Improving the Right of Access to Education: Cases of IIUM, Gombak and Simpang Ampat

Author: *Sejahtera Centre for Sustainability and Humanity, International Islamic University of Malaysia*

Corresponding Email: *sejahtera@iium.edu.my*

One the fundamental impacts of poverty is access to education. Many children are deprived from basic education due to their very poor living condition that they cannot afford to go to school. Among those who have completed secondary education, many cannot afford to higher level of tertiary education not only because of the tuition fees but their higher priorities are to make a living for the family. These are normal phenomena in Malaysia although after 60 years of its Independence.

The nature of poverty and inequality in Malaysia is rather distinctive that it requires a very thorough analysis towards solving it. Unlike other developing countries, the segment that trapped in the poverty cycle are among those who are living in modern and advance infra structure as some refers to urban poor.

Malaysia development plan have always put strong emphasis on rural areas to ensure poverty issue are addressed. However, apart from implementation and efficiency issues in delivery, lack of structured and long-term action plan for the identifiably 2 levels of poverty-stricken group – the M40 (middle 40) and B40 (bottom 40) are main factor why poverty issues perpetuate in Malaysia. This problem obviously requires redefining of poverty and consequently appropriate measurement for improvement

Another area of concern related to poverty is the environmental degradation impact as these people must meet the economic need. This trade off cycle of economic need (poverty)-social and environment is getting more complicated in Malaysia as development is not yet mainstreaming as defined by sustainable development. Here is where the Malaysia government intervention program for poverty such as the role of infrastructure and development projects; international financial institutions; the management of public finances; and multinational or domestic corporations in relation to poverty need to reoriented so that it address reality on the ground and at the same time coming up with Malaysia own model for poverty eradication program like the very successful program of FELDA

International Islamic University of Malaysia takes poverty issue seriously. In line with its strategic direction 2019-2020, which is humanizing education through sustainable development goals and Maqasid Syariah, all activities are set to be aligned with 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which include SDG 1: No Poverty and SDG 2: Zero Hunger. This write-up will focus on the nature of people receiving assistance, its prevalence and distribution in three places; Gombak area where IIUM is located which focus on the current economy situation, IIUM itself which focus more on students receiving financial assistance and Simpang Ampat Perlis, which focus on the nature of school children receiving assistance from Charity Right program by Mercy Mission Malaysia.

Gombak is recorded as one of the highest median household income rate (RM 7 903) among 140 districts in Malaysia. This is according to survey in 2016, which shows that Gombak placed in the third after Sepang and Petaling. This rate is way higher than the national rate of RM 5 228 per month. Unfortunately, despite the high household income rate, there are still communities living in a condition termed urban poor. In line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 on ending poverty specifically 1.2 to reduce at least half of proportion of women and men living in poverty, and SDG 2.1 which focuses on ensuring access to nutritious and sufficient food to all, IIUM has conducted few big projects and activities for capacity building of the economically deprived and marginalized community.

What makes Gombak special is that it is a settlement for indigenous community, which is living in urban poor condition despite having a settlement in Gombak. The socio economics gain per family are less than RM500 per month and extended families living in the same houses. As for example, four families living in one small house, which makes the living condition not sustainable for their health and quality of life. Although this special group of community is rich with its culture, the heritage and culture of Orang Asli no longer attracts the indigenous youth there, thus they fail to see the potential income generation from their own preserved culture. Living in urban poor condition affected the indigenous community not just in their quality of life, but the education and ability to survive in the majority society.

IIUM, being an international Islamic university which brings with its name; peace to all, had passionately providing financial assistance to students via various programs and schemes. Through six (6) channels, IIUM had been allocating not less than 9 million (RM) in 2015 for student financial assistance and this amount had continuously increasing each year until it reached about RM 15, 935 183.93 in 2018. This huge amount of money is channeled through six programs as follow; Scholarship, Zakat Distribution, Financial Assistance, tuition fee discounted, welfare management unit, and Office of Deputy Rector fund. The number of students receiving this financial aid has also increased from 1529 in 2015 to 2747 in 2018.

The final area of concern is in Simpang Ampat, Perlis. IIUM was honoured for the chance to collaborate with Mercy Mission Malaysia in one of their noble program, Charity Right: Feed to Educate. Charity Right is a Food Aid Program to help families who are in need, with the help of school and madrasah. This is not just another one-off ‘Feed the Needy’ program where there is no long term impact to solve the cause of poverty among this group of people, but this assistance is offered with condition that the parents or caretakers need to ensure the attendance of the children under their care to school. Failure to do so will result in discontinuation of the help received. This program is based on the aspiration that education is the solution for these young children to get out of poverty.

As of 2018, SK Simpang Ampat has 687 students in total, with 471 of them receives government assistance. 58 of them are orphans and there are few students who were diagnosed with disabilities such as Down Syndrome, blind and learning disabilities. In this Charity Right program, 100 receivers from SK Simpang Ampat are selected as eligible recipient. Out of 100 students assisted, 69 are of the poor category, 19 are orphans, and 12 are considered people with disabilities (OKU). The average income per head is RM 122.70 per month. Looking into impact of this program, overall there has been increase in both academic performance (4.38%) and attendance (0.88%). Two students were able to get 6As in the final exams, while those who used to score 6E managed to perform better during the final exams.

In a nutshell, it could be concluded that despite the high-end technology advancement in Malaysia, there are still some part of this country strive to feed themselves a meal daily. Gombak is a good example of how crucial it is to close the economic gap between all macrocosms of society. This write-up is lack of details due to privacy concern. However, the author(s) would recommend the Special Rapporteur to meet both the indigenous community, as well as the recipients of Charity Right: Feed to Educate to understand more on the current poverty situation in Malaysia, thus assisting in the connecting the link between poverty and the realization of human right in Malaysia.