

Mapping Malaysia's Poverty Alleviation Strategy: A Typological Analysis of the Malaysia Plans

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Abstract

Poverty eradication remains a central priority in Malaysia's development planning, with poverty alleviation programmes embedded in national strategies since the inception of the New Economic Policy in the 1970s. Examining how these interventions are framed within long-term planning documents is vital to understanding the strategic priorities that shape Malaysia's evolving response to poverty. However, research on Malaysia's poverty strategy lacks a systematic classification of programme types, limiting the ability to assess coherence, evolution, and institutional adaptation over time. This study aims to develop a typology of Malaysia's poverty alleviation programmes by examining their representation in national development plans. The study identifies eight strategic categories and nineteen codes based on qualitative content analysis of 216 excerpts from the Second to Twelfth Malaysia Plans and their Mid-Term Reviews. These categories are analysed to reveal how Malaysia's poverty response has shifted from structuralist models toward more individualised and empowerment-based interventions. Findings show that while infrastructure and human capital development remain dominant, recent strategies have begun incorporating microfinance, livelihood insurance, and limited social protection. Critical gaps remain, particularly in market integration, risk protection, and policy integration. The analysis also reveals strong institutional path dependency, with legacy agencies and rural-biased interventions persisting across policy eras. The typology provides a foundational lens to analyse how Malaysia's poverty alleviation strategies have evolved across policy eras. It offers critical insights for rebalancing longstanding structural interventions with emerging needs, guiding more responsive, inclusive, and contextsensitive poverty policy development.

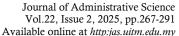
Keywords: Poverty alleviation, Programme typology, Institutional frameworks, Malaysia Plans, Poverty governance

INTRODUCTION

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Poverty continues to be a global challenge that undermines economic growth, social stability, and human well-being. Governments worldwide have implemented various poverty alleviation programmes to address this issue.

While the proportion of people in extreme poverty declined significantly from 36% in 1990 to below 10% in 2018 (Gu et al., 2022), recent global crises, notably the COVID-19 pandemic, have reversed much of this progress, pushing an additional 75 to 95 million people into poverty in 2022 relative to pre-pandemic forecasts (Mahler et al., 2022). Although poverty fell by 13 million in 2023, the reduction was uneven, with poverty levels remaining elevated in low-income regions (UN, 2024). Crespo Cuaresma





et al. (2018) project that over 300 million people may still live in extreme poverty by 2030 if policy responses remain inadequate. These persistent and uneven trends underscore the urgency of inclusive and equitable strategies that promote economic growth and enhance resilience among vulnerable populations.

Malaysia is similarly affected by these global disruptions. The COVID-19 crisis revealed the fragility of its poverty reduction gains, particularly for urban and informal sector workers (Harith & Jamil, 2021; Khudaykulova et al., 2022; UNICEF Malaysia, 2024). Rahman et al. (2022) projected that poverty incidence could rise from 6.4% to 8.4%, potentially adding 670,000 poor households by 2025. In response, successive national development plans, from the New Economic Policy (1971–1990) to the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, have incorporated various poverty alleviation programmes (Karim, 1995; EPU, 2021; Ministry of Economy, 2023). Earlier Malaysian Plans primarily focused on rural development and socioeconomic restructuring, whereas more recent strategies have increasingly incorporated inclusive growth and social protection elements (Koutronas, 2020). However, despite this breadth of interventions, a pressing need remains to classify these programmes systematically to trace patterns, identify thematic gaps, and assess long-term policy continuity (Siwar, 2006; Mohd Nor & Khelghat-Doost, 2019; Sabran, 2023).

