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# **The issues of poverty and participation in community development: A case study in Terengganu, Malaysia**

**Siti Munirah Mauzud**

## **Abstract**

In Malaysia, community development has been used primarily by the government as an approach to develop and empower the community, especially the economically disadvantaged population, with the main aim of addressing poverty within this group. Many community development programmes designed to address poverty have been provided for this group, but the government data shows that the relative poverty rate is still persistent (with a slight increase in recent years) despite all the programmes provided. This study explores how community development has been used as a response to address poverty in this context and the related issues of social inequalities in relation to improvement in the participants' quality of life.

This study adopted a qualitative design in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu, Malaysia and focused on a range of different community development interventions responding to poverty amongst the Bumiputera population. A total of 34 semi-structured interviews were conducted and the collected data were then systematically coded and thematically analysed. The research found that participation in community development activities affect the experiences of particular people living in poverty in a way that they remain in relative poverty despite their participation in those activities (alongside other individual approaches). The persistence in relative poverty could be maintained by the social dynamics issues embedded within implemented programmes whilst social aspects are also important and need to be taken into account in designing the community development programmes for the people. Nevertheless, it was found that through participating, the participants had improved their quality of life to some extent, especially in terms of social and emotional aspects. A model of community development that prioritises the voice of the participants (bottom-up approach) is recommended while at the same time, shifting the focus of the interventions from a deficit-based to an asset-based approach could potentially help to address the persisting relative poverty among the participants.

**The Issues of Poverty and Participation in  
Community Development:  
A Case Study in Terengganu, Malaysia**

Siti Munirah Mauzud

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology  
Durham University  
2022

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## **List of Abbreviations**

|                 |                                                         |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| AIM             | Malaysia Endeavor Trust                                 |
| B40             | Bottom 40% of the income share                          |
| DOA             | Department of Agriculture                               |
| DOSM            | Department of Statistics Malaysia                       |
| FELCRA          | Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority |
| FELDA           | Federal Land Development Authority                      |
| GDP             | Gross Domestic Product                                  |
| HDI             | Human Development Index                                 |
| HIS             | Household Income Survey                                 |
| IACD            | International Association for Community Development     |
| IMF             | International Monetary Fund                             |
| IPL             | International Poverty Line                              |
| JAKIM           | Department of Islamic Development Malaysia              |
| JAPEN           | Department of Information                               |
| JKKK            | Village Development and Security Committee              |
| JKM             | Department of Social Welfare                            |
| JPW             | Department of Women's Development                       |
| KEMAS           | Community Development Department                        |
| KKMM            | Ministry of Communications and Multimedia               |
| km <sup>2</sup> | Square Kilometres                                       |
| KPLB            | Ministry of Rural and Regional Development              |
| KPWKM           | Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development     |
| LKIM            | Fishery Development Authority of Malaysia               |
| LPPKN           | National Population and Family Development Board        |
| M40             | Middle 40% of the income share                          |
| MAIDAM          | Islamic Religious Council and Malay Customs Terengganu  |
| MCP             | Malayan Communist Party                                 |
| MARA            | People's Trust Council                                  |
| MDGs            | Millennium Development Goals                            |
| MGGI            | Malaysian Gender Gap Index                              |
| MHLG            | Ministry of Housing and Local Government                |

|                       |                                                        |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| MOA                   | Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry        |
| MOE                   | Ministry of Education                                  |
| MOHE                  | Ministry of Higher Education                           |
| MP                    | Malaysian Plan                                         |
| MPI                   | Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index                        |
| MPKK                  | Village Community Management Council                   |
| NCP                   | National Community Policy                              |
| NDP                   | National Development Policy                            |
| NEM                   | New Economic Model                                     |
| NEP                   | New Economic Policy                                    |
| NKRA                  | National Key Result Areas                              |
| NVP                   | National Vision Policy                                 |
| OECD                  | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PAR                   | Participatory Action Research                          |
| PLI                   | Poverty Line Income                                    |
| PPP                   | Purchasing Power Parity                                |
| PUNB                  | <i>Perbadanan Usahawan Nasional Bhd</i>                |
| RISDA                 | Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority     |
| SALAM                 | Salam Malaysia Foundation                              |
| SDGs                  | Sustainable Development Goals                          |
| SMEs                  | Small and medium Enterprises                           |
| T20                   | Top 20% of the income share                            |
| TEKUN <i>Nasional</i> | Economic Entrepreneurs Group Fund                      |
| UMNO                  | United Malays National Organisation                    |
| UN                    | United Nations                                         |
| YPKT                  | Terengganu Family Development Foundation               |

## **DECLARATION**

I confirm that no part of the material presented in this thesis has been previously submitted by me or any other person for a degree in this or any other university. In all cases, where it is relevant, material from the work of others has been acknowledged.

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# CHAPTER 1

## RESEARCH BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Introduction to the research

In this research, I explore issues of poverty and participation in community development among particular people within the majority Bumiputera<sup>1</sup>-Malay population living in poverty in a rural and an urban area of Terengganu, Malaysia. Through original qualitative research, this study primarily explores the research participants' participation in community development as an approach to poverty alleviation, whilst also considering whether/how this has helped to improve their wider quality of life. In the process, this thesis examines what issues have arisen for those engaged in these community development and poverty alleviation approaches at local levels and their implications for related policies. This chapter begins the thesis by introducing an overview of the poverty situation in Malaysia and a general view of global poverty in relation to participation in community development.

In setting the context for this thesis, it is helpful to begin by acknowledging that the initial background work, data collection and writing up of this thesis took place during a time of considerable change in Malaysia. The presented data and figures around the Malaysian poverty and economic-related data in this chapter and in the literature review chapters (that provided the background for this study) are in contrast to more recent data. This research started at the end of 2016, and the data collection process took place between the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018. Therefore, I used the available poverty and economic data related to the time when the study was conducted (data in 2018 or before) in the background of this thesis. However, there is more recent data at the time of this thesis being completed (end of 2021), some of which has been used in the discussion chapter instead of in the background of the thesis.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bumiputeras (sons of the soil) are native Malaysians, including Malay (the majority) and all indigenous tribes that make up 68.6% of the total Malaysian population (Abdullah et al., 2015). The word 'Bumiputera-Malay' and 'Malay' will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis as both words refer to the same ethnic group.

### **1.1.1 Poverty and participation in community development**

Poverty is recognised as a persistent global issue that affects every nation and occurs across all communities. Globally, the latest World Bank data has forecast that 8.6% of the world's population was still living in extreme poverty in 2018, with women more vulnerable to poverty than men (United Nations, 2015b; World Bank, 2018a). In Malaysia, poverty used to be an issue primarily for certain ethnicities and localities, particularly for most of the Bumiputera-Malay population from rural areas. Nowadays, however, it is a problem affecting all ethnic groups in Malaysia (Abdullah et al., 2015). The national poverty data in 2016 recorded by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) through the Poverty Line Income (PLI) measurement shows that 0.4% of the Malaysian population are in absolute poverty and 15.9% of the population are in relative poverty (Economic Planning Unit, 2018). These data show that poverty is still quite persistent, both at a national level and in relation to international data provided by the World Bank.

Efforts to fight poverty have been made at all levels. At the international level, 'A World Free of Poverty' has been the mission of international institutions such as the World Bank Group, which aims to end extreme poverty by 2030, in line with the latest United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The United Nations (UN) has been one of the main actors in monitoring and delivering development programmes specifically to fight poverty at a global level. Many international and local organisations are cooperating to create and deliver various poverty alleviation activities and projects for the poor regardless of age, sex, ethnicity or geographical location. In Malaysia, poverty has been a significant focus for the federal government, with the result that poverty eradication programmes have been infused in all development policies ever since independence (Abdullah et al., 2015). One well-known and longstanding approach to combat poverty is community development.

In most of the Commonwealth nations, community development was introduced and used by the British colonial government in the early nineteenth century as a way to implement the capitalist system (Popple, 2015) and Malaysia (previously known as



Malaya<sup>2</sup>) was no exception. Later, community development was used as an approach to combat the ‘communist<sup>3</sup> threat’ in Malaya in the early 1950s through the emergency resettlement of the population into community development villages. The approach was also used to restructure the social and economic aspects of society after the post-war period as well as for political development (Craig et al., 2008; Mayo, 2008). After independence in 1957, the Malaysian government continued to use community development as a strategy to overcome poverty and improve the quality of life of the Malaysian community through various development policies (Asnarulkhadi and Fariborz, 2009a). For example, the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) was established in 1956 aimed to eradicate poverty among the rural population through land development and relocation projects (Selvaratnam and Bee Tin, 2001).

In this regard, participation in community development is important to tackling poverty. The existing literature about the relationship between poverty, community development and participation has consistently shown that participation in community development has frequently been deployed as a vehicle to solve community problems including poverty and social exclusion (see Craig, 1998; Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan, 2012; Popple, 2006). The stated objective of participation and community development is frequently to empower the economy of the community, especially marginalised groups, to increase the quality of life of the participants and to eradicate poverty.

Behzad and Ahmad (2012) argue that participation in community development could improve the life quality of an individual because participation provides chances to learn new knowledge and skills and can also boost the confidence level of the

---

<sup>2</sup> Malaya or the Federation of Malaya (i.e. Peninsular Malaysia) was established in 1948. This was the former name of Malaysia that was used before the formation of the Federation of Malaysia (i.e. Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore) on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1963 (The Commonwealth, n.d.).

<sup>3</sup> Communists in Malaya were represented by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), established in 1930 and they had caused a threat to the people of Malaya and the British colonial government primarily during the Cold War period since 1948 until 1960 by which Malaya was put under ‘Emergency’ state within this period (Deery, 2007). The MCP’s goals were trying to free Malaya from the British colonialist (through guerrilla operations), and they had tried to create a socialist nation (but failed) after Malaya had been granted independence from British and they were labelled as Communist terrorists (Deery, 2003).

participants. However, it is also worth noting that there are also debates over whether this process has achieved the objective because there are also strong critiques of participation and community development that argue they just keep people quiet rather than fundamentally changing their circumstances (see Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Gourlay, 2015).

Despite various efforts to fight poverty, this process remains challenging due to the growing gaps in income between the poorest and the richest populations, particularly between rural and urban areas, as is happening mainly in developing countries (United Nations, 2015b). In Malaysia, income inequality not only exists between the rural and urban population, but it is also a regional problem. It is observed that the income disparities between states are persisting and have not changed much since the 1970s, especially for non-industrialised states (Abdullah et al., 2015). It is argued that the national development policies, such as the New Economic Policy (NEP), gave little attention to regional income disparities although national absolute poverty (the rate is measured through the Poverty Line Income of less than MYR 950) has been successfully reduced (Ibid.).

There are also other social inequality dimensions such as gender, social class, power and power relations issues that become hindrances to poverty alleviation strategies, including those involving participation and community development. Cooke and Kothari (2001) argue that the expression of 'power' in participation is supposed to be something that circulates among all participants rather than as something divided and owned only by certain individuals or groups. In Malaysia, for example, power-related issues exist as one of the factors in the participation process in urban planning where public participation has been manipulated in many ways by the local communities which have power (i.e. dominant group/s), with this type of inequality existing across and within communities (Dola and Mijan, 2006).

Therefore, in this research, I want to respond to the issues around poverty and participation in community development by exploring the complexities of lived experiences of some particular people living in poverty and their experiences of participation in community development as an approach to address poverty among the Bumiputera-Malay majority in a rural and an urban area of Terengganu, Malaysia. Through semi-structured interviews, I set out to identify how participation

in community development affects the experiences of these particular people. Whilst I primarily explore the experiences of these particular people living in poverty, I also investigate selected perspectives of those in particular positions of power (i.e. community leaders and agencies' stakeholders) in relation to the community development and poverty alleviation programmes, who are intervening to help change these particular people's circumstances. Before discussing the aims of this research, I will explain the motivation for the research and discuss some of the unique aspects of Malaysia and Terengganu as the location of my study, including the social, cultural and religious aspects of everyday life.

## **1.2 Motivation to the research**

My motivations to engage in this research combined academic interests with my own life experiences. Since I was a child, I have always questioned why I, my family and some of my community live in poverty and how we can live a better and more prosperous life and not see ourselves as people living in poverty anymore. I hoped to find answers to why some people in my community experienced poverty and what could be done so that they could lead more prosperous lives and, in so doing, I could make a contribution to the academic literature around poverty and community development. Born in Malaysia in the late 1980s, I have been comparatively lucky to have been living in a peaceful<sup>4</sup> and economically progressing country where the national poverty rate (absolute) is decreasing. The national rate of absolute poverty recorded in 2016 was 0.4%, compared to 37.7% forty years ago (Economic Planning Unit, 2018). This decrease in the national poverty rate is linked to the success of development policies such as the NEP (1970-1990). However, these policies have not fully solved all problems related to poverty because the rate of relative poverty is still significant, even though absolute poverty has almost been eradicated based on official measures as shown from statistics above.

I very much wanted to study the experiences of the people living in poverty in the majority Bumiputera-Malay population in Terengganu from both rural and urban

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth to note that there was a bloody race riot in 1969 involving the Malays and Chinese due to the dissatisfaction in the economic imbalances between these two ethnic groups and following that, various national economic and development policies had been drafted in addressing this issue (Zin, 2014) and this is discussed further in Chapter 3, Section 3.1.

areas and their participation in community development because the government has used this approach to fight poverty in Malaysia since independence. Many similar types of research that focused on bottom-up approaches to poverty have been conducted in relatively similar contexts in other countries, but only a few research projects on this topic have been conducted in Malaysia (Gopal and Malek, 2015). For instance, in 2004 Krishna et al. explored the approaches adopted by poor villagers in 35 villages in Rajasthan state, India, and found that social capital and the variety of income sources among the respondents helped them to break their poverty cycle (Krishna et al., 2004). From this study, I hope to have a thorough understanding of the relationship between community development and poverty among those engaged in the research who were living in poverty in Terengganu.

### 1.3 Why Malaysia? And why, Terengganu?

The uniqueness of the social, cultural and religious structures of everyday life among the Malaysian population strengthened the reasons for me to undertake this research. It is hoped that these aspects, which are discussed below, will make this research significant, especially to the academic world. Malaysia is an upper-middle-income country with an average economic growth rate of 5.5% annually between 2010 and 2017 (World Bank, 2018b). It is a relatively small country with an area of 330,345 square kilometres (km<sup>2</sup>) and had a population of 32.38 million in the year 2018 across 16 states (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018a). States in Malaysia are divided into East and West Malaysia. East Malaysia consists of only three states, and it is also known as Borneo. In contrast, West Malaysia, commonly known as Peninsular Malaysia (Malaya before independence), comprises 13 states (Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1: Malaysia map  
Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia



Figure 1.2: Terengganu map  
Source: Google Images

Specifically, this research is based in the state of Terengganu, which is located on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia (Figure 1.2). It had a total population of 1.23 million people in 2018 with an area of 12,959 km<sup>2</sup> (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018a) and is populated by 94.0% Bumiputera-Malay, 2.4% Chinese, 0.2% Indian, 0.3% other-Bumiputeras and 3.1 % other ethnicities that spread across the eight districts as recorded in 2016 (Terengganu State Government, 2017). The high concentration of the Bumiputera-Malay population in Terengganu will provide a basis to better understand the poverty that is endemic within this ethnic group in this context. Terengganu is also classified as a less industrialised state, in which a majority of Bumiputera people are experiencing tougher problems of poverty as compared to the more industrialised states with mixed races (Zin, 2014).

### **1.3.1 The social structure of the Malaysian people**

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country represented by Bumiputeras (69.1%), Chinese (23.0%), Indians (6.9%) and other ethnicities (1.0%) that live in East and West Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018b). The Bumiputeras make up the largest ethnic group in Malaysia and this group is further divided into: Malay ethnicity (82%), mainly from West Malaysia; and other indigenous tribes (18%), mainly from East Malaysia. The population in Malaysia is increasing and has a growth rate of 1.1% in 2018. However, this rate has decreased from 1.8% growth in 2010 (Ibid.). Malaysian population growth is contributed primarily by the Bumiputera population, which is increasing. The rate of growth of the Bumiputera grew by 0.3% from 2017 to 2018 while the Chinese and Indians rate of growth declined by 0.2% and 0.1% respectively for the same period (Ibid.).

Historically, the Bumiputeras are the indigenous population in Malaysia while the Chinese and Indians migrated from China and India respectively mainly during the British colonisation era in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century (Hirschman, 1975). Their migration to Malaya was mainly for labour due to the emergence of the tin mining industries and rubber plantations in the 1900s. Many Chinese and Indians were later granted birthright citizenship through the principle of

Jus Soli<sup>5</sup> prior to Malaysian independence in 1957. The implementation of the principle created a controversy as the Bumiputera-Malay opposed this principle because it 'challenged the ethnic homogeneity of Malay-nation states' (Low, 2017: 1). In response to this controversy, the Malay were accorded with 'special rights' including the power to rule with social and religious protections in return for the Jus Soli implementation (Singh, 2001). The implementation of this principle also marked the beginning of multiculturalism<sup>6</sup> in Malaysia (Zaid, 2007).

The current socio-political landscape of the Malaysian population shows that the Bumiputeras have political dominance despite them being economically less enfranchised than the Chinese and Indians (Abdullah et al., 2015). This has been the case since independence, although the situation is changing. The majority of Bumiputeras are involved in less productive sectors (mainly in agriculture) and reside in more rural and/or less industrialised states compared to the Chinese and Indians, a consequence of the colonial system that divided the Malaysian ethnicities based on occupation (Ibid.). The Constitution protected the domination in political and social control among the Bumiputeras, given that they are indigenous to Malaya (Singh, 2001). However, the political power that the Bumiputeras have has not helped them to acquire economic power given that the economic imbalances between them and other ethnicities, particularly the Chinese are large, as discussed further in Chapter 3, Section 3.1.

Meanwhile, the modern social structure of Malaysian society is divided into three main social classes known as an elite group, a middle-class group and a lower-class group. The middle-class group is further divided into upper-middle-class and lower-middle-class groups (Mohd Koharuddin, 2005). Malaysian society is divided into the

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<sup>5</sup> Jus Soli is generally known as birthright citizenship with 'the rule by which birth in a state is sufficient to confer nationality, irrespective of the nationality of one's parents' (Oxford Reference, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Multiculturalism in Malaysia tried to imply equal rights to all cultures based on the formulated policies that pursue social justice for all ethnic groups and manage the tensions between these groups (Noor and Leong, 2013). This was needed because the Malaysian multicultural society consisted of 'three traditionally isolated and mutually distrustful ethnic/cultural groups, the Malays, the Chinese, and the Indians', a situation that stemmed from the volatile social structure constructed by the British (Gudeman, 2002: 139). The implemented policies have so far been successful in designing programmes for ethnic and cultural unity (that is in creation of a single multicultural nation), but the everyday practice of some of the multicultural social reality aspects of the Malaysian society remain a concern as they represent the underlying tensions between ethnics in Malaysia (Ibid.). However, Malaysia is still successful in avoiding itself from any kinds of destructive ethnic violence since the first and last bloody riot in 1969.

class system based on status, the types of occupation and the material possessions that they have. The elite group consists of those in the highest management level in the country led by His Majesty the King of Malaysia, and the King of every state in Malaysia, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Ministries and those who hold the highest level of management in every government or private agency and institutions in Malaysia. This class classification is followed by the upper-middle-class group, which consists of professional people, business people, entrepreneurs and landowners. The lower-middle-class group consists of skilled workers and those that are involved in small businesses. The last group comprises lower-class people who do low-paid work or general work such as the fishermen, factory workers and labourers (Ibid.). In short, the society is grouped into different hierarchical social classes based on a person's occupation and the amount of economic (i.e. income distribution), social and cultural capital that they have with each of the class hierarchies consisting of all ethnic groups.

Therefore, it can be understood that social class divisions in Malaysia are currently represented by categories within the income distribution of its population, and these can be easily identified through the division of income share level among the population. In Malaysia, the population is divided by the top 20% (T20), middle 40% (M40) and bottom 40% (B40) of the income share level. The distribution of these groups (the T20, M40 and B40) varies by state and strata, but it is a common trend in Malaysia for the urban areas to be populated with a higher proportion of the T20 and M40 people as compared to the rural areas because rural population are consisted mainly by the B40 population. For example, the proportion of the T20, M40 and B40 population by strata in Terengganu in 2016 showed the urban population were populated by 24.1% of the T20, 41.1.% of the M40 and 34.8% of the B40 while the rural population consisted of 12% of the T20, 37.8% of the M40 and 50.2% of the B40 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020b). These statistics show the rural-urban population distinction as reflected in the ethnic make-up of the strata (i.e. the proportion of the lower-class people that were residing in rural areas is higher than the urban areas). The rural and urban structure of society in Malaysia is discussed further in the next subsection.

### **1.3.2 Rural-urban structure**

In Malaysia, the rural and urban structure of society has been historically differentiated by ethnicity. As noted above, before independence, the majority of Bumiputeras lived in rural areas within an agricultural society, while the majority of Chinese lived on the tin-mining sites and Indians lived on rubber plantations (Hirschman, 1975). In the 1950s, the colonial government ordered 'new village' resettlements that later developed into small towns where the relocation was dominated by the Chinese and this event also separated modern and traditional sectors according to states. For example, Bumiputera-Malay majority states like Kelantan, Kedah and Terengganu were involved in traditional sectors like agricultural activities. In contrast, multiracial states such as Selangor, Penang and Melaka are more industrialised and developed (Abdullah et al., 2015).

In 1967, it was recorded that the urban population accounted for 32.3% of the total Malaysian population, while the rural population accounted for 67.7% (Hirschman, 1975). In the early 1970s, 51.8% of the urban population was Chinese, 35.1% were Indians, and 17.6% were Bumiputera-Malay, which created significant socio-economic imbalances among different ethnicities in Malaysia given that Bumiputeras as the majority of the Malaysian population were located mainly in rural areas (Ibid.). The socio-economic problems during this period were addressed through the implementation of the NEP and other development policies, which provided many job opportunities for rural people to work in the cities. These jobs were mainly in the manufacturing sectors because Malaysia has transformed its agricultural industry into manufacturing sectors for exports since the beginning of the 1970s (Hadi, 2001). Industrialised states such as Selangor, the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan and Pulau Pinang received high numbers of rural immigrants, mainly the Bumiputeras from the early 1980s, until the twenty-first century (Hussain et al., 2015).

The data in 2017 recorded that the urban population accounted for 75.5% of the total Malaysian population, of which 56.1% are Bumiputeras, 25.5% are Chinese, 7.5% are Indians, 0.8% are other ethnicities, and 9.6% are non-citizens; the rural population accounted for 24.5% of the total population, of which 79% are Bumiputeras, 6.3% Chinese, 2.3% Indians, 1.1% other races and 12.9% non-citizens



(Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, 2017). The ethnic density of the urban and rural population has changed significantly over the last five decades as demonstrated by the above data, and the changes have been accelerated by the migration process of the rural population, particularly of Bumiputeras to urban areas (Rashid and Ghani, 2007). On the other hand, the population growth dynamic has also influenced the rural and urban composition of the Malaysian population. It was recorded in 2017 that the annual growth rate of the urban population was 2.1% while the rural population had a negative rate of 1.1% (Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, 2017).

### **1.3.3 The cultural and religious structure of everyday life**

Malaysia is classified as a collectivist country because it embraces Asian values that emphasise the importance of the relationship with in-group members. Malaysian values are characterised as cooperation, helpfulness, obedience and dependence among the in-group members, and the parents firstly embed these values into children (Keshavarz and Baharudin, 2009). A study conducted by Noordin et al. (2002) found that collective values for Malaysians are seen in their social relations, self-sacrifice and family integrity. This is because collectivist individuals are dependent on and loyal to one another within their group. As an Asian country, Malaysia embodies Asian values that emphasise the ‘values of family centredness, self-control, frugality and cooperation’ (Wee, 1999: 244).

Apart from being a collectivist nation, Malaysia is also a multi-religious country with four main religions practised by its population (Islam, Christian, Buddhism and Hinduism). The government data recorded in 2010 showed that 61.3% of the Malaysian population practised Islam, 19.8% practised Buddhism, 9.2% practised Christianity, 6.8% practised Hinduism, 0.4% practised other religions, 0.1% were unaffiliated, and 0.7% of the population had no religion (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). Islam (Sunni) is known as the official religion, and all other religions are freely practised as guaranteed by the Malaysian Constitution (Malaysia Government, 2017). The independent figures from the PEW Research Centre support government figures. The PEW data recorded in 2010 was nearly the same as the government data: 63.7% of the Malaysian population were reported as being Muslims, 17.7% were Buddhists, 9.4% were Christians, 6.0% were Hindus, 2.3%

were Folk religions and less than 1% practised other religions or were unaffiliated (PEW Research Centre, 2015).

Religions in Malaysia are also easily identified by the ethnicity of different groups. The Bumiputera-Malay are Muslim by default with Article 160 in the Federal Constitution stating that ‘Malay means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom’ (Attorney General’s Chambers of Malaysia, 2010: 153). In the Malaysian context, constitutionally, ethnicity (i.e. Malay) and religion are defined as being aligned, and there are quite strong social norms<sup>7</sup> and legal requirements that maintain this conformity of ethnicity and religion. While in other parts of the world, ethnicity and religion may be less overlapping, in the case of Malaysia, they are strongly aligned within the Constitution.

Meanwhile, the majority of the Chinese and Indians practise Buddhism and Hinduism respectively (some of them also practise Christianity, Taoism and Islam), and the non-Malay Bumiputeras practise Christianity, Islam and other religions (Malaysia Government, 2017). All religious celebrations are given days off, whether as a national public holiday or as a state public holiday. The public holiday at the state level depends on the composition of believers for each particular religion, for example, there is no public holiday for Thaipusam in the state of Terengganu as the percentage of the Indian population in this state is too small. There are approximately 20 days of public holidays every year that are religiously related in Malaysia, both at a national and state level, to celebrate the diversity and unity of all ethnic groups (Hairol Anuar, 2016).

For this research, I will specifically discuss the cultural and religious structure of the everyday life of the Muslim community in Malaysia in terms of the cultural, social and economic aspects because this research focuses on the Bumiputera-Malay population who are constitutionally all considered to be Muslims. In a Muslim patriarchal society, it is the responsibility of men to provide the family with all the

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<sup>7</sup> In creating a single multicultural nation of the Malaysian society, a language (i.e. the Malay language was chosen as the national language) and a shared education system (Malay language is used as the primary medium of instruction) were chosen as the common multicultural identity (Gudeman, 2002). In return for this Malay cultural priority (including Islam as the state religion), the Chinese and Indians were granted citizenship through Jus Soli principle without neglecting their freedom and right to practice their culture and religion (discussed earlier on page 8).

basic necessities for living because men play the role of the breadwinners in families (Joseph, 1996). However, Islam does not forbid women from working and doing other activities in public, but some guidelines need to be followed (preserving women's modesty in public areas and obtaining permission from their chaperones for such activities) because Islam encourages its followers (regardless of gender) to live a good and decent life (Al-Islam.org, 2018).

The view above is a general interpretation of traditional and narrow gender roles in Islam, and it is also understood and accepted within the Malaysian Muslim community because, in today's Bumiputera-Malay community, many women work to help to provide for their families due to the high cost of living. In addition, Islam has obligated its followers to pay zakah. Zakah is the third pillar of the Five Pillars in Islam that obligates rich Muslims to pay a certain amount of money to the poor because the poor and needy Muslim population have the right to receive the zakah (Embong et al., 2013). This order is clearly seen in Chapter 9, verse 103 of the Holy Quran: 'take from their wealth so that you might purify and sanctify them' (At-Taubah, 9:103) because zakah is a way to purify wealth.

In Malaysia, zakah is officially implemented among Muslims where it is managed and supervised by the religious department of the state government at every state level and further administered by the local zakah agencies. All zakah agencies in Malaysia are considered community development agencies, working together with other government and private community development agencies in tackling poverty amongst Muslims. For example, in Selangor, the zakah distributions have helped to increase the household income of the people living in poverty who received the money, thus reducing the poverty level in this state (Patmawati, 2006). Apart from zakah, Muslims are also encouraged to do voluntary work and be charitable to others. Thus, studying the poverty experience of the particular people living in poverty amongst the Bumiputera-Malay (Muslim) population needs to take into account the religious and social structural aspects (as discussed above) alongside the strategies that they have adopted to overcome their poverty.

#### **1.4 Research aims and research questions**

The fundamental objective of my research is to explore the relationship between community development and poverty, in terms of how participation in community development activities affect the experiences of particular people living in poverty among the Bumiputera-Malay majority in a rural and an urban area of Terengganu. I intend to establish whether participation in community development (as a common type of programme designed to address poverty), has helped them to improve their quality of life and exit their poverty situation. This is because, to date, there have not been many studies on the people living in poverty who have broken out of their poverty in Malaysia while many similar studies have been conducted in other countries (Gopal and Malek, 2015). One study that was conducted in Malaysia found that household strategies in Kelantan and Terengganu, such as farmers selling their non-productive assets, had increased their monthly income (Abdelhak et al., 2012). Through the qualitative study presented in this research, I hope to explore the participation in community development as strategies to poverty alleviation undertaken by these particular people living in poverty in Terengganu.

Another aim of this research is to explore the dynamics of social inequality issues within the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation among these particular people living in poverty in a rural and an urban area of Terengganu. I would like to explore how the dynamics of these issues have influenced this process because it is normally known that inequalities could be a hindrance in the implementation of any programmes, and it is anticipated that they are also present in process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation.

To achieve these research objectives, an overall research question and five specific sub-questions were developed towards the end of the study as the precise focus of the research developed inductively, with broader tentative initial research questions becoming progressively refined as the study developed. The reasons and justification for these changes are explored in detail at the start of the methodology chapter (Chapter 4). The initial and final refined research questions respectively can be found in the first and second set of the research questions below:

Initial research questions:

- i. What approaches to poverty alleviation are undertaken in rural and urban areas of Terengganu among the poor Bumiputera majority population? Do the approaches include participation in community development?
- ii. To what extent does participation in community development activities influence the life quality of the poor population among the Bumiputera majority in rural and urban areas of Terengganu?
- iii. What factors have influenced the poor population among the Bumiputera majority in the rural and urban areas of Terengganu to participate or not participate in community development activities?
- iv. Within the poor population among the Bumiputera majority in rural and urban areas of Terengganu, do issues of social inequality exist in the poverty alleviation process, and/or in participation in community development?
- v. How does the poor population among the Bumiputera majority in rural and urban areas of Terengganu perceive the implementation of the poverty-related policies in Malaysia?

The refined research questions are outlined below, and are organised around a primary research question and five specific underlying research questions that contribute to answering this overall question:

Overall research question: How does participation in community development activities affect the experiences of particular people living in poverty amongst the Bumiputera population in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu?

- i. What are the dynamics of the experience of poverty from the perspective of the research participants from the Bumiputera majority population living in a rural and an urban area of Terengganu?
- ii. What approaches to poverty alleviation (with a particular focus on community development approaches) are undertaken that affect participants living in poverty among the Bumiputera majority population in a rural and an urban area of Terengganu?
- iii. What are the perspectives of the research participants living in poverty about what factors influence their participation in community development activities designed to address their poverty?
- iv. What are the participants' perceptions about the ways in which community development programmes tackle poverty and improve quality of life, and what are their related limitations?

- v. How do social inequalities impact the dynamics of participation in community development and/or poverty alleviation amongst the research participants?

### **1.5 Outline of the thesis structure**

This thesis consists of eight chapters. This first chapter provides background to the research, including the rationale for the research topic and the general overview of Malaysia in relation to the topic. It also lists the research objectives and research questions of the study. The second chapter is the first part of the Literature Review, where poverty, participation, community development and issues around these themes, including inequalities and power, are discussed more comprehensively and analytically from the international perspective. The third chapter is a continuation of the Literature Review. It discusses the same issues from the Malaysian perspective to provide a national and local understanding of these issues and connects it to the earlier chapter. Both chapters provide theoretical frameworks for this study.

The fourth chapter outlines the research design and research methods, with qualitative research and sampling strategies, data collection through semi-structured interviews, participant observations and document analysis, ethical considerations and data analysis are all discussed. The fifth chapter presents the first findings and analysis chapter, and it analyses the participants' experience of being poor, including the causes of poverty and ways to overcome it, from the perspective of both the rural and urban respondents. It also analyses participation in community development activities, including the types of community development activities and the agencies involved. Chapter 6 continues to analyse the participants' perspectives about what factors influence their participation in community development and their perceptions about the ways in which community development programmes tackle poverty and improve quality of life. It also analyses how do social inequalities impact the dynamics of participation in community development and/or poverty alleviation amongst the research participants.

Chapter 7 provides a thorough discussion of the two preceding findings and analysis chapters (Chapter 5 and 6). It provides an analytical overview of the research and discusses the implications of findings in relation to the theoretical framework and

research questions. It also outlines the relationship between poverty and participation in community development activities to alleviate poverty by participants to improve their quality of life. The final chapter concludes the whole thesis, discusses the contributions and limitations of this study and provides a critical reflection on the research, including the policy and practice recommendations.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, this chapter provided a background for this research by discussing the general view of the research topic, and it also explored the motivation that led to this research. In addition, the chapter provided the reasons for choosing Malaysia as the location of study by discussing the particularly interesting social and religious structures in Malaysian society. Also, it discussed the aims of the research and listed the research questions of the study that are to be answered. Last but not least, this chapter outlines the thesis structure of this research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW: INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT**

#### **Introduction**

To set the context for this research into the relationship between community development and poverty in Terengganu, this chapter primarily discusses poverty issues in relation to participation in community development from the global perspective, including the debates within its theory and practices, with different responses by states and non-state actors. Wider inequalities and power dynamics are also discussed as related concepts that are separate, but which overlap with the concept of poverty. In the subsequent chapter, the same issues will be discussed from the Malaysian perspective to develop a national and local understanding of these issues. Together, these chapters provide both a conceptual and contextual framing for the topic of this research.

In this chapter, the literature review consists of three sections. In the first section, I review the issues of poverty, which include its definitions and measurements, its causes, the policies around it, its relation to quality of life, its dynamics, the labour market and the welfare state. I then discuss both inequalities and power issues within participation in community development through a discussion of power and power relations, social class and social inequality. Lastly, community development as a tool for poverty alleviation is discussed, including its definitions, models and debates in community development and the interrelationship between participation, empowerment and social capital with poverty and community development.

#### **2.1 The issues of poverty**

Poverty is a long-standing global issue that affects every nation ranging from the global North to the global South. It is not only a problem in poor countries but also in rich and developed countries. Poverty gained increasing attention as a global issue after the Second World War with many countries concentrating policy debate on this issue, especially among the richer countries, which aimed to eliminate poverty-related problems during the post-war era as a part of the post-war settlement (Sen, 1983). However, about one-tenth of the world's population is still living under extreme poverty, primarily in the sub-Saharan African region, and poverty remains



one of the main global problems to be solved (World Bank, 2016a). Therefore, this section will discuss the issues around poverty in the following sections below:

### **2.1.1 Definitions and measurements of poverty**

Definitions of poverty have been highly contested within academic debate, policy and practice. According to Sen (1983), debates for the best way to conceptualise poverty emerged in the last century (since the 1880s), primarily around defining poverty in absolute and relative terms. The definition of absolute poverty as a condition of being without the essentials of life was primarily based on the work of Booth and Rowntree from the 1880s to the 1950s. They suggested a poverty line indicating the levels of household income required to meet the minimum cost of basic necessities (Alcock, 2008).

Meanwhile, relative poverty is based on the average standard of living of the whole society, which keeps changing over time and in relation to place. This was expounded in the 1950s by Townsend, who included income and social security in the poverty measurement (Ibid.). Such dynamic measures tend to use average income (which in Europe is generally either 60% of median<sup>8</sup> income or 50% of mean income) to make connections to standards of living in society and as a basis for understanding relative aspects of poverty (Alcock, 2012). These can include the limitations of wider participation in society and ideas of social exclusion, which are important to determine whether or not an individual or household achieves established living conditions in society (Gordon et al., 2000).

However, at a global level, poverty is still largely treated as an absolute phenomenon. It is traditionally measured using the conventional approach of an income-based measure that is based on the International Poverty Line (IPL). This measurement is used because it is easier to determine the number of poverty incidences at a political level as this measurement is applied worldwide (Gordon et

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<sup>8</sup> Median income is the middle value in the income range (arranged ascendingly from the lowest value to the highest value) while mean income is the average income that refers to the sum of all incomes divided by the number of incomes (Mack, 2016). Nowadays, the UK and most of the EU are using 60% median income to replace the use of 50% mean income as the poverty threshold because 'giving money to those on the lowest incomes will not in itself raise the median threshold but will raise the mean threshold' (Ibid.: n.d.).

al., 2000). The UN applies this measurement through Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) where people who live on the PPP of \$1.90 a day or less are living in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2015) because they do not have enough income to fulfil their daily needs. An income of \$1.90 is needed for a market basket of goods taking into account the exchange rate of all currencies of each developing country.

Nevertheless, poverty relates to more than just income because it also includes economic, social, moral and political aspects. Townsend (1993) has argued for a scientific definition and measurement of poverty that can be universally applied to all nations, covering all levels of the economic status, geographical areas and conditions of life in every country. Therefore, during the United Nations World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, an internationally agreed definition of poverty by 117 governments was established where absolute poverty is defined as:

‘a condition characterised by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to social services’ (United Nations, 1995: 57).

By contrast, relative poverty is viewed as:

‘the lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihood, hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterised by a lack of participation in decision-making and civil, social and cultural life’ (United Nations, 1995: 57).

Both of the definitions above for absolute and relative poverty not only include the monetary measurement but also include other indicators of poverty such as education, social discrimination and exclusion. Anand and Sen (1997) support these definitions (of absolute and relative poverty as defined at the Copenhagen summit) by arguing that any denial of opportunities to live an established life can also lead to poverty because poverty is not solely based on the lack of material aspects. Any type of human deprivation from all aspects of life that hinder a sustainable livelihood can cause people to fall into poverty.

Therefore, it can be concluded that an understanding of poverty is best covered under the relative definition because poverty is a human-centric problem. It ties material conditions to other non-economic aspects such as access to basic social services and disadvantage in social outcomes in education, health, social exclusion and more. Based on the definitions of poverty discussed above, Gordon and Townsend (2000) have suggested all countries should adopt the Copenhagen measures, which cover all the possible indicators that lead to poverty. However, for this study, I will use the definition of poverty from the UN, which measures poverty through the PPP (not the Copenhagen definitions) as it fits the Malaysian policy context better. This definition parallels the Malaysian government's definition of poverty because Malaysia uses the monetary measurement known as national Poverty Line Income (PLI) to measure poverty in accordance with the International Poverty Line measurement.

### **2.1.2 International strategies and issues around poverty**

The UN has been one of the main global actors in fighting poverty alongside other international agencies such as the World Bank, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and others. Many strategies are formulated at the international level by these agencies, which are then adopted by nation-states. For instance, the latest major UN strategy is Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which seek to end poverty in all its forms everywhere in the world as its first goal out of 17 goals in the next fifteen years (2016-2030) for its Agenda 2030 (United Nations, 2015a).

The SDGs are better aligned with the conceptions of poverty outlined above than the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as they try to tackle the relative aspects of poverty including inequality (e.g. gender) and sustainability issues (Artaraz and Hill, 2016). For example, the persisting issue of gender inequality such as the discrimination of women in accessing the labour market, lower earnings for women and so forth makes women more vulnerable to poverty than men (United Nations, 2015b). It was recorded worldwide that only half of women (working-age) participated in the labour market compared with three-quarters of men (working-age) in 2015, thus putting women at higher risk to live in poverty (Ibid.).

Moreover, the World Bank has admitted that the non-monetary indicators of poverty such as access to education, health, electricity and so forth in addressing poverty are important because it is believed that these indicators can help to create better strategies to fight poverty and thus increase people's quality of life (World Bank, 2015). The Commission on Global Poverty was established by the World Bank and published a report on 'Monitoring Global Poverty' in 2017, recommending the use of non-monetary indicators to measure the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty (World Bank, 2017). The indicators consist of educational outcomes, access to health care, and access to basic services including water, sanitation and electricity, which are all currently implemented in the SDGs (Ibid.).

The World Bank still recommends the use of \$1.90 PPP to determine the extreme poverty line and has recommended that this measurement continues to be used as the IPL until 2030 (World Bank, 2016b). However, the credibility of the World Bank and other international institutions such as the IMF in solving the global economic problems including poverty is arguable and they have received significant criticism (Artaraz and Hill, 2016). These institutions are driven by, and are key agents of promoting the ideology of neoliberalism<sup>9</sup>, and are therefore associated with an economic agenda around economic development and growth, known as the 'Washington Consensus', which is far from neutral.

Artaraz and Hill (2016) argue that these institutions are profiting from indebting poor countries by imposing their economic policies on those countries such as tight controls on public expenditure resulting in reduced funding for social services of the countries, which can lead to further economic problems and poverty (e.g. secondary school children are required to pay schooling fees). The policies are also being criticised for being implemented in the interests of more powerful national governments such as the US and the UK (Ibid.). Therefore, the current global poverty situation, which sees a high level of poverty in certain regions and in areas such as the sub-Saharan African region, is also linked to the structural causes of poverty discussed above.

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<sup>9</sup>Neoliberalism is an ideology of the political-economic practices which gives entrepreneurial freedoms that promote free markets, free trade, private property rights and privatisation of the public sectors and small state agencies (Harvey, 2007).

To conclude, it is important to recognise that by setting a quantitative threshold to measure poverty it is equally important to qualitatively understand the emotional and relational dynamics of people's experiences of poverty and how they regard the level of their quality of life. Therefore, the quality of life in relation to relative poverty is discussed below.

### **2.1.3 Quality of life in relation to relative poverty**

Quality of life, which is sometimes also referred to by other terms such as 'well-being' has gained wider attention among politicians and policymakers in many countries such as the UK and Germany and also from international organisations such as the OECD and Eurostat (Boelhouwer and Bijl, 2015). It started to become a research focus in the US and the UK in the 1960s, and it has been one of the indicators for assessing the progress of a country because using solely Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the only indicator was clearly lacking (Self, 2017). GDP is a measure of economic production and not the social aspects of life (people's well-being) and therefore, it is important to 'shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being' (Stiglitz et al., 2009: 12). This is because measuring people's well-being helps to provide sustainable information between the 'aggregate GDP data and what counts for common people's well-being' (Ibid.).

The definition of life quality is in a multidimensional form because it comprises many dimensions of people's well-being. Elements that determine a good life quality consist of social indicators such as health status, working conditions, education and housing, factors which have influenced most of the current national statistics, especially in European countries (Self, 2017). Amartya Sen has developed his 'capabilities framework' in evaluating people's wellbeing (i.e. the capabilities of the poor to do things, such as their choices and desire fulfilments) (1983, 1985). According to Sen, an individual's capability is the best indicator to evaluate the economic wellbeing of any individual or community because as discussed earlier (see subsection 2.1.1), poverty does not solely involve economic aspects but also involved any denial of opportunities to have established wellbeing.

Stiglitz et al. (2009) suggested that other indicators should also be measured, including material living standard, personal activities, political voice and governance, social connections, environment and physical and economic insecurity. In addition, leisure time is also taken into account in certain circumstances (Boelhouwer and Bijl, 2015). The study conducted by Stiglitz et al. (2009) emphasises three approaches to measuring the quality of life. These are measuring subjective well-being (assessment of people's own satisfaction); the notion of capabilities (assessment of people's lives based on their functions); and the notion of fair allocation (assessment of the monetary aspects of quality of life). These approaches have incorporated Sen's capability approach and the traditional real-income framework in evaluating people's wellbeing.

The literature above provides an understanding of life quality and the indicators and approaches that can be used to measure it. I argue for the use of subjective well-being as an approach to measure life quality because, for this research, I will ask the participants' perceptions about the ways in which community development programmes tackle poverty and improve quality of life. This is because I will not measure in detail the quality of life of the research participants using the listed indicators (as outlined in the second paragraph) but instead focus on the lived experiences in poverty and participation in community development. I will only ask in general whether or not participants' quality of life improved in terms of the economic, social and emotional aspects through their participation in community development.

#### **2.1.4 Dynamics of poverty**

The dynamics of poverty involves many different dimensions. They involve the movement above and below the poverty line, the movement in and out of poverty and where the poverty line is drawn. For this research, I mainly discuss poverty dynamics in terms of the movement in and out of poverty because they relate to the approaches to poverty alleviation that affect this movement.

However, I will start this section by briefly discussing the poverty line dimension of poverty dynamics in relation to absolute and relative poverty. The dynamics of poverty can be looked at through the relative aspect of poverty, which links poverty

to society as a whole and the standards of living that prevail with the ongoing development of society. For example, the relative measure of poverty of 60% median income in the UK moves relative to changes in the overall level of income (Alcock, 2012). This movement shows the idea of poverty dynamics within a society which keeps pace with how society develops.

Understanding the dynamics of poverty is important in helping to solve the problem of poverty. This is because these dynamics can help to identify the causes of the transition into and out of poverty and the reasons why people experience poverty at various life stages and the findings can lead to more effective policy in combating poverty (McKernan and Ratcliffe, 2002). This type of understanding of poverty could also help researchers and policymakers to define the 'concept of economic well-being' more clearly and identify the reasons behind short-term or long-lasting poverty (Ribar and Hamrick, 2003). The causes of poverty entries and poverty exits are commonly associated with changes in employment and household composition, which are triggered by various events (McKernan and Ratcliffe, 2002).

This movement in and out of poverty can be defined around individuals or households (Holden et al., 1986). It is argued that the first way to understand these dynamics of poverty is through the definition of the period of poverty (poverty spells), while other approaches that are commonly used include modelling the level of variables such as income and the 'tabulations of the frequency of the event over some fixed timeframe' (Bane and Ellwood, 1983: 2). Previous studies conducted in the US and Europe have identified that the following are among the events that lead to poverty: the loss of employment by one or more of the household members (this also relates to the change in the type of labour market, which is discussed in the next subsection); illnesses and disabilities of household members especially the household head; the birth of a child; the divorce or death of the primary wage earner; and termination of social benefits (Duncan et al., 1993; Holden et al., 1986; McKernan and Ratcliffe, 2002; Ribar and Hamrick, 2003).

Meanwhile, the events associated with poverty exits are the opposite of the events that lead to poverty entries. Duncan et al. (1993) have identified the events that lead to poverty exits including (re)marriage, the gaining of employment by household members, increased work hours and receipt of social insurance benefits. Findings

from the study by McKernan and Ratcliffe (2002) support these findings as they found that the gaining of employment increased the labour supply while (re)marriage of a single-headed family to a two-adult household increased the chances of exiting poverty.

Apart from the changes in employment and household composition discussed earlier, the demographic subgroups of individuals and households also influences poverty entries and exits. Cellini et al. (2008) have identified that race, ethnicity, gender, age and education level are variables related to poverty entries or exits. For instance, in the US, it is consistent in many studies that black people, women, young adults (under 25 years old) and those with a lower education level have a higher possibility of entering poverty, for example, women are frequently discriminated against in employment making them very vulnerable to poverty (Ibid.).

Measuring poverty duration is another way to understand the dynamics of poverty. Poverty duration is linked to spells of poverty, which refers to how long people are in poverty, whether it is a long-term, short-term spell or recurrent spells of poverty, and this understanding is used as one of the common approaches to describe poverty dynamics. The beginning and end of poverty spells are linked to the events that trigger changes in income and household composition (Bane and Ellwood, 1983), as discussed previously. It is important to understand the dynamics of poverty spells because such an understanding can better inform policy and it is useful for programme evaluation so that policy implementation can reach the right targets via the most suitable programme.

For example, Cellini et al. (2008) have suggested the need for policy reform in the education sector by emphasising school-to-work programmes for secondary school students because they found that the rate of high school completion is an important event in poverty exits rather than a college degree, especially for students experiencing long-term poverty. Therefore, providing secondary school students from poor households with such a programme is important as it prepares them to enter the skilled job sector upon school completion.



#### **2.1.4.1 Deserving and undeserving poor**

Debates around poverty are frequently constructed by people in power within social hierarchies. This has led to some debates about poverty being constructed around labels of the so-called ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor in the past (Alcock, 2006). People have used notions of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor to give some resources to some and not to others. This section explores how these constructs of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor have been used in both academic and policy terms to create a response to poverty which is quite stigmatising.

‘Deserving’ and ‘undeserving poor’ have emerged as concepts to determine the eligible recipients for benefit allocations (Zatz, 2011). Distinctions between those considered to belong to these groups are commonly adopted by the welfare state nations in allocating the benefits as a way to reduce benefit spending. This issue has sparked interest from many parties, including policymakers, social service providers and academics. The indicators of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor are differentiated through non-financial aspects mainly by subjective determinations of the ‘moral deservingness’ focused on behavioural aspects of the poor rather than focusing on whether support is required based on income indicators alone (Ibid.). For instance, in the UK, involvement in any criminal activities could change the public perception of a welfare recipient from being considered ‘deserving’ to ‘undeserving’, including young offenders, although in this context it does not necessarily affect their welfare benefits (Goldson, 2002).

Examples of undeserving indicators used in the past have included a non-marital status among the poor, although, at present, moral deservingness is frequently linked to other perceived behavioural requirements, such as working or actively looking for work, in determining eligibility for the main means-tested benefits (Zatz, 2011). In addition, Schneider and Ingram (1993) also relate categories of the deserving and undeserving poor to positive and negative social constructs, in which negative behaviours could invalidate the deserving status. These indicators of deserving and undeserving poor are designed to reduce any culture of social dependency on the benefits provided by the government because this culture is sometimes perceived to lead to moral hazards of dependency; for example, it is argued that unemployment

benefits often lead to people not looking for a job due to the incentives that they have received (Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1992; Levitas, 1999).

However, the regulation of deserving and undeserving poor categories within the welfare practice has received much criticism. For example, Zatz (2011) argues that the judgment of caseworkers determines the selection of whether someone is deserving or undeserving, which could lead to class, gender and race biases. Katz (1986: 291) contends that ‘the distinction between the worthy and unworthy poor has always been a convenient but destructive fiction’ because this issue obscures the more important critical discussion of wider causes of poverty. He also argues that this distinction displays poor people as the object of charity, which makes them different from other members of the community because their deserving statuses are always being evaluated, whether by welfare agencies or even their own community (Katz, 1990).

### **2.1.5 The labour market**

The labour market is important because it is one of the primary ways to alleviate poverty through people earning their own income. However, access to the labour market and particular types of jobs is seriously unequal. The labour market is defined by The Economic Times (2018) as the interaction between employers and workers as both parties try to get the best workers and jobs, respectively. This process involves the demand and supply of labour (Ibid.). In contemporary capitalist institutions, the labour market is believed to have emerged in the sixteenth century in Europe, boosted by massive economic growth that led to an increase in income and productivity (de Vries, 1993).

One view of the benefit of the labour market is that it provides a balanced market price for labour in which the demand and supply of the labour are aligned, resulting in a stable market that leads to zero unemployment (Adnett, 1989; Gothard et al., 2001). A more critical view is that the labour market exists to provide an ample supply of labour to reduce the cost of demand for labour which, therefore, also produces disciplined workers with the threat of substitution if they are undisciplined (Byrne, 2005). At the same time, Byrne (Ibid.: 13) has also argued that the labour market disadvantages those at the lowest level of the social class including poor,

socially excluded people and the unemployed because they are treated as the 'reserve army of labour'. The reserve army of labour is important to the capitalist system as it helps the capitalists to keep costs low at the bottom of the labour market especially in times of crisis (Ibid.).

Meanwhile, there are also critiques of the functionality of the labour market in relation to power and inequality. For example, Joumard and Vélez (2013) argue that the labour market contributes to an increase in income inequality and poverty in Colombia due to the high unemployment rate because the high competition rate in employment disadvantages those with a lower education level resulting in them having less power as compared to those with higher education. These findings are supported by earlier research conducted by Puhani (2004), who argues that the labour market in the twentieth century has led to unemployment and income inequality among workers. This is occurring due to the income increment at the top level of income distribution and the decrease in wages among the lower-class workers (Acemoglu, 2002).

This means that if there is an economic downturn or a change in the type of labour market, particular places can become economically depressed and there are extremely high levels of competition for a limited number of jobs, which is a big cause of unemployment and poverty. This shows the trends of the labour market as it exists within wider economic trajectories. For instance, the digital transformation of the economic sectors in Europe has changed the nature of work that led to a smaller labour market that 'require fundamental rethinking of extant labour market regulation and social protection' (Eichhorst et al., 2020: 1).

The role of the state in fostering growth in the labour market is important so that it can be reformed and work better. For example, certain economic sectors could be privileged over others and prioritising those sectors, will increase the economic growth and will then has trickle-down effects on other parts of the economy and society as a whole. Therefore, understanding the principle and functionality of the labour market matters to my research as the labour market relates to the main issues of this research, which are poverty, inequality and power.

### 2.1.6 The welfare state

There have been various interventions to try to solve poverty. Some of the interventions are conditional interventions based on poor people behaving differently to manage poverty; such interventions are typically based on making distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, as discussed earlier. The role of the welfare state relative to poverty alleviation is significant, in this respect.

The welfare state can take on a range of forms, based on different understandings of poverty, and combine different types of intervention, including ones that are conditional on behaviour and circumstance or unconditional. For example, the British welfare state was introduced with a free national health service for all and also through the introduction of a national insurance system to pay for certain benefits and pensions following the Beveridge Report of 1942 (Fraser, 2009). The welfare state as it was originally conceived was formed through a combination of universal elements (based on universal citizenship rights) and through people paying into the system through general taxation and national insurance contributions, with the purpose of this system being to tackle the five evils of Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness (Beveridge, 1942).

The definition of the welfare state is discussed by Briggs (1961: 14) as a state that can exercise the political and administrative power to change 'the play of market forces'. He further explains that the market forces can be changed through the guarantees of a minimum income (through unemployment, sickness and pension benefits, for example) and the introduction of social contingencies for individuals and families while social services can be offered equally at the same standard to all citizens regardless of their class (Ibid.).

There is extensive literature on the welfare state regime with most of them are associated with the seminal work of Esping-Andersen in 1990, *The three worlds of welfare capitalism* (i.e. classification of the major types of welfare states), as a benchmark, and some of which has added to the work of Esping-Andersen's typology (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011). According to him, the welfare state de-commodifies people as 'de-commodification occurs when a service is rendered as a matter of right, and when a person can maintain a livelihood without reliance on the market' (Esping-Andersen, 2013: 21–2). His argument above describes the key

roles of the welfare state, and he states that the more de-commodified the people, the higher the social safety net is (Ibid.).

These debates on decommodification have contributed to Esping-Andersen's typology of the welfare state which divides the welfare state in Western Europe and North America into three systems known as Conservative (Christian democracy), Liberal and Social Democratic (Bambra, 2007; Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011). It is argued by Bambra (2007) that this typology is lacking because the three-system classification is only based on the study of 18 OECD<sup>10</sup> nations. It does not include other Western countries (Portugal, Spain, Greece) and other East Asian welfare state countries (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) who could form new regimes of the welfare state by using different principles in determining the type of welfare state. Therefore, many scholars (e.g. Bambra, 2007; Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011; Schröder, 2009) have revised and expanded Esping-Andersen's welfare state categorisation such as by adding the East-Asian welfare states as the new category. It is also argued that Esping-Andersen's work could include more variables, such as gender and politics (Bambra, 2007).

Meanwhile, the original goal of the welfare state, which is to mitigate against the harshness of the capitalist market seems to be in decline. For example, in the UK, the current Conservative government is trying to reduce the welfare state allocation (Taylor-Gooby, 2016). This is because the welfare states are facing the challenge of the affordability issue as citizens are reluctant to pay adequate tax despite wanting high-quality public services (Gamble, 2016). Other factors affecting welfare state developments have included demographic shifts and significant economic challenges (Gamble, 2016; Österle and Heitzmann, 2016).

#### **2.1.6.1 Social safety net programmes**

Safety nets are programmes provided mainly by governments for people as social protection and security in overcoming adverse situations including a 'chronic

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10 Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries included in Esping-Andersen's work are: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, UK and USA with a liberal regime; Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Italy and Switzerland with a Conservative regime and; Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Sweden with a Social Democratic regime (Bambra, 2007).

incapacity to work or earn' and a 'decline in the capacity to work' due to physical or mental disability (i.e. illnesses or age) and the changes in household composition (i.e. death of household head) (Subbarao et al., 1997: 4). These programmes are introduced as a way to overcome poverty because people who are facing adverse situations are vulnerable to poverty, such as in times of recession and economic crisis (Moffitt, 2013).

There are many types of social safety net programmes around the world as Alderman (2002) has listed, including cash transfers, food-related programmes, price and tax subsidies, fee waivers in health and housing and so forth. These programmes are known to have helped to reduce extreme poverty to some degree. A study conducted by Devereux (2002) in three Southern African countries found that the cash transfer programmes helped people in poverty in those countries to enhance their life quality as the income transfers were invested in activities that benefited themselves such as in education and other income-generating activities. A more recent study done by Schmidt et al. in 2016 on the effect of safety net programmes on food insecurity in America among single-parent families who lived under the national poverty line found that the cash or food benefits received by the participants helped to reduce the incidence of food insecurity among them (Schmidt et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, there are also some challenges in achieving the objectives of these programmes. It is argued by Dercon (2002) that a social safety net will not benefit the people living in poverty who are not covered by these programmes. For example, some people living in poverty are missed out by the programmes for various reasons, including low coverage, ineffective targeting of recipients and poor implementation, as is the case in Indonesia (Sumarto et al., 2002). The underlying problems that restrict the overall success of the social safety net programmes in addressing poverty issues, including the effectiveness of policy implementation in Malaysia, are part of what is explored in this research.

