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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Development of Education for Indigenous Converts in Empowerment of Knowledge: A Case Study in Rembau Negeri Sembilan Malaysia

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Indigenous communities should not be marginalized in any development and progress efforts. The discussion in this study covers the development of community education of indigenous converts in the struggle for knowledge empowerment among them to improve their identity in the knowledge of Fardhu Ain, Recital, and 3M education. This qualitative study uses the method of interviews with Rembau district Islamic Religious Officers as well as observation methods, where the researchers saw themselves at the scene during the duration of this program. Surau Al-Hidayah located nearby in the community was used as a learning center throughout this program. Apart from being a place of worship, it is also used as a learning center which is seen as very poor and requires perfect infrastructure facilities. The government needs to look back at the convenience of their standard of living by providing initiatives for more perfect, conducive, and interactive learning places so that these communities are not left behind and thrive in tandem with other communities and nations. The role of all parties in helping this community should be further enhanced, whether government or non-government bodies. This is so that they continue to love knowledge and have a strong belief in the basic religion in them, especially since they are among the converts. However, the education development program which was carried out for 12 sessions with lecturers and researchers consisting of lecturers from Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia (UPTM) from early January 2024 to April 2024 ran successfully and had a very positive impact on this community despite certain constraints in the beginning. The findings found that several participants had the potential to get out of poverty and poverty factors which could be a catalyst to continue the learning sessions there even without the instructors and be able to be independent and generate their income in the future. However, the role of all parties in defending this community should not be stopped. Their persistence to continue to explore knowledge can be seen even though they have to sacrifice their daily work to go down every Saturday to attend this study class. This can also be identified by the teaching staff when they show an improvement in their understanding of knowledge from week to week.

INTRODUCTION

Based on research data from the Department of Orang Asli Development in 2014, a total of 178,197 Orang Asli communities live in peninsular Malaysia. (JAKOA e-Damak Information System 2014). The majority are from Pahang with 67,506 people, followed by Perak with 53,299. The state with the least

number of Orang Asli is Kedah with 270 people. Meanwhile, by ethnicity, the largest population is Senoi (97,856), followed by Malay-Proto (75,332). The least is Negrito (5009). These statistics prove that there are several parts of the Orang Asli settlements that exist in Malaysia (Abdullah, I. N., & Don, A. G. H. (2019). This proof shows that this community has long been established in Malaysia, especially in rural areas and villages.

Therefore, this community should move in tandem with other communities as well, especially in terms of intellectuality and knowledge generation. From the researcher's research, the average participants of this community have a high fighting spirit. It's just that in the early stages, they need to be guided and encouraged because some of them have low self-esteem and are too shy to move forward even though they can do something.

This study discusses the development of Fardhu Ain, Mengaji, and 3M (Reading, Writing and Counting) knowledge education programs in the rural areas of Negeri Sembilan, Rembau based at the Al Hidayah surau, in Kg. Pabai. The program was named the 3M Orang Asli Community Religious and Educational Development Programme. A total of 20 participants were selected to participate in the program funded by All Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia- Sustainable Development Goals APPGM-SDG as well as collaboration from lecturers at Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia (UPTM), Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA), Negeri Sembilan Islamic Religious Affairs Department (JHEAINS), District Islamic Religious Office (Rembau) (PAID) and Orang Asli Community Mobilisers (PMOA).

Problem statement

Humanitarian knowledge can be divided into several important aspects related to the soul, society, and morals (al-Qaradawi, 1986). All of this knowledge has a significant role in facing humans, especially the Orang Asli community who by nature have various ways of thinking, ways of living, and even the way they understand religion are also different (Abdullah, I. N., & Don, A. G. H. (2019). In this regard, without other obstacles such as the aspect of poverty, knowing is important to all levels, communities, nations, and descendants.

For this important initiative, this study is highlighted to discuss that the problems of poverty and poverty faced by this community are not obstacles and try to overcome them by participating in this 12-session learning program continuously. 20 participants were involved, 10 of whom were adult participants of which two (2) people worked day jobs, namely village work (some jobs with salary), three (3) monthly salary workers who worked as Finishing Assistants and Factory Operators, and the other five (5) people did not work. Meanwhile, the other 10 are teenagers and children who are still in school (Shamsol, 2024).

