



## **Batek tribe: Entrepreneurship in perspective**

**Mohd Amlı Abdullah<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Zahran Abd Mutalib<sup>2</sup>, Badli Esham**

**Ahmad<sup>3</sup> Mohd Rozaidi Ismail<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>UiTM Cawangan Pahang, 26400 Jengka, Pahang, [amli\\_baharum@pahang.uitm.edu.my](mailto:amli_baharum@pahang.uitm.edu.my)

<sup>2</sup>UiTM Cawangan Pahang, 26400 Jengka, Pahang, [zahran600@uitm.edu.my](mailto:zahran600@uitm.edu.my)

<sup>3</sup>UiTM Cawangan Pahang, 26400 Jengka, Pahang, [badli@pahang.uitm.edu.my](mailto:badli@pahang.uitm.edu.my)

<sup>4</sup>UiTM Cawangan Pahang, 26400 Jengka, Pahang, [mrozaidi@pahang.uitm.edu.my](mailto:mrozaidi@pahang.uitm.edu.my)

### **ABSTRACT**

A study was conducted on the Batek tribe in Taman Negara, Pahang. The study was aimed at exploring the contribution of the Batek tribe in entrepreneurship activities among them. An expedition assisted by a local guide was conducted in Taman Negara, Jerantut, Pahang, MALAYSIA where a few small and medium sized communities of Batek live. Interviews were conducted with some of the Batek men to understand their entrepreneurship activities. Observation was also used as evidence in exploring their entrepreneurship activities. The expedition was led by local guide who has a close relationship with the Batek headman and is also proficient in their language. Three settlements are identified; Kampung Lubuk Ceruk or also known as Seberang Kanopi. Kampung Aur and Kampung Rinching. The study intends to look at the type of business that the Batek were involved in as well as the motive behind their involvement. The study found that the Batek were involved in handicraft as well as becoming personal tourist guides. The main motive for their involvement is to provide adequate resources during monsoon seasons. The study concludes by suggesting a few ways to improve the entrepreneurial activities for the Batek.

**Key Words:** Batek, entrepreneurship, indigenus

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Orang Asli (or “original people”) of Malaysia constitute only 0.5 per cent of the population and are diverse in culture, language and beliefs, as they come from eighteen different ethnic groups (Tijah, 2003). Under the Orang Asli Act (Act 134) 1954 (revised 1974), Orang Asli is considered as an Orang Asli if one of his/her parents is a member of an Orang Asli ethnic group

and lives according to the laws, beliefs, and rituals of that group. Currently, there are 18 ethnic groups of Orang Asli in Malaysia; 37.2% of the total population is still living in remote areas or in the forest, 61.4% is still living in rural areas, and only 1.4.% of the Orang Asli is living in or near urban areas (Nicholas 2007).

Zahari (2016) found that the Bateks is one of the aboriginal tribes found in Peninsular Malaysia and falls under the Negrito group and is the smallest found here, being approximately 3% of the whole population of Orang Asli. The Bateks separate themselves into different *bangsa*' (Malay language for race). This is due to the fact that there are minor differences in their dialects. The Bateks loved to associate their group more to the river than to the land. There are 5 groups of Orang Batek as suggested by Endicott (1979) which are the Batek De', Batek Iga, Batek Nong, Batek Teh, and Batek Te'. Most of the Batek studies were focused on ritual and culture (Endicott, 1979; Lye, 1997), property, power and conflict (Endicott, 1988), economy (Endicott, 1984), sex role (Endicott, 1979), knowledge (Tuck-Po, 2002), and linguistics (Ahmad, Noor & Shariff, 2011).