## **Summary**

This section focused on the global situation around poverty and the responses to poverty. Poverty is widespread, and there are huge inequalities in the world. There are various actors, including the state and the non-state actors that have been working hard to address poverty and significant differences globally in terms of the

best way to address poverty. For instance, states are taking responsibility to address this issue through various forms and degrees of welfare provision. Non-state actors, including community development actors as per the focus of this research, are also playing a role and taking action to address poverty (discussed in Section 2.3).

## **2.2 Inequality and power**

Inequality (primarily referring to income, wealth and social inequalities) is a widely discussed issue in the present day. Inequality has become apparent to everyone as people are observing the differences in how different social groups live and the power relations that exist between them (Piketty, 2014). This leads to various personal and political judgements of inequality as people differ in opinion as to whether it is negative or positive.

For example, from a negative perspective, a worker might feel that his/her life condition is not equal to the life of an employer due to the inequalities in income and social statuses between them and due to that, (s)he might also feel that life is unjust (Ibid.). Equality is a goal for some people (or groups), but perfect equality is not possible. Some scholars such as Krueger (2018) and Welch (1999) argue that inequality in itself is not necessarily bad, and a certain amount of inequality is helpful. For instance, inequality may be perceived as something good if it encourages people to work hard due to the differential rewards that they can obtain depending on their efforts although excessive inequality can also be problematic (Krueger, 2018). The key issue from both perspectives is how much inequality is deemed to be a bad thing.

For this research, I will specifically discuss the economic (income and wealth) and social inequality from the perspective of scholars who see these inequalities as problems related to poverty (Piketty, 2015; Piketty and Saez, 2014; Wilkinson, 1997). Piketty (2014) argues that inequality links to poverty as the growing gaps in income and wealth inequalities between the top and the bottom income earners have made the poor poorer, and the rich richer, which has worsened the poverty situation among poor people (Ibid.). This is why both significant economic inequality and poverty are generally seen as problems that need to be solved as this will result in an

improvement in people's life quality and enable people to participate in society more actively (United Nations Development Programme, 2015).

On the other hand, power is another contested concept within the social sciences arena as it has been defined as *power over*, *power to* and *power of* (Dominelli, 2000), as discussed in subsection 2.2.2. The issue of power and power relations exist in almost every aspect of our lives. In a global context, the issue of power is seen in the inequality of power among different governments, primarily possessed by the rich and developed neoliberal nations and international institutions through the exercise of power over the poor and less 'developed' countries (Harvey, 2007). The example of this relationship can be seen through the Washington consensus discussed earlier in subsection 2.1.2.

In this section, the issue of income and wealth inequality, social class and social inequality will be reviewed. Following this, there will be a discussion on the power and power relations issues with some analysis of the main theories of power and the cycle of power relations. For this research, power and power relations within the process of participation and community development will be reviewed.

### **2.2.1 Income and wealth inequality**

Due to the concentration of income and wealth, income and wealth inequality have featured in the academic literature since the 1770s (eighteenth century) and gained growing attention in the twentieth century (Townsend, 1979). Prior to that, these inequalities also featured in more ancient literature including the religious texts (Holy Books), as seen in many religions, primarily around the ways to address these inequalities (Krueger, 2018). For instance, the command of Zakah among Muslims was recorded in the Quran more than 1400 years ago. In the academic literature, the work of Adam Smith in 1776, *The Wealth of Nations* was among the earliest that discussed inequality (Smith, 1776). Smith's work is seen as 'the most progressive interpretations to accept inequality, rationalised as the inevitable trade-off for increasing prosperity compared to less developed but more equal economies (Boucoyannis, 2013). Smith's work highlighted that economic growth would inevitably lead to inequality in wealth distribution (economic inequality) although a



certain amount of this inequality is good to trigger productivity among people (Rasmussen, 2016).

There is significant academic debate about the relationship between poverty, inequality and economic growth. Some economic theorists argue that it is economic growth that enables poverty to be reduced (particularly in relation to absolute measures), through mechanisms such as generating efficiencies and economies of scale, which often resort to arguments about resources ‘trickling down’ to poorer groups as a side benefit of growth in economic wealth overall (Dollar and Kraay, 2002; Ravallion and Datt, 2002). The benefit of the economic growth (i.e. the generated wealth) would ‘trickle-down’ across all layers of society including the people living in poverty (e.g. through encouraging conditions of the labour market), thus can help to reduce poverty (Abhayaratne, 2004; Nindi and Odhiambo, 2015).

However, the notion of ‘trickle-down’ for economic policies and welfare in promoting income growth among the poorest was very debatable because much literature argued that ‘trickle-down’ did not work, both in the developed and developing countries (see Lopez and Serven, 2014; Nindi and Odhiambo, 2015; Norton, 2002). For instance, there are proposals that economic growth has historically led to increased relative poverty and economic inequality, as raised by Kuznets and Jenks (1953), who suggested that the increase in income inequality in the US in the early twentieth century happened due to economic growth and the rise of industrial sectors.

In addition, Gordon and Townsend (2000) also highlight that the uncontrolled economic expansion in many countries has increased the inequality of income and wealth. In this case, trickle-down is a form of economic growth that exacerbates these tendencies for economic inequality and relative poverty. Meanwhile, Young (2019) found that the benefit of economic growth in Nigeria (a developing country) had only trickled down to the poor people in conjunction with high rates of employment growth.

Moreover, Piketty and Saez (2014: 840) stress that it is important to understand the wealth to income ratios because this ‘measures the overall importance of wealth in a given society, as well as the capital intensity of production’, which helps in understanding the nature and extent of causes of inequality. Piketty and Saez also

highlight that income and wealth inequality are caused by the inequalities of capital ownership, capital income, and labour income. Piketty (2015) further explains that labour income and capital inequality are increasing the gap between the rich and poor, as illustrated by the wealth aggregation of the top 10% and bottom 90% income earners.

To address this issue, academics and policymakers have looked at various approaches, yet no ‘one size fits all’ approach has been found. The welfare state has been considered as an effective mechanism through redistributing income from the rich to the poor, which helps to reduce income inequalities among all classes of workers and also reduce wealth inequalities (Gordon and Townsend, 2000). Likewise, Piketty (2015: 138) has suggested that the effective redistribution of income that is based on Keynesian demand management can help to solve this problem. This mechanism redistributes the purchasing power from the capitalists to workers through the increase in wages, which ‘can stimulate demand for goods and services and thereby increase output and raise the level of employment’. This process can trigger beneficial activities and solve income inequality at the same time.

#### **2.2.1.1 Social class and social inequality**

Social class or class is one of the systems of social stratification that divides groups of people into different layers of society, thereby causing many problems, including social inequality. Many of the early sociologists, such as Karl Marx and Max Weber, provided definitions of social class with Marx defining class as either *bourgeoisie* (the capitalist) or *proletariat* (the workers), a classification based on the relationship of people to the means of production (Henslin, 2000). As for Weber, he recognises three elements that determine class differences, namely property, power and prestige (Ibid.).

Theories of class are highly contested and involve many debates around the ways in understanding class differences, including those which are status-based, role-based and capital-based. One commonly discussed model of the class system is usually based on the status that divides the groups of people into an upper class, a middle class and a lower class (working class), a system mainly based on the European class system (Ibid.). In Malaysia, the particular understanding of the class system within

the Malaysian population is also quite similar to this European model of the class system, organised through status-based distributions which have been discussed earlier in Chapter 1.

Nevertheless, the latest studies have found that social class in the twenty-first century comprises more than the three main classes. For example, Savage et al. (2013) identified seven social classes in the UK, where their study was conducted between 2011 and 2013, through surveys and interviews with the UK population by measuring the social, cultural and economic capital of the population. The classes are classified as; Elite, Established Middle Class, Technical Middle Class, New Affluent Workers, Traditional Working Class, Emergent Service Workers and Precariat, although there was some bias in the study (Savage and Mouncey, 2016). As a comparison, both the classic and modern classifications of class indicate that the classes are determined based on the relation between the power that people have and the types and position of their work. However, they also found that the modern class classification also includes cultural capital in its measurement by also measuring the cultural aspects of people such as leisure, musical, eating and holiday preferences.

In addition, Thompson (1968: 11) highlighted the ‘differences in legitimate power associated with certain positions’ as an indication of class differences among individuals. He also stresses that class exists due to the struggle of power between those who have it and those who do not. This is supported by Todd (2014: 504), who also observes the power inequalities in the distribution of class with the emphasis on the experience of inequality as it helps in ‘shaping people’s sense’ towards their class differences. In short, the class system can be organised in all sorts of status-based indicators such as the wealth level, employment type and the degree of power that people have, and these indicators exist across societies, albeit with differences in the organising system. However, the class system is often seen as a blockage to social mobility. Bourdieu (1979: 80) argues that this system allows the ‘domination of one class over another’ through the power that they have by establishing and legitimating class distinctions, which reduces the chance for the dominated class to move up the class ladder. This is primarily the domination of the upper-class people over the lower-class groups, which prevents equal chances for social mobility in every class.

### 2.2.2 Power issues

The definition of power is contested across the literature that attempts to conceptualise it, and there is no agreed definition on it (Lukes, 2005). Power is a complex issue from both the theoretical and political points of view, and it exists in every aspect of life. Foucault argues, ‘power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere’ (1998: 93). This indicates that power involves real issues embedded within all affairs of human life. One of the most popular definitions of power comes from Lukes (1974), in his famous book, *Power: A radical view* as he has defined power in three-dimensional models. However, in the second edition of the book published in 2005, Lukes acknowledged that his earlier dimensions, which are the first and second dimension of power, focused ‘entirely on the exercise of ‘power over’ – the power of some A over some B and B’s condition of dependence on A’ (Lukes, 2005: 109).

According to Lukes (1974, 2005), the conceptualisation of power is best found in the third model of power, the three-dimensional view of power. The three-dimensional model requires the conceptualisation of power to be given ‘consideration of the many ways in which potential issues are kept out of politics, whether through the operation of social forces and institutional practices or through individuals’ decisions’ (Lukes, 1974: 28) where this process could occur with or without any observable or latent conflict.

Meanwhile, Dowding (2006: 1) points out that the three-dimensional model is related to human domination where ‘people are subject to domination and acquiesce in that domination’ and whose concept ‘denies agents’ privileged access to their reasons for actions’ as the domination process can either happen intentionally or unintentionally. However, Dowding is concerned that the notion of domination should be carefully used by avoiding negative judgements over people’s actions. With regard to this research, the issue of power will investigate the perspectives of inequality, development, participation and how these themes interplay with one another. Therefore, the related theories of empowerment and power will be discussed.

### **2.2.2.1 Structural injustice within power and power relations: Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power**

It is important to discuss key theories of power and power relations within the scope of this research to provide an understanding of why some people are still in poverty while some are not despite many poverty alleviation projects including community development that have been implemented globally and locally. Some questions to be considered in exploring the theories of power that relate to the topic of this research are: how power and power relations issues influence the lives of people living in poverty relating to their participation in the development process, particularly community development and poverty alleviation; what are the dynamics of power relations among the people living in poverty? What are the elements that can empower people living in poverty and help them to alleviate poverty? To answer these questions, Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power will be discussed.

According to Bourdieu (1994: 164) 'symbolic power is a power of constructing reality', it is 'invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it'. In this respect, power acts as a tool of domination by individuals or groups 'to imply a certain claim to symbolic authority as the socially recognised power to impose a certain vision of the social world, i.e. of the divisions of the social world' (Ibid.: 106). The concept of symbolic power indicates that all levels of social classes are struggling with some issues of power which are caused by conflicts within symbolic and material resources, also known as a chiasmatic structure in the modern industrial societies (Bourdieu, 1989). The chiasmatic structure can be understood as the struggle in the distribution of economic (wealth, income and property) and cultural capital (knowledge, culture and educational credentials) that describe this field of power. However, the exercise of symbolic power through power relations that are based on material dependence is accepted as a legitimate relation like, for example, the exchange of gifts (Cronin, 1996).

The theory of symbolic power discussed above is a political-economy theory that can be divided into a 'theory of symbolic interest, a theory of power as capital and a theory of symbolic violence' (Swartz, 2012: 65). Firstly, the theory of symbolic interest emphasises motivation towards a meaningful outcome in which everyone is

supposed to have similar interests and motivation so that they will not be seen as different from others and that ‘there can be as many interests as there are institutionalised arenas of conflict overvalued resources’ (Ibid.: 71).

Secondly, (Ihlen, 2005: 494) discusses the theory of power as social capital, emphasising two components of social capital, the ‘size of an individual’s network and the volume of the capital that the other parts of the network have, and to which the individual gains access’. This theory of power as social capital is commonly used in social science to represent capital and its values that are possessed by a community although this theory lacks an operational definition and overlooks the role of organisations (Gečienė, 2002; Ihlen, 2005). It is worth noting that social capital theories are diverse, ranging from the significance of sets of resources (i.e. cultural and economic capital) to social capital to education (Field, 2005). For this research, I discuss social capital in relation to symbolic power, as discussed above.

Lastly, a theory of symbolic violence can be understood ‘as the capacity to impose the means for comprehending and adapting to the social world by representing economic and political power in disguised, taken-for-granted forms’ (Swartz, 2012: 89). This theory represents the exercise of power by the dominant groups over those they dominate without exerting too much energy as the social system has done the job for them (Hastings and Matthews, 2015). In short, the theory of symbolic power can provide relevant support to this research concerning the issues of power and power relations that are circulating within the poverty alleviation process because it includes the scope of power domination, the degree of power possession and the field of power.

#### **2.2.2.2 Dynamics of power relations: the *power over*, the *power to*, the *power of***

The dynamics of power relations involve the negotiation of power between the powerful and the less powerful parties with the process influenced by the resources and ‘situational circumstances’ of both parties and this process can happen either directly or indirectly (Dominelli, 2000). These people engage in the dynamic of power relations by exercising the concept of *power over*, *the power to* and *power of*. *Power over* is the most used approach because this type of power is easily applied

whenever there are differences in power between two people or more due to any circumstances and it can be taken away when the circumstances change.

*Power over* is defined by Dominelli as a type of domination that is mainly applied over the lowest groups of social classes, in which these people become passive victims because others control their lives. Dominelli further explains that this type of power relation links to personal modes of power because the victims can make use of the personal relationship between them and the one that exercises the ‘power’ to lessen the ‘power’. Roger Smith argues that this personal relationship depends on the attributes and characteristics of the victims (Smith, 2010). On the other hand, the *power to* refers to the capacity of individuals to come together with certain goals to do something to stop the oppression. In contrast, the *power of* is an outcome of the *power to* once they have successfully formed a collective group/organisation as the *power of* an organisation to fight the oppression (Dominelli, 2000).

Power relations are also related to participation in community development. The inequality in power, which includes social class, has a significant influence on the participation process. According to Asnarulkhadi and Fariborz (2009b), people with more experience and resources are more motivated to participate and exercise ‘power over’ another party by dominating the participation process because they normally have a higher level of self-confidence. Research by Dola and Mijan (2006) found that power-related issues exist as one of the factors in the participation process where public participation has been manipulated in many ways by the local communities who have power. It is argued by Cooke and Kothari (2001) that the expression of ‘power’ in participation is supposed to be something that circulates among all participants rather than as something divided and owned only by certain individuals or groups.

## **Summary**

To summarise, this section discussed the issues of inequality and power as underlying issues to poverty and participation in community development. Inequality is related to poverty because it is recognised that the inequality of income and wealth causes a further problem related to poverty as these inequalities further disadvantage people living in poverty who are at the bottom of income and wealth distribution.

Power is another related issue to this research as it affects the poverty alleviation process, including participation in the community development process. It is known that power and power relations exist in this process, including for political reasons.

Key theories related to inequality and power are highlighted to provide support for research analysis purposes. The concept of *power over* as discussed by Lukes and Dominelli can help to identify whether there was an exercise of *power over* among the research participants and the local authorities in the poverty alleviation process. Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power also applies to this research because I explore the dynamics of power in the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation. These theories can assist in the understanding and identification of any existing conflicts within material resources (poverty alleviation programmes) that occurred among the research participants. In relation to poverty, these theories of power in terms of how the inequality in power and power relations lead to poverty due to the unequal accumulation of economic and cultural capitals are important in understanding the issue of poverty in this research.

### **2.3 Community development as a tool to fight poverty**

Community development has been one of the models in community work and it was believed to have started in the 1840s, although it was known as a collective action at that time (Phillips and Pittman, 2014). The term 'community development' came into use in the 1940s, then gained increasing recognition in the 1960s which this period was a period of optimism for community development because it was seen as a tool to fight poverty, which corresponded with the post-war reconstruction and development particularly in social and economic development (Craig et al., 2008). However, there are debates concerning the best model and approaches of community development to be used among academics and policymakers. Therefore, this section discusses the definitions and concepts of community development to understand how it has been conceived as a vehicle for fighting poverty. The models and debates in community development are discussed. The concepts of participation, empowerment and social capital in relation to community development are also discussed.



### **2.3.1 Definitions of community development**

Definitions of community development are nebulous and contested. There are more than a hundred definitions of community development in the literature that have been and will be used in broadly differing ways, with every definition having its own persuasive and promising connotations with its vision (Craig et al., 2008). Historically, for example, Biddle (1966) defined community development as a social process where people can control the local aspects of a changing world and be more proficient in it. A few decades later, Christenson and Robinson (1989) defined community development as a group of people in a locality initiating a social action process to change their economic, social, cultural or environmental situation.

Nowadays, community development is commonly defined as a way of empowering disadvantaged and marginalised people by giving them greater control over their lives because they know best for themselves what is good for them to enable them to meet their needs with a strong emphasis on community participation (Craig, 1998; Ife, 2010; Mayo, 2005a). The International Association for Community Development (IACD) suggested a wide-ranging definition of community development in 2004 during the Budapest Declaration (Conference) and a renewed definition at the Minnesota International Conference in 2016:

Community development is a way of strengthening civil society by prioritising the actions of communities, and their perspectives on the development of social, economic and environmental policy through the empowerment of local communities taken to mean both geographical communities, communities of interest or identity and communities organising around specific themes or policy initiatives. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organisations and networks; and the capacity of institutions and agencies (public, private and non-governmental) to work in dialogue with citizens to shape and determine the change in their communities. It plays a crucial role in supporting active democratic life by promoting the autonomous voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. It has a set of core values/social principles covering human rights, social inclusion, equality and respect for diversity; and a specific skills and knowledge base (IACD, 2004).

Community development is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participative democracy, sustainable

development, rights, economic opportunity, equality and social justice, through the organisation, education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these are of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings (IACD, 2016).

The IACD definitions of community development focus on community action among communities including geographical communities, communities of interest or identity, communities in rural and urban settings and communities organising by empowering the capacity of people in the development of social, economic, and environmental aspects. These definitions also highlight the extent of community development whether its process should solely involve the promotion of individuals and community capacity as the main asset (bottom-up approach) or it should be supplemented with help from stakeholders (professional interventions) to provide important resources that are needed by the community.

Based on all the definitions discussed above, the main points highlight empowering vulnerable people, fighting for the social justice of those marginalised groups and providing them with greater control over their lives. Thus, I argue for this understanding of community development as this definition is the most relevant to my study given that community development in Malaysia is contextualised with quite a similar framing, in line with these international definitions that focus on individual and collective capacities (from the academic and professional perspectives) and the responsibility of the government (from the policy perspective) to develop a community towards desired goals. Also, I recognise that there are debates on the best approach for community development, and how the roles of different individuals, groups and sectors relate together, as discussed below.

### **2.3.2 Models of community development**

A community requires economic, human, social and physical development to be considered as fully developed. In this respect, the process of community development focuses on economic development, including poverty reduction through income generation programmes; human development, including personal development through empowerment, skills and knowledge; and physical development, including infrastructure development (Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan, 2012). Various models and approaches have been discussed in the

literature. They have been practised in community development including the deficit-based, asset-based and self-help models while these models are taking either directive (imposed) or non-directive approaches (Batten and Batten, 1967; Bhattacharyya, 2004; Lovell, 2007; Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan, 2012). The models and approaches are discussed below, while the debates on them are discussed in the next subsection.

The deficit-based model, also known as the needs-based model, is a traditional model of community development that focuses on the needs of a community where the lack of the needs and resources are seen as a problem that requires help from external agencies (Green and Haines, 2008). This model is reflected as a top-down approach (directed) because governments and agencies commonly practise it via the institutional reform in delivering and providing resources to a community in need through the needs assessments to identify the problems and weaknesses in the community (Green and Goetting, 2010).

The deficit-based model of community development stresses stakeholders' responsibilities to provide resources for the community because the community is regarded as not having the necessary resources (i.e. education, funds and infrastructure) to develop themselves. This model is primarily linked to the directive approach of community development, an approach that focuses on the development of the disadvantaged or marginalised groups, for example, the use of community development during the colonial and post-colonial period by the British Commonwealth towards its colonies (Lovell, 2007).

Conversely, asset-based community development is seen as an alternative model to the deficit model. The view of assets is very broad because it includes not only the monetary forms of the asset but also all kinds of assets that any community has, including any natural resources, physical resources and human resources (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993). The whole idea of asset-based community development is to take a holistic view of all these assets and work from that basis to help organise the development process by mobilising the assets, including the skills and talents of the community (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003; O'Leary et al., 2011).

Asset-based community development is driven by the community rather than the external agencies (as in the deficit model), and it is based on the principle of

appreciative inquiry by recognising past success which then increases the aspiration and confidence of the community for the current project (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). An example of asset-based community development is the Timebanks project in the UK, which involves the exchange of skills and talents among individuals using 'time' as a currency unit (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2012). This community development model reflects the bottom-up approach to development and is also linked to the non-directive approach of the community. All community development models share the same principle, which is to improve the life of a community by fulfilling the needs of the community via help from the community development organisers although they differ in approach and outcomes (Ibid.).

Together with community development, there are other models of community work that sometimes overlap with one another. It is necessary to acknowledge that there are different but related and overlapping models of community work because they are used by community development practitioners in delivering community work services to the community. For example, Popple (2015) has listed nine community work models including community care; community organisation; community development; community education; community economic development; community action; feminist community work; ethnic minority and anti-racist community work; and environmentalist and the green movement critique. Aligning these approaches (or a combination of these) to the community issue is important in addressing any particular community issue.

### **2.3.3 Debates in community development discourse**

Some debates in community development focus on whether it starts with the deficit-based or asset-based model. It is argued that the deficit model has many drawbacks as it is often criticised for not using the assets and capabilities of the community to start the change because this model discourages the community from becoming independent. Green and Haines (2008: 9–10) argue that 'relying on professionals and others, communities become dependent on outside resources and often lose control over the development process'. This means that the community may lose its strengths through dependency on outside institutions while the local culture and identity of the community will be weakened at the same time (Wilson, 2015). Psychologically, the community may start to believe that they have no capability or

strength to solve their problems on their own without help from outside agencies, a negative mindset that makes the community more vulnerable (Nel, 2018).

The asset-based model, which is a community-driven process of community development, is also debatable because it is argued that the role of community organisers (i.e. private agencies) to facilitate the community at early stages of development could lead to a dependency culture among the community towards the organisers which can discredit the principle of this model (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). Therefore, the best way to do community development is a matter of debate because both models have their own disadvantages. The deficit model is seen to have failed to develop people's capacity and voice. In contrast, the principle of the asset-based model, which focuses on a broader range of assets within local communities as assets to development, is criticised for the potential for the development process to include a hidden agenda associated with the use of these assets.

Another key debate in community development lies within the use of directive versus non-directive approaches to community development. Batten (1973) argues that the directive or imposed approach of community development should be replaced by a non-directive approach. The core concept in the practice of community development is 'working with people' instead of 'for people', but in practice, many community development providers are seen to think and decide for those people instead of helping them think and decide for themselves. Batten also critiques the directive approach as it encourages agencies to put the blame on the community. Whenever a project fails, the community is commonly blamed for being ignorant in a very one-sided response. Thus, Batten introduces the non-directive approach to community development because he believes that the final decisions must come from the people about what works best for them through the help from the practitioners to assess the positive and negative sides of any community development project.

Batten's concept for a non-directive approach came as a result of his opposition towards colonialism, in which he disagreed with the directive approach used mainly by the UK colonialist government 'as a means to perpetuate colonial domination' in the UK colonies (Batten and Batten, 1967: v). He saw that the community development practised by the colonialists was a way of co-opting local groups into

colonial (decision-making) systems by making them feel like they have some say while continuing to exploit them economically. He realised this agenda when he was working for colonialist community development in Africa, and he later developed several approaches to address this (including the non-directive approach) (Lovell, 2007). This argument is supported by Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan (2012), who argue that the imposed approach often fails to build the sense of community and overlooks the democratic process in which the decision-making process solely rests with the stakeholders.

Other issues that have been discussed within the community development discourse include Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan's (2012) argument that the concept of community development should serve 'both academics and practitioners' by applying the objectives and processes of community development from both perspectives. Meanwhile, Craig et al. (2011) see 'community development as an embodied argument' that keeps searching at the grassroots level for new forms of social and political expression. They also argue that globalisation and the growth of social movements have challenged community development practice. Globalisation is making local people more interested in participating in global agendas rather than focusing on their local needs and problems. This is due to the growing awareness that their daily lives and choices are affected by the practices and policies of global institutions and processes.

#### **2.3.4 Participation, empowerment and social capital in relation to community development and poverty**

Participation, empowerment and social capital are nested concepts, but they come with different dimensions and elements. The interrelationship between these concepts is complex and they can be represented in their broadest sense as the important goals of community development primarily as an approach to poverty alleviation. As discussed earlier (see subsections 2.3.1), community development emphasises the empowerment of the local communities (e.g. poorer groups) so that they will have more control over their lives and the community can be empowered through the process of participation in the community development interventions. In the meantime, social capital is also an important element for empowerment

(primarily for the poor people) as it becomes one of the pillars<sup>11</sup> of empowerment that can directly result in empowerment at the local level (World Bank, 2001).

Many scholars (e.g. Krishna, 2003; Mayoux, 2001; Nega et al., 2010) argue that social capital is equally important as other capital (i.e. human, physical and financial capital) to empower the community, especially the people in poverty and as a way to address poverty because it might very well be as economically important in many ways. However, how and why these interrelated concepts of participation, empowerment and social capital are important for community development and poverty alleviation is complex. Therefore, the definitions of these concepts and how they operate in relation to community development and poverty are discussed below.

Participation is defined as ‘a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources which affect them’ (World Bank, 1994: 1). The seminal work of Sherry Arnstein, ‘A Ladder of Citizen Participation’ in 1969 discussed a range of stages of participation (i.e. eight-rung ladder), classified as nonparticipation, tokenism and citizen power (Arnstein, 1969). Her work provides significant classifications of citizen participation with theoretical power and practical relevance in place. The eight-rung ladder (Manipulation, Therapy, Informing, Consultation, Placation, Partnership, Delegated power and Citizen Control) represents the redistribution of power between the powerholders (e.g. local government) and citizens in the citizen participation process (Gaber, 2019). The ladder describes that the degree of citizen power increases when going up the rung and this can also help the citizen (community) to be able to realise their community goal better.

These definitions of participation focus on the sharing of power in the decision-making process between the development provider (e.g. local government) and community (citizen) in any development agendas. In addition, it is commonly known that the development process normally targets disadvantaged people and therefore, as Guijt points out, the main objective of participation is to ‘increase the involvement of socially and economically marginalised people in decision-making over their own lives’ (1998: 1). Craig et al. (2011) argue that participation is used in preparing

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<sup>11</sup> The other two pillars are making state institutions more responsive to the poor and removing social barriers (i.e. reducing social inequality) (World Bank, 2001).

people living in poverty to have an effective involvement in community institutions and make use of the resources to increase their quality of life. Therefore, participation can be defined as a process of achieving collective meanings, which plays a significant role in the development process, including community development.

These definitions emphasise that participation can empower people, especially marginalised groups, through the influence of stakeholders by developing and co-producing (e.g. through engagement and consultation) the goals together. Dominelli (2000) has linked participation to empowerment where participation in collective action will empower the marginalised individuals or groups and help them to realise their true potential on both personal and structural levels. For instance, each person in a group has an equal chance to learn new knowledge and skills through the participation process which will empower that individual at a personal level and will empower the group at a structural level.

Meanwhile, empowerment is defined as ‘increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make effective development and life choices and to transform these choices into desired actions and outcomes’ (Krishna, 2003: 1). Whilst the World Bank (2002: 14) solidly anchors empowerment as empowering only the poor people and defines it as the ‘expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives’. Both definitions emphasise that through the empowerment process, any individuals or communities (including the poor people) can have control over decisions and negotiate power in improving their quality of life. The efforts of empowerment are greatly dependent on social capital with the primary concern on power and power relations within a community (Nega et al., 2010).

Moreover, the definitions of social capital are contested and differ across studies, but they commonly reflect the ‘role of social relations in the economic sphere’ (Nega et al., 2010: 5). For this research, social capital is defined as the ‘features of social organisation such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit’ (Krishna, 2003). As for Mayoux (2001: 441), she defines it as the ‘rules and norms which facilitate formation and continuance of associations and relationships’ within communities primarily at the local level. In



this context, social capital is seen as an important component for community development alongside other forms of capital (e.g. human, economic and physical) because community development focuses on empowering the capacity of people in all developmental aspects including the economic, social and environment.

For instance, social capital through the formation of social organisations such as the micro-finance institutions (e.g. Grameen Bank) that focused on group-based programmes has been a successful approach to poverty alleviation (Esman, 2003). In addition, social cohesion (e.g. close-knit group cohesion and social ties), strong community identity and reciprocity also stem from social capital which can lead to community stability and expanding the community's capabilities (Ansari et al., 2012). Also, social capital builds better social networks, increase one's ability to engage in collective actions (e.g. in social and political activities) and indirectly increase incomes (Mayoux, 2001).

As discussed earlier (see Section 2.1 and 2.2), it is widely acknowledged that income (economic) capital has been the primary indicator of development and wellbeing (including in poverty measurements). Social capital is equally an important indicator of the economic capital for the community development initiatives and also in defining and measuring the multidimensional forms of poverty (Ansari et al., 2012). To achieve the best result of social capital, it needs external help and initiatives inputs or complementary resources such as other forms of capital (Esman, 2003; Krishna, 2003). For example, poor communities can improve their quality of life through social capital (e.g. forming cooperation with other networks that are more resource-rich) as it provides a 'necessary bridge between the poor and the resources available through external groups or institutions' (Ansari et al., 2012: 815).

In this respect, the interrelation of these concepts can be concluded as the participation of the local populations (i.e. the people living in poverty) in the process of community development including through the building of social capital as a way to produce an empowered community, thus improving their overall quality of life and also acted as poverty alleviation approach. This type of participation also includes participation in the decision-making processes such as in defining local problems and in discussing the solutions which give the people the ability to empower themselves (Burton, 2004; Morrison and Dearden, 2013). This

participation process also involves the contribution and sharing of knowledge while at the same time can increase the level of self-confidence among the participants (Behzad and Ahmad, 2012).

Participation in community development not only leads to improvements in the life quality of the participants but it can also improve the quality of the environment, preventing and solving social problems such as crime because the local people (participants) have the opportunity to think and find their own solutions to their problems (Chavis and Wandersman, 1990; Mubita et al., 2017). Not to forget, the discussion of social capital also lies around the theory of power as social capital (discussed earlier in subsection 2.2.2.1) that stresses the size of an individual's network and the volume of the capital which can be possessed by a community. Last but not least, I recognise that there are debates in the practice of these concepts in the developmental process which are discussed below.

#### **2.3.4.1 Debates in the practice of participation, empowerment and social capital in the developmental process**

Participation in the developmental process is quite a controversial issue among academics and policymakers. Since its emergence as an approach to development in the 1980s, it has received much criticism for being seen as a tyranny of development as it often fails to fulfil its objectives to empower and transform the disadvantaged people (Hickey and Mohan, 2004). This has been a key debate in the process of development, highlighted in Cooke and Kothari's (2001), *Participation: The New Tyranny*. They argue that participation is a way for stakeholders to oppress marginalised people through the negotiation of power and power relations, by making people believe that they are contributing something towards the development agenda. This argument is supported by Hickey and Mohan (2004), who propose that participation in the developmental process often fails to separate and clearly differentiate between development and politics because political influence normally exists in the process through the exercise of power among the service providers.

The critiques on participation as tyranny in the process of development and its failure in empowering the local community who participated in the developmental process are yet to be fully countered. In addition, there are also debates on whether participation serves as just a state tool in the development process to exert social

control over people. For example, participation in community development is sometimes regarded as ‘voluntarism and community involvement’ by some political leaders as an excuse to reduce the spending for community development (Craig, 1998: 3). However, despite the backlash on participatory development, it is also argued that participation in development can provide a positive outcome for people as discussed in the earlier subsection.

Meanwhile, the scope of social capital in the developmental process is debated among scholars in terms of viewing social capital either as a multilevel concept or only existing at the meso level (i.e. at the level of communities) (Grootaert, 2003). Some analysts, such as Putnam (1993) believed that social capital should not go beyond the level of a community. Whilst other scholars such as Grootaert (2003) and Krishna (2003) argue that the multilevel concept of social capital (i.e. integrated approach at the micro, meso and macro-level) could provide the best outcome of social capital both economically and socially. In addition, it is argued that social organisations often fail to protect their autonomy under the influence of external institutions (e.g. the governments) because the organisation commonly become a state tool and lose their role in representing the members’ interest (Esman, 2003). It is also a debate among scholars (e.g. Mayoux, 2001; Nega et al., 2010) on how social capital can best contribute to empowerment primarily for the poorer groups if this capital is not supplemented with other types of capital.

## **Summary**

To summarise, community development has always been a broad field, as reflected by the IACD definition. In addition, there is a healthy debate on what is community development and how community development can best be done, including the best model and approach to community development discussed above. This section has reviewed the international literature on community development to contextualise community development in Malaysia and will develop this further in Chapter 3 by focusing on the Malaysian government’s definition of community development.

Meanwhile, both participation and social capital are used in community development as the means for empowerment of the people who are living in poverty in this research and to help improve the communities’ capacity and directly empowered them. These concepts are especially used at the very local level so that local people

will have the ability to solve their problems with the help of community organisers. These concepts have existed in many forms of the development process, including community development and are dependent on the contextual specificities and the trajectory of every approach that must be simultaneously and separately pursued. There is, however, a debate about participation as a new form of tyranny in development that is seen as a manipulative way of the state to deliver state agendas and so the social capital.

### **Summary of this chapter**

This chapter reviewed global literature to provide an understanding of the international conceptualisation of poverty and participation in community development as it helps me to contextualise this topic prior to further consideration of the Malaysian context. It has reviewed the global literature on the issues of poverty that recognise poverty as a persistent human-centric problem and discussed the personal and structural causes of it. Then, it discussed the issues of inequality and power, in relation to the process of participation in community development and around the issues of poverty. This chapter also discussed community development as an approach to poverty alleviation and the key debates around it. This chapter has also reviewed participation and social capital as approaches to the process of development that can empower a community, including community development. The next chapter will discuss the same issues in relation to the Malaysian context.

From this literature review, the concepts of inequality and power emerged as key issues related to poverty and participation in community development. Inequality, especially economic inequality, is believed to prevent people from getting out of the poverty trap because when income and wealth distribution between the top income earners and the bottom income earners is increasing, this leads to the increase of relative poverty worldwide. This situation also contributes to the unequal division of power among people and limits the effectiveness of relative poverty intervention strategies. Meanwhile, the power and inequality issues in relation to poverty are recognised by community development practitioners as the problems that need to be solved. Participation and social capital in community development are suggested as the ways to solve this problem by promoting the concept of empowerment among the people living in poverty so that they will have the ability to develop their own

responses to poverty and further improve their quality of life. How communities participate in defining and understanding poverty and developing their own responses to it that relate to these broader analyses of relative inequality will be explored in the findings and analysis chapters.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW: MALAYSIAN PERSPECTIVES

#### Introduction

Having discussed the global context of poverty and participation in community development in the previous chapter, this chapter continues to discuss the case for the research by looking into the Malaysian context. The chapter consists of three sections. In the first section, I review poverty and the socio-economic situation in Malaysia by looking into the previous socio-economic system and its history to provide an understanding of poverty in Malaysia. I also discuss absolute and relative poverty in Malaysia and the implementation of the policies related to poverty. Secondly, I discuss community development in Malaysia, by discussing its definitions, implementation and the previous research related to it. Lastly, I discuss the dynamics of gender relations in the development process in Malaysia.

#### 3.1 Poverty and the socio-economic situation in Malaysia

Poverty as a global socio-economic issue is also prevalent in Malaysia. Poverty in Malaysia is historically linked to ethnicity. As highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, this was commonly seen more among the Bumiputeras before independence as compared to the Chinese and Indians, but gradually poverty has become an issue in all ethnic groups. In addition, poverty is also a regional problem because the non-industrialised and less developed<sup>12</sup> states (i.e. normally populated by the majority of the Bumiputeras) have a higher poverty rate than others, especially in rural areas (Zin, 2014). The current patterns of poverty in Malaysia are still commonly based on ethnicity and geography (as mostly found in the Malaysian poverty-related literature) as a result of huge economic imbalances between ethnicities and localities. These

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<sup>12</sup> States in Malaysia are divided by developed and less developed states which this division is primarily based on the states per capita GDP. Developed states include Johor (7<sup>th</sup>), Melaka (5<sup>th</sup>), Perak (10<sup>th</sup>), Negeri Sembilan (6<sup>th</sup>), Penang (3<sup>rd</sup>), Selangor (2<sup>nd</sup>) and Federal Territories (1<sup>st</sup>) while the less developed states are Kedah (13<sup>th</sup>), Kelantan (14<sup>th</sup>), Pahang (8<sup>th</sup>), Perlis (11<sup>th</sup>), Terengganu (9<sup>th</sup>), Sabah (12<sup>th</sup>) and Sarawak (4<sup>th</sup>) with the numbers are showing the states ranking by per capita real GDP in 2010 (Habibullah et al., 2018). This state division is originally stemmed from the country's historical development during the colonial British period that had divided the states for particular economic sector which led to some states (West Coast states) to be more industrialised and prosperous than others (Northern and East Coast states), and also resulted to the racial issue as discussed earlier in Chapter 1, Section 1.3 (Zin, 2014).

imbalances have lasted more than five decades following independence, although the current data (see Table 3.1) shows that it is now a problem for all and imbalances are narrowing (Gopal and Malek, 2015).

### **3.1.1 The pre-independence of a socio-economic system in Malaysia**

Before independence, Malaysia was ruled by the British Commonwealth government from 1824 to 1957, although within the period there was Japanese occupation in Malaysia for four years between 1941 and 1945 (Department of Information, 2018). During colonial times, Peninsular Malaysia (known as Malaya before independence) was directly governed by the British government while the ruling of Sabah and Sarawak was administrated by the British North Borneo Chartered Company and the Brook family respectively (Andaya and Andaya, 2016). Malaya's economy during these times was hugely dependent on tin and rubber exports to the West. The growth of these industries led to a mass migration of Chinese and Indian labourers from China and India, brought in to Malaya by the British Commonwealth government from the late nineteenth century (Hirschman, 1975). The entry of these immigrants into those industries essentially influenced the Bumiputeras, particularly the Malays who mainly lived in less developed states and remained as rural agriculturalists while the Chinese and Indians engaged in more prosperous sectors including mining, manufacturing and other business sectors (Hirschman, 1975; Zin, 2014).

As a result, the colonial economic system that provided better opportunities and outcomes for the immigrants led to racial and regional economic imbalances among states and between ethnic groups in Malaysia. The historical distribution of the population shows that the immigrant workers were concentrated in the west coast states while the Malays lived in less developed states that are mainly rural and perpetually stayed in their traditional occupations (Zin, 2014). The economic imbalances among ethnic groups were very pronounced at this time (and until post-independence). As Thillainathan (1976) notes, the Chinese per capita product in the mining sector was 150% more than the agriculture sector of the Bumiputera-Malay. The migration process has also created a multiracial society in Malaysia because the immigrants were given citizenship statuses prior to independence through the *Jus Soli* principle (Zin, 2014), as discussed in Chapter 1.

### 3.1.2 The current socio-economic situation in Malaysia

Nowadays, the socio-economic situation in Malaysia can still be represented by racial and geographical characteristics, although the latest socioeconomic data recorded did not show huge disparities among ethnic groups and states as compared to the earlier data. The Bumiputeras are still slightly behind the Chinese and Indians economically. The monthly household income data by ethnic group in Malaysia shows the median monthly household gross income of Bumiputera is MYR 4,846 (GBP<sup>13</sup> £863) as compared to MYR 6,582 (GBP £1,172) and MYR 5,428 (GBP £967) for the Chinese and Indians respectively (Economic Planning Unit, 2018). Moreover, the percentage of absolute poverty incidence by ethnic group (Table 3.1) also shows that the Bumiputeras have the highest poverty rate (slightly higher than others) compared to other ethnic groups, and states populated with a high percentage of the Bumiputera population (Table 3.2) also have a higher rate of poverty.

It is seen from the table that the socio-economic data in 2016 among ethnicity and states in Malaysia shows poverty incidences to be quite marginal as compared to the earlier data. For instance, the rate of absolute poverty for the Bumiputera in 1976 was 64.4% as compared to 17.4% and 27.3% for the Chinese and Indians respectively, whilst in 2016 only 0.5% of Bumiputera and 0.1% of Chinese and Indians respectively still lived in absolute poverty. The dramatic decline of absolute poverty across all regions and ethnicities occurred mainly between the 1970s and the 1990s as a result of the implementation of the NEP from 1970 to 1990, which focused on poverty alleviation across all ethnicities and the elimination of racial identification based on occupation and locality (Zin, 2014).

Table 3.1: Percentage of poverty incidence (absolute poverty) by ethnic group in Malaysia, 1976-2016 (%)

| <b>Ethnicity/Year</b>        | <b>1976</b> | <b>1987</b> | <b>1997</b> | <b>2007</b> | <b>2016</b> |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Bumiputera                   | 64.4        | 26.6        | 9.0         | 5.1         | 0.5         |
| Chinese                      | 17.4        | 7.0         | 1.1         | 0.6         | 0.1         |
| Indians                      | 27.3        | 9.6         | 1.3         | 2.5         | 0.1         |
| <b>National poverty rate</b> | 37.7        | 19.4        | 6.1         | 3.6         | 0.4         |

Source: Economic Planning Unit, 2018

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<sup>13</sup> I use the currency conversion rate from the XE Currency Converter website (<https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/>) for all exchange rates, dated 29<sup>th</sup> December 2021.



Table 3.2: Incidence of absolute poverty by states with the percentage of Bumiputera population for each state, 1976-2016 (%)

| <b>States</b>         | <b>1976</b> | <b>1987</b> | <b>1997</b> | <b>2007</b> | <b>2016</b> | <b>Percentage of Bumiputera population in 2017 (%)</b> |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Johor                 | 29.0        | 11.1        | 1.6         | 1.5         | 0.0         | 54.1                                                   |
| Melaka                | 32.4        | 11.7        | 3.5         | 1.8         | 0.0         | 64.5                                                   |
| Selangor              | 22.9        | 8.9         | 1.3         | 0.7         | 0.0         | 52.7                                                   |
| F.T of Kuala Lumpur   | N.A         | 5.2         | 0.1         | 1.5         | 0.0         | 41.6                                                   |
| F.T of Putrajaya      | N.A         | N.A         | N.A         | 0.0         | 0.0         | 95.7                                                   |
| Pulau Pinang          | 32.4        | 12.9        | 1.7         | 1.4         | 0.1         | 41.1                                                   |
| Perlis                | 59.8        | 29.1        | 10.7        | 7.0         | 0.1         | 90.2                                                   |
| Negeri Sembilan       | 33.0        | 21.5        | 4.7         | 1.3         | 0.2         | 57.7                                                   |
| Perak                 | 43.0        | 19.9        | 4.5         | 3.4         | 0.2         | 55.3                                                   |
| Kedah                 | 61.0        | 31.3        | 11.5        | 3.1         | 0.2         | 76.7                                                   |
| Pahang                | 38.9        | 12.3        | 4.4         | 1.7         | 0.2         | 75.0                                                   |
| Terengganu            | 60.3        | 36.1        | 17.3        | 6.5         | 0.4         | 94.3                                                   |
| Kelantan              | 67.1        | 31.6        | 19.2        | 7.2         | 0.4         | 92.9                                                   |
| Sarawak               | 56.5        | 24.7        | 7.3         | 4.2         | 0.6         | 71.7                                                   |
| Sabah & F.T of Labuan | 58.3        | 35.3        | 16.5        | 16.0        | 2.8         | 61.3                                                   |

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017c; Economic Planning Unit, 2018  
N.A: Data that does not exist because the territories had not yet been formed in that particular year

Both Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show that the percentage of poverty rate among ethnic groups and states declined from year to year and this trend is true for all ethnic groups and states, although some of the states with a high percentage of Bumiputera still recorded a higher rate of poverty than others. The success in reducing the absolute poverty rate is very much linked to the government's effort in alleviating absolute poverty, through the implementation of various economic policies and plans, which will be discussed further in subsection 3.1.4.

### **3.1.3 Absolute poverty, relative poverty and income inequality**

In Malaysia, poverty is officially measured in terms of the absolute form of poverty. The poverty data in Malaysia is determined by the National Household Income Survey (HIS), conducted twice every five years by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), which records the latest gross household income of all

populations and generates data for poverty (Economic Planning Unit, 2018). The HIS is also responsible for calculating and revising the national Poverty Line Income (PLI) through the statistics of the basic amenities for the poor household. Malaysia has different PLIs (Table 3.3) according to the region (see Figure 1.1) and strata due to the differences in the cost of living in those regions (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2014). The PLI was published in 2014, and the use of the PLI to measure absolute poverty is adopted from the UN measurement of poverty, which is based on the International Poverty Line (IPL) income.

Table 3.3: Average PLIs according to the region, 2014

| <b>Region</b>               | <b>Urban</b>                   |                               | <b>Rural</b>                   |                               |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
|                             | <b>Absolute Poor (MYR/GBP)</b> | <b>Extreme Poor (MYR/GBP)</b> | <b>Absolute Poor (MYR/GBP)</b> | <b>Extreme Poor (MYR/GBP)</b> |
| Peninsular Malaysia         | 940/165                        | 580/102                       | 870/153                        | 580/102                       |
| Sarawak                     | 1040/183                       | 700/123                       | 920/162                        | 610/107                       |
| Sabah & F.T of Labuan       | 1160/204                       | 690/121                       | 1180/207                       | 760/133                       |
| <b>Average national PLI</b> | 950/167                        |                               |                                |                               |

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2014

The PLIs measure the percentage of poverty incidences in Malaysia and show the rate for absolute poverty through a fixed amount that does not take into account growth in income across the population. An overview of the incidence of poverty by ethnicity in Malaysia in 2016 shows that 0.5% of Bumiputeras are still living in absolute poverty compared to only 0.1% of the Chinese and Indians respectively (Table 3.1), whereas 1.0% of the rural population are in absolute poverty as compared to only 0.2% of the urban population and the overall absolute poverty in Malaysia in 2016 is 0.4% (Economic Planning Unit, 2018). The data show that the absolute poverty incidence in Malaysia is nearly zero and that the current rate of absolute poverty incidence (see Table 3.1 and 3.2) among ethnicities and locality is very marginal when measured in absolute dimension. It can be concluded that the history of different opportunities through colonialism for different ethnic groups in rural and urban settings, which previously led to absolute poverty imbalances among ethnicities and geographical areas seems to have been almost eliminated.

Based on the latest absolute poverty rate, poverty as subsistence in Malaysia should no longer be a large-scale problem. However, the current use of the poverty

measurement, which is solely based on the PLIs is not enough because it does not take into account the dynamic and multi-dimensional aspects of poverty that a relative measurement of poverty covers through linking poverty to the conditions prevailing in a society. Rasool et al. (2011) argue that the PLIs are solely based on the monetary approach which measures the minimum requirements for the basic subsistence needed in every household (i.e. food and non-food items) and that the PLIs could also be multi-dimensional by seeking to measure social and other non-economic aspects of life.

Therefore, they have suggested the use of a multi-dimensional measurement of poverty to replace the conventional monetary measurement because the poverty situation in Malaysia has become more complex. This is caused by the growing numbers of urban poor as shown by the non-monetary indicators such as the decrease in living standards and the increase in social problems among the urban population while the rise of the income and wealth inequalities has led to the increase in relative poverty (Rasool et al., 2011).

In addition, the current PLI measurement may not be suitable to be used in all areas and strata. Sulaiman et al. (2014) argue that the current national PLI fails to measure urban poverty adequately because it does not cover socio-economic aspects, living conditions and social fragmentation dimensions among the urban poor population. Therefore, they have also suggested the use of the Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) to replace the current PLIs. Gopal and Malek (2015) also support this view, arguing that the previous use of the monetary concept to measure poverty in Malaysia places doubt on the credibility of progress towards poverty eradication because it solely emphasises the material aspects without taking into account other social indicators. This is because poverty should also include other non-economic aspects such as access to basic social services like education and health, and others.

Following this, the Federal Government has recently adopted the MPIs under the 11<sup>th</sup> Malaysian Plan (MP), which runs from 2016 until 2020 and measures four dimensions of poverty including income, education, health and living standards, which represent both absolute and relative types of poverty (Jayasooria and Nathan, 2016). Jamil and Mat (2014) have previously argued that poverty in Malaysia should be measured relatively by looking at the average income and standard of living of the

society because this type of poverty will keep on persisting due to the inequality in the income distribution among society.

Meanwhile, relative poverty in Malaysia was defined as the ‘per capita household income level that cuts off the bottom 40% of the population’ (Nair and Sagarin, 2015: 103). It is now officially measured through half the median income of all Malaysian households in each particular year (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020a). Similarly, the relative poverty measurement used by most countries (e.g. the UK and Europe) also uses either the mean or median income (see Chapter 2, subsection 2.1.1). The rate of relative poverty in Malaysia recorded in 2016 is 15.9%, which covers the numbers of households with half of the median monthly household income, which is MYR 2,614 (GBP £466) as the median income for the Malaysian households recorded in the same year is MYR 5,228 (GBP £931) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017b). Table 3.4 shows the national relative poverty rate and the rate by ethnicity from 1997 to 2016.

Table 3.4: Percentage of the relative poverty rate at the national level and by ethnicity, 1995-2016 (%)

| <b>Ethnicity/Year</b> | <b>1995</b> | <b>2007</b> | <b>2014</b> | <b>2016</b> |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Bumiputeras           | 18.9        | 15.7        | 15.3        | 18.2        |
| Chinese               | 17.6        | 18.2        | 14.3        | 10.3        |
| Indians               | 14.5        | 14.8        | 13.7        | 12.0        |
| <b>National Rate</b>  | <b>19.5</b> | <b>17.4</b> | <b>15.6</b> | <b>15.9</b> |

Source: Economic Planning Unit, 2018

Table 3.4 shows that the national relative poverty rate in Malaysia steadily decreased from 19.5% in 1995 to 15.6% in 2014, but it had a slight increase to 15.9% in 2016. The table also shows that relative poverty in Malaysia is a problem among all ethnic groups, but it is more prevalent among the Bumiputeras as the latest data in 2016 recorded that the relative poverty rate for Bumiputeras was the highest among other ethnicities. For the Chinese and Indians, however, the rate for these groups has steadily decreased, which means that fewer of them are experiencing relative poverty and absolute poverty. The 2016 data on relative poverty incidence among different ethnicities, which shows Bumiputeras are experiencing a higher rate of poverty, is consistent with the absolute rate of poverty (see Table 3.1), which also shows the highest rate among Bumiputeras as compared to other ethnicities and makes them the most suitable target for this research. The increased percentage of the relative

poverty of the total population in 2016 as compared to the previous year in 2014 could also indicate that not everyone was benefitting from the country's economic growth, especially the Bumiputeras.

Moreover, the 15.9% of the Malaysian households who are currently living below the relative poverty line consists of all those who are in absolute poverty (i.e. below the PLI of MYR 950) and also consists of nearly half of the bottom 40% (B40) population of the income share level. This is because the median income of the B40 households recorded in 2016 was MYR 3,000 (GBP £534), which is just slightly more than half of the median income (MYR 2,614) of the total Malaysian population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017b). In Malaysia, the income share level of the B40 population is divided into those with a monthly gross household income of below MYR 4,360 (GBP £777), the middle 40% (M40) population with a monthly gross household income of between MYR 4,360 and MYR 9,619 (GBP £1,714) and the top 20% (T20) population with more than MYR 9,619 of monthly gross household income (Economic Planning Unit, 2018). The B40 population are commonly known as the low-income population, and nearly half of them live in relative poverty (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, n.d).

To conclude, it is evident in the statistics that the absolute poverty rate decreased substantially from 37.7% in 1976 to 0.4% in 2016 (see Table 3.1) while for relative poverty, it recorded a steady decrease after 1997 before a slight increase in 2016. The decrease of both the absolute and relative poverty rate is a result of the implementation of various government policies and projects since independence in 1957, although the focus was more on the eradication of absolute poverty. Only recently has the attention shifted to relative poverty, as reflected in the 10<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan (2010-2015), which focused on the prosperity of the B40 population because a significant proportion of this group is in relative poverty (Gopal and Malek, 2015). Thus, the next section will discuss the related economic and development policies and their implementation in detail in alleviating both absolute and relative poverty.

#### **3.1.4 Policy shifts and their implementation in Malaysia**

In addressing poverty and inequality issues, the Malaysian government has introduced and implemented various plans and policies since independence. There

are four main national economic development policies and 13 national plans that have been implemented since 1957. The aim of the implementation of these policies and plans was to turn Malaysia into a developed nation by 2020, in line with Vision 2020<sup>14</sup>. Table 3.5 below shows Malaysia's key development policies and plans.

Table 3.5: Malaysia's key development policies and plans, 1957-2020

| Year      | National plans            | National development policies     |
|-----------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1956-1960 | 1st Malaya Plan           | -                                 |
| 1961-1965 | 2nd Malaya Plan           |                                   |
| 1966-1970 | 1st Malaysia Plan (1MP)   |                                   |
| 1971-1975 | 2nd Malaysia Plan (2MP)   | New Economic Policy (NEP)         |
| 1976-1980 | 3rd Malaysia Plan (3MP)   |                                   |
| 1981-1985 | 4th Malaysia Plan (4MP)   |                                   |
| 1986-1990 | 5th Malaysia Plan (5MP)   |                                   |
| 1991-1995 | 6th Malaysia Plan (6MP)   | National Development Policy (NDP) |
| 1996-2000 | 7th Malaysia Plan (7MP)   |                                   |
| 2001-2005 | 8th Malaysia Plan (8MP)   | National Vision Policy (NVP)      |
| 2006-2010 | 9th Malaysia Plan (9MP)   |                                   |
| 2011-2015 | 10th Malaysia Plan (10MP) | New Economic Model (NEM)          |
| 2016-2020 | 11th Malaysia Plan (11MP) |                                   |
| 2020      | Vision 2020               |                                   |

Source: Prime Minister's Office, 2018

The First Malayan Plan (1956-1960) emphasis on rural development, especially for agricultural and infrastructure development, mainly targeted the Bumiputera-Malay from rural states with 52% of the total national development expenditure was allocated for this plan (Zin, 2014). Emphasis was given to the agricultural sector and rural development to increase the economic level of the Bumiputera-Malay because they populated this sector. The Second Malayan Plan (1961-1965) was a continuation of the first plan with the same focus on rural development, and it also promoted people's participation in the development process (Department of Information, 2019b). Following the two Malayan Plans, the First Malaysia Plan (1MP) was introduced in 1966 after the formation of the Federation of Malaysia in

<sup>14</sup> At the time the thesis was completed (end of 2021), it seems that Malaysia had not achieved its Vision 2020. The Malaysian Government realised this Vision cannot be achieved on time and therefore has announced a change in the Vision 2020 to a new plan, known as the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, as announced at the end of 2019 (Hasnan, 2019).

1963. The 1MP was quite similar to earlier plans with an emphasis was given to enhancing the living standards of the rural population targeting the Bumiputera-Malay by improving the available community and social services (Selvaratnam and Bee Tin, 2001).

The Malaysian development agenda witnessed a shift in its plans and policies from 1970 through the implementation of the NEP, which was considered the beginning of development in modern Malaysian history (Mohamad Zahir, 2018). The NEP was implemented as a solution to the previous national plans, which were unable to address poverty issues among the Bumiputeras completely. The first national household survey in 1970 recorded 49.3% of the Malaysian population as living below the poverty line with 86% of them living in rural areas (Department of Information, 2019a). The NEP was also intended to strengthen social cohesion following the outbreak of a bloody race riot in May 1969, which was triggered by the prolonged income inequality issues among ethnic groups that caused dissatisfaction among the Bumiputera-Malay with the Chinese population (Zin, 2014).