Rural and remote areas are also among the problems identified in this study due to inadequate infrastructure facilities and the placement of learning centers that need to be improved to ensure a smooth learning process in the present and future

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

This program runs for 12 sessions starting from January 2024 to April 2024 every Saturday. This learning class for the community is divided into 3 slots, namely the 3M Slot which focuses on learning English, the Basic Fardhu Ain Slot, and the Studying Slot. To ensure that this community receives proper protection in exploring knowledge despite being squeezed by poverty, it requires various approaches and roles that must be played by all parties to ensure that this community continues to be literate in line with other communities in the country. The role of APPGM-SDG in financing this smoothly means a lot to them in addition to valuable experience for us as researchers, lecturers, and also program management admins.

Methods taken by the community for survival to continue the education program

Through the observation method during the 12 sessions with the indigenous conversion community there, it was found that one of the methods made by them was to work alone to cover the cost of living. According to Mr. Shamsol, who is a civil servant at the Negeri Sembilan Islamic Religious Affairs Department on average, they are self-employed and earn a daily salary, like "there is a job, there is a salary":

"Some tap rubber and indeed they depend on the day's salary. By providing this attendance booster allowance, it eases their burden to some extent and allows them to attend this learning class..." (Shamsol, 2024).

Despite the assistance, incentives, or initiatives that the government has put together to help the local indigenous communities, it is undeniable that it is still not enough to ensure their survival. The approach taken to get out of the shackles of daily problems by the participants was able to give them a little breath to continue living as well as show progress from the socio-economic point of view of the region itself. Those who have skills on traditional knowledge that can be used to generate income such as skills in identifying plants for planting and herbs. Some participants took the approach of collecting forest products such as yams to sell to the harvesters.

The job of tapping rubber depends on the weather conditions and the quality of the rubber trees planted. Many hope to increase sales revenue to sustain their daily lives. In addition, almost all the residents of Kampung Orang Asli Pabai receive financial assistance from the government such as Bantuan Rakyat 1 Malaysia (BR1M) for each family. BR1M has now been renamed Bantuan Sara Hidup Rakyat (BSHR). However, keep in mind that they should not rely too much on government assistance alone.

The method or practice taken by the participants is to work to earn their living even though a wife is not obliged to earn a living in Islamic teachings but to ensure more guaranteed survival, the choice to work is made. The best approach in their work is to take into account the geographical factors of their position of residence and the surrounding area that indirectly shape their way of working and at the same time ensure a positive movement from a socio-economic point of view in their place. They are not very selective in looking for a job because of their educational background, but it is not a barrier to their work. (Shamsol, 2024). Jobs such as maintaining grocery stores, gardening, or tapping rubber are enough for them to keep from being shackled by poverty.

The definition of progress is also often associated with the economic growth of a society (A. Samah & H. Hamsan, 2008). From this point of view, the researcher found that the definition of progress has been triggered by the economic growth rate that has existed among the villagers, including the participants involved in this program. When there are job opportunities that are welcomed by the participants and residents of the local Indigenous community, this also provides room for progress from a small scale and can open the eyes to greater job opportunities in the context of rural communities, especially for the Indigenous community.

The well-being and quality of life of the Orang Asli community can be assessed through their socio-economic conditions. They engage in two main types of economic activities: those aimed at earning money, such as tapping rubber, and collecting rattan and agarwood, and those focused on meeting daily needs, such as fishing, hunting, and collecting forest products (Er Ah Choy et al., 2010). Research by Kamal Solihin et al. (2016) shows that the Orang Asli community in the Belum-Temenggor Valley is involved in self-employed efforts such as agriculture, forest product collection, and handicraft work. Therefore, the criteria used to assess their quality of life in Kamal Solihin et al.'s study revolved around jobs that had daily wages and were self-employed. These criteria are demonstrated by the participants of this program where their *'nature of work'* is indeed based on the same type of work and this work practice gives them space to continue to have a well-rounded life.

