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Challenges in the Use of Natural Resources among Semaq Beri, Hulu Terengganu

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Abstract

The Orang Asli of the Semaq Beri tribe in Kampung Sungai Berua depend on natural resources for the survival of generations. This pattern of dependence exists to meet daily needs and sources of income. However, now the natural resources they often obtain have been threatened by several threats such as invasion, clearing, logging and dam construction. This is a challenge to the well-being of the Semaq Beri tribe. This study uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. Data collection took six months through fieldwork in the village of the Semaq Beri tribe in Sungai Berua Hulu Terengganu. Throughout the fieldwork, interview, participant observation and document review techniques were used to collect data. The data obtained through each technique was analyzed using NVivo 12 PLUS software. The results of the study show that the Orang Asli dependence on natural resources faces various challenges such as competition for resources, limited resources, challenging economic activities, high expenses, poverty problems, and the sustainability of traditional knowledge. Recommendations for future studies, researchers need to identify what socioeconomic development is appropriate to help the Semaq Beri tribe reduce their dependence on natural resources.

Keywords: Challenges, Dependence, Natural Resources, Semaq Beri, Orang Asli

Introduction

The residents of Kampung Sungai Berua are made up of the Semaq Beri tribe. Semaq Beri means "People," while Beri means "Forest." Therefore, the combination of the two words means "Forest People". However, among the outside community, this community is better known as Orang Asli or Semaq Beri (Jumaat, 2020; Nizam, 2020). Kampung Sungai Berua is a new settlement for Semaq Beri created in 1977, located near Tasik Kenyir (Ramle, 2014; Hairulnizam, 2019). This settlement is the second settlement for Semaq Beri after the Kampung Sungai Pergam, which was created in 1961 (Ramle, 2014; Hairulnizam, 2019). This

village was created by the government so that the Orang Asli community would have a special place to live and make it easier for the government to deliver various facilities and assistance, such as medical assistance, education, and also economic development projects (Ramle, 2014; Subhi, 2019; Norhayati, 2019). Most of the residents in Kampung Sungai Berua are from the Semaq Beri tribe. Until 2022, the Semaq Beri tribe in Kampung Sungai Berua is estimated to number 132 families or a total of 547 people (JAKOA, 2022). With this number, the Orang Asli population in Sungai Berua is the first largest group in Terengganu, followed by the second largest group, which is the population of Kampung Sungai Pergam is 491 people. While Kampung Sungai Sayap has 32 residents (JAKOA, 2022).

Table 1

Distribution Population of the Orang Asli in Terengganu

No.	Village	Tribe	District	Head of the household	Household members	Total
1.	Kampung Sungai Sayap	Batek/Semaq Beri	Besut	7	25	32
2.	Kampung Sungai Berua	Batek/Semaq Beri	Hulu Terengganu	132	415	547
3.	Kampung Sungai Pergam	Batek	Kemaman	160	331	491
Overall Total Orang Asli in Terengganu				299	771	1070

Sources: JAKOA (2022)

Objectives and Areas of Study

Orang Asli and nature is an entity that is very synonymous with the identity of daily life, which is how they adapt to economic activities based on forest products, hunting, residence, and shifting agriculture. The Semaq Beri tribe is one of the Orang Asli tribes that depend on the forest to continue all activities that involve meeting the needs of life based on the natural environment, such as shifting cultivation, hunting, gathering forest products, and fishing (Ramle, 1993; 2001; 2014; Faezah, 2018; Hairulnizam, 2019; Norhayati, 2019; Hamdan, 2020; Jumaat, 2020). This study discusses a study that has been carried out to identify the challenges experienced by the Semaq Beri tribe against dependence on nature in the Lake Kenyir area. The diagram is the area for this study.