The NEP ran from 1970 until 1990 to address income disparities among ethnicities and it was incorporated into the 2MP until the 5MP. The main objective of the NEP was to attain national unity and promote nation-building among all ethnic groups through poverty elimination programmes and the restructuring of the society (Zin, 2014). Mohamad Zahir (2018) discusses the prominence of the NEP as intensively focusing on rural development, promoting public participation in the planning and development processes and providing equal facilities and opportunities in education, health and housing for all ethnic groups. The NEP has resulted in great success with a huge decrease in the rural absolute poverty level from 51% in 1970 to 22% in 1990, mainly among the agricultural Bumiputera-Malay community although it was less successful in tackling relative poverty (Abdullah et al., 2015).

After the NEP had ended, the government implemented the National Development Policy (NDP) from 1991 to 2000 as the continuation of the NEP, and it was also incorporated into the 6MP and 7MP. Thus, the objectives of the NDP were quite similar to the NEP with more emphasis given to the private sector to collaborate with the government agencies to achieve their objectives (Zin, 2014). The NDP was seen as a preparatory phase to achieve Vision 2020, but it was slightly affected by the

outbreak of the Asian economic crisis from 1997 to 1998, which led to the problem in the policy's financial budget, and thus slowed down the projects' implementation under this policy (Mohamad Zahir, 2018). However, NDP was still successful in achieving its objectives and decreased the overall absolute poverty level from 12.4% in 1992 to 8.5% in 1999 (Economic Planning Unit, 2018).

Followed by the NDP, the National Vision Policy (NVP), also known as the second phase of Vision 2020, was implemented from 2001 to 2010. It emphasised development in the twenty-first century with the strategies to build a resilient nation with a strong economic capability that is competitive and aimed to make Malaysia one of the 'developed' countries by 2020 (Mohamad Zahir, 2018; Zin, 2014). Its core objectives were still the same as those of the NEP and NDP (focused on the cohesion and unity among its multi-ethnic society), but it also aimed for sustainable economic development through the creation of a united Malaysian society. The NVP was incorporated into the 8MP and 9MP, with the 9MP focusing on human capital development to prepare Malaysian society to compete at the global level (Mohamad Zahir, 2018).

The current economic and development policy in Malaysia is the New Economic Model (NEM), launched in 2010. It came together with the 10MP (2010 - 2015) and 11MP (2016-2020), which focus on preparing Malaysia to become a developed country by realising its growth potential (Zin, 2014). The NEM aimed for national economic growth to lead Malaysia to become a high-income country by 2020, and this goal was to be achieved by alleviating relative poverty among the B40 population, departing from previous policies that focused on absolute poverty (Nair and Sagar, 2015). This is because the 10MP focused on the life improvements of the B40 population in particular and also for all populations in various sectors including housing, transport, healthcare and others through more transparent programmes that were needs-based (Zin, 2014).

The current 11MP is a continuation of the 10MP with an emphasis on the prosperity and wellbeing of its society in preparing its people for Vision 2020. It comprises six core strategies to achieve this goal: strengthening the inclusiveness for an equitable society by making sure that all levels of society receive equal opportunities in all aspects of development particularly for the B40 population; increasing the prosperity



of the people by providing sufficient access to healthcare and housing sectors; increasing human capital development by providing more skilled job opportunities and by focusing on skills and technical development; focusing on the green growth for the country's sustainability; strengthening the infrastructure sector to support economic growth and stimulating the growth of the economy via added values and knowledge (Economic Planning Unit, 2015b).

The Malaysian government (especially from 1970 to 2000) combined economic growth with poverty reduction as the philosophy of development in the policies and plans described above and through the rapid expansion of the modern economic sectors that had created many employment opportunities especially to the poorer groups (Abhayaratne, 2004). These approaches aligned with 'trickle-down' theory and boosted the country's economic growth (i.e. the side benefits of the economic growth are trickling down to the economically disadvantaged groups, for example, it improves the conditions of the labour market) which automatically acted as absolute poverty reduction strategies. Nonetheless, as noted earlier the impact of 'trickle-down' approaches to economic growth can also worsen economic inequality and relative poverty.

For the case of Malaysia, it is noted that the rate of relative poverty (see Table 3.4) has only improved moderately since the government had first recorded it in 1995 with 19.5% while the recorded rate in 2016 was 15.9%. This data could indicate that the 'trickle-down' theory did not work in reducing the relative side of poverty in Malaysia although it had nearly addressed the absolute poverty. It is acknowledged that economic growth is important in poverty reduction, but the 'redistribution of income and assets' are more crucial to reducing poverty particularly relative poverty (Young, 2019: 157). In addition, Rachman et al., (2020) support that the economic development strategies for poverty reduction should prioritise equal income distribution than high economic growth as the growth (GDP) itself will not promptly improve the community welfare.

## **Summary**

This section focuses on the national situation of poverty in Malaysia and the responses to poverty, with the main argument being that relative poverty remains a big problem in Malaysia. It is also worth noting that poverty was largely defined as

absolute poverty. However, there has been a movement towards developing an understanding and measurement of relative poverty and developing interventions in tackling this type of poverty among the B40 population. In addition, the newly introduced MPIs to measure both types of poverty have just been implemented, and this data is due for release.

From the Malaysian policy perspective, the word ‘poor’ or ‘poverty’ are commonly being referred to individuals or households living in the specified PLIs which actually relates to absolute poverty. In contrast, relative poverty is commonly being represented as the low-income population or the B40 population (given that nearly half of the B40 population are in relative poverty). Based on the presented data and figures, they show that absolute poverty has been nearly eliminated in Malaysia although relative poverty is persisting while geographical and racial dimensions that were commonly known to characterise the poverty landscape (especially absolute poverty) in Malaysia are no longer recognised as significant factors.

### **3.2 Community development in Malaysia**

Traditionally, community development in Malaysia (for example in Sarawak) emerged in the early 1900s although it had not yet been labelled as community development through activities like clearing the grounds of the local facilities (e.g. government primary schools) that were initiated by the community themselves because they wanted to use the provided facilities well (Wallis, 1966). However, an established form of community development in Malaysia was used as part of a wider strategy of British colonialism, in which community development supported the implementation of the capitalist system in the colonial territories for British economic benefits by ‘incorporating the indigenous ruling class into the colonial hegemony’ to gain local support for the colonial power (Popple, 2015: 21).

The use of this model in the colonial territories was criticised by Ng (1988), who sees the incorporation of the local people into the colonising system as a way to dominate them because they were offered subordinate positions in relation to the British colonisers. Later, community development was used by the British colonial government to combat the communist threat in Malaya in the early 1950s with ‘new community development villages’ being developed as the emergency resettlement of

the people in Malaya (Craig et al., 2011: 76; Mayo, 2008). Community development during this time was known to be an approach to develop a community through the communitarian form of participation (Hickey and Mohan, 2004) as it helped to sustain territorial development and form social unity among the citizen (Mangone, 2008).

After independence in 1957, the Malaysian government, like some other governments in developing countries, continued to use community development as a strategy to fight the spread of communism, as it was the common approach used after the colonial period (Popple, 2015). It is then used as a formal way to bring the community into the agenda of development, especially in solving poverty and improving the life quality of the Malaysian community (Asnarulkhadi and Fariborz, 2009a). However, it is argued that the community development process after independence has been ‘shaped by the political context....., and even quite fundamentally distorted by the political interest and struggles with which they become locally implicated’ (Shamsul, 1986: 4), which could be considered as a way to gain political support from the people.

### **3.2.1 Definitions of community development in Malaysia**

To date, there is no formal or specific definition of Malaysian community development, whether from a policy perspective or an academic perspective or any professional body. The practice of community development in Malaysia adopted the wide definition of community development because it involves any government and local initiatives of community development activities, and also involves any community events that bring the community together. The definitions of community development are slightly different from the policy and the academic perspective.

Malaysian academics contextualise community development through the international context and define it as an approach to improve ‘the abilities of individuals within a community to collectively make better decisions about the use of local resources and knowledge’ (Abu, 2014: 82). In contrast, Sabran (2003) concludes community development is an effort from all parties, particularly from the community itself, to enhance their life quality by utilising the resources that they have. Malaysian academics’ standpoint on community development seems to focus

on individual capacities rather than the responsibility of agencies following the international definitions of community development that mainly emphasise the actions and voice of the communities, as discussed in Chapter 2. The discussion around definitions of community development within the Malaysian context did not record any divisions or tensions that might exist within it neither among the academics nor the policymakers.

From the policy perspective, community development is known as an approach to develop the communities, mainly concentrating on poverty eradication strategies, and this approach is embedded into the national development policies that have been incorporated into the Malaysian five-year master plan (Asnarulkhadi and Fariborz, 2009a). The current practice of community development in Malaysia appears to still adopt the traditional practice of community development based on the deficit-based model left by the colonial legacy by providing the outside resources to the targeted community to develop the community (Mohd Yusuf et al., 2011). The provided resources are primarily on the economic, physical and social development of the local community and the development is provided by stakeholders (Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan, 2012; Midgley et al., 1986). The government has been directing the changes of the community (mainly the poor and low-income population) by providing those interventions through a top-down approach.

The practice of community development in Malaysia aims to help the communities to improve their life quality and reduce dependency on the government through planned and sponsored programmes from the government (Selvaratnam and Bee Tin, 2001). However, this practice of community development might be criticised because it can be seen (in its implementation) as a substitute for local government rather than emphasising the real objectives of community development that include participation, collective action and self-help among the communities as reviewed in the wider literature (see Jones, 1977 for example).

The government provides the majority of the community development programmes in Malaysia. Community development in Malaysia primarily focuses on underdeveloped communities that need to be developed (according to the government), such as the farmer communities, fisherman communities and the aboriginal communities, by providing necessary local facilities, infrastructure and

other necessary services (Ministry of Women Family and Community Development, 2006). These communities are generally located in rural and remote areas that are sometimes left behind by the development process. In this context, the rural population has become the focus for community development due to various reasons, including low income and health quality, lower literacy rate and lack of basic infrastructure than the urban population (Mohd Yusuf et al., 2011). The characteristics of rural areas are seen as impeding the national economic development process and therefore, it is important to mobilise rural populations through community development strategies and education (Isa, 2010).

The government has also prioritised the development of the urban community by introducing the National Community Policy (NCP) in 2019. NCP emphasises the sustainable living conditions of particularly the low-income (B40) urban population residing in social (low and medium cost) housing areas as they make up around one-third of the total urban population (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 2019b). The development of this vulnerable urban community is equally important to the development of the rural population because both communities are contributing to the overall country's development.

Apart from the government-initiated programmes, there are some community development programmes initiated by the community themselves (i.e. have the elements of asset-based) and they have been done through cooperation with various parties including government agencies and private bodies such as the Homestay programme (Mohd Yusuf et al., 2011). Taking the Homestay programme as an example, it has been initiated by the local people but also involves the role of the government agencies (tourism agencies) in promoting and developing this programme further. A few other programmes use asset-based practice at some point in the programmes' phase, as these programmes normally involve building the skills and assets of the participants.

Based on the definitions discussed above, it can be concluded that practically, community development in Malaysia is defined as a process to empower mainly underdeveloped communities. Community development is used by the government (either the federal or state government) primarily through providing resources to the community that needs to be developed (i.e. deficit-based approach) and also

involved the top-down approach as the government determines the content of the interventions.

However, many proponents of community development would say that if it involves a deficit-based or top-down approach, it is not ‘real’ community development. Nevertheless, it is clear that in practice, many such deficit-based activities end up getting labelled by governments and NGOs as being ‘community development’, even if others would disagree with this, as discussed earlier in Chapter 2 (see subsection 2.3.3). It is argued that this approach to community development discredits the actual role of community development as a way of engaging with the communities to address their needs by developing individual capabilities (Craig, 2011). The success of this type of community development approach is questionable because the participation of the community through the deficit-based model and top-down approach is minimal and is limited to the direct participants of the planned programmes (Mohd Yusuf et al., 2011).

### **3.2.2 The implementation of community development in Malaysia**

The implementation of community development in Malaysia has been done by the government since independence, and the government has played a major role in developing communities, especially the rural population (Abu, 2014). The Malaysian government mainly uses a deficit-based model, also known as the need-based model in delivering community development programmes to the people. This is because the target of this type of community development strategy is the disadvantaged communities in poverty that need resources and guidance from community development providers in order to be able to develop (Isa, 2010). There are four main ministries responsible for implementing and delivering the community development programmes, known as the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry (MOA), Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWKM), Ministry of Rural Development (KPLB) and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG).

The understanding of community development is varied in the literature, but in Malaysia, community development often includes different activities under the remit of these ministries). The agricultural type of community development is known to be

one of the main community development programmes in Malaysia because it is observed that agriculture and development are closely related in developing countries, including Malaysia (Abu, 2014). The community development programmes run under the MOA are among the earliest community development programmes, having been established in the 1950s. They include programmes such as land development schemes for the rural people, namely the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA) and Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (FELCRA) (Selvaratnam and Bee Tin, 2001). The KPWKM delivers community development programmes through its departments, the Department of Social Welfare (JKM) and the Department of Women's Development (JPW). The JKM provides welfare assistance schemes for people in need, especially the poor and low-income individuals and households, primarily through a monetary form, either monthly or one-off assistance (Department of Social Welfare, 2019).

The KPLB focuses on the development of the rural population and carries out its community development programmes via the Community Development Department (KEMAS). The objective of KEMAS is to provide support and knowledge for the local rural community through collective actions to improve their life quality and build their social skills in 'reducing dependency on the government' (Selvaratnam and Bee Tin, 2001: 80). The community development programmes facilitated by KEMAS include a skills education programme, social development and an economic development programme to develop and empower the human capital of the rural population (Department of Community Development, 2018). The MHLG, through one of its functions, focuses on the improvement of the quality of life of the urban population, particularly the low-income urban population, through a comprehensive national housing programme (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 2019a). All of these agencies have regional and local offices to assist with the delivery of the programmes to the targeted community at the very local level.

Apart from these agencies, there are also a few statutory bodies that are classified as community developers, including the Economic Entrepreneurs Group Fund (TEKUN Nasional), Malaysia Endeavor Trust (AIM) and People's Trust Council (MARA). These agencies provide microcredit schemes (financial services) to low-income households, mainly targeting women as the borrowers for them to start or expand

their small-scale business, thus increasing their household income (Al-Mamun et al., 2014b). In addition, there are also state-led agencies at a regional level that perform the same roles as these microcredit agencies, such as the Terengganu Family Development Foundation (YPKT), for instance. Meanwhile, there are other agencies especially for the Muslim population, known as Zakah agencies, which are directly administered under the State Islamic Council and present in every state in Malaysia (Zin, 2014). The listed community development agencies above are targeting both males and females among the poor and B40 population as their participants except for JPW, AIM and YPKT that are specifically focused on females.

In this regard, community development as a poverty alleviation approach in Malaysia focuses more on women than men because it is commonly established that women have a higher risk of living in poverty primarily for female-headed households and many programmes are, therefore, designed to attract women participants. For instance, the number of single mothers in Malaysia had increased significantly for various reasons from 130,249 in 2000 to 235,240 in 2010 which means the numbers of women as a head of household had also increased (Ministry of Women Family and Community Development, 2014). It is discussed earlier (see Chapter 2, subsection 2.1.4) that a single-headed household (primarily for female-headed households) is at greater risk to enter poverty and thus, more focus on community development as an approach to poverty alleviation on women is reasonable.

As discussed, it is obvious that community development in Malaysia has become a state tool because it has been pioneered and delivered by the government. It is used as a way to develop the community and solve community problems, primarily poverty in the Malaysian context. However, effective and successful community development in developing the poor group has not yet been fully achieved. It is argued that these approaches have become ‘effective tools for political gain’ in a way that the government wanted to attract the people to vote for them through the provided programmes (Isa, 2010: 159) and that the participation among the communities is treated as tokenistic (Dola and Mijan, 2006). Other issues include the issues of inequality, such as the power and power relations that might exist within the implementation process of community development. Thus, this research sought



to explore these aspects in order to evaluate the extent of the community development approach in benefiting the community.

### **3.2.3 Is Malaysia a welfare state nation?**

The national government of Malaysia has principally asserted that Malaysia is not a welfare state nation, and this assertion was made in writing on the official portal of the Department of Social Welfare (Department of Social Welfare, 2019). The government refuses to adopt welfare state institutions because it is believed that a welfare state will cause a problem for the country's economy (Wan Saiful, 2012). Contrarily, the government provides a social protection system for people in need, mainly through welfare assistance to help and support the beneficiaries to be able to live independently (Department of Social Welfare, 2019). As the former Prime Minister Najib Razak stated, 'although Malaysia is not a welfare state, the government still provides a social safety net to protect the welfare of the people, including the less fortunate' (Razak, 2012).

The reason why Malaysia does not consider itself to be a welfare state nation despite having a social safety net system could possibly be linked to the fact that the Malaysian safety net only helps a very small proportion of the total Malaysian population (i.e. primarily people in absolute poverty). This is because the Malaysian safety net system does not consider the low-income population (people in relative poverty) as being in poverty, whereas nations with more developed welfare states such as the UK would consider this group to be living in poverty. This means that Malaysia is practising a very residual<sup>15</sup> type of welfare state because only those who are in absolute poverty are considered to be in poverty under this system.

In this regard, the implementation of the social safety net system in Malaysia is based on several pillars including poverty eradication and welfare programmes, social security schemes, social insurance, and saving schemes, which are following the World Bank pillars of social protection system (Zin, 2012). However, only the first pillar will be discussed in this research as it closely relates to the topic of poverty and community development that has been the main focus of this study and

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<sup>15</sup> A residual (or Hybrid) welfare state is a regime type of welfare state which does not fall under Esping Andersen's classifications, introduced and used by other scholars (e.g., Obinger and Wagschal, 2001; Ragin, 1994) to group any welfare state nations that does not attend the decommodification logic (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011).

directly involves the poor population; other pillars do not directly target this group (see Appendix 1).

The poverty eradication and welfare programmes are publicly funded, primarily targeting the poor. They include community development programmes, federal and state welfare financial assistance and a few other programmes in which means-tested assistance is given in the form of regular cash assistance with the monthly amount ranging from MYR 100 to MYR 450. This assistance is administered by the KPWKM (Zin, 2012). The government has also introduced one-off monetary assistance since 2011 that targets the poor and B40 population, such as the back-to-school assistance for school children. Other types of assistance run specifically under certain ministries and include schooling assistance for students (scholarships, supplementary foods, etc.) provided by the Ministry of Education (MOE). In addition, the community development programmes run by the KPLB and MOA include assistance with equipment and raw materials, courses, subsidies and housing assistance in helping the poor and B40 population to generate new or side income and thus increase their household income.

Nonetheless, the implementation of this type of social safety net system and the community development programmes often disadvantages the middle M40 population, particularly those M40 in urban areas. It was because they did not fit the criteria for eligible beneficiaries or participants because their monthly household income slightly exceeds the income threshold of the B40; this group of the urban population have been excluded from all types of government assistance. It is argued that the urban population with a monthly household income of less than MYR 6,000 (GBP £1,069) should also be categorised as a low-income population and thus be eligible for assistance because it is feared that neglecting this group will make urban poverty worse as the urban population constitutes more than two-thirds of the total population (Mohd Pilus, 2017). Several studies demonstrate the complexities of relative poverty in urban areas including poor housing conditions, and health and safety issues which are insufficient to be measured through monetary terms alone (Rasool et al., 2011; Zainal et al., 2012).

In short, it is arguable that the practice of poverty eradication and welfare programmes in Malaysia as a way to provide a social safety net for the people does

actually resemble the principle of a residual type of welfare state although the Malaysian government denies it. The welfare state institution that is mostly adopted by Western countries includes social contingencies for people in need (Briggs, 1961), which is reflected in the social safety net practice for the poor (as main beneficiaries) and B40 population in Malaysia. In addition, Malaysian citizens also enjoy free education (up to the GSCE level) and health services (Bernama, 2018; Khalid, 2018), which are provided for free and therefore, also interact with the welfare state institutions.

### **3.2.4 A note on the limited research about community development in Malaysia**

Based on the latest available data found, research in community development in Malaysia is quite limited, and in some respects, quite dated and therefore, current data may have slightly changed. Research into community development sits under the social development research, and it accounts for less than 10% of the total social development research that includes the basic or applied studies of community development (Ministry of Women Family and Community Development, 2006). The public universities in Malaysia primarily conduct research with specified funds from the ministries, mainly the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). This research also consists of thesis research, ranging from masters to doctorate research carried out by university students undergoing research in this field, which is not funded by the ministries except for some students who are granted scholarships (Ibid.).

One example of research in community development is the research conducted by Al-Mamun and Mazumder in 2015, which investigated the effect of the AIM microcredit agency on the income, poverty, and economic vulnerability of the low-income population in Peninsular Malaysia through a quasi-experimental approach, cross-sectional design, and stratified random sampling method. They found that the participation of the poor living in poverty in this programme helped the participants to reduce their poverty rate and level of economic vulnerability (Al-Mamun and Mazumder, 2015).

Another example of community development research in Malaysia is the research done for the *AZAM Tani* participants, which is an agricultural programme of community development under the MOA. The research was conducted in Penang state through a census, and the results demonstrated that the participants had gained

more knowledge and skills in agriculture by the participation process in this programme (Nadzir et al., 2017). This study also showed an increase in the income level of the respondents. Apart from these examples, there is also other research in relation to community development in Malaysia, with approximately 200 community development research projects recorded by the KPWKM from 2001 to 2005. The main findings of the research recorded positive outcomes of community development for the participants (Ministry of Women Family and Community Development, 2006).

### **Summary**

This section has focused on the process and progress of community development in Malaysia that is used by the Malaysian government as an approach to fighting poverty among rural people (adopted into the national development policies). However, there is no definition of community development specifically from the Malaysian context, either from the policy side or academic perspective, as both parties define community development following the international definitions of community development. Nevertheless, it is observed that community development in Malaysia models the deficit-based type of community development because it is an approach that is mainly implemented by the government and represents the top-down approach. The federal and state governments lead the implementation of community development in Malaysia under the surveillance of several ministries and agencies. The community development strategies also include the welfare assistance scheme as a form of social safety net for people in need, although this system does not make Malaysia a welfare state nation from the government point of view.

### **3.3 The dynamics of gender relations in Malaysia**

Gender relations as a concept recognises the complexities of the gender roles based on the following categories: labour structure (work allocation based on the categories of people and the work organisation, i.e. the sexual division of labour and gender pay gaps); power structure (the practice and condition of the transaction of power within gender, i.e. male supremacy and patriarchy), and cathexis structure (the formation of the sexual, social relationship between people, i.e. homogenous and heterogenous relationships). These structures are dependent and overlap with one another

(Connell, 2014). In addition, the main discussion of the structure of gender relations also lies within the ‘institution of kinship as a cross-cultural basis of sex-inequality’ (Ibid.: 92).

For this study, I will only discuss some parts of these structures, namely gender roles (Malay women) in a patriarchal society and gender inequality in the development process, as these sub-topics are the most relevant to my study given that Malaysia is commonly known as a patriarchal society and that I would like to address any inequalities in gender relations that exist within the poverty alleviation process and participation in community development. Before discussing these sub-topics, I will firstly discuss how gender and national identity are constructed specifically in Malaysia. This involves the ideas of nationalism in the Malaysian context and the ideas of Islam being interpreted in relation to nationalism and gender in this context.

### **3.3.1 Nationalism and interpretation of Islam in relation to gender in Malaysia**

The national identity of contemporary Malaysian society is still being primarily constructed through ‘the privileging of one cultural community, the Malays; one religion, Islam; and a single notion of a cultural-kingship tradition, the Malay monarchy’ (Mohamad, 2010: 362). The process of making a majority (i.e. the Malay-Muslims) in a nation with a large minority (35% of non-Muslims from various ethnicities) is done through the Islamisation process that was taking place nationally, the process of which became centralised in the mid-1980s through the establishment of the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) (Mohamad, 2010; Olivier, 2016).

The process of Islamisation in Malaysia began when Islam first arrived in the Malay Peninsula (between the tenth and seventeenth centuries), and it has since undergone many profound changes within the process (Aziz and Shamsul, 2004). The changes included the adoption of Sharia in social and political administration during the pre-colonial period; exclusion of the Islamic roles from most social and political areas (Islam is only limited to religious affairs and family law) during the colonial (British) period through the establishment of a secular system (including civil law); and the modern Islamisation process since the post-colonial period (from 1957 and onwards) that is currently taking place which also involves many considerable changes within its process (Ibid.).

The modern Islamisation process in Malaysia is argued to have been influenced by the Malay-Islamic political domination since the 1960s, particularly linked to the domination of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) party after independence and also linked to the Malay lordship spirit (*Ketuanan Melayu*) that was heightened due to the racial riot in 1969 (Mohamad, 2010; Olivier, 2016). The Islamisation agenda in this respect was to gain loyalty from the Malay-Muslim community by sustaining the homogenous characters of this community in the creation of the Malay-Muslim majority project by the Malaysian government, given that the Malays have the political majority for votes (Mohamad, 2010).

However, the Islamisation process undertaken by the government since the 1980s has only involved the areas of education (i.e. formal Islamic education), economy (i.e. Zakah institutions), administration (i.e. Sharia and family laws, Islamic councils and organisations) and arts (i.e. Islamic culture) which are based on the principles of Islam in accordance with the Islamisation policies (Aziz and Shamsul, 2004). These policies are being implemented throughout the country, particularly managed by the Islamic State Councils and are supervised by the JAKIM. The Islamisation process that is happening in Malaysia involves a peaceful transition although this is not always the case in other Muslim countries (Ibid.).

Therefore, the ideas of Islam (i.e. through the Islamisation agenda) in relation to nationalism within the contemporary Malaysian context is dominantly seen in the legal-bureaucratic structures, and the modern Sharia implementation as this agenda is used ‘as a ‘ring-fencing’ device to keep members from leaving the flock’ (Mohamad, 2010: 378; Olivier, 2016). In addition, with regard to the Malay-Muslim family and gender, the currently implemented and reformed Islamic family law (Sharia) led to the formation of the patriarchal Malay-Muslim family, which involved ‘privileging male entitlements as a basis for remaking the new Islamic family’ (Mohamad, 2010: 378–9). In this regard, as Mohamad (2010) argues, the government failed to protect the welfare and productivity of the family.

This contemporary patriarchal Malay-Muslim family is different from the traditional (prior to colonisation) patriarchal Malay family as the male-female relations were influenced by the traditional Malay culture, which offered more gender freedom, as reflected in the cooperation of both men and women in the traditional working

activities (Olivier, 2016). The current patriarchal Malay society has regressed the Malay-Muslim women's position. For example, 'attitudes and perceptions regarding violence towards women mainly blamed the victims for attracting such incidences onto themselves' (Ariffin, 1999: 419). In relation to the findings of this research, this literature provides an overview and history of the emergence of the current patriarchal Malay-Muslim society in Malaysia as the practice of this system in Malaysia is different from that in other Muslim countries, as discussed above. Whilst some western feminist perspectives might critique the understanding held by the research participants and the wider Malay-Muslim society in relation to this patriarchal system, from the point of view of universal human rights, this system is, embedded, regulated and widely accepted within the Malay-Muslim society.

### **3.3.2 Gender roles in a patriarchal society**

Traditionally, gender roles are differentiated based on the family structure, in which women's roles are limited to 'working inside the home as wives and mothers' (DeSena, 1999: 283). This includes caring and nurturing roles while men's roles are associated with more superior roles, including being the breadwinner of the family. Nowadays, many societies are moving towards more equal roles between the genders because it has been recognised in the modern social structure that both genders have potentially equal contributions in society and that they should be treated equally, a movement which has emerged through feminist groups and standpoints (Stanley and Wise, 1983). The promotion and recognition of gender-equal roles are perceived mainly in developed countries rather than developing and undeveloped countries; for example, women's roles as both mother and worker are supported by a government that 'facilitates women's integration into the workforce', as seen in Denmark and Sweden (Orloff, 1996: 64).

In a patriarchal society, the traditional roles of gender are still recognised and practised, and these roles are very much linked to religious and cultural rationales. Patriarchal society is commonly defined as a society where males have more power than women in all aspects of society, and there are many forms of patriarchal systems practised throughout the world including the Arab patriarchy, the European and so forth (Joseph, 1996). For example, Arab patriarchy is defined as a 'hierarchy of authority that is controlled and dominated by males' (Krauss, 1987: xii) while the

European patriarchy sees women 'as subordinate to men as men, rather than to men as fathers' (Joseph, 1996: 14). There is an idea embedded within a patriarchal society that sees women as 'dependent' in a household, which excludes women from getting an equal resource distribution (Byrne, 2005).

However, the degree of patriarchy practised within society differs between cultures and religions. There is an extreme or classical type of patriarchy that has a belief that women should live in private spaces and should only have very limited access to public spaces, as mainly seen in the African and Arab countries such as Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia. There is also a more moderate type of patriarchy that allows more freedom and choices for women to be in public spaces, as commonly observed in the Southeast Asian Muslim countries (Afzali, 2017; Kandiyoti, 1988).

The practice of Muslim patriarchy in Malaysia is moderate in comparison to other more conservative Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia because Malaysian women have an equal right to access public areas, and the law guarantees the safety of women. Nevertheless, there are religious and cultural expectations for the Malay-Muslim women to be accompanied by either a male chaperone or by other women whenever they leave their houses although failure to do so will not result in any legal (whether civil or Sharia law) action taken against them (Naemah et al., 2013). However, it is also worth noting that the practice of this system in Malaysia is not necessarily moderate in comparison to other Muslim countries like Turkey and Albania (Çaro et al., 2012; Shissler, 2004).

The role of women in helping to provide for the family economically within the Malay-Muslim society has become more distinct recently. These women engaged in agricultural activities for decades alongside their male counterparts by doing less strenuous activities such as 'working in the garden, fetching water and firewood' while they were simultaneously undertaking their universal roles as mothers and wives, as observed, for example, within the FELDA settler communities in the 1960s (Lie and Lund, 2013: 89).

Nowadays, Malay-Muslim women engage in various working activities (i.e. formal employment sectors) including non-agricultural activities, industries and professional sectors. By 2017, the percentage of women in the labour force in Malaysia had increased to 54.3% and is also recorded that 19.7% of Malaysian women-owned



Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) businesses in various sectors, including the services and production sectors (Norhafzan and Syalikha, 2017). The increasing trend of women entering the workforce in Malaysia, especially among Malay-Muslim women is aligned with a similar global trend because women's participation in all work sectors is increasing due to the effects of globalisation and liberalisation (Boserup and Kanji, 2007).

Nevertheless, there is a contestation of what is the correct application of the interpretation of religion in terms of working Muslim women within the Muslim world. Many conservative Muslim countries like the Arab countries do not provide appropriate access for women to join the labour market due to the strong patriarchal systems and the belief that 'males and elders are considered to be financially responsible for women and junior relatives' (Joseph, 1996: 15).

The current contemporary interpretation of Islam in Malaysia does not follow this traditional conservative Islamic approach in terms of gender roles in practice. This is because the understanding of Muslims in Malaysia is quite different from other Muslim countries due to many reasons (i.e. differences in the school of thought, differences in cultural background, etc.) which have characterised the application of religion and cultural context among the working Muslim women. From an Islamic perspective, 'Islam does not prohibit Muslim women from participating in seeking an income for the family' with the condition that they adhere to the Islamic ethics and propriety while working, because there is no authentic text (either the Quran or Hadith) that forbids women from working (Marican et al., 2011: 4883).

### **3.3.3 Gender inequality in the development process**

Gender inequality is one of the social inequalities present in society while gender inequality towards women happens due to the oppression of women, which has existed for generations and is built on the inadequate recognition of women's roles and social determinants (including the role of religion) of women's inequality in both developing and undeveloped countries (Craig et al., 2011). For instance, work selections based on gender often 'prohibit women and men from making production or profit-maximizing choices' because they do not get the chance to work in a particular sector and it is mainly observed that this inequality often disadvantages the

females more than males (Braunstein, 2014: 59). The Oxfam Institute recorded that globally, there are 42% of women (working age) involved in the unpaid labour force (unpaid care responsibilities) as opposed to only 6% of men in 2019 (Coffey et al., 2020).

Similarly, women's roles in the process of development have historically received less attention and recognition from all parties including academics and policymakers, for example, in the process of community work and community development (DeSena, 1999). In this regard, feminist theory since the 1960s has aimed to recognise women's contribution in the community development process because women have demonstrated their involvement in community programmes at a grassroots level (Craig et al., 2011) and that their involvement is also observed in poverty alleviation strategies (Lind, 1997). For instance, Dominelli (1999) has argued that the contribution of women social workers should be adequately recognised because the salary for this female-dominated profession fails to keep pace with other earnings. In addition, Mayo (2005b) argues that the policymakers and planners should provide more positive policy responses around women's development projects because they often failed to understand women's roles as both workers and wives (mothers).

In Malaysia, gender inequality is a significant issue, and inequality is measured based on four indicators in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) indicator, namely, the ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education, the ratio of literate women to men, aged 15–24 years old, the percentage of women in waged employment in the non-agricultural sector and the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament (United Nations Development Programme, 2005). The latest available Gender Inequality Index for Malaysia is relatively high as the Human Development Index (HDI) report recorded that Malaysia ranked in 59th place (0.291) in 2015, a deterioration from 42<sup>nd</sup> place (0.209) in 2014 (United Nations Development Programme, 2015, 2016). The data shows that gender inequality in Malaysia is struggling to keep pace in terms of global comparison.

The report also recorded that the latest labour force participation rate in the non-agricultural sectors consisted of 49.3% of females over 77.6% males and the shares

of seats by females in the parliament were 13.2% in 2015. In addition, 75.4% of females over the age of 25 had at least some secondary education as compared to the 79.1% of males (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). The percentage of the total labour force in all sectors in Malaysia in 2016 recorded 38.6% of women as employed as compared to 61.4% of men (Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, 2017). For the gender ratio, the male population exceeded the female population with the ratio of 107 males over 100 females, a ratio which was the same as in previous years (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017a).

The data show women still lag behind men economically as reflected in the percentage of the total labour force by gender, in which men's employment is almost double that of females while most of the sectors have a higher male percentage than female (e.g. political sphere and the non-agricultural sectors). Therefore, gender inequality has received quite a lot of attention from the government and this issue has been addressed in the Malaysian policies starting from the 3MP, which focuses on gender equality and women's empowerment so that women will not be left out of the development process (United Nations Development Programme, 2005). Many of the current community development programmes also focus on women's empowerment and target women as participants (Al-Mamun et al., 2014a).

The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWKM), established in 2001, is specifically targeted at women and acts as one of the main government actors providing assistance and training for women. KEMAS skill activities such as cooking, sewing, handcraft, grooming and family wellness education are female-orientated activities that aim to help women to use these skills to generate side incomes (primarily working from home) although males are also welcomed to participate and achieve the same goal (Department of Community Development, 2019). Some microcredit agencies such as the AIM, YPKT and others specifically target poor women to improve their socio-economic condition through microcredit and empowerment programmes that encourage entrepreneurial activities mainly within their domestic sphere (Al-Mamun et al., 2014a).

In this case, the implementation of those policies through the provided programmes are occurring within the Malaysian patriarchal and religious society (see the previous subsection) because in so doing, the provided programmes can fit well within the

local cultural context and attract the most of the people's (female) participation. However, it can be argued that these types of assistance are female-oriented activities, which are very gendered in a way because it provides women with skills for gendered and generally lower-paid work, but not access to higher positions in the labour market. These activities are preventing women (by giving gendered skills to women) from achieving higher positions because a gender difference has been built into the activities which could then enshrine gender inequality rather than challenging it as a way to overcome the poverty among women.

### **Summary of this chapter**

In this chapter, I have considered the national and local literature on poverty and participation in community development. This chapter has reviewed poverty and the socio-economic situation in Malaysia from before and after independence to get a view of the current situation that is happening in Malaysia, and it also discusses community development as a tool to fight poverty in Malaysia in terms of its definition and implementation.

In general, this chapter has discussed the theoretical framework of this study alongside Chapter 2 to provide a rationale and understanding of the research questions that are to be addressed. Both chapters provide an outline of the poverty issues that are happening worldwide and in Malaysia. Poverty is seen as a socio-economic problem that needs to be solved because it restricts the global and the country's overall development. Globally, poverty is currently being addressed through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while in Malaysia this issue is being addressed through various national policies that are also aligned with the current SDGs and the previous global development goals.

The literature also shows that poverty is closely related to the issue of inequality and power, which worsen poverty, whether at the local or global level. This is because economic inequality and the unequal division of power among the population have increased the gap between the bottom and the top income earners, which has caused relative poverty to grow. The literature also discusses community development as an approach to poverty alleviation because it is known to be one of the best approaches to tackle poverty and also inequality.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodological approach that I have adopted during the research process. It explains the research design and methods that were employed to answer the research questions. This chapter starts with a reflection on the development of the research questions that took place during the research process. Then, it discusses the research design of this study that includes the choice of a qualitative study and the sampling criteria and participant selection. This is followed by the justification for the chosen research methods and the process of data collection including the discussion around semi-structured interviews, participant observations, document analysis and my role as a researcher, which includes the insider-outsider role that has emerged throughout the data collection process and the accompanied fieldwork. Fourthly, the chapter discusses the ethical considerations related to the research, such as the issue of anonymity and confidentiality and informed consent. Lastly, it discusses the data analysis process, which includes the process of storing and organising the data and the process of analysing the data through content and thematic analysis.

#### **4.1 Reflection on the development of the research questions**

In the introduction chapter, I highlighted that the original research questions for this study became refined through the development of the research. I also listed there the refined research questions (also see below) that ultimately became addressed in the thesis, including the refined overall research question:

“How does participation in community development activities affect the experiences of particular people living in poverty amongst the Bumiputera population in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu?”

The process of adapting and refining the research questions happened inductively in practice throughout this study, as the central focus became more sharply defined and the relationships between the initial questions and the qualitative data collection and analysis became clearer. In particular, the original focus of the study became

modified in practice in light of its subsequent development and implementation. The modified focus emphasised *the relationship between* community development and poverty, rather than exploring the process of participation in community development *and* poverty alleviation separately as well as together. On critical reflection, the scope of the original research questions was too broad meaning that the initial research questions were only partially answered by the data gathered the refined questions correspond to a more focused and tightly specified understanding. These refined questions reflected the methodological choices adopted to address the central focus about how participation in community development activities affected the experiences of particular people living in poverty in the chosen areas.

On reflection, the wording in the original research questions that initially referred to focusing on the ‘poor population’ as a whole has been refined; this instead became a focus on the experiences of ‘particular people living in poverty’ among the Bumiputera majority in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu. The qualitative approach and approach to selecting the participants was not designed to represent the whole ‘poor population’ in the rural and urban areas in Terengganu. The use of the phrase ‘poor population’ might give the impression that the study is more generalisable or representative than it is.

In addition to this, the phrase ‘the poor population’ potentially carries a connotation of labelling the group being studied, whereas ‘people living in poverty’ refers instead to their circumstances. Instead, the focus of the research was intended to be on the complexities of the lived experiences of the 30 particular people who were living in poverty and participating in some form of community development initiatives who became the research participants. Rather than trying to represent any wider group, the refined focus and questions make it clear that the study sought to qualitatively understand the diverse individual experiences and dynamics of poverty and community development participation for those that *did* take part in the study.

Furthermore, as the literature review makes clear, these were respondents from an under-researched group in general and in relation to this topic, in particular. Building engagement and participation in the study presented particular challenges in gaining access and generating contributions that will be discussed further below. Five revised

sub-questions with a reordered sequence, relative to the logical flow of inquiry in the study, are outlined below:

- i. What are the dynamics of the experience of poverty from the perspective of the research participants from the Bumiputera majority population living in a rural and an urban area of Terengganu?
- ii. What approaches to poverty alleviation (with a particular focus on community development approaches) are undertaken that affect participants living in poverty among the Bumiputera majority population in a rural and an urban area of Terengganu?
- iii. What are the perspectives of the research participants living in poverty about what factors influence their participation in community development activities designed to address their poverty?
- iv. What are the participants' perceptions about the ways in which community development programmes tackle poverty and improve quality of life, and what are their related limitations?
- v. How do social inequalities impact the dynamics of participation in community development and/or poverty alleviation amongst the research participants?

The first refined sub-question reflects the study's concern with the dynamics of the experience of poverty from the perspective of the research participants from the Bumiputera majority population living in a rural and an urban area of Terengganu. In this study, I interviewed 30 people who were living in poverty themselves, and all of them had participated in at least one of the community development initiatives. In addition, I also interviewed four people (the local officials) who were not living in poverty but were involved in poverty alleviation measures and community development initiatives.

The diversity of the research participants' experiences (e.g. some of them experienced poverty since childhood while most of them had experienced poverty during adulthood especially after having a family) with poverty gave a good rationale for exploring the different perspectives on the dynamics of the experience of poverty among the participants (i.e. 30 people who lived in varying degrees of poverty). I had used various strategies to ensure a diversity of respondents, as discussed in detail in subsection 4.2.2. The inclusion of local officials provided views of those in particular positions of power in relation to the community development and poverty alleviation programmes to be compared and contrasted

with those of the respondents directly experiencing poverty and the community development initiatives.

The second refined sub-question explores what approaches to poverty alleviation (with a particular focus on community development approaches) are undertaken that affect participant living in poverty among the Bumiputera majority population in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu. This question represents a minor change from question one in the original set of the research question because exploring the approaches to poverty undertaken by the participants has been central to the study.

However, emphasising the particular focus on community development approaches to poverty alleviation in order to explore a specific relationship between community development and poverty draws out the general focus of this research. In addition, it was also important to explore how the approaches that were undertaken had affected the lives of the participants in order to further explore the relationship between community development and poverty. In so doing, this question provides some of the groundwork that the fourth refined sub-question of this research builds on, as discussed further below.

The third refined sub-question was concerned with the perspectives of the research participants living in poverty about what factors influence their participation in community development activities designed to address their poverty. This question has been changed to focus on the ‘perspectives’ of the participants about community development ‘designed to address poverty’, rather than simply any factors that influence the participants to participate in community development activities more widely. The rationale for this change is that it can provide a more accurate reflection of the nature of the qualitative data collected through the study through framing this around perceptions and it does so through a tighter focus on the relationship between community development and poverty. Only the factors that influence participation in community development activities specifically designed to address poverty from the perspectives of the participants living in poverty will be explored.

The fourth refined sub-question was to explore the participants’ perceptions about the ways in which community development programmes tackle poverty and improve quality of life, and their related limitations. This question is far more specific than the second question in the original set of the research question that sought to explore



the extent of quality of life improvements through participation in community development activities but made no reference to poverty. The shift in focus here was also from ‘extent’ to ‘ways’, as the research was not seeking to quantitatively measure any improvements (for example, on some form of standardised scale); instead, it was concerned with qualitatively exploring participants’ perceptions of *how* community development programmes went about these aims, as well as what might limit their achievement from participants’ perspectives.

In doing this, this fourth refined question also integrated consideration of related limitations for the community development programmes to tackle poverty and improve life quality. This has replaced the fifth question in the original set of the research question that sought to explore how the participants perceived the implementation of the poverty-related policies in Malaysia as a whole. This refined question was more specific because it is explicit about relating it to participants experiences related to particular limitations of community development programmes designed to tackle poverty.

The fifth refined sub-question was designed to explore how social inequalities impact the dynamics of participation in community development and/or poverty alleviation amongst the research participants. Rather than asking whether or not social inequalities existed in community development and/or poverty alleviation processes (as in the fourth original question), the revised sub-question focuses on *how* social inequalities impacted the dynamics of community development and/or poverty alleviation *for the participants* (who had been chosen for both their experience of poverty and community development). Rather than being able to answer this question with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’, the revised sub-questions focus on ‘how’ reflects the wider overall research question’s concern with exploring how experiences may differ between the different respondents who were involved in the study, including those with experience of directly participating in and providing related programmes.

By refining the research questions into an overarching question with sub-questions supporting and unpacking this, the findings and analysis around the relationship between participating in community development and experiences of poverty amongst particular respondents from the Bumiputera population in these particular

areas of Malaysia are more clearly framed and bounded. In this respect, the findings from the research are specific to the study but can contribute new understandings to wider bodies of literature on the relationship between community development and poverty that may be of interest and use to people in different contexts.

## **4.2 Qualitative research**

Qualitative research is a form of research inquiry for exploring and understanding the social reality of people. According to Denzin and Lincoln, qualitative research is ‘multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter’ (1994: 2). It is ‘concerned with understanding human behaviour from the informant’s perspective’ (Minichiello, 1990: 5) and aims at ‘developing a depth of understanding rather than a breadth’ of the particular researched topic (Boddy, 2016: 430). Its approach is exploratory as it seeks to listen to respondents in their natural setting and tries to explain the process and reason behind a particular behaviour or phenomenon of the topic being studied (Creswell, 2013). This means that qualitative researchers ‘attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 2).

For the current study, a qualitative design was chosen to provide a holistic approach to the understanding of the relationship between poverty and community development. Within this qualitative study, this research included elements of a multi-level case study. Focusing primarily on individual lived experiences of poverty at a local level, I was concerned to explore the dynamics of poverty amongst those who participated in my study (including their experiences of poverty and whether or not community development helped them address poverty). As such, individuals became the primary cases involved in this study. It was also important to recognise the potential impact of local characteristics (such as the nature of the local economy, local community development and poverty alleviation policy and practice, demographics, culture etc.) and national policies to set these in context.

Therefore, the research employs aspects of a multi-level case study approach by focusing on two specific local areas which were purposively selected (see subsection 4.2.1) from which to recruit my participants, then triangulating views between these participants and between them and local officials. I also needed to set these in the

context of understanding the national case and stated intentions of policy-makers at that level, hence the importance of the national policy document analysis (see subsection 4.3.3). Adopting a constructivist paradigm, this study is especially concerned with the participants' perspectives within the particular context mentioned earlier. Creswell states that constructivist researchers 'believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work' by developing 'subjective meaning of their experiences' (2013: 8). This can involve an in-depth investigation with a detailed analysis of a case where the common cases can include individuals, processes, programmes, neighbourhoods, events and so forth (Ibid.). A multi-level case study involves multiple levels of studies by linking the analysis across these levels (Caronna et al., 2009).

As indicated above, the design of this study focuses predominantly on the individual level of the experiences of people living in poverty that participated in community development where data was collected from 30 individuals through semi-structured interviews and participant observations. In addition, this was supplemented with organisational analysis at the local level (through semi-structured interviews with four local officials, consisted of the local community leaders and local community development stakeholders) and also complemented by document analysis in the form of contextual analysis of national policy documents around different types of community development interventions that occurred at local and national levels. The analysis of these contextualised with a multi-level understanding being developed and these research methods will be discussed in Section 4.3.

This research design was chosen over other methods for this kind of research because this study focuses on the lived experiences of the particular people living in poverty and their participation in community development designed to address poverty. For instance, the research explored the participants' emotional experience and, in so doing, developed a nuanced account about the dynamics of poverty from their perspectives. Moreover, the strength of a qualitative research approach over other approaches (e.g. quantitative methods such as experiments and surveys) is that it can deal with various types of evidence such as interviews, observations and documents (Yin, 2014).

Through the study's data collection method, interviews, participant observations and document analysis were intended to be triangulated in order to cross-check the gathered information. Stake (2005) has argued that triangulation in qualitative research can add to the clarity and validity of the gathered information. This is supported by Atkinson et al. (2003), who posit that the combination of interviews, observations and contextual analysis can establish a holistic approach to data collection and data analysis. Thus, this research approach (i.e. qualitative research with elements of a multi-level case study focusing on people with similar experiences in two geographical locations) was designed to explore this issue through urban and rural comparisons. Through this approach, I anticipated differences in the nature of place and poverty in terms of urban and rural aspects because it is commonly known that urban poverty often has different aspects to rural poverty, for example, these areas received different attention for development from the government (Isa, 2010; Zin, 2014). The findings are believed to make a unique contribution to the knowledge given the paucity of research into the subject matter in Malaysia, let alone in Terengganu.

#### **4.2.1 Participant selection**

Through this qualitative research, I was not seeking to develop a representative sample. Within qualitative research in general, often it is not primarily concerned with being representative; instead, the concern is to engage in-depth with the investigation rather than sampling the whole population in a representative way as its goal is to 'sample participants in a strategic way' (Bryman, 2015: 418). The purposive choice of participants is important to help to answer all the research questions. For the participant selection, purposive sampling was adopted as the main strategy to reach the targeted participants, and the snowballing technique was also used at a certain stage during the process. Purposive sampling was chosen because as Mason (2002: 124) states, it can ensure 'certain characteristics or criteria' of the type of participant required. Meanwhile, Bryman (2015) argues that purposive sampling involves selecting a unit that directly relates to the research questions.

For this research, I was interested in finding out how participation in community development activities affects the experiences of particular people living in poverty amongst the Bumiputera population in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu.

Therefore, it is important to have people living in poverty as the main research participants to explore their poverty experience and their participation in community development. The primary research focus was on the qualitative experiences and perspectives of these participants. It was also important to have local officials (i.e. community development stakeholders and community leaders) involved, as these were creating and delivering the forms of community development within which the poor people were participating. Therefore, contributors of perspectives to the research were divided into three different groups.

Group 1 consisted of the main participants of this research because they were the people living in poverty in Terengganu and participated in the community development activities. Their responses have contributed to most of the findings and results. The demographic information for the Group 1 participants is presented in Table 4.3. To write and present the data, I used the word ‘participant(s)’ or ‘respondent(s)’ to specifically represent all the 30 individuals from Group 1 involved in this research and whose names have been anonymised using the alphabetical and numerical codes (see Table 4.1).

Meanwhile, I use the word ‘local official(s)’ to represent Group 2 and Group 3 individuals (see Table 4.1) that were also involved in this research. They were the institutional actors that represented the local community leaders and local community development stakeholders, respectively, and who acted as the poverty alleviation mediators and/or community development organisers of the Group 1 participants. I used different words to represent all the individuals involved in this research so as not to confuse the groups because I had different groups of people who participated in this research. These representations will be used consistently throughout the whole thesis.

Table 4.1: Name code representation of the research participants and local officials who participated in the research

| <b>Group of Participants</b>       | <b>Name Code</b> | <b>Research Sites</b> | <b>Number of Participants Involved</b>    |
|------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Group 1 (People living in poverty) | R1 - R15         | Rural                 | 15                                        |
|                                    | U1 - U15         | Urban                 | 15                                        |
| <b>Group of Local Officials</b>    | <b>Name Code</b> | <b>Research Sites</b> | <b>Number of Local Officials Involved</b> |
| Group 2 (Community Leader)         | JKKK-R           | Rural                 | 1                                         |
|                                    | JKKK-U           | Urban                 | 1                                         |

|                                    |                                              |                |   |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------|---|
| Group 3<br>(Agencies' Stakeholder) | State Religious Welfare Department's Officer | Not Applicable | 1 |
|                                    | State Microcredit Agency's Officer           |                | 1 |

The research participants were selected from two districts in Terengganu (Figure 4.1), in which each district represented one study site, namely Besut and Kuala Terengganu. The state of Terengganu is located on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia and consists of eight districts, as discussed earlier in Chapter 1, Section 1.3 (see also Figure 1.1 and 1.2). Besut is my home district because I was born and lived there, and this represented the rural research site, while Kuala Terengganu represented the urban research site as it is the only urban area in Terengganu, and it also acted as the state capital for Terengganu.

These two districts were chosen because the latest available poverty statistics from *e-Kasih*<sup>16</sup> showed that they recorded the highest poverty cases among all districts in Terengganu as tabulated in Table 4.2, providing the primary rationale for choosing to study the experiences of those living in poverty in these areas. In addition, Terengganu was my birth state, so conducting the research was more time and cost-effective because I have an insider's role in both research sites, although I was more of an insider in Besut than Kuala Terengganu. These insider-outsider roles, including a critical discussion of their potential impact on the research, are discussed further in subsection 4.3.7.

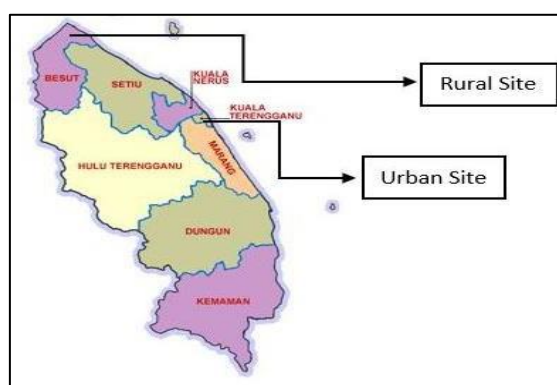


Figure 4.1: Map of study sites in Terengganu

<sup>16</sup> *E-Kasih* is a national poverty databank that was established in 2007 that registers poor individual and household profiles in Malaysia (National Databank and Innovation, 2017).

Table 4.2: Absolute poverty statistics by the district in Terengganu, 2016

| <b>District</b>  | <b>Number of Poverty Incidences among the Population</b> | <b>Percentage of Poor Cases Recorded (%)</b> |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Kuala Terengganu | 1988                                                     | 0.69                                         |
| Besut            | 1464                                                     | 0.58                                         |
| Marang           | 651                                                      | 0.40                                         |
| Setiu            | 405                                                      | 0.37                                         |
| Kuala Nerus      | 778                                                      | 0.28                                         |
| Hulu Terengganu  | 317                                                      | 0.25                                         |
| Dungun           | 454                                                      | 0.17                                         |
| Kemaman          | 138                                                      | 0.04                                         |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>6,188</b>                                             | <b>0.34</b>                                  |

Source: Tabulated by the author from the Federal Development Office of Terengganu State, 2016 and Terengganu Economic Planning Unit, 2015

For this qualitative study, the experience of the particular people living in poverty and their participation in different forms of community development as an approach to poverty alleviation in a rural and an urban area of Terengganu was the focus of this research. Thus, a purposive sampling strategy was chosen as it assisted me in reaching the targeted people as the relevant research participants based on the explicit criteria of the people living in poverty who also participated in the community development programmes. In terms of determining who was considered as living in poverty for the purposes of selecting Group 1 participants, my criteria were primarily based on the monthly household income of less than MYR 2,500 which was just slightly below the relative poverty line of MYR 2,614. They must also be involved in at least one type of community development programme (the programmes can include the economic and/or social-related programmes provided by government agencies or NGOs).

For this research, there was a limited space to frame the research design within. I had taken an informed decision about what was culturally appropriate (discussed throughout this chapter) and designed my strategy based on local and insider-knowledge to this effect. I had employed purposive sampling (in both the urban and rural research sites) as the main strategy for participant selection by contacting particular gatekeepers while snowballing was used only in the rural research site. Snowball sampling required initial contact with key participants relevant to my research topic, and I had their assistance in locating other relevant participants to participate in the research (Bryman, 2008). In this respect, the community leaders

and my parents acted as initial gatekeepers (formal and informal gatekeepers, respectively) by providing me with the required access and information. My insider knowledge of the local context and culture led me to approach community leaders to access participants because they are the primary contact source for those wishing to reach any particular community for any purpose, in Malaysia.

These research participants were a hard-to-reach group (due to the sensitivity and stigma of poverty) and therefore, the use of gatekeepers in providing access and information was pivotal. There were two types of gatekeepers (i.e. formal and informal) that I had approached to get the required access and information. The community leaders in both the rural and urban research sites acted as the formal gatekeepers in this study because I had first approached them to get access and permission to conduct my fieldwork in their localities. Formal gatekeepers are people in a position of power that 'have the authority to grant official permission and sponsor research for specific entry points' (Wanat, 2008: 192–3). I had gone through some small negotiations (e.g. I had to guarantee that my research and I will not cause any harm or problems to anybody within the research localities) with the community leaders to access the participants.

In addition, the urban community leader had also provided me with the information needed for me to reach the targeted participants. I contacted the Chairperson of the Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK<sup>17</sup>) based on several purposively selected criteria of potential participants because I was not familiar with the research site. The JKKK Chairperson, who acted as a Community Leader, had appropriate information on the poverty situation of the area and suggested to me names and households that met the outlined criteria of participant selection.

In the rural research site, I approached my parents (i.e. informal gatekeepers) in facilitating me to the research participants. Informal gatekeepers have the necessary information to access the people and places within their localities but are not 'necessarily in structural positions to exercise control' over research but are 'able to

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<sup>17</sup> The Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK) acted as the formal federal administrative system at the very local level. But, it was dissolved in 2018, post the 14<sup>th</sup> Malaysian general election and has now been replaced by the Village Community Management Council (MPKK) (Irwan Shafrizan, 2018).



influence who else could engage' in the research (Reeves, 2010: 322). I used my personal social networks (i.e. through my parents) to reach the targeted participants. In addition, I used both the purposive and the snowball sampling strategy in this research site to select the research participants. First, I adopted purposive sampling to select the rural people living in poverty as possible research participants by contacting my parents instead of the JKKK, and I used the same outlined criteria for the participant selection. My parents provided me with the relevant names and brief information of their background that made them meet the participant selection criteria (I had also briefly known some of them) and I went to recruit them as research participants.

I gained access to the participants through my parents because they knew the local community well and had the local knowledge to navigate me to the targeted participants. My parents are actively engaged in neighbourhood activities. For instance, my mother has a weekly knowledge sharing with the fellow female community, and my parents' active engagement in the community enabled me to get enough information for my research. The rationale for approaching my parents rather than other people was because I needed a way into the local community, and I used my personal networks to get the way in which was necessary given the close-knit nature of this rural community. However, I recognised the limitations and problems that came along with this approach like for example, I could end up with a completely different recommendation of participants if I approach other people as the informal gatekeepers, which I address in detail on the next page. Meanwhile, the process of gaining access and information from the gatekeepers are discussed further in subsection 4.2.2.