As a result of the researcher's research on the participants during these 12 sessions, although the average participants were categorized as economically disadvantaged as well as the infrastructure facilities of the learning centers that needed improvement, we found that some participants had the potential and talent to be highlighted as instructors as a result of the monitoring and performance shown throughout the learning sessions of this program. The following are the participants who were identified as having the potential and hope to generate their income in the future.

Table 1: Results of the Participant's Performance Survey on the Knowledge Empowerment Process (Category Adult Woman)

NAME	AGE	WORK	CHARACTERISTIC
Jumiah bt Chari	43 years	Housewives	He is one of the older participants who is very committed and quick to catch every learning session
Rahanum Bunchit	44 Years	Housewives	He is categorized as moderate, but able to help tutor other participants
Hatitah Bunchit	50 Years	Assistant of Kemas	She is one of the participants who is active, easy to understand and is the leader of the indigenous women community there

Table 2 : Results of Participant Performance Survey on the Knowledge Empowerment Process (Category Children/Adolescents)

NAME	AGE	WORK	CHARACTERISTIC
Aleeya Farhana Azrizan	16 Years	Still in school	Quick and witty and can help with tutoring peers and the elderly
Muhammad Nadzmi Mohd Adzhar	15 Years	Still in school	Initially, this participant was a bit shy, but over time he became more confident and had a smart mind.
Nur Aqilah Najwa Mohd Adzhar	17 Years	Still in school	Among the teenage participants are the most advanced, intelligent and intelligent.
Nur Hanis Sumaiyyah Abdullah	11 Years	Still in school	The most enthusiastic participant, sitting in front of the class
Muhamad Faiz Abdullah	10 Years	Still in school	Even though they are still children, these participants quickly understand what they are learning and can help their peers

Source: Results of the Investigators' Observation of Participants Throughout 12 Sessions

From the table above, two categories can be highlighted where the adult and child/adolescent categories have been identified as having the potential to get out of poverty and subsequently highlight their existing talents to generate their income through their knowledge and hidden talents in the future. For the adult female category, there is no problem, because they also have their community leader and can continue their learning sessions at the surau besides in their community they also have their takmir teachers to teach the Orang Asli community. For children and adolescents, their talents can be highlighted and they can receive wages or allowances provided by the surau there (Shamsol, 2024).

It can be summarized here, that although some of the participants use the method of immersing themselves in the work scene even if they are just working in the village, on average some do not work and become housewives. Therefore, the approach adopted in this program is to open up space for participants to hone their talents to fill in knowledge not only for life guidance but also to generate income in the future by becoming instructors from among themselves. This is because the average participant in this program has talent, but it is hidden due to the inferiority complex that is still thickened.

Challenges faced by participants in continuing the education development program and their solution methods

According to Cohen and Uphoff (1977), *participation* is an important element, especially for the Orang Asli community so that this community feels involved in every process without feeling isolated. Throughout the 12 joint study sessions with the Kg Pabai Orang Asli participants, the dominant challenge was to ensure that the need for community involvement remained until the end of the session. This is because there are participants who are unable to commit to attending every week due to financial constraints as well as employment and employer instructions.

The next challenge was the physical constraints of the aging participants. This is because of the 20 participants, 10 of them are elderly mothers and some are elderly. For the elderly or the elderly, their involvement is slightly disrupted due to health factors that do not allow it. However, the participants in this category showed great interest in the organization of this program by proving through good attendance, commitment to sit in front of the class, diligence in asking questions during learning sessions, and being ready to be guided.

The constraint of lack of self-confidence is also one of the challenges for this program. According to Ifdil, Emria, and Zofla (2018), self-confidence is important, especially in student development. Self-confidence is an inherent feeling where it can produce the will to move forward, know the level of self-ability, and express positive success. It also affects positive physical formation. Among the examples of behaviors shown by participants regarding this lack of self-confidence are shyness to try, difficulty in providing views and ideas, and reluctance to ask questions.

However, as a result of our observation as researchers and teachers, one of the solutions to face this challenge is to provide weekly attendance allowances to participants as a booster for them to attend classes and also as a *top-up* of their income because they are unable to work on that day due to being present in this learning program. In addition, for the elderly or the elderly who are unable to sit on the floor during learning sessions, we provide the facility of a chair with a desk to make it easier for them to read and write.

