

A Preliminary Findings of Urban Poor Malay Households Livelihood Strategies in Klang Valley, Malaysia

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Abstract

Many urban poor face hardships living in the megacities. Urban livelihood differs from rural livelihood in many aspects. The context that poor people live in has exerted pressures for the poor people. Developing countries like Malaysia do experience rapid urbanization at the expense of the urban poor people's livelihood. This main aim of the study was to discover the urban poor Malay household livelihood strategy, the majority of the ethnic group in Malaysia who suffers from the urbanization of poverty. The study adopted a qualitative case study design and was carried out in Klang Valley. A total of six (6) key informants were involved in the preliminary study. The data was analysed using thematic analysis and assisted by the NVivo 12 software. The preliminary findings were analysed based on the 5 main livelihood assets; financial, social, human, physical and natural capital. The findings had shown the main themes were diversifying incomes, health conditions, upskilling, accessibility to public services and basic amenities, social network support and practice urban agriculture determined how the urban poor Malay households managed their livelihood in the cities. Therefore, this study concludes that it is important to address the urban poor Malay households' strategies from the people-centred approach or perspectives of the urban poor. Undoubtedly, this remains a significant approach in the Malaysia government's poverty eradication policy and programmes.

Keywords: Livelihood, Urban Poor Malay, Livelihood Strategies, Sustainable Livelihood Approach

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Urban poverty is a significant phenomenon in contemporary society. Rapid industrialization was undertaken in most of the developing countries in the early 1950s and recorded exponential growth since. The adaptation of the economic model to improve the country's profit-making invited expeditious urbanization to cater to the influx of migrants into the city centre. The UN had projected that 90% of the total population in Asia and Africa would be urbanized in 2050 (Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations, 2018). Little do they know that urbanization raises multiple issues to the newly created complex society of the city (Manaf & Ibrahim, 2017; Siwar, Ahmed, Bashawir, & Mia, 2016). Some of the disputes are the question of social stratification, access to health and resources, crime, education, and more. Interestingly, urban poverty is the by-product of these dilemmas (Mohd Fadzil & Ishak, 2009).

In Malaysia, the urban poverty rate had decreased from 21.3 percent in 1970 to 3.8 percent in 2019 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011; 2020). On the same note, the National Poverty Data Bank, eKasih, reported there is an alarming number of Malays falling under the urban poor category. In this context, the Malays are the majority of the country and realizing this occurrence, an abundance of social assistance has been provided by the government to uplift their standard of living (Economic Planning Unit, 2004). The World Bank (2020) research identified that the urban population incomes are insufficient to meet their end needs, which is further implicated by inflation, inadequate affordable housing, low income and lack of skills. Hence, it is important a study be carried out to explore the livelihood strategies of the urban Malay poor in Malaysia.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Livelihood strategies adopted by the poor community are very significant in the study of people-centered approach of poverty eradication (Rakodi & Lloyd-Jones, 2002). Globally, many developmental studies had adopted the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) for analysing the livelihood or household strategies of the poor households (Morse & McNamara, 2013). Nevertheless, many of these studies were carried out mainly on the livelihood among the rural community households (Woyesa & Kumar, 2020; Deng, Li, & Zhang, 2020). Similarly, in Malaysia context, most of the SLA studies were adapted for examining the livelihood strategies among rural communities (Azhar & Mohd, 2020; Yusmah et al., 2020; Siwar, Ahmed, & Idris, 2013; Sulaiman & Masud, 2012; Sulaiman et al., 2011; Ibrahim et al., 2018). Yet, very limited studies have explored the livelihoods strategies among the urban poor households who lived in metropolitan cities and in particular among the urban Malays ethnic; who formed the majority of poor groups in Malaysia (Azhar & Mohd, 2020). Hence, the main objective of the study was to explore and uncover the livelihood strategies adopted by the urban poor Malay households who live in Klang Valley through the lens of the SLA. In particular this study aims to uncover how the urban poor Malay household survived their livelihood in the hustle and bustle of metropolitan cities in Malaysia.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 *Overview of urban poverty in Malaysia*

Economic growth is vital for any country that will help in improving the lives of the people. Most importantly is with the growth, the government must make sure that all members of the society share in the benefits of that growth (Global Monitoring Report, 2015). In