Secondly, I also adopted snowballing techniques by asking the participants to identify other potential participants that matched the sampling criteria. However, only four of them managed to suggest to me some potential names while the rest were unsure who else met the criteria outlined. This meant that the majority of my rural research participants (11 participants) were recruited through purposive sampling, while only four participants were recruited through both purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling only was used in the urban site because it was possible to identify an equivalent number of participants through this route and

developing a snowball sample would have required more time and money given the travel required to access this location.

Through these strategies, I managed to approach and access the individuals who were both in poverty and involved in community development that met all the criteria as the research participants. They were individuals with the range of monthly household income of MYR 1,000 to MYR 2,500 which all of whom were in relative poverty at the time the fieldwork was conducted, although most of them were previously in absolute poverty. I did not intend to claim generalisability from this research, but it is hoped that this research can provide a thorough understanding of the research topic and lead to further research in this field. The results from both of these sampling strategies were categorised as non-probability sampling as the process of sampling may have a bias; thus, they were unable to be generalised (Henry, 2009). Statistical generalisation or population representation can only be made through probability sampling (May, 2001).

I acknowledge that there were some weaknesses of the chosen sampling strategies. For the purposive sampling, I approached the first participants suggested by the gatekeepers who met all the outlined criteria and were easiest to access, while the snowball sampling used was also dependent on a single route-in (i.e. via the participants who were suggested by the gatekeepers) and this could exacerbate the initial potential bias of the participant selection. These sampling strategies could have restricted the diversity of my research participants, given that I only depended on a very limited source of information (i.e. the gatekeepers) to reach the initial participants. Nonetheless, I did what I could in ensuring the diversity of the research participants as I ended up with a diversity of experiences within the purposive sampling criteria (albeit with gender being strongly skewed towards women) which are discussed in the finding chapters, despite only speaking to a single-heterogenous group within the wider community.

Despite these limitations, this approach provided access to the people and places that have not been researched before in this way. In addition, my status as an insider meant it was possible to obtain permission from the community leaders and get access to the participants through the gatekeepers, and that was why I chose to do the research this way. I had chosen a culturally appropriate strategy based on my insider

status by seeking help from the gatekeepers in getting access and information to the participants and managed to get a diversity of participants (see Table 4.3) from the purposive sampling strategy used whilst acknowledging the implications of gatekeepers. It would most likely have taken me a lot longer to gain access if I did not adopt this approach. Due to my insider status, I was also aware of what was culturally appropriate in these areas (especially in the rural study site) and included this in my approach to gaining access to participants.

Indeed, arguably, this approach enabled me to contribute original findings through accessing particular groups. On reflection, and with hindsight and more resources, I might have done more to ensure that I had maximised the diversity of participants in the research from the outset by finding additional routes to select participants beyond the community leaders and my parents. However, participants expressed a wide variety of opinions about community development and poverty alleviation and the strategies adopted here helped me to access these particular people living in poverty who were a hard-to-reach group.

Meanwhile, the selection of the Group 2 and Group 3 individuals to participate in this research was again purposive. Group 2 were the community leaders representing each study site, who I directly approached and obtained permission from them to participate in this research, while Group 3 individuals were the community development officers representing the main community development agencies in Terengganu. They consisted of one State Religious Welfare Department's Officer and one State Microcredit Agency's Officer as these two agencies (i.e. were purposively chosen) were widely known to the people in Terengganu and therefore, I purposively approached these agencies and sent requests to carry out interviews with them, requests which were promptly accepted.

At the same time, the sample size (i.e. 34 individuals consisting of the 30 people living in poverty and four local officials) of this research might be criticised for not being sufficiently large in terms of its size to represent the aspects and experiences related to the research problem. However, it is worth noting that there are debates over the right sample size in qualitative research primarily around the lack of justifications for the determination of sample sizes in qualitative research (Marshall et al., 2013). Boddy argues that the determination of sample sizes in qualitative

research mainly depends on the ‘context and scientific paradigm of the research being conducted’, with positivist research favouring representative samples and constructivists approach more concerned with an in-depth investigation of the samples (2016: 430–1).

Furthermore, Casey and Young (2019: 57) suggest that ‘rigorously collected qualitative data from small samples can substantially represent the full dimensionality of people’s experiences’. In addition, earlier research found that samples of as few as six to nine interviews can produce thorough and meaningful results and achieved code saturation (Casey and Young, 2019; Hennink et al., 2017). In my research, the focus was more on qualitatively exploring the dynamics of the experiences and perspectives of the particular selected people living in poverty who in effect became individual-level cases with experience of participation in community development, rather than on generalising from these individual cases to the experiences of others within those areas. Despite the limited time available for fieldwork in an under-researched area, I managed to conduct 34 individual interviews with the research participants and the local officials which yielded findings discussed in detail in the following chapters.

#### **4.2.2 Getting information and access from the gatekeepers**

The data collection process of this research involved interviews from three different groups (i.e. Group 1, Group 2 and Group 3), participant observations and document analysis, the process of which is explained in detail in the next section (4.3). Before I started my data collection process, I had to get access and information from the gatekeepers because, as is argued by Homan (2001), gatekeepers provide access and information for researchers. For this study, I sought information about the research site and the potential research participants for Group 1 interviews from the gatekeepers (i.e. the JKKK and my parents) as discussed in the above subsection. Also, access and permission to conduct the fieldwork were obtained from the related gatekeepers (i.e. the JKKK for Group 1 interviews and the management unit of the community development agencies for Group 3 interviews). Permission for both Group 1 and 3 interviews was acquired from these official sources before the data collection began. This permission was in the written form of email conversations between me and the gatekeepers, and they are securely kept and stored.

For Group 1 interviews, I sought permission to conduct the interview with the particular people living in poverty from the JKKK Chairperson of each study site. Although the data collection for my Group 1 involved the local people experiencing poverty, it was still important for me to get access to the research setting in the first place and the participants were aware that I had obtained permission from the JKKK to conduct the fieldwork. It was essential for the participants to acknowledge that I was doing research and that they were well informed about the route to access this study to guarantee the continuity of the fieldwork process. Gaining an endorsement to conduct fieldwork from the JKKK in the first place was also essential because I can be stopped from conducting my fieldwork if I did not get their permission. Having done this prior to fieldwork can minimise the risk that can affect the safety of the researcher and the respondents and this was in line with the UK Social Research Association code of practice for the safety of social researchers (Social Research Association, 2001). Nevertheless, I did not experience any major problems throughout the fieldwork period.

For the Group 3 interviews, the permission to conduct the interviews with the officers among the community developers was acquired from the management unit of each agency in my written requests through emails, and the process was quite straightforward. I had initially requested to conduct the interviews with three community development agencies; one State Religious Welfare Department, one State Microcredit Agency and one Federal Microcredit Agency. However, one agency declined to participate due to previous adverse experiences of research.

I was aware that my engagement with the gatekeepers as a way to get the information and access needed to conduct the research could have influenced the data collection process because they had set a starting point for the process of the data collection. It is argued that the researcher will have limited access to the research setting due to the influence exercised by the gatekeepers 'primarily in terms of controlling and limiting the collection of data' and that the role of gatekeepers needs further consideration (Broadhead and Rist, 1976: 329). For this research, I acknowledge that the engagement with the gatekeepers was the starting point, and they helped me frame aspects of the research through the route into the access they provided. I also needed to protect the identity of the research participants from the gatekeepers by anonymising the participants' identity within the wider write-up of

the findings, and also by getting the gatekeepers to sign a confidentiality clause as explained below (also see Section 4.4 for further discussion on this).

In addition, I was also aware that the use of gatekeepers especially family members (i.e. my parents) for access to participants will have implications for bias and confidentiality, such as the suggested individuals could come from the same subgroup, for example, they all could come from the same political group. The rationale of using my parents and the JKKK as the gatekeepers was that the participants were a hard-to-reach group and that not many studies have been done before in this particular setting, making it more difficult to identify participants by other routes. For example, my parents had provided valuable information in getting access to the rural participants as they were insiders to the area of research. As insiders, they know the poverty situation in their area and they had provided me with potential names who met the selection criteria for the research participants. Previous studies (see Cui, 2014; van Heugten, 2004) had benefitted the insider role held by the researchers or their social networks including family members to recruit research participants. Issues around bias in the participants' selection can be addressed by triangulating the research methods and undertaking reflexive practice throughout the research process (Mackieson et al., 2018; van Heugten, 2004).

For this research, I tried to minimise the implication for bias of the participant selection by triangulating the interview data with the document analysis around the researched topic (e.g. to corroborate the differences between rural and urban poverty that were being identified within Malaysia). I also adopted the reflexivity practice in this research by always reflecting on my engagement in the fieldwork and during data analysis. For instance, I needed to balance my insider role while analysing the data to avoid personal judgment and interpretation. Reflexivity is a process that discusses the researcher's awareness of the influences they might bring into the research process (Mackieson et al., 2018).

In this study, I am aware that I had simultaneously held the insider-outsider roles throughout the research process which I discussed in detail in subsection 4.3.7. The confidentiality of the research participants from the gatekeepers was addressed through the confidentiality clause signed by the gatekeepers so that any information about the participants was only known to them. The participants were also well

informed on this matter before signing the consent form prior to the interview sessions. I had also anonymised the participants' names with pseudonyms to further protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Nevertheless, from my reflection of doing the interviews, the gatekeepers did not significantly influence my data collection process because the participants were relatively open and wanted to critically discuss the issues in a way to improve their lives in relation to the findings discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. In the resulting data, there was a fair amount of critique from the participants around the issues of power dynamics within the process of poverty alleviation and community development which could be an indication that the participants' selection was not entirely from a biased sample consisting of just those supporting existing approaches; it also supported the view that the ethical protections I had put in place were sufficient to enable participants to express a range of views, including critical ones.

Meanwhile, I still triangulate the fieldwork data with document analysis and with the reflexivity in practice to minimise the implication for bias as discussed above. It is possible, however, that residents not identified by gatekeepers may have been more critical. In addition, the participants' demographic background (see Table 4.3) was quite diverse (in terms of age, educational background and family size). It showed that the selected participants were not entirely from the same demographic groups and their experiences of poverty were also varied. Together, these provide some evidence of the diversity of resulting participants and views that was achieved through these selections, data triangulation and reflexivity processes. However, I acknowledge that if I can use more routes to access the participants, it might have provided a more diverse group of participants within the purposive sampling criteria.

To conclude, the study was conducted by getting the gatekeepers' access and information through purposive sampling. This framed the route into the study but did so because the permission and acknowledgement from the community leaders were essential in ensuring the continuity of the research process. Retrospectively, more collaborative approaches might yield different results, which could be explored through alternative studies. For example, a participatory action research (PAR) approach rather than simply a qualitative study might have been adopted through purposive sampling so that I could potentially identify the possible participants

through collaboration with the community and without the need to depend on the gatekeepers. However, the research context relative to the issue of gatekeepers discussed above will make PAR very challenging to implement.

Given that my study is funded, and I am required to complete the study within a given time scale, I had to choose the method for data access and collection that best fit with the time available to conduct the study. However, the time constraint to completing this research in relation to the chosen research method did not prevent the development of original findings through engagement with participants within a hard-to-reach and under-researched population, and I was able to study the dynamics of experiences of poverty and community development for those reached, in line with the overall refined research question.

#### **4.2.3 The sample sizes and demographic details of the participants**

This research comprised 34 interviews in total, with participants from three different groups. The primary subjects of the research, the Group 1 participants with experience of living in poverty in the selected local areas, consisted of 30 households, and there were 30 individual interviews in total, with 15 household interviews in each site. Each household was represented by an individual (either the husband or wife) from the selected households because I wanted to get the views about this topic from both male and female perspectives. The demographic details of the participants are listed below in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Demographic details of the research participants for Group 1

| <b>Participants</b> | <b>Area</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Age Range</b> | <b>Level of Education</b> | <b>Number of Children</b> |
|---------------------|-------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| R1                  | Rural       | Female        | 50s              | Secondary School          | 8                         |
| R2                  | Rural       | Female        | 40s              | Secondary School          | 8                         |
| R3                  | Rural       | Female        | 60s              | Primary School            | 7                         |
| R4                  | Rural       | Female        | 30s              | Secondary School          | 4                         |
| R5                  | Rural       | Female        | 30s              | Secondary School          | 3                         |
| R6                  | Rural       | Female        | 50s              | Secondary School          | 8                         |
| R7                  | Rural       | Female        | 50s              | Secondary School          | 9                         |
| R8                  | Rural       | Female        | 50s              | Secondary School          | 7                         |
| R9                  | Rural       | Female        | 60s              | Primary School            | 8                         |
| R10                 | Rural       | Female        | 30s              | Secondary School          | 4                         |
| R11                 | Rural       | Female        | 50s              | Secondary School          | 6                         |
| R12                 | Rural       | Female        | 40s              | Secondary School          | 7                         |
| R13                 | Rural       | Female        | 50s              | Secondary School          | 5                         |



|     |       |        |     |                    |           |
|-----|-------|--------|-----|--------------------|-----------|
| R14 | Rural | Male   | 50s | Secondary School   | 10        |
| R15 | Rural | Female | 50s | Secondary School   | 5         |
| U1  | Urban | Male   | 50s | Tertiary Education | 3         |
| U2  | Urban | Male   | 60s | Secondary School   | 5         |
| U3  | Urban | Female | 20s | Secondary School   | 2         |
| U4  | Urban | Female | 60s | Tertiary Education | 0         |
| U5  | Urban | Female | 40s | Secondary School   | 4         |
| U6  | Urban | Female | 50s | Secondary School   | 3         |
| U7  | Urban | Male   | 70s | Primary School     | 12        |
| U8  | Urban | Female | 50s | Secondary School   | 4         |
| U9  | Urban | Female | 50s | Secondary School   | 6         |
| U10 | Urban | Female | 20s | Secondary School   | 1         |
| U11 | Urban | Male   | 40s | Tertiary Education | 1         |
| U12 | Urban | Female | 60s | Secondary School   | 6         |
| U13 | Urban | Male   | 50s | Secondary School   | No Answer |
| U14 | Urban | Female | 50s | Secondary School   | 2         |
| U15 | Urban | Female | 40s | Secondary School   | 4         |

Table 4.3 presents the demographic information of the 30 research participants from both a rural and an urban area in Terengganu who participated in this study. The age range of the participants varied between the 20s to the 70s with almost half of them in their 50s. Female participants outnumbered the male participants with 24 females over six males. In the literature review chapters, the effects of poverty on women relative to men (i.e. the gendered dimension of poverty) were discussed in relation to women experiencing this more than men. Also, the timing of the data collection (in relation to purposive convenience sampling) which was mainly done on weekdays and during the daytime resulted in having more female participants who were at home when I approached the targeted households. This explains, at least in part, the gender composition of the research participants. For instance, the findings were largely about women's perspectives of poverty. However, responses from the six male participants brought different perspectives around the research topic, which were integrated into the findings. These were important in adding to the diversity of perspectives overall, whilst acknowledging their relatively smaller numbers within the participant group as a whole.

The level of education of the participants showed that nearly all participants had studied until the secondary level. Four participants had studied up to the primary level and only three participants, who were from urban areas, had undergone tertiary education. The average number of children for all the participants was 5.2 children

per family, with 6.6 children per family for the rural participants and 3.7 children per family for the urban participants. These numbers are significantly higher than the average national number of children per family, which was 1.8 children per family, and this trend was common in Terengganu as it recorded the second-highest birth rate among other states in Malaysia, especially for the families in rural areas (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018c).

The second group (Group 2) consisted of the JKKK Chairperson (i.e. community leaders) from both research sites. The rural JKKK Chairperson was male while the urban JKKK Chairperson was female, and they were both in their 60s. The third group (Group 3) involved two stakeholders from two state government community development agencies, with one stakeholder interviewed from each agency, although I had approached three agencies to recruit participants initially. One agency declined (the reason was provided in the previous section) to participate in this research and the two agencies involved were the State Religious Welfare Department and a State Microcredit Agency.

Despite many agencies doing community development activities in Terengganu, these agencies were chosen because they were the most prominent and active agencies in delivering development programmes and assistance to the localities in this study. The State Microcredit Agency provided financial loans and skills needed for the poor and low-income individuals to start a business; the State Religious Welfare Department was a Zakah agency that distributed Zakah money to the poor people in Terengganu while providing skills and technical courses for those eligible for income generation purposes as well. The local people know these agencies well as they have branches in every district and town, and they were easily reachable.

#### **4.3 Research methods and data collection**

This section outlines the use of semi-structured interviews, participant observations and document analysis as the methods for data collection, including the strengths and weaknesses of each method. Within this study, I used mixed qualitative methods, including my interviews with people with direct experience of poverty and community development work in that context (in the case of the workers, these had wider experiences of working with a larger range of people in poverty beyond the

interviewees, as well as a direct experience of community development intervention practice). I also did some wider observations of related activities to broaden this out and check for experiences and issues that may not have been narrated by the particular people I spoke to in my interviews. In addition, I also carried out document analysis of the national and local contexts (i.e. the National Development Policies documents and the Five Years Malaysia Plans documents) being studied in particular to poverty and community development in Malaysia to further triangulate the fieldwork data.

This section will also discuss how the methods were applied during data collection and the process of recording and transcribing the interviews as ways of gathering the interview data, the use of field notes and research diaries as ways of recording the participant observation data and the steps in document analysis. It also discusses the power dynamics in the research process, which includes my insider-outsider role during the research process. The fieldwork took two months, starting in early November 2017 and ending in early January 2018.

#### **4.3.1 Semi-structured interview**

A semi-structured interview is one of the basic types of interviews used in qualitative research, apart from structured and unstructured interviews. For this research, the findings of this study depended primarily on semi-structured interviews, and these were chosen because they have both the elements of the structured and unstructured interview (Sarantakos, 1993). They provide more flexibility for the researcher in scheduling and sequencing the interview questions because a semi-structured interview has an interview scheduled with an orderly series of questions, but the probes and order of questions do not necessarily have to be followed (Bryman, 2015).

The advantage of this method is that the research topic can be explored more openly because the participants will have more chances to express their emotions, feelings and opinions (Esterberg, 2002). Through this method, I gained more understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the particular people living in poverty in relation to their participation in community development. This method allowed me to interrupt and ask for further clarification and elaboration from the participants on

certain issues. Furthermore, this method also allowed me to ask interview questions that could directly answer my research questions because the interview questions were formulated based on the research aims and research questions of this study. For instance, I was able to paraphrase my interview questions (see Appendix 2) by using the local dialect and repeating my interview questions so that the participants could fully understand my questions and provide the responses.

On the other hand, this method does have some disadvantages. The structured element of this method could turn it into a structured interview if the interview schedule is being followed too strictly and provides no room for flexibility, which may limit the responses from the participants (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In addition, it could turn into an unstructured interview if the structure is not carefully followed as this can result in the interview questions not being answered because the participants are free to talk about whatever they like (May, 2001). Thus, I carefully followed the interview guide of a semi-structured interview by using similar questions from one participant to another participant and only allowed the paraphrasing of the questions without changing the original meaning (Bryman, 2008).

#### **4.3.2 Participant observations**

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, which made the most significant contribution to the research findings, I also adopted participant observation to triangulate and strengthen my interview data. In particular, these were designed to focus on certain community-development-related events (see Table 4.4) to try to understand these responses in context based on certain criteria (see Table 4.5). Together, these will help to address the last refined research question, which was how do social inequalities impact on the dynamics of participation in community development and/or poverty alleviation amongst the research participants. Emerson et al. (2007: 352) define participant observation as ‘establishing a place in some natural setting on a relatively long-term basis in order to investigate, experience and represent the social life and social processes that occur in that setting’. Through this method, as a researcher, I engaged in the community of the research areas because, as Atkinson et al. (2003: 109) argue, a researcher needs to act reflexively and become a ‘part of the social events and processes’ that are to be observed.

Through this method, I focused on the instances of community-development-related events and I particularly observed these three events: one religious community event in the rural research site and two community development programmes in the urban research site. The details of the observed events are listed in Table 4.4. There were many regular community events taking place in both research areas, particularly religious community events such as the weekly Friday prayer, daily and weekly religious sermons and teaching at mosques. However, I did not participate in these events because the attendees for these kinds of regular events were commonly the same people which could then limit the things that I wanted to observe because there was less diversity of the attendees. Therefore, I chose these particular events due to more diversity of the types of attendees at the events. They were also examples of the types of community development interventions that I was studying.

Table 4.4: Details of observed community development events for participant observations

| <b>Events<br/>Details</b> | <b>Community<br/>religious event<br/>(Event 1)</b> | <b>Microcredit<br/>agency event<br/>(Event 2)</b>          | <b>Welfare agency<br/>event<br/>(Event 3)</b> |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Event's name              | Celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birthday         | Monthly meeting of a microcredit agency with the borrowers | Delivery of monetary monthly cash benefits    |
| Event's location          | Rural area                                         | Urban area                                                 | Urban area                                    |
| Event's time and duration | Late evening (2 hours)                             | Morning (1 hour)                                           | Afternoon (1 hour)                            |
| Number of attendees       | 60 people                                          | 25 people                                                  | 15 people                                     |
| Gender of attendees       | 45 males<br>15 females                             | Female                                                     | 8 males<br>7 females                          |
| Age range of attendees    | Ranged from children to adults in their 70s        | Adults ranged from the 20s up to 60s                       | Adults ranged from the 20s up to 60s          |

For the rural research site, I participated in a special religious event that was celebrated once a year because such an event received a higher participation rate from the various level of the local people as compared to the regular events. For the urban research site, I managed to participate in two community development events, the monthly meeting of a microcredit agency with the borrowers and the delivery of monetary assistance event. The limited number of the special community and community development events that I managed to participate in was due to the timing of the fieldwork because fewer special community programmes were planned

and conducted at the end of the year, as the locals were busy preparing for the new school term in January every year. In addition, the end of the year also marks the monsoon season in Terengganu and therefore, fewer community programmes were carried out due to the weather uncertainty. Table 4.5 showed certain criteria that I decided to observe during participant observations.

Table 4.5: Criteria to be observed during participant observations

| <b>Non-verbal Communication (Body Language)</b>                  | <b>Verbal Communication</b>                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Characteristics of the Participants</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Facial expressions<br>- E.g. Sadness, surprise, fear and disgust | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- E.g. Who are the passive participants?</li> <li>- E.g. Who is dominating a conversation?</li> <li>- E.g. Contents of the conversations (dissatisfaction tones)</li> </ul> | Age (estimation)                           |
| Body gestures<br>- E.g. Negative finger signs                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Gender                                     |
| Body postures<br>- E.g. Far body proximity                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Social status                              |

These criteria for participant observations were outlined before I started the observations and consisted of non-verbal communication, verbal communication and the characteristics of the participants. For non-verbal communication, I gave attention to the facial expressions, body gestures and body postures of the participants who attended the events where I was doing the observations (i.e. community events) and looked for any body language signs that could indicate any forms of social inequality among the participants. The occurrences of these signs were then recorded in a table.

For verbal communication, I observed the number of active and passive participants in a group conversation as this could indicate who held more power than the others and I also paid attention to the contents of the conversation to look for any dissatisfaction tones expressed by any of the members. Lastly, I recorded the characteristics of the participants, who I observed based on the above criteria relating to their age, gender and social status as these could give a general view of which category of the local community was being treated unequally. These criteria were chosen to explore inequalities through local interactions at community development activities.

I adopted this method to verify the data gathered from the interviews on the impact of social inequality towards the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation that included the issues of power and power relations, social class and gender. The participant observation process involved the physical environment and the human sets of emotions because, as argued by Jorgensen (1989), these can provide a more complete perspective of every situation. Through this method, I explicitly recorded the information gathered from the observation in field notes with a primary focus on the interactions among the locals and between the locals and the local authorities (programme organisers) within the chosen events to help observe any social inequality issues that arose, mainly the power relations within the community. This method was selective because I was not able to see all the social inequality issues just by looking and I only focused on certain events (which, to my knowledge, were significant at the point of observing them) to observe and write about (Emerson et al., 2007).

I also gave attention to the conversations among the locals at these events to find out any issues of power dynamics within the area. In addition, I observed and recorded characteristics of the participants who attended the events, namely the participant numbers, ages (estimation) and gender. These criteria helped me to identify which category of the community was actively participating in community events. I publicly participated in those events because no permission was required from anyone. Nevertheless, I did let the participants know that I was doing an observation when I was asked by some of them (only in the urban area) because they were curious about seeing me at the event, but I did not observe any changes in their behaviour when they knew they were being watched.

Apart from these community events, I had also proposed participating in the JKKK's meetings to conduct observations during the meetings and carry out daily observations in the JKKK's offices to observe the interactions among the JKKK committee member and the locals that deal with the JKKK, as stated in the Research Ethics and Risk Assessment application. I aimed to observe whether there were any inequalities in power that existed within the community, including which individual was more favourable to the JKKK committee member, and whether this issue had any influence on the poverty alleviation process.

However, I was not successful in carrying out these types of observations because I was unable to get permission to do so. I was informed that the JKKK meetings are confidential, and only committee members are allowed to join because of the bureaucratic nature of the meetings. Another reason that I was not successful was that the timing of my request to carry out the observations coincided with the general election that was due to take place in early May 2018 and therefore this was a very politically heated period. The timing of fieldwork made participant observations more challenging than anticipated. I was also unable to carry out daily observations in the JKKK's offices because of their opening hours; the JKKK members were rarely attending the offices during normal working hours because they were working. In this case, the locals normally went straight to the JKKK's houses for any related matters, mainly in the evening time, which was corroborated by some of the research participants, as discussed in the findings chapter.

The participant observation data collected for this research was obtained only through community events. I recognise that given the observations were limited to these events I only saw particular types of encounters through the events (see Table 4.5). The data on more political interactions were potentially absent because I was unable to do other observations as planned. For instance, I did not observe any occurrences showing the dynamic of power between the locals and the JKKK through the events that I observed as I could have potentially seen it if I had obtained the permission to conduct participant observations in the JKKK's meetings and their offices.

Therefore, I decided not to integrate the participant observation findings as the collected data added limited depth into the analysis, even though I had originally wanted to triangulate the findings with the interview findings to address the last refined research question, specifically. I initially wanted to make internal comparisons between the gathered information from these two methods on the social inequality issues, particularly in terms of the dynamics of power relations among and between the locals and the local authorities. However, based on my judgement, notes from these observations were limited in detail because more sustained observations were needed to observe the nuanced issues around social inequality. I expected that I could pick meaningful occurrences around these issues (mainly the interactions between the local people and local officials around the allocation of resources) by



doing participant observation in the JKKK's meeting and daily observation at their offices. I was not granted permission to do so. I only managed to conduct the participant observations in the general community events. As a result, the observations were not included in the study because the interview data and documentary analysis proved much richer and more detailed.

#### **4.3.3 Document Analysis**

Apart from the interviews and participant observations, I also adopted document analysis in this study to triangulate the fieldwork data with a particular focus on the stated national policy intentions related to my research questions. Document analysis is defined as a procedure to analyse and interpret data from documents (both printed and electronic) that are related to the research topic which can help to answer specific research questions (Bowen, 2009; Frey, 2018). Document analysis is highly compatible with a qualitative study given that it can produce rich descriptions of the case. It starts by reading the data (i.e. text and/or images), examining and interpreting the data to elicit meaning and empirical knowledge of the research topic which commonly relates to the social aspect. Atkinson and Coffey see documents as 'social facts', which are produced, shared, and used in socially organised ways (1997: 47). There are various sources of documents including 'advertisements; agendas,....books and brochures,....letters and memoranda; maps and charts; newspapers (clippings/articles); press releases; program proposals,...organisational or institutional reports; survey data; and various public records' (Bowen, 2009: 27-8).

Meanwhile, Bowen (2009) also discusses the advantages of document analysis as being a less-time consuming and cost-effective method while available access (i.e. mainly through an internet search and do not require authors' permission) to the required documents are particularly easy. Given the advantages of this method, I decided to adopt it in this research to provide additional insight within a time-limited study. However, I also recognised that this method has potential flaws such as it does not contain information about the target population's experiences and perspectives and that was why I used this method as triangulation to the interview data.

For this research, I specifically looked at the policy documents and government institutional reports around Malaysia's community development and poverty

alleviation (i.e. responding to Research Question 2). I collected the documents online as they can be easily accessed through the government's official websites. There were 13 Malaysian Plan reports and four national development policy reports (see Chapter 3, subsection 3.1.4) that covered the period from 1957 to 2020. I looked to examine and interpret the community development interventions as approaches to poverty alleviation. I had looked for the socio-economic section in those policies that included any poverty alleviation and community development programmes delivered to the Malaysian people such as the types and provider agencies and the success rate of the programmes.

Then, I made internal comparisons between the gathered information from document analysis and the interview data as it provided me with a deeper and wider understanding of the poverty alleviation process and participation in community development activities among the particular people living in poverty involving their experiences and perspectives within the process. The document analysis corroborated and supplemented the primary data gathered through interviews and compensated for the absence of the participant observation, in some respects, through providing contextual data. The triangulation process of the research data had also minimised the impact of potential biases in this study as discussed earlier in subsection 4.2.2.

#### **4.3.4 Recording and transcription of the interviews**

All the interview sessions were recorded using a digital recorder once informed consent had been agreed. The advantage of recording the interviews is that it can help to improve the quality of the interview transcripts because the recording can be replayed whenever needed (Silverman, 2006). Notes were also taken during the interviews to record the main points of the participants' responses because it helped me to ask more probing questions whenever needed, such as to clarify with the participants about factors (whether economic or social) that influence their participation in community development to make sure all the interview questions were answered. Notes were written in short form and by using abbreviations because I had to write very fast while interacting with the participant at the same time. All interviews were conducted in the Malay language using the local dialect because this medium was more effective as compared to the use of the standard Malay language.

In this way, the participants felt more comfortable interacting during the interview sessions.

After the interviews, all the interview recordings were transcribed into written and readable transcripts in original language using verbatim transcripts with every word spoken by the participants written down. This included all the pauses, laughter, and other non-verbal responses that were detected from the recordings because those responses could have important meanings once they are analysed (Ibid.). I only translated selected quotes from the transcripts into English following the analysis rather than translating all the transcripts. I spent approximately two months completing the transcription process. All the transcripts were saved in a password-protected Microsoft Word document while the printed version of the transcripts was securely kept in a locked drawer which was accessible only to me.

#### **4.3.5 Field notes and research diaries**

The participant observation data was recorded in the form of field notes, and they were written in my research diary. Notes were taken when I was observing the interaction among the participants in the community events and were handwritten in the diary. Prior to the observation, I had listed the criteria (see Table 4.4) to be observed during the event, focusing on an exploration of the inequality issues. This observation template included the way people interacted among themselves and who was the most engaging person and the most passive individual at the event because these criteria could help me to identify aspects of inequalities, particularly the power inequalities (e.g. who was dominating a conversation in a group). The observations were based on those criteria, and I was very selective in taking notes to make sure that I recorded only the relevant data.

After each observation, I transferred the field notes into typed field notes that matched the criteria listed in Table 4.5 on a computer. However, I was not quick to discount events that did not seem significant to me because I could have missed things that were significant to the participants. In this case, it is worthwhile to include initial analytical thoughts to decide whether or not the instances were significant and could help in answering the research questions (Bryman, 2015). This is because significance is a characteristic that may differ from different perspectives.

Therefore, I had to regularly do a self-checking process by asking myself questions such as ‘Was the event significant to the participants too?’ and help in addressing the research questions.

#### **4.3.6 Being accompanied by a family member during fieldwork**

I was accompanied by a family member (i.e. my brother) when I conducted the data collection. Nowadays, accompanied fieldwork is quite commonplace in social research including sociology particularly for those applying ethnography research (see Cupples and Kindon, 2003; Korpela et al., 2016; Lunn, 2014; Lunn and Moscuza, 2014). The fieldwork company can include family members, fellow researchers or colleagues and justifications for accompanied fieldwork need to be thoroughly discussed (Lunn, 2014).

For this research, I decided to have accompanied fieldwork because of two main reasons. First, I wanted to keep a culturally and religiously appropriate image as a female Muslim researcher because religious beliefs and cultural practices are still deeply rooted in the community in Terengganu. Having insider knowledge of the research areas, I anticipated that being accompanied during fieldwork will yield more benefits than going to the fieldwork alone. This was because in the social setting in Malaysia and particularly in Terengganu, people appreciate the efforts of those who try to portray an appropriate image of a Muslim in line with the local cultural practice. For Muslim women, this includes bringing a companion<sup>18</sup> when going out, as this is deemed as more socially appropriate than going out on your own (Naemah et al., 2013). Conforming to this norm was part of my reflexive consideration as a researcher of how I could best gain access and ensure respondents felt comfortable sharing sensitive details about their lives and experiences of poverty.

Fitting in a particular social setting is important because a researcher ‘needs to be socially understandable to others in any social context’ (Korpela et al., 2016: 11). Thus, I tried to keep a culturally appropriate image during fieldwork to gain access and be fully accepted within this particular social context because failing to do so

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<sup>18</sup> A Muslim woman is supposed to get permission and be accompanied by her husband or any members from her family (either male or female family members) or by other women when she leaves her house as described in the Quran (Naemah et al., 2013).

could lead me to be excluded or ostracised from the communities that I am seeking to research. In addition, the interview settings that took place primarily within the participants' households (with the participants having their families in the background) allowed me to do contextual engagement with them. In this respect, having had a family member with me during fieldwork fit well within this local social setting. This approach helped me to understand the participants' responses in the context of their living circumstances and family lives which became the advantage of this approach.

Therefore, throughout the fieldwork, I was accompanied by my brother, although I initially wanted to be accompanied by my husband. I decided to have my brother (who was already in Terengganu) instead of my husband during fieldwork after considering the logistic and budgeting factors, particularly with my husband being based in the UK at the time I was to start my fieldwork. I chose my brother over other family members because he was available locally and had no commitments for other things at the time the fieldwork was conducted, which he promptly agreed to accompany me when asked.

On reflection, doing accompanied fieldwork proved to be good for my case because I was asked by most of the research participants whether I would come alone or was being accompanied, and they were happy to know that I had my brother with me and at the end of the interview sessions, my brother was also invited to join us for some refreshments. In addition, my marital status as a married woman had also helped to increase the rapport with the participants because the role that I held was according to local gender norms (i.e. women are expected to get married early, normally before they reach their thirties) which made them felt more comfortable to talk about family lives as they were openly shared their experiences and perspectives with me.

The second reason for having accompanied fieldwork was for safety reasons. It is known that lone female researchers are likely to be harassed while undergoing fieldwork because they are generally more vulnerable than lone male researchers (Molz, 2006; Social Research Association, 2001). Accompanied fieldwork is recommended if doubts about the researchers' safety are recorded, particularly in an unknown vicinity (Social Research Association, 2001). For this research, I did home interviews and I felt safer with the presence of my brother around especially in the

urban research site, an area which I had never been to before. It is commonly known that Malay people are mostly warm and welcoming but, considering I was researching particular people living in poverty, this made me take extra precautions because poverty can be a sensitive topic that may provoke unexpected reactions among respondents.

In addition, I also decided to conduct accompanied fieldwork due to gender dynamics. For every interview session, I did not know beforehand whether I will have a female or male participant (except for nine participants who were single mothers) because the suggested households for the potential participants could lead me to either having a husband or wife as the participant, depending on the availability and willingness for any of them to participate. According to Kloß, doing fieldwork as a female researcher within a patriarchal society can lead the researcher to be seen as having a subordinate position particularly when it involves male respondents (2016), which is particularly true for my fieldwork context. The presence of my brother helped to balance this gender dynamics between me and my male respondents and the whole research participants as well.

Nevertheless, accompanied fieldwork should be avoided if there are no necessities to have it because it may raise many ethical questions. First, the issue of confidentiality of the data and research participants to be known to the person who accompanied the researcher. I addressed this confidentiality issue by asking my brother to sign a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix 5) that he will not disclose anything that he heard or observed unless authorised by the participants, which was very unlikely to happen. This was because my brother never stayed near me when I was interviewing as he normally sat quite far away (i.e. in a front yard area around the participants' houses) while I was sitting with the participant inside the house. This meant that my brother's (male) additional presence did not, therefore, inhibit female respondents in particular from sharing any gender-related perspectives that they might wish to share with me.

Being accompanied by my brother during interview sessions proved to cause no problem because none of my participants (both males and females) expressed that they felt insecure or distracted with the presence of my brother outside their houses. For the case of female participants, most of them had their children playing around

us during interview sessions while some of their husbands were chatting with my brother outside their houses. The same situation happened with the interviews with male participants as there was always someone (i.e. the participants' children or wives) with them throughout the session. It is important to acknowledge that the presence of the participants' family members during the interview sessions was a reflection of the cultural practices within the Malay community when having guests as I was treated more like a guest than a researcher by the participants. The interview sessions went very much like casual conversations, and I received many critical and analytical responses from the participants through these.

To conclude, accompanied fieldwork was an appropriate option in the circumstances for my research because it fit well within the local cultural and social context and allowed me to gain access to the participants. In addition, the focus of my study was on a contextualised understanding of the impact of community development on poverty and doing these interviews within these community and family contexts could have potentially brought me closer to understanding the participants' experiences that I was seeking to explore. Also, the contexts in which the participants were living (being in their own homes) made them more comfortable and able to take part (as opposed, for example, to interviewing them in a public place away from the homes that made them have to find separate childcare or travelling to take part in the interview). Meanwhile, I had discussed these issues of accompanied fieldwork in the Research Ethics and Risk Assessment application prior to data collection and received ethical approval before I conducted the fieldwork.

#### **4.3.7 Reflexivity: Insider-outsider role and power flows in the research**

As a researcher, there were several roles that I played throughout the research process. According to Atkinson et al. (2003), the phases of the relationship between the researcher and the participants during the research will change if there is an existing relationship between them. For my study, I was researching my own community that was the Bumiputera-Malay community and I chose my home district for the rural research site. Therefore, for the interviews, I had a few participants that I already knew from my parents' network, and this event influenced the research relationship and affected the data that I received. For instance, some of the participants (R1, R6, R9, R12, R14 and R15) had been very happy to have me

interview them as I was the child of their friends, and I was treated well during the interview session (i.e. served with foods and drinks during the interview). However, it could be argued that interviewing people that I know may have implications for bias in the data because, for instance, the participants could tell me things they think I might want to know and hide those that I should not know about. On reflection, the data gained from these participants were similar to the responses that I received from other participants, for example, through the critical responses around the power dynamics issues within their areas.

In addition, I also successfully managed to engage well with other participants outside my parents' networks (those that I managed to reach through the snowballing technique, i.e. R4, R5, R10 and R13) as they were very friendly to me during the interview sessions while the rest of the participants cooperated well throughout the interview process. When I was conducting observations, my role also changed, and the changing roles were due to the insider-outsider role that emerged during the research process. I was regarded as an insider because I conducted this study in my state, Terengganu, and particularly in my hometown, Besut (the reason for choosing this area has been discussed in detail earlier in subsection 4.2.1). According to Merton (1972), a researcher will hold an insider role when he/she has a fixed identity with common attributes that are socially recognised. At the same time, I was also an outsider because I am a PhD student from Durham University with different educational values than in Terengganu. Therefore, this influenced the rapport and interaction that were built because I was simultaneously holding the insider-outsider role throughout my research.

There were both advantages and disadvantages to having both roles. Being an insider gave me the advantage of recruiting potential participants due to my familiarity with the local communities, particularly from my parents' network for the fieldwork in the rural research site, and this also helped me to establish a good rapport and trust with my participants, which led to fuller responses. For example, as an insider, I more comfortably interacted with the respondents in the rural area compared with the urban area using the local dialect because the choice of language created a friendlier environment as I hold more of an insider role in the rural district rather than the urban district.



However, there was also the disadvantage of being an insider, as was the case in the urban site; I was seen as a government officer by some of the participants since I had made early contact with the JKKK to get suggestions of their names. They were hoping that I could help them to get some government assistance rather than them to participate in the interviews. I then explained to them that all I can do is provide recommendations for policy and practice as the findings could help change and improve the poverty-related policies and indirectly better the lives of those living in poverty, including themselves in the future.

Holding an outsider role also had advantages and disadvantages. When my participants recognised me as having an outsider role, some of them became disengaged from participating in the interview process and did not provide me with enough information. My outsider role as an international PhD student made them feel a bit shy to talk and became less engaged (in particular, U3 and U9). Nevertheless, at the same time, some of them (in particular, U7, R10 and R15) took my outsider role as being that of an international student at a university not based in Malaysia, which made them feel safer to share more information with me and to share things that they never told other people before.

#### **4.4 Ethical consideration**

I had to give serious consideration to the ethical issues pertaining to this study throughout the whole research process. According to Bryman (2015), ethical issues in research are very important and include the people involved in the research and justifiable activities during the processes. He explains that the ethical principles consist of four core issues, including the lack of informed consent, harm to participants, invasion of privacy and involvement of deception. These core issues must be taken into consideration throughout the research lifecycle.

Therefore, I started my fieldwork only after I had received ethical approval from the Research Ethics and Risk Assessment Committee of the Department of Sociology, Durham University. I did not engage in any fieldwork activities before the approval was granted because this approval was key to whether or not I could carry out the data collection. I abided by all the principles discussed in the ethics application to reflect the significance of the researcher's awareness of the balance between

individual rights and the public benefits of research by guaranteeing the rights of the participants to get the clearest information about my research.

#### **4.4.1 Informed consent**

Informed consent was secured from all participants before I interviewed them. Homan (1991) argues that informed consent aims to guarantee the rights of human subjects to know the activities involved in a research project and to approve their participation. This allowed the participants to refuse, withdraw or agree to take part in the research on the basis that they were informed with comprehensive information about the nature and purpose of the study. Thus, I gave the participants a consent form (see Appendix 4) to be signed as proof of their agreement to participate in the research after I had explained to them everything that wanted to know about this study, and the forms were securely stored in line with confidential data protection regulations.

Before obtaining the written consent from the participants, I explained to my participants about this study as thoroughly as possible through a detailed research information sheet, (see Appendix 3). After the explanation, I gave the information sheet to the participants to read first (and to be kept by them afterwards) before they gave their decision whether or not to participate, prior to the interview sessions so that the participants would have enough understanding about the study and make their own decisions as to whether or not to participate, without any influence. Also, there was no penalty incurred if they withdrew because the participation in this study was fully voluntary. I also provided an opportunity for the participants to ask for and seek further explanation if needed until they were satisfied and voluntarily agreed to take part.

A signed consent form is an indicator that the participants understand the research and their rights to participation and issues of confidentiality and anonymity (Wiles et al., 2005). This form can also protect the researcher if any issues arise after the research. For instance, the participants had been told in advance how I gained access to them (i.e. through the use of gatekeepers) and were aware that there was a small risk (although very unlikely) that the gatekeepers might identify who said what in my write-up after the participants had signed the consent form. This was because I

had clearly explained to them in advance before the interviews that their confidentiality in participating in this research could not be completely guaranteed (addressed below) in relation to the gatekeepers and they were free to decide whether or not to participate without any pressure or influence from me or anyone before they agreed to give their consent.

The limit on confidentiality from the gatekeepers and my brother who accompanied me had been clearly communicated with the participants and they had understood it before signing the consent form. It could be argued that limits to confidentiality might cause the participants to respond in a particular way. For example, they might disclose or hide certain things, which could disadvantage them if it is known to the gatekeepers, decreasing the criticality of the data. Nevertheless, having analysed the data, there were many critical responses received from the participants, indicating that the limit to confidentiality did not appear to have caused them a big concern. Anonymising their identity in the write-up of the findings provided a degree of protection and reassurance to them that there was only a very small possibility that the gatekeepers might be able to identify who said what.

Moreover, the participants were well informed that they were also free not to answer any questions they were unwilling to and could answer only those questions they wanted to. I continuously checked with my respondents whether they wanted to continue or not with the interviews throughout the interview process. I also informed all the participants that I was using ethical approval from Durham University while conducting my research. In addition, I informed them that they had the right to withdraw from this research at any time during the research course for any reason. However, there is no such issue arose after the completion of the data collection process.

#### **4.4.2 Anonymity and confidentiality**

Anonymity is considered the best way of protecting confidentiality (Snyder, 2002). For this research, I guaranteed the anonymity of the research participants from the public domain to make sure that the reported quotes and incidences are not directly traceable to particular individuals. The anonymity of all participants in this research was guaranteed using fictitious names (pseudonyms) for the participants in the very

localised places within the Besut and Kuala Terengganu districts. I referred to the participants and the study sites with pseudonyms using an alphabetical and numerical method known as 'R' for the rural site and 'U' for the urban site.

The participants' names were coded with R1 until R15 for rural participants and U1 until U15 for urban participants for the Group 1 interviews. The local officials from Group 2 were regarded as JKKK-R and JKKK-U, respectively for the rural and urban JKKK chairpeople. For the local officials from Group 3, I regarded them as the State Religious Welfare Department Officer and State Microcredit Agency Officer, respectively. The possibility for them to easily be indirectly identified is quite small because these agencies have many departments with different people in charge. All the pseudonyms were used to anonymise the research participants, and they are used throughout the thesis.

I did my best to fully guarantee my research participants' confidentiality from other non-participants who were involved in this research. Therefore, the JKKK and my parents, who had acted as the gatekeepers, and my brother who accompanied me during fieldwork were also asked to sign a separate confidentiality clause (see Appendix 5 and 6) saying that they will not disclose any identities of the participants that they had suggested as the potential participants of this research to any parties. In addition, the participants had been made aware of the limit on confidentiality from the gatekeepers and my brother who accompanied me which I addressed the limit through anonymity and the signed confidential clause form.

In securing informed consent, I acknowledged that the results of this research would be freely available for anyone to read (including extracts of direct quotations) when I published the thesis (and also in other publications) online. To address this, I informed the participants that I will use the information obtained from them for my dissertation and publication purposes and any names and identifiers would be removed and changed to a pseudonym so they were fully aware of how I will use the data and obtained their consent in relation to this before conducting the interview.

Furthermore, I told my participants that I would save the data gathered in a password-protected Microsoft Word document, and the hard copy files and documents would be kept in a secure cupboard which I will destroy all data after five years upon the research completion. Having all this explained to my participants,

they were free to decide whether or not to take part in this study, and their confidentiality was guaranteed if they did participate. In addition, there were some circumstances in which there would be a limit or exclusion to the anonymity/confidentiality offered to participants. For example, I explained to the participants before the interview that I will lodge a report to the authorities if anyone involved in my study was harmed. By explaining this to the participants beforehand, they could also take any precautionary steps if they feel endangered. Through all these precautionary steps taken, I maintained the confidentiality of my participants in accordance with the processes set out in gaining informed consent.

#### **4.4.3 Reflexivity on a minor change in the ethics**

Prior to using the consent form with the participants, I decided to remove the intention to provide a summary of the findings directly to the participants. This process involved the omission of the sixth point in the original consent form that stated: 'I would like to receive a summary of the results'. I did this because on reflection this might have meant it was possible for personal (albeit anonymised) details of people in poverty to be shared in the localities among people who might recognise each other. In order to be ethical, I had to protect the participants' responses and lived experiences in poverty so that these will not be shared inappropriately with the local people in ways that the participants might be identifiable to those who knew them. Based on a discussion about this issue with a local gatekeeper who had a very good knowledge of the networks in the particular areas, I, therefore, made a minor change to the consent form and did so prior to any participants agreeing to consent.

Nevertheless, this change was ethically sensible as I had behaved ethically as a researcher throughout the data collection process because I made this change based on my judgement in the field before starting a direct engagement with the participants, and I had not created an expectation among the participants that they can have the results summary of this research. Furthermore, this change had been agreed with the Chair of the Ethics Committee to be within the departmental policy. I had contacted and informed them that I ended up using a version of the consent form that was slightly different from the one approved and had their approval for this retrospectively (see Appendix 7).

#### **4.5 Data analysis**

The process of data analysis of the current study was interactive and interpretive because the data came from many sources, including; the field notes; recordings and transcriptions from both the interviews and participant observations and; policy documents and government institutional reports around community development and poverty alleviation in Malaysia. The research data was compared primarily using thematic analysis, and this method of data analysis was chosen because it is a useful method for comparisons that can easily highlight the similarities and differences in the data. It is also helpful to analyse the different perspectives of the participants as this study compared the findings from both the urban and rural research sites (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data were analysed thematically and involved six stages, ‘an iterative and reflective process that develops over time and involves a constant moving back and forward between phases’ (Nowell et al., 2017: 4).

The six stages of the data analysis involved the process of self-familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Ibid.). It is important to make sure that the procedures of each stage are properly followed to ensure the trustworthiness of this kind of qualitative research, which includes the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability so that it is comparable to the validity and reliability criteria of quantitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Before the start of the data analysis process, data was kept and organised systematically soon after the data collection process had ended. I firstly organised, classified and edited the raw data into an accessible file which was saved in a password-protected Microsoft Word document. In contrast, the hard copy files including the research diaries, field notes and interview notes were kept in a secure locker. All written information collected will be retained for five years after the completion of this study and will then be deleted. The correct storage procedures are important to make sure of the confidentiality of the data.

#### **4.5.1 Stages of data analysis: Applying thematic analysis practice and content analysis**

To analyse the data of the research, I adopted a thematic analysis and content analysis. For the policy documents and government institutional reports around community development and poverty alleviation in Malaysia, first, I started to analyse them using content analysis and followed with thematic analysis together with other data. The process of content analysis involved a first-pass document review through which I identified meaningful and pertinent passages of text from the documents (Bowen, 2009). At this stage, it was important to decide which information are relevant to be used and which are not as it reflects the researchers' capacity in identifying pertinent information (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). I organised the content into categories that helped to answer the research questions, that consisted of the; types of community development projects delivered to address poverty and the provider agencies; objectives of the provided community development projects and the provider agencies and; poverty situation generally in Malaysia and particularly in Terengganu that consisted of the previous and current rate of poverty.

Meanwhile, the thematic analysis involves the construction of themes and sub-themes from the transcripts of interviews, observation field notes and document analysis, although the activity of searching for themes could also be presented in other qualitative data analysis approaches such as grounded theory and others (Bryman, 2015). This data analysis approach does not have a series of specific analysis procedures because it is normally employed in many different contexts based on other qualitative data analysis approaches. For this research, I used the commonly applied procedure that involved six stages of thematic data analysis as below (Nowell et al., 2017).

For the first stage of thematic data analysis, I started to analyse the data by familiarizing myself with the data. This process started immediately after each interview session when I read through the interview notes and wrote a reflection of each interview session. The same process was used for the observation data, for which I started the initial analysis by transferring the handwritten field notes to typed field notes at the end of the day after the observation and did a reflection of the data.

This was followed by transcribing all the interview recordings into typed words. Then, I read all the transcripts and the field notes again thoroughly, from line to line to find any significant responses that could answer my research questions and highlighted those responses carefully, so I did not miss any important aspects related to the research questions (Cui, 2014). For the document analysis, I reviewed the categories of information derived earlier from the content analysis to familiarise myself with the data.

The second stage of data analysis, known as the coding process, was to generate the initial codes of the data into a simpler set of data that focused on the ‘specific characteristics of the data’, and this process required me to keep on returning to the transcripts and field notes (Nowell et al., 2017: 5). For this process, I was required to give equal attention to each transcript, field note and the selected data from the content analysis so that I would not miss any interesting aspects that could later be formed as themes (Bowen, 2009; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The coding process was done with the help of the NVivo computer software to identify common themes in the interview answers as it helped to provide potential patterns in the data. NVivo is known as a coding software package for qualitative research that can produce a more sophisticated analysis because it helps to sort and organise data more effectively (King, 2004). Thus, I decided to use the NVivo computer software package for data analysis (in coding the data) because it is a practical choice. It is time effective as I can organise, sort and search for data easily and enabled me to work more efficiently, rather than hand-coding them. This software is an ‘efficient means for storing and locating qualitative data’ and can also help to compare different codes (Creswell, 2013: 195).

The third stage of data analysis involved the sorting of all the significant coded data into applicable themes that could address the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The themes can ‘capture and unify the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole’ when all the coded data with similar ideas or experiences are linked together under themes (DeSantis and Ugarriza, 2000: 362). For this research, themes were formed deductively because the coding frameworks matched the interview questions, as I organised the coded data based on the conceptual framework of this research and the themes were represented as both parent nodes



and child nodes in NVivo (Figure 4.2). I used the latest NVivo software (NVivo 12) for the coding process.

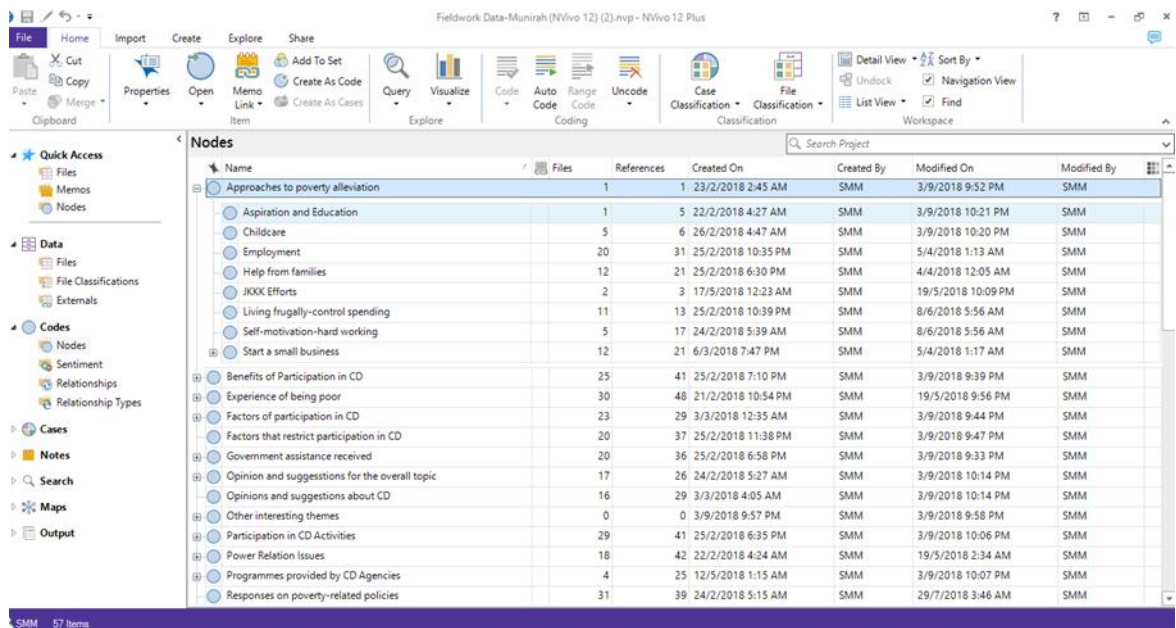


Figure 4.2: A screenshot of the coding framework in NVivo

The fourth stage involved a review of the themes, which meant changes in the earlier coding process including the addition or deletion of a new code or overlapping code because it was important to make sure that the themes provided a consistent pattern (Nowell et al., 2017). Pattern consistency was necessary to produce a trustworthy finding of the research. At this stage, it was also crucial for me to reflect on all the codes that had been produced earlier and the connections made between them to ensure that all the codes were relevant in providing answers to the research questions (Bryman, 2015).

The fifth stage was to define and name the themes by considering the ‘what’ and ‘why’ aspects of the story that each theme had captured and identified and whether the story ‘fit into the overall story about the entire data set in relation to the research questions’ (Nowell et al., 2017: 10). It was imperative to keep on refining the definitions or names of the themes to make sure that those themes represented all the coded data related to the research questions.

The last stage of the data analysis was to present the research findings, with the interview and document analysis data were presented in a systematic report by

comparing the findings from the rural and urban areas by way of how participation in community development affected the experiences of particular people living in poverty. Through these data analysis procedures, I developed five new themes about poverty and how community development can address the poverty problem, which are discussed in the discussion and conclusion chapters. The structures of community development programmes that the research participants participated in and the types of consultations and help that they sought from the community development activities were also compared between the urban and rural participants.

### **Summary of this chapter**

This chapter has discussed the research design and research methods of this study, which involves a small-scale and local qualitative study. First, it discussed the qualitative study design to conduct the research because this study helped me to explore the experiences and perspectives of particular people living in poverty (Group 1) in relation to their participation in community development in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu. The local officials, which consisted of the community leader (Group 2) in each study site and the community development practitioners (Group 3) operating within the localities were also involved in the research to provide alternative perspectives within the data compared to the main research participants. The research participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling methods with the help of the gatekeepers to obtain the information and access the research. However, it is acknowledged that these sampling strategies potentially limited the diversity of the participants. Nevertheless, they proved effective at enabling access to an original group of participants which might not have otherwise been reached and, investigating their particular experiences of poverty and community development in line with the research questions.

Then, I discussed the research methods and data collection process, which involved semi-structured interviews as the main method to collect the data, and I also conducted participant observations to support one particular research question although, in the end, I decided not to integrate the observation findings into the analysis due to their limitations in practice. I also discussed the use of the recording and transcription process for the interviews and the field notes and research diaries for the participant observations. I also discussed the insider and outsider roles that I

held throughout the research process and how the different roles influenced the interaction between the interviewees and me and not to forget, the need and implications of accompanied fieldwork was as discussed.