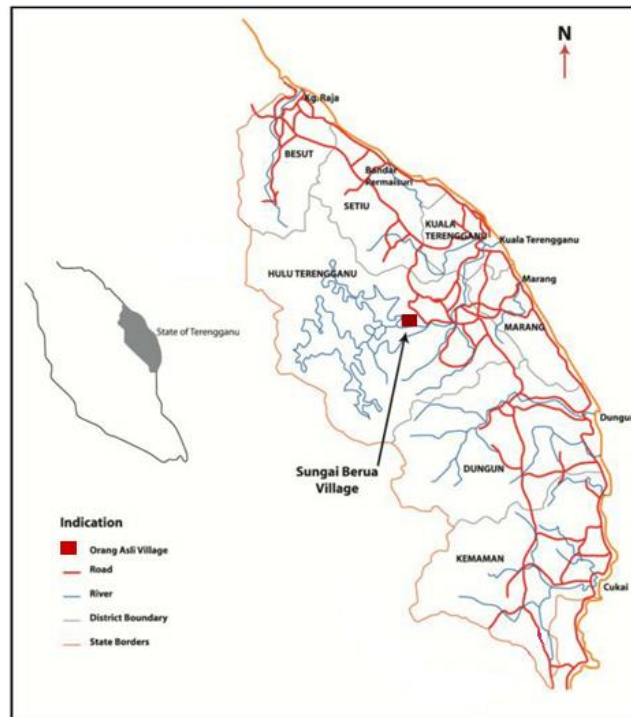


Figure 1: Location of Kampung Sungai Berua (Ramle, 2014)

Methodology

This study uses qualitative methods to obtain information. The ethnographic approach, as well as participant observation techniques and interviews have been conducted for six months in the Kampung Sungai Berua. The researcher lived with the community to obtain some information related to the topic of this study. During the six months of the field study, a total of twenty informants were successfully interviewed by the researcher to obtain information. The interview technique used is to obtain accurate information about the challenges experienced by the Semaq Beri tribe today. Participant observation was used to see and explore how the challenges faced by the Semaq Beri tribe related to natural resources around the settlement and Lake Kenyir. Participatory observation and interviews are usually carried out individually and in groups with community members. The researcher divided informants into two groups, namely key informants and informants. Key informants are individual informants who know more about the study's objectives, are authoritative and knowledgeable in all aspects that the researcher wants to study, While the Informant is an individual who knows how to explain or give information to the researcher about the matter being studied. The process of finding key informants and informants was made by interviewing several leaders in the community, shamans, heads of the household, housewives, and community members familiar with activities related to nature. Voice recorders and cameras are used to ensure that the information obtained can be saved for reference. In addition, previous research records from various research-related departments and reading materials have been used as secondary data sources. The information obtained has been analyzed using NVivo PLUS software by involving several processes namely (i) transcription, (ii) data organization, (iii) conditioning (getting used to the data), (iv) coding, (v) themes, demonstration of reliability or validity and (vi) reports.

Patterns of Dependence on Nature

The forest environment in the settlement area has much influence on the socio-culture of the Semaq Beri tribe in Kampung Sungai Berua whether related to daily economic activities, social systems, beliefs, norm systems, art, and communication (Hairulnizam, 2019; Subhi, 2020; Hamdan, 2020; Jumaat, 2020). According to Hairulnizam (2016) and Iqbal Jumaat (2020) explained that the Orang Asli have their own culture, methods and knowledge in their dependence on nature for generations. The environment's influence on a society's culture is a natural thing. Every community member will adapt to the environment and then pattern the community's behavior, thoughts, values and activities in line with the local ecological environment (Ramle, 2014; 2001; Hairulnizam, 2019). He explained that this situation also occurs in the Semaq Beri community covering several elements of their culture such as social organization, chieftaincy system, family system and marriage. This cultural pattern has been formed based on the knowledge of previous generations who have long adapted to nature in their lives until today.

The close relationship of a community group with the natural environment, especially for those who depend a lot on the environment including the forest, is something natural (Elviridi, 2011). Such a relationship also exists in the life of the Semaq Beri tribe. In this context, they have their own perspectives, bond values and emotional values towards the natural environment (Kuchikura, 1987; 1988; Ramle, 2001; 2014). The Semaq Beri tribe is interconnected with the forest so that every element in their lives also has a connection with nature. This connection can be seen from the perspective of customs, culture, ideology, taboos and way of life. For them, the natural environment is a heritage that is quite valuable and needs to be used as best as possible like previous generations. They also believe that this forest is the property of Orang Asli and they are free to use the property in the forest for daily use as needed.