Malaysia the government has spent millions of ringgit to ensure the poor which include the urban poor have sets of skills (Leng, Samsurijan, Gopal, Malek & Hamat, 2018). Massive rural urban-migration due to high industrialization and rapid urbanisation has caused urban poverty. It means, poverty is not limited to rural areas as it extends to the urban areas as well. There are five key dimensions of poverty which include income, health, education, security and empowerment exist in the urban context. In understanding the context of urban poverty, one needs to digest the three characteristics of urban life such as commoditization, environmental hazard and social fragmentation (Global Monitoring Report, 2015; Baharoglu & Kessides 2001; Moser, Gatehouse & Garcia, 1996). These three characteristics have much related to poverty and vulnerability in the urban context. Therefore, it is important to analyse urban poverty in the context of multiple dimensions of poverty and vulnerability specifically linked to the aspect of asset ownership. Dimensions such as income poverty shows that people are depending on cash for all kinds of purchases including the essential buying for goods and services. If the labor markets are limited (in this case labor is considered as an asset) thus they become vulnerable. The prolonged vulnerability may lead to urban poverty. Assessing urban poverty nationwide is necessary to ascertain the overall level of poverty, as well as to understand differences in poverty trends within regions and within urban areas. Identifying such locational variations helps the government in focusing and enhancing the relevant policy, allocating budget interventions on the cities or regions suffering the greatest levels of deprivation.

3.2 *The urban poor Malay*

Poverty issues among Malays are not new. Towards the independence in 1957, the colonial legacy had left Malaysia with an inequality impact among ethnics. As we know that the Malays are the majority ethnic and seen as the poorest ethnic in Malaysia (Ravallion, 2019). This is related to the fact that most of them live in the area that is lacking in development. In 1970, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced to minimize ethnic inequality. This national policy that has been highlighted in RMK-2 (Government of Malaysia, 1971) has enlisted two main agenda that focus to strengthen the national unity as well as to reduce poverty. During that time, the Bumiputera that refers to the Malay or the other origin people, has received various opportunities in terms of education, housing, public sector employment and corporate partnership ownership. This policy had continued to serve the public for almost 20 years. The big impact that has been received from the policy resulted in a huge migration of Malays to the city to grab the jobs and businesses opportunities however, it created a new challenge, which is urban poverty and slums areas. This includes the unpreparedness of the migrated community to face the challenges in parallel to the dynamic of urban life development. Due to those barriers, these people are often seen as weak and incapable of achieving the target that has been planned by the government.

After NEP, National Development Policy (NDP) had been introduced in 1991 and its main aim still continued with some of NEP main agendas remaining in the policy and one of them was to eliminate the poverty rate among the Malays (Lee & Chew-Ging, 2017). Most of the studies showed that the difficulties in handling the issue is on how to get them out of this cycle since they have a very low level of education (Dennison, 2016). Normally, this group of people is unable to monitor their children's education because they themselves would have to struggle to do multiple works at a time in order to sustain their urban life. It also appears that children are not paying enough attention in their learning due to the unfriendly environment that they are living in that eventually leads them to be among those who are in the low-wage category sector that has been controlled largely by the foreign workers (Ridzuan & Idris, 2018).

In 2010, Najib Tun Razak the former Prime Minister had introduced the New Economic Model (NEM) in order to increase the productivity of the workers in achieving the target to be one of the high-income countries. With all the policies and programs that have been initiated by the government, there are many vulnerable people in the urban area who still seem to lag behind. The World Bank has classified Malaysia as a high urbanization country with 75 percent which is equivalent to 24.1 million people living in urban areas (Iskandar, 2018). However, most of its urban population in the country are still categorized as poor. Moving forward based on the 12th Malaysian Plan (2021-2025) that tabled in 2021, the initiatives still need to be focused on the interest of Bumiputera since they are the largest ethnic and as the origin of the country it is important to make sure that they are equally treated. Be that as it may, Malaysia has further divided the community based on their income level to give more attention especially to the B40 up to the B10 group to ensure that the aids reach to the targeted population in the country (Bernama, 2020).

3.3 *The livelihood assets of the urban poor households in Malaysian context*

Livelihood concept consists of capabilities, assets and capabilities for a means of living (Chambers & Conway, 1992). Meanwhile, Maas (2015) looks at livelihood in a broader concept which covers the ability, assets (including social resources), and activities needed as a means of survival. Livelihood will turn into a sustainable livelihood when the community can overcome a destructive problem and recover from damages or even improve the ability and own assets in the present and future, by not relying on natural resources only (Maas, 2015). As the issue of urban poverty keeps arising, thus it is vital to understand how the urban poor households construct their livelihood strategies. Ibrahim, Hassan, Kamaruddin & Anuar (2018) in the opinion that asset is the most complex portfolio and consists of natural, social, human, physical and financial assets. In Malaysia, the government has implemented various policies such as Five years Malaysian Plan, Government Transformation Planning, and Economic Transformation Planning and other poverty reduction projects and also subsidies to increase the level of income households (Ibrahim et al., 2018; Nee & Mansur, 2015).

