

**UNDERSTANDING THE ECONOMIC NEEDS
OF BALING RESIDENTS THROUGH TARGETED NEED ASSESSMENT STUDY**

Abdi Omar Shuriye
Albukhari International University Malaysia
Email: abdi.shuriye@aiu.edu.my

Sharinaz Ismail
Email: shahrinaz.Ismail@aiu.edu.my
Albukhari International University Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The state of one who has lesser or lacks what usually an acceptable number of materials is what normally referred to as poverty; differently put, when people are unable to sustain the basic needs and necessities for survival; not necessarily near the borderline of starvation, are considered poor. In other words, people who lacks nutrition, housing, and clothing, are also considered poor; thus, poor health, low level of education, lack of skills, inability to work, unwillingness to function to find livelihood and disruptive behaviour are also regarded as poor. The objective of this work is to ascertain the economic hardships and poverty levels of Baling residents through Need Assessment Study. Depending on diverse factors such as duration and distribution poverty line in one nation may vary from the financial resources and essentials for the minimum standard of living of another. Therefore, the state where one lacks access to basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter is different from the conditions prevent them from being able to acquire education, seek medical help, secure a stable job, and participate in recreational activities; other aspects of it could be marginalization and exclusion; for that every nation has its own measure for poverty; although the World Bank metrics of International Poverty Line of living on less than US\$1.90 per day is the classification of extreme poor.

KEYWORDS: Baling; poverty; need assessment

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is a result of a *Need Assessment Study* conducted by Albukhari International University on Baling, Kedah. The objective of the study was to understand the economic needs of the Baling residents and use result of the study to conduct more deeper investigation on the subject. The study also aimed to extract themes and area of study for future research. Some of the themes extracted are challenges faced by rubber tappers, the role of the NGOs in poverty alleviation, economic hardships faced by single mothers, the role of donations and Zakat funds, youth unemployment, mentally and physically challenged persons, predicaments faced by business owners and entrepreneurs, the role of government in general and welfare department in particular and problem of drugs and ketum in the villages as well as the negative attitude and peer influence. There are 8 mukim (sub-districts) in Baling district: Siong, Bongor, Baling, Pulai, Kupang, Tawar, Teloi Kanan, Bakai and there are approximately 200 kampung (villages) in Balig district: 27 villages under Siong, 16 villages under Bongor, 14 villages under Baling mukim, 30 villages under Pulai, 44 villages under Kupang, 29 villages under Tawar, 26 villages under Teloi Kanan, and 26 villages under Bakai

2. METHODOLOGY

A semi-structured interview survey was conducted in March 2022, on five main respondents and one supporting respondent. Each respondent was chosen based on the demographic characteristics or community they represented, i.e., head of village, village committee member, teacher, senior citizen, woman, and youth. Table 1 shows the information of this research setting, which summarises the background information and the interview setting of each respondent.

Respondent 1: Post/Role: Village Committee Member (Secretary), Women representative, Date and Time: 17 Mar 2022 10:14AM, Duration: 50 minutes, Dominant Themes: Economy, social, education, women's development. **Respondent 2:** Post/Role: Teacher, Date and Time: 17 Mar 2022 11:00AM, Duration: 56 minutes, Dominant Themes: Socio-economic, social, education

Respondent 3: Post/Role: Secretary of Surau (Resident Village), Secretary of Village, Development and Safety Committee (outside village), Date and Time: 20 Mar 2022 10:25AM, Duration: 47 minutes, Dominant Themes: Economic, social, business activities, youth.

Respondent 4 and 5: Post/Role: Head of Village (Respondent 4), Youth (Respondent 5), Date and Time: 20 Mar 2022 12:10PM, Duration: 27 minutes, Dominant Themes: Economy, business activities, education (Respondent 4); youth (Respondent 5). **Respondent 6:** Post/Role: Former Village Committee Member, Senior Citizen, Date and Time: 20 Mar 2022 12:58PM, Duration: 46 minutes, Dominant Themes: Economy, business activities, social, education, youth.

As elucidated above, the interviews were conducted in person, with duration spanned between 25 to 60 minutes each. Two respondents were interviewed on 17th March 2022, while another four respondents were interviewed on 20th March 2022. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed before narrative analysis was made. Even though semi-structured questions were prepared beforehand, the interview was conducted in a way that it allows the respondents to freely elaborate and explain their stories from their personal perspectives. Narrative analysis reveals the constructed story of each respondent, who were not influenced by each other. The responses are compiled in summative form, based on the themes initially prepared before the interviews and new themes that emerged from the interviews. The results of this analysis are as discussed in the next section.