This article addresses that need by conducting a typological analysis of Malaysia's poverty alleviation programmes based on the Malaysia Plans (MP), the country's primary development policy documents. The Malaysia Plan, which was introduced in 1966 (Government of Malaysia, 1965), is a key government document that outlines national development policies and strategies for five years. These plans have been crucial in shaping Malaysia's economic and social development. Over time, they have adapted to meet emerging national priorities, including poverty eradication, while aligning with long-term development visions. The strategies outlined in the MP are incorporated into the annual budget presented by the Finance Minister. Using qualitative content analysis, the study identifies distinct programme typologies to track shifts in strategic focus, thematic priorities, and institutional approaches. The typology provides a structured lens to assess coherence across programme types, monitor shifts in strategic focus, and highlight overlooked areas in poverty policy planning. Such classification enables policymakers to evaluate alignment with policy objectives, reduce redundancy, and design more adaptive and targeted interventions.



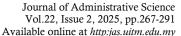
LITERATURE REVIEW

Poverty alleviation programmes are defined in various ways, reflecting differences in purpose and approach. The World Bank (2000) views them as crisis-response tools such as food aid, shelter, and cash transfers. Ravallion (2016) expands this to include redistributive policies that enhance access to basic services. Narayan and Petesch (2002) frame them as coordinated institutional efforts to address poverty systematically. Riddell and Robinson (1992) conceptualise poverty alleviation primarily through income growth and employment creation, reflecting a productivity-oriented approach to poverty reduction. These perspectives highlight the multidimensional nature of such programmes, spanning humanitarian relief, structural reform, and economic empowerment.

Malaysia's poverty intervention efforts began with the New Economic Policy (NEP) in the 1970s, introduced after the 1969 racial unrest to eradicate poverty and restructure society (Malaysia, 1971; Gomez & Jomo, 1999). The NEP prioritised rural development, agricultural support, and broader economic participation (Jomo, 2005; Yaakub et al., 2022). Over time, successive Malaysia Plans expanded this focus to include income-generating programmes, cash transfers, and housing schemes targeting the B40 group (EPU, 2010; Othman et al., 2023), reflecting the redistribution policies that Malaysia has implemented since gaining independence (Ravallion, 2016). These interventions helped reduce absolute poverty from 49.3% in 1970 to 6.2% in 2022 (DOSM, 2023), yet hardcore poverty and emerging vulnerabilities persist (Ridzuan et al., 2024). In response, the Twelfth Malaysia Plan adopts a multidimensional approach, through strategies focused on income, service access, and cost-of-living issues (EPU, 2021), aligning with SDG 1 to halve global poverty by 2030 (UN, 2015).

Poverty Alleviation Strategies in Developing Countries

Most developing countries adopted five main strategies: stimulating economic growth, economic and institutional reforms, promoting microfinance institutions and programmes, improving the marketing systems, and cash or income transfer programmes (Ayoo, 2022). Stimulating economic growth remains vital for poverty reduction, especially in agriculture-dependent developing countries. Agricultural development enhances income and food security (Narayan & Petesch, 2002; de Janvry

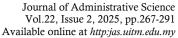




& Sadoulet, 2010; World Bank, 2017). Countries like Ethiopia and Kenya have adopted irrigation and intensification to combat rural poverty, though high costs limit access for poor households (Republic of Kenya, 2010; World Bank, 2017; Adebayo et al., 2018; Adetoro et al., 2022). Tailored support, such as microfinance, facilitates the adoption of productive technologies (Mariyono, 2019; Glover, 2022), with initiatives like Bangladesh's Grameen Bank and Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) improving income and employment (Khandker et al., 1998). Infrastructure investments such as roads, electricity, and services boost rural productivity and market access (Wang & Sun, 2016; Page & Pande, 2018), while Xiao et al. (2022) arguing that electrification improves income distribution. These efforts must, however, be embedded in broader development strategies to maximise impact (Kaiser & Barstow, 2022).