In reducing poverty, Samsudin and Kamaruddin (2013) were in an opinion that the access to natural resources such as land is essential. Without having proper natural assets like land or accessibility to water and electricity, it may lead to vulnerability. In the aspect of natural asset people in the urban areas with high income and savings may own land and thus have access to the natural resources. This is different with the setting in rural areas as some people may have inherited land from their family that they might use it for livelihood strategies.

As for social assets, the element of social relations and interactions are important as mixing around in the community may help a person to increase their level of capability. Samsudin and Kamaruddin (2013) point out that social assets are important for a community to generate prosperity and sustainable development. The involvement in community activities may open chances for urban poor households to cope with livelihood strategies. The situation reflects the economic role of education in a household where a low level of education may be associated with poverty (Samsudin & Kamaruddin, 2013). Looking at this situation like having a basic education achievement and accompanied with certain illness, it is a big challenge especially to urban poor households. The importance of having a sound education is echoed through Leng et al. (2018) whereby their study showed that urban poor households are very determined in ensuring their children have a high education as a prerequisite to withstand the vulnerability and may face fast recovery from poverty.

The high quality of human resources normally leads to high productivity. High

productivity can be assumed to lower the risk of poverty and being able in coping with livelihood strategies. [Bennett \(2010\)](#) defines human assets are very much related to knowledge, manpower, ability and good health. A person with good health is able to meet the current requirements needed to fulfil the employment. With the added value such as skillful, creative and hard work this can assist a person and his or her family in coping with difficulties such as poverty. In Malaysia education plans are clearly structured whereby many children are being sent to school as they are being increasingly considered as the future human resources for the development of the country and their family. With a sound education background, it is easier to secure a job and have some income to support the family. It is very important to understand that a household that is not income-poor in the current period still faces the risk of falling below the poverty line in the event of shocks such as illness or death of the principal bread winner, crop failure, rising food prices, and so on. The likelihood of a household falling into the poverty trap is referred to as vulnerability to poverty ([Dey, 2018](#)).

Physical asset is another important portfolio. [Ibrahim et al. \(2018\)](#) defined physical assets as the required accessibilities facilities needed by households or individuals like transportation, good facility, proper housing, safe drinking water, and accessibility to medical facilities, market and schools. Housing issues for the urban poor are a continuous problem ([Ramlan & Zahari, 2016](#)), especially the issue of lack of affordable housing for low to middle-income communities in the urban areas. The effort of owning a house, one of the necessary goods which are facing great depletion. Due to this limitation, many urban poor households are willing to share rent, although it is uncomfortable. Some are hoping for rent subsidies or assistance ([Turner et al., 2009](#)) for low-cost homes. Besides, transportation plays a huge role for people in urban areas, as many people commute to their office using public transport. Affordable transport fares mean a lot to poor urban households to ease their travel, whether to their workplace, sending kids to school and others. In this era of technology, accessibility to technologies may also lead to a certain level of vulnerability as technology can help in raising income. Without this asset, this may lead to a slow recovery or being left behind due to incomplete information received.

Financial assets denote the financial resources that people use to achieve livelihood objectives. Various types of government interventions, such as subsidies and other direct transfer payments have been implemented to assist their living standards. [Leng et al. \(2018\)](#), in their findings for urban poverty based on multi-ethnic perspectives, concluded that financial assistance or aid (such as AIMS, FAMA) does play a significant role in coping with livelihood strategies as financial aid can help them in alleviating poverty. Prudent in daily expenditure is also another critical aspect of urban poor households and personal attributes such as a person's attitude is vital in poverty alleviation strategy in urban areas ([Leng et al., 2018](#)). This is not difficult to understand as the environment in urban areas is dissimilar with rural areas. The fast-paced lives, competition, high cost of living requires a person to have a mental- strength, and able to grab the opportunities provided by the authorities and most important is hard-working, disciplined, perseverance and self-determination are essential urban poverty alleviation strategies.

Understanding the current situation of livelihood strategies of the urban poor households by looking at the five livelihood assets owned by the urban poor are very crucial for the government (federal, state and local authorities) in providing appropriate assistance and perhaps reform the related socioeconomic policies.

