

Land, education for young Orang Asli
Malaysiakini.com
July 02, 2010

In the efforts to transform and improve the standard of living of the Orang Asli community represented by 18 sub groups, education, skills and land ownership are seen vital for their development.

According to Peninsular Malaysia Orang Asli Association president Majid Suhut, this is because through education and skills the Orang Asli community can compete with the rest and through land ownership they can earn an income.

He was of the opinion that to upgrade the lives of the Orang Asli whose number is estimated at 141,000, the government has to focus its efforts in providing land and education especially for the younger generation under the 10th Malaysia Plan (10MP).

The Orang Asli still fare poorly in education with the number of undergraduates and school students is not reflective of their population figure.

Members of the community blame on the lack of financial resources that seriously impede education for the community though they receive substantial aid.

Though the education infrastructure can be considered satisfactory, the welfare of the Orang Asli children still needs attention. Even today it is a known fact many Orang Asli children go to school on an empty stomach.

Though there is the Supplementary Food Scheme in schools, outside school the Orang Asli children don't have the menu like what their other counterparts are enjoying.

Teach them to fish

Majid appreciated the government's recent gesture of providing scholarships to six Orang Asli students to study overseas and this augurs well for the community.

"So far, the Orang Asli students lacked the opportunity to study overseas though some of them were qualified and among the reasons for this is the lack of a dedicated organisation like Majlis Amanah Rakyat (Mara) to assist us".

At the same time Majid wanted the government, NGOs and other agencies to equip the community with skills instead of just providing monetary assistance.

Too much monetary assistance will make the Orang Asli dependent on the assistance and discourage them from working hard to earn a living.

"If the government provides training on skills like tailoring and making bead ornaments, this will help them to increase their income and reduce their dependence on monthly monetary assistance.

"What I see now is that a small number of them have become dependent on assistance, though we still want the financial assistance it should come along with the appropriate skills training," he added.

Land allocation through 10MP

Majid noted that the community is highly appreciative of the government's renewed effort to help the Orang Asli in every sphere under 10MP especially in land ownership and he stated this would be very helpful for the community.

According to Majid, many Orang Asli have no legal ownership over the land that they are on as they reside in jungles and river banks.

However, the land ownership proposal under the 10MP remains vague and the Orang Asli community is eagerly waiting for the details.

Majid hoped that the government would not limit the land allocation to 2.6 hectares only (6 acres) for any particular family especially for those working on land area bigger than this.

"We suggest that the land area to be allocated should be equal with the area the family has been working on, yet if we are allocated a new piece of land we are also ready to accept it," he said.

He said the demarcation of the Orang Asli land is often decided by their leader, the 'Tok Batin', and not by the community members.

"The Orang Asli mark their land from trees to trees and the others cannot stake claim, and they have to deal with the Tok Batin over any arising matters over the land.

There could be problems in providing land ownership for the Orang Asli because many of them own many pieces of land or the land that they are on now belongs to the state government.

Apart from that, land ownership should also be given to the elderly and those who have families.

Majid is of the view there should be no problem in fulfilling the Orang Asli's aspirations.

Felda style programmes

Majid opined that if the government is to help the Orang Asli community by providing land under the 10MP, programmes based along the lines of Felda land schemes are suitable.

According to him, the Orang Asli need secure income to help alleviate the financial burden due to the high cost of living though most members of the community live in the interiors.

"Previously the Orang Asli depended on jungle resources but it is no longer the case because the forest resources like animals and fishes have depleted.

"So they have to switch to new economic resources, and when we mention of the new economic resources the Orang Asli can work on the land provided by the government," he said.

Meanwhile, Majid wants the government to provide more opportunities for the Orang Asli in the public sector especially in managing Orang Asli affairs.

"We want to see the children from all the Orang Asli sub-groups playing a role in managing their own community.

"Therefore, we want the government to help us on this and there are already some members of the community who are qualified to hold positions," he said.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/136197>