Afizi et al (2014); Faezah (2018) also explained that the lives of the Orang Asli are closely tied to their environment, which is the forest which is the source of their daily needs. The dependency of the Orang Asli tribe is not only to meet daily needs. However, this dependence has started to change towards generating income and property assets (farms and houses). While Ramle (2014); Hairulnizam (2019) explained that nowadays, Semaq Beri's dependence on the forest is still high involving elements of the settlement, belief, food sources, income, medicine and equipment. The high dependence occurs because of the current needs and wants in addition to no other resource that can replace the pattern of dependence on the forest, leaving them with no choice to continue to rely on forest resources. In addition, they also think that the traditional forest-related expertise that they have and the forest resources that are easily obtained are also among the factors that they still depend on nature.

Challenges to Orang Asli

It has been stated before, natural resources are important in the lives of the people of Kampung Sungai Berua. The supply of resources that have been obtained and used from the forests around the settlement and the forests in the Tasik Kenyir area show a very high dependence on natural resources in their lives. However, the use of natural resources in the same settlement area and other threat factors have caused the resources needed to decrease. The problem of lack of resources around the settlement has caused the daily activities performed by the locals to get on with life have changed. The risks that exist in Tasik

Kenyir are now a life challenge that must be faced by the Semaq Beri tribe. The challenge is the impact of the threat that the Semaq Beri tribe will face now and in the future. Their lives are seen to be getting more difficult as a result of the threats that exist today. The challenges that the Orang Asli will face in detail are as follows:

i. Competition Acquires Limited Resources

The source of forest treasures around the settlement and Tasik Kenyir is one of the most important elements in the lives of the people Kampung Sungai Berua. Their source of food and income today is derived from the jungle. The dependence on nature that has existed since previous generations has formed a cultural pattern of life that makes the natural environment the background of their lives today. The previous generation of Kampung Sungai Berua, in the 1950s, made nature a resource for their own use only. However, after the broader relationship between them and the outside world, especially in the 1970s, economic activities changed from subsistence to commercial economy. However, the activities are done orderly to meet their and their families needs. An Orang Asli around Tasik Kenyir said the results of their commercial economic activities are declining, especially agarwood. They recounted that their economic resources were dwindling due to various threat problems ranging from agricultural development projects, encroachment, settlement development and land division.

Efforts to obtain forest products are increasingly challenging. The residents of Kampung Sungai Berua not only compete with other groups to obtain resources, but they also compete with foreign invaders such as citizens of Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar. Competition exists because the main activities carried out by both parties are almost the same, namely collecting forest products and hunting. In addition, the activities of the outside community that are greedy in exploiting forest resources through logging, land clearing, agriculture, tourism industry and dam construction are also the residents' complaints. This competition is an unhealthy culture in the life of the Semaq Beri tribe, which is still new in the mainstream. This unhealthy competition is also seen to be able to threaten some species of flora and fauna. According to the villagers, competition to obtain agarwood also occurs among the local community around Tasik Kenyir. However, the competition took place in a small group, unlike the competition faced by foreign invaders. This significant competition has also caused the well-being of the surrounding population to be disrupted. The dwindling natural resources are also due to competition collecting natural resources with invaders. The implications of this invasion are a big problem for the Semaq Beri tribe. According to the residents of Kampung Sungai Berua, the average they get agarwood is only one or at most three in a month and sometimes they never get the resource and only rely on existing forest resources to meet the needs of the month.

