individuals or families. These institutions dictate and shape the interactions of individuals or households. The institutional setting influences the vulnerability experienced by individuals and their access to life assets. This study identified multiple organizations directly associated with

the respondents, indicating that agencies tied to rural communities either assist or provide services to urban communities and the impoverished.

In this study, livelihood strategy denotes the economic activities undertaken by individuals, encompassing both primary and secondary employment. Livelihood income influences household welfare and long-term growth potential. This study identifies three criteria as components of livelihood outcomes: income, well-being, and the mitigation of vulnerability experienced by individuals, pertaining to the method of vulnerability reduction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research design focusing on urban impoverished neighbourhoods in Kuala Lumpur. This study employed a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is an optimal method for this study, facilitating the deliberate selection of participants who are directly engaged with or impacted by matters concerning sustainable and resilient living in the urban impoverished neighbourhoods of Kuala Lumpur. This sampling strategy is appropriate for research investigating certain social phenomena among specific groups and necessitates insights from persons with distinctive, pertinent knowledge or experience (Patton, 2015). After establishing the sampling technique, the following study ascertains the requisite sample size for the investigation. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) indicates that around 0.2% of households in Kuala Lumpur are classified as experiencing deep poverty, impacting around 18,445 homes in this study, with a total sample size (n) of 394. According to Krejie and Morgan (1970), if the population exceeds 15,000, the required sample size is 377.

To obtain precise results, the survey included 394 respondents. The questionnaire used in the study consisted of open-ended and closed-ended questions, with a five-point Likert scale for perception inquiries. Data analysis was conducted using several software tools, including Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25. This study employed a vulnerability score and an asset ownership index to assess the sustainable and resilient living conditions of impoverished urban neighbourhoods in Kuala Lumpur.

Vulnerability Index

This study's Vulnerability Index is a composite index methodology introduced by Hahn (2009). The Vulnerability Index for the study encompasses three categories of vulnerability: economic, social, and physical, as well as environmental. The inquiries for each indicator are structured as a dichotomy, represented by 1 (facing/ever facing) and 0 (not facing). This indicator for vulnerability categories is selected based on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) by DFID (1999), tailored to the context of this study. All

vulnerability indicators are standardized (composite) to create this index. The construction of the Vulnerability Index employs a uniform weighting value for each vulnerability category and its corresponding indication. This weighting factor is derived from Sullivan et al. (2002), wherein each indication contributes equally to each vulnerability category. According to Hahn (2009), index calculation should employ a comprehensible procedure, with the application of uniform weights being one of the suggested approaches. Nonetheless, it may be modified by the researcher to align with the study's requirements. This study used nominal data represented as 1 (facing/ever facing) and 0 (not facing). The nominal data for each indicator will be computed as a percentage and transformed into an index value utilizing the 92-conversion process employed in the Human Development Index, which considers three principal values: the actual data value, the minimum value, and the maximum value.

Asset Ownership Index

The Asset Ownership Index utilized in this study is a composite index methodology introduced by Han (2009). This study's Asset Ownership Index comprises five categories of assets: financial, physical, human, social, and natural assets. Twenty indicators represent these five assets. The selection of indicators for these assets is grounded in the SLF by DFID (1999), tailored to the context of this study. Only standardized asset indicators are utilized to compute the asset ownership index. Asset indicators that cannot be standardized for calculation will be addressed descriptively only. The computation of the Asset Ownership Index employs an identical weighting value for each asset and its corresponding indication. This weighting factor is derived from Sullivan et al. (2002), wherein each indication contributes equally to each asset category. According to Hahn (2009) and Ismail et al. (2025), constructing the Asset Ownership Index should employ a comprehensible procedure with uniform weights as a recommended approach. Nonetheless, it may be modified by the researcher to align with the study's requirements.

Due to the varying measurement scales of each asset indicator, researchers may opt to utilize the original scale or select items with a consistent measurement (Ismail et al., 2019). This study exclusively considers uniform asset indicators when constructing the asset ownership index. This study used nominal data represented as 1 (presence) and 0 (absence). The nominal data for each indicator will be computed as a percentage and transformed into an index value utilizing the conversion method employed in the Human Development Index, which considers three primary values: the actual data value, the minimum value, and the maximum value (UNDP, 2007; Hahn, 2009).