This chapter also discussed the ethical issues that were considered, namely informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. For this research, I needed to obtain consent from community leaders, (and I needed to conduct the research through an accompanied way that I did) to gain access, without which I would not have been able to conduct this original research. I made all the participants aware of my approach to anonymity and confidentiality through gaining informed consent to participate in the study. Lastly, I discussed the data analysis process, which involved content and thematic analysis because the findings were arranged by themes and subthemes, assisted with the NVivo computer software in finding answers to all the research questions of this research.

## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **DYNAMICS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING IN POVERTY AND APPROACHES TO POVERTY ALLEVIATION**

#### **Introduction**

This is the first chapter of two findings and analysis chapters that discuss the empirical findings of this study. This chapter addresses the first two questions of the research, namely: What are the dynamics of the experience of poverty from the perspective of the research participants from the Bumiputera majority population living in a rural and an urban area of Terengganu (Research Question 1) and; What approaches to poverty alleviation (with a particular focus on community development approaches) are undertaken that affect the research participants (Research Question 2). The analysis of these two preceding research questions will help me to address parts of the overall research question of ‘How does participation in community development activities affect the experiences of particular people living in poverty amongst the Bumiputera population in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu?’.

This chapter comprises two sections that present the findings in thematic blocks alongside an analysis of these through the integration of the theoretical framework. The first section (5.1) addresses Research Question 1 by exploring the dynamics of the experience of being in poverty among the research participants. Section 5.2 then presents the approaches taken by the participants to alleviate their poverty (with a particular focus on community development approaches) and a range of poverty-coping mechanisms that affect them, to address Research Question 2.

#### **5.1 Dynamics of the experience of being in poverty**

This section discusses the interpretations of the meaning of poverty from the participants’ perspectives and narrates the participants’ experience of being in poverty at different stages of life (and their views on what led them into poverty) that are discussed further in the following subsections.

### 5.1.1 Participant interpretations of the meaning of poverty

The interpretations of the meaning of poverty among the research participants are explored to provide a local understanding of how the people living in poverty understand poverty and the dynamics of the experience of being in poverty. In addition, the views from the local officials (i.e. the community leaders) are also explored to better understand the dynamics of poverty within the researched areas at the local level.

The majority of the research participants described poverty in terms of having insufficient monetary sources to fulfil their life needs and family needs (i.e. absolute poverty). Their understanding of poverty is typically portrayed through their accounts of their poverty situation, which was conveyed through their descriptions of the living conditions they faced that involved financial struggles such as the struggles to fulfil the family needs, as illustrated in the quote below:

**R11:** I face poverty because I was struggling in raising my children since my late husband got sick and he couldn't work, so, it's me who work to find the money. He was sick for four years, so, I took his responsibility to work, to provide our children with their needs and it is so hard because I have to work to earn money for the family and handle everything concurrently.

Another similar example is illustrated in the quote below:

**U7:** .....I worked days and nights, I went out to seek customers at night in the coffee shops so that they will pick me and use my welding services for their projects, they agreed, and I gave my quotation, and we agreed. If they didn't agree, I could not proceed. Anyways, most of them felt pity towards me when they saw I worked hard, days and night...

For R11, poverty means the difficulty of supporting an ill spouse and family and then supporting the family as a single parent, which they associated with the inadequacy of the monetary sources available to them, which made her struggle to earn a living while simultaneously having to manage other life affairs. Similarly, U7 highlighted the hard work that he had undertaken to support his family. Both examples emphasise the importance of generating monetary income through work. The lack of sufficient financial sources led them to poverty because they did not

have enough resources to fulfil all the life necessities, especially for the children's needs. Apart from the monetary factor, the quotes above also indicate other dynamics of being in poverty that are the causes and experiences of poverty such as caring responsibilities, gender roles, excessive working hours and the (lack of) wider support from their family (i.e. whether the individual comes from a rich family or not). These wider factors are discussed in more detail in the next subsection (5.1.2).

These responses, which were representative of both the rural and urban participants, raise questions of how poverty is being understood among the particular people living in poverty at the very local level and whether this is in line with official definitions. This was because, as has been discussed in Chapter 3, subsection 3.1.3, poverty (i.e. absolute) in Malaysia is officially defined through a monetary indicator, as it is measured through the national Poverty Line Income (PLI). These measurements are being used nationally and recognised locally mainly by the local authorities. The community leaders from the research sites had defined poverty in their area based on the national definition, as illustrated in the quote below:

**Researcher:** Do you know what is the average income of the poor population in your area?

**JKKK-U:** It is estimated around MYR 1000, they normally have an income of more than MYR 700.

Based on the response above, the JKKK-U defined poverty in her area based on the monetary measurement set by the federal government. She responded that the people living in poverty in her district have an average monthly household income of around MYR 700 to 1000, which the amount is very close to the national PLI (absolute poverty line) of MYR 950 although she did not mention the exact amount of national PLI. However, in another response, the other community leader taking part in the study understands poverty through a broader lens that also include the people living in relative poverty; those who also fall in the B40 category as the B40 covered a more extensive range of poverty including both the absolute and relative poverty, as illustrated in the following quote:

**Researcher:** So, how do you see the poverty issue in this village?  
How many of the villagers are still categorised as poor?

**JKKK-R:** In terms of the poverty rate, I will say that there is about 20% to 30% of the villagers are considered to be in the bottom 40% (B40).

For the JKKK-R, he also recognised that a significant proportion of the B40 population was also categorised as a relatively poor group, although he was not providing the percentage of the overall B40 population in his area. However, both responses did not specify nor differentiate the differences between absolute and relative poverty, but it shows that their understanding of poverty was in line with the national definition of poverty that is based on the income level of the people.

To conclude, the participants and the local officials described poverty differently. From the perspective of the local officials (represented by the community leaders), poverty is defined primarily based on the income level of the people. However, the participants' perspective was slightly different because apart from the income level, they also stressed that poverty is about the efforts and struggles that they faced to raise an adequate income. Both the participants' quotes above showed different experiences in family circumstances but led to a similar outcome (i.e. poverty); for U7, he experienced a lack of adequate demand and pay in the labour market to meet family needs, while for R11, the sickness of a family member and single-parent family caused her to experience poverty. Their understanding of poverty based on their lived experiences could also be linked to the fact that the Malaysian residual welfare state system is not meeting certain contingencies of its people, for example, sickness within a family.

It was notable that the understanding of poverty at a local level among the participants corresponds with changes in monetary circumstance which caused them to experience poverty and therefore, the understanding of poverty overlaps with the causes of poverty. The quotes above also showed that the interpretations of poverty among the participants are much more complex than the official definition of poverty. These experiences and causes of poverty are unpacked more below.

### **5.1.2 Experiences and causes of poverty**

The lived experience of poverty and its causes among the participants also showed the dynamics of being in poverty among them. In general, all the 30 research

participants of this study experienced poverty at some point in their lives. They shared the different poverty situations that they had experienced with different degrees of poverty at different times in their lives. All of them were in relative poverty at the time this research was done because their monthly household income exceeded the PLI of MYR 950 (i.e. above the absolute poverty line) but was less than MYR 2,500 (i.e. below the half median income of MYR 2,614), although most of them had previously been in absolute poverty. The majority of them started to experience poverty during adulthood, especially after they started a family. However, five of them had experienced poverty since childhood, and their poverty persisted until they got married, for example:

**U9:** I have been poor since I was a child because I lived with my mother after she got divorced from my father. My mother was poor though my father was quite well-off, so I have been poor since [I was a] kid. Even after I got married, my late husband just worked in the private sector, so we didn't do very well.

The experience of poverty at different stages of life was caused by several factors that have been grouped into two overlapping and interrelated categories of 'family factors' and 'employment factors'. Family factors involved the changes within a household composition, which included the expansion of family size, illnesses of household members, and a divorce or death of the primary income earner that caused the participants to experience poverty. Meanwhile, the changes in employment events that had caused the participants to be poorer were due to two possible reasons, retirement and ceasing a job which had caused them to be financially insufficient and, worsened their poverty situation. All participants, both from rural and urban districts, experienced poverty due to family factors whilst nine of them (five rural participants and four urban participants) also attributed this to employment factors.

The increase in the size of a household as a result of having more children was the main family factor that caused the participants to experience poverty or become poorer than before; this was experienced by half of the participants. They faced difficult times financially after they got married and started to have children which led to life becoming tougher because they had more children to support. This was especially true for rural participants. For example, R12 responded that:



**R12:** After we got married and started to have children, we had to add to our income, and that's why now I am doing this food business while my husband is also working. It's because we have to provide all sorts of things for our needs, especially for the children. We have to find extra income because what we have now is not enough as we don't come from a rich family. Some people just wait for their parents to help them, but not me because I originally come from a poor family.

R12, who had seven children, raised the issue of income insufficiency to provide all the family necessities, which made both her and her husband need to work, and she was also pointing to the lack of wider financial support from her own parents (discussed further in subsection 5.2.2.2). The birth of a child is known to contribute to entering into poverty if the family income and the cost of children are not parallel (McKernan and Ratcliffe, 2002). This finding is consistent with previous research done by Mok et al. (2007) on the determinants of urban household poverty in Malaysia. They found that larger family sizes are more prone to poverty. This is because the increase in a family's size means that any household providers need to provide more for every dependent child. This relates to the cost of child-rearing, including the cost of food, clothing, education and health care (McKernan and Ratcliffe, 2002).

For this research, most of the participants had a big family (in terms of their immediate nuclear family) as two-thirds of the participants had four or more children in their family. The average number of children of the participants was 6.6 children per family for rural participants and 3.7 children per family for urban participants (see Table 4.3 in Chapter 4). The age of the majority of the participants who had more than four children was above forty years old (ranging from forty to seventy years old), which means that their children had mainly been born between the 1970s and the 2010s. The national fertility rate from the 1960s to the 1990s was 4.0 children per family, which means that having many children during this time was common, and it was culturally embedded within the society, especially among the Malay ethnic group as the average Malay family recorded 4.3 children in 1990 (The National Population and Family Development Board, 1990).

In addition, the National Population Policy enacted in 1984 aimed to increase the Malaysian population up to 70 million people by 2100 (Rashidah, 1993). To achieve

the population target, the government had taken several initiatives, which included increased maternity leave allowance for civil servants with three children to five children, an increase in the government tax allowance for every child born, the introduction of a low-cost housing scheme and many more (The National Population and Family Development Board, 1990). This policy during these times supported additional children in a family because the national fertility rate is constantly declining each year with the 2018 recorded national number of children per family being 1.8 children (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018c).

Moreover, the trend of having many children among the participants in general and the local population of Terengganu, in particular, could also link to the low level of the practice of family planning in this state. The statistics recorded by the National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN) in 2018 showed that Terengganu ranked in the second-lowest place for the use of contraceptives among the population with only 42.6% of its population using them as compared to other states. For instance, 65.2% of the population in Sarawak were using contraceptives, the highest percentage of any state in Malaysia (Md Akir, 2018). The low levels of awareness and access to family planning among the Terengganu population have also been affected by the Islamic fundamentalist movement, which grew mainly in the rural east coast states in the mid-1970s, as this movement sees family planning as an un-Islamic act (Rashidah, 1993). As a result, the fertility rate among the Terengganu population (Malays) is high with the available rate recorded as 3.2 children in 2017 while the national rate is almost half of this rate (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018a).

Based on the statistics and points discussed above, it is understandable why the research participants had many children. Therefore, they were experiencing poverty because they had to have enough financial resources to fulfil all the children's needs. Below is an example illustrating this:

**R4:** Anyway, I have felt poor since I had children. Well, it's because I needed to buy them diapers, milk and other things for them in their early years.... And because my husband is just a labourer and he sometimes works and sometimes doesn't because he has diabetes. That's why I am working too as a cleaner to supplement our family income.

It is argued that the spending for children's necessities (for example, food and clothing) are costly, and all of these costs need to be covered by the parents because children are not economically active in the labour market and there is limited support from the government to cover the cost of families in Malaysia. Also, the cost of the basic children's necessities in the early years cost a lot of money, as was illustrated in the response of R4, who was in her thirties with four small children. She also had to work to make sure that her children's needs were fulfilled.

Meanwhile, the response from R4 above also highlights the poor health condition of her husband, which became one of the reasons that their poverty worsened. It was also notable from the responses above that the attributed causes of poverty were interrelated with one another. The participants' large families and their husband's poor health combined to contribute to them being more impoverished. It is recorded that nine participants, including R4 (four rural participants and five urban participants), mentioned that the illnesses of a family member, especially the husband, made their lives financially unstable and this became one of the causes of poverty. Another example apart from the earlier responses is as follows:

**U10:** I faced poverty when I had my first child because he was ill with a heart problem; he had it since he was born, and I was advised to get him operated on. The cost of his operation was very expensive, it was 35 thousand Ringgit, and I also had to quit my job because I needed to take care of him.

From the responses above, the illnesses of family members are also regarded as one of the causes of poverty. McKernan and Ratcliffe (2002) discuss the determinants of poverty, which include the health status of any family members as this correlates to the family income as poor health of working family members will result in fewer working hours. Thus, household income is lower, while any illnesses that require particular medication or treatment will also require more money for this purpose.

In addition, the majority of the poor people and the B40 population in Malaysia are not protected by any social or health insurance because most of them are self-employed (doing the kind of jobs that are not formally registered with the Labour Union), which means they are not entitled to worker's insurance (Zin, 2012). They have to pay and become members of a private insurance scheme if they want to be insured. Any social insurance does not protect the vast majority of the poor people

and the B40 population in Malaysia, unlike the middle and upper-class people who normally subscribe to private insurance schemes. This means that only people who can afford such schemes will have access to social insurance, and those who cannot afford it will be unprotected. This situation impacts the cycle of poverty profoundly.

Another family factor that led the participants to be poorer than before was the event of divorce or death of the primary income earner (i.e. husband in these cases). This was experienced by nearly one-third of the participants (five rural participants and four urban participants), all of which were females and the events had led them to be single mothers. These participants (who identified themselves as full-time housewives<sup>19</sup> before the events occurred) said that they went through a hard time financially after the events due to the loss of a significant source of income and they had to start working afterwards to provide for their families. For example, one of the female participants described the situation as follows:

**U6:** It was after I got divorced from my ex-husband, and all my children were with me. I didn't work at that time so it was so hard for me to raise my children and to provide them with what they needed for school and so on..... So, it was me then who was working for my family, to earn a living by starting to work as a cleaner at the estate office near *Tanjung Road*. Then, I also did extra work; I made *Nasi Lemak* [a local meal] every morning and sent it to a café to be sold. After that, our lives got better because I had some income ....

The event of divorce or the death of the primary income earner (husband) of these participants had transitioned the household structure of these participants from a two-headed family into a female-headed family. Previous studies that were mainly situated in the US found that the transition from the two-headed family into a female-headed family is one of the reasons for falling into poverty as female-headed households are at a higher risk of having insufficient household income rather than two-headed households (Cellini et al., 2008; McKernan and Ratcliffe, 2002; Ribar and Hamrick, 2003).

Within the residual Malaysian welfare state system, there is no specific assistance for single mothers, but there is some assistance that they can apply for under different schemes based on the condition that their monthly household income is under the

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<sup>19</sup> It would be sensible to use the terms that the participants use to describe themselves although the term 'housewife' brings gendered connotation in it.

national PLI and if they meet other conditions set by the agencies (Ministry of Women Family and Community Development, 2019). This means that those who have a monthly household income of less than MYR 950 (below the absolute poverty line) can apply for financial support, but they are also subject to other conditions. However, those in relative poverty (nearly half of the B40 population) are not entitled to apply for such benefits.

Examples of the assistance that single mothers living in poverty can apply for include Child Assistance (MYR 100 per month per child) for their children under 18 years old, Elderly Assistance (MYR 300 per month) for single mothers who are above 60 years old and Business Capital Assistance (MYR 2700 as a one-off payment) for those who want to start small businesses (Ibid.). However, many of the participants (who were previously in the category of absolute poverty) did not apply for this assistance as they were not aware this was available and the financial support itself was not enough to live, which meant that they still had to work.

Meanwhile, the divorce cases where the mothers take care of the children, as seen from the U6 quote above, involved the issue of the ex-husbands' responsibility in providing ongoing child maintenance support. The responsibility of the ex-husbands to provide this financial support is compulsory in Islam, and the mothers can pursue their ex-husbands legally (through Sharia-law in the Syariah Court) for children's maintenance if the ex-husbands refuse to provide it (Ismail, 2014). However, as published in the main local newspapers, there are many reported cases where the ex-husbands are still reluctant to pay the money even after they receive a court order to do so, while there are also many women who did not pursue the case because the legal processes usually take a long time (Nor Hatina, 2019). As a result, many single mothers are taking full financial responsibility to support their children after a divorce, a phenomenon which Ismail (2014) links to the common attitude of the Malay women (and Malay people in general,) who are 'too kind' and are willing to provide for their children alone.

Alongside the family factors, employment factors also contribute to the poverty situation experienced by the participants; these included the events of retirement, ceasing a job and lack of work due to the poor health condition of the primary income earner. It was recorded that nine participants (five rural participants and four

urban participants) said that employment factors contributed to making them poorer. One participant from the urban district became poor after retiring, and one participant from the rural district became poorer after her husband ceased his job. For example, U2 stated:

**U2:** When I was working last time, I didn't feel poor, but after I retired, my pension amount was not that much, and I started to feel the struggle in terms of finances.

Retirement is recognised as a period when people frequently enter into poverty, and it commonly happens due to insufficient social protection for older people. These older people include those who have paid considerable taxes throughout their working lives and those who may look to the government for support when they are no longer able to work as a result of the decrease in their earnings (Duncan et al., 1993; McKernan and Ratcliffe, 2002). Income during retirement is related to what citizens expect at times in their lives when they are less able to financially provide for themselves. In Malaysia, a retirement scheme (i.e. pensions) is only available to government employees (known as civil servants' pension), who account for only 5.4% of the total Malaysian population (Zin, 2012).

In this research, only three participants were working as government civil servants, and they held a work position with the lowest salary grade (i.e. it made them fall into relative poverty). Other participants (including all the female participants whose husbands had passed away) were not entitled to any pension schemes because none of their husbands was working in the government sectors. This pension scheme reflects a part of the social safety net system applied in Malaysia, but it only covers a small percentage of the Malaysian population (i.e. only the civil servants) and not the wider range of the population, primarily the poor and the B40 group, to which most of the participants in this research belong. A further seven participants faced poverty due to the lack of work because of the poor health condition of themselves or their spouses that made them unable to work, affecting their working hours, as discussed earlier under family factors (in terms of the illness of family members).

To conclude, based on all the responses above, family factors were the leading causes of poverty experienced by the participants with a large family size (having many children) being the most significant factor, which also included the cost of the

basic necessities for the children. This was followed by the employment factors (i.e. retirement and the event of ceasing a job mainly due to health reasons). All of these factors and causes of poverty are linked to life events. These events also interact with the labour market (i.e. the participants were generally working but not earning enough to cover these costs), and the participants were (generally) not receiving benefits either.

This then raises the question of how does the government deal with this in terms of what support is in place for these families? In this case, it could be argued that the government policy that aims for population growth seemed to be saying that they want Malaysian families to increase in size, but there does not seem to be many ways of support for the families to meet the cost of having many children. There are some tax incentives and a certain degree of welfare (benefits) to cover the cost, but the participants' experiences seemed to show that the provided incentives did not fully address their relative poverty situation. Therefore, it can be argued that the introduction of child benefits would have a significant impact on poverty alleviation in Malaysia.

## **5.2 Approaches to tackling poverty (with a particular focus on community development) and the range of poverty coping mechanisms**

This section addresses the second question of the current research that focuses on the approaches to poverty alleviation (with a particular focus on community development approaches) that affect the research participants. Findings from both the document analysis (i.e. policy documents and government institutional reports) and interviews with the participants are explored and triangulated to address this second question of the research. From the findings, it is evident that the research participants had taken various approaches to alleviate their poverty problem, and these are being classified as 'participation in community development activities' as per focus of this research and, also included other approaches classified as 'individual approaches'.

### **5.2.1 Participation in community development as approaches to tackling poverty**

From the findings, I categorised the types of community development activities participated in by the research participants into three categories: income generation

programmes as a way to overcome poverty (Category 1), knowledge and skills enhancement programmes to cultivate business interests (Category 2) and community engagement programmes to improve social and emotional aspects and enhance integration (Category 3). I created these categories based on the data collected from the participants, and they were also in line with the general categorisation used by most of the community development agencies as discovered through the document analysis. The agencies often included these types of different activities under the community development programmes that were provided to the community.

The aim of the community development activities in this study was primarily focused on improving the economic circumstances of the participants as ways to tackle poverty (reflected through programmes in Category 1 and 2), followed by the improvement of the social and emotional aspects of the people through their participation. All three categories of community development outlined above were organised by specific agencies operating within the research areas. The agencies, as listed in Table 5.1, were identified by the research participants as the community development agencies that had provided community development activities they had participated in. These agencies had also been highlighted in the national development policy documents as the responsible agencies in delivering community development programmes to the Malaysian people as gathered through document analysis of the policy documents and government institutional reports.

Table 5.1: Details of the community development provider agencies delivering community development programmes to the research participants

| <b>Agencies</b>                         | <b>Types of Agency</b>    | <b>Coordinating Ministry</b>                                | <b>Types of provided Community Development Activities</b>                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Department of Social Welfare (JKM)      | Federal Government Agency | Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWKM) | Category 1:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Welfare Assistance Scheme (Monetary funds)</li> <li>- Equipment assistance</li> </ul> Targeting both men and women           |
| Department of Women's Development (JPW) |                           |                                                             | Category 1, 2 and 3:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic programmes</li> <li>- Counselling programme</li> <li>- Training programmes</li> </ul> Targeting only women |
| Department of Community                 | Federal Government        | Ministry of Rural                                           | Category 1, 2 and 3:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educational skills</li> </ul>                                                                                       |



|                                                      |                           |                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Development (KEMAS)                                  | Agency                    | Development (KPLB)                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training and professional development</li> <li>- Social development activities</li> </ul> Targeting primarily women                                                                         |
| Department of Agriculture (DOA)                      | Federal Government Agency | Ministry of Agriculture and Agri-based Industry (MOA) | Category 1 and 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Courses for farmers and Agri-based entrepreneurs</li> <li>- Equipment assistance for entrepreneurs</li> <li>- Rural group farming</li> </ul> Targeting both men and women |
| Fishery Development Authority of Malaysia (LKIM)     |                           |                                                       | Category 1 and 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support and guidance for Agri-based entrepreneurs and fishermen</li> <li>- Equipment assistance for entrepreneurs and fishermen</li> </ul> Targeting both men and women   |
| Economic Entrepreneurs Group Fund (TEKUN Nasional)   |                           |                                                       | Category 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Business capital financing for the Bumiputeras</li> </ul> Targeting both men and women                                                                                          |
| Terengganu Family Development Foundation (YPKT)      | State Government Agency   | -                                                     | Category 1 and 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Microcredit scheme</li> <li>- Skills and training</li> </ul> Targeting only women                                                                                         |
| Islamic Religious Council and Malay Customs (MAIDAM) | State Government Agency   | -                                                     | Category 1 and 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Zakah scheme (monetary assistance)</li> <li>- Skills and training</li> </ul> Targeting both men and women                                                                 |
| Malaysia Endeavor Trust (AIM)                        | Statutory Body Agency     | -                                                     | Category 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Microcredit scheme</li> <li>- Entrepreneurship training</li> </ul> Targeting only women                                                                                         |
| Department of Information (JAPEN)*                   | Federal Government Agency | Ministry of Communications and Multimedia (KKMM)      | Category 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1Malaysia Community Programmes</li> </ul> Targeting both men and women                                                                                                          |
| Local authorities (District Councils)*               | -                         | Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG)       | Category 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Various community events (e.g. village cleaning programmes)</li> </ul> Targeting both men and women                                                                             |

Source: tabulated by the author from various government websites

The research participants had participated in community development activities provided by the eleven agencies outlined in Table 5.1. These agencies consisted primarily of federal government agencies administrated by specific ministries that delivered and organised the community development activities as part of their primary function or subsidiary function (marked with \*) to the research participant. There were also two state government<sup>20</sup> agencies and one statutory<sup>21</sup> agency that delivered and provided such activities for the participants. As discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2, these agencies were not only delivering community development programmes to the research participants but also the local community, whilst mainly targeting the poor and low-income population.

From the table above, it can be seen that the federal and state government play a significant role in community development in Malaysia because they were providing all the community development activities that the participants were engaged in, in one form or another. The process in which the poor people were participating in particular forms of community development, initiated and organised by these specific agencies, indicates that community development in Malaysia is mainly based on the deficit model of community development through a top-down approach instead of the non-directive asset-based community development approach. These activities were provided either by the federal or state government as national or state-supported activities through institutional reforms rather than being initiatives of the participants in organising themselves through community development as ways to respond to their poverty problem. This process is in line with the distinction between top-down state instituted reforms and bottom-up activities by communities organising themselves, as outlined by Green and Goetting (2010).

Apart from these eleven public bodies listed in the table above, the research participants were aware of various other government agencies and some voluntary organisations that are also involved in the community development activities in

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<sup>20</sup> The state government agencies are under the jurisdiction of the state secretary and receive funds from the state. They have their own administration system (separate from the general public administration system), which means that they are fully independent from the federal administrative power.

<sup>21</sup> Statutory bodies are semi-government agencies and stand as separate entities from the federal government agencies; they have autonomous power to administrate, own, buy and hold assets and this means that they are also fully independent from the federal administrative power (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2016).

Malaysia. For example, the People's Trust Council (MARA) is a statutory body providing various entrepreneurship services, including business financing and training for the Bumiputera population (Majlis Amanah Rakyat, 2019). Salam Malaysia Foundation (SALAM) is a non-profit organisation that focuses on community development through voluntary activities to improve knowledge and skills and build the capabilities of the targeted communities, including the low-income and aboriginal population (Yayasan Salam Malaysia, 2019). The role of the non-state organisations in community development in Malaysia was less prominent than that of the federal and state agencies due to the limited funding that they had, thus limiting the coverage of participants as well.

Meanwhile, it was recorded that all of the research participants had participated in at least one of the categories of community development activities. The number of research participants who participated in the categories of community development activities is listed in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: The number of participants in different categories of community development activities

| <b>Categories of community development</b> | <b>Participants</b>                                                               | <b>Number of participants</b> |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Category 1, 2 and 3                        | R13, U8, U9, U14                                                                  | 4                             |
| Category 1 and 3                           | R9, R12, U6, U15                                                                  | 7                             |
| Category 2 and 3                           | R1, R5, R11                                                                       |                               |
| Category 3                                 | R2, R3, R4, R6, R7, R8, R10, R14, R15, U1, U2, U3, U4, U5, U7, U10, U11, U12, U13 | 19                            |

Table 5.2 shows four participants who had participated in all three categories of community development. In comparison, seven of them had participated in two categories (either Category 1 and 3 or Category 2 and 3), and the remaining 19 participants participated in one category (all of these were in Category 3). Category 1 had eight participants in total, and Category 2 had seven participants. It is noted that the number of participants in Category 1 and 2 was smaller than the number of participants in Category 3. This is due to Category 3 consisting of community development projects that typically had no participation criteria, and anyone could participate without the need to apply to become participants. These categories of

community development are discussed in detail below, and the number of participants listed in every activity for all categories represents the whole distribution of the research participants.

#### **5.2.1.1 Category 1 – Income generation programme**

Community development that focuses on the socio-economic development of the Malaysian population consists of programmes or services that are planned to alleviate poverty among the poorest people, particularly through income generation activities. The programmes also targeted the low-income population (those in relative poverty) to help them to increase their household income. The government developed these activities because they are seen as suitable approaches to improve the economic conditions of these people. They would later lead to the overall improvement of the country's economy, and therefore the federal government, alongside the state government has been the main actor in delivering such activities to the targeted population (Economic Planning Unit, 2015a). Programmes under this category provided physical aid and/or monetary funds with accompanying training (if applicable) for the participants for income generation activities as ways to alleviate poverty, which made it different from the other two categories.

For this research, there are three income generation programmes participated in by eight of the research participants, including the microcredit schemes, the *1AZAM* programme, and the Women Bazaar 1Malaysia programme. The microcredit scheme is the most popular of the programmes as five participants were involved in this (one of these also participated in the *1AZAM* programme), while there were three participants in the *1AZAM* programme and one participant participated in the Women Bazaar 1Malaysia programme.

Apart from these three programmes, the government monetary welfare assistance (primarily administered and provided by the JKM) is also classified as one of the branches of community development in Malaysia (see Section 3.2 in Chapter 3). It is recorded that 16 participants (not included in Table 5.2) had received various types of welfare assistance from the federal and/or state government either through one-off cash payment or monthly cash assistance. The assistance included the monthly monetary schooling assistance for children (from JKM); monthly monetary

assistance for patients with chronic diseases (from JKM); monthly elderly welfare assistance (from JKM); monetary assistance from the Zakah agency (from MAIDAM); 1Malaysia People's Aid (BRIM) cash assistance; and courtesy cash assistance (from Terengganu state government). Each of these sixteen research participants (four rural participants and 12 urban participants) had received at least one of the listed forms of the government assistance.

### **Microcredit scheme**

The microcredit schemes aim to create entrepreneurs and small businesses among the poor and the low-income population in Malaysia and in so doing, alleviate poverty (primarily focused on absolute poverty). In this study, there were five participants (three rural participants and two urban participants), all females who had participated in microcredit schemes under three microcredit agencies, namely the AIM, YPKT and TEKUN (see Table 5.1). Four participants participated in the AIM (one of them was a former participant of YPKT), and one participant was a participant of TEKUN. They participated in this programme to start small businesses, with two participants starting food-related businesses, two participants starting apparel businesses, and one participant starting a grocery shop. An example of this participation is illustrated below:

**R13:** Yes, I used to borrow from AIM before and am still borrowing now. I used the money to buy tools for my dessert baking. It is AIM that provides me with my business capital, and I have been with them for more than ten years now... I borrowed from YPKT too when I first started this business, but then I changed to AIM because AIM provides a bigger loan amount.....with the loan, I can get everything needed for my business, and it helps me to generate more income.

R13, who was a single mother of five children and in her fifties, had started a dessert business more than a decade ago, during which she had participated in a microcredit scheme to secure the resources to get her business running properly, and her participation in this scheme had allowed her to become self-employed and gain more income. All research participants who participated in this scheme also reported that they had gained income increments through the financial capital provided by the agencies. The economic improvement reflects the findings in wider research (see Al-Mamun et al., 2014a; Hoque, 2008; Khandker and Pitt, 1998) that the credit received

through microcredit programmes can successfully help the poor population mainly in developing countries to alleviate their poverty problem.

Nevertheless, not all participants who received lending capital for business purposes used the money solely for business capital. Two of the participants who participated in this scheme (the economic loan) provided by the AIM admitted that they also used some of the borrowed money for other purposes, namely to renovate their houses. For example:

**R12:** For the last six years, I have started to borrow from AIM. I used the money to add to my food business capital, and I also used it to renovate my house. If I don't do it like this, we will forever live in that small house because my husband's income alone is not enough for the renovation.

The response from R12 shows that she also used the money for purposes other than those that fall under the scheme that she participated in, and this could be linked to the credit management that she received through the scheme. Pitamber (2003) found that many microcredit loans are used for purposes other than the ones that they were initially intended for, and, in my study, it was shown to be the case for two of the participants, as R12 illustrated above. The microcredit agencies that provided the loans for the participants, such as the AIM, did carry out the monitoring process of the borrowed funds, but the management of the loans rested with the participants (Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia, 2019).

### **1AZAM Programme**

The *1Azam* Programme is another type of programme introduced in 2010 to fight poverty in Malaysia. Its name was derived from the words '*Akhiri Zaman Miskin*', which literally means 'end the poor life', and could be interpreted as aiming to end the situation of people having to live in poverty (Nadzir et al., 2017). This programme is under the National Key Result Areas (NKRA) initiative led by the KPWKM with various agencies delivering the programmes. It has four types of programmes running economic activities for income generation namely *AZAM Niaga* (business), *AZAM Kerja* (work placement), *AZAM Tani* (agriculture-based activities) and *AZAM Khidmat* (services activities) that target poor families (in

absolute poverty) who are registered and verified in the *eKasih* database system to be eligible to participate in the programmes (Radieah and Sharifah, 2016).

For this research, it was recorded that three research participants (one rural participant and two urban participants) participated in the *1AZAM* programme that was *AZAM Tani* programme. Two participated in the programme under the Department of Agriculture (DOA), and both received food processing machines with one of these also receiving a small factory for the food business. Another participant participated in this programme through the Fishery Development Authority of Malaysia (LKIM), where she received a three-wheel motorcycle for her hawking business. Here is an example from one of the participants to illustrate the participation in this programme:

**U9:** Yes, there was one course that I went to. What was that, let me remember, .... the DOA organised it. It was a dessert-making course, and they also gave me a machine. It was a dessert processing machine, and they also gave me a freezer and an onion machine, and I use them until today.

**Researcher:** Does it mean that through this participation, it helps you to generate more income?

**U9:** Yes, it helps a bit. But I don't earn too much like others because I only produce the dessert on a small scale as my health condition is not too good. But, the equipment received did help me.

The equipment received has enabled these participants to increase their household income because the machine has improved their work productivity. Meanwhile, they can reduce the expenditure on equipment as it was given for free. The programmes participated in by these participants were still categorised as *AZAM Tani* programmes even though they did not involve any agricultural activities. Ibrahim and Dara Aisyah (2013) explained that this was because any equipment or assistance for the food processing sector provided by the agency under the MOA is classified as *AZAM Tani* programmes. All of the assistance provided under this programme is either in a subsidised form or a one-off endowment.

From the responses above, the participants received the assistance that was provided by the MOA agencies, known as the DOA and LKIM, through one-off equipment assistance and therefore, the expenditure that the participants received for food

processing fitted under the *AZAM Tani* scheme. The *AZAM Tani*, through running programmes under the food processing category and seeing this as within its broader agricultural remit, appears to be responsive to the needs in the community, given the participation demonstrated in this study.

### **Women Bazaar 1Malaysia Programme**

The Women Bazaar 1Malaysia programme was introduced in the year 2012, targeting women entrepreneurs, including single mothers on low incomes (B40), to do business at a chosen market sites (bazaar) and this programme is being administered by the Department of Women's Development (JPW) under the KPWKM (Department of Women's Development, 2019). For this study, there was one urban participant who had a dessert business in this programme. She was granted a membership certificate to sell at a bazaar and received a booth and other tools and equipment needed for selling, as illustrated below:

**U14:** I participated in the Women's Bazaar organised by the Ministry of Women's Development. They give me a certificate, a membership certificate so that I am allowed to sell at the market...they also gave us a canopy and everything needed for the selling activity...and I sell my spring roll dessert there.

This response indicates that women entrepreneurs who participated in this programme were provided with all the necessities to set up a stall and start selling their product and therefore generate extra income. Nor Afzan (2015) reported as a journalist that this programme was providing a better platform than other types of programmes for any women entrepreneurs from the B40 category to sell their products because those who became participants were equipped with a strategic selling location and other necessities and this boosted their sales.

However, participation in this programme was minimal because the participants needed to have their own product and the participation quota of this programme is very limited. The JPW was conducting interviews to select the applicants that could participate in the Bazaar, and they prioritised the applicants who demonstrated high commitment to business as an additional criterion (Department of Women's Development, 2019). However, this programme needs more investment by the government because there is a higher demand for this programme among women



entrepreneurs than the number of available places, as reported by Nor Afzan (2015). The research findings also show that some of the female participants were also interested in participating in this programme.

### **Comparing all the three community development programmes in Category 1**

It was notable that the microcredit programme is the most popular compared with other programmes and this is most likely related to it covering a more extensive range of potential participants. For instance, the AIM, which is one of the major microcredit agencies in Malaysia and which receives its funding from the federal government, offers its schemes to individuals from the poor and B40 population. It had more than 350,000 participants nationwide (Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia, 2018) in 2017 as compared to the *1AZAM* programme that is only limited to the poor (absolute poverty) households and which had around 50,000 participants in 2017 (1 Malaysia, 2018). In comparison, the Women Bazaar 1Malaysia programme had much smaller numbers of participants, with approximately 20 participants in each state making a total of 320 participants nationally in 2017 (Department of Women's Development, 2017).

The research findings also show that all eight of the research participants participating in these income-generation programmes were females. The microcredit programmes, such as programmes provided by the AIM and YPKT agencies, are gender-based as they target only female applicants while the Women's Bazaar 1Malaysia programme is specifically designed for women, as reflected by its name. The findings reflect wider global trends. A study done by Harris (2009) reported that nearly three-quarters of the microcredit borrowers worldwide were females because schemes often exclusively target women, not least because females were generally more likely to experience poverty than men.

It has also previously been proven that female borrowers are more creditworthy than men because they show a good repayment record and this has been one of the reasons why the microcredit agencies have lent money primarily to females (Al-Mamun, et al., 2014b). Furthermore, the poverty alleviation programmes, which are mainly small-scale economic programmes, suit females better than men because these types of income-generation activities fit around their family lives better than big-scale enterprises and full-time businesses.

The *1AZAM* programmes are for both male and female applicants, though, for this research, only the female research participants participated in them. However, there was an over-representation of women in my sample and therefore, there was a greater likelihood of more female participants participating in this programme. This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, subsection 7.4.2. In addition, the national figures of the *1AZAM* participants recorded by the KPWK M show that there were more female participants than male participants, with 65% (91,290) female, as recorded from the period of January 2011 to March 2015 (Radieah and Sharifah, 2016). Thus, the fact that all the three participants of the *1AZAM* programmes were females was somewhat representative because nationally, more women were participating in this scheme.

#### **5.2.1.2 Category 2 - Knowledge and skills enhancement programme**

Category 2 of the community development programmes identified in this research are knowledge and skills enhancement programmes. Programmes under this category differ from Category 1 as they do not involve any physical aid or monetary funds but instead consist of skills and knowledge programmes provided for the participants, with the aim of improving the quality of life of the participants economically and socially (in which they can generate income using the acquired skills). The knowledge and skills enhancement programmes participated in by the research participants consisted of only three programmes, namely, cooking classes; sewing classes and computer classes, although there are many other programmes in this category that are running nationwide including the technical and vocational courses such as automotive mechanical engineering courses and so forth.

From the findings, it was demonstrated that seven female research participants (four rural participants and three urban participants) participated in these programmes. Four of these had also participated in the income-generation programmes. All four rural participants participated in the cooking classes, and one of these also participated in the sewing classes, fully coordinated by KEMAS. For urban participants, one of them participated in the cooking classes organised by the DOA, one of them participated in the sewing classes organised by YPKT and one of them participated in the computer classes held by JAPEN. The data showed that the majority of participants were involved in the cooking classes because they were

housewives, and this activity suits their circumstances the most as compared to other programmes. Below is an example to illustrate this situation:

**R5:** I did participate in the cooking classes last time, but not anymore because they have changed the venue. It was three years ago, the cooking classes at the community hall. I went there every day to learn how to make desserts.

**Researcher:** Ok. So, you learned for yourself or a business?

**R5:** I did not learn for business. It depends on us actually. They teach us the skills, and it depends on us how to make use of that knowledge. They taught us the steps to make different sorts of desserts. If we know how to do it properly, we can make a business from it.

From the response, it showed that the participants took part in this programme to learn new cooking skills for themselves rather than for income generation. That is to say, participation in this kind of programme is for self-development because the participants were engaging in one of the development activities (London and Smither, 1999). In addition, the skills acquired by the participants could contribute to the improvement of life quality for both the participants and their families; for example, they can use the skills to cook for themselves rather than buying meals, which can help to cut their household spending on certain types of foods.

In contrast, there was one participant who had participated in the sewing class to learn other tailoring skills with the purpose of generating more income through that activity, as illustrated in the following quote:

**U8:** After I returned here, I participated in the sewing classes with the YPKT. I already have some tailoring skills and have been sewing for a while, but I went to YPKT and participated in their class for a specific skill. I learnt how to sew scarves to generate more income.

U8, who was a single mother in her fifties, purposely wanted to develop herself with more skills in tailoring activities because she saw a bigger opportunity awaiting her with the newly acquired skills. Anakwe et al. (1999) found that self-development or self-knowledge is significant in helping any individuals to flourish especially in their career pathway and in many different settings because this virtue leads to individuals' empowerment.

For this study, a lot of the skills programmes provided are more for the self-development of their participants, and the skills learnt are considered as knowledge. The quote from U8 above reflects the relationship between the acquired skills and the better opportunity in life. She had expanded her career in tailoring activity through the new knowledge (skills) she gained in tailoring, and it could have been that her self-knowledge had led her to participate in the programme as a way of increasing her income. Consequently, there was a relationship between self-development and self-knowledge, even if the latter was not the primary focus of these programmes. This type of programme can provide valuable human activity as it helped people to flourish with many benefits for themselves.

#### **5.2.1.3 Category 3 - Community engagement programmes**

The last category of community development activities participated in by the research participants was community engagement programmes. This category of community development was significant in participants' responses although it is not specifically designed to fight poverty or provide particular skills to the participants like the programmes in Category 1 and 2 discussed earlier.

In Malaysia, community engagement programmes are an established branch of community development because the aim of the programmes is for the human development of its participants by increasing the social, emotional and intellectual aspects of the participants through the integration process among the communities and the public bodies. The programmes also involve developing some forms of skills, or at least broader educational activities and are mainly provided and administered by the community development section of the federal or state agencies or the local councils.

For instance, the Community Development Division under KEMAS runs programmes for the local rural communities, emphasising the wider human development of the communities through spiritual programmes and a literacy education programme (Department of Community Development, 2018). For example, spiritual classes implement five elements in its curriculum, which consist of personal excellence education, family education, social education, health education and economic education for the social capital development of the community (Ibid.)

In this study, there are five community engagement programmes recorded in both rural and urban districts, consisting of the village cleaning programmes, religious (spiritual) programmes, sport and cultural programmes, agricultural programmes and ‘cheerfulness village’ programmes. The local councils became the main organiser of these programmes, and they were working in partnership with the local government agencies. It was recorded that all 30 research participants had participated in the activities in this category, at least in one of the listed programmes (four of them also participated in both Category 1 and 2 while seven of them participated in either Category 1 or 2).

The participation in this category by all of the research participants demonstrates the value attributed to this form of participation in community development within my sample and that all the participants wanted to be socially engaged through this mechanism of community development. Potentially, in terms of participation in community development among the research participants, they seemed to prefer to develop the social network and social bonding among themselves rather than the economic development, as reflected in the numbers of participants in this category of community development activities.

Of the five programmes being carried out, it is recorded that the majority of the participants from both rural and urban study areas participated in the monthly village cleaning programme, the religious programmes and the ‘cheerfulness village’ programme. The ‘cheerfulness village’ programme emphasises the vibrant elements of the village environment such as the beautiful landscape of the village and also encouraged relaxation among the people as it reflects that the people have awareness for a lively and cheerful lifestyle. For example, one rural participant described his participation in the ‘cheerfulness village’ programme, and one urban participant shared her participation in the religious classes as below:

**R14:** Let’s look at the recently finished programme; this village took part in the cheerfulness village programme. I participated in the programme...I participated due to the community bonding that I have with my community.

**U8:** Now I always go to the religious classes, organised by the mosque committee, like the Quranic recitation class and *fiqh* (Islamic

jurisprudence) classes. I attend those classes every day except for Tuesday.

The commitments of the participants in these programmes were demonstrated through both study sites winning awards for the cleanest and most cheerful village for rural and urban categories at the district level. The participants' commitments in participating in this programme were also highlighted by the community leaders (see also JKKK-R quote in Chapter 6, subsection 6.3.2) who explained that the people were using and developing their assets in participating in the programme. Meanwhile, the religious programmes are carried out regularly, mainly as weekly activities in both study sites. A rural community leader stated:

**JKKK-R:** We have a lot of weekly programmes including religious programmes such as the *Yassin* (one of the Quranic chapters) recitation programme and *Tahlil* programme. We are doing good in all programmes, and everyone, regardless of their political views, is cooperating well because we normally have more than 60% of participants in every programme and we are also known as the best village in this district, in terms of our cleanliness and cheerfulness and also the rate of participation from our community.

All responses above indicate that the participation of the community, including the research participants, was excellent. These three programmes are carried out regularly because they are among the elements for the excellent village award that are judged by a committee (consisting of officers from local councils and related agencies), participated in by many villages in Malaysia. The elements of creativity and innovation of the villagers in landscaping and decorating the village and keeping the village safe and clean were judged as this reflected the awareness of the residents in taking care of the facilities and environment for a better life quality (Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, 2011). Meanwhile, religious programmes enhance the practice of religious lives among the community. The variety and frequency of the religious programmes also become one of the elements that are judged for the excellent village award as the programmes take into account the panels' judgement concerning religious adherence and positive attitudes among the residents (Ibid.).

Sports and cultural programmes mainly involve activities such as sports day, traditional sports and games tournaments and cultural heritage activities, organised by the village committee or local councils. Two-thirds of rural participants

responded that they frequently participated in those programmes, whereas only one-third of the urban participants did so. For example:

**R7:** Sports programmes, like the traditional games, I did participate in the games a few years back, games like coconut grating and many more, I participated in those. But now I am quite old, so it's tiring for me to join them, so I don't participate anymore...the village committee organised the games.

**Researcher:** Did you gain anything from participation in those programmes?

**R7:** Yes, yes, I did. I felt happy, and it was a satisfaction to see people cheering up for me, my family and all the community that came to the programme, it really motivated me...

Ramely (2017), a local journalist, reported that sports activities are an excellent platform for local unity and developing positive social impacts among the people. This study corroborates this viewpoint as participants in this programme explained that they felt happy through taking part and gained good social support as reflected in the quote from R7 above. It is also crucial for these kinds of traditional and cultural activities to be organised regularly so that the new generations will not forget their traditions because culture and tradition reflect the identity of the community (Sinar Harian, 2015).

Nevertheless, culture is a living tradition that involves critical engagement with the past and not all cultures and traditions are necessarily considered good by all. For example, gender inequality might be a traditional and cultural aspect of patriarchal community identity, but it is considered by many to be a negative practice in a society (Cooray and Potrafke, 2011; Hiller, 2014; Ylipaa et al., 2019). Therefore, people need to choose what it is from the past that needs to be brought forward, because not everything is necessarily appropriate to the current condition, and some aspects of historical traditions may be considered problematic, as the gender inequality issue.

For this research, the cultural and traditional activities carried out involve creativity and/or cooperation (for example, the cheerfulness village programme) among the participants while it also encourages participation from all regardless of age, gender, race and political preference (see the earlier quote from the JKKK-R). These

activities are good for developing a positive atmosphere among the participants and can help to develop the community in general, especially in terms of the social aspects of life.

Conversely, for the urban study site, these kinds of activities are organised less frequently due to the urban site has limited space for such programmes (traditional sports and cultural games) that commonly require a large ground for them to be held as illustrated below:

**JKKK-U:** We are not too keen on the cultural programmes, because we think those programmes are more suitable for the rural community because here in the urban area, the space for activities is limited. We have no appropriate location for such programmes.

The quote above shows that some types of sport-based community programmes are not available in the urban study sites potentially due to the nature of the place which dictates the nature of the types of sports activity, resulting in a lesser variety of sports and cultural activities for the urban community. This is because urban areas are known to have smaller physical spaces for such activities than rural areas due to the high density of their population as compared to the available space because the concentration of urban population is increasing (Martellozzo et al., 2014).

Another study in Malaysia found that urban places can lose traditions due to the recalibrating process of urban places over time and the urban regeneration process, which has caused the urban population to be less traditional, as was happening in Kajang town, Kuala Lumpur (Zainudin et al., 2019). The nature of the place (differences in the physical space between the rural and urban places) has influenced the type of activities and facilities available for the community. However, the basic sports facilities such as the badminton court and the playground are located in both study sites as observed by the researcher during the data collection process.

Meanwhile, the community agricultural programme is only available in the rural research site because the rural area has open spaces and suitable locations for such programmes. The urban study site is lacking space for these programmes, although two urban participants reported planting vegetables on their own initiative at home as a way to reduce the spending on food items (see the quote from U13 in subsection 5.2.2.4) rather than through an organised programme. The community agricultural



programme recorded in this study is known as group farming, coordinated by the DOA and the village committee members. This programme encourages participation from the local people in the farming processes, with the crops then distributed among them. A corn farming programme is participated in by three rural participants, as illustrated in the quote below:

**R3:** Recently, I participated in planting the corn, with the locals here. It was a corn planting programme, located near the village leader house. I went there from when the programme started till it ended, every morning and evening I went there.

**Researcher:** Were there other local people participating in that programme?

**R3:** Yes, yes, there were many of us. We went there all the time. Then, when the crops were harvested, everyone brought back some of the corn; the corn was distributed among us.

The responses from R3 shows that corn farming activity is a collective activity among the local community because the people collectively planted and shared subsistence farming among themselves. This programme is not a formal economic programme because the participants did not make any profits from the crops. Still, it helped the participants economically because they obtained the corn for free rather than having to buy it. The reason why this activity is available in the rural research site is due to similar geographical issues discussed under the sports and cultural programme above.

To conclude, the types of community engagement programmes participated in by rural and urban research participants are quite varied due to the nature of the site locations and the facilities for those programmes, as seen in the sports and cultural programmes and the community agricultural programme. Other programmes like the village cleaning programmes, cheerfulness village programme and religious programmes are favourable to both rural and urban participants because both sites have the same facilities, like the mosques and community halls to run these programmes. All community development programmes in this category (Category 3) reflected the social integration and social development of the local community through the relationship-building activities across the community in rural and urban research sites.

Moreover, some of the programmes in this category involved the adoption of asset-based practice at some point in the programmes' phase. For example, the cheerfulness village programme where the community (including the research participants) came out and worked together using whatever they have (e.g. ideas, skills and other material) to cheer up their village received a high participation rate from the community as compared to the programmes in Category 1 and 2. Thus, it is argued that the government should invest more in providing these kinds of programmes to the community.

### 5.2.2 Individual approaches to tackling poverty

Apart from participating in community development activities as approaches to poverty alleviation discussed earlier, the participants also adopted other strategies to tackle their poverty. There were more than 20 different answers from the participants on the types of individual approaches they had taken to alleviate their poverty and the range of poverty coping mechanisms. These have been categorised into four categories: employment and entrepreneurial activities, help from families, minding their own children and living frugally (see Table 5.3 below). All participants had adopted at least one of the individual approaches to poverty alleviation, and most of them adopted two or more approaches. The approaches to poverty alleviation discussed include all the previous approaches taken by the participants before the data collection was done, and also the strategies used at the time of the data collection.

Table 5.3: Approaches and coping mechanisms for poverty alleviation taken by the research participants

| <b>Approaches / coping mechanism to poverty alleviation</b> | <b>Participants</b>                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Employment and entrepreneurial activities                   | R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12, R14, R15<br>U1, U2, U3, U4, U5, U6, U7, U9, U10, U11, U13, U15 |
| Help from families (monetary help)                          | R1, R2, R3, R6, R7, R8, R12, R15<br>U5, U7, U8, U12                                                               |
| Caring for own children and grandchildren                   | R2, R3, R5, R6, R11<br>U3, U5, U10, U12                                                                           |
| Living frugally                                             | R1, R2, R6, R8, R10, R12<br>U7, U12, U13, U14                                                                     |

### 5.2.2.1 Employment and entrepreneurial activities

Employment and entrepreneurial activities were the most common approaches taken by the participants to alleviate their poverty problem. For the current research, employment refers to any paid working activities that are undertaken by the participants and/or their spouses. Meanwhile, entrepreneurial activities are related to business activities carried out by the participants through individual initiatives in doing business rather than the initiatives through community development (discussed separately earlier in subsection 5.2.1). Table 5.4 lists the number of working participants and those who ran businesses.

Table 5.4: The number of participants in employment and entrepreneurial activities

| Employment              |        |                       | Unemployed | Entrepreneurial activities |                                   |
|-------------------------|--------|-----------------------|------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Single-earner household |        | Dual-earner household |            | Through own initiatives    | Community development initiatives |
| Participant             | Spouse |                       |            |                            |                                   |
| R7                      | R2     | R1                    | U12        | R11                        | R9*                               |
| R8                      | R3     | R4                    |            | R15*                       | R12*                              |
| R10                     | R5     | U1                    |            | U7                         | R13                               |
| R14                     | R6     | U4                    |            | U10*                       | U8                                |
| R15*                    | R9*    |                       |            | U11                        | U6*                               |
| U2                      | R12*   |                       |            |                            | U9*                               |
| U5                      | U3     |                       |            |                            | U14                               |
| U13                     | U6*    |                       |            |                            | U15*                              |
| U15*                    | U9*    |                       |            |                            |                                   |
|                         | U10*   |                       |            |                            |                                   |
| 9                       | 10     | 4                     | 1          | 5 (2*)                     | 8 (5*)                            |

\* Indicates those who are involved in both employment and entrepreneurial activities

Table 5.4 shows that 23 participants and/or their spouses participated in employment sectors in which 19 of them were from single-earner households (either the participants or their spouses were working), and four participants were from dual-earner households (both the participants and their spouses were working). This means that less than half of the research participants were employed when the employment of their spouses was not counted. Also, there was one participant who was not working nor involved in any of the entrepreneurial activities. The majority of the participants and/or their spouses participated in manual work, and most of them were working as builder labourers, cleaners, drivers and farmers, particularly rural participants, while there were three participants (all from the urban district)

who worked in the government sectors in the most junior grade. Here are some quotes to illustrate the type of work of the participants and/or their spouses:

**U13:** I am working with a government within the D salary grade. Well, you know how it is.

**R4:** Every morning I make my way to work after I send my kids to my mother. I go to work in the morning and come back in the evening. I have worked as a cleaner since five years ago to support my husband's income.

U13, a single household earner, was working as a vehicle driver in a government department, and his type of job indicates that he was at the lowest government employment level (Grade D) as illustrated through his salary grading scale. The salary grading scale is commonly classified into Groups B, C and D for the government support staff with a higher salary in a higher alphabetical order. Meanwhile, R4 was a dual household earner because both she and her husband were working to provide for their family. Her response also indicates that she was using her mother's help to care for her children (identified as a significant feature of living in poverty and discussed further in subsection 5.2.2.3) while she was working.

From the responses above, the type of work of the participants and/or their spouses indicates that they were in low-paid jobs because the jobs above are classified as unskilled jobs, which provide relatively low earnings. Nevertheless, these jobs helped them to both support their family and alleviate the relative poverty situation that they were experiencing. The limited available opportunities were a reflection of the labour market; Terengganu, a non-industrial state, has quite a small labour market as compared to the industrialised states (Zakariya and Yin, 2016).

In addition, the availability of unskilled jobs in Malaysia is less than that of skilled jobs because Malaysia has a shortage of labour in the skilled job sectors (Ibid.). In this research, the majority of the participants did not pursue skilled education or higher education because most of them stopped at either the primary or secondary education stage (see Table 4.3 in Chapter 4 for the education level of the participants). As a result, their education level prevented them from getting better jobs because educational attainment also influences access to the labour market. Educational attainment is recognised as one of the determinants of job appointments,

with a higher educational level providing more job choices and opportunities (Mauro and Spilimbergo, 1999).

Conversely, there were five participants involved in entrepreneurial activities. Of the five, one participant was also in paid work while another participant had her husband working concurrently (see Table 5.4). Four of these participants were running food businesses, and one of them had a welding business. These participants started up their businesses through their own initiatives that involved the use of their own savings and helped from families for monetary capital (discussed further in subsection 5.2.2.2) as the capital for their businesses. They did not seek assistance from other parties such as the community development agencies that provided microcredit loans to people like them. For example, R11 illustrated the situation:

**R11:** No, no, I never borrowed from that microcredit agency or any other agencies. I used my savings. With the few hundred (MYR) that I had, I used that money to buy things to open up this food stall. I started up on a very small scale, and my father did help me with some cash too when I was about to open this stall. My business is very small, but it does give me income to support my family. It helps me to live my life and prevents us from creating any debts.

From the response above, it shows that R11 was running a small food business to generate income for her family and to alleviate her relative poverty by using their own and/or family resources to start this up and this was almost the same trend for the other four participants. It is argued by Alvarez and Barney (2013) that entrepreneurship is one of the approaches to alleviate poverty because entrepreneurial activities result in income generation and contribute to the economic growth of poor households. The quote above also shows that most businesses need capital from some sources to get started. This is because one of the issues for those in poverty (including the research participants) is access to financial capital even if they have an entrepreneurial idea. For these five participants, they obtained access to financial capital through their savings and the monetary help of their families.

However, it is recognised from the findings that this form of access to financial capital (i.e. help from families) was not available to all of the research participants involved in entrepreneurial activities because most of their families were also poor (e.g. see the quote from R12 on page 139) and they had found alternative access to

capital. This was the case for the other eight participants (see Table 5.4), who had started up their businesses through community development initiatives (particularly through microfinance schemes) and had mainly turned to the microfinance agencies as ways to access the financial capital. It is known that microfinance is one of the most common agencies used by poor people for financial capital (including start-up capital). Many previous studies have also explored the impact of entrepreneurial activities, including through microfinance, as a way to tackle poverty (see Al-Mamun and Mazumder, 2015; Mohd Sayuti and Kamarulazizi, 2015).