ii. Economic activity is increasingly challenging

The increasingly limited forest resources require a concerted effort to obtain them. Previously, the majority of the residents of Kampung Sungai Berua only engaged in economic activities around Tasik Kenyir and settlement areas because the results were easily obtained. However, after the resources around the settlement decreased, the residents of Kampung Sungai Berua had to go to forest areas farther from the settlement to obtain resources. In the past, they made the forest area around the settlement and Hulu Tasik Kenyir as the primary search area. However, they go collecting and hunting activities have involved far areas within 30 kilometers to 50 kilometers from settlements. Due to the difficulty in obtaining resources,

they had to use vehicles such as cars, boats, motorcycles and sometimes had to walk to find forest resources outside the settlement. However, not all locals can afford to own a vehicle. Therefore, they will share a vehicle or walk to the area. Before going out into the woods, they would form a group of five or six people. Together they headed to a forest area expected to be rich in resources. Usually, they will go into the forest to find resources, starting in the early morning until the evening. However, some of them live in the forest for a certain period, especially in Tasik Kenyir to collect forest products for generated income. Usually, they take a week or more to gather valuable resources such as rattan, agarwood, honey, herbs and selected fauna. The results will be distributed equally or according to the method of rotation among the groups. Observations show that every day the majority of the community in Kampung Sungai Berua has to go far from the settlement area to earn a living in order to support the family's survival.

iii. High Spending

Like other communities, spending is an important element for the residents of Kampung Sungai Berua, which involves daily expenses and also expenses to carry out activities. Daily expenses involve buying necessities such as food, clothing, equipment, etc. While the expenses to carry out activities are the costs that have to be borne by the residents while doing hunting activities and collecting forest products. The daily cost of activities is increasing due to current economic factors. The activity implementation will involve transportation and food costs while doing activities in the forest. Transportation costs involve purchasing vehicles such as boats, motorcycles or motorcars to facilitate them to the search destination. Apart from that, it also involves the cost of fuel and vehicle maintenance. While the cost of food involves supplies that need to be brought during activities in the forest. The main food supplies were rice, flour, biscuits, oil, salt, sugar, tobacco, betel, tea and curry spices. Preparing these materials involves high costs because they do activities in the forest in groups and take a long time, between a week to a month. This rising expenditure is a problem for the residents; they must work hard to ensure they can afford all the living costs.

iv. Challenges of Declining Income Sources

The residents of Kampung Sungai Berua are highly dependent on natural resources for their daily use. Therefore, when a threat disrupts the resources, it becomes a big challenge to their lives to meet their needs, especially to generate income. As stated by Ramle (2014), the residents of Kampung Sungai Berua consider the forest as a "Bank Rimba" to meet their needs. However, their savings in "Bank Rimba" are declining due to robbery by various parties. Among the reasons for their declining income are declining resources due to forest exploration activities for agriculture and competition to seize natural treasures by foreign invaders. This has caused the residents of Kampung Sungai Berua to start worrying about their source of income in the future. According to the informant's story, they often have difficulty in obtaining forest products until they return empty-handed without any resources even though they search for the source every day. It will harm their lives in the future, especially for the new generation. Due to the decline in income, the residents of Kampung Sungai Berua have to rely on government assistance and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to meet their daily needs. The impact of the decline in income of the residents Kampung Sungai Berua is currently seen as a problem for their socio-economy. Their income from dwindling forests has caused them to rely on outside help constantly to get on with life. In turn, the impact of

this dependence on external aid will result in them not being able to get out of poverty in the present or even in the future.

v. *The Problem of Poverty*

Implications from dwindling natural resources have also impacted the socio-economy of this unstable society since time immemorial. Therefore, it will make it difficult for the government to eradicate poverty in the community. The majority of the residents of Kampung Sungai Berua work as forest collectors and hunters. They make natural resources available to meet the necessities of life to generate income. Due to the threats, the implications are huge and provide challenges in their lives, especially in improving their socio-economic status. Due to dwindling resources, unemployment is among the problems that can occur as job opportunities become increasingly limited. When natural resources are depleted compared to the increasing population of the village, then their income is disrupted in addition to the problem of unemployment and then poverty. Quality of life problems can potentially occur as a result of the stress of life if not curbed, leading to increased social problems such as robbery, extortion, burglary, and murder. The threat that exists also causes the lives of the residents of Kampung Sungai Berua will always be squeezed by poverty. Existing income cannot lift them out of poverty. Based on the observation and participation, the residents of Kampung Sungai Berua had to leave the village area every day to go to the forest area farther from the settlement to find resources because the existing resources around the settlement were declining. This dealt a massive blow to the lives of the villagers who depended entirely on nature to survive.