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS OF URBAN POOR COMMUNITIES IN KUALA LUMPUR

Table 1 presents the Vulnerability Index for urban impoverished communities in Kuala Lumpur. The index reveals that economic risks represent the greatest vulnerability, with a value of 0.600. Although social, physical, and environmental hazards exist, their index values are comparatively lower at 0.187 and 0.352, respectively. This indicates that prioritizing economic concerns is essential to reduce overall vulnerability in these areas.

Table 1: Vulnerability Index of urban poor communities in Kuala Lumpur

Construct	The value of the index according to the indicator	Type of Vulnerability	The value of the index is according to the type of vulnerability
Loss of the primary source of income/job	0.600	Economic	0.600
Physical condition of the house (cramped/bad house)	0.2	Social and Physical	0.187
Lack of home furnishings	0.133		
Lack of basic facilities (prayer, kindergarten, shop lot)	0.044		
There is a polluted river/source of water	0.089	Environment	0.352
Floods that damage crops and property	0.044		
Factory smoke	0.933		

Source: Field Study (2022)

Table 2 depicts the Asset Ownership Index of impoverished communities in Kuala Lumpur, indicating a reasonable level for human and physical assets. The analysis suggests minimal ownership of social, natural, and financial assets. This demonstrates that asset ownership among individuals in the urban impoverished communities of Kuala Lumpur is comparatively restricted, highlighting difficulties in establishing financial stability and enduring prosperity.

Table 2: Asset Ownership Index of Poor Communities in Kuala Lumpur

Asset component	Index value according to indicator	Asset type	The value of the index depends on the type of asset
Respondent's highest education	0.334	Human assets	0.606
Current work experience	0.267		
Health	0.778		
Knowledge get help	0.378		

Water source	0.532	Physical assets	0.543
Toilet	0.632		
Home conditions	0.321		
Homeownership	0.121		
Vehicle ownership	0.6		
Association position	0.289	Social assets	0.242
Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA)	0.411		
Society	0.600		
Cooperative	0		
Land ownership	0.144	Natural assets	0.466
Income	0.666	Financial assets	0.430
Acceptance of financial aid	0.800		
Loan	0.144		
Savings	0.111		
Overall			0.590

Source: Field Study (2022)

Sustainable Livelihood Results

Increased Income

Table 3 depicts the income distribution within impoverished areas in Kuala Lumpur for 2022. The predominant share (64.4%) earns between RM501 and RM1000, while 11.1% earns RM500 or less, signifying acute poverty. A lesser proportion (17.8%) earn between RM1001 and RM1500, and merely 4.4% reside within the RM1501–RM2589 bracket. Individuals earning above RM2589 represent merely 2.2%, indicating that even those with higher incomes in this category may still face difficulties owing to elevated living expenses. The data suggests that 75.5% of the impoverished earn RM1000 or less, highlighting the necessity for focused measures to mitigate low-income inequities.

Table 3: Income of poor communities in Kuala Lumpur in 2022

Income	**Percentage (%)**
RM500 and below	11.1
RM501-RM1000	64.4
RM1001 – RM1500	17.8
RM1501 – RM2589	4.4
RM2589 and above	2.2

Source: Field Study (2022)

Vulnerability Reduction

Vulnerability reduction analysis pertains to the resilience tactics employed by impoverished communities in Kuala Lumpur to combat vulnerability. It refers to the resilience methods used by the study participants in economic, social, physical, and environmental aspects.

Economic vulnerability

Table 4 illustrates the reduction or resilience strategy addressing the economic vulnerability encountered by impoverished groups in Kuala Lumpur. Meanwhile, economic vulnerability denotes the deprivation of the primary source of income. The strategy of undertaking a side job is the most effective risk reduction approach in the event of losing their primary source of income or employment.

Table 4. The reduction strategy or resilience strategy against economic vulnerability

Type of Vulnerability	Strategy for reducing vulnerability	Percentage (%)
Loss of primary income/source of employment	Seeking new employment	37.8
	Taking on side jobs	38.9
	Borrowing money	13.3

Source: Field Study (2022)

Vulnerability to social and physical threats

Examining measures for reducing social and physical vulnerability encompasses resilience approaches to address the susceptibility of housing conditions, insufficient furnishings, and inadequate essential services. In response to the precarious physical condition of the dwelling, impoverished populations in Kuala Lumpur employ numerous resilience methods. Note that home remodeling is a resilience strategy selected by 13.3% of impoverished populations in Kuala Lumpur (Table 5). To address the lack of house furnishings, individuals from underprivileged communities in Kuala Lumpur predominantly purchase furnishings independently. The absence of essential infrastructure constitutes a minimal threat encountered by responders.

Table 5. Comparison of social and physical vulnerability reduction strategies

Types of vulnerability	Vulnerability reduction strategies	Percentage (%)
Physical condition of the house (cramped/bad house)	Self-improvement of the house	13.3
	Repair the house yourself	4.4
	Apply for home help from the responsible party	2.2
Lack of home furnishings	Buy your home furnishings	11.1
	Ask for help from the responsible party	2.2
Lack of basic facilities (prayer, kindergarten, shop lot)	Make reports and complaints to relevant agencies	4.4
	Ask for help from the responsible party	0

Source: Field Study (2022)

Ease of environmental threats

The prevalence of environmental risks necessitates various resilience methods for impoverished people in Kuala Lumpur. The analysis suggests two resilience options for mitigating the flooding hazard: upgrading homes and obtaining assistance or compensation from relevant institutions (Table 6). The 4.4% of participants from impoverished communities in Kuala Lumpur renovated their residences. Hence, the mitigation method for storm damage to crops and property solely engages people from impoverished neighbourhoods in Kuala Lumpur. It focuses on damage restoration, procurement of new equipment, and obtaining assistance or reimbursement from relevant organizations.

Table 6. The resilience strategies to ease environmental threats

Types of vulnerability	Vulnerability reduction strategies	Percentage (%)
There is a river or source of polluted water	Do not engage in polluting activities	6.7
	Implementation of awareness programs	0
	Actions from responsible parties	2.2
There is an open burning from factory activities	Implementation of awareness programs	2.2
	Actions from responsible parties	4.4
Floods that damage property	Renovating the house	4.4
	Getting help/compensation from related agencies	40.0
	Build drainage / deepen ditches and drains	0

Source: Field Study (2022)

Well-being

Table 7 examines the welfare of participants from impoverished communities in Kuala Lumpur across economic, social, physical, and environmental dimensions. This well-being analysis employs a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. Moreover, mean analysis indicates that impoverished areas in Kuala Lumpur exhibit high well-being solely due to environmental factors.

Table 7. Well-being Analysis

Dimensions	Score
Economic	2.203
Social and physical	3.603
Environment	3.839

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Medium; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree
Scale: *Score: 1.00 – 2.39: Low; 2.40 – 3.79: Medium; 3.80 – 5.00: High

Source: Field Study (2022)

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS IN KUALA LUMPUR'S URBAN POOR COMMUNITIES

Essential techniques for improving sustainable living in Kuala Lumpur's impoverished urban neighbourhoods include prioritizing cheap housing, ensuring access to fundamental services, and creating economic opportunities within urban design. Creating affordable, high-quality housing will mitigate overpopulation and enhance living circumstances (Sohaimi et al., 2018). Furthermore, augmenting and improving the public transportation network will enhance mobility, facilitating greater access to employment, healthcare, and education. Urban planning must also establish areas for local enterprises and vocational education, promoting employment generation and skills enhancement. Guaranteeing dependable access to clean water, sanitation, energy, and healthcare can enhance general well-being and mitigate health concerns within these communities.

Moreover, sustainable urban development must prioritize community engagement, green areas, and catastrophe risk mitigation. Involving impoverished urban areas in the planning process ensures that their needs and interests are included (Azmi et al., 2023). Incorporating green spaces and sustainable architecture will boost environmental sustainability and offer recreational areas that promote residents' physical and emotional well-being. Other than that, efforts for disaster risk mitigation are crucial, particularly in regions susceptible to flooding or other natural calamities. Enhancing social

safety nets and welfare programs will assist the most vulnerable individuals in these communities, ensuring enduring sustainability and resilience.

SUMMARY

This study contributes to knowledge of sustainable and resilient living among impoverished urban populations. The results demonstrate that governmental actions significantly contribute to improving the sustainable livelihoods of urban residents in Kuala Lumpur. Mean analysis indicates that impoverished areas in Kuala Lumpur exhibit high well-being only in terms of environmental factors. The vulnerability index for impoverished urban populations in Kuala Lumpur indicates the necessity of prioritizing economic concerns to mitigate overall vulnerability. Therefore, sustainable urban development must prioritize community engagement, green spaces, and disaster risk mitigation. Involving impoverished urban areas in the planning process guarantees that their needs and interests are included.

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