In addition, we also reward any potential participant, who gives the right answer and is brave to come forward. We also try to always be close to them so that no gap makes them feel shy, inferior, and unconfident.

The problem of poverty is not a foreign polemic, especially in touching matters related to the social development of the community. If referring to past efforts, many collaborations and energy ties have been implemented by the government and non-government in eradicating this poverty issue. However, the issue of poverty remains a national polemic despite many efforts that have been planned and implemented by the authorities. At the same time, the issue of poverty is also often used as a cause or constraint in every social development plan. This is based on the poverty factor, which is one of the factors that is often left aside in describing the issue of poverty (Brown 2007; Rogers 1992).

According to Chamhuri Siwar (2009), the issue of poverty and education is closely related to increasing competitiveness at the global and local levels as well as improving the quality of life. The role of education is very important, especially in impacting the acquisition of higher opportunities and reducing the income inequality gap in the current society. It is expected that the implementation of the program, especially in the education cluster, will be able to have a significant impact on the issue of community poverty, especially involving the Temuan Indigenous community in Rembau.

This has been proven through the implementation of the People's Wellbeing Development Scheme which has been implemented by the Malaysian government in generating income focused on education, training, and skills programs. In addition, the element of poverty has been made a key element in eradicating poverty through the implementation of the ASEAN Six-Year Work Plan. Therefore, through these proofs and recommendations, it will be a strong assumption in reducing this polemic. The collaborative effort, which is carried out by the educators of Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia and assisted by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - Parliamentary Cross-Party Group (APPGM), is expected to have a special impact on the selected communities.

The joint implementation of this development project has selected the Orang Asli community in Rembau district as a participant in achieving the aspiration to increase educational resources in the community in need. The main objective of the implementation of this project is to focus on the development of education at the basic level, namely from a religious point of view (focusing on the knowledge of fardu Ain and reciting) and the 3M learning angle (Reading, Writing, and Counting in English). The results of the implementation of this project are expected to be a starting point, especially in creating an educated society at the basic level comprehensively.

Strength in Running Education Development Programs

Islam strongly encourages its people to demand, spread, and glorify knowledge. The proof is that the descent of the first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH through verses 1-5 of surah al-Alaq obliges the pursuit of knowledge (Aemy Aziz et.al. 2021). There are two divisions of knowledge in Islam; iImu fardhu Ain (the basics of faith, shariah, morals, and the basics of the Quran) and the knowledge of fardhu kifayah (current knowledge consisting of various skill fields (Yuri Indri Yani, Hakmi Wahyudi & Mhd. Rafi'i Ma'arif Tarigan, 2020) which starts from mastery in the basic skills of 3M; reading, writing and arithmetic. Human mastery in both branches of knowledge regardless of ancestry including Indigenous people will make them a strong and civilized nation (Mahani binti Othman & Awang Azimin bin A.Rahman, 2019). On the contrary, the failure to master it makes them live in ignorance and debasement.

Based on a study conducted by (Ain Nathasha Omar et. al. 2017) on the teaching module for converts at the Perkim Islamic Da'wah Institute, it was found that the teaching module applied in the study syllabus for converts was not comprehensive. Instead, it is only focused on faith-based studies (Azman Ab Rahman et. al 2020). Therefore, the researcher suggested that the content of the teaching modules used for converts, including among the Orang Asli, must cover all aspects of basic education that should be given to them. Meanwhile, the implementation of the teaching process must be carried out continuously and systematically.

In fact, from the beginning, the implementation of the SDGs project together with the indigenous community faced various challenges; among them were the constraints of getting participants to meet the set targets, the commitment of participants in each class session until the end, the distance of the project site that was quite far from the teachers' residences, the constraints on the time of the lecturers with their actual tasks, and the lack of basic infrastructure. However, due to the spirit of jihad and high commitment (https://www.islam.gov.my/images/ePenerbitan/jihad_dan_konsepnya.pdf) all these challenges were successfully overcome and the implementation of the program went well as planned with slight changes based on current development factors. The fighting spirit to bring the indigenous community out of the shackles of ignorance of the basic knowledge as a Muslim and the mastery of 3M as the basis for building self-confidence to be born as human beings and a civilized society is an injection of enthusiasm for the research group to overcome all existing obstacles (Amini Amir Abdullah, 2014), but instead consider all of them as an opportunity to contribute to the community in line with the goals of policy implementation SDGs (Aji, S. P., & Kartono, D. T., 2022).

