

MALAYSIA'S APPROACH IN CURBING CHILD POVERTY AND INCREASING SOCIAL PROTECTION

ABSTRACT

Is child poverty recognised and incorporated into poverty elimination policies? Who and where are the children living in poverty? Are the government, civil society organisations and international organisations aware of their existence and formulating policies and taking measures to reduce child poverty? In Malaysia, these issues are being dealt from three aspects: the family, the market and the state.

The Market

Malaysia's transformation since independence, from a poor country to an upper middle-income country is credited to a guided macro-economic plan. Economic growth and wealth creation has led to broader improvements in the well-being and the quality of people's lives. The more prosperous an economy is, the better off the residents of that economy are in terms of opportunities to gain a higher income and access quality health care. The aspirations of the current Government Transformation Programme and the New Economic Model are premised on high income, inclusiveness and sustainability. A high economic growth supported by a comprehensive social protection system for children has managed to alleviate child poverty in Malaysia.

The Family

Over the last 5 decades, Malaysia has made tremendous progress in reducing poverty across the country. The incidence of poverty declined from 49.3% of total households in 1970 to 3.8% in 2009, while hardcore poverty has been practically eliminated. In Malaysia, we believe the well-being of children starts from the family itself. To combat child poverty, we must empower the family to have the means to improve their household economy through social enterprise. In our endeavour to reduce poverty and eliminate hardcore poverty, Malaysia relies on the concept of Productive Welfare. Among the initiatives that utilise this concept are 1AZAM (End To



Poverty Era) programme, Incubator Skills Training for Single Mothers (I-KIT), Women Entrepreneurship Incubator Programme (I-KeuNITA), economic development programme for indigenous children, scholarship programmes and monthly monetary assistance for poor children. We believe that a stable economy is the gateway towards creating a conducive environment to enable citizens including children to optimise their potentials and enhance their well-being.

The State

Besides economic and social initiatives, the Malaysian Government has taken steps to strengthen the social protection system for children. Malaysia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1995 and enacted the Child Act in 2001. In addition, the Government has also formulated the National Child Policy and National Child Protection Policy in 2009, whereby child protection is emphasised as the main pillar and strategy to strengthen the safe environment for children. On the 2nd of April 2012, Malaysia acceded to both the Optional Protocols under the CRC namely Optional Protocols on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Government also provides a comprehensive range of services from preventive to remedial for the social protection of the child. This encompasses prevention, capacity building for child protection frontline workers and provision of secondary and tertiary responsive services to children at risk or suffering from maltreatment.

This paper will highlight policies and strategies, legal framework, programmes, challenges and the way forward to reduce the number of children living in poverty in Malaysia.