#### **5.2.2.2 Help from families**

Getting help from families was another strategy used by some of the participants to alleviate their poverty problem. Help, in this case, was mainly provided by the children, parents and siblings. It was recorded that 12 participants (eight rural participants and four urban participants) had used this approach. Of the 12, the majority of them received regular monetary assistance from their children that supplemented their income, and three of them sought help from family members during difficult times and for business purposes. Below are some examples to depict the situation:

**U8:** All my four children who are now working help me regularly; each of them gives me MYR 200 (GBP £36) per month. Besides this, I also do some tailoring activities that can give me around MYR 300 (GBP £53) per month. That's how I earn my living.

**R2:** What I did to cope with poverty was to borrow some money from my younger siblings, sometimes from my mother. I borrowed temporarily from them, and I paid back at a later time.

**U7:** I borrowed money from my uncle, who was a medical doctor with a private clinic at that time. So I borrowed MYR 5000 (GBP £891) from him and used the money as the first capital to start my business...

The response from U8 illustrates that her children were helping her financially, and this circumstance was widespread among the research participants, as one-third of the participants were receiving regular monetary help from their children. For R2 and U7, borrowing money from their family members was an essential source of income as it respectively helped to alleviate poverty and to start an entrepreneurial

activity (i.e. linked to the earlier findings at the end of subsection 5.2.2.1 about the access to financial capital which made a difference for those who had it via family members or other sources). Although this help from families as an approach to alleviate poverty was not available for all research participants, it proved to be a helpful approach for those who had it.

Based on those responses, the trend of the participants receiving help from family members could well be linked to the fact that family are typically the closest people that anyone can reach out to and that family members are bonded biologically. This seeking of help from family could also be linked to the Islamic preaching that commands all of its believers (noting that all the research participants are Muslims) to do good to their kinship especially to the closest family members and stresses the relationship between children and parents in particular, as is reflected in many verses of the Quran and Hadith<sup>22</sup>. For example, verses 23-24 in Chapter 17 state that:

‘And your Lord has decreed that you do not worship anyone except Him, and to parents, you treat well. Whether one or both of them reach old age [while] with you, say not to them [so much as], ‘*uff*,’ and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word. And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, ‘My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small.’ (Quran.com, 2016)

The verses above give the understanding that being dutiful and kind to parents is highly encouraged by Islam as it is considered an act of worship. It is argued by Somaya (2016) that kinship care, as seen from the Islamic perspective, could provide supportive networks among Muslim families and communities. That is to say, receiving help or reaching out for help from the family members, including for monetary assistance, is a result of having a good informal support system among the family members, which helps in alleviating poverty.

### **5.2.2.3 Caring for children and grandchildren**

Caring for their own children and grandchildren instead of paying for alternative childcare was reported as a significant feature of living in poverty by those participants who had small children that required childcare at the time of data

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<sup>22</sup> ‘The recorded traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, which reflect his counsel and practices in a spectrum of matters.’ (Somaya, 2016: 383)

collection. Seven participants mentioned that they chose to stay at home and provide care for their children rather than working while two rural working participants (R4 and R9) sent their children to be cared for by their parents. In addition, two participants (R3 and U5) were taking care of their grandchildren. Examples to illustrate these situations are as follows (and the quote from R4 in subsection 5.2.2.1 also illustrates this point):

**U3:** I have two small children that I need to take care of, and I have no one and no other place to leave them if I go to work. If I live with my parents, they can probably help me to mind my children and I can work...If I work, I choose to work from home, because the cost of childcare services is very expensive nowadays. So, I need to have a job that can provide me with a good salary because I need to pay for the childcare services if I work.

**U5:** I take care of my grandchildren, which are the children of my eldest child, because she is working, and she asked me to take care of her children.

The response from U3 indicates that staying at home and minding children is better than paying for expensive childcare services while earning little and this trend is also observed in other participants. Paying for childcare represents a financial trade-off that is too costly, especially if more than one child is sent to a childcare centre. The average cost of childcare per child at the registered centres in Malaysia is around MYR 400 per month (although the cost slightly varies depending on locations and providers) while the wages for the unskilled jobs are commonly less than MYR 1000 per month (Shazwan, 2018).

The quote above also indicates that childcare (i.e. of more than one child) is more expensive than the average wage of those with unskilled jobs. For these participants, it was hard for them to get a high-paid job due to the available opportunities in relation to the labour market and the educational qualifications discussed in subsection 5.2.2.1 and therefore, being stay-at-home mothers is considered as a better option than working. Also, this approach was one of the ways for family cost-saving because the participants were helping to reduce family spending by avoiding the cost of childcare that their husbands needed to provide.



However, the childcare provided by family members (grandparents) based on the responses from R4 and U5 manifested the value of social capital within a community in general and the importance of social bonds among family members in particular. The benefits of social bonds within families could either be in terms of the economic, social and/or emotional aspects (OECD, n.d.) and in this research, the economic benefit of social bonds among the participants was demonstrated.

All responses above show that the pattern of childcare among the participants was family-oriented as the majority of them were taking care of their children or grandchildren, while some of them were getting help from their mothers. In addition, all participants who adopted this approach were females, which indicates that caring activity was typically taken on by women rather than men, being an activity that is quite gendered in this context. Nevertheless, this poverty coping mechanism helped the participants to alleviate their poverty situation because the cost of the childcare services could have trapped them in poverty as the labour-market offer would not have paid sufficiently if they did work which I shall return to this issue in the discussion chapter (Section 7.2 and 7.3).

#### **5.2.2.4 Living frugally**

Living life frugally was also used as a poverty coping mechanism by the participants. This mechanism deals with how the participants managed their resources to cope with living in poverty. Ten participants (six rural participants and four urban participants) mentioned that they lived their life frugally as a way to reduce family spending and maximise the available household income. The majority of them cut their expenses by controlling the overall household spending primarily on food items. This involved them cooking for their family instead of buying more expensive ready meals. Some of them were also planting vegetables for the use of their family while a few others reduced their spending on clothing by rotating the clothes from one child to another child. Here are some examples to depict the situation:

**R6:** For food, I just buy the needed ingredients and cook for my family. I never buy anything for breakfast. I always cook because we are already poor, and I have to control our family's spending by not buying ready meals.

**U13:** I control the spending. I've also planted some vegetables around my house, so when my wife wants to cook some, she can just take them and doesn't need to buy them. I can also give some to my neighbour.

The responses above show that the participants were frugal in terms of household expenses to prevent them from being more deprived due to the shortage of money. In addition, the strategies that the participants took can be seen as a process of economic self-sufficiency and productivity to achieve the primary financial goal, which was getting out of poverty (Hong et al., 2009). The strategies taken demonstrate that these participants managed the resources that they have relative to their income, thus fulfilling their necessities with whatever strategies they can (Becker et al., 2004).

### **Summary of this chapter**

To summarise, this chapter has addressed the first two questions of this research in order to respond to the overall research question in three separate sections. The first section has addressed the first research question around the dynamics of the experience of being in poverty from the participants' perspective by discussing the local interpretations of the meaning of poverty among the participants and their lived experience of living in poverty with the causes that led them into poverty. The findings showed that the participants' understanding of poverty corresponds with changes in monetary circumstance (the community leaders from both research sites also had similar understanding) and they also pictured their poverty situation through the hardships and struggles in living their lives. In addition, they faced poverty at different stages of life, with the majority experiencing poverty after they started a family which made family factors as the main causes that led them to experience poverty, followed with employment factors.

However, the participants took various approaches and also adopted a range of poverty-coping mechanisms to seek to alleviate their poverty problem as discussed in the second section that was responding to the second research question. A whole range of community development activities adopted by the participants has been identified and categorised into three categories of community development activities. Category 1 (income generation programmes) and Category 2 (knowledge and skill enhancement programmes) were community development activities designed to

address poverty which was participated by one-third of the research participants. Whilst Category 3 (community engagement) programmes focus on the human development of the communities which all of the research participants were involved in at least one of the organised programmes. The participants were more interested in Category 3 programmes because these programmes include the elements of building on the potential of the existing relationships and wider extended networks of the participants, as well as the asset of their current passions, interests, and desires for learning (i.e. they consisted of the elements of asset-based approach).

The implementation of these programmes (in all categories and primarily for Category 1 and 2), in the research areas and Malaysia more generally, mainly follow the deficit-based model as seen from the economic development process (economic-related activities) that target the poor and low-income population. This occurs because most of the community development programmes provided are delivered either by the federal or state government agencies, as seen in Table 5.1. The government generally see poverty as about the lack of income in one way or another and provide the programmes to respond based on this need (also by seeking to tackle the lack of appropriate skills and capital to address this lack of income). Meanwhile, the participants also adopted individual approaches such as employment and entrepreneurial activities and seeking help from families to cope with their poverty while some participants also lived a frugal life and cared for their own children as other poverty coping mechanisms.

To conclude, this chapter has partly explored how participation in community development activities affect the experiences of particular people living in poverty amongst the Bumiputera population in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu. The findings here suggest that community development activities that emphasise social development are well received in the communities studied although economic development programmes have been the main focus and priority of the government in developing communities. However, there were also problems and negative aspects of the implementation within the process of community development that were raised among the participants including the suggestions for improvement which will be discussed in the next chapter to fully address the overall question of this research.

## **CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **PERSPECTIVES, PERCEPTIONS AND ISSUES AROUND THE PROCESS OF PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION**

#### **Introduction**

This last chapter of the findings and analysis complement the previous chapter that had discussed the dynamics of the experience of being in poverty and approaches to poverty alleviation. In this chapter, it will present the remaining findings and analysis to fully address the overall question of this research by focusing on perspectives, perceptions and issues around the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation. This chapter comprises of three sections. The first section explores the perspectives of the research participants living in poverty about what factors influence their participation in community development activities designed to address their poverty (Research Question 3). Section two explores the participants' perceptions about the ways in which community development programmes tackle poverty and improve quality of life, and their related limitations (Research Question 4). Section three discusses how social inequalities impact the dynamics of participation in community development and/or poverty alleviation (Research Question 5).

#### **6.1 Participants' perspectives about what factors influence their participation in community development activities designed to address poverty**

This section addresses the third research that explores the participants' perspectives about what factors influence their participation in community development. Five main factors were identified to have influenced the research participants to participate in Category 1 and 2 of community development activities designed to address poverty. The identified factors were: the need to increase the household income; to learn new knowledge and skills; to widen and strengthen social networks; enthusiasm (passion) for the programmes and; to fill up free time. Four of these factors (except to increase the household income) also influenced the participants' participation in Category 3 of community development activities. Most of the participants had more than one factor that influenced them to participate in the community development programmes (see Table 5.2 in Chapter 5). The findings also show that these factors were associated with the benefits of participation.

Apart from the listed factors, the findings also recorded different perspectives from both the research participants and local officials around the issues of social inequalities that had also influenced the participation of the research participants in the community development programmes. For instance, it was claimed by some participants that the established networks between some other programme applicants and the programmes' providers restricted the access of some of the research participants to participate in these programmes. These complications around different perspectives and impact of inequalities within these are discussed in detail in Section 6.3.

### **6.1.1 To increase the household income**

The primary factor associated with participation in community development activities designed to address poverty was for improving household income. Eight out of the 30 participants responded that they participated in community development activities (specifically in Category 1) in order to improve household income and all the eight participants succeeded in this aim. The majority of those participating in the income-generation programmes used the microcredit programmes. For example:

**Researcher:** What are the factors that have made you participate, like in your case, that have made you participate in the microcredit scheme?

**U15:** It's because I want to increase my household income and the family's economy through business.

As discussed earlier, it was clear that income-generation programmes aim to increase the household income of the poor people or low-income households thus alleviating their poverty problem; therefore, it can be expected that at least some participation in these programmes was for an income generation purpose, as reflected in the quote from U15 above. The explicit aim of these programmes to increase the household income of their participants through business capital and entrepreneurial training provided by public or private bodies had attracted the participants to participate in the programmes (Al-Mamun et al., 2014b).

The findings recorded that all eight participants (four of them also participated in Category 2, which also encouraged income generation activities through acquiring

skills) responded that their household income had increased after they had participated in the income-generation programmes. It was recorded that their economic situation was getting better through the increment of their household income since they had participated, as illustrated in the following quotes:

**Researcher:** How has your life changed since you started participating in the income-generation programmes? Are there any improvements in terms of economic benefit?

**U6:** In terms of my income, thanks to God, now it's getting better. Last time, I had to think very carefully about spending, but now, I always have money in my pockets, so, life has become easy now.

The response showed that the participant's life had improved because now she has generated more income after she had participated in the income generation programmes, and she did not need to live a frugal life anymore. This benefit was only directly acquired by the research participants who had participated in Category 1 (with half of them also participating in Category 2) of the community development programmes. In contrast, the other 22 participants (those who were not participating in Category 1 of the community development programmes) did not have a direct increment in their monthly household income through their participation in other categories of community development programmes. The income-generation programmes determined the primary aim of its programmes on the grounds of whether the participants had any increment in household income.

### **6.1.2 To learn new knowledge and skills**

The second factor associated with participation in community development (involving all categories) was to learn new knowledge and skills. 18 out of the 30 participants responded that they participated for this reason and that they benefited from the participation in gaining new knowledge and skills. They consisted of nine rural participants and nine urban participants, with the majority of them participating in Category 2 and 3 of community development programmes for this purpose. The following quote illustrate this situation:

**R1:** It's like this. If we don't participate, we will learn nothing. So, that's why I participate in those programmes organised by many agencies because I want to learn new things, and to learn from other

people's experiences on how they have improved their life....for example, I participated in the anti-drug campaign to know the types of drugs and their dangers.

The response above was representative of rural and urban participants more generally, with them participating in various community programmes including campaigns, religious programmes and talks because they wanted to learn about many general issues and also religion. The response indicate that the participant was participating in non-formal education (community education). The concept of participation in this respect has a broader scope involving all types of participation of people in every aspect of lives rather than community participation that focuses on the 'direct involvement of ordinary people in local affairs' (Midgley et al., 1986: 23). That is to say; the urge to learn new knowledge and skills in this respect is also considered a factor associated with participation because learning is a process to build the participants' own capacity and the capacity of the community. Passing on this knowledge to others may be considered a form of social development even if this activity does not involve participation in decision-making or wider political processes contributing to local affairs.

Moreover, the research participants responded that they gained new knowledge and skills by participating although the benefits gained were less tangible compared to the increment in household income. Some of them who participated in the cooking and sewing classes (Category 2) replied that they had acquired additional skills after they had participated in the programmes while those who had participated in the community engagement programmes (Category 3) answered that they had gained many pieces of new knowledge such as religious knowledge and event management knowledge through their participation. For example:

**R11:** My participation in the cooking classes helped me to increase a bit of my cooking skills, and I applied it in my cooking as I am running this food stall.

The response from R11 shows that she acquired some new cooking skills through her participation in this type of non-formal education. This is consistent with the argument made by Dominelli (2000) that says gaining new knowledge and skills can often be linked to individual empowerment and development at a personal level through the acquired knowledge because participation process gives equal chances to

every individual to learn. Also, the new knowledge and skills obtained by the participants can help them to increase their socio-economic condition through participation (Behzad and Ahmad, 2012).

### **6.1.3 To widen and strengthen social support**

The third factor associated with the participation of the research subjects in the community development activities (involving all categories) was to broaden and strengthen social support, and this factor has benefited the participants in strengthening their social support systems. Half (six rural participants and nine urban participants) of the 30 participants in this study responded that they wanted to make new friends and build networks through the participation process. For example:

**R12:** It's because, in the programme, there will be many other participants. So, we can strengthen our bonding, meet new and old friends and can get the latest updates about them.

**Researcher:** So, that's what makes you participate?

**R12:** Yes, because in the programme, everyone is there. So, it's a good place to meet each other and widen our network.

The responses above show that the opportunity to widen and strengthen social support had influenced R12 to participate in community development programmes. Her responses also suggested strengthening of the sense of common identity and relationships between those within the community. These findings are consistent with Craig and Mayo's argument that having a wider social network could benefit the individual in many ways as it assists in finding any available resources that could advantage the person's life in many respects and this process also helps to increase self-esteem within the individual (1995).

However, the findings show that more urban participants wanted to widen their social network than the rural participants, as reflected in the higher number of urban participants participating due to this factor. This could be linked to the nature of living in urban areas as it was commonly harder to develop social networks among the urban population due to their hectic and more individualistic lifestyles (Kingsley and Townsend, 2006). These programmes provided an excellent platform for these



urban participants to get the social support benefits and therefore, had attracted many of them to participate.

These participants responded that their social support had increased through this participation process. The majority of these participants claimed that their circle of friends had widened while some of them claimed that their networking circle was growing bigger. They gained this benefit through their participation in all three categories of community development programmes. For examples:

**R4:** Yes, it is. I can make new friends by participating and it influences me to participate. Also, my friends always encourage me to participate in the programmes with them.

**U14:** Yes, it is. Now I tend to know more people; my network is growing, and it's getting easier to ask for help. For example, I used to receive a freezer for my dessert from a businessman through the recommendation of the JKKK.

Both responses above show that the process of participation provided a platform to widen the social networks and support among the participants, while it also indirectly led to some form of economic benefits through the established network. These findings corroborate the earlier study done by Kalsom and Nor Ashikin (2006), which found that the improvement in the social support among the participants was gained from the unity and bonding that were formed among them which led to community empowerment and betterment in the overall aspects of life.

#### **6.1.4 Enthusiasm (passion) in the organised programme**

The fourth factor associated with participation in community development was the enthusiasm (passion) that the participants had in the programmes (involving all categories). Billow (2000: 97) defines passion as an 'ongoing process of integrating and utilising one's most basic and important emotions'. This relates to anything that is emotionally significant for any individual, and it is reflected through the high levels of interest in such things. 11 out of the 30 participants (six rural participants and five urban participants) in this study responded that they participated in the community development activities due to their high interest in the organised programmes (mainly in Category 3). For instance:

**R7:** The sports and cultural programmes, I really like them. I have a great interest in such programmes, so I participate. Even if I have work on the day of the programme, I tend to leave work and would rather participate in the event.

The response from R7 indicates that having a great passion for the community programme, as highlighted in the quote, shows her willingness to prioritise participation in the programme. Her confession that says she was willing to leave her work and participate in the programme showed that she was ready to sacrifice her immediate work to fulfil her passion because it gave her an emotional fulfilment. A previous study completed by Shapie et al. (2017) on youth engagement in community activities in Selangor, Malaysia found that organising a programme that can make people feel passionate about participating is important in attracting local participation. Their findings corroborate the current research finding, which highlights the passion towards the conducted programme as one of the factors that influence the people to participate in any programmes.

The finding also corroborates the point made by Ploderer (2011) that says passion is something that often requires sacrifices but provides significant outcomes to the individual, mainly in terms of the emotional aspects. In addition, the findings show that community engagement programmes (Category 3) provided an important platform for the participants to express their passions and interests. Thus, there is a need to provide more cultural and leisure activities for the community to make them function better because such programmes positively impact on the emotional and social aspects (through the participation process) of the people, which later lead them to develop themselves in all aspects of lives including the economic aspect. This means that developing people's capabilities that can provide significant results to the people could also help to address poverty (Sen, 1999) which I will return to this point further in the discussion chapter (Section 7.3).

#### **6.1.5 To fill up free time**

The last factor associated with participation in community development was to fill up free time. Eight out of the 30 participants replied that they participated in Category 2 and/or 3 of the community development programmes because they

wanted to fill up their free time as the majority of them were housewives. For example:

**R5:** This one, it's to fill up my free time. Instead of just staying at home doing nothing, it's better I participate in the cooking classes.

The response above shows that participation in skills classes is a good way to fill up leisure time (other than the time for household chores) for a housewife. The findings were consistent with the argument from Mattingly and Bianchi (2003) that filling up free time through such activity provides an opportunity for self-growth and development because it helps individuals to rejuvenate and entertain themselves after long hours of work or household responsibilities. In addition, the participation process itself also brings many benefits to the participant; for example, it develops social relationships among them. Nevertheless, the response above also shows that the participant was devaluing her roles as a housewife as reflected in her response that she was idle at home, an assumption which is very gendered and is discussed further in subsection 6.3.4.

## **6.2 Participants' perceptions about the ways in which community development programmes tackle poverty and improve quality of life, and their limitations**

This section specifically addresses the fourth question of this research that is the participants' perceptions about the ways in which community development programmes tackle poverty and improve quality of life, and their related limitations. 28 (15 rural participants and 13 urban participants) participants responded to questions about their perceptions on how the community development programmes help them to tackle poverty and improve quality of life. The participants' perceptions were grouped into those who considered the community development programmes helped to improve poverty-stricken people's lives and those who considered these programmes not to be helpful. In addition, most of these participants also thought that the community development programmes have some limitations in which the implementation of the programmes needs to be improved and they had provided suggestions for improvement. These perceptions, limitations and suggestions are discussed accordingly in the following subsections.

### **6.2.1 The community development programmes helped to improve poverty-stricken people's lives**

The majority of the participants responded that the community development programmes were generally sound as they had helped them to improve their lives in many aspects although some of them also believed that these programmes need to be improved from time to time. The implementation of the previous and current programmes was beneficial to them in many ways as explored in the first section.

Primarily, they had an increase in household income, particularly through their participation in the Category 1 and 2 community development programmes, including those who received the government welfare assistance. Their participation in community development programmes (particularly in the income-generation programmes, participated by eight participants) had increased their household income, and they were now out of absolute poverty.

As discussed in the literature, the poverty rate in Malaysia is measured by the PLI, which indicates the poverty rate in absolute terms (see Table 3.3 in Chapter 3). In general, from the policy perspectives, only individuals or household with a PLI of less than MYR 950 are considered to be poor. For most people who participated in the income-generation programmes, they did have an increase in their income because the majority of the programmes reported success in this regard (Al-Mamun and Mazumder, 2015; Radieah and Sharifah, 2016). The programmes' success is reflected in the monthly income of more than MYR 950 (above the absolute poverty line) generated by the programmes' participants after they had participated, which means that they had overcome their absolute poverty condition, and this was also the case for my research participants.

However, only a very small percentage of the programmes' participants had successfully achieved high incomes, and the research participants did not contribute to this percentage. The relative poverty line in Malaysia is MYR 2,614 in 2016 and none of the eight participants had an income of above that amount when the fieldwork was conducted (and were therefore in relative poverty). For example, a study done by Al-Mamun and Mazumder (2015) on the impact of the AIM's microcredit programme in Malaysia found that only 1.7% of the AIM's participants had a monthly household income of more than MYR 6000. The YPKT (Terengganu

state microcredit agency) recorded in 2017 that only 10% of its borrowers had a monthly household income of more than MYR 2000 (Terengganu Family Development Foundation, 2017). In addition, the government assistance and programmes for the poor population like the monthly welfare assistance for the children and the welfare assistance for those with chronic diseases were also helpful. Below is a typical example to illustrate the response:

**R11:** Yes, because when we get welfare assistance, it can cover what we can't cover. Meaning that it can lighten our burden a bit. Like me, when I got the JKM's assistance for my children's schooling, it did lighten my burden, because at least I didn't have to worry about it anymore and there was an increase in terms of finances because whenever I can't provide any needs for my children, I can use the money given for that purpose, so it helped a bit. It doesn't mean that I relied totally on the assistance, but it did help.

The quote above indicates that the implementation of the community development programmes through the provided government assistance (cash benefit) had helped the research participant. This was because the assistance had provided them with some modest additional resources that helped them to 'manage' alongside other resources. Indeed, all the participants who said that they had precarious lives responded that their lives had improved a little through various kind of government assistance.

The responses show that the implementation of various government programmes and assistance to help the poor population, had helped this marginalised group. The findings corroborate the previous study by Kamaruddin et al. (2013) who found that the government monetary assistance that was referred to BRIM had helped the poor and low-income people to have additional resources for their daily needs and that they perceived the assistance as sincere government initiatives to lessen their monetary burden. Although the amount of these assistance (the types of benefits provided to those who were eligible ranges from MYR 200 to MYR 450 per month) will not pull someone out of relative poverty as the cash benefits provided were used to cover the recipients' necessities, the participants still found it to be useful in terms of managing poverty. This assistance comes through the application process, and it will only be given to eligible applicants who meet all the application conditions.

Secondly, the participants also reported that they had benefited from an increase in the social and emotional aspects of their lives through their participation in the community development activities (mainly in Category 3). Through participating in the programmes, the participants can have a platform to meet and greet with the local community and also strengthen the sense of common identity and relationships between those within the community (Kalsom and Nor Ashikin, 2006). The emotional support gained through the participation process was reported as making the lives of the participants happier. The emotional support was mainly received and/or provided indirectly from other participants engaging in these activities. The mutual relationship formed between the participants led to positive outcomes in terms of social and emotional development.

The findings that showed the social and emotional aspects of the research participants had increased through their participation in community development activities corroborate the earlier studies done in Malaysia. A study done by Kalsom and Nor Ashikin (2006) on the community members' involvement in a community development programme in Kedah, Malaysia found that the relationships formed between the participants strengthened the social bonding among themselves. Similarly, a much later study conducted by Shahudin (2017) on the benefits of a particular community development (Homestay) programme in Selangor, Malaysia found that the programme had helped the participants to nourish the social values among themselves and within the community.

### **6.2.2 The provided community development programmes identified as not helpful**

Five participants responded that the community development programmes did not help them to move out of poverty. This is because the programmes, particularly the cash assistance, only lasted for a temporary time because it was seasonal and short-term assistance, as illustrated below:

**R3:** It didn't really help, because the assistance is not provided for forever. They just gave us whenever they wanted to. It's only for a short time; after that, we go back to our previous state of life.

For R3, the cash assistance that she had received (BRIM and Zakah money) were through a one-off payment, and her response shows that the assistance received from

the government did not last long and that the support could not be depended upon forever. One-off cash payments are commonly for short-term relief to be spent on basic life necessities (Kamaruddin et al., 2013).

Four other participants who thought that the community development programmes were not helpful had similar responses to R3 above because they had also received the same types of government monetary assistance. Their views on these programmes were limited to the government cash assistance through one-off cash payment because they did not receive other types of monetary assistance (i.e. monthly welfare assistance), nor did they participated in other programmes such as the Category 1 and 2 of community development programmes. Thus, their views on this issue were that short-term or one-off payments through community development programmes had not helped to improve their life situations, particularly when they received no other kind of support, because by themselves these payments did not change their long-term situation.

### **6.2.3 The related limitations in the implementation of the community development programmes and wider poverty alleviation interventions**

Two-thirds of the research participants believed that the implementation of the community development programmes and wider poverty alleviation interventions have some limitations and needed to be improved, and the majority of them also provided suggestions for improvement (are discussed separately in the following subsection). For example, the participants thought that the allocation of the government assistance must be prioritised through better allocation of assistance and provided to those who are really in need, as illustrated in the quote below:

**R5:** If possible, the government should improve the policies. Because, for example, like the elderly welfare assistance, even the quite rich elderly that has many possessions also received the assistance, but those who are more in need didn't get it. So, the welfare staff should be more alert on this matter.

The response above indicates that there was perceived to be a problem in the assistance allocation process as the support did not appear to this participant to be reaching the most in need applicants. Her response also indicates that she was hoping for a better monitoring process from the local officials who are responsible for the selection and approval processes of the applications so that the support goes to the

most in need applicants. From her response, it can be interpreted that she was hoping for a form of means-testing to be applied within the application process so that only those who are in need receive the resources.

In Malaysia, the primary criteria for being able to apply for most of the government assistance is normally based on the monthly household income (either meeting the income measurement of absolute and/or relative poverty) as the basic application criteria. This means that everyone who meets the criteria can apply regardless of the level of their needs. In addition, another participant responded that the appointed local officials must deliver their duties responsibly:

**U7:** Yes, they have to improve the implementation of the policies, in terms of the government officers who deliver the assistance. They have to treat everyone fairly.

Both responses show that the participants wanted to see improvements in the implementation of the current programmes so that the programmes are implemented equitably relative to need without neglecting anyone, and they believed that the programmes implementers should deliver their duties responsibly. The findings support the study conducted by Dawood and Khoo (2017), who found that most of the poverty alleviation programmes (absolute poverty) in northern Peninsular Malaysia needed improvements so that the implemented programmes could reach and benefit all the people in need.

The research findings identify the limitations in the implementation process of the community development that was the allocation of the poverty alleviation assistance and programmes to the poor people that need improvements in terms of the selection of the most in need applicants and the role of the local officials in treating all applicants with fairness. Therefore, means-testing such as the assets that the applicants have (see the quote from R5) could be improved for the allocation of scarce resource so that the most in need applicants receive the support. It was because the findings show that there were some of the neediest not getting the resources, and there seems to be a limited resource available within the researched areas. In addition, most of these participants also provided some suggestions to improve the implementation of these policies, as discussed in the next subsection.



#### **6.2.4 Suggestions to improve the implementation of the community development programmes (designed to address poverty) and the broader poverty alleviation interventions**

20 participants had provided suggestions to improve the implementation of the community development programmes and the broader poverty alleviation interventions so that everyone can gain benefits from the provided programmes. The suggestions for the improvement included: (i) better allocation and better monitoring system of the government assistance and programmes to the community; (ii) elimination of biased treatment over the applications' approvals among the local officials; and (iii) providing more suitable community development programmes designed to address poverty to the community. These are discussed further below.

##### **6.2.4.1 Better allocation and better monitoring system of the government assistance and programmes to the community**

The majority of the research participants suggested that the government should improve the process of community development programmes (primarily the allocation of the assistance) so that they reach the people who are more in need, as some of the participants claimed that those who were less in need of support were getting it, as discussed above. These participants suggested that government officers should conduct a thorough background check on every applicant to make sure only the most in need applicants receive the assistance or get chosen for any community development programmes designed to address poverty. They suggested this could be done through field visits to the applicants' houses. The quote below illustrates this suggestion:

**R11:** If possible, the officers should come and visit all the applicants to see whether the provided details were true. Don't just simply take the information that was provided by the JKKK.... They have to come and investigate, come directly here and see for themselves how our condition is.

The response above indicates that application for the poverty alleviation assistance reaches the agencies once it has gone through the approval or nomination stage from the community leaders because the community leaders act as the mediators and key informants between the local people and the government (i.e., local government). In this research, the findings show that the role of the local committees is essential.

However, their involvement was somewhat problematic, and participants suggested the need for more independent assessment from those outside the particular rural community.

Nor Hayati et al. (2017) argue that the roles of community leaders are essential in providing accurate information about their people to the related agencies (government) in helping to combat poverty problem from the grass-roots level. Nevertheless, as discussed in the next section, there were some claims that the community leaders had not supported the applications of the more in need applicants and therefore, the participants had suggested that the related agencies conduct cross-checks of the applications that had reached them so that every application would receive fair consideration. The suggestions were seen as a way for the agencies to understand the needs of the people better and be able to respond to them and also target limited resources to the most in need applicants.

#### **6.2.4.2 Eliminate the biased treatment over the applications' approval**

Five of the rural participants also suggested that the effectiveness of the community development programmes within the local level should be improved by addressing the biased treatment over the applications among the local officials. The participants responded that this issue occurred at the very local level where some of the locals (including themselves) were not given the equal opportunity from the local authorities especially the community leader in accessing government assistance due to the different political views. For example:

**R15:** The programmes are actually good. But, the implementation is bad when it reach the local level because, at the local level, the local authorities were being unfair because they just choose the favourable people among themselves to allocate the assistance. If the government really wants to make sure that all people get the provided assistance, they have to eliminate the unfair treatment, maybe by appointing the village committee members from the opposition party too.

The response above indicates that support was being offered in a biased way to those who were favourable to local authorities and therefore, the process involved political decisions about who benefitted from the support. This claim was held across all five rural participants expressing this type of view. The findings support the study by Dawood and Khoo (2017), who found that political favouritism did exist in the

selection of the assistance applicants among the community leaders in rural areas in Malaysia. Furthermore, a study was done by Pusiran and Xiao (2013) on the challenges in community development programmes (i.e. the Homestay programme) in Malaysia also corroborates the research findings. The study found that one of the reasons that caused the Homestay programme to fail was the prejudice among the local community leaders who prioritised personal interest in the community development programmes.

Therefore, R15 suggested that the biased treatment over applications should be eliminated and that the process should be done through the appointment of community committee members from both the government and opposition parties. This would provide a check and balance process in selecting the eligible recipients for the government's assistance and programmes. Other participants also suggested that the committee would have to put aside their political preferences and be fair to everyone.

#### **6.2.4.3 Provide suitable help and support to the eligible participants for any income-generation programmes**

Some of the research participants suggested that the government should provide suitable support for the participants of any income-generation programmes so that the participants can move out of poverty and become successful through the programme. This can be done by providing both the resources and the place to utilise the resources in order to generate income, and the participant will be able to succeed by making significant profits out of the programme. The federal and/or state government also have to make sure that they provide a suitable programme for the eligible participants so that the objectives of the programme can be achieved. For example:

**R1:** They have to provide both the resources and the place for that. If the government is providing cows for any poor people so that they can breed the cows and gain income from it, the government should also provide an area for the grazing fields... Because if the recipient doesn't have any place for the cow to live, he or she will end up selling the cow.....also, the government must make sure that the provided programmes reach the right people. For instance, for the young entrepreneur's programme among the unemployed graduates, the agencies involved have to check that the participants are

motivated and have a suitable qualification for the programme so that the programme can reach the right people and succeed.

The response above stresses the importance of providing suitable programmes (based on skills and interest) together with the programmes' primary material support for the eligible participants. Through this approach, the participant can use the skills that they have to utilise the materials and resources provided to them as having either the skills or materials alone without the other element will make the objective of any projects hard to achieve.

The findings are consistent with an earlier study done by Pusiran and Xiao (2013), who found that the roles of the related government agencies in Malaysia in providing training and resources to the Homestay (community development programme) operators are deemed necessary for the operators to succeed in this programme. Meanwhile, Asnarulkhadi and Fariborz (2009a) argue that the participation of the community in the community development activities can help them to combat their poverty and improve their quality of life through the proper use of the provided resources and programmes. Apart from that, it was also suggested that more training and courses need to be provided for the local people within a smaller locality so that it will enable the locals to participate in the courses and use the skills to generate more income, as illustrated by the following quote:

**R5:** I hope to join the sewing classes, but the classes are located a bit far from here, and it's hard for me to join. If it's held here, I can join because through that I can generate more income because a tailor can make money nowadays. So, I suggest that any related agencies will look into this matter.

Based on both responses, the research participants had suggested that the government should provide suitable assistance and programmes for eligible people and organise more training in more localities so that all locals can have access to it and gain benefits from the provided assistance and programmes. The participants' responses also indicate that the improvements for the income-generation programmes are needed for the longer-term rather than for the temporary relief of poverty and that the government should particularly invest more in the latter.

### **6.3 How social inequalities impact the dynamics of participation in community development and/or poverty alleviation**

This section addresses the final research question; how do social inequalities impact the dynamics of participation in community development and/or poverty alleviation amongst the research participants? In general, the research participants responded that social inequalities existed around the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation within their areas. These inequalities are identified as the inequalities in power and power relations and social class, which had primarily impacted the access to the community development programmes and poverty alleviation provisions.

Nearly two-thirds of the research participants responded that they had experienced or observed these inequalities, especially the rural participants. Other participants either responded that there was no inequality in any of these processes or provided no responses at all. Inequalities in power and power relations were reported as the most common inequalities happening in both study sites, followed by inequalities in social class that represent the views of the participants who were living in poverty. Instead, the third subsection (6.3.3) is a very contrasting set of views from the people who were in the position of power (the local officials) and therefore made decisions on the allocation of the poverty alleviation provisions and community development programmes. The combination of the different views from these people allows me to explore how these inequalities interact and impact the dynamics of poverty alleviation and participation in community development in the researched areas. The last subsection discusses the particular gender dynamics within the poverty alleviation process and participation in community development.

#### **6.3.1 Inequality in power and power relation**

For this study, ten research participants (rural participants) reported experiencing inequality in power and power relations around the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation. The findings show that inequalities in power and power relation were particularly perceived by participants as being present in the rural site rather than the urban site. The power and power relation issues encountered by these participants were commonly described as the discriminatory treatment experienced by the participants from the local officials,

especially the community leaders (JKKK) in getting access to the poverty alleviation programmes and in participating in the community development activities. The quote below illustrates the inequality in power and power relations that took place within the researched areas:

**R10:** The issue here is that, when the JKKK allocate the assistance, it's just those who have a close connection to them [who] receive the assistance, like the house renovation assistance. The JKKK allocate assistance to the people that they like.

The response above indicates that inequality in power and power relations could have occurred in the research areas (particularly rural) as it was claimed the poverty alleviation assistance flowed to those who had a close connection to the community leaders. That is to say, the participation of these people in the poverty alleviation programmes was considered by the research participants to have been gained through the negotiation of power and power relation via the personal networks established between them and the community leaders (Ihlen, 2005). This finding is consistent with the argument from Dola and Mijan (2006), who found that the local communities in Malaysia with more power dominated most of the public participation in the developmental process. Moreover, the same research participant further explained the situation of the power and power relations issue that was happening in her area:

**R10:** The JKKK seem to assist the same people. Last year, those people already received assistance to renovate the roof; this year they received assistance to renovate the wall of the house although the original condition of their houses was still good...If you see, those who live nearby [in] the street, although their houses look fine, even the roof is still fine, but when they applied to renovate some parts of their houses from the JKKK, their applications were approved.

This response raises the question of whether or not assistance is given to those who most need it and how the resources are matched to those who most need them. R10 did not seem happy with the decision of the community leader who kept on providing the house renovation assistance to the same people because she believed that those people were less in need of such support as shown in the description of the good physical condition of their houses. The application conditions of the house renovation assistance stated that the assistance is open to applicants (who registered

in the e-Kasih databank) whose house condition is poor, as outlined by the related agency (Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, 2020). Meanwhile, the community leader making the decisions at the local level for the application to be passed on to the next application stage agreed that the power and power relations might have existed in the allocation process, as illustrated by the quote below:

**JKKK-R:** I know that there were some issues around the application process because there were some applications from applicants who were less in need of assistance from the community.... and it could be that some of their applications were approved for some reasons.

The response from the JKKK-R above indicates that he perceived that the less in need had been receiving assistance. However, the community leader did not specify the reasons for this or whether this problem was happening in his area or other areas. In this regard, I wanted to explore more around this issue through participant observation by participating in the JKKK's meetings and conduct daily observations in the JKKK's offices to observe how the resource allocation processes are being managed but failed as I could not get the access to do the observations (see Chapter 4, subsection 4.3.2). Empirically, I was not given access to the actual process and therefore, I cannot formally comment on this issue as part of the research.

However, as an insider in the community, I was aware (from living in this context) that the villagers informally raised questions about this resource allocation process and whether the resources were being provided to those who are most in need. Thus, the JKKK-R quote above may be interpreted as relating to the community leader (and community committee) finding reasons and providing a justification to allocate resources to some of the less in need residents rather than the more in need ones. This explanation is also derived from the responses of the research participants (see the earlier quote from R10, for example) who claimed relational networks led to resources falling to those who were deemed as less in need who were better connected to the committee.

Another possible explanation could be that the committee wanted to preserve the good relationship that they had with the less in need applicants due to the political interest that existed between them as pointed out by some of the research participants. The participants raised concerns about poverty alleviation assistance (with the house renovation assistance as one example of this) reaching the people

most in need. They attributed this to power and power relation issues existing between the less in need applicants and the local officials, which included political interests and relational networks between the applicants and the local officials, especially the local committee. The quotes from participants below show the factors that contributed to types of inequality in power and power relations:

**R10:** It's hard to tell, it's because of the differences in the political party... I used to go and meet the JKKK chairperson to apply for the house renovation assistance, but this was what he said, 'you are the opposition supporter, and you come to ask for help from the government', ...they denied our rights though they are supposed to take care of us all and give assistance to their people.

**R11:** I am a government supporter, and I applied for assistance from the federal community development agency. But I was denied this by my very own government, even though I was a single mother, with many children that were still undergoing schooling at that time. I just asked for assistance for my food stall [business capital], but I didn't get it. Why was that? It's because if you have a good relationship with those who have power, you can easily get anything.

For this research, both responses above show that the participants highlighted political interest (R10) and relational networks (R11) as the possible reasons that caused their application to be overlooked in favour of less in need applicants. They, therefore, felt that their application for poverty alleviation assistance and community development programme had not received fair treatment from the local officials. The rules of this system (the application process for the poverty alleviation assistance including the community development programmes) would usually need to go through the first stage of the application process, in which the application needs to be supported or nominated by the local committee (usually the JKKK) before the applicants can submit it to the related agencies for final approval (Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, 2020). This requirement (needing support from the JKKK) contributed to the perceived or actual tendency for bias towards those who had connections with local officials.

From the quotes, R10 believed that the JKKK rejected her application for the house renovation assistance in the first place due to the differences in political views as the committee had no political interest in her. R11 attributed the reason that she did not receive the budget allocation for her food business to the fact that she had not



personally approached any of the agency officers to help her to get her application approved. Both responses above show the potentially political nature of the poverty alleviation processes (in terms of access to the types of provisions) that were happening in the rural study site. The quotes indicate that the resources may be being allocated on the basis of relationship and political preference rather than the level of the needs with the preference for politically-connected applicants as the reason.

However, it is important to recognise that both of these participants were turned down by the schemes, and this may have influenced their responses as they were obviously not happy about being turned down. In seeking to explain the reason for being turned down they may have been accurate in their claims, either in full or part, but they may also have been wrong about, or misinterpreted the elements of all the technical rationale for why their applications were rejected. In contrast, the response from the JKKK-R, who was not able to substantiate with evidence why this problem might have happened within the allocation process, could be interpreted as a little problematic especially from the point of view of tackling poverty. It might be expected that the JKKK-R at least was able to give an overview and rationale about the common reasons why some applications were turned down, and the resources went to the less in need people.

To conclude, the inequalities in power and power relations featured strongly in the findings within the rural research site because more than half of the rural participants reported the existence of this issue and the response from the rural community leader also seemed to support the participants' claims. However, the fact that the community leader did not specify whether the problem in the allocation process was happening in his area or elsewhere did not give a clear indication that this problem was evident in the rural research site. Nevertheless, the findings corroborate the previous research because the issues of power and power relations exercised by the local officials especially among the local committee are well-known issues in the developmental process in Malaysia (see Dola and Mijan, 2006; Nor Hayati et al., 2017). This issue influenced the fair distribution of the provisions because factors outside of those which were formally recognised as being factors which affect the decisions were also considered by the decision-makers (i.e. local committee and agency officers) such as the factor of personal relationship and political preference.

Contrastingly, in the urban research site, none of the urban participants talked about any of the power and power relations issues, and/or denied that there were these issues within their area. Of those who responded to the interview question of whether there were any inequalities in power and power relations (three out of fifteen participants), their responses show that they did not specifically talk about the power and power relations issues in their area, as illustrated in the quote below:

**U6:** For that kind of issue, no, there is not. None exists here.

Most of the urban participants gave no response when they were asked about these issues, and their silence does not necessarily mean that these issues were either present or absent in the urban research site. Potentially, their silence could be interpreted that these issues may have existed in the urban research site, but they did not want to discuss them. Alternatively, it may be too sensitive to talk to an outsider researcher about it. These potential interpretations of the silence among the urban research participants towards inequality would then require future research to explore this issue further.

Nevertheless, many previous studies in quite a similar context found the issues of power and power relations did present within the urban population in Malaysia, given there are more people in urban areas and the competition for resources in urban areas is higher than in rural areas (Meinzen-Dick and Appasamy, 2002). The findings of a study by Azman and Ismail in 2016 on the perception of flood victims on the distribution management of the flood disaster contribution in Kelantan, Malaysia is in contrast to the views of the urban research participants. The study found that there were inequalities in power and power relations in both the rural and urban areas in the distribution of the flood disaster contribution that linked to the political interest among the distribution management unit (mainly the local officials) and the flood victims (Azman and Ismail, 2016).

Moreover, a study conducted by Nor Hayati et al. in 2017 also found that political preference among the community leaders was one of the factors that had influenced the unfair distribution of support among the poor population in Terengganu in both the rural and urban areas (Nor Hayati et al., 2017). Therefore, the findings of this study, which showed that none of the urban research participants talked about the

power and power relations issues in the allocation of the poverty alleviation provisions need to be qualified relative to the wider research literature.

It is worth noting that the system for allocating funds and any poverty alleviation provisions including community development programmes is the same across regions and includes the role of the local committee in approving and/or supporting the first stage of the applications process, regardless of rural/urban division (Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, 2020). However, there is scope for the local implementation of this and the nature of service delivery also relates to local history, working cultures and relational issues and dynamics between and within organisations and social systems. Previous research (see Azman and Ismail, 2016; Dola and Mijan, 2006; Nor Hayati et al., 2017) has highlighted that inequality in power and power relations exists in the process of community development and poverty alleviation in Malaysia in both the rural and urban population.

It is also important to recognise that the same data from the urban research site (i.e. the urban participants were less keen to talk about this issue) could be linked to the sampling strategy, which was not as robust (i.e. the approached participants were fully dependent on the nomination from the gatekeeper) as for the rural area. In addition, this situation could also be linked to the insider-outsider roles of the researcher that could have influenced the reaction of the rural and urban participants to act differently as the researcher held more of an insider role in the rural area. The insider role could have potentially led to a more comfortable feeling among the rural research participants to talk about this issue as compared to the urban participants, who were not fully comfortable, which then resulted in urban participants remaining silent about this issue. Therefore, further research will be needed to establish whether or not these dynamics are happening in the urban area.

### **6.3.2 Inequality in social class (in terms of the income distribution) and its relation to power**

Social class inequalities were found in the research areas around the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation. In this study, the social class is understood in terms of the socio-economic income distribution of the population (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3). This income inequality was acknowledged only by four out of the 30 participants. Most of the participants (mainly rural

participants) responded that there was no such issue (referring to class-inequalities) in their areas, and six participants gave no response regarding this issue. It is important to note that in both the rural and urban study areas, the social stratification of the communities ranged from upper-class to lower-class people.

Findings of the characteristics of the researched community that were gained based on the established interviews show that class within the researched community was constructed by their occupation status relative to income. The lower-class people commonly consisted of those who were involved in manual work (self-employment) and had low educational attainment (up to the equivalent of GSCE level); middle-class people were mainly involved in professional employment (civil servants) such as public teachers and doctors with tertiary education certificates, and upper-class people primarily consisted of the large-scale business people with various but higher educational levels. These criteria of the general understanding of class within the researched community were classified based on people's occupational status, which aligns with the general class division in Malaysia (Mohd Koharuddin, 2005) as discussed in the first chapter (subsection 1.3.1).

The distribution of classes in the rural area was skewed to the lower-class population with only a small proportion of middle-class and high-class people while in the urban area, the members of each class were relatively evenly distributed across the population with the middle-class people constituting the biggest percentage of the population (see statistics in Chapter 1, subsection 1.3.1). The higher proportion of lower-class people in the rural area may relate to access to resources (and the dynamics of power and power relations) as discussed in the earlier subsection, because the rural participants claimed more cases of inequalities in power and power relations than the urban participants. The high proportion of lower-class people could also contribute to more competition for resources among the rural lower-class group that, in turn, may increase the significance of existing relational networks (through the exercise of power and power relations) in terms of accessing scarce community resources provided by the federal or state government.

From the findings, the rural participants responded that they did not observe any social inequalities among the different classes in their area because the rural community from all classes gave good cooperation in the community programmes

held within the area as compared to the urban participants. The following quote illustrates the perceived good relationships among all classes in the rural area:

**R2:** Most of us are the working-class people. But, the higher-class people here are good; they are not arrogant...They aren't showing off and treat us equally. For example, if they donate [to] the pro-government supporters for any activities, they will also give the same donation to us too. We are treated equally by this group.

From the response, it showed that the participant was satisfied with the way she and her fellow group were treated by the higher-class people in their area, which meant that inequality between different classes was not identified as an issue in this area. The community spirit among all classes of people in the rural area was depicted through their togetherness in the participation in community engagement programmes. This situation was also supported by the statement from the rural community leader, who said that the higher-class people in the area always provided good support and helped in every programme held, as illustrated in the quote below:

**JKKK-R:** Yes, they do cooperate, always. I can say that almost all the time and they are those business people. There are quite a few of them here, and they help this village a lot. Their help is very invaluable in terms of monetary and energy contribution. Like when we did the village cheerfulness programme lately, it cost around thirty to forty thousand Ringgit, and they did contribute a lot. I think this village is fortunate to have this kind of people here as I think other villages couldn't be like us.

Both responses that represent the rural views above indicate that the rural population had a strong solidarity level, regardless of class difference. However, it is possible that wider class dynamics existed through the act of giving from the higher-class people to the lower-class group (including the research participants), which can be interpreted as conservative (i.e. preventing radical social change) and paternalistic, although the participants did not frame the issue in these terms. In addition, the higher proportion of the lower-class people in this area had led to the high competition for resources among them and the significance of the exercise of power and power relations as discussed in the earlier subsection. This was because the high concentrations of poverty had caused more problems and issues with the unmet needs among the lower-class people. These dynamics are discussed further in Chapter 7.

Nevertheless, in the urban research site, four participants reported on the class inequality that was happening there in terms of the lack of participation from the upper-class and middle-class people in the community programmes (i.e. the Category 3 of the community development activities) held in the area. The community programmes held are generally public events and were open to everyone regardless of class. For example:

**U14:** We have a low participation rate from the high class and middle-class people in the village community activities, maybe because they are busy with their things.

The brief response above suggests social class appears to be significant in the urban area in terms of participation in community engagement activities as the high and middle-class people did not participate in community programmes held in the area. The response from a community leader in this area also corroborated this finding:

**JKKK-U:** When we organise any programmes for the community here, we normally have participation from the lower-class people only. It's hard to get participation from the middle-class (government employee) group. I don't blame them for not participating as they might have other commitments.

Both responses above show that in the urban research site there was limited participation from middle-class and upper-class people in community engagement (Category 3). Both U14 and JKKK-U have a similar view on the possible reasons why the higher-class people did not actively participate in the organised programmes, i.e. they were too busy and/or had more important things to do. It seems clear that poorer people engage more with community programmes in the urban area, and this shows the dynamics of social class in this area.

To conclude, the research participants and the local officials interpreted class in this research by linking it to the occupational status relative to income. The findings show a difference in the types of social class dynamics that occurred in the rural and urban research site. The rural participants observed inequality within the lower-class people as reflected in the competition for resources through the exercise of power and power relations among them. In the urban area, there was limited participation from the upper and middle-class people in the community programmes, despite a relatively even distribution of the population between social classes.

These dynamics in social class in both study sites relate to the characteristics of the community (or lack of community) in each area (as illustrated by characteristics such as relations between groups, mutual solidarity and interdependence). It is commonly argued that the rural lower-class people are more community-oriented and interdependent between themselves, which links to the psychological characteristics of these people as compared to the urban people (Belmi and Laurin, 2016). However, these dynamics in relation to the characteristics of the rural and urban community would require future research to explore this issue further.

### **6.3.3 The dynamics of power from the perspective of the local officials**

The local officials (stakeholders of community development agencies) provided their views on how the poverty problem among the poor local population, including the research participants, could be tackled. From their experiences dealing with the local poor people, they viewed the lack of religious practice (and/or where religion is not ‘properly’ practised) and negative attitudes among the poor community as the problems that caused the poor population to stay in poverty. For them, these issues need to be tackled in the first place to solve the poverty problem. However, their views were somewhat problematic because they expressed these views without providing further evidence to support their statements and, thus, potentially revealed aspects of the dynamics of power through their views on religion and poverty.

#### **6.3.3.1 Religious conformity among the poor population**

A senior officer of a religious welfare department responded in the research fieldwork to the poverty situation faced by the Terengganu population. His employer is the state agency that manages the religious affairs, the development of Islam and the socio-economic prosperity of Muslims in Terengganu. This agency primarily involves the Zakah services, which it manages the Zakah money (paid to this agency) by distributing it to the eligible recipients<sup>23</sup> among the Muslim population in Terengganu through monetary (the majority) and non-monetary form (equipment

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<sup>23</sup> There are eight categories of Zakah recipients that includes: *Faqir* (the extremely poor people), *Masakin* (the poor people), *Amilin* (those who administrate and manage the Zakah matters), *Muallaf Al-Qulub* (those who convert to Islam), *Riqab* (the free slaves), *Gharimin* (people who has debts and couldn't pay), *Fi Sabilillah* (Fighters in the cause of Allah to promote Islam) and ‘Wayfarers who run out of food rations in their travel for a good cause’ (Ahmad et al., 2015: 144).

assistances, skills and knowledge programmes). This officer provided his view as illustrated below:

**Religious Welfare Department's Officer:** I also look at the religious practice of our people who are quite low, and the majority of our assistances' recipients are not practising. Like this, the main thing is that they don't pray and it was so sad to see that happened. For example, we used to organise a programme at a mosque because we want the participants to pray before we started the programme, but many didn't pray. They gave various reasons like their clothes were dirty and sorts of. So, for me, if this basic obligation they cannot do, how can they manage the assistances and programmes that we provided to them appropriately.

This officer argued that the proper practice of the religion was an important aspect of poverty alleviation because he viewed that instilling religious and moral aspects among the Bumiputera-Malay population (who are considered as Muslim by the Constitution) is essential for them to succeed economically and socially. His view was that these values would help the poor population to grow by using the assistance and resources provided to them appropriately. The officer concluded that many of the less religiously-practising poor people who received assistance from this agency did not use the assistance appropriately. He stressed the importance of praying as the first thing that all Muslims have to do before other things. This is because prayer is the second pillar of Islam after the profession of faith (Ali et al., 2004).

From a sociological perspective, it could be true that individual religious piety may shape social and economic behaviours in ways that may be supportive. Many social scientists argue that religion functions to provide a moral framework to its followers and have a positive relationship between the level of the religious knowledge and practices and the attitude of the individuals (see Alavi et al., 2013; Fauziah et al., 2012; Mydin et al., 2020; Stark and Bainbridge, 1996; Suhid, 2007). This is because religions encourage the followers through a whole range of religious values (such as being diligent and working hard) that can affect the individuals' behaviours and social norms in ways that can support the economic activities.

However, the response above shows that the officer did not provide any further details to substantiate his views and therefore, his view was seemingly a prejudicial



view against those who were not conforming in practice to a default identity in law. From a position of power, this officer was making an assertion about these poor people, and this is quite problematic as he was stigmatising them based on his interpretation of their lack of religious conformity. People with behaviours that are not the 'norm' should not be stigmatised and excluded from any available opportunities by those who are in the position of power. In addition, the views of this officer were not consistent with research participants' views on this matter. All the participants were religiously-practising Muslims and they were still experiencing relative poverty which indicate that being religious alone will not solve the poverty among these people. It is, therefore, inaccurate to say that the persisting poverty situation among the research participants was due to their lack of religious practice.

Moreover, the quote above may show that within this poor population (and the wider community), some people were expressing a degree of resistance within the dominant religious community. The quote shows the lack of conformity and participation in a very simple collective religious practice (public prayer) in a society in which all Malays are constitutionally considered to be Muslim. However, there could also be other reasons that caused these people to not conform to the officer's expectation, such as that they might (due to their poverty) lack the resources to have sufficient separate sets of clothes to keep a separate set for praying at the mosque. Prayers may also be done privately, though congregation prayers are more recommended. Therefore, further research would be required to explore more in order to substantiate or contrast the assertion made by this officer and to find more possible reasoning in relation to this issue.

#### **6.3.3.2 The attitude of the poor population**

Apart from the religious welfare department officer, an officer from a microcredit agency also provided his views on how poor people can address their poverty situation. This microcredit agency is a State Statutory Body operated under the Terengganu State Government. It is responsible for managing the development of the family and community in Terengganu, including through the lending of the capital loans to the poor and low-income families for the SMEs as a way to improve their life quality. From the point of view of this officer, he argued that the poor population, especially from the Bumiputera-Malay, should change their negative

attitudes (primarily due to a perceived lack of discipline among them) into more positive ones. The quote below illustrates the assertion:

**Microcredit Agency's Officer:** The challenge to success for most of the Bumiputera-Malay people is the attitude. Look at the Chinese, their discipline, when did they start their businesses? And we? Sometimes I went out to check our participants' businesses who received loans from us when I arrived at their premises at 8 AM, and they were still not ready to start their businesses. They have to change.

The microcredit agency officer considers discipline to be the most important characteristic that everyone needs, and it is the key to success. However, through focusing on the opening times of businesses, and indicating that specific times 'need to change', he may have neglected to take account of the childcare needed and the 'school run' of the participants' children because alternative care is not always available this early in the morning which caused these participants to be late in opening their premises.

This officer's view that attributed the undisciplined attitude of the Bumiputera-Malay population could very much be linked to the long-standing stereotype that characterised the Malays as lazy. In addition, this view may have stemmed from racist beliefs because the officer was linking ethnic or 'racial' groups to characteristics being perceived as negative, particularly without providing empirical evidence to substantiate his view. For the Malays, the stereotype that attributed Malay people with negative attributes as being a lazy and indolent race started during colonial times when many of the colonial officers who worked in Malaya portrayed the Malays with such values in their writings. For example, Frank Swettenham who was a former British Resident in Malaya in the 1870s claimed that Malay people were lazy (Noor, 2019).