3. TERMINOLOGY

Penghulu: Head

Mukim: Sub-District

Daerah: District

Kampung: Village

Qariah: Village

Persatuan Anak Baling: Association of People from Baling

Raya: Celebration, often Eidul Fitr and Eidul Adha

Zakat: Payment, often as donation

Pasar malam: Night market

Pasar Tani: Farmers' Market

Kolej Komuniti: Community College

4. ABBREVIATIONS

JPKK: Village Development and Safety Committee

NGOs: Non-governmental Organisations

KEDA: Kedah Regional Development Authorities

ICU: Implementation Coordination Unit

PWD: Person with Disability

JKKK: Village Development and Security Committee

MRSM: MARA Junior Science College

IT: Information Technology

KKAW: State Government

KEMAS: Community Development Department

KAFA: Al-Quran and Fardhu Ain Classes

ASB: Amanah Saham Nasional Berhad

MID: Medan Info Desa

RM: Ringgit Malaysia

SPM: Malaysian Education Certificate

RISDA: Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA)

AJK: Committee Member

IKBN: National Youth Skills Institute

IKM: MARA Skills Institute

MARA: People's Trust Council

B40: Bottom 40 percent income group

KPI: Key Performance Index

SRP: Low certificate of education

MARDI: Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute

5. THE INTERVIEW TEXT AND CONTENT

INTERVIEW ONE

Respondent's Designation: Secretary to JPKK

Economy and Social Issues

- It is not as bad as “kais pagi makan pagi, kais petang makan petang” (to live from hand to mouth), because the youths work in factories nowadays
- The elders were rubber tappers, and they could not earn on rainy days because of the daily income
- Now, the children help, so there are no obviously hardcore poor
- Even for those who stay alone (no family), he/she receives money from the Welfare Department, not abandoned; there are no news heard about cases where the people are forgotten
- Most villagers now are more caring, and they get to know on others' situation – e.g., for single mothers, there is an association or organisation that will have concern on them
- There seems to have Persatuan Anak Baling (Association of People from Baling)
- There are also NGOs that come and visit the village, especially when Raya is nearing, they will come to donate zakat
- Most villagers are self-employed (e.g., small groceries, selling at “pasar malam” (night market), rubber tapping in own estate), but their children may work outside of the district or state
- Rubber estate owners either tap the rubbers themselves or hire people to work for them
- Conclusion: There are no hardcore poor, only for rubber tappers who cannot earn daily income during rainy days
- During Covid-19, those who work in factories had to quit their jobs, but some of them who could still work will go to work, else they will find other jobs
- Some youths help their mothers working on rubber tapping
- Factory work is mostly in Penang, or nearest would be in Kuala Ketil
 - The workers have to travel daily by factory van or bus and have to leave their house as early as 4AM (it used to be as early as 3.30AM because there was no highway to Kulim)
 - The factory workers are prone to risks of accidents especially if they ride motorbikes (few cases of motorbikes)
 - There was a plan for a factory establishment in Baling that would provide job opportunities closer to home
- Most villagers are self-employed – rubber tapping, contractor/construction works, labour, agriculture (vegetables) – there are no paddy fields in the village
- Farm owners who own the land would hire others to help out
- For rubber tapping, they calculate the income based on weight of the product, and divide by two as income for the tapper and the owner
 - During low price of rubber, it would be around RM 100, divided by two, each party will receive RM 50 – nothing much can be bought with this amount
 - However, there are people in the village who get RM 250 per month
 - Plus, they get things through the e-Kasih programme (eligibility is based on the number of people in the household) – every month they would spend on groceries/things within the value of RM 200
- The issues with the villagers nowadays are self-development – it is just a matter of whether they want to be successful in life or not
- Youths are prone to or influenced by negative things, e.g., drugs, ketum leaves – because they need to stay up at night but need to wake up early in the morning
- Issue of laziness fades away once the youths have family and children, as it is not logical to sleep until late in the morning because they must work hard to earn
- For laziness and ketum addiction, it is suggested that we could give motivation, courses, awareness to the youth, especially the Malay youths
- Number of residents is around 1,600
- There are programmes planned for the village by KEDA, including the current programme called e-Kasih Project, to free the residents from poverty
- Some time ago, a project team called Implementation Coordination Unit (ICU) visited the village, aiming for the youths development
 - Since SPM is the minimum requirement for any job today, it is a problem to get a job of even security guard and factory worker without SPM
 - A few youths do not have SPM, so ICU wanted to help them to take SPM to secure at least some job