Economic and institutional reforms are crucial for removing the structural barriers that hinder poverty reduction. Such reforms promote growth, improve governance, and enhance accountability, expanding opportunities for low-income populations (Arndt et al., 2016; Page & Pande, 2018). Priority areas include land tenure reform, curbing resource mismanagement, and promoting inclusive decision-making (World Bank Group, 2015). For example, systemic change is critical for sustainable agricultural development (Clark, 2002) in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, Indonesia's experience with decentralisation and local-level reform demonstrates how enhanced governance can improve service delivery and responsiveness to the needs of poor communities (World Bank, 2001). Empowered local governments can better identify poor households and tailor poverty strategies (Narayan, 2002). In parallel, fiscal reforms such as tax restructuring are needed to expand pro-poor fiscal space and ensure sustainable social spending (Ayoo, 2022).

Microfinance institutions play a vital role in poverty reduction, especially in rural and underserved areas with limited access to formal banking (Vatta, 2003; Imai et al., 2010). Small loans and financial services to low-income households enable small-scale entrepreneurs and farmers to sustain and expand their livelihoods (Boltana et al., 2023; Kayongo & Mathiassen, 2023). Beyond financial access, microfinance supports grassroots entrepreneurship by offering minimal collateral requirements, flexible repayment terms, and reduced transaction costs (Ojong & Simba, 2019; Liu et al., 2021; Ayoo, 2022). A prominent example is Bangladesh's Grameen Bank, which has helped raise household incomes and empower rural women through targeted microcredit initiatives (Sachs, 2005). Over time, increased access to microfinance has also been





associated with a decline in income inequality, highlighting its long-term value in promoting inclusive economic development (Miled et al., 2022).

Effective marketing systems are crucial for enabling low-income producers in developing countries to expand output and increase earnings. Karnani (2017) and Ranjan (2017) show that smallholders frequently lose income due to weak bargaining power and exploitative intermediaries. In addition, Ayoo (2022) highlights how poor infrastructure and inefficient markets deepen rural poverty. To address this, Vatta (2003) argues that rural road development can enhance market access and allow farmers to command better prices. However, infrastructure alone is insufficient, as productivity gains must be paired with redistributive mechanisms to ensure that low-income households benefit more equitably from market participation (Page & Pande, 2018). Moreover, Sachs (2005) and the World Bank (2015) underscore that resolving market inefficiencies is central to poverty alleviation, while Otsuka and Ali (2020) stress that sustained government investment is required to catalyse change.

In addition, market access interventions, including contract farming and output price information, demonstrate substantial socioeconomic and food security benefits (Villar et al., 2023; Marion et al., 2024). Online platforms further expand farmers' market reach and income potential (Ma et al., 2024). Similarly, collective action is critical; producer groups help African smallholders tap into new value chains and overcome market distortions (Markelova & Mwangi, 2010). When empowered with accurate market information, small-scale farmers can make informed decisions and improve their market positioning (Van Crowder, 1997).

Cash transfer programmes are widely adopted in developing countries to reduce poverty and vulnerability, particularly among children and low-income families. In Sri Lanka, they have significantly reduced child poverty and improved school attendance (Kumara & Pfau, 2011), with similar positive impacts reported in South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, and Chile (World Bank Group, 2015; Hanna & Olken, 2018; Page & Pande, 2018). Beyond short-term benefits, long-term outcomes include enhanced resilience in Jamaica and reduced child mortality in Brazil (Neves et al., 2022; Oconnor, 2024). Nonetheless, concerns about their fiscal sustainability and potential effects on business incentives remain (Baird et al., 2024; Grimm et al., 2024). However, Bangladesh demonstrates the feasibility of domestically funded cash transfer programs (Ayoo, 2022). Therefore, with adequate financial and institutional support, cash transfers are vital to effective social protection systems.



MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper employed qualitative content analysis to examine how poverty alleviation programmes are represented in Malaysia's primary national development policy documents, specifically the Second to Twelfth Malaysia Plans and their respective Mid-term Review Reports. The analysis focused on poverty eradication, following the NEP's original objective, and excluded the restructuring of society. Guided by Krippendorff's (2004) content analysis methodology and the directed content analysis approach of Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the unit of analysis was the excerpt for any sentence, paragraph, or segment that explicitly or implicitly referenced a poverty alleviation initiative. Excerpts were selected based on contextual integrity and thematic relevance. These units were coded to identify recurring strategies, implementation approaches, and programme typologies across policy cycles.