However, the statements made about Malay people by the colonial officers were merely the personal views from the colonial point of view because they were not 'trying to understand what caused the Malays to act in certain ways' (Rojudin and Muhammad, 2020: 70). It is argued by Al-Attas (1989) that the Malays was labelled as lazy because they did not want to work for the Colonists; their unwillingness to cooperate was therefore regarded as lazy during that time.

Nevertheless, this stereotype has been widely circulated among the Malaysian society, and it has also 'been embedded within the process of Malay identity formation' because there were some local elites had perpetuated the discourse on the negative images of the Malays (Khalidah, 2020: 23). For example, the former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed wrote in his book, 'The Malay Dilemma' in 1970 that Malays are lazy and refused to change although he had purposefully made the statements as a wake-up call for the Malays to be more economically competitive like the Chinese and Indians (Rojudin and Muhammad, 2020).

Nonetheless, while it may be true that some Malays have these attitudes, it is unreasonable (and indeed, prejudicial) to generalise all Malays in this way as the values were individually possessed. Any individuals from any ethnic groups can also own those values. The view of this officer about the Malay people's attitudes, in general, was quite stigmatising, although it may be grounded in his experience. It was not fair to generalise all Malays in such a way without further unpacking and analysing the relationship between the cultural differences of different groups about what is important or normal (for example, the cultural difference between contexts where shops are expected to open among the Chinese and Malays). In this respect, this officer's view about the attitude of the Malay population could also be linked to the people in the position of power who were putting the blame on to this group for the poor condition experienced by this population.

To conclude, the views of this microcredit officer and the religious welfare officer (from the earlier subsection) show some fairly prejudicial views about the poor population. Their views were based on experience but with limited evidence to back their statements up. Whilst those living in poverty saw themselves as actively seeking to employ the wide range of strategies to get out of poverty (see Chapter 5, Section 5.2), these officials resorted to stigmatising stereotypes and blamed those in poverty for not engaging in religious practises and being lazy nor doing more to resolve their situation. From a position of power, they appeared to find reasons for the persisting poverty situation among their beneficiaries and the wider poor population.

#### **6.3.4 Gender dynamics within the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation**

In this study, gender dynamics were observed in the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation. Nearly one-third of the participants provided their insights on a gendered pattern in the community development programmes and poverty alleviation. It is important to note that the majority of the recorded programmes involving research participants targeted women, as illustrated in the quote below:

**R1:** I like to participate in many activities for youth, and I had participated in so many activities. Here, our village is very active, we have many programmes for the local people and most of the programmes are for women.

The next example below shows a common response around the dynamics of gender:

**R14:** For the division of the programmes based on gender, for community programmes here, most of the programmes are for everyone regardless of gender, and there are also some programmes that target only women like the cooking and sewing classes, and that's fine.... The fine art programme that I am involved with, now it also has women participants although this programme was known to suit only men before.

R14 was a male in his fifties who thought that most programmes offering activities are not gendered in his view and it was appropriate that some focused on women alone. His quote seems to display some quite gendered assumptions (e.g. that programmes are either for all, or just for women, and the women-only ones will be on cooking and sewing, not, for example, on construction work). Also, his comment about fine art suggests historical gendered assumptions within poverty alleviation and community development programmes that appear to be somewhat changing.

Nevertheless, some programmes focus on activities such as childcare and adopted gendered assumptions in focusing on participation by women in these activities. The approach that divides the type of programmes based on the gender dimension is perpetuated as it (i.e. division of programmes based on the perceived gendered common characteristics) had been accepted as one of the cultural norms within a community (Hutchings, 2000). In Malaysia, gendered assumptions have been

culturally embedded and accepted within the community because most of the Malaysian women do not regard gender inequality as an issue to be challenged (Ariffin, 1999). The example below shows this participant's opinion on gender inequality in the community development programmes:

**R12:** In my opinion, the male group doesn't mind being left out from community development. Many programmes here seem to target the housewives as the participants. This is because as housewives, we just stay at home doing nothing and it's good for us to join the programmes like the cooking and sewing classes and also the microcredit programmes...But, it doesn't mean that there is no programme for males, there are many, and there is no such issue here.

R12 was a female in her forties whose comments reflect the design of the programmes (Category 1 and 2) by the federal and state agencies targeting women and the housewives, in particular, from the poor and low-income households as ways for them to generate side-income through small business activities. Through the participation, they can help to increase their family income by using the skills and knowledge gained from the provided programmes, assistance and courses. These findings corroborate Teoh and Chong (2014) who found many programmes in Malaysia are provided for women with the aims of increasing women's involvement in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The SMEs platform has helped to increase women's employment opportunities and has increased the overall percentage of women in the workforce, which in turn has contributed to better gender equality in the workforce.

Nonetheless, although these interventions seem to be trying to tackle the gender equality in the workforce, it could be argued that the agencies are doing so against a backdrop of gendered assumptions and patterns of economic activity. This is because questions remain about whether such programmes see their intervention as aiming to just generate a side income or to enable women to become a significant economic contributor, and whether male or female partners are expected to bring in the higher income are part of this pattern.

Most of the programmes for women are targeted at providing additional income alongside the main income of the male breadwinner, and this is problematic in terms of gender inequalities but also corresponds with the nature of Malaysian society (see

Teoh and Chong, 2014) and also to a greater or lesser extent across countries globally (see Rhodes et al., 2017). These interventions were also limited in the extent to which they can alleviate poverty for single-parent families (including due to bereavement) and families with a family member who was ill and unable to work, given they are designed to provide a supplementary income.

Most of the community providers are developing the interventions that focused on women based on the dimension to help women earn a bit of side income, which can be interpreted as a paternalistic and individualistic approach to poverty alleviation. Lee and Choong (2019) argue that the gender gaps in Malaysia are still wide, despite various interventions (including all the programmes for women through community development) to address this issue. This could be due to the relatively big difference between a programme that seeks to equalise gender participation in the workforce (and earning power) and one that helps women earn a side income whilst expecting male wage earners to continue to be the higher full-time earners.

Furthermore, the R12 response above also seems to raise other issues that include the role of housewives and the provided unpaid childcare and domestic labour at home (also see the quote from R5 in subsection 6.1.5). Another example of similar responses that described what the female participants were doing when they were at home is illustrated in the quote below:

**R6:** No, I didn't work, I just stay home and doing household work while looking after the kids, that's all, I didn't do any paid work, it is just my husband who is working for us, we only rely to him to provide us.

Those responses above were typical responses received from the majority of the Bumiputera-Malay women who were not working because they were still adhering to the traditional belief of women's roles which is that the responsibilities and the household activities that they were performing contributed no monetary benefits (Teoh and Chong, 2014). In addition, the R12 response that says the housewives 'stay at home doing nothing' could perhaps be an indication of a housewife who is devaluing her own contribution, having accepted the wider social discourses about the value of the activity she does engage in.

To conclude, from all the responses received, the findings show the gender dynamics within poverty alleviation processes and community development which indicate that gendered assumptions existed and were culturally embedded within the community. The findings also demonstrated that the community development programmes are more focused on women because women had received more attention, since the third Malaysia Plan, from community developers, especially in the entrepreneurial and small business activities, with the goal to increase female participation in the labour force (Lee and Choong, 2019). The government plans and policies for women's development have been implemented since 1976 through entrepreneurial, and SME activities and the initiatives led to an increase in women's participation in the workforce from 46.4% in 2009 to 53.6% in 2014 (Economic Planning Unit, 2015a).

In addition, the findings also showed the relationship between community development and economic development as most of the community development programmes provided for poor people (particularly focused on women) are economic-related programmes. Moreover, some of the community development activities are designed to bring women into the labour market. This was successful in increasing the percentage of women's participation in the labour force but has yet to fully address gender inequality overall.

### **Summary of this chapter**

To summarise, this chapter has addressed the last three questions of this research and complemented the previous chapter to fully respond to the overall research question. First, it had explored the participants' perspectives about what factors influence their participation in community development activities designed to address their poverty (respond to the third research question). From the listed factors, it shows that the participants not only wanted to improve their economic situation through participation in the programmes, but they were also interested in improving social and emotional aspects of life as well. This was because only some of them had participated due to the economic factor while most of them saw other factors such as learning new knowledge and widening their social networks as significant factors that influence them to participate in all categories of community development activities including those specifically designed to address poverty. The findings

suggest that developing these broader aspects among the participants is equally important as tackling insufficient income.

Second, this chapter has explored the participants' perceptions about the ways in which community development programmes tackle poverty and improve quality of life, and their related limitations that was responding to the fourth question of this research. The findings indicate that most of the research participants thought that community development programmes provided many benefits to them, which were broader than just the economic benefits that helped them to manage their poverty although it did not help them to fully address their relative poverty. They had also suggested some recommendations for the improvement of the programmes, especially in terms of programme implementation so that the poorer group will have equal opportunities to benefit. Programme implementation was highlighted as an issue in terms of the distribution of resources, but I would also argue that this matters relative to overall resourcing as the findings show that the available resources for the participants (and wider poor population) are limited.

Meanwhile, the third section explores how social inequalities impact the dynamics of participation in community development and/or poverty alleviation amongst the research participants that was responding to the last research question. Findings show that social inequality issues did exist around the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation within the researched areas. In this study, the participants had responded to two different social inequalities: inequality in power and power relations and inequality in social class that were found to have taken place in both the rural and urban research sites. It was claimed that the power and power relations issues in the study areas happened due to the competition over the resources among the poor population in the areas. The competition that was happening primarily among the lower-class people had led them to negotiate power and power relations that they had between them and those who provided or approved the resources. The relationship had contributed to the existence of the power and power relations inequalities, while the political interest and relational networks were also recognised as the factors that contributed to this type of inequality.

For social class inequality, both study sites showed the types of social class dynamics quite differently. The rural participants did not seem aware that the good



relationship established between themselves, and the higher-class people could be a form of conservative and paternalistic relationship while the competition for resources that was happening among them could be an effect of the class inequality within the lower-class people and the wider population. In contrast, the urban participants saw this dynamic through the limited participation from the upper and middle-class people in the community programmes held within their area.

Contrarily, the views from the community development officers who represented the people in positions of power that were making the decision about community development programmes (as part of poverty alleviation strategies) also showed the dynamics of power within the poverty alleviation process and participation in community development. Their responses indicate a tendency to blame poor people for their persisting poverty by arguing that these people were undisciplined and said that the lack of religious practice contributed to the poor attitude of these people in managing the resources received from the community development agencies.

For the dynamics of gender within the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation, it is recorded that more community development programmes for women in both the rural and urban areas corresponding to the priority given to this at the national level due to women's lower rate of participation in the labour force. This approach could help to increase the rate of women's participation in the labour market while concurrently empowering women. However, gendered assumptions were observed to have been culturally embedded within the community, which limited the nature of the programmes in tackling gender inequalities.

Having explored all the five questions of this research in the current and previous chapter helped to address the overall question of this research. The participation in community development activities affect the experiences of particular people living in poverty amongst the Bumiputera population in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu in many ways which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: KEY ISSUES OF POVERTY AND PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THIS RESEARCH**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the key issues of poverty and participation in community development in Malaysia (in light of the findings and analysis discussed in the previous two chapters) in addressing the overall research question of: How does participation in community development activities affect the experiences of particular people living in poverty amongst the Bumiputera population in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu? The main research findings and analysis related to the research sub-questions explored earlier helped address this overall research question.

The findings explored the dynamics of the experience of poverty for the research participants, and their individual approaches to poverty alleviation, as discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.1 and subsection 5.2.2 (addressing Research Questions 1 and 2). The findings showed that the research participants had participated in various categories of community development programmes as approaches to poverty alleviation, as explored in Chapter 5, Section 5.2 (addressing Research Question 2). It also explored their perspectives about what factors influenced their participation in these programmes (addressing Research Question 3), as explored in Chapter 6, Section 6.1. Through the process of participating in the research, they shared their perceptions about the ways in which community development programmes tackle poverty and improve quality of life, and their related limitations (addressing Research Question 4), as explored in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.

In addition, the research participants also experienced some issues associated with social inequalities within the process of participation in community development activities, and poverty alleviation as explored in Chapter 6, Section 6.3 (addressing Research Question 5). Therefore, having undertaken this study, this chapter explores the significance of this research in relation to wider literature through considering five key contributions to understanding poverty and community development in relation to these research participants within the Malaysian context. These points

also contribute to the wider literature around poverty and community development and, are discussed accordingly through the five sections summarised below:

Section 7.1 will discuss the significance of a multifaceted understanding of poverty in these Malaysian contexts among the participants, particularly the importance of understanding the social dynamics of poverty amongst those researched. Section 7.2 will discuss the range of approaches to poverty alleviation that were exercised by the participants, but which were limited by their circumstances. Section 7.3 will discuss the persistence of relative poverty for these participants within their contexts, and the need to rebalance ways of also addressing the social aspects of poverty through community development, because the existing programmes were focused primarily on income generation at the programme level.

Section 7.4 will discuss some issues associated with social inequalities within the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation that were found within the research. These issues included the perceived influence of strong relational networks in the community's power dynamics and the perceived impact of these within the resource allocation process. It will also discuss the issue within the researched communities of women being targeted more by community development programmes and the aspects of gendered assumptions among the Malay-Muslim patriarchal society. Section 7.5 will discuss the specific Malaysian model of community development encountered through this research.

### **7.1 The significance of multifaceted understanding of poverty among the participants**

There were significant differences in understandings of the Malaysian context of poverty between the local perspectives of the participants in my research and the perspectives of the government. From the participants' perspectives, poverty is multifaceted in ways that include both social and economic aspects of poverty. In line with the extensive literature on poverty (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1), poverty is recognised as multifaceted because it is a human-centric problem cutting across economic, social and cultural aspects. The participants viewed poverty as deprivation in both economic and non-economic aspects of life. They regarded the material aspect of poverty as involving having an insufficient household income and resources. They also described poverty as the efforts and struggles they faced to raise

an adequate income (i.e. connecting their experiences of living in poverty and its causes). The participants' perspectives on how they defined poverty supported the earlier argument made by Anand and Sen (1997) who argue that human deprivation can lead to the inability to have a sustainable livelihood and cause people to experience poverty.

Furthermore, the participants' understandings of poverty went beyond an absolute definition of poverty because their experiences and understandings of poverty related to a broader range of issues and complexities of poverty at the local level and extended beyond having a minimum subsistence income. Instead, their experiences relative to those they lived alongside and in wider society appeared important as well. The findings showed that the participants were concerned about their poverty condition relative to the wider community, based for example on their responses around the issues of resource allocation in which they claimed these had reached less in need people, as well as their comparisons concerning the lack of engagement of the higher income people when compared with the lower income groups (discussed further in Section 7.4). The participants' responses around these issues and complexities of poverty indicate their limited, or lack of, access to basic services and social exclusion as well, reflecting the understanding and experiences of relative poverty within the UN definition of relative poverty (United Nations, 1995).

In contrast, the Malaysian government's definition of poverty particularly used an income measurement to define poverty as discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.1; this was also consistent with the community leaders' perspectives on the definition of poverty (see quotes on pages 136 – 37). The government has been using the Poverty Line Income (PLI) to officially measure the poverty rate in Malaysia, representing the rate for absolute poverty (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2014). This measurement is solely based on the income approach. It has been argued that the government could helpfully also measure wider social and other non-economic indicators because poverty is multifaceted that includes the socio-economic aspects, living conditions and social fragmentation dimensions which were not being measured through the use of the current PLI (Rasool et al., 2011). In addition, the government has been focusing on eradicating absolute poverty since independence. Only recently (since 2010) has the attention shifted to relative poverty, given the significant proportion of people in relative poverty (Gopal and Malek, 2015).

To conclude, the importance of a multifaceted understanding of poverty from the participants' perspectives in this context is significant because it reflects the wider definition of poverty in the literature as poverty includes both economic and non-economic aspects of life, but despite this the Malaysian government focused primarily on monetary indicators to define poverty. My research reinforces the applicability of the wider global debate in terms of recognising the multidimensional and relative aspects of poverty, as it relates to the particular participants from the Bumiputera-Malay people in Terengganu within my study and illustrates important details of how these aspects were reported as being manifested within their everyday lives within that context.

## **7.2 A range of approaches to poverty alleviation were exercised by the participants but were limited by their circumstances**

The previous section discussed poverty from the participants' perspectives as multifaceted and, therefore, including social and economic aspects. In relation to the experiences of poverty, the participants were exercising their agency to get themselves out of poverty (through the various approaches described), but their circumstances limited the options available to them. Their circumstances were related to the position of Terengganu as a poorer region with limited labour market opportunities relative to other states in Malaysia. This, in turn has contributed to the capacity to reduce relative poverty in Terengganu because it is not keeping pace with the more economically prosperous states.

Furthermore, the fact that Terengganu is not an industrialised state makes the labour market in this state more limited for its people (see footnote number 12). The small labour market in Terengganu and the high poverty rate in this state (see Table 3.2 in Chapter 3) showed that the fast economic development in the metropolitan cities like Kuala Lumpur (the country's capital) and Penang had not trickled down to Terengganu as a less industrialised state. Reasons for this include many of the Terengganu population were migrating to those big cities for better job opportunities.

As a result, it is hard to tackle this wider structural issue of poverty in Terengganu despite some good work from both the federal and state government for poverty alleviation approaches (including through community development). The working activities undertaken by participants continuing to experience poverty demonstrate

how structural constraints are challenging to overcome despite individual agency and the existence of these programmes. The analysis of these approaches within this research therefore contributes to wider global debate around poverty alleviation approaches, by understanding the different approaches being used within this context (many of which reflect those adopted by others experiencing poverty in other parts of the world), and the contextual constraints on their effectiveness.

The local experiences of the participants in my research showed a range of poverty alleviation strategies adopted by them that consisted of individual and family-related approaches, and in addition to those, complementary approaches associated with participation in community development. The individual and family-related approaches were identified as employment and entrepreneurial activities, help from families (monetary and childcare), and living frugally (see Table 5.3 in Chapter 5). The majority of the research participants were working or doing entrepreneurial activities as their main strategies to overcome their poverty. Their involvement in the employment sector and entrepreneurial activities was mainly temporary and involved occasional work due to the nature of the labour market (the placement of jobs was mainly short-term, for example, jobs in constructions and buildings).

The findings also showed that half of the participants sought help from families (i.e. financial support and childcare) as an approach to poverty alleviation. Family support reflects the notion of social capital because this support within families happened due to the relationships between them that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefits, as has been reflected in on-going debates within social capital related literature (e.g. Krishna, 2003; Mayoux, 2001). Social capital (together with other capital) can also help alleviate poverty because, through this capital, the people in poverty (including the participants) can empower themselves by mutually utilising the social assets that they have, such as the family support for the case of this research. Within my analysis of the qualitative data, rural participants tended to live near their family members, whereas urban participants did not, and this meant it was easier for the rural participants than the urban participants to seek help from their family members when needed.

Previous studies within the Malaysian context showed that the inter-familial networks among the Malaysian community were strong due to the Asian values

embedded within the community, which emphasised collective values among its members (Roy, 1984). A later study conducted by Wee (1999) showed that Malaysian communities stressed the value of family centredness, including reciprocal help among the members. Those studies suggest that family support remains an important mechanism for poverty alleviation, and the current research findings support them. In this study about one-third of both the rural and urban participants reported living their lives frugally and controlling the family spending as a way to cope with their poverty situation, which involved managing their existing resources well. This strategy was important to ensure that the participants could fulfil their needs relative to their resources and suggested the significance of poverty within these people's lives.

Within my research, participants noted how their individual efforts seemed insufficient without wider support in lifting them out of relative poverty. Since early poverty research (e.g. Rowntree, 1902) it has been recognised that individual efforts may not be sufficient to enable people to pull themselves out of poverty. This has been reflected in ongoing debates within related literature on individual versus structural responses to situations in which poverty is widespread (e.g. Bradshaw, 2007; Jencks, 1996; Tobin, 1994). Developments in society can leave people behind due to inequalities in wealth, opportunities, condition, outcomes and so forth, which require societal responses to level the playing field to create the basis for greater equality and, thus, less relative poverty (Alcock, 2006).

In the Malaysian context, it could be that the Malaysian labour market is not providing enough income for people to avoid relative poverty as the approaches to poverty alleviation taken by the participants that primarily involved employment activities did not seem to lift them out of relative poverty. In particular, larger family size, where participants had many children was interacting with income derived from the labour market, raising the question of whether more services should be provided by the government, such as child benefits and free childcare support. The working activities for these families did not provide the participants who had large families with enough material resources to cover these costs. Meanwhile, some participants chose to take care of their own children rather than work and then have to pay for childcare costs because the labour market did not provide a sufficient salary for sending more than one child to childcare.

The issue above creates a question of whether it is the individual/family's responsibility (i.e. based on the income that they can generate from the labour market) in interaction with the labour market, and/or government responsibility to provide support for costs associated with having families among the Malaysian population, particularly in a situation where the government is encouraging larger numbers of children. This question also links to locating Malaysia within the typology of welfare states as being a residual type of welfare state (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011). In this case, the Malaysian residual welfare state (i.e. the extent to which the state itself gets involved in this act of redistribution is below the level of developed welfare states) focuses on the individual responsibility to meet these costs.

Briggs (1961) argued that the guarantees of a minimum income and the introduction of a comprehensive social contingency to all citizens can help address poverty. In this regard, Malaysia's social safety net system, as reviewed in the literature (see Chapter 3, subsection 3.2.3), is not a comprehensive system because it only covers some aspects of social contingencies for its people. The minimum wage in Malaysia cannot fully address the relative poverty situation among Malaysian society, a situation that has recently been highlighted in many national newspaper articles/reports (see Haika et al., 2019; Radhi, 2021). This was because the minimum wage received could not support the monthly spending of an individual/household, especially for those who live in the cities. It is worth noting that the current minimum wage of MYR 1200 (GBP £210) as documented in 2020 (Ministry of Human Resources, 2020) represents an increase from MYR 1100 in the previous years. To what extent this increased minimum wage will improve the poverty condition of the people is yet to be evaluated.

To conclude, the discussion in this section reflects the wider debates (i.e. over individual and/or structural initiatives) in the literature around the best way to address poverty. The research participants had taken various approaches to mitigate their poverty problem (i.e. the approaches had helped to alleviate the experiences and conditions of poverty), but they still remained in relative poverty because the circumstances limited the approaches that were adopted. In this context, the Malaysian labour market had contributed to the participants remaining in relative poverty. Wider support from external parties (particularly the government) could



help to lift participants out of relative poverty. The following section will discuss the persistence of relative poverty among the participants in this research despite their participation in community development and the individual approaches taken.

### **7.3 The persistence of relative poverty and the need to rebalance the social aspects of poverty through community development**

As discussed in the earlier two sections, poverty is multifaceted and includes both social and economic aspects of poverty as viewed by the participants. They were attempting to tackle their relative poverty by participating in community development alongside other individual approaches. Despite those approaches taken, all the participants remained relatively poor (when using what is a modest threshold of what constitutes relative poverty by European standards). The national rate of the percentage of the population that is living in relative poverty has also increased in recent years (see Table 3.4 in Chapter 3), and the latest released data in mid 2020 show a further increase of this rate from 15.9% in 2016 to 16.9% in 2019 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020a).

Within the Malaysian context, this persistent problem of relative poverty (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1) is being addressed in several ways that mainly involve the federal government's role. The Malaysian government has provided various economic-related activities (largely through entrepreneurial support), including community development for the population living in poverty (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2), but this alone has not solved persistent relative poverty. In addition, the government provides financial assistance to some of the eligible individuals living in poverty.

In relation to community development as an approach to poverty alleviation it is important to understand poverty from the perspectives of the participants who had experience it in order to develop appropriate solutions and responses. Most of the participants in my research raised concerns about existing programmes focusing primarily on income generation and highlighted that the social dynamics of poverty were also an important aspect of poverty, which needed tackling to fully address relative poverty in particular. In this respect, community development is well situated as an intervention to address this aspect of poverty. It means those existing community development programmes must be altered to also focus on the social

aspects in addition to their economic focus. This approach to poverty alleviation through community development is more consistent with the wider approach of community development in the literature that also included asset-based approach and not solely a need-based approach (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

From the findings, most participants pointed out that social inclusion is important, as shown through their active participation in the community engagement programmes (Category 3) and the requests for more social activities to be conducted within their areas. By participating in the social activities, the participants can benefit in terms of their social networks (i.e. social capital), which they considered a sufficient outcome from these programmes because enhancing social connections was a very significant aspect for them based on their lived experiences. A good established social relationship can facilitate cooperation for mutual benefits, and it is also a form of social capital that may help address poverty alongside other capitals (Krishna, 2003). For these participants, even if their economic circumstances did not directly improve due to these activities, some aspects of their experiences of poverty (e.g. social isolation) were tackled because they gained social support and enhanced life satisfaction through participating in the social programmes.

In addition, the participants' lived experience of poverty also included other forms of human deprivation from wider aspects of life, including having insufficient power to influence the programmes that were available to them, in order to make them more responsive to their circumstances, preferences and everyday lives. This was because most of the provided programmes were designed and formulated by those people (i.e. community developers) who had not necessarily experienced poverty. In so doing, those participants reported being unable to influence the programmes and that their understanding of poverty is not being listened to and understood by the community developers.

In this context, developing the capabilities of any individual is equally important to economic development because poverty may involve capability deprivation, and therefore poverty alleviation requires more than just economic transfers. Sen (1999: 87) explains poverty as capability deprivation in terms of the reduced capabilities to make one's own life choices, whilst arguing that addressing this involves developing 'the substantive freedoms he or she enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she has

reason to value'. Hence, addressing poverty through community development also requires developing people's capabilities, because most of the participants were interested to develop this as shown from their perspectives towards the preferences they had in the particular programmes.

Those findings discussed above showed that the persistence of relative poverty and issues around community development participation was significant. There is also an on-going debate around these in the literature (e.g. Ansari et al., 2012; Bradshaw, 2007; Craig et al., 2011). The existing programmes focused primarily on income but taking the social aspects through community development into account would arguably increase the effectiveness, particularly in tackling relative poverty. This means that addressing relative poverty more fully in this context from the participants' perspectives requires a broader focus that includes and moves beyond purely economic support to recognise the importance of enabling those living in poverty to be less excluded from local communities and wider society.

Furthermore, the research reflected how these social relations matter to poverty alleviation in this context because of the complexities of different aspects of these social relationships experienced by the participants, including dimensions relating to power, gender, class, etc. This included those situations where, at the local level, the existing programmes seemed to have some problems as reported by some of the participants in handling these social dimensions in relation to the local officials who were making decisions about where the resources go, which had perpetuated their disadvantaged situation.

In this respect, community development is quite well situated to more fully engage with these social dynamics associated particularly with relative poverty if it starts from a bottom-up approach to listening to and involving the experiences of those living in poverty in designing responses together. Understanding the local and micro relations between different participants in the first place is key to getting to the grass-roots level of poverty and intervening in poverty through community development and therefore, I am arguing for this particular type of community development activities within the Malaysian context as a result of this research.

To conclude, the discussion in this section reflects the wider debates in the literature around the persistence of relative poverty and the importance of the social aspects of

poverty for poverty alleviation. The fact that many of the participants were not only interested in increasing their income but also saw other factors (i.e. social aspects) as equally or more important than just income generation alone is significant in the results and requires attention from all parties, especially the government, to produce a strong and empowered community through social activities. Taking the social dynamics into account unveils a whole range of more complex things that need to be considered (the different dynamics within the local community). Therefore, these issues around particular social dynamics within participation in community development will be discussed in the following section.

In future, the government may wish to consider connecting these aspects together, given their potential to produce strong and empowered communities. Furthermore, how these programmes support and integrate or coordinate with economic development programmes in the Malaysian context is important for further research. In terms of poverty alleviation, this might also suggest that, for these participants, tackling poverty may require more than just tackling insufficient income but also developing these broader aspects of their lives.

#### **7.4 The issues of social dynamics within the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation**

This study reveals that for the 30 particular individuals living in poverty who were the research respondents, issues of power, class, gender, religion, and other social factors were very complex as discussed in the findings (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3). In this section, social dynamics will be discussed as including: the issue of strong relational networks through the resource allocation process and power dynamics within the researched communities; and the issue of women being more targeted for community development programmes and the aspects of gendered assumptions within the researched communities among the Malay-Muslim patriarchal society.

##### **7.4.1 The strong relational networks through the resource allocation process and power dynamics within the researched communities**

It has been discussed earlier in this chapter that participation in community development and poverty alleviation in the Malaysian context is more complicated than it looks. By looking at this process, the findings revealed some wider inequalities that involved relational networks and power dynamics within the

researched communities, and through the research problems, a better understanding of these particular communities emerged. First, people in positions of power were considered to favour the people closest to them in social, relational and economic position in the allocation of resources (i.e. patronage) as claimed particularly by the rural participants. Second, the strong relational networks furthered inequalities and power dynamics within the communities through the resource allocation process. The findings also showed how the participants were responding to these dynamics.

From the rural participants' perspective, some applicants for the community development and poverty alleviation initiatives who they deemed less in need were seen to have received the provisions. Some of them claimed that the applicants for the provisions used the close relational networks (e.g. family networks) that they had with the local officials (e.g. community leaders) to get their application approved, while the community leader was reported as commonly approving the applications due to political interest (i.e. to get political support). This is a kind of exclusionary process because it showed that if someone has a strong relational network with the people in the position of power (i.e. the local officials), they were perceived as being more likely to be accepted; if not, they were considered more likely to be excluded. Such dynamics may be common because some people will have better access to power where power is not uniformly and universally available to all.

The perceived unfairness within the resource allocation process as claimed by the rural participants showed there were potentially unequal influence within the process as people competed over limited resources. It is consistent with the broader literature that this exclusionary process does occur in other places in terms of people in lower social class positions often having antagonisms with one another around the allocation of resources that they tend to use their relational networks for their own advantage as opposed to the wider distribution of resources within society (see Azman and Ismail, 2016; Dola and Mijan, 2006; Walsh, 2012).

In addition, these issues (mostly through political interest) have been highlighted in the national news (i.e. newspapers and broadcasting) with the issues commonly reported, including the unfair resource allocation among the local leaders (see Omar, 2020). The findings also revealed a wider issue of the lack of discussion of social class among the participants in both rural and urban research sites. It is striking that

none of the participants had specifically responded that there were class issues among themselves when they were asked whether or not they had experienced any social class inequalities. Potentially, wider society was viewed as separate and distant but was obscured by more immediate internal class dynamics as reflected from the conflicts over resource allocation among the people living in poverty (including the research participants). These participants' responses potentially reveal the extent to which inequality is embedded in society, given the extent to which redistribution of resources (e.g. social benefits) is off the agenda.

Moreover, the conflict also involved the concept of 'power over', which relates to status and power, as the competition among this population over the limited available resources had forced some of them to play the issues of relational networks and power within the process discussed earlier in order to maximise their chances of receiving some of the resources that were available. From an inequalities point of view, the exercise of power and power relations relative to social class is quite common. Class consciousness turns inward around differences, and competition is between those at the bottom rather than across the distribution of society as reflected in the wider literature.

For example, Byrne (2005) has argued that it is common for the economic disadvantage among the population at the lowest level of social class to create higher competition among them compared to the higher societal level. This process reflects wider concepts on the power theories that show the relation between the size of an individual's networks and the access they can gain which may happen in all levels of social classes, particularly within the struggle in the economic distribution (e.g. Bourdieu, 1989; Gečienė, 2002; Ihlen, 2005).

To conclude, the relational networks issues in this regard are the main points that help us understand the power dynamics within the researched communities. They were also keys to the exercise of power. They are instrumental and also can be used academically to understand the nature of power in this respect. The relational aspects within the community are significant in terms of allocation of resources which showed the power dynamics that might be interplayed within the studied communities. It could also show how the local officials (i.e. community leaders) were responding to the issue of power in a way that they were put into the position of

power, and they were keeping the people who were putting them into the position happy so that they can continue to be in that position.

Through this research, I am contributing to the wider global debate around the social dynamic issues within the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation from the Malaysian context based on the participants' perspectives in this research. These social dynamics are complicated and include the social relationships networks and power while also taking into account other aspects like gender and religion (which will be discussed in the following subsection) in how this process is implemented. In addition, none of the research participants questioned the social structures within their areas as they only asked questions about the allocation of resources within localised places.

#### **7.4.2 Targeting of women in community development programmes and gendered assumptions**

The relational networks and power dynamics also revealed other social factors, including gender and religion in this particular context. The findings revealed that the community development programmes identified in this study were more designed to target women and highlighted aspects of gendered assumptions within the researched communities (i.e. within the Malay-Muslim patriarchal society), which will be discussed in this subsection.

In the Malaysian context, the thesis has discussed that the government has been using community development as one of the approaches to poverty alleviation, targeted towards the needs of particular groups (i.e. in this research the Bumiputera population, and specific groups and localities within this). In relation to gender, this included adopting gendered responses within this approach by specifically targeting women within particular programmes given that women are more vulnerable to poverty (as noted within the wider literature in terms of the ways that poverty affects women more than men both at a global and national level).

For example, Oxfam Institute recorded that globally, women earn 10 to 30 percent less income than men on average in most countries with 700 million fewer women in paid work than men in 2015 that made them more vulnerable than men to living in poverty ((Rhodes et al., 2017). Therefore, most of the community development programmes in Malaysia are gender-based programmes (i.e. based on the common-

perceived characteristics of each gender) that primarily target female participants (Department of Community Development, 2018).

The empirical findings from the interviews supported and secondary data gathered through document analysis of the policy documents and government institutional reports supported the skew in distribution of the types of programmes (see Table 5.1 in Chapter 5). The findings revealed that programmes within Categories 1 and 2 are more focused on women than men as their targeted participants. For example, two out of three microcredit agencies participated in by the research participants provided microcredit loans only for women (i.e. YPKT and AIM), while two out of three programmes in Category 2 are designed primarily for women (i.e. in offering activities such as sewing and cooking classes that the programme organisers expected would primarily attract female participants). These findings support many previous studies in the Malaysian context around the focus of community development programmes on women (see Lee and Choong, 2019; Talib et al., 2012; Teoh and Chong, 2014).

The Malaysian government recognised the problems and had incorporated the gender equality development goal into the Malaysian Plans since 1976 (Lee and Choong, 2019). These gender-oriented programme (i.e. focused on women) were responding to the high levels of gender inequality in the economic sector in Malaysia (since independence) with a small number of females in the labour force and a gender pay gap. The latest available data in 2006 showed that the Malaysian Gender Gap Index<sup>24</sup> (MGGI) for the gender pay gap in Malaysia was 0.2455 while the women's empowerment index was 0.5754 with lower scores in the previous years (Ministry of Women Family and Community Development, 2009).

The gender development equity goal had been mainly implemented through various community development initiatives to increase female participation in the workforce and reduce poverty among women, especially among single mothers in rural areas (Teoh and Chong, 2014). Women's participation had helped increase the family income and reduce the national poverty rate by increasing their household income (Talib et al., 2012). As a result, many community development programmes were

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<sup>24</sup> The figures in this index are represented by the scores of 0.00 (imparity) to 1.00 (parity), which means, the lower the score, the more unequal are any indicators for women towards men and vice versa (World Economic Forum, 2018).



concentrated on women's development, mainly through entrepreneurship as a way for these women to create additional income for their families, given that most of them were identified as housewives (Teoh and Chong, 2014). These programmes were implemented with the support and guidance from government agencies and other NGOs.

Nevertheless, these gendered responses to poverty can entrench the traditional gendered views of women, because these activities encouraged women (in this case, those who primarily saw themselves as housewives) to work or do something through paid entrepreneurial type of programmes within or related to their domestic sphere to add to their family income. The findings showed that many of the female participants helped to provide for their families through these programmes while concurrently, they also played the roles of mothers and wives at home. This gendered approach to poverty fit the Malaysian patriarchal culture in general and the Malay-Muslim patriarchal culture in particular because through this approach, women are more likely to undertake economic activity in the private home as opposed to men.

Despite some social networking going on through participating in these programmes, it could be argued that this approach (i.e. by being carried out mainly in the domestic sphere) has a controlling effect on women in terms of the nature and type of work available to them within a patriarchal system. From the findings, the implementation of this gendered approach implied that these activities fit within the local cultural context fairly well by being gendered in this particular way. It was because this approach provides opportunities for the female participants to fit around their other responsibilities while participating (e.g. undergoing the paid entrepreneurial activities). They were also interested to take part and their participation did not upset the local power relationships (between men and women) too much because this approach is culturally viewed as appropriate for women to do.

On the other hand, from the community development point of view, potentially this approach did not challenge the existing power relationships that keeps women in low paid work and in the domestic sphere because it does not enable women to have wider roles in the wider economy. Walby (1990) argues that within a patriarchal society, women are always seen as subordinate to men in the labour market and at

home which this patriarchal nature is embedded within the society's structure. The findings of this research showed that this approach within this particular context was encouraging the female participants to stay more within their domestic spaces.

At the same time, these female participants were bearing a dual role made up of unpaid domestic labour with low-paid wage labour (because the economic activities that they were doing aimed to generate additional income) that can lead them to be less economically succeed than men. It is commonly argued in the wider literature that this dual role makes women more vulnerable to poverty because women and men participate unequally in paid and unpaid labour (e.g. Chant, 2012; Pressman, 2003; Sarvasy and Vanallen, 1984; Winchester, 1990).

Moreover, whilst it may be good that women are being targeted more for poverty-related interventions given their particular experiences of poverty, **how** they are being targeted in relation to the wider gender norms and gender equality is significant because the current implementation of this approach seems to perpetuate the gender inequalities. For example, programmes to encourage women to be better at domestic chores, or by improving highly gendered entrepreneurial activities (such as the sewing classes to provide women with tailoring skills that can be used to generate income while being at home) within the labour market can be interpreted as an extension of the patriarchal system.

These gendered responses to poverty also link to the aspects of gendered assumptions identified within the researched communities in relation to the roles of women and the types of community development programmes. It is noted that gendered assumptions have been culturally embedded within the Malaysian patriarchal society (Teoh and Chong, 2014). In this context, from the perspectives of many of the participants (including the responses from both male and female participants), they discounted the importance of the housewife role as this role was not perceived as bringing any economic benefits to them and their families. This is because people normally see the activities that have economic outcomes as worthy, while the informal social roles such as cooking and childcare, which are commonly performed by females (in the form of unpaid labour), are perceived as less worthy (Lie and Lund, 2013).

This gendered view that perceives particular tasks such as housework, childcare and so forth as necessarily being part of a woman's role is epitomised by the use of the term 'housewife'. In addition, this gendered assumption on a woman's role is also a perpetuation from the patriarchal system, which had divided the roles of gender based on the family structure where women's roles are limited inside the house (DeSena, 1999; Stivens, 2006). In the Malaysian context, men are typically seen within the traditional patriarchal system as the head of the household (as husbands and fathers), and as being responsible for providing for their families (see Chapter 3, Section 3.3). However, the current system of social expectations is becoming more moderate, given that women can easily access work (and other sectors too), as demonstrated through the findings that many of the female participants were economically active in helping to provide for their families, despite they were doing it primarily within their domestic spaces.

To conclude, community development as an approach to poverty alleviation may be gendered, including in the way that its programmes are designed to be targeting women more than men given that women are experiencing poverty more than men as discussed in the wider literature. In this context, the female participants did find that the programmes benefitted them, as highlighted in the findings (see Chapter 5, subsection 5.2.1). However, when this issue is explored through the gender equality lens, gendered norms and assumptions could be found through the programmes in line with wider gender inequality in a patriarchal society. The participants' perspectives about these issues contribute to the wider global debate around the gender dynamics within the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation from the Malaysian context.

The lived experience of poverty and responses that involved trying to get involved in the economic and community activities (economically and socially active) for these women in my study did not mean abandoning the practice of the current Malay-Muslim patriarchal system (because they were adhering to religious and cultural regulations within this system), instead working within it. Also, the role of women in contributing to family economics alongside the other roles as wives and mothers is very prominent. Nevertheless, the dual role has implications for women's economic success because they are competing with men who are not fulfilling a dual role, which would commonly contribute to women earning less than men. Last but not

least, it is also important to acknowledge the gender distribution of the sample that skewed towards women. Still, the findings here relate to wider discussion of gender dynamics as reviewed in the literature.

### **7.5 The Malaysian model of community development and its potential implications**

In the final section of the chapter, I will discuss the study's findings relative to the Malaysian model of community development. As discussed in the literature, the Malaysian community development model is being characterised as the government-initiated approach to address the community problems, particularly poverty. The research findings had partially corroborated how this community development model worked in practice (i.e. the analysis of the types of programmes participated in by the participants and the agencies delivering these supported the literature as reviewed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2; this analysis also corroborate the secondary data gathered through document analysis of the policy documents and government institutional reports). The findings also recorded relatively similar responses from both the rural and urban participants in terms of the community development activities conducted in Malaysia that used the same approach regardless of the locality (see Asnarulkhadi and Fariborz, 2009a; Selvaratnam and Bee Tin, 2001).

From the wider literature (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3), it is known that public authorities in other parts of the world are involved in community development and there are some tensions within it, such as the tensions of community development workers that are being employed by local authorities or states. For example, in the UK, there were some ethical tensions among the community development workers (that were employed by one local authority) who ended up in positions where they enabled the local people to challenge decisions (e.g. to change policies and so on) that were made by the local government (Banks and Orton, 2007). Other tensions within this include; what state and local government can do to support the community development activities and the relationship between community development and local government.

In the Malaysian context, the government (primarily federal government) had been the main actor in providing all kinds of community development initiatives (e.g. financial capital, training and skills, facilities and so forth) to the targeted community

through its agencies that were providing the initiatives to the community in need (Selvaratnam and Bee Tin, 2001). Income-generation activities were the main type of programme provided, reflecting the agencies' objectives to boost the economic condition of those who participate and, concurrently, achieve the government's goal to alleviate poverty among the Malaysian population. The government agencies became the main community developers. They determined the community problems and their needs, thus providing help, reflecting the deficit-based community development model through a top-down approach in the wider literature (Green and Goetting, 2010).

In this respect, the employees from the government agencies became the community development workers. The research findings had explored the perspective of the community development workers (see Chapter 6, subsection 6.3.3) in terms of the power dynamics that indicate the workers were more likely to blame the local people rather than the government when the provided community development programmes were not fully successful in tackling poverty. Meanwhile, this community development model has a close relationship with the local government primarily in delivering the programmes to the community.

For example, many of the community development programmes designed to address poverty such as the house renovation schemes are being provided and approved by the local government. This kind of relationship between different types of organisations existed in the Malaysian context but some of the participants in this study were raising concerns about this functioned. Based on the participants' responses, the issue of strong social and relational networks among the local officials (who represented the local government) and some residents led to the perceptions of unfairness within the process of community development.

The findings above showed that the way this model is locally embedded relates to social dynamics in a rapidly developing country and can contribute to the wider understanding of poverty and community development. For example, the gendered approach to poverty offered activities that fitted within the local culture and successfully engaged participants but can also be critiqued as perpetuating gender inequalities. In addition, the perceived issue of strong relational networks through the resource allocation process and power dynamics within the researched

communities were deeply rooted within the local embeddedness of this model and Malaysia can learn from the wider literature in terms of developing oversight that via checks and balances around resource allocation (see Chelimsky, 2006; Fox and van Weelden, 2010; Poulsen and Varjao, 2019). This may help to address issues associated with social dynamics through having systems of independent oversight of resource allocation so that powerful stakeholders do not just locally distribute the resources in ways that perpetuate existing relational inequalities.

Furthermore, this currently implemented model of community development could have possible implications in terms of restricting the individuals or communities from developing their true potentials (as assets). It was because this model focuses on developing the economic aspects of the people by providing them with the needed (as assessed by the community developers) access and resources, despite the provided initiatives still keep the participants in relative poverty. Many consider this type of community development (deficit-based model through a top-down approach) has many drawbacks because it discourages the community from becoming independent (e.g. Lovell, 2007; Green and Haines, 2008; Green and Goetting, 2010). From the findings, the research participants wished to see an equal (or more) priority between social and economic-related community development programmes given the positive impact of the former on non-material aspects of poverty and its role in enhancing the participation of those living in poverty in these programmes.

In this context, developing the economic aspects alone through this community development model is not enough because it disregards the voices of the participants (bottom-up approach) and neglects the development of the participants' assets and social relationships (networks) as well. Developing the assets and capabilities of any community is important as it can increase the people's capacity to make effective development because this process involves the empowerment process of the people (Krishna, 2003). Therefore, Malaysia can learn from the wider literature to shift the current model's focus and approach by listening to the participants' responses that reflects the bottom-up approach of community development model through listening to the people's voices, in line with the wider concept of community development.

Moreover, the types of the provided programmes or assistance tended to focus on particular populations. For example, as well as numerous programmes being

designed mainly for women (discussed earlier in subsection 7.4.2), there was also a focus on the Bumiputera (and Muslim) population due to this group having the highest number of those who were living in poverty (both absolute and relative poverty). Programmes were mainly created to accommodate Bumiputera, which has been the case in all national development policies since the first Malayan Plan (see Chapter 3, subsection 3.1.4). For example, many microcredit agencies were providing loans for entrepreneurship purposes only for Bumiputera, such as the People's Trust Council (MARA), *Perbadanan Usahawan Nasional Bhd* (PUNB), Economic Entrepreneurs Group Fund (TEKUN Nasional) and others (Hazwan Faisal, 2020).

In this respect, some of the provided programmes (e.g. human capacity building) are also influenced by Islamically-related elements because the programmes were mainly targeting Muslim participants (primarily the Bumiputera-Malay), such as the Islamic education programmes organised by the Community Development Department (Department of Community Development, 2018). It is widely acknowledged and accepted among the Malaysian people (including the government's agencies) that the Islamic-related elements can be infused in all kinds of programmes and events which have Muslim audiences because the Constitution is legally protecting the teaching and practice of Islam given that Islam is the official religion in Malaysia (see Chapter 1, subsection 1.3.3).

However, the Constitution has guaranteed the freedom of other religions where 'every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and, subject to Clause (4)<sup>25</sup>, to propagate it' (Attorney General's Chambers of Malaysia, 2010: 25). But the propagation of other religions (see footnote below) towards Muslims (including all Malays) is not permitted. Therefore, the religiously related community development programmes provided primarily by the government agencies were aligned only to Islam. The research findings recorded that the participants were participating in various types of Islamic programmes (e.g. Islamic education), particularly in Category 3 of community development programmes. In addition, *zakah* agencies and other Islamically related agencies also provided programmes and assistance,

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<sup>25</sup> 'State law and in respect of the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya, federal law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam.' (Attorney General's Chambers of Malaysia, 2010: 26).

particularly for Muslims, reflecting Islam's influence in the practice of community development in Malaysia.

Therefore, it can be said that this Malaysian model of community development (i.e. top-down government-led programmes) was also integrating Islamic elements within its programmes which could have potential implications towards the interracial and religious (including non-religious groups and individuals) unity and cohesion because this model favours the Bumiputera (Malay-Muslim) population as the potential participants. As discussed in the literature (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3 and footnote number 6), there were many underlying multicultural problems of the everyday lives of different ethnics recorded in Malaysia and this issue is being publicly portrayed in the mass media too (see Gudeman, 2002; Nurhidayah, 2021; Sinar Harian, 2020). The implementation of this community development model may therefore result to these multicultural problems too, but to what extent has this model contributed to these issues would require further and separate research in the future including with other non-Bumiputera groups within the population.

To conclude, through this research, I am contributing to the wider global debate around community development. The broadly top-down government-led approach in Malaysia has only partially responded to deeply rooted social inequalities and dynamics and tended to focus on particular populations (i.e. Bumiputera and Muslims). Nevertheless, the Malaysian model has helped to manage a very rapid economic development cycle. In this respect, developing communities' assets, capabilities and social capital through bottom-up approach can help to equalise the power and power relations inequalities that commonly happen and cause a problem in the development process (Nega et al., 2010). However, given the complications of multicultural and inter-religious relations in Malaysia as discussed above and in Chapter 1, Section 1.3, this process would require further research, particularly when community development might work across groups affiliated with different religions due to these complexities in this particular Malaysian context. Approaches to enhance the system of community development in Malaysia at the local level will be discussed in the final chapter.



## **Summary of this chapter**

To summarise, this chapter has discussed the issues of poverty and participation in community development in Malaysia. It has highlighted five key points on poverty and community development within the Malaysian context that contribute to the wider literature around this topic. First, it discussed the significance of a multifaceted understanding of poverty among the participants, including the social aspects of poverty alongside the economic aspects. Then, it discussed the range of approaches to poverty alleviation (i.e. individual approaches and participation in community development) that the participants exercised. Those approaches showed that the participants did their best to tackle their relative poverty but remained in relative poverty because the circumstances limited the approaches taken. Third, this chapter discussed the persistence of relative poverty and the need to rebalance the social aspects of poverty through community development given the circumstances of the poverty alleviation approaches that limited the participants to tackle their relative poverty.

Fourth, this chapter discussed the issues of social dynamics within the participation in community development and poverty alleviation because these issues existed at the programme level that had limited the participants to fully benefit from the programmes. Those issues identified as the strong relational networks through the resource allocation process and power dynamics and the issue of women were being targeted more for community development programmes, including the aspects of gendered assumptions within the researched communities among the Malay-Muslim patriarchal society. Finally, this chapter discussed the Malaysian community development model and its potential implications as the currently used model seem to have failed in tackling relative poverty among the participants. This model is specific to the Malaysian context with the social dynamics issues embedded within it and favouring certain populations.

These five points, whilst drawing specifically on my empirical research of the dynamics relating to poverty and community development for the 30 particular research participants, have also drawn on my wider analysis of related literature, evidence and government documents. Whilst the experiences of these particular 30 research participants may not necessarily be representative of other individuals living

in poverty in Malaysia, the qualitative understandings gained from the ways in which these dynamics operated for these particular 30 cases have helped to open up new avenues for further research in this context. In the process, it has also established key features of the Malaysian model of community development in responding to poverty within the areas studied, in ways, which contribute to broader international literature. Last but not least, participation in community development activities affects the experiences of these particular research participants living in poverty amongst the Bumiputera population in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu in a way that they remain in relative poverty despite their participation in those activities (alongside other individual approaches).

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Introduction**

This final chapter concludes the overall thesis, and it comprises five sections. Section 8.1 provides an overview of the research findings in relation to the research questions. Section 8.2 highlights the original contribution of the study and the main areas for future research. Section 8.3 provides the policy and practice recommendations arising from this study that may be of interest to policymakers, community developers, academics and other related parties. Section 8.4 identifies the limitation and weaknesses of the research. The last section marks the conclusion of the thesis.

#### **8.1 Overview of the research and the research findings**

This research aimed to explore how participation in community development activities affects the experiences of particular people living in poverty amongst the Bumiputera population in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu. To achieve this aim, I conducted detailed semi-structured interviews with 30 people living in poverty in a rural and urban research site in Terengganu with experience in community development activities. I also interviewed two community leaders and two community development stakeholders, providing views of the local officials who were involved in delivering and providing community development activities for the local communities, including the research participants. The local officials' responses provided insights from those implementing the projects alongside the responses of participants who were in receipt of these. These interviews were set in the context of an original analysis of community development activities as they feature within key policy documents in the Malaysian context. The findings responded to the overall research question and all the five sub-questions of this research, as has been analysed and discussed thoroughly in Chapters 5 to 7.

This study started by exploring the dynamics of the experience of poverty among the research participants (Research Question 1) in terms of how they define poverty and their experiences and perspectives on the causes of poverty, as discussed in Chapter

5, Section 5.1. It was found that the participants with experience of poverty had interpreted poverty as a form of deprivation involving both economic and non-economic aspects, in contrast to the local officials (and the national definition) that viewed poverty as only being a lack of monetary resources. Participants had experienced poverty at different stages of life, with most starting to face poverty during adulthood (after marriage), with their subsequent increase in family size (in particular, after having many children) becoming the main cause that had led them into poverty. Other causes of poverty based on the perspectives of those with first-hand experience of poverty included the illness of household members, divorce or death of the primary income earner, retirement and ceasing a job. This range of family and employment factors were identified as both causes and consequences of poverty that were largely beyond the participants' direct control.

In this respect, the key findings of this study have found that participation in community development activities affected the experiences of these 30 particular people living in poverty amongst the Bumiputera population in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu in three different ways. First, the research found that participation in community development activities, alongside the individual approaches taken by the participants (as discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.2 that addressed the Research Question 2), helped them to get out of absolute poverty, but their relative poverty condition persisted. The absolute economic condition of these participants had significantly improved because none of them now fell under the category of absolute poverty (i.e. individuals or households with a monthly household income of less than the PLI of MYR 950) at the time when the fieldwork was conducted, although most of them had previously been identified as being in absolute poverty.

The individual approaches taken were primarily through employment activities that involved paid (mostly manual) work and their own entrepreneurial activities. Apart from working, the participants also undertook other approaches, including seeking help from families in terms of the monetary help and childcare needed, and it is noted that this approach was more accessible to the rural participants than the urban participants. The participants also engaged in various poverty-coping mechanisms to mitigate their poverty by taking care of their own children (instead of getting paid childcare services) and living their lives frugally.

Meanwhile, nearly one-third of the participants had participated in community development activities as an alternative approach to poverty alleviation specifically through income-generation programmes, identified here as ‘Category 1’ of community development activities in this study (e.g. microcredit programmes). This was because they purposely wanted to increase their household income when they shared their perspectives about what factors influence their participation in community development activities designed to address their poverty (Research Question 3), as discussed in Chapter 6, Section 6.1. The rest of the participants had participated in programmes identified here as ‘Category 2’ (i.e. knowledge and skills enhancement programmes) and ‘Category 3’ (i.e. community engagement programmes), triggered by the reasons that they wanted to widen and strengthen their social networks and to learn new knowledge and skills. Some of them had also participated due to the passion that they had towards the subjects of these programmes and also to fill up their free time.

Second, this study showed that participation in the social-related community development activities was also important, and the participants were hoping for more of these programmes to be conducted as the current focus of the government-initiated programmes was primarily on economic-related activities. This was because the participants also viewed poverty as including the social dimensions and their involvement in the social-related activities had given them social benefits such as increased social and emotional support that helped them to address some aspects of their experiences of poverty (e.g. social isolation). It was found that their participation in all categories of community development activities had generally improved their general quality of life when they shared their perceptions about the ways in which community development programmes tackle poverty and improve quality of life (Research Question 4) as discussed in Chapter 6, Section 6.2. All of them had shown an improvement in their social lives, while some of them (including those who had participated in the income-generation programmes) had also gained economic benefits.

Furthermore, this study has also explored the participants’ perceptions towards the related limitations of community development programmes (Research Question 4). It found that most of the participants thought that the implementation of community development and the broader poverty alleviation interventions needed to be

improved and gave some suggestions for improvement. For example, the participants mentioned providing suitable support and follow-ups for the participants of any income-generation programmes; this could be attributed to the persistence of relative poverty and the need for more extensive and sustained support to tackle this.

Meanwhile, half of them perceived that the programmes (across all categories including both the economic and social programmes) were quite helpful in getting them to tackle their poverty through providing social and emotional support while providing some improvement in the economic condition. However, the provided programmes did not fully address their experiences of relative poverty because they saw poverty holistically, with social and economic activities addressing different aspects of their poverty situation. They saw both social and economic activities as important, while the government was mainly focusing on economic development as shown from most of the economic-related initiatives provided to the community.

Third, this study showed the impact of the issues associated with social inequalities on the dynamics of participation in community development and poverty alleviation amongst the research participants (Research Question 5), as discussed in Chapter 6, Section 6.3. Some of the participants raised concerns about resource allocation reaching those less in need than others and suggested that relational networks and power and community dynamics and inequalities (primarily in the rural site) impacted the resource allocation process. This study also suggests that women were being targeted more for community development programmes but through programmes operating within the gendered norms and assumptions of the patriarchal Malay-Muslim society.

## **8.2 Original contributions and main areas for future studies**

This study has identified new themes that have the potential to contribute to the academic literature. The five themes outlined below enhance the understanding of poverty and how community development can address poverty within a specific context. Primarily, the research adds to the academic literature about Malaysia that is contributing to the wider literature around poverty and community development within this context.

Firstly, my study has contributed to understanding the persistence of relative poverty experienced by the research participants through a qualitative study by exploring how the experiences of the particular people living in poverty and their participation in community development were functioning in relation to the persistence of relative poverty. From a qualitative study point of view, the study provided an in-depth understanding (Boddy, 2016) of participants' mixed views and experiences of persistent relative poverty. The findings showed that some of the research participants were somewhat frustrated about their progress and position relative to the wider society as they were questioning their economic and social position despite their participation in community development and other approaches to tackling poverty undertaken by them.

For example, the participants questioned about the issue of the people who they deemed as less in need receiving resource allocation, which indicates that they were aware of their disadvantaged economic position relative to the rest of society. In addition, some of the urban participants also questioned about the lack of participation from the higher-income people in community development in their area. In this case, the participants wanted to gain more benefits in terms of their economic (i.e. tackling their relative material condition) and social (i.e. being socially included) aspects through the community development and poverty alleviation programmes provided for them so that their condition would improve relative to the wider society. However, the findings also recorded that there were some of the participants who seemed to be satisfied with their current lives because they did not question their situation relative to other parts of society.