APPGM-SDG Involvement in the Science Education Development Program

According to the United Nations, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a global collective plan to end extreme poverty, reduce inequality, and protect the planet by 2030 (Aji, S. P., & Kartono, D. T. (2022). The SDGs are an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims to drive a more forward-looking future. This agenda is intended to address global problems, such as poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, and justice (Aji, S. P., & Kartono, D. T. (2022). In addition, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a world program that aims to prosper communities and preserve nature (Mas, S. R., Suking, A., & Haris, I. (2021). This includes the welfare of society from the aspect of science where the role of the SDGs in bringing society to a better and perfect life.

In this SDG-funded program, which is registered as APPGM-SDG (NO. Y23-SP209), P131 Rembau, Negeri Sembilan aims to create a community of indigenous people who are knowledgeable covering Fardhu Ain and Fardhu Kifayah. Geographical factors and constraints of life that are difficult to overcome are not just the enthusiasm and commitment shown in this program, but they are overcome by taking the initiative to work even if it is just village work such as rubber menorah, collecting forest products, and others. In this program, they are also absorbed and polished talents from among them who can help their community by guiding the knowledge gained to their community. For example, in this program, researchers have identified one of the participants who is talented enough to re-teach the knowledge that the instructors have poured into their friends. This level can be expanded until one day they will be able to generate their income by creating tuition classes for their group. This is what the instructors always emphasize to them every learning session.

The Role and Initiative of All Parties in the Orang Asli Community

Government (Ministry of Education, MOE)

The Orang Asli community is one of the indigenous tribes in Peninsular Malaysia where the majority live in rural areas and are still lagging in the country's development. Various programmes have been implemented by the agency on this community including education, training and skills programs, health, income generation, infrastructure, and social facilities, but the quality of life of this community is still low when compared to other communities in Malaysia. (Manaf, N. A., & ABDULLAH, R. (2021). Therefore, it is very appropriate that this community is not marginalized and neglected.

The government through the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) has formulated various holistic approaches to help increase the mastery of the Orang Asli in terms of learning. This approach does not apply to Indigenous children but also covers Indigenous parents. Among the programs that took place was the implementation of the Orang Asli and Penan Parents Adult Class (KEDAP) initiative as

an effort to overcome the problem of dropouts. Through this program, the MOE will strengthen activities and approaches so that the goal of reducing illiteracy among the Orang Asli community will be reduced. Among the activities carried out is providing 3M learning classes to Orang Asli parents intending to help with their children's academic assignments at home (Berita Harian Online, 31 December 2022).

Apart from the KEDAP program, the Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA) has also conducted the Orang Asli Functional Literacy Programme (PLFOA) targeting Adults, Youth – Youth, and Adolescents who have dropped out of Formal Education (Adminit, 2022). The PLFOA program implemented in 2019 has benefited the Orang Asli community to get out of illiteracy. This is because the main objective of PLFOA is to eradicate illiteracy to increase literacy levels targeting rural and rural areas through 3M (Reading, Writing, Counting) towards improving the quality of life of the community. The program, which lasted four hours a day for 23 days, was a collaborative program between JAKOA and KEMAS kindergarten teachers as teaching staff. Meanwhile, the teaching module based on the 3M method, namely reading, writing, and arithmetic, is also an effort by Jakoa in collaboration with Kemas to improve the quality of life of the Orang Asli community.

The MOE has also identified the Malaysia Development Plan (2013-2025) which emphasizes the aspect of curriculum transformation, namely the teaching and learning quality level (PnP) in Malaysia to be on par with developed countries (MOE, 2021a). Through this plan, the MOE has taken steps to create a national education system based on five main aspirational characteristics, namely access, quality, equity, unity, and efficiency.

Based on the government's efforts, there is no doubt that the Orang Asli community is not spared from receiving strong support from the government and the surrounding community so that there will be no dropouts, especially in the aspects of 3M education, fardhu ain and reciting. Various activities and approaches are carried out periodically so that the Orang Asli community continues to receive direct education which not only focuses on the education of children but also covers the education of their mothers and fathers.