Following Krippendorff's (2004, p. 111) guidelines, the study applied stratified and purposive sampling to ensure relevance and representativeness. Stratified sampling organised documents by edition, and only sections referencing poverty were analysed to capture longitudinal change. Purposive sampling then targeted text segments detailing specific interventions, institutional mechanisms, or policy strategies, aligned with the study's research questions (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 111). The coding began with five predefined categories (Ayoo, 2022), with four new ones added inductively as the analysis progressed, following Krippendorff's rule-guided but reflexive approach. Additionally, one of the predefined categories was excluded from the inductive process, resulting in a final total of eight categories. Each excerpt was assigned a code and strategic category, forming a structured typology that enabled a systematic, empirical interpretation of Malaysia's evolving poverty programme landscape.

RESULTS

The Malaysia Plans were analysed and organised into 19 codes, which were further grouped into eight topical categories: basic infrastructure and amenities, human capital development, stimulating economic growth, agricultural and land development, promoting microfinance schemes, cash and income transfer programmes, improving marketing systems, and social protection. Categories were developed through analysing 216 excerpts from the Second to Twelfth Malaysia Plans, based on the orientation of poverty alleviation programs. The resulting typology was then examined concerning



both individual Malaysia Plans and broader policy eras (see Table 1 and Table 2). The distribution of excerpts across the eight categories is are basic infrastructure and amenities (56, 25.9%); human capital development (51, 23.6%); stimulating economic growth (39, 18.1%); agricultural and land development (27, 12.5%); promoting microfinance schemes (25, 11.6%); cash and income transfer programmes (9, 4.2%); improving marketing systems (5, 2.3%); and social protection (4, 1.9%).

Table 1: Frequency of Programme Categories Across the Malaysia Plan

Dua anamana Cata a ana			Exc	erpt ac	ccordin	ng to N	//alays	ia Plaı	n (n =	216 exc	erpts)	
Programme Category	Total	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Basic Infrastructure and Amenities	56	6	2	3	15	1	3	5	4	2	4	11
Human Capital Development	51	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	4	13	1	25
Stimulating Economic Growth	39	1	0	2	1	0	4	6	4	5	0	16
Agricultural and Land Development	27	3	1	5	12	0	0	0	1	4	0	1
Promoting Microfinance Scheme	25	3	0	0	2	0	3	6	4	1	1	5
Cash/ Income Transfer Programme	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8
Improving the Marketing Systems	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
Social Protection	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4

Table 2: Frequency of Programme Categories Across Policy Era

	Ex	cerpt	Excerpt	according	to policy e	ra (n = 216	excerpt)
Programme Category	Total	Percent (%)	NEP	NDP	NVP	NEM	SPV
Basic Infrastructure and Amenities	56	25.9	26	4	9	6	11
Human Capital Development	51	23.6	1	0	11	14	25
Stimulating Economic Growth	39	18.1	4	4	10	5	16
Agricultural and Land Development	27	12.5	21	0	1	4	2
Promoting Microfinance Scheme	25	11.6	5	3	10	2	5
Cash/ Income Transfer Programme	9	4.2	0	0	0	1	8
Improving the Marketing Systems	5	2.3	0	0	0	2	3
Social Protection	4	1.9	0	0	0	0	4

Note: NEP (New Economic Policy), NDP (National Development Policy), NVP (National Vision Policy), NEM (New Economic Model), and SPV (Shared Prosperity Vision)



Basic Infrastructure and Amenities

The basic infrastructure and amenities category includes codes related to poverty alleviation through housing repair, affordable housing, and expanded access to utilities and public services. This category accounts for 56 excerpts, representing 25.9% of the 216 excerpts coded. Table 3 shows that the most frequently observed codes within this category were affordable housing and living conditions (28 excerpts, 50.0% of this category) and utilities and public service access (28 excerpts, 50.0% of this category). These programmes were most commonly cited during the Fifth Malaysia Plan (15, 6.9%), followed by the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (11, 5.1%). At the level of the policy era, the category appeared most frequently under the NEM period (26, 12.0%).