Therefore, future studies should complement the in-depth qualitative understanding of this research by further exploring the perspectives among the relatively poor people in Malaysia on how they perceived the persistence of their relative poverty in relation to the wider society and seeking to develop a fuller evidence base around these issues. This is particularly important as the rate of relative poverty in Malaysia has started to increase again (after a modest decrease since the 1990s) in recent years. In addition, most of the attention on poverty eradication in Malaysia has been given to eradicating absolute poverty in previous years rather than relative poverty (Gopal and Malek, 2015). Thus, investing more research work in the perspectives of the relatively-poor people will potentially lead to better outcomes in tackling this

type of poverty whether in Malaysia or across the globe, as their perspectives will help to develop a better understanding of the needs and wants of these people and, therefore, can be used to assist in improving their living conditions.

Secondly, this study has contributed to understanding the importance of social alongside economic aspects of community development activities for the participants. The findings demonstrate that the participants wanted more of the social activities because there were not too many social-related programmes provided compared to the economic-related programmes. This was because these social and economic activities addressed different aspects of their poverty situation, and both aspects are important as the participants saw these as different but complementary aspects of tackling poverty (because they understood poverty more widely as both an economic and social phenomenon). The existing initiatives provided primarily by the government currently put more emphasis on the economic development of the poorer group (including the research participants) in dealing with poverty, with the current focus to address relative poverty (as the absolute poverty among the Malaysian people has almost been fully eradicated as shown from the national statistics of the percentage of absolute poverty in Malaysia in Table 3.1, Chapter 3).

As reviewed in the literature, relative poverty is measured by the material factors (i.e. through income relative to the population) and it also has impacts on the social factors. The economic measure is chosen because it provides a good measure of a range of deprivation that is leading to the individual falling behind the standard prevailing in society. This showed that material factors are important in this concept because they relate to other factors as well. For the case of Malaysia, relative poverty is currently measured through half the median income (MYR 2,614) of all Malaysian households with 16.9% of the Malaysian population were recorded living in relative poverty in 2019 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020a). Based on this official definition and measurement of relative poverty, it means that relative poverty can be officially eradicated when every household in Malaysia has an income level that is above the relative poverty threshold.

From the point of view of measuring relative poverty, the issues of the labour market, regional economic disparities and the failure of the country's economic growth to 'trickle-down' to other parts of the economy and society are important



contextual characteristics that need to be addressed as part of the strategy to tackle poverty. Terengganu has a smaller and weaker labour market as compared to the industrialised states and its per capita real GDP in 2010 ranked 9<sup>th</sup> place among 14 states in Malaysia (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1 and Chapter 5, Section 5.2). Therefore, structural interventions could play a more significant role in helping to tackle economic disparities between the regions. For example, regional economic policies might target labour market disparities through investment in infrastructural programmes to close the economic disparity between Terengganu and the national standard, which in turn may help to improve the context in which local programmes focused on social dimensions of poverty are operating.

Apart from the economic interventions to address relative poverty, social dimensions can also improve the material (economic) condition despite the use of economic measures to set the threshold. This is because poverty (both absolute and relative poverty) is a complex social phenomenon, including a wide range of attributes as reviewed in the literature. Poverty, as measured by income alone, is insufficient to deal with what I have found because the participants viewed their relative poverty as a complex mix of economic and social deprivation as discussed above. In this context, the social dimension matters, within a society being shaped to a reasonable extent by economic forces including structures of economic and social inequalities. This, in turn, relates to the power dynamics of class and to further issues like social exclusion and potentially differential social capital. For this research, the social dynamics issues have been discussed in terms of the participants wanting to feel included within the society, wanting to have better social supports (including family supports and childcare primarily for the urban participants as discussed in Chapter 6, subsection 6.1.3), and many more wants relative to the wider community.

Therefore, the specific interventions that were being applied to tackle particular cases of relative poverty in an individual family need to be designed around the needs and lived experiences of people who are likely to access those initiatives. These interventions can be improved through complementing the social with economic dimension more fully within their programme design, particularly through using the participative nature of community development processes. For instance, developing activities focused on supporting inclusion within the local community, developing informal support networks, and tackling social stigma are examples of

areas for development in structuring government programmes that are based on participants' experiences, and which could involve those with first-hand experience of poverty in developing more appropriate responses.

At a national level, examples such as listening to the experiences of parents in poverty and responding through the introduction of child benefits and better policies around childcare based on parents' experiences would also help tackle structural contributing factors. In this context, community development may be beneficial in its own right (as it has a broader set of aims and intentions that go beyond the economic, including building social dynamics and relationships within communities). This is in addition to its potential role in terms of enhancing those connections within places that may have benefits particularly in terms of developing the economic and material aspects of participants' lives.

Future studies might evaluate how investing more in the social side of community development programmes alongside the improvements in the economic activities could potentially help these groups to address their relative poverty so that both the social and economic aspects of poverty among the participants can be addressed more effectively. Most of the previous research on community development in the Malaysian context has focused on how economic initiatives have helped the people in absolute poverty to primarily increasing their household income (e.g. Al-Mamun et al., 2014a; Al-Mamun and Mazumder, 2015), rather than focusing on the social side of people in relative poverty. Focusing only on one aspect of poverty (either the economic or social side) makes it harder to achieve the reduction of relative poverty given the current circumstances of the relative poverty situation particularly in Terengganu as described earlier.

In addition, there is a way of thinking about this more in terms of alternative understandings of poverty such as capability deprivation, which may fit better in this context. According to Sen (1983, 1985, 1999), the capabilities framework is the best to evaluate the well-being of any individuals or community as there are many reasons (not solely economic factor) that make people's lives impoverished because poverty is multidimensional (see Chapter 2, subsection 2.1.3 and Chapter 7, Section 7.3). This framework could help to understand the problems of poverty and deprivation better because it focuses on what people can do and be rather than what

they have (material resources). Seeing poverty in terms of capability deprivation in the Malaysian context might provide an alternative framework that may fit these experiences of relative poverty among the participants more closely (by listening to the perspectives of their lived experiences that is beyond the material dimension), and this could be explored further in future studies.

This research has formulated a typology of three categories of community development in Malaysia. To my knowledge, there has been no previous formal categorisation of community development activities either from a policy or academic perspective in Malaysia. The typology presented here could provide a starting point for organising and developing future evaluations of community development programmes in Malaysia. Meanwhile, of the three categories of community development activities identified in this study, Category 3 (community engagement programmes) was the type preferred by the participants.

Thirdly, this study has contributed to understanding how the social dynamics issues within the process of community development and poverty alleviation had impacted the livelihood of the participants. These dynamics included the gendered pattern in the community development programmes that were more targeted on women (as a way to increase women's employment) and it is consistent with the wider literature in Malaysia (see Radieah and Sharifah, 2016; Teoh and Chong, 2014). The issue of strong relational networks through the resource allocation process and power dynamics within the researched communities also perceived as included in these dynamics. The study findings showed that the relational networks and power dynamics within the researched communities had led to some groups (those who did not have good relational social networks to the resource providers) perceiving themselves as experiencing disadvantages in accessing the allocation of scarce resources, despite being most in need.

The findings also raised the possibility of internal class conflict within their community as participants tended to focus on internal dynamics in areas of high poverty rather than discussing differences between social classes, and between areas, where the greater inequalities in power and resources persisted. The key criticism and question raised by the research participants about these social dynamic issues concerned the perceptions of the inequitable allocation of resources through these

programmes. Future studies should target these specific issues of relational networks, power dynamics and gender dynamics within these programmes to complement the understanding of this research in relation to these issues, given the significance of these issues within the findings of this study.

Fourthly, this study has contributed to the understanding of the specific Malaysian model of community development through integrating findings and analysis based on participant perspectives with qualitative (e.g. government policy and reports) and quantitative (e.g. demographic and socio-economic) data gathered through the document analysis within this context. This study shows how a model of community development that has persisted since before independence for approximately eight decades (building on the trajectory link to colonialism as introduced in Chapter 1, subsection 1.1.1) is primarily a government-led approach to community development. It delivered the interventions to the targeted community primarily through top-down strategies with the economic development of the communities becoming the main objective within this model.

In addition, despite the top-down design and implementation of this approach, the research findings show that this model is quite locally embedded based on the perspectives of the research participants. This was because there were interesting social elements embedded at the local level identified as the strong relational networks through the resource allocation process and power dynamics within the researched communities. There were also gendered assumptions embedded in this model within this Malay-Muslim patriarchal society. A relative moderate Islamic patriarchal country (compared to other Muslim countries like Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia) has had an approach to community development focused on top-down, deficit-based economic development that has persisted over a long time. Given the persistence of relative poverty in this context, it could be that the way society functions (part of the wider trajectory of society) in relation to community development and poverty alleviation has remained relatively stable over a long time which is an interesting finding that this study is contributing to the wider literature.

Lastly, this study has contributed to the body of academic knowledge through conducting primary research in an under-researched context. Through the sampling strategy used (i.e. the purposive sampling through the access and information

provided by gatekeepers), I managed to get access to people experiencing poverty in Malaysia with experience of some form of community development initiatives. There is relatively limited research about poverty in Malaysia and even less on Terengganu. I managed to get perspectives from those who were living in poverty in a way that gave voice to under-researched communities and their concerns (outlined under the previous contributions above). The use of this methodology provided valuable qualitative in-depth knowledge about the lived experiences of the particular people studied who were experiencing relative poverty in an urban and a rural area of Terengganu and how their participation in community development activities had influenced their condition of relative poverty.

### **8.3 Policy and practice recommendations**

The findings of participants' perceptions that resources were being allocated to the better-off poor population through community development and poverty alleviation programmes led participants to suggest the need for better implementation of these. I would argue that a well-managed bureaucratic system with clear rules and checks and balances for the administration of means-testing of the allocation of resources would improve the persisting issues around the implementation process of these policies. The currently implemented administration system in Malaysia, whether at the national (federal), state or local level is responsible for formulating, implementing and achieving the goals of any formulated national policies (Ho, 1999). However, there are many criticisms of this system in terms of its inefficiency and corruption as reflected through the growing concern among the society because this system has failed to guard public interests (Siddiquee, 2005).

As is currently being practised, the local governments in Malaysia have had full autonomy in managing their own administrative affairs since the 1990s (Ho, 1999), and therefore, issues related to inefficiency or corruption among the local officials may occur because there is no direct supervision or monitoring from a higher and/or independent administrative unit. In this respect, the current system<sup>26</sup> appears to lack

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<sup>26</sup> The regularity of policy and legislation of the local governments are being set nationally by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, but the implementation and interpretation of the administrations are under the jurisdiction of the State Government which means each local government is being directly supervised by its State Government and therefore, the type of supervision might differ from one to another.

much in the way of checks and balances with some important implications for local resource allocation (as demonstrated by some of the research participants). In particular, this study found that the allocation of resources may have favoured those closer to the relative poverty threshold because they have stronger relational social networks and overlapping power relations with those allocating resources.

The issues identified in resource allocation at the very local level suggests the need for a more fully established system of clear and impartial rules that will assist in improving the governance of the local bureaucracy and reduce the potentially prejudicial allocation of the resource perceived in the study. However, it is also recognised in wider literature that bureaucratic means-testing comes with disadvantages including undervaluing the importance of ideas, the lack of flexibility in bureaucratic processes to adapt to local needs and individual circumstances (Fraser, 2009). A blended approach between the local decision-making autonomy and a centralised bureaucratic means-tested structure could potentially lead to a better solution in addressing the issues raised by the participants, particularly if the rules used within such a structure were developed with the participation of those with first-hand experience of poverty. Therefore, it would be worth considering the introduction of a stronger and clearer set of rules and oversights concerning the resource allocation application to ensure that resources are allocated to those most in need.

Meanwhile, the current implementation of community development in Malaysia continues to follow the deficit-based model of community development, which was discussed in Chapter 7, Section 7.5. The majority of the community development programmes are initiated by the federal or state agencies (i.e. through top-down approach) who have put the focus on the group that is more likely to be in the disadvantaged situation by trying to solve the group's problem so that they can have the same standard of lives relative to the rest of society (Sabran, 2003). Tackling the problems among the most disadvantaged group (namely the B40 group) in Malaysia by providing access and resources for them to improve their life quality shows how community development is being targeted in Malaysia. However, this study showed that participation in community development activities did not fully address the relative poverty of the participants, which, in turn, leads to the questions of: What is the best community development model to be used in Malaysia as a way to address

the relative poverty issue? and; How to improve the conditions of relative poverty among the participants (and wider poorer community) through community development?

Therefore, it would be worth considering bottom-up approaches as these may have benefits in the implementation of community development and poverty alleviation policies. In this study, the participants wanted equal (or greater) attention to the social dynamics of poverty alongside the improvement in the economic aspects in the provided programmes. Following a bottom-up approach, it is important to listen to the voices of the participants and their view was that existing social relationships were assets and that social activities can help to strengthen ties within communities. In turn, these provide wider networks, which can help link the participants more to society as a whole and improve social inclusion among the community. The established networks between the participants and the wider society can indirectly lead to enhanced availability of economic opportunities through the networks.

For example, the participants gained wider social networks by participating in community development programmes and improved their emotional aspects. More investment in the social activities will, therefore, tackle some of the wider aspects of poverty, whilst being important in their own right and not only because these activities might have spin-off benefits to the economic well-being of its participants. Through this approach, it also means that the local community (i.e. those living in and understanding poverty) regardless of social demographic diversity (e.g. ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) should be involved through engaging in the process of planning, developing and organising any community development programmes to the targeted groups. These people can provide support and advice on how the rules are set. This process reflects the bottom-up approach of community development by involving and recognising the roles of people from the grassroots level.

By listening to the voices of the people in poverty, I am also recommending a shift from the deficit model (widely used in Malaysia) of community development to an asset-based approach through developing the assets of people experiencing poverty. This is because the research findings have clearly demonstrated that the participants were interested in the social side of community development activities that had some asset-based elements (e.g. the cheerfulness village programme) in the programmes as

compared to the deficit type of economic-related activities. More asset-based approaches to community development will give more voice to the people in poverty and also enable systems to support the types of activities that the people who are living in poverty want to develop as opposed to what the government thinks (about the needs of these people).

The asset-based model of community development emphasises the positive elements that any community has which can be utilised to develop them (community-driven initiatives) rather than the external agencies-initiated programmes (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). Adopting the asset-based approach can help to build on the skills and assets of the participants, which can later help them to realise their own vision for change. However, the asset-based approach needs to be looked at alongside other things. For example, any related policies around this approach need to be considered within the wider context of regional and local economic trends such as the labour market because developing the community's assets alone without external help and resources will not necessarily tackle poverty.

In addition, it is also important to recognise that there would be issues and challenges in terms of delivering the community development interventions in a more asset-based way, particularly in this patriarchal culture. Some of the questions to consider when adopting this approach are; To what extent does this approach enable challenges to this culture where the culture may be contributing to poverty and inequality for some within it? To what extent does this culture contribute to the problems in implementing this sort of asset-based community development approach? and so forth. This is important because there were some issues (e.g. the gendered type of community development interventions that keep women in low-paid work and within the domestic sphere) happening within this community that may be seen as maintaining the position of poverty for these participants, as discussed in Chapter 7 (subsection 7.4.2). This approach of community development has its own challenges which are recognised in the wider literature (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3), but there are very little around this within the Malaysian context and it will be very interesting to look at this further as a future study.

The findings also showed that the participants were resilient in overcoming experiences of relative poverty through a range of approaches taken as they managed



to survive despite the challenging circumstances. They also had skills and abilities that can be developed further through additional economic support and resources in order to utilise these more effectively. It is also important to remove the policy constraints (as discussed earlier in this section) around the process of participation in community development and poverty alleviation allocation. In addition, improving regional economic development in integration with community development could be a good way to improve the conditions of relative poverty among the participants. In this regard, the economic aspects are important because relative poverty stems from the economic as a measure of poverty.

To conclude, applying the bottom-up approach of community development and providing programmes that focus more on the asset-based approaches could potentially help to improve the experience of the relative poverty of the participants and the wider Malaysian population. Through this recommended community development model, it can help to make the material aspect of the people better through enhancing the social relationship and enhancing people's economic opportunities, but it also has a value in its own about trying to enhance social and cultural aspects for people who are living in poverty (that is profoundly about both the economic and social concepts).

However, I also recognised that in the context the study had taken place in, it would involve a change in approach that may be too stretching a goal at the moment. This is because the current Malaysian model of community development has existed since colonial times and the durability of this model might suggest that changing this model is hard to achieve. In addition, the social system (the embeddedness of the social elements within a patriarchal society) perpetuates the implementation of this model further. In this context, the recommended model of community development (with more emphasis on bottom-up and asset-based approaches including developing more around the social dimensions of poverty) might be difficult to implement, not least because this system is well established over a long time.

Given the persistence of this model within this particular type of society, I anticipate the change in approach for this model may take time; how likely it is that this could happen in this society (due to the coalescing of social dynamics issues discussed in Chapter 6 and 7) would require separate and further research. However, focusing on

and improving both the economic and social aspects in community development programmes (and broader poverty alleviation) would represent an important change of direction in tackling relative poverty as discussed earlier. In addition, the distance of Terengganu relative to other developed states in Malaysia is an advantage as it could be an early pathfinder in developing a better combination of the economic and social aspects in community development programmes.

#### **8.4 Limitations of this research**

In this study, having revised the research questions along the way of the research process, I have focused on the dynamics for the individual participants in poverty with experience of some form of community development initiatives. I am not attempting to generalise the findings as representative of poverty or community development in Malaysia, or Terengganu, or amongst Bumiputera-Malays, more specifically. Nonetheless, I recognised an important limitation of this study is that it is limited to the experiences of 30 particular people living in poverty among the Bumiputera-Malay population in Malaysia and the findings should be qualified accordingly.

In this regard, diversifying my sample further (i.e. by studying more people in poverty, with a wider range of identities, circumstances and experiences) may have provided further insights into the dynamics of individuals in poverty and, in particular, the experiences of men. Choosing a wider range of gatekeepers, extending beyond my networks (i.e. my parents and the community leaders in this case) for access and information would have assisted in diversifying the sample. However, the sampling strategy was chosen in response to issues around access within these kinds of communities and utilising these kinds of informal networks provided a basis for novel research in an under-researched area.

However, having conducted this study and gained more understanding of the dynamics within the research areas, I acknowledged that diversifying the sampling strategy and/or changing the approach to include a more ethnographic design and bottom-up approach may have improved the research design. Nonetheless, given research funder time-limits and through conducting the fieldwork during a time-limited visit from the UK (as the place of study) back to Malaysia (as the site of the

primary research data collection) the scope of the study was necessarily limited. The constraints placed on the research led to an element of convenience in the purposive design. The results and analysis are necessarily qualified, in this respect.

Future research based on a longer ethnographic study could assist in studying the power dynamics within the local community in greater depth and address the limitation in this study around participant observations. Nevertheless, it would mean that I have to get a sponsored ethnography from any organisation that wanted to study these power dynamics issues within the implementation of community development at the local level. Therefore, given the fieldwork for the current study is not sponsored and the time constraints for a longer fieldwork time, it means that the adopted research approach was appropriate given the circumstances discussed.

Apart from the limited diversity of my study sample in general, the gender composition of the participants was heavily skewed towards women and was another identified limitation of this study. In terms of interpreting the findings of this study, I decided to use the findings from the male participants (despite their limited numbers) as I am particularly interested in the individual dynamics in poverty for the individual participants. The men's responses also contributed to understanding these dynamics (albeit to a lesser extent than for women) that have been explored in this research. I would diversify the participants further if I could (as discussed above), but the diversity that I had was nevertheless important as I had tried to get mixed responses from both male and female participants. Whilst in practice I ended up with more female participants, this provided qualitative insights into an issue raised in the literature review about poverty affecting women more than men, in general.

Ultimately, what I am interested in this study is the individual dynamics of poverty and their engagement with the community development initiatives and I used the diversity that I had in the sample whilst recognising the limitations that this study had. Having reflected on the approach that I have taken, I think there are some more potential avenues for further research apart from the longer ethnographic study discussed above. I might also do a more structured evaluation of particular community development initiatives and the longitudinal impact that those initiatives have on the people's poverty situation. Another approach might also be a more representative sample of the whole population living in poverty and what is

happening within the process through a more quantitative study. In addition, as a further study, I could have changed the research questions and be interested to study other populations rather than individuals from this Bumiputera-Malay population within these two particular areas and it would be interesting to do this study in other localities and to also consider other ethnic groups.

Furthermore, there are also some limitations identified in the research analysis process. This study was conducted in Malaysia and used the Malay language as the medium for the data collection process. Therefore, there might have been some instances when I had not adequately translated the participants' responses into English due to some language barriers, which could have led to the loss of the real meaning for some of the responses in the data analysis. In addition, doing this thesis within the Malaysian context while being supervised in the UK also caused a challenge given the different cultures and norms between these two places. This required some form of reconciliation between these, which was achieved through negotiation and discussion with the supervisors. For example, the reflection around accompanied fieldwork was supported with the explanation of the cultural norms among the Malay-Muslim community to provide a better understanding among the non-Malaysian readers on how this norm operates within the Malaysian society, and how this was approved through the university ethics approval process.

## **8.5 Concluding remarks**

The conclusion to this thesis draws upon the findings of this research, which revealed how participants experienced and developed approaches to living in persistent relative poverty. This finding has led to a broader discussion about how community development is best designed and implemented in order to address relative poverty. In so doing, the issues associated with social inequalities have been considered within the process of community development and poverty alleviation, particularly the issue around inequitable resource allocation. This study has suggested adopting bottom-up approaches to community development through listening to the voices of people living in poverty and moving away from deficit-based approaches to an asset-based model of community development to help in tackling relative poverty. In addition, this study has suggested that more research should be conducted around the design of the community development programmes

in Malaysia as future findings could contribute to a better understanding of the models of community development in Malaysia. This is because this qualitative study was not designed to claim to be representative due to the methods and sampling strategies used. Instead, through adopting a qualitative study design, the dynamics of poverty experience of the individuals that I have studied through the research were explored through an in-depth understanding of their lived experience of poverty in relation to participation in community development among the Bumiputera-Malay population in a rural and an urban area in Terengganu.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Multi-Pillar Social Protection Schemes in Malaysia

Note: The size of x or X indicates the importance of each pillar in each target group.

| Pillar | Target Groups    |                    |                  | Main criteria                                                                                  |                       |                                                | Programmes<br>In Malaysia                                                          |
|--------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|        | Lifetime<br>poor | Informal<br>sector | Formal<br>sector | Characteristics                                                                                | Participation         | Funding/<br>collateral                         |                                                                                    |
| 0      | X                | x                  | x                | "Basic or "Social pension," at least social assistance, universal or means-tested              | Universal or Residual | Budget/general revenues                        | Federal & state welfare programmes                                                 |
| 1      |                  |                    | X                | Public pension plan, publicly managed, defined-benefit or notional defined-contribution        | Mandated              | Contributions, perhaps with financial reserves | Civil Service Pension; Retirement Fund Incorporated                                |
| 2      |                  |                    | X                | Occupational or personal pension plans, funded defined-benefit or funded, defined-contribution | Mandated              | Financial assets                               | Employees Provident Fund, SOCSO                                                    |
| 3      | x                | x, X               | X                | Occupational or personal pension plans, funded defined-benefit or funded, defined contribution | Voluntary             | Financial assets                               | Bonds and other personal savings schemes, general &/or life insurance, unit trusts |
| 4      | x                | X                  | X                | Personal savings, homeownership, and other individual financial and non-financial assets       | Voluntary             | Financial assets                               | House ownership, personal savings (financial & non-financial assets)               |

Source: Adapted from (Zin, 2012, p. 201)

## **Appendix 2: Interview Guide**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

#### **Group 1: Local Communities**

**Research: Poverty and participation in community development: A case study in Terengganu, Malaysia**

The study is interested in exploring the relationship between poverty and participation in community development in Malaysia. This interview guide shows main interview questions related to participants' experiences and their views with regard to the participation in community development programmes. All participants will be asked the same ten questions, but the probes and order of questions may be slightly amended depending on the participants' interests.

**1. Have you experienced poverty? If you had experienced poverty before, what had you done to overcome the poverty problem?**

**2. Have you participated in any community development programmes?**

- What were agencies organising the programmes?
- Did you actively participate?

**3. Has your life quality increased or getting better from the participation?**

- Was there any increase in the monthly household income or did you gain any new skills/knowledge?
- Did your social support (networking) and emotional support have increased through the participation?

**4. What are the factors that have influenced you to participate or not participate in the community development programmes?**

**5. Are there any inequalities present in your area that affect your participation in the community development programmes?**

- Do power relations exist?
- Does gender inequality present?
- Does social class and statuses play any role in the participation process?

**6. Do you think that the current poverty-related policies helpful to help you get rid of poverty?**

- What are your suggestions to the government or related agencies that they can do to help you overcome the poverty problem?

**7. What else have you done apart from participating in community development programmes in order to overcome poverty issues?**

**8. Have those things that you have taken and your participation in community development changed your life?**

**9. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about in relation to this topic?**

- Do you have any suggestions for the future of community development?
- Has community development helped you to get rid of poverty?

**10. Would you like to be interviewed again if necessary?**

**Thank You for Participating in this Research**



## **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **Group 2: JKKK Chairperson**

#### **Research:**

**Poverty and participation in community development: A case study in Terengganu, Malaysia**

**The study is interested in exploring the relationship between poverty and participation in community development in Malaysia. This interview guide shows main interview questions related to participants' views with regard to the power relations issues in the process of community development. All participants will be asked the same eight questions, but the probes and order of questions may be slightly amended depending on the participants' interests.**

**1. How do you perceive poverty in your area and has community development plays any roles in the poverty alleviation?**

**2. What is your responsibility to cater the poverty problem in your area?**

**3. Have you experienced dealing with the community development providers whether from government or NGO agencies?**

- Did you face any problem when dealing with them?

**4. How about the community development practice in your area?**

- Which agencies are delivering the community development programmes for the locals?

**5. What kind of resources that you get from the central government to solve the poverty issues in your area?**

- Do you think that the poverty-related policies relate to each other and are they helpful?

- Do you need other help from the government or related agencies to cater this issue?

**6. In your opinion, do community development programmes help the poor population to increase their life quality?**

**7. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about in relation to this topic?**

- Any suggestions for the future of community development and poverty alleviation programmes?

**8. Would you like to be interviewed again if necessary?**

**Thank You for Participating in this Research**

## **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **Group 3: Community Development Stakeholders**

#### **Research:**

**Poverty and participation in community development: A case study in Terengganu, Malaysia**

The study is interested in exploring the relationship between poverty and participation in community development in Malaysia. This interview guide shows main interview questions related to participants' views about community development practice by their agency. All participants will be asked the same eight questions, but the probes and order of questions may be slightly amended depending on the participants' interests.

**1. Could you tell me about your community development programmes?**

- Who are the targeted groups of the programmes?
- Which areas are covered?
- What is the participation rate of the programmes?
- What are the problems and challenges for the locals to participate?
- What are the barriers and opportunity in those programmes?
- Do the objectives of the programmes delivered have been met?

**2. Do the policies for poverty work? (If yes, how? If no, why not?)**

- Do you need other policies to solve the poverty problem?
- Why poverty remains an issue in Malaysia?

**3. Does your agency received all the resources needed from the government to carry out the community development activities?**

**4. Are there any problems or challenges that arose when delivering the community development programmes to the targeted groups?**

**5. In your opinion and supported by your agency's data, do community development programmes help the targeted group especially poor population to increase their life quality?**

**6. Could you tell me about your opinion on the future of community development practice in Terengganu in particular and Malaysia as a whole?**

**7. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about in relation to this topic?**

- Do you have any suggestions for the future of community development in Terengganu?

**8. Would you like to be interviewed again if necessary?**

**Thank You for Participating in this Research**

## **Interview Guide (Malay Version)**

### **PANDUAN TEMUBUAL**

#### **KUMPULAN 1: KOMUNITI SETEMPAT**

**Tajuk Kajian: Kemiskinan dan penyertaan dalam pembangunan komuniti: Kajian kes di Terengganu, Malaysia**

Kajian ini berminat untuk meneroka hubungan di antara kemiskinan dengan penyertaan dalam aktiviti pembangunan komuniti di Malaysia. Panduan temubual ini mempamerkan soalan-soalan utama temubual yang berkaitan dengan pengalaman dan pandangan peserta tentang penyertaan mereka dalam aktiviti pembangunan komuniti. Semua peserta akan ditanya dengan sepuluh soalan yang sama, tetapi susunan soalan mungkin akan sedikit berbeza bergantung kepada minat peserta.

- 1. Bagaimanakah pengalaman anda menghadapi kemiskinan? Sekiranya anda pernah mengalaminya, apa yang telah anda lakukan untuk mengatasi masalah kemiskinan tersebut?**
- 2. Pernahkah anda terlibat dalam aktiviti pembangunan komuniti?**
  - Apakah agensi-agensi yang telah menjalankan aktiviti tersebut?
  - Adakah anda terlibat secara aktif dalam aktiviti tersebut?
- 3. Adakah kualiti kehidupan anda telah meningkat atau bertambah baik melalui penyertaan tersebut?**
  - Adakah terdapat penambahan pendapatan bulanan anda atau adakah anda telah dapat belajar ilmu atau kemahiran yang baru melalui penyertaan tersebut?
  - Adakah sokongan sosial (rangkaian hubungan sosial) dan sokongan emosi anda meningkat melalui penyertaan tersebut?
- 4. Apakah faktor-faktor yang telah mempengaruhi anda untuk turut serta atau tidak turut serta dalam aktiviti pembangunan komuniti tersebut?**
- 5. Adakah wujud ketidaksamarataan di kawasan anda yang telah mempengaruhi anda untuk terlibat atau tidak terlibat dalam aktiviti pembangunan komuniti?**
  - Adakah isu ketaksamaan kuasa wujud?
  - Adakah isu ketaksamaan jantina wujud?
  - Adakah strata dan status sosial memainkan peranan dalam proses penyertaan?
- 6. Pada fikiran anda, adakah polisi (dasar-dasar kerajaan) berkaitan dengan isu kemiskinan yang ada sekarang dapat membantu anda untuk menghapuskan kemiskinan?**
  - Apakah cadangan anda kepada pihak kerajaan mahupun agensi berkaitan yang boleh mereka lakukan untuk membantu anda menangani masalah kemiskinan ini?

7. **Adakah terdapat cara-cara lain yang telah anda lakukan selain daripada menyertai aktiviti pembangunan komuniti untuk mengatasi kemiskinan?**
8. **Adakah semua cara tersebut termasuk penyertaan anda dalam aktiviti pembangunan komuniti telah mengubah hidup anda?**
9. **Adakah terdapat apa-apa perkara lain lagi yang ingin anda kongsi?**
  - Adakah anda mempunyai cadangan untuk masa depan pembangunan komuniti?
  - Adakah aktiviti pembangunan komuniti telah membantu anda menghapuskan kemiskinan?
10. **Adakah anda sudi untuk ditemubual lagi sekiranya perlu?**

**TERIMA KASIH KERANA MENGAMBIL BAHAGIAN DALAM KAJIAN  
INI**

## **KUMPULAN 2: Pengerusi JKKK**

**Kajian: Kemiskinan dan penyertaan dalam pembangunan komuniti: Kajian kes di Terengganu, Malaysia**

Kajian ini berminat untuk meneroka hubungan di antara kemiskinan dengan penyertaan dalam aktiviti pembangunan komuniti di Malaysia. Panduan temubual ini mempamerkan soalan-soalan utama temubual yang berkaitan dengan pandangan peserta terhadap isu hubungan kuasa dalam proses pembangunan komuniti. Semua peserta akan ditanya lapan soalan yang sama, tetapi susunan soalan mungkin akan sedikit berbeza bergantung kepada minat peserta.

- 1. Bagaimanakah anda melihat isu kemiskinan di kawasan anda dan adakah aktiviti pembangunan komuniti memainkan peranan dalam membasmi kemiskinan tersebut?**
- 2. Apakah tanggungjawab anda dalam menangani masalah kemiskinan di kawasan anda?**
- 3. Pernahkah anda mempunyai pengalaman berurusan dengan pihak agensi pembangunan komuniti samada daripada pihak kerajaan mahupun bukan kerajaan (NGO)?**
  - Adakah anda menghadapi apa-apa masalah ketika berurusan dengan mereka?
- 4. Bagaimanakah dengan pengamalan aktiviti pembangunan komuniti di kawasan anda?**
  - Agensi manakah yang telah menjalankan aktiviti pembangunan komuniti kepada masyarakat setempat di kawasan anda?
- 5. Apakah jenis sumber bantuan yang telah anda perolehi daripada pihak kerajaan untuk menyelesaikan isu kemiskinan di kawasan anda?**
  - Pada fikiran anda, adakah polisi atau dasar-dasar kerajaan yang berkaitan dengan kemiskinan telah membantu mengatasi masalah kemiskinan?
  - Adakah anda memerlukan apa-apa bantuan lain daripada pihak kerajaan atau agensi-agensi lain untuk membantu anda mengatasi masalah kemiskinan ini?
- 6. Pada fikiran anda, adakah aktiviti pembangunan komuniti dapat membantu golongan miskin untuk meningkatkan taraf kehidupan mereka?**
- 7. Adakah terdapat apa-apa perkara lain yang berkaitan dengan topik ini yang anda ingin kongsi?**

- Adakah anda mempunyai apa-apa cadangan untuk masa depan pembangunan komuniti dan program pembasmian kemiskinan di masa hadapan?

**8. Adakah anda sudi untuk ditemubual lagi sekiranya perlu?**

**TERIMA KASIH KERANA MENGAMBIL BAHAGIAN DALAM KAJIAN  
INI**

### **KUMPULAN 3: PEGAWAI DARIPADA AGENSI PEMBANGUNAN KOMUNITI**

**Kajian: Kemiskinan dan penyertaan dalam pembangunan komuniti: Kajian kes di Terengganu, Malaysia**

Kajian ini berminat untuk meneroka hubungan di antara kemiskinan dengan penyertaan dalam aktiviti pembangunan komuniti di Malaysia. Panduan temubual ini mempamerkan soalan-soalan utama temubual yang berkaitan dengan pandangan peserta berkaitan dengan pengamalan aktiviti pembangunan komuniti oleh agensi mereka. Semua peserta akan ditanya lapan soalan yang sama, tetapi susunan soalan mungkin akan sedikit berbeza bergantung kepada minat peserta.

- 1. Bolehkah anda kongsi tentang aktiviti pembangunan komuniti oleh agensi anda?**
  - Siapakah golongan sasaran aktiviti pembangunan komuniti anda?
  - Manakah kawasan liputan aktiviti pembangunan komuniti anda?
  - Apakah kadar penyertaan peserta dalam aktiviti yang telah dijalankan?
  - Apakah masalah atau cabaran yang dihadapi oleh penduduk setempat dalam menyertai aktiviti anda?
  - Apakah penghalang atau peluang yang wujud dalam aktiviti tersebut?
  - Adakah objektif bagi aktiviti yang telah dijalankan berjaya dipenuhi?
- 2. Adakah polisi-polisi untuk kemiskinan berkesan? (Sekiranya ya, bagaimana? Sekiranya tidak, kenapa?)**
  - Adakah anda memerlukan polisi yang baru untuk menyelesaikan masalah kemiskinan ini?
  - Kenapakah kemiskinan masih kekal menjadi isu di Malaysia?
- 3. Adakah agensi anda menerima sumber bantuan yang secukupnya daripada pihak kerajaan atau pihak-pihak lain untuk menjalankan aktiviti pembangunan komuniti yang telah dirancang?**
- 4. Adakah terdapat apa-apa masalah atau cabaran sewaktu pihak anda menyampaikan/menjalankan aktiviti pembangunan komuniti ini kepada golongan sasaran?**
- 5. Pada pandangan anda dan disokong oleh data dari agensi anda, adakah aktiviti pembangunan komuniti ini telah dapat membantu golongan sasaran terutamanya golongan miskin untuk meningkatkan taraf kehidupan mereka?**
- 6. Apakah pandangan anda tentang masa depan amalan aktiviti pembangunan komuniti khususnya di Terengganu dan umumnya di Malaysia?**
- 7. Adakah terdapat apa-apa perkara lain yang berkaitan dengan topik ini yang anda ingin kongsi?**

- Adakah anda mempunyai apa-apa cadangan bagi masa depan pembangunan komuniti di Terengganu?

**8. Adakah anda sudi untuk ditemubual lagi sekiranya perlu?**

**TERIMA KASIH KERANA MENGAMBIL BAHAGIAN DALAM KAJIAN  
INI**



## **Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **Researcher**

Siti Munirah Mauzud  
School of Applied Social Sciences, Durham University

#### **Research Title**

Poverty and participation in community development: A case study in Terengganu, Malaysia

#### **What is this study about?**

This study is about the relationship between poverty and participation in community development in Terengganu where it will explore whether or not the poverty alleviation programmes through the community development programmes in Terengganu have helped the poor populations to get rid of the poverty problem. This is because there is a small but persistent level of poverty that still presents among some localities and ethnicities in Terengganu. Therefore, this study seeks to find out whether community development programmes have helped the poor people in Terengganu to alleviate their poverty problem, how it has helped the poor people and whether it has worked for everyone. This study also can help to identify what else can be done by the government and all parties to solve this problem because the remaining poverty is an undesirable state of condition that should not have stay within the community. This study involves interviews and participant observations as the main methods of getting information.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

Community development has been used as an approach to empower communities especially the marginalised groups like the poor populations. The study is interested in the participation of the rural and urban poor populations in the community development programmes. It is important to consider whether or not their participation in the community development programmes can help them to increase their life quality because the goal of community development is to empower the communities. The purpose of this study is to explore how participation in community development programmes contributes to a better life quality among the poor populations in rural and urban areas of Terengganu, Malaysia. The results of the study could provide a better understanding of the relation of participation in community development and could also provide a general aspiration to the policymakers that can influence future changes to policy regarding poverty, and community development approaches.

#### **What will happen at the end of the study?**

The results of the study will be presented as a dissertation for a PhD qualification and may be published in a research paper. All written information collected will be retained for 5 years, and the audio records will be deleted at the end of the study.

#### **Why have you been invited?**

You have been selected because you met the criteria as a respondent for this research where you are either belong to a household that has a low monthly income (Group

1), a JKKK Chairperson (Group 2) or a stakeholder from a community development agency (Group 3).

### **Do I have to take part?**

Taking part in this study is voluntary, and it is up to you to read all the information and decide whether you would like to take part or not. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form but you are still free to withdraw at any time during the interview without giving a reason, and no penalty will incur for the withdrawal if it is done within a month from the interview date.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

It is hoped that you will take part in an audio-recorded interview that could last up to an hour (60 minutes). After having read the information in this participant information sheet, if you are still interested in taking part in the study, you will be asked to sign a consent form, and the interview will start afterwards. Prior to commencing the interview, we will discuss any questions you may have and explain your rights.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

This study may have benefits for you where the findings could help to change and improve the policies related to poverty and indirectly help the poor populations. It is hoped that the information gathered in this study may contribute to developing better programmes of community development and improve the participation process among the community. It could also create awareness about the importance of participation and encourage you to participate in the community development programmes in the future actively. Your participation also will help the researcher to complete her studies and obtain her PhD.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

It is not envisaged that there will be any direct risk to you by taking part. However, for Group 1 participants, your participation may be known to the JKKK because they have suggested your names as potential participants and therefore you can decide whether or not to participate. The researcher will do her best to minimise any inconvenience and disruption for you by ensuring the confidentiality of your participation in this research. She will also use pseudonyms to make sure that the reported quotes and incidences are not directly traceable to particular individuals or areas as it might cause harm. You can decide whether or not to take part or stop during the interview with no further consequences.

### **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

During the data collection, your name will be coded as a number on the audio-record at the interview and within the data analysis process such as P1, P2, P3, etc. All the information that is collected about you during the research process will be kept confidential because it will be replaced with fictitious names in the paper so that it will not be directly traceable. For example, Adam will be replaced as Daniel. Your information will be kept in a securely locked drawer, and the electronic data will be kept in the researcher's password protected computer.

### **Who is organising and funding the research?**

The researcher has been funded by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. The sponsor has no influence over the nature or process of this study. The study is being organised by the researcher with support from her supervisors at Durham University. The researcher has been insured by the University for travel purposes.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

The research has been discussed with my two supervisors Professor Lena Dominelli and Dr Jonathan Wistow. This study has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the School of Applied Social Sciences (SASS) Ethics Committee where the ethics have been approved, and the ethical approval has been obtained for me to conduct this study.

**What if there is a problem?**

It is unlikely that you will be harmed in any way by taking part in this study. However, any complaint about the way you have been dealt with during the study or any possible harm you might suffer will be addressed. If you have a concern or a complaint about this study, you should contact the researcher (Siti Munirah Mauzud through email at [siti.m.mauzud@durham.ac.uk](mailto:siti.m.mauzud@durham.ac.uk)) who will do her best to answer your question. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can contact Professor Lena Dominelli or Dr Jonathan Wistow from the School of Social Sciences (SASS) at Durham University (Address: Durham University, 29 Old Elvet, Durham, DH1 3HN); (email: [lena.dominelli@durham.ac.uk](mailto:lena.dominelli@durham.ac.uk) /[jonathan.wistow@durham.ac.uk](mailto:jonathan.wistow@durham.ac.uk)). They can provide you with details of Durham University Complaints Procedure.

THANK YOU FOR READING THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Siti Munirah Mauzud  
School of Applied Social Sciences  
32, Old Elvet  
Durham  
DH1 3HN  
Email: [siti.m.mauzud@durham.ac.uk](mailto:siti.m.mauzud@durham.ac.uk)

## **Participant Information Sheet (Malay Version)**

### **HELAIAN PENERANGAN RESPONDEN**

#### **Penyelidik**

Siti Munirah Mauzud, Pusat Pengajian Sains Sosial Gunaan, Durham Universiti

#### **Tajuk Penyelidikan**

Kemiskinan dan penyertaan dalam pembangunan komuniti: Kajian kes di Terengganu, Malaysia

#### **Tentang apakah kajian ini?**

Kajian ini akan melihat kepada hubungan di antara kemiskinan dengan penyertaan dalam aktiviti pembangunan komuniti di Terengganu. Kajian ini akan menyiasat samada program pembasmian kemiskinan melalui aktiviti pembangunan komuniti di Terengganu telah dapat membantu golongan miskin keluar daripada kemiskinan atau sebaliknya. Ini kerana masih terdapat sejumlah kecil kadar kemiskinan yang berterusan di kawasan-kawasan tertentu dan dalam kalangan etnik-etnik tertentu di Terengganu. Dengan itu, kajian ini berhasrat untuk mengenal pasti samada aktiviti pembangunan komuniti telah dapat membantu golongan miskin di Terengganu untuk keluar daripada kepompong kemiskinan, juga bagaimana aktiviti tersebut telah membantu golongan ini dan samada aktiviti itu berkesan untuk semua golongan. Kajian ini juga dapat membantu untuk mengenal pasti apakah inisiatif-inisiatif yang boleh dimainkan oleh pihak kerajaan dan pihak lain untuk menyelesaikan masalah ini kerana adalah sangat tidak wajar untuk situasi kemiskinan yang dialami oleh golongan ini terus berterusan. Kajian ini melibatkan temubual dan pemerhatian sebagai kaedah utama dalam mendapatkan maklumat.

#### **Apakah tujuan kajian ini?**

Pembangunan komuniti telah digunakan sebagai salah satu pendekatan untuk memperkasa komuniti terutamanya golongan-golongan yang terpinggir seperti golongan miskin. Kajian ini berminat untuk melihat kepada penyertaan golongan miskin bandar dan luar bandar dalam aktiviti pembangunan komuniti. Adalah penting untuk mempertimbangkan samada penyertaan mereka dalam aktiviti pembangunan komuniti ini berupaya untuk meningkatkan kualiti kehidupan mereka kerana matlamat pembangunan komuniti itu sendiri adalah untuk memperkasa komuniti. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk meneroka bagaimana penyertaan dalam aktiviti pembangunan komuniti menyumbang kepada kualiti kehidupan yang lebih baik dalam kalangan golongan miskin bandar dan luar bandar di Terengganu. Hasil daripada kajian ini diharapkan dapat memberi pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang hubungan penyertaan dalam aktiviti pembangunan komuniti dan dapat menjadi aspirasi kepada para penggubal polisi yang diharapkan dapat memberi pengaruh yang baik untuk penambahbaikan polisi-polisi berkaitan kemiskinan dan pembangunan komuniti di masa hadapan.

#### **Apa yang akan terjadi di akhir kajian ini?**

Pada akhir kajian ini, hasil kajian akan dibentangkan dalam bentuk tesis untuk kelayakan Ijazah Doktor Falsafah (PhD) dan akan digunakan juga dalam penerbitan artikel. Kesemua maklumat bertulis yang dikumpulkan akan disimpan selama 5 tahun dan semua rakaman suara akan dihapuskan setelah kajian ini tamat.

**Kenapa anda dijemput untuk menyertai kajian ini?**

Anda telah terpilih kerana anda telah memenuhi kriteria sebagai responden bagi kajian ini iaitu samada anda terdiri daripada kumpulan isi rumah yang berpendapatan rendah (Kumpulan 1), Pengerusi JKKK (Kumpulan 2) atau pegawai daripada agensi pembangunan komuniti (Kumpulan 3).

**Perlukah saya mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini?**

Mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini adalah bersifat sukarela dan terpulang kepada anda untuk membaca helaian penerangan responden ini seterusnya memutuskan samada ingin mengambil bahagian atau tidak. Sekiranya anda memutuskan untuk terlibat, anda akan diminta untuk menandatangani borang maklumat dan keizinan. Namun, anda masih bebas untuk menarik diri daripada kajian ini sewaktu temubual berlangsung dan dalam tempoh sebulan daripada tarikh temubual dijalankan tanpa memberikan sebarang sebab di mana tiada penalti yang akan dikenakan untuk penarikan diri tersebut.

**Apa yang akan berlaku kepada saya sekiranya saya mengambil bahagian?**

Adalah diharapkan anda akan terlibat dalam temubual yang berbentuk audio rakaman yang akan berjalan selama lebih kurang satu jam (60 minit). Setelah membaca kesemua maklumat dalam helaian penerangan responden ini, sekiranya anda masih berminat untuk mengambil bahagian, anda akan diminta untuk menandatangani borang maklumat dan keizinan dan sesi temubual akan bermula. Sebelum memulakan sesi temubual, penyelidik akan menjawab sebarang persoalan daripada anda dan menerangkan hak-hak anda dalam proses temubual ini.

**Apakah kebaikan yang bakal diperolehi dengan mengambil bahagian?**

Kajian ini boleh memberikan kebaikan kepada anda di mana hasil dapatan daripada kajian ini boleh membantu untuk menambahbaik polisi-polisi berkaitan kemiskinan dan secara tidak langsung akan membantu golongan yang miskin. Adalah juga diharapkan maklumat yang bakal dikumpul dalam kajian ini akan menyumbang kepada perkembangan aktiviti pembangunan komuniti yang lebih baik dan meningkatkan proses penyertaan dalam kalangan komuniti. Kajian ini juga akan dapat membina kesedaran tentang kepentingan penyertaan dan menggalakkan anda untuk menyertai aktiviti pembangunan komuniti dengan lebih aktif lagi di masa hadapan. Penglibatan anda dalam kajian ini juga akan dapat membantu penyelidik menamatkan pengajian beliau dan mendapat Ijazah Kedoktoran (PhD).

**Apakah keburukan dan risiko yang mungkin berlaku dengan mengambil bahagian?**

Adalah dijangkakan bahawa tidak terdapat sebarang risiko yang langsung kepada anda sekiranya anda mengambil bahagian. Tetapi, bagi peserta daripada Kumpulan 1, penyertaan anda dalam kajian ini mungkin akan diketahui oleh JKKK kawasan anda kerana nama anda telah dicadangkan oleh mereka sebagai bakal peserta dan dengan itu anda bebas memutuskan samada ingin mengambil bahagian atau sebaliknya. Penyelidik akan berusaha sebaiknya untuk meminimumkan sebarang gangguan atau kesulitan dengan memastikan kerahsiaan penyertaan anda dalam kajian ini. Beliau juga akan menggunakan nama samaran untuk memastikan kesemua maklumat daripada anda tidak dapat dikesan secara langsung kepada mana-mana individu untuk mengelakkan sebarang bahaya. Anda boleh memutuskan

samada ingin mengambil bahagian atau sebaliknya atau berhenti ketika sesi temubual tanpa dikenakan sebarang tindakan.

**Adakah penglibatan saya dalam kajian ini akan dirahsiakan?**

Sewaktu proses pengumpulan data, nama anda akan dikodkan dengan nombor pada rakaman suara bagi temubual dan sepanjang proses analisis data seperti P1, P2, P3 dan sebagainya. Semua maklumat yang diperolehi daripada anda sepanjang kajian ini akan dirahsiakan kerana butiran diri anda akan digantikan kepada nama samaran di dalam laporan akhir agar identiti anda tidak akan dapat dijejaki secara langsung. Sebagai contoh, nama sebenar Adam akan digantikan dengan Daniel. Maklumat anda akan disimpan dengan selamat di dalam laci yang berkunci dan data elektronik pula akan disimpan di dalam komputer penyelidik dengan kata laluan.

**Siapakah yang menganjurkan dan menaja kajian ini?**

Penyelidik telah ditaja oleh Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia (MOHE). Namun, pihak penaja tidak mempunyai apa-apa pengaruh ke atas perjalanan dan proses kajian ini. Kajian ini dianjurkan oleh penyelidik dan para penyelia beliau di Durham Universiti. Penyelidik juga telah dilindungi dengan insuran oleh pihak Universiti bagi tujuan perjalanan menjalankan kajian.

**Siapakah yang telah menilai kajian ini?**

Kajian ini telah dibincangkan dengan dua penyelia penyelidik iaitu Profesor Lena Dominelli dan Dr. Jonathan Wistow. Kajian ini telah dinilai dan diberikan pandangan yang sepatutnya oleh pihak Jawatankuasa Etika daripada Pusat Pengajian Sains Sosial Gunaan (SASS) di mana kelulusan etika telah diberikan dan penyelidik telah mendapat kelulusan etika bagi menjalankan kajian ini.

**Bagaimana sekiranya terdapat apa-apa masalah?**

Adalah sangat tidak dijangkakan anda akan mengalami masalah dengan menyertai kajian ini. Bagaimanapun, sebarang aduan berkaitan dengan cara anda dilayan sewaktu proses temubual atau sebarang bahaya yang dijangkakan sepanjang proses kajian ini boleh dilaporkan. Sekiranya terdapat sebarang kebimbangan atau aduan tentang kajian ini, anda bolehlah menghubungi penyelidik (Siti Munirah Mauzud melalui emel [siti.m.mauzud@durham.ac.uk](mailto:siti.m.mauzud@durham.ac.uk)) di mana beliau akan berusaha sebaiknya untuk menjawab soalan anda. Sekiranya anda masih tidak berpuas hati dan ingin membuat aduan secara rasmi, anda boleh menghubungi Profesor Lena Dominelli atau Dr. Jonathan Wistow daripada Pusat Pengajian Sains Sosial Gunaan (SASS), Durham Universiti (Alamat: Durham University, 29 Old Elvet, Durham, DH1 3HN); (emel: [lena.dominelli@durham.ac.uk](mailto:lena.dominelli@durham.ac.uk) / [jonathan.wistow@durham.ac.uk](mailto:jonathan.wistow@durham.ac.uk)). Mereka akan membantu anda dengan butiran tentang prosedur aduan Durham Universiti.

TERIMA KASIH KERANA MEMBACA HELAIAN PENERANGAN  
RESPONDEN INI

Siti Munirah Mauzud  
School of Applied Social Sciences  
32, Old Elvet  
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DH1 3HN, United Kingdom  
Emel: [siti.m.mauzud@durham.ac.uk](mailto:siti.m.mauzud@durham.ac.uk)

## Appendix 4: Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM

#### Title of project:

**Poverty and participation in community development: A case study in Terengganu, Malaysia**

**Name of Researcher: Siti Munirah Mauzud**

Please Initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated 20/10/2017 for above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time in between the interview session to a month after the interview date without giving any reason and no penalty will incur for the withdrawal.
3. I understand that some of the information I give in my interview may be looked at by Durham University staff. However, I understand that I will be identifiable from this information.
4. I consent to the interview being audio-recorded.
5. I consent the possible use of anonymised quotes in the final dissertation, and any subsequent publications or conferences.
6. I agree to take part in the above study.

☐☐☐☐☐☐

.....

| Name of participant | Date | Signature |
|---------------------|------|-----------|
|---------------------|------|-----------|

7. I have explained this study to the above participant and have sought his/her understanding of informed consent.

Name of researcher etc.

.....

| Name of researcher | Date | Signature |
|--------------------|------|-----------|
|--------------------|------|-----------|

**Consent form (Malay version)**

**BORANG KEIZINAN PESERTA**

**Tajuk Penyelidikan: Kemiskinan dan Penyertaan Dalam Pembangunan Komuniti: Kajian Kes di Terengganu, Malaysia**

**Nama Penyelidik: Siti Munirah Mauzud**

Sila tandakan pada kotak

1. Saya pasti bahawa saya telah membaca dan memahami helaian penerangan responden yang bertarikh 20/10/2017 bagi kajian ini. Saya juga telah diberikan peluang untuk mempertimbangkan semua maklumat serta bertanya soalan dan soalan tersebut telah dijawab dengan memuaskan. ☐
2. Saya faham bahawa penyertaan saya adalah bersifat sukarela di mana saya bebas untuk menarik diri pada bila-bila masa dalam tempoh temubual berlangsung sehingga sebulan selepas tarikh temubual tanpa memberi sebarang sebab dan tidak akan dikenakan sebarang denda. ☐
3. Saya faham bahawa maklumat-maklumat tertentu yang saya berikan melalui temubual ini berkemungkinan akan dilihat oleh kakitangan dari Durham Universiti. Bagaimanapun, saya faham bahawa saya mungkin boleh dikenali melalui maklumat tersebut. ☐
4. Saya mengizinkan temubual ini dirakamkan secara audio. ☐
5. Saya mengizinkan penggunaan petikan daripada temubual saya dengan menyamakan identiti saya dalam tesis akhir dan mana-mana penerbitan artikel atau persidangan. ☐
6. Saya bersetuju untuk mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. ☐

.....

|              |        |             |
|--------------|--------|-------------|
| Nama peserta | Tarikh | Tandatangan |
|--------------|--------|-------------|

7. Saya telah menjelaskan tentang kajian ini kepada peserta seperti nama di atas dan telah mendapatkan persetujuan beliau bagi borang keizinan peserta ini.

Nama penyelidik, dll.

.....

|                 |        |             |
|-----------------|--------|-------------|
| Nama penyelidik | Tarikh | Tandatangan |
|-----------------|--------|-------------|



**Appendix 5: Confidentiality clause form (Guardian)**

**CONFIDENTIALITY CLAUSE FROM RESEARCHER'S MALE  
GUARDIAN WHO WILL ACCOMPANY HER DURING DATA  
COLLECTION PROCESSES**

I, ..... will be accompanying Siti Munirah Mauzud during her interview sessions, but I will maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of each participant she talks to where I will not reveal any of the findings or any other information pertaining to the research.

Thank you.

Yours Sincerely,

.....

Name:

Date:

Relation to the researcher:

## **Appendix 6: Confidentiality clause form (Gatekeepers)**

### **CONFIDENTIALITY CLAUSE FROM THE GATEKEEPERS THAT HAD SUGGESTED THE NAMES OF THE LOCALS AS POTENTIAL CANDIDATES TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH**

I, ..... had suggested the names of the locals as potential candidates for this research to the researcher, Siti Munirah Mauzud, but I will not disclose any identities of the participants that I might be able to identify from this research to any parties to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

Thank you.

Yours Sincerely,

.....

Name:

Date:

Position:

## Appendix 7: Research Ethics and Risk Assessment Approval

### Ethical Approval: SOC-2020-11-25T00\_32\_34-tghn26

Ethics <no-reply@sharepointonline.com>

Fri 04/12/2020 02:45

**To:** MAUZUD, MUNIRAH S.M. <siti.m.mauzud@durham.ac.uk>

**Cc:** SOCIOLOGY-PGRADMIN, S S. <sociology.pgradmin@durham.ac.uk>

**[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Do not open links or attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe. Otherwise, use the Report Message button or report [to phishing@durham.ac.uk](mailto:to_phishing@durham.ac.uk).**

Please do not reply to this email.

Dear Munirah,

The following project has received ethical approval:

Project Title: *Poverty and participation in community development: A case study in Terengganu, Malaysia;*

Start Date: *01 October 2016;*

End Date: *04 December 2020;*

Reference: *SOC-2020-11-25T00\_32\_34-tghn26*

Date of ethical approval: *03 December 2020.*

#### **30/11/2020: Approved by Tiago (e-mail)**

Comment - approved subject to clarification of what JKKK stands for in the project summary form.

Please be aware that if you make any significant changes to the design, duration or delivery of your project, you should contact your department ethics representative for advice, as further consideration and approval may then be required.

If you have any queries regarding this approval or need anything further, please [contactsociology.pgradmin@durham.ac.uk](mailto:contactsociology.pgradmin@durham.ac.uk)

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If you have any queries relating to the ethical review process, please contact your supervisor (where applicable) or departmental ethics representative in the first instance. If you have any queries relating to the online system, please contact [research.policy@durham.ac.uk](mailto:research.policy@durham.ac.uk).

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