Civil Society

Apart from the MOE's efforts in improving the quality of learning for the Orang Asli community, a holistic effort has been implemented by the combination of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and CIMB Islamic by establishing the UKM Education Centre- CIMB Islamic with the theme 'School to Community'. Positive achievements can be seen following the establishment of this community education center, both in terms of increasing the number of students enrolled and achieving literacy proficiency in 3M (reading, counting, and writing). As a result, this center has succeeded in opening hearts and attracting parents and Orang Asli children to mainstream schools (Rokiah Omar et al, 2020).

In addition, to help the literacy foundation of Orang Asli children, UPSI has improved the PdP element by providing the Development of the DH3M Learning Kit (Didik Hibur Reading, Writing & Arithmetic). Teachers are provided with QR Code technology for several simulation videos as a more interactive learning guide. The DH3M kit has succeeded in making the learning atmosphere more interesting and relaxing. At the same time, the goals of 3M studies can be implemented (Abdul Halim Masnan et al, 2021).

Continuous Support for the Orang Asli Community Converts: From Zero To Hero

The Ministry of Economy through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) program proposes 17 main thrusts (Ministry of Economy, 2024) aimed at ensuring well-being and happiness by 2030. Therefore, in supporting change and mobilizing Indigenous communities to build resilient communities, four SDG goals have been adopted, namely Thrust 4: Ensuring quality education, Thrust

10: Reducing inequality among communities, Thrust 16: Creating peaceful, just, and sustainable institutions at all levels and Thrust 17: Strengthening and intensifying Global Cooperation for sustainable development.

Therefore, the selection of this core is appropriate to help educate the Orang Asli to preserve 3M and at the same time educate them in preparation to become a facilitator for the local community who specialize in 3M, the basics of obligatory ain and reciting as well as ensuring the sustainability of activities that do not stop at the SDG session. This program can be continued through efforts such as supplying appropriate basic books, sessions focusing on potential participants to become instructors, improving surau facilities as a comfortable learning center, and through the role of JHEOA Rembau, surau imams, and District Islamic Religious Officers themselves.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, in supporting change and mobilizing the Indigenous community towards building a resilient community, especially in the aspects of knowledge generation and empowerment, namely 3M education (Reading, writing, Arithmetic), the basics of recitation, and the basics of obligatory ain, several proposals can be considered:

1. Integrated education programs can be implemented through the provision of holistic and integrated educational programs that not only focus on academic aspects but also on religious aspects. The program can include both formal and informal learning sessions, as well as engage local communities and local religious leaders.
2. Community engagement is a program that actively engages the Indigenous community in planning, implementing, and evaluating educational programs. This includes involving parents, adults, traditional leaders, and religious leaders in the learning and teaching process.
3. Through mentorship and guidance, this sustainability can be continued to help the Indigenous community in the development of reading, writing, arithmetic skills, basic recitations, and the basics of obligatory ain. This can involve volunteers from the local community or qualified outsiders.
4. As technology is an affordable device for today's people, the provision of technological educational resources can support access to quality educational materials, including mobile apps, online learning platforms, and interactive software. This can improve the accessibility of education in rural areas as well as enable children of the Orang Asli community to learn independently.
5. Provide training and professional development to teachers, preachers, and volunteers involved in the education of indigenous communities. This training should include teaching skills, understanding of indigenous cultures, and learning approaches that are appropriate to their context.
6. Organise a program to raise awareness on the importance of 3M education, the basics of learning, and the basics of fardhu ain as the main agenda for the development of resilient Orang Asli. The program can involve promotional campaigns, talks, educational fairs, and other community activities aimed at raising awareness and support for education
7. Collaborate with government agencies non-governmental agencies (NGOs), and the private sector with experience and resources to support the development of education for indigenous communities. This includes leveraging funds, technical assistance, and human resources to improve access and quality of education among indigenous peoples.

Through these efforts, it is hoped that the Indigenous community can be given adequate support in building a resilient community, especially in the field of education which is the foundation of holistic human development.

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