Table 3: Codes under Basic Infrastructure and Amenities

Codes	Total	excerpt		Exc	cerpt a	ccordi	ng to l	Malays	sia Pla	n (n =	216 ex	cerpt)	
Codes	Count	Percent (%)	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Affordable housing and living conditions	28	50.0	3	1	1	5	1	1	2	2	1	4	7
Utilities and public service access	28	50.0	3	1	2	10	0	2	3	2	1	0	4

Human Capital Development

The human capital development category includes codes describing poverty alleviation programmes relevant to education and capacity enhancement, such as skills training, post-training startup capital, and mentor-mentee entrepreneurship schemes. This category was represented by 51 excerpts, accounting for 23.6% of the 216 excerpts. Table 4 demonstrates that the most frequently observed codes within this category were skills and entrepreneurship (26, 51.0%) and inclusive educational access (25, 49.0%). These codes were most commonly cited during the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (25, 11.6%), followed by the Tenth Malaysia Plan (13, 6.0%). By policy era, references appeared most frequently under the SPV period (25, 11.6%), followed by the NEM period (14, 6.5%).



Table 4:

Codes under Human Capital Development

Codes	Total	excerpt		Exc	erpt a	ccordi	ng to l	Malays	sia Pla	n (n =	216 ex	cerpt)	
Codes	Count	Percent (%)	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Skills and entrepreneurship	26	51.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	9	0	12
Inclusive education access	25	49.0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5	1	4	1	13

Stimulating Economic Growth

The stimulating economic growth category includes codes describing poverty alleviation programmes that enhance low-income individuals' employment opportunities and income generation. This category was represented by 39 excerpts, accounting for 18.1% of the total 216 excerpts. Table 5 shows that the most frequently observed codes within this category were income-generating programmes (31, 79.5%) and employment creation (8, 20.5%). These codes were most commonly cited during the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (16, 7.4%). By policy era, this category appeared most frequently under the SPV era (16, 7.4%) and followed by the NVP era (10, 4.6%).

Table 5: Stimulating Economic Growth

Codes	Total	excerpt		Exc	erpt ac	ccordi	ng to N	Malays	ia Pla	n (n =	216 ex	cerpt)	
Codes	Count	Percent (%)	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Income-generating programme	31	79.5	0	0	0	1	0	4	6	3	3	0	14
Employment creation	8	20.5	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	2

Agricultural and Land Development

The agricultural and land development category includes codes for poverty alleviation programmes that modernise agriculture and improve access to land and infrastructure. This category was represented by 27 excerpts, accounting for 12.5% of the 216 excerpts. Table 6 shows that the most frequently observed codes in this category were rural transformation (12, 44.4%), integrated farm development (8, 29.6%), rubber planting initiatives (5, 18.5%), and agricultural infrastructure (2, 7.4%).



These codes were most commonly cited during the Fifth Malaysia Plan (12, 5.6%) and followed by the Fourth Malaysia Plan (5, 2.3%). By policy era, references appeared most frequently under the NEM period (21, 9.7%).

Table 6: *Agricultural and Land Development*

	Total	excerpt		Exc	erpt a	ccordi	ng to I	Malays	sia Pla	n (n =	216 exc	cerpt)	
Codes	Count	Percent (%)	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Rural land transformation	12	44.4%	1	1	3	4	0	0	0	1	2	0	0
Integrated farm development	8	29.6%	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
Rubber planting initiatives	5	18.5%	1	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Agricultural infrastructure	2	7.4%	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Promoting Microfinance Scheme

The promoting microfinance scheme category focuses on improving financial access for poor and marginalised communities through small-scale credit and institutional loans. This category was represented by 25 excerpts, accounting for 11.6% of the total 216 excerpts. Table 7 demonstrates that the most frequently observed codes within this category were access to micro-credit schemes (22, 88.0%), followed by financial inclusion and capital ownership (3, 12.0%). These codes were most commonly cited during the Eighth Malaysia Plan (6, 2.8%) and the Ninth Malaysia Plan (4, 1.9%). By policy era, references appeared most frequently under the NVP period (10, 4.6%), followed by the NEP and SPV (5, 2.3%).

