

EDUCATION FOR POVERTY ERADICATION: MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS INITIATIVES

Rahimi Md Saad
Noraini Idris, Ph.D
Loh Sau Cheong, Ph.D
Selvaranee d/o Subramaniam, Ph.D
Norjoharuddeen Mohd Nor
University of Malaya
rahimisaad@um.edu.my
noridris@um.edu.my
lohsch@um.edu.my
drselvaranee@um.edu.my
norjo@um.edu.my

As a developing country, it is a concern that poverty is still an issue in Malaysia. Among effects of poverty in society are failures of the poor children to receive a good education. This will affect their future as education is an important tool of sustainable and equitable development. As a responsible government in eradicating poverty, the Malaysian government, through its various agencies and authorities, is involved in attempting to determine the issues. This effort also receives support from various Non-Government Organisations (NGOs). The main focus in this effort is to provide educational opportunities and facilities for the children in poverty. Through education, they can become skilled and consolidate positive change in their attitudes towards poverty. The main agenda is to increase access at all educational levels (kindergartens, primary, secondary and university) for poor communities. The initiatives provided for them are in the form of financial and educational support systems. This paper will discuss the initiatives that are part of the efforts to democratize education in Malaysia for more efficient poverty eradication.

Keywords: Poverty eradication, sustainable and equitable development, educational opportunity

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Poverty is the worst form of violence." With such prominent saying in mind, this paper on Education for Poverty Eradication: Malaysian Government and Non-Governmental Organizations Initiatives is done.

In order to achieve Malaysia's vision of becoming a developed country by 2020, Malaysia has to go through a massive reformation in education. It is always known that the main key to civilization and success is none other than education. It is not a myth; it is a fact that cannot be changed.

Hence, the Ministry of Education has done a number of surveys to identify the enigma that our country faces. After many surveys and researches, it is identified that the main factor of school drop-outs is due to poverty. Besides that, the research done showed that education among most poor families is very low.

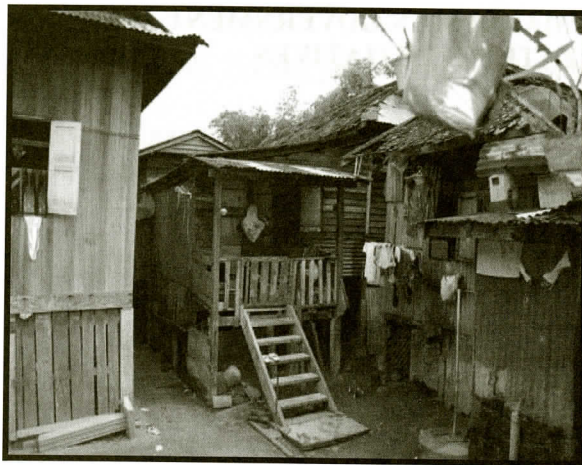


Figure 1. Some cases of poverty in Malaysia

The only way for a person to grow out of the vicious cycle of poverty is by obtaining better education. Over time, the incidence of poverty in Malaysia has decreased from 42.4% in 1976 to 17.1% in 1990 and 5.7% in 2004. This shows that the Malaysian government is doing its best in helping the poor to live a better life, garner better education and eventually grow out of the vicious cycle of poverty.

Government Initiatives

Many programs have been implemented by the Malaysian government to eradicate poverty and in time improve the education level. Among the programs are income generating projects, providing better infrastructure and amenities, welfare assistance and inculcating positive values among the poor. The programs are focused on the extremely poor group of citizens as they are aimed at eliminating hard core poverty by 2010. This article will discuss the programs targeted for the poor by the Malaysian Government and Non-Governmental Organisations in further detail.

Ministry of Education

On January 2003, Compulsory Education Policy under Sect. 29A, Education Act 1996 (Act 550) was implemented. The Act made it compulsory for parents to send their children to school for primary education. It was a response by the Ministry of Education to the poverty eradication plan. Realizing the fact that the implementation of the Act would burden families from poor households, remote areas and the Orang Asli the government initiated various educational support programs to lessen the financial burden of the poor. The support given included textbook-on-loan, boarding school facilities, free tuition (SBT), nutritional and health programs (RMT & PSS), financial assistance (KWAMP) as well as integrated infrastructure and facilities enhancement for rural and remote schools (PPPLB Sabah and Sarawak). With all these, the Act could be carried out smoothly and without any obstacle.