- Number of youths is about 200
- The people of ICU project were in the village to validate on the e-Kasih programme
- For PWD (person with disability), there is a tailor who received sewing machine, and ICU people came to ask her if she needs other things to support her, i.e., additional items or repair
- The welfare department also provides monthly allowance to the PWDs – so far, in the village, there is one female PWD (the tailor), one male, one elder (about 70 years old)
- There is one called Encik Bakar who stays alone, the Zakat Office or somebody provided a home for him after his house was damaged some time ago
- To know more about the socio-economic situation in the village, we can refer to the Head of Branch (the Village Head, Head of Branch, and JKKK are the same person)
- Some youths help their mothers who make kuih, tempeyek, bahu, etc. – like “small industry” under KEDA
- The ICU project is planning to help in gathering of raw materials and marketing of products, and now seeking for land
 - It is a challenge to establish the “village product” because the helping hands from the youths are unavailable due to their work in factories as they prefer to work in factories
 - Some of the female producers of these village products are already old, and their children would provide them with money to survive as they do not have enough energy to work on the products anymore
- There are no elders who are left alone; at least they have neighbours who look after them if not their own children staying with them

Suggestions on Activities and Projects

- There are many abandoned lands, not yet developed, but some are shared among many owners, which cause issues to acquire, hence they are abandoned
- In terms of facilities and infrastructure, all roads are tarred except for new villages that have pebbled roads, thanks to the MRSM (boarding school) nearby
- They already have basic courses for computer and IT, as they have Info Desa (a block of building with computer classes), but it is a matter of interest among the villagers
- Suggestion to have an interesting course, like the one organised by the KKAW – for example, making the mosque more interactive so people will not be bored, or fun activities that they will remember for a long time
- Kampung Medan is provided with facilities for utility bill payment
- The village (Kampung Telok Teduri) is not so deep inside (rural) like Kampung Tok Guring which is far from Baling town
- For example, to go to school back in the old days was too difficult, but now the youngsters already have motorbikes, and if they need pocket money, their parents can provide, so there is no need to work

Education and Financial Education

- The village has one primary school, and there are several nearby secondary schools
- Suggestion on activities for awareness, like for SPM/school leavers
- Students are not serious in study and usually do not join the online classes; and since pandemic, they have their “port” or place to hang out
- Problem with online class – in some households, only the mother has handphone, so the siblings need to take turn to join online classes, not every day one can join the classes – so the students are often left out from their studies
- Today’s study requires social media and Internet, and the Internet connection in the village is not so good – only Celcom and other lines that use Celcom towers can be used
- Students still take the SPM exam; the ones affected with studies are Form 1 and 2, and primary school students, hence to catch up with SPM is difficult
- Some parents have lack of time to care about the children’s education that they do not even know if they have exams
- Some parents have insufficient knowledge on how to use Google Meet, so they just leave the children to figure out on their own, making them always absent from online classes – this left the teachers giving instructions mostly in WhatsApp
- When the mothers leave home for work and come home late, the children will not be able to log in for their online classes – so using WhatsApp is still feasible
- Villagers usually use prepaid telco service, and sometimes they could not top up the prepaid amount enough and/or on time
- Some students are smart, but they need help because their parents cannot afford to provide sufficient support
- Teachers are mostly living outside of the village area, closer to town, so Internet connection is not a problem to them
- Most secondary students ride motorbikes to go to school without license, so they will absent from school if there is police inspection on the road to school

- There are approximately 100 primary school children in the village, because there is only one class for one standard (level of study in school)
- The number of guardians is less than 100, because young parents have migrated out of the village
- Some parents send their children to schools near to town since it is on their way to work – this has brought an issue of less students in the village school that it may be closed soon
- There is one pre-school in the village called Tadika KEMAS, for 5-6 years old, limited to 25 students only – for those who could not join due to the quota, they will join another pre-school under KEDA, or a private pre-school outside of the village
- Religion school (KAFA) is in the same school, in which the teachers from outside will come to school and teach after official school time – it is under the State Government, and the fees need to be paid and quite costly, but the teachers' salaries are paid by the Religion Department under the State Government
- Some KAFA students are playful, and they will not attend