Table 7: Promoting Microfinance Scheme

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	Total	excerpt		Exc	erpt ac	ecordi	ng to N	Malays	ia Plai	n (n =	216 ex	cerpt)	
Codes	Count	Percent (%)	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Access to micro-credit scheme	22	88.0%	3	0	0	2	0	2	5	3	1	1	5
Financial inclusion and capital ownership	3	12.0%	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0



Cash/Income Transfer Programme

The cash/ income transfer programme category includes codes for monetary assistance to supplement income for low-income households to alleviate poverty and reduce income inequality. This category was represented by nine excerpts, accounting for 4.2% of the 216 excerpts. Table 8 shows that the most frequently observed codes within this category were basic need support (5, 55.6%) and targeted assistance (4, 44.4%). These codes were most commonly cited during the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (8, 3.7%), followed by the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (1, 0.5%). By the policy era, references appeared frequently during the SPV period (8, 3.7%).

Table 8: Cash/Income Transfer Programme

Codes	Total	excerpt		Exc	erpt a	ccordi	ng to l	Malays	sia Pla	n (n =	216 exc	cerpt)	
Codes	Count	Percent (%)	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Basic need support	5	55.6%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Targeted assistance	4	44.4%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3

Improving the Marketing Systems

The improving marketing systems category includes codes that describe efforts to strengthen the infrastructure and mechanisms for efficient product distribution and sales. This category was represented by five excerpts, accounting for 2.3% of the 216 excerpts. Table 9 demonstrates that the most frequently observed codes within this category were enhanced market access (3, 60.0%), equally shared by inclusive market channels and digital market integration (1, 20.0%). These codes were most commonly cited during the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (3, 1.4%) and the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2, 0.9%). By policy era, references appeared most frequently under the SPV era (3, 1.4%) and followed by the NEM era (2, 0.9%).

Table 9: *Improving the Marketing Systems*

	Total	excerpt		Exc	cerpt a	ccordi	ng to l	Malays	sia Pla	n (n =	216 exc	cerpt)	
Codes	Count	Percent (%)	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Enhanced market	3	60.0%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1



access													
Inclusive market channels	1	20.0%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Digital market integration	1	20.0%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Social Protection

The social protection category includes codes for initiatives designed to protect individuals and households from socio-economic vulnerabilities and poverty, especially among marginalised groups. This category included four excerpts, representing 1.9% of the total 216 excerpts. Table 10 shows that the most frequently observed codes within this category were insurance access (2, 50.0%) and voluntary protection (2, 50.0%). These codes were exclusively cited during the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (4, 1.9%). By policy era, this category only appeared under the SPV era (4, 1.9%).

Table 10: Social Protection

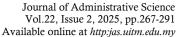
Codes	Total	excerpt		Exc	erpt a	ccordi	ng to l	Malays	sia Pla	n (n =	216 ex	cerpt)	
Codes	Count	Percent (%)	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Insurance access	2	50.0%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Voluntary protection	2	50.0%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the typological patterns emerging from Malaysia's poverty alleviation programmes as identified through content analysis. It analyses key focus areas, strategic developments across policy eras, underrepresented program types, and institutional continuity trends. The analysis contextualises the findings within broader discussions on theory, policy, and global development to better understand Malaysia's anti-poverty strategies.