After the Compulsory Education Policy under Sect. 29A, Education Act 1996 (Act 550) was implemented, the school enrolment among Orang Asli has increased tremendously. At primary level in 2000, a number of 21,704 Orang Asli were enrolled in schools. The positive outcome from the implementation of the Act shows that the number increased to 26,210 in 2005. Likewise, at secondary school level, the number increased from 5,971 in 2000 to 8,490 in 2005.

In 2003, the Federal Government commenced Kumpulan Wang Amanah Pelajar Miskin under the 8th Malaysia Plan with a RM200 million launch grant. Its mission is to ensure no school drop-outs among poor students after the implementation of the Compulsory Education Policy. This Kumpulan Wang Amanah Pelajar Miskin is managed by the Scholarship Division of the Ministry of Education and is aimed at helping students from families with household income below RM530/RM160 (per capita). Types of aid provided annually are the Schooling Aid (RM200 – Primary); (RM300-Secondary) and the General Aid (RM300 – Primary; RM300- Secondary). The fund is generated from

government grants, private sectors contributions and individual donations through monthly salary deduction.

Ministry of Rural and Regional Development

The Ministry of Rural and Regional Development is aware that the development in information and communication technology has influenced many aspects of our lives. Thus, the Ministry initiates to guarantee balanced development between urban areas and rural areas to achieve growth with equity. Hence, the Ministry implements systemic development of infrastructural, human and economic facilities by building community/multi-purpose halls, collaborative centers and resource/computer centers in villages to help develop the rural areas. By doing this, the information and communication technology development or in other words; the 'digital divide' between the rural and urban areas can be equalized.

Other than that, the Human Mind Development Programme (PPM) has also been a major step in helping our country achieve its vision of poverty eradication. Household leaders, housewives and household members among the poor are invited to join the courses held by PPMI which touches the aspects of attitude improvement, motivational courses and personal development. Through such courses, poverty-stricken citizens who are facing a hard time will be motivated to not blame the vicious cycle of poverty but gain knowledge and education to grow out of it.

Moreover, Training and Education Programs (PLP) are also held for household members from poor families who are productive and skillful but are unsure how to use their skills for the betterment of their future. Courses on skills training are for those who failed to enter higher learning institutions and as for school students, courses on ways to improve academic achievement are also provided. These courses not only help nurture values of making the best out of a person's life but also emphasize living and surviving skills.

ICT Training is also given to provide suitable skills to produce ICT entrepreneurs and most importantly, a computer literate society. It is part of the Infodesa Programme which is aimed at reducing the rural-urban digital gap. The Infodesa Programme (PID) is a program implemented as part of the National IT Agenda which hopes to create a massive information and knowledge-based society by 2020.

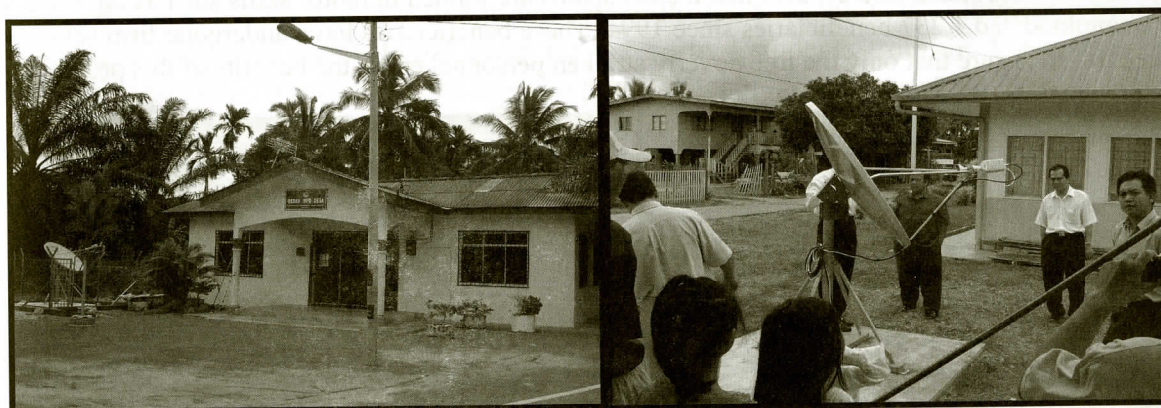


Figure 2. Among Facilities Provided by the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development under Infodesa Programme

Source: <http://www.rurallink.gov.my>

Research has shown that most poverty-stricken families have little knowledge of family planning and tend to have many children but very small income. Hence, the Children's Nursery Building Programme is initiated to build nurseries in areas with a high number of poor families. The nurseries will help take care of the children to give women ample time to go to work to help increase the family income. The children are given the necessary care and attention by the nursery staff.