3.4 Theories related to the study

Two underlying theories related to the study are the Critical Approach by [Neubeck \(1986\)](#) and the Culture of Poverty by [Lewis \(1959\)](#). According to [Neubeck \(1986\)](#), social problems arise from the gap between the ideal societal states against the current societal status

quo. Thus, the gaps, in reality, are stark inequalities that are seen as problematic rooted in the societal structure. The situation happens as the dominant group exert their values upon those less powerful (Neubeck & Glasberg, 1995). It forces vulnerable people to adapt to these dominant group values imposed, which influences their choice of livelihood strategies. The theory also highlights that the societal problem of urban poverty is due to the inability of people to reach the standards of socioeconomic wellbeing similar to the rest of the population. However, their aspirations are still the same as those in the city (Benassi & Morlicchio, 2019). Hence, the urban poor would adapt themselves to cope with urban livelihoods.

In the urban poor livelihood context, the urban poor has a culture of poverty where they adapt to their marginalized conditions from generation to generation (Lewis, 1959). They do recuperate, but due to the improbability of achieving their aspirations, it makes them feel helpless (Lewis, 1959). Thus, the urban poor is influenced by the culture of poverty, which causes them to adopt livelihood strategies that continue to trap them in the poverty cycle. These livelihood strategies include their social relationships as valuable assets such as providing consultation, money, skills, information and goods (Lubbers, Small, García, 2020). Nevertheless, sometimes the urban poor ignores regulations by local authorities, which are deemed preventing them from generating income, such as illegally occupying the land (Majale, 2002). Thus, the government should recognize the prevailing socioeconomic realities of the urban poor and address the societal structures that adversely affect their livelihoods.

3.5 Conceptual framework of the study

The Sustainable Livelihood Approach is a tool to enhance the comprehension of livelihoods of the poor in which are reflected upon to improve poverty reduction strategies (Uddin, 2020). The Sustainable Livelihood Approach was adopted and adapted in the study. The conceptual framework is portrayed in Figure 1.

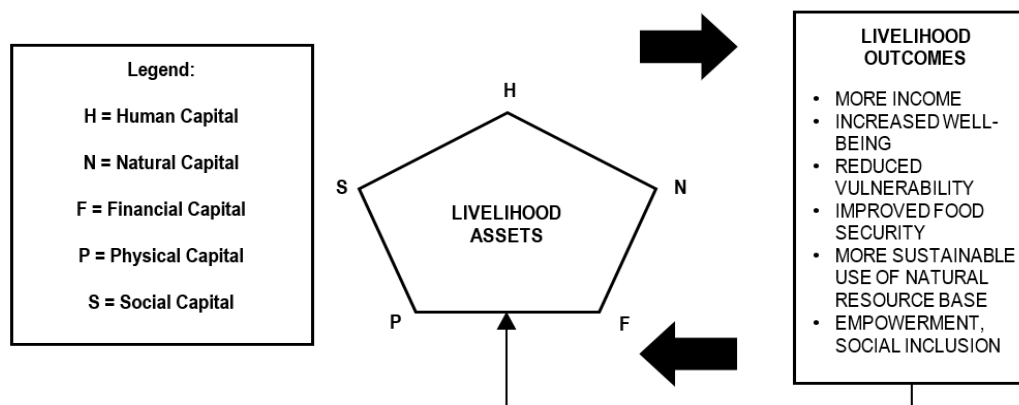


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

(Source: Adopted and Adapted from Department for International Development, 1999)

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 describes that the urban poor livelihood assets are managed to form livelihood strategies in determining the livelihood outcomes (Uddin, 2020 & Department for International Development, 1999). The livelihood assets are human, natural, financial, physical and social capital. Ahmad, Siwar & Idris (2011) define these assets as; natural capital is the practice of urban agriculture and utilisation of natural resources such as rivers for livelihoods such as washing, drinking, poultry and fishing. Human capital is the capacity to work as labor, having sets of skills, knowledge and good health. In modern worldwide economics, a proper definition of human capital is provided by Fitz-Enz (2009) as traits an individual brings to the job, which are; intelligence, positive attitude, reliability and

commitment, fulfilling work energy, ability to learn and imagination with creativity (Fareed, Noor, Isa, Shahzad, & Laeeq, 2016). Human capital is viewed as one of the organizational resource, which eventually enhances values and delivers effectiveness which leads to the organizational success (Fareed, Noor, Isa, & Salleh, 2016). Financial capital is the components of capital base, such as cash, credit/debt, savings, and other economic assets and social capital are the social resources (networks, social claims, social relations, affiliations, associations) for reciprocity, trust and source of information. Lastly, physical capital is the economic and social infrastructure that includes buildings, roads, public amenities, public transportation, production equipment and technologies, livestock and housing.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research design

The research is mainly grounded within a social constructionist philosophical position or interpretivism. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the Interpretive Epistemological perspective assumes that reality is socially constructed. This research aims to indulge in the emic approach rather than the etic approach (Creswell, 2007). This study employed a qualitative case study design as it provides in-depth description of exploring the individual's poor household to share their life stories.