Dominant Programme Focus Areas: Infrastructure and Human Capital

The typology shows that Malaysia's poverty alleviation efforts have concentrated mainly on basic infrastructure and amenities, human capital development,





and stimulating economic growth, accounting for over 65% of programme references. This reflects a structuralist logic that attributes poverty to limited access to services, employment, and education (Cotter, 2002; Calnitsky, 2018), consistent with the NEP's redistributive approach. Infrastructure initiatives such as rural roads, housing, electricity, and water have been central in reducing rural-urban disparities, particularly during the NEP and subsequent Malaysia Plans.

Parallel to this, investments in human capital, especially in education and skills, have aimed to foster social mobility, particularly among B40 households. These efforts were prominent under the NDP and NVP, focusing on expanding access to education, training, and healthcare. Such interventions support intergenerational mobility by improving long-term life outcomes for disadvantaged families. This focus aligns with global poverty literature, which identifies education and infrastructure as core enablers of opportunity and inclusive development (Foster et al., 2011; Berthod, 2018; Eryong & Xiuping, 2018; Akbar et al., 2022; Saadaoui Mallek et al., 2024).

Strategic Evolution and Thematic Shifts Across Policy Eras

Malaysia's poverty strategy has gradually shifted from broad structural interventions toward more targeted and empowerment-driven approaches, particularly under the NEM and the SPV era. While infrastructure and education continue to dominate programme portfolios, the growing inclusion of microfinance schemes (e.g., TEKUN, AIM), conditional cash transfers, and livelihood insurance reflects a shift toward addressing vulnerability and social inclusion. This signals a recognition that poverty is not solely a function of productivity deficits, but also exposure to risk and institutional exclusion. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a critical juncture, exposing the fragility of informal and low-income households and reinforcing the urgency of building robust social safety nets (Pak et al., 2020; Suryahadi et al., 2020; Harith & Jamil, 2021; World Bank, 2021; Khudaykulova et al., 2022; UNDP, 2022). Although modest in volume, these targeted interventions represent alignment with international good practices and Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015; Brickenstein, 2015; Ulriksen & Plagerson, 2016).

Nonetheless, the implementation of such targeted strategies reveals persistent institutional challenges. Eligibility is often determined through proxy means testing or community-based assessments, both of which risk exclusion errors and subjective bias



(Alatas et al., 2012; Hanna & Olken, 2018; Shrider, 2024). Malaysia's eKasih system balances efficiency and equity, yet concerns over leakage, accuracy, and transparency remain (Jamaluddin & Hanafiah, 2018, 2020; Mohd Nor & Khelghat-Doost, 2019). Malaysia's adoption of consolidated cash transfer frameworks remains cautious compared to more integrated systems in countries like Brazil and Mexico (Fiszbein et al., 2014). Although recent Malaysia Plans reflect rhetorical commitment to policy innovation, the limited institutional mainstreaming of these newer programmes suggests enduring path dependency. This tension between strategic ambition and structural inertia continues to constrain the realisation of more inclusive and adaptive poverty reduction models.

Low-Frequency Categories: Gaps or Strategic Oversight?

The underrepresentation of specific categories, namely, improving the marketing systems, cash/income transfer programme, and social protection, which account for only 8% of excerpts, raises important concerns about visibility and prioritisation. Limited attention to market access strategies such as cooperative marketing, price stabilisation, and post-harvest handling is notable, especially given persistent constraints faced by smallholders (Ranjan, 2017; Ola & Menapace, 2020; Ayoo, 2022). Although the Tenth and Twelfth Malaysia Plans show efforts to integrate B40 entrepreneurs into markets, initiatives remain fragmented. Attempts to bypass intermediaries and adopt inclusive supply chains signal intent but fall short of the structural transformation needed for agrarian resilience.

Similarly, cash transfers and social protection measures appear marginal in Malaysia's policy discourse, likely due to productivity-focused preferences (Asmorowati & Yuda, 2024), fiscal caution (Slater, 2011; Hanna & Olken, 2018), and targeting challenges (Vadapalli, 2009; Cameron & Shah, 2014). Nonetheless, their growing presence in the Twelfth Malaysia Plan Mid-term Review suggests a gradual shift toward integrating short-term buffers with long-term goals. Social protection remains underreported despite operational relevance, limiting its policy traction (Fiszbein et al., 2014). While recent plans reflect evolving perspectives, greater integration of market systems and risk protection mechanisms is needed to build household resilience beyond income generation alone.