Government-Linked Organizations Initiatives

Lembaga Zakat Selangor

One of the most prominent Government-linked organizations is the Lembaga Zakat Selangor which also helps to abolish poverty among the Malaysian community. It is an official and established syndicate under the Selangor Islamic Religious Council which is responsible for collecting and distributing the *zakat* (tithe) among Muslims. The entire collection of *zakat* (tithe) at the end of each year is distributed among 8 groups of people entitled to the *zakat* according to the Holy Quran. Two of the eight groups are the *faqir* people (extremely poor) and the *miskin* (poor).

Lembaga Zakat Selangor not only collects and distributes the *zakat* but it also offers various assistance including financial aid for education, school uniform and bus fees. Baitul Hasanah, a temporary boarding school accommodation is built by Lembaga Zakat Selangor to ease the long walking journey to school for poor students from remote areas. It currently accommodates 59 students and another center which is in process of building will accommodate 500 students at one time. Assistance is also provided for tertiary level (local and overseas institutions) in the form of tuition fees, accommodation fees, living allowance and special fees for languages courses.

Non-Government Organizations Initiatives

Due to the increase in the poverty-stricken number, certain people have gathered some initiative to overcome the problems that haunt the poverty-stricken citizens. Yayasan Basmi Kemiskinan or Poverty Eradication Foundation is a non-government charitable organization which focuses on the social development, education and training of the poor people. This organization was incorporated in the early 1990s and is situated in Selangor. Through this organization, poverty problems are eradicated as much as possible.

For example, Asrama Kasih also known as Caring Hostel is specially developed by the Yayasan Basmi Kemiskinan. It provides free accommodation for its occupants. The occupants also enjoy free meals and are also provided with educational assistance to enhance their capabilities. Asrama Kasih is complete with up-to-date infrastructure and is equipped with learning facilities. Not only that, Asrama Kasih also ensures that the occupants are trained in motor skills such as tailoring. It has accommodated 1,237 beneficiaries since 1994. These beneficiaries have undergone firm selection procedures to ensure that only the true poverty stricken personnel enjoy the benefits of this program.



Figure 3. Among residents of Asrama Kasih

To realize Malaysia's goal of producing productive citizen by the year 2020, a non-profitable and non-government organization which goes under the name KUNTUM or Kumpulan Tuisyen Hujung Minggu, has developed a program especially for SPM candidates who cannot afford highly priced tuition fees. Under this program, SPM candidates are offered free tuition conducted by certified and highly experienced teachers. Currently, this program has good support from the administration and

teachers. This program is conducted after school session or at the weekend to accommodate the students who are involved in extra-curricular activities. However, this program can only be enjoyed by selected schools in the rural areas. This is to meet the program objective which is to help poverty stricken citizens. To realize the objective, each class conducted is limited to only 20 students at a time. This ensures that each student receives individual attention. This program covers most of the subjects including Malay Language, English, Mathematics (Modern and Additional), Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Commerce and Accounting. After completing their SPM examinations, most of the students are offered places at the Community College. This community college offer vocational courses especially in automotive and electrical division.

Sultanah Bahiyah Foundation which holds firmly to its mission to be an agency of change by assistance and programs which will benefit people in need in Kedah Darul Aman is a charitable organization incorporated in 1996. The foundation which is based in Kedah performs two key roles in the community. First, it functions as an agency of change through community work in education, development, health, youth and training initiatives. Second, it functions to collaborate with other non-governmental organizations and private companies on social projects. Sultanah Bahiyah Foundation organizes projects and activities over a broad spectrum and involves people of all ages.