As exploration done by previous studies were less focused on entrepreneurial perspectives of Batek. This was supported by Frederick, (2008) who identify that most research in indigenous entrepreneurship is undeveloped. Hence, this study will focus on types of business ventures that involved the Batek and the motives for this entrepreneurial intention. Interviews were conducted with Batek men and guided open questions were asked. The local guide was used to guide in communicate with Batek man as most of them use their language in communication. From the exploration and also information from local guide, there were few settlements of Batek in Taman Negara, Pahang. The settlements are Kampung Sungai Yong, Kampung Lubuk Ceruk @ Seberang Kanopi, Kampung Terisik, Kampung Atok, Kampung Dedari, Kampung Aur, Kampung Kuala Keniam, Kampung Rinching and Kampong Ulu Sat. This study was conducted in three settlements that are Kampung Lubuk Ceruk @ Seberang Kanopi, Kampung Dedari and Kampung Aur as the population is enough for this study and these has become a kind of permanent settlement for the Batek as they would normally travel from a place to another and do not stay permanently.

## **2. INDIGENOUS ENTREPRENUER**

Indigenous entrepreneurship is a process of extracting and contributing value that is anchored in a community's particular socioeconomic conditions within which an entrepreneur/venture is embedded (Jack & Anderson, 2002). Colbourne, (2017) explain that indigenous entrepreneurial value creation occurs in the context of strong social interrelationship and interdependencies that are embedded in cultural and spiritual understandings, beliefs and practices in their

community's geographical and environmental ecosystem. Best-practice lessons show that poor indigenous groups can improve their standards of living through entrepreneurial activity (Annan, 2003). Frederick, (2008) believes that social marginality theory could explain indigenous entrepreneurship as many self-employed entrepreneurs come from socially or economically marginalised populations. Lists of barriers of self-employment highlighted by The European Commission (2003) include lack of basic food, shelter or clothing, financial problems and related stress, literacy problems and low level of formal education which lead to lack of skills and qualifications. These problems are similar to the ones faced by the Batek as living in the forest has limit their access to basic amenities as well as education. Additionally, indigenous people usually experience language problems and cultural differences when they decide to launch a business. Frederick, (2008) believes that the study of indigenous entrepreneurship must necessarily begin by examining the cultural imperatives of economic and business development. Because of the above limitations, entrepreneurial opportunities for indigenous families have to rely at least initially, on low-scale technologies (Morrison, 2008).

### **3. ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION AMONG BATEK**

Most of indigenous people around the world are involved in ecotourism. Tourists' visits to the settlements of indigenous people has long been popular in various parts of the world and indigenous groups participate in such encounters can range widely, from economic benefits to political empowerment to the desire to educate outsiders about themselves and their ways of life (Endicott, 2016). It is also explained by Sharif (2012) that some of the young Batek men are now working as tourist guides or skill demonstrators at the two designated villages near Kuala Tahan (Pahang's major entry point to the Taman Negara). Endicott, Tuck-Po, Zahari, & Rudge (2016) found that the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) finds the Batek to be a source of labour for various purposes, and their existence as a tourist attraction is consistent with the department's aim of supporting tourism in the park. This is also mentioned earlier by Endicott (1984) that one of the additional sources of income and food for the Batek is working for outsiders. From our observations in Kampung Lubuk Ceruk @ Seberang Kanopi, a few young Batek men were working with local tourist guides (Figure 1). The knowledge of the forest has allowed the Batek to use it as a safe haven for their families. (Yunus, M. A., & Solat, 2014). A few advancements made by the Batek men include becoming a personal tourist guides or boat operators to the tourist (Fatanah, Omar & Daim, 2016), These is where entrepreneurial intention comes to place as Batek is known to be shy to outsiders. Daily interactions and observations towards the local tourist guide may have triggered these changes.