Institutional Path Dependency and Policy Continuities

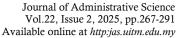
The typology highlights strong institutional path dependency in Malaysia's poverty alleviation efforts. Although policy narratives have shifted from the NEP's emphasis on structuralism to the SPV's focus on inclusivity, the core programme types have mainly remained consistent for over five decades. Programmes involving land development, agricultural expansion, infrastructure, and rural resettlement continue to feature prominently across the Malaysia Plans. This pattern reflects incremental adaptation rather than comprehensive transformation (Mahoney & Thelen, 2009). While such stability promotes coherence and administrative continuity, it may also entrench outdated models that are ill-suited to address emerging challenges, such as urban poverty, informal sector vulnerabilities, and gendered deprivation.

Institutional inertia is further reflected in the continued dominance of agencies like FELDA and RISDA, signalling deep roots in Malaysia's post-independence development structure (Hannan & Freeman, 1984). Although the New Economic Model (2011–2020) and Shared Prosperity Vision (2020–2030) have incorporated broader goals such as inclusivity and multidimensional well-being, they still rely on legacy programmes. Hodgson (2002) notes that institutions often reproduce prevailing assumptions unless disrupted by reformist movements or external shocks. Without agile and cross-sectoral policy instruments, Malaysia's poverty strategy risks falling behind in addressing the increasingly complex and urban nature of poverty.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the typology of poverty eradication programmes embodied in Malaysia's main national development planning policy documents. It uses qualitative content analysis of 216 excerpts from the Second to Twelfth Malaysia Plans and their Mid-Term Reviews. Eight strategic categories and 19 thematic areas were identified, providing a structured overview of the poverty alleviation programmes and their evolution.

The findings reveal that Malaysia's poverty reduction efforts remain primarily oriented towards structural interventions such as infrastructure development, education, and job creation, echoing the logic of redistributive growth. However, the content analysis also highlights an emerging shift towards more individualised and targeted





approaches, including microfinance, entrepreneurship development, and limited social protection schemes. Several critical dimensions, notably market integration and direct income support, remain small in the programmatic landscape. This pattern indicates that while Malaysia's strategy has achieved significant progress, especially in rural development and reducing absolute poverty, there are thematic gaps that necessitate enhanced integration and innovation.

Despite its contribution to the clarity of the typology, this study has several limitations. First, it relies solely on specific national policy documents, particularly the Malaysia Plan, which reflect planned intentions rather than real-time implementation or outcomes. As a result, the study does not capture how programmes are implemented, whether they are delivered equitably, or how beneficiaries experience them. Second, the analysis may under-represent informal, local, or inter-agency programmes not explicitly documented in central planning texts. Third, content analysis of citation frequency does not convey information about the budgetary weight of programmes, geographic targeting, or administrative coordination.

Future research should complement this document-based typology with field-based investigations that examine how programmes are implemented on the ground. Interviews with policymakers, frontline implementers, and program beneficiaries can illuminate anti-poverty strategies' practical relevance, validity, and coherence. Longitudinal case studies and fiscal tracking analyses can help assess the alignment between planning intentions and program delivery. Comparative research across similar upper-middle-income contexts would also provide insights into institutional best practices, social protection innovations, and cross-sector coordination frameworks.

This typological study provides a significant diagnostic framework for evaluating Malaysia's poverty policy instrument. It emphasises the importance of balancing a legacy infrastructure-driven approach with more responsive, multidimensional, and inclusive interventions. As Malaysia navigates increasing socioeconomic complexity, future policies must evolve to reduce poverty and build long-term resilience and equity.



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Author contributions

The author conceptualised the study, designed the methodology, conducted the data collection and analysis, and wrote and revised the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest associated with this publication.

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