vi. *Sustainability of traditional knowledge*

The Semaq Beri tribe in Kampung Sungai Berua has extensive knowledge of exploring nature. However, their traditional knowledge is beginning to be threatened with extinction due to dwindling resources and there is a handful of them beginning to abandon the practices and skills inherited from generations to acquire natural resources. Many residents voiced concerns about the fate of their traditional knowledge in the future. As children, we were taught how to live and work in the forest. Living and working in this forest is indeed a hereditary activity of the Semaq Beri tradition. The majority of the residents work as gathering forest products and hunting such as agarwood, rattan, herbs and many other things that have commercial value. While working in the forest, sometimes they will bring their children or family members to join them in activities for the informal learning (traditional knowledge) process. However, due to the problem of threats, activities and the learning process cannot be carried out correctly. The average resident explains that the skills and knowledge they have now are inherited from generations through activities with their fathers and family members in the forest. Threats such as encroachment, logging, construction of dams have made the resource area decrease and shrink. Nevertheless, they are also worried about the forest resources being gone. They will not be able to do our traditional activities anymore and they do not have work to earn money and inherit traditional knowledge to their children. They are distraught that their children's generation will not be able to continue living because they do not know the traditional knowledge and way of life in the forest.

Conclusion

The increasingly limited natural resources have caused them to need a persistent effort to obtain a resource. Before this, most village residents did economic activities around the

settlement area because it was easy and close to obtaining the relevant resources. However, after the resources around the settlement dwindled due to continuous use and external threats, they began to explore other resource-seeking areas further away from the settlement. They also have to use vehicles such as cars, boats and sometimes walk to find forest resources outside the settlement. Because they are forced to explore, the challenges in terms of daily expenses and high activity expenses including food, clothing, equipment, operating costs and so on that need to be provided while hunting and gathering forest products cause their income to be low. This will also cause the villagers not to be able to improve their standard of living like the Orang Asli in other places. The findings of the study clearly show that the threats that have occurred have caused the well-being of the Semaq Beri tribe in Kampung Sungai Berua to be disturbed, especially in obtaining resources and generating income. Forest exploration and forest encroachment is an action that is detrimental to many parties, especially in ensuring the stability of the ecosystem around Lake Kenyir. On behalf of the residents of Kampung Sungai Berua, acts of extreme threats resulting in the destruction of nature on a large scale, such as those carried out by intruders and outside communities are prohibited. For them, this action not only causes disaster to nature and their lives can even cause the wrath of supernatural forces. If found guilty, the punishment will be imposed by the *batin*, *pawang* or supernatural power. Therefore, the risks that exist in Lake Kenyir are now life implications that must be faced by the current and future residents. The impact of the threat shows that the life of the Orang Asli Semaq Beri in the future will be increasingly difficult as a result of the threat that existence. The impact of limited resources involves the natural resources in the forest that are taken for commercial purposes are decreasing and limited due to the various threats spreading around Lake Kenyir. The same economic activities carried out by a few outsiders and foreign invaders around the settlement and Lake Kenyir have caused competition in obtaining resources that have commercial value. In addition, due to the exploitation of the same natural resources has also caused the necessary resources to decrease. As a result of these dwindling resources, job opportunities are becoming more limited and the unemployment problem exists. In addition, the problem of diminishing resources can potentially cause the extinction of the traditional knowledge of the Semaq Beri tribe because they cannot inherit the practice and practice it. The problem of extinction of traditional knowledge due to dwindling resources causes them to abandon some practices that have been used for generations to obtain the relevant resources. Concerning the problem, they will always depend on help from outside to continue living. This gives the impression that the problem of poverty will always constrain the standard of living of the Semaq Beri tribe.

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