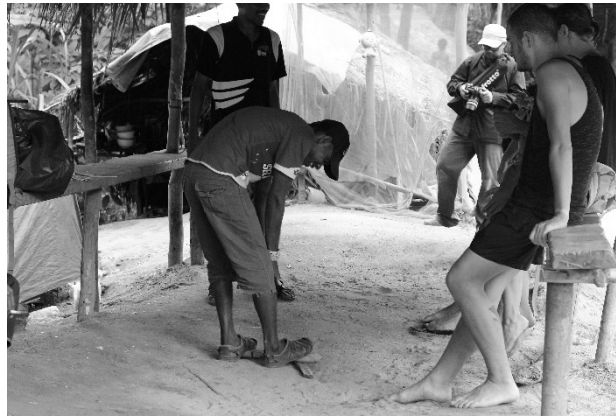


Figure 1: Batek men show how to start fire in front of tourists

Prior to the establishment of tourist attractions in the Batek settlement, traders would come up the river bringing food supplies which were then used to pay for the rattan (Endicott, 1984). From our observation in the village, the Batek men would collect rattan from the forest and Batek women will weave them to become some handicrafts (Figure 2). Handicrafts are produced by the families in the settlement, either by women or by women and men working together (Endicott, Tuck-Po, Zahari, & Rudge, 2016). Based on our observation in 2012 in the Batek settlement, the handicraft made by them looked rather dull without any colour. However, during recent visits in 2017, the handicrafts produced were more varied and colours were added to the design using colourings that were made from plants.



Figure 2: Products produced by Batek

Another trade activity that involved the Batek community is selling resins. (Figure 3). According to Endicott (1984), the tame Sakai carried on trade with Malays, exchanging resins, rattan, incense woods, ivory and rhinoceros' horns for bush knives, cotton, cloth, salt, tobacco, betel nut, cultivated foods, and occasionally old firearms. During an exploration through the

Taman Negara River, we discovered a group of Batek men who were heading to the nearest town to sell resins but not for product exchange but for money. This is where the barter trade is no longer used by the Batek community. They have learned how to use money to buy their necessities.



Figure 3: Resins that collected by Batek men

These new business activities have changed the perception from the previous literature that entrepreneurship does not exist in the Batek community. However, there are limitations to this entrepreneurial intention, as the source of their entrepreneurial activities comes from the forest. Endicott (1979) believes that the Batek economy system is complex for they are involved not only in different economic activities but their economic system changes from one activity to the other. Lye (2013) explains that traditional Batek strategy of keeping multiple economic opportunities open but not becoming dependent upon any one of them may have been a response to resource fluctuations in the rainforest. Additional to that, they have to deal with land expropriation, resource degradation, and pressures to give up culture and identity (Endicott, 2016).

#### **4. ENTREPRENEURSHIP GOALS OF BATEK**

Why some Batek are involved in entrepreneurship activities? Findings from the interviews conducted suggest that the Batek took up entrepreneurship activities as something to fall back upon especially during the monsoon season when there would be very limited tourist activities. High flow of tourists into their settlement would help to generate a steady flow of income to them. However, during the off season or during the monsoon, there would be limited or no tourists at all, hence, limiting their source of income. The savings received from entrepreneurial

activities such as selling resins and other forest produce will be used to buy necessities especially food for the whole community (in the settlement itself). These findings agree with the explanation by Roberts and Woods (2005) that social entrepreneurship is when dedicated individuals construct, evaluate and pursue opportunities to transform their society. This is especially true during the monsoon season as access to and from the settlements is limited due to floods. Gomes (2012) explains that orang Asli would normally engage in intensive intra-group sharing and generalised reciprocity that works to grant, albeit indirectly, equal access to everyone in the village to its resources. It also serves as a levelling mechanism to balance out inequities in production or opportunities for production. Young children are socialised to share their food and belongings with their neighbours.

## CONCLUSION

The Batek have long since moved away from the barter trade that signifies their entrepreneurial activities with the local population. They have learned the value of the currency and expanded their basic needs to include modern amenities as well. However, they are still lagging in terms of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge. Production of handicrafts as well as collecting or foraging for forest produce is not as efficient and more often than not depends on the needs of the settlement and not the economy of scale. This has limited the production of handicrafts and the families would only make them during the peak holiday season. It would be imperative to engage the Batek more in the entrepreneurial activities and also to provide them with basic business skills in order to become better entrepreneurs with a much better and steadier income. More activities that are related to business and entrepreneurship should be conducted so as to encourage the Batek to be more involved in diversifying their income. Their knowledge of the forest and its flora and fauna should be a platform for the Batek to increase their economy. However, caution has to be given so as not to jeopardize their way of living as well as their cultural values.