4.2 Subject of study

The participants of the study were the urban poor Malays households who lived in major cities in Klang Valley, mainly in Petaling District of Selangor and Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur. The participants were selected based on the eKasih database provided by the Implementation Coordination Unit (ICU) of Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur and Implementation Coordination Unit (ICU) of Selangor. eKasih is a Malaysia national poverty data bank under the National Poverty Data Bank System and developed in-house by ICU, under the Prime Ministers Department in January 2008 (<https://www.malaysia.gov.my/portal/content/30681>). The profile of the key informants is listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *The profile of the key informants:*

Respondent Code	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Working Status	Household Structure	Number of Household members
R1	Female	50	Widowed	Working Full-time	Extended Family	3
R2	Female	75	Widowed	Not working	Female-centered family	1
R3	Male	55	Married	Working Full-time	Nuclear Family	7
R4	Female	53	Divorced	Working Part-time	Extended Family	3
R5	Male	43	Married	Working Full-time	Nuclear Family	6
R6	Male	56	Divorced	Working Part-time	Male-centered Family	1

The six key informants of the study consist of three females and three males. They are represented by respondent code R1, R2, R3, R4, R4, R5 and R6. R1 is a widowed woman aged 50 who is working full time selling food and lives with her two grandchildren. R2 is also a widowed woman aged 75 who is too frail to work and lives alone. Moreover, R3 is a 55-year-

old married man working full time as a food caterer and lives with his wife and five children. R4 is a divorced 53-year-old woman who works part-time and lives with her son and granddaughter. R5 is a 43-year-old married man working full time as a helper at the wet market and lives with his wife and four children. R6 is a divorced 56-year-old man who works part-time as a construction worker with heart disease and lives alone.

4.3 Sampling Technique

This study adopted a purposeful sampling technique to select its key informants. The type of purposeful sampling adopted is maximum variation sampling that would involve identifying and seeking out those who represent the widest possible range of the characteristics for the study (Merriam, 2009). A total of four to eight of the total participants were targeted for the preliminary studies. However, a total of six participants were involved in this preliminary study.

4.4 Research instrument

The main research instrument of the study was an in-depth interview. An in-depth interview was chosen as it was an appropriate method to explore the depth of the informant's views, lived experiences and life stories (Merriam, 2009). Moreover, the in-depth interview allowed the researchers to probe further into the informants' answers.

4.5 Data collection procedures

The data were collected through a semi-structured interview. A list of open-ended questions was developed and validated by experts. A semi-structured interview is an interview guide that consists of open-ended and less structured interview questions. All questions were used flexibly or no predetermined order of question to gauge answer from the informants (Merriam, 2009 & Creswell, 2009). An interview protocol was developed, and the interviews were recorded, and later they were transcribed verbatim for the use of data analysis.

4.6 Data analysis

This study adopted a thematic technique for analyzing the interview transcripts. The analysis process involved three main stages, namely a) descriptive coding, b) interpretative coding, and c) thematic analysis coding (King and Horrocks, 2010). In order to ensure rigor analysis, computer software NVivo 12 was used to assist the data management.

5. FINDINGS

The findings of the study have revealed interesting livelihood strategies adopted by the urban poor Malay households. The results of the study are presented based on the thematic analysis based on the five livelihood assets; the financial, human, social, physical, and natural capital. The summary of the themes is described in NVivo Project map in [Figure 2](#) below:

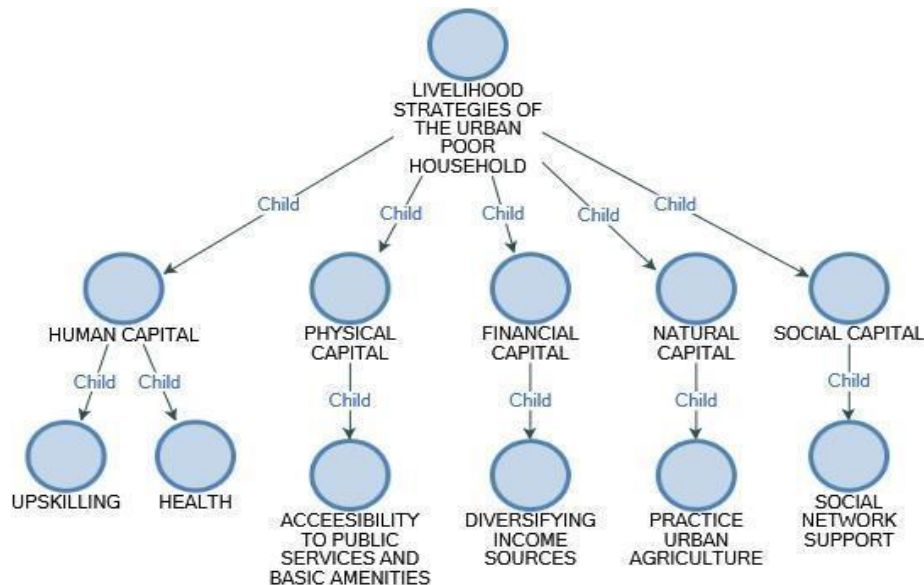


Fig. 2. Main themes of the Livelihood strategies of urban poor Malay households

5.1 Financial capital

Theme: Diversifying sources of income

The findings of the study had revealed that the participants faced financial hardship living in the high cost of living cities in Klang Valley. All of the participants said they had experienced insufficient income. Several of them mentioned that they had to work very hard to increase their income by diversifying their income sources by engaging in odd jobs and working longer hours. Among the odd jobs, they did include painting houses, fixing air conditioning, fixing roofs, fixing cars and motors as well as nannying. One participant stated, "...I'm nannying children, so there is extra income" (R5); "I paint (houses) as part-time on the weekends" (R4). The poor urban struggles in working long hours, especially for young girls traveling alone at night as a respondent claimed, "My daughter walked from home and became sick for three days saying she saw a mysterious figure." These extended hours are spent for meager income as a respondent claimed, "I start working at 12 midnight ... until 12 in the afternoon... I earn around RM80-RM100 a day, if I work hard and based on my capacity" (R5).

Another participant expressed that their livelihoods were just enough to meet their ends. One participant describes this, she said, "only sufficient to eat, but I wouldn't say eating anything luxurious" (R1) or in the Malay's proverb it says, "*Kais pagi makan pagi, kais petang makan petang*" which means earnings are just enough for their livelihoods only.

5.2 Human capital

Theme: Health conditions

Health is a vital asset for the urban poor to survive in the city. A few participants have adverse health conditions rendering them vulnerable such as asthma, heart disease and knee pains that hinder them from working as a participant claims, "I used to work constructing houses. But I can no longer work there because I get breathless...I don't have the courage to walk far because of my heart disease" (R6). This is prevalent for the ageing urban poor who are too frail to walk and solely depend on government aid and their children to care for them as a participant claimed, "Us old folks can no longer walk, we no longer have the strength...my children buys me food...or else I don't eat"(R2).

Theme: Upskilling

The findings also revealed that upskilling was pertinent to the livelihood of the participants. A few participants felt that equipping themselves with additional skills would expand their capabilities for better livelihoods. The participants were mainly self-employed, worked in informal sectors as laborers in the wet markets, construction workers and doing odd jobs. Most of the participants were concerned that acquiring necessary domestic skills would support them in sustaining their means of living. Skills including sewing, cooking, house painting, fixing the air condition, fixing cars and motors were valuable that could be turned into a business and support their livelihoods. “I have been cooking and selling food as a catering service since my husband is sick” (R3); “I used to go to sewing workshops and work in a factory making laundry bags” (R4). One of the participants admitted that the government initiatives for upskilling are pertinent to their livelihoods. However, there are no opportunities presented for the urban poor to utilize these skills as a participant claimed, “I have the (sewing workshop) certificate... I have a big sewing machine... after I’ve studied, they said they will give us clothes to sew... but in the end, there isn’t even a tiny speck” (R3).

5.3 *Natural capital*

Theme: Practice urban agriculture

The urban poor rarely utilise natural capitals such as urban agriculture, owning animals and using rivers as a source of livelihoods. The urban poor live in strata spaces in which tenants cannot cultivate livestock, and there is no need to use rivers as clean water is provided in the house. However, in the context of participants, one participant illegally occupies land near the strata to set up a cabin to practice agricultural activities, cultivate chickens and prepare food for her catering business. This helps support their livelihoods as she claims, “I plant tapioca and for my children to eat” (R3). However, this illegal occupation of the Tenaga Nasional Berhad’s reserve land has stirred complaints among tenants and was reported to the local authorities for her to stop but she persisted, claiming it is a source of her livelihoods.

5.4 *Physical capital*

Theme: Accessibility to public services and basic amenities

Most of the participants expressed their livelihoods were highly dependent on the accessibility to public services and basic amenities, especially they were satisfied with their living spaces as the rent is cheap and the basic amenities available, especially for those living in the public housing in Klang Valley.