The Malaysian exam-oriented education system has indirectly influenced the growth of education-based charity organizations and projects. Titian Bestari Project is one of the many projects that emphasizes academic achievement among the needy students. This project provides free tuition for Mathematics, Science and English to help Year 4 to Year 6 students in order to ensure that they do drop out of school. Some 23 tuition centers in Kedah operate yearly; providing free tuition and also motivation seminars for students. Some classes are held in mosques which are closer to schools. The positive outcome of this is that a close and mutual relationship is developed between the students and the mosque community and the activity adds to the social function of the mosques. This Titian Bestari Project has received many great testimonials from parents as students show encouraging results thanks to the collaborative efforts between parents, teachers and volunteers.

From the grueling experience of a single mother named Kalsom who was struggling to make ends meet while her children were on the verge of being forced to drop out of school to help the family's financial status, Projek Kalsom was born. She has inspired people to set up such organizations to help other needy ones. Projek Kalsom was started in Jerantut in 1995 and has since been held annually until now, Projek Kalsom XIV – 2008. It focuses on conducting an annual motivational camp for the Form 4 students from the lesser developed parts of Malaysia. The objective of this camp is to encourage and assist students to excel in their studies. It is also aimed at making learning a more positive experience for the students. It has promoted awareness and empathy towards the struggles of the less fortunate among the Malaysian students in the United Kingdom (UK). On the other hand, students in UK have become positive role models for the rural participants. To show support, a group of young Malaysian students who are currently studying in the UK have decided to run a collection and volunteered to take Projek Kalsom a step further.



Figure 4. Some of the activities in Motivational Camp under Projek Kalsom
Source: <http://www.projek-kalsom.com>

This motivational camp is held for duration of 5 days and comprises 3 modules, namely: 'Effective Study Skills', 'English Made Easy' and 'What's Next after SPM'. Under the first module 'Effective Study Skills', students are exposed to time management and ways to comprehend their lesson better. 'English Made Easy' module is specially designed to increase the English comprehension and grammar level of the students and lastly 'What's Next after SPM' gives students insight into what they can pursue completing their SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education). It guides them to choose which higher learning institutions suit their interest and what career they can pursue.

BP in Malaysia is among the many corporate bodies keen in helping the poor to obtain better education. BP in Malaysia organises a Mentoring Program each year in collaboration with several Malaysian public universities. The program encourages tertiary students to volunteer as mentors to their younger peers (mentees). BP provides the structure linking up mentors and schools as well as the program funding. Schools identify the mentees and mentoring sessions will then be held in the mentees' schools. At the end of the day, the mentors not only gain a once in a lifetime experience of volunteering and teaching the needy ones, they are also given a quality career enhancing training as a recognition by BP.

Another renowned corporate body in Malaysia that yearns to help the needy is Shell in Malaysia. This very prominent oil company focuses on helping the needy people in Sabah and Sarawak. It provides great assistance for bumiputra students from remote areas as well as conducting regular vocational training programs in welding and computer skills.

Conclusion

In moving hand in hand with the government's agenda of becoming a developed Third World country with a First World mentality by 2020, many organizations have decided to spare some time and money to help the poor embrace a better life. Priority is given to education as it has proven to be a successful mechanism in alleviating poverty and at the end of the day creating a more knowledgeable and developed community. Other than the government-based programs, non-governmental organizations and the private sector have also done their part in helping the poor by initiating their own programs either motivational, educational or vocational. They should pat themselves on the back as they have done a great job in nurturing important values of survival and instilling the importance of education amongst the poor. They are the eye-opener for other people to lend a hand and help the less fortunate.

"The real poverty is the lack of books." - Sidonie Gabrielle

'Books' in the quote is the analogy to the garden of knowledge hence justifies the statement of knowledge being the only superior power that could release a person from the vicious cycle of poverty. It is not an odious job to help the poor gain better knowledge. Instead, it is a sincere and heartfelt work that is blessed. Therefore, all parties and organizations should collaborate in ensuring the success of poverty eradication in Malaysia so that not only will the Petronas Twin Towers stand tall with pride but it is Malaysia's economy and development that will leave other countries in awe.

References

<http://www.bp.com/sectiongenericarticle.do?categoryId=188&contentId=2000634>
<http://www.e-zakat.com.my/baru/>
<http://www.projek-kalsom.com/>
<http://www.rurallink.gov.my/main.php>
<http://www.shell.com/home/Framework?siteId=my-en>
<http://www.ybk.org.my/>