## REFERENCES

- Ahmad, B. E., Noor, M. Y. M., & Sharif, T. I. S. T. (2011). Endangered Language: Batek Lexicon and Loaned Words. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 26(2), 241-249.
- Annan, K. (2003), "Secretary-general launches commission on private sector and development at headquarters press briefing", 27 July, available at: [www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2003/UNDPbrf.doc.htm](http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2003/UNDPbrf.doc.htm) (accessed 4 May 2006).
- Colbourne, R. (2017). Indigenous Entrepreneurship and Hybrid Ventures. In *Hybrid Ventures* (pp. 93-149). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Endicott, K.M. (1979). Batek Negrito Religion: The World-View and Rituals of a Hunting and Gathering People of Peninsular Malaysia. Oxford : Clarendon Press.

Endicott, K. M. (1979). *Batek Negrito religion: The world-view and rituals of a hunting and gathering people of Peninsular Malaysia*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Endicott, K. L. (1979). Batek Negrito sex roles.

Endicott, K. (1984). The economy of the Batek of Malaysia: Annual and historical perspectives. *Research in Economic Anthropology*, 6, 29-52.

Endicott, K. (1988). Property, power and conflict among the Batek of Malaysia. *Hunters and gatherers*, 2, 110-127.

Endicott, K., Tuck-Po, L., Zahari, N. F., & Rudge, A. (2016). Batek playing Batek for tourists at Peninsular Malaysia's national park.

Endicott, K. (ed.) 2016. Malaysia's original people: past, present and future of the Orang Asli. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press.

European Commission (2003), Building the Information Society in Europe: A Pathway Approach to Employment Interventions for Disadvantaged Groups, Itech Research, Dublin, p. 29.

Fatanah, N. Z., Omar, M., & Daim, S. (2012). Lawad, Ye'Yo' and Tum Yap: The Manifestation of Forest in the Lives of the Bateks in Taman Negara National Park. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 42, 190-197.

Frederick, H. H. (2008). Introduction to special issue on indigenous entrepreneurs. *Journal of enterprising communities: People and places in the global economy*, 2(3), 185-191.

Gomes, A. (2012). Alter-Native 'Development': indigenous forms of social ecology. *Third World Quarterly*, 33(6), 1059-1073.

Jack, s., & anderson, a. r. (2002). the effects of embeddedness on the entrepreneurial process. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 17(5), 467-487.

Lye, T. P. (1997). *Knowledge, forest, and hunter-gatherer movement: the Batek of Pahang, Malaysia* (Doctoral dissertation, Univ. of Hawaii [Manoa]).

Malaysia. 1954. Akta Orang Asli 1954 (Akta 134).

Morrison, K. (2008). Indigenous entrepreneurship in Samoa in the face of neo-colonialism and globalization. *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, 2(3), 240-253.

Nicholas, Colin. 2007. The Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia : A Brief Introduction. Center for Orang Asli Concerns. [www.coac.org.my](http://www.coac.org.my). [27 September 2007]

Roberts, D. and Woods, C. (2005), "Changing the world on a shoestring: the concept of social entrepreneurship", *University of Auckland Business Review*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 45-51.

Sharif, T. I. S. T., Noor, M. Y. M., & Ahmad, B. E. (2012). Ethical Concerns in Language Documentation: A Case Study of the Tembeling River Batek Aslian. In *Second International Conference on Social Science and Humanity IPEDR* (Vol. 31, pp. 154-158).

---

Tijah Chupil, Jerald Joseph, Pusat Komang (2003) *Creating Knowledge for Change: A Case Study of Sinui Pai Nanek Sengik's Educational Work with Orang Asal Communities in Malaysia*.

Tuck-Po, L. (2002). The significance of forest to the emergence of Batek knowledge in Pahang, Malaysia. *Japanese Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 40(1), 3-22.

Yunus, S. Y. M., bin Abdullah Baharum, M. A., & Solat, N. (2014). Exploration on Innovation Culture in Batek Tribe. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Science, Technology and Social Sciences (ICSTSS) 2012* (pp. 333-341). Springer, Singapore.

Zahari, N. F. K., Omar, M., & Daim, S. (2016). Lawad, Ye'Yo' and Tum Yap: the manifestation of forest in the lives of the Bateks in Taman Negara National Park. *Journal of ASIAN Behavioural Studies*, 1(1), 29-38.