One participant stressed that the modes of transportation are essential for living in the city to get to work, buying household items and also a means to generate income. However, the urban poor often face challenges in which they are unable to pay for a license, owing to traffic summons, inability to afford a car and difficulty in reaching public transport. A participant said, “I have a motorcycle but not a license because a license is too expensive... She (her daughter) has to walk far to reach LRT and LRT is expensive. The bus is also expensive” (R1). The difficulty in reaching public transportation because it was far from their living residence and the buses were inefficient as it did not follow its schedule. Another participant said she had to pawn assets such as jewelry to buy a vehicle to get to work. “I pawned my jewelry to buy a motorcycle for my daughter to go to work” (R1).

5.5 *Social capital*

Theme: Social network support

The findings revealed that social networks with families, friends, neighbours, government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) had helped enormously to sustain the participant's urban livelihoods. For most participants, they believed that their involvement with their social network could assist them when they were in trouble. One participant said, "We received aid from zakat for a lot of electric bills due" (R5). The most vulnerable group are the ageing urban poor who are dependent on their family members to send them to clinics for health check-up and buying food. "My son takes me to see the doctor". "My son is the one that buys food" (R2).

Findings have also revealed that participating in social organisations and social activities organised by the local communities such as Jawatankuasa Ketua Kampung, NGOs and political parties helped them to sustain their livelihoods. A participant said, "My NGO (MyKasih) is really good that residents in block J are willing to send their children when MyKasih does a free tuition" (R1).

Indeed, the social network ties were significant to protect and hinder their family members from involving in illegal activities such as taking drugs. "There should be programs aimed at children to prevent doing things they shouldn't" (R5). Another participant said, "I spend a lot of time at the mosque...There's a lot of programs at the mosque" (R4). In short, good connections with neighbours and those who usually go to the mosque or prayer hall were observed. They seek out companionship and help from their social networks such as borrowing money, lending a car and sending them to a hospital. "The car that I have is a gift of sympathy from a friend" (R6). However, social networks could also cause social problems such as taking drugs as the urban poor are exposed to this kind of environment "My son takes drugs. He doesn't go out, stays with me and doesn't work. I am lucky I receive aid from zakat...It is common here to have drug problems. He goes in and out of prison as well as rehabilitation centres but it's hard to change" (R4).

The government and NGO aid such as monthly BR1M significantly help in relieving the burden of buying household expenses such as food and funding children's education. A participant expressed that the non-government agencies such as Baitulmal that help in paying monthly rent and government rebates for utility bills help the urban poor survive the high living cost in the city. "I used to receive aid from Baitulmal for monthly rent" (R6).

6. DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Urban poverty statistics in Malaysia has indeed shrunk in numbers; however, the challenges living in such a situation is a painstaking reality. Most often than not, poverty is the by-product of the failure or inadequate governance of the authority (Jaax, 2020). Due to this shortcoming, neo-liberalism had suggested a community development approach to be held at the grassroots level. Today, many NGOs, grassroots movements and even individuals have step-up to help the vulnerable community. At the systemic level, the government had an open-up opportunity for private and public partnership and tax holidays for firms that were interested in Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR), to channel their direct and indirect assistance to the poor. One of the most crucial assistance is giving training, so the poor are ready for the job market or creating their businesses. The findings have been found otherwise. Although the upskilling program remains relevant for the poor personal development, often, the program had been shunned before the maturity period. In essence, the poor are trained halfway and seldom monitored by the Project Coordinator to ensure the program objectives are materialized. Thus, training programs are one-off activities and miss the connection of practicality in the real sense.

Furthermore, the findings uncover that social structure tension and sentiments between ethnicities exist at an urban poor level, although the sentiments are latent. With such sentiments prevail, the social structure struggles had contributed to their daily hardship, with access denial to certain aids and opportunities. Consistent with the result of the study, financial inadequacy poses a higher vulnerability for the Malay urban poor to fall back into poverty. Eroğlu (2017) asserts that society usually condemned informal employment held by the poor, and they are also subject to being caught in a detrimental mentality, such as lazy, hopeless and deviant. Even so, with the financial aid by the government they received, it did not do much help (Fahlberg et al., 2020; Rahman, 2020; Zakir Hossain & Ashiq Ur Rahman, 2018). Most of the urban Malay poor suffer from financial insufficiency, and this pushes them to do extra jobs even resort to debts to support their livelihoods (Al-Shami et al., 2015; Azhar & Mohd, 2020; Yusof, Jusoh & Rokis, 2015; Ghazali, 2003). Past studies also had indicated that the B40 employees might suffer discrimination and an indecent workplace that might be affecting their physical, social and mental wellbeing (Daly et al., 2018).

Besides, the flat units that they live in are limited in space. However, space limitation did not inhibit their creativity from generating side income for the family. Families in the study had shown that utilizing unused land nearby their units could help them to generate side-incomes or personal consumption by planting vegetables, building workshops and also breeding livestock such as chickens. Although they realized it was an unlawful act, which they have repeatedly received a warning letter from the authorities, it was regarded as essential for their survival in everyday life. Such an adamant attitude adopted is consistent with the modification of action highlighted by Nnaeme et al. (2020). According to the scholars, changes in fate required strategic actions from the poor. A “developmental agent,” or the poor, should have high motivation to change their life. The motivation is translated into making strategic choices and decisions to improve their livelihoods by deceiving the structural hurdles. Consistent with Oscar Lewis’s thought, which emphasized that the mental map of the urban poor would determine their chosen strategies to sidestep the reproduction of poverty (Lewis, 1966).

From the critical analysis of the social structure, the urban poor is at the disadvantage level as they are located at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The location has positioned the poor as powerless and hopeless, which the poor voices are often silent. While at the systemic level, the elites actors who govern the social organization would maintain their status quo and decide what the best of their interests are (Neubeck & Glasberg, 1995). It is appealing that the clashes between these interests would occur, and the phenomenon of one-fits-all policies would be formed to assist the poor without making sense that the poor come in a diverse form of vulnerabilities. Thus, policies might fail in fulfilling the poor’s needs. On the same note, the critical analysis criticizes the functionalist claims that the members of society benefit from the way the society is structured and how it adjusts to their environment. In reality, the members of society live in a dynamic environment that constant change is inevitable. Government policies are generated from power struggles, rather a logical adaptation from the environment. So, systemic actors should acknowledge the livelihood strategies made by the poor by responding to environmental challenges, before formulating policies on the poor.

The study findings implicate several ways. Firstly, the Sustainable Livelihood Approach is a people-centered approach to understand what the poor want in order to improve their lives. Training projects by the government and private actors are indeed welcomed. However, the emphasis on the sustainability of the programs should be

highlighted. Change of leadership, budget revision, and instant results by private actors' requirements are among the threats of the maturity of the upskilling programs, which did not benefit the poor. Thus, the responsible ministries should provide a clear guideline of training programs such as a period of two years of monitoring by the providers after training is given, and postulate market linkages towards the human capital in which they had produced. Second, the provision of health insurance should also be enhanced, such as MySalam. In this way, all the poor are covered by an insurance scheme, even though they are in informal sectors in which lowering the burden of the government in health allocation in the long run. Thirdly, new flat unit development should also gazette multipurpose land or hall that could be rented at a lower price by the residents to help in generating their side-incomes or personal use. The residents could use the infrastructures to plant their vegetation, and activities such as sewing, cooking, and other preparation for their side-business. The local council could dictate the flat-rate according to the residents' affordability. A collaboration with the head of the public housing units is essential to establish a strong network with the poor, and the capacity building could be undertaken among the head of the residential housing to achieve this means. Finally, it is suggested for the government to have a more integrated system that captures all the assistance received by the poor. eKasih is a national poverty database that gathers all information of the recipients under the government. However, it did not apprehend the assistance from NGOs and other agencies such as religious bodies, into the system. Integration is vital in several ways. eKasih could be the one-stop-center for poor Malaysians to apply for assistance. Besides, it also perceives as a checklist of qualified assistance in which the poor have not applied. On the same note, all the service or assistance providers could review the records of the assistance received by the poor to avoid multiple contributions to the same recipients. So, eKasih database will be a complete database for the poor records without any eligible person being left out.

7. CONCLUSION

Poverty is a never-ending world story and for addressing it sustainably, it requires a people-centered approach to the Malaysian poverty eradication programs. The study aims to explore the urban poor Malay households' livelihood strategies in Klang Valley, Malaysia through the lens of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach and was supported with the Critical Approach by Kenneth Neubeck and Glasberg, and the Culture of Poverty theory by Oscar Lewis. The findings discovered the main themes of diversifying incomes, health conditions, upskilling, accessibility to public services and basic amenities, social network support and practice urban agriculture. These livelihood strategies were adopted by the key informants, are essential for the policymakers, NGOs and the grassroots movement to ensure the sustainability of the livelihood strategies of poor urban Malay. Hence, for future research, it is suggested to widen the locality of the study to view the dynamic of urban poor livelihood strategies in Malaysia. Despite that, a comparison study of urban poor between ethnicities in the country would give a holistic perspective on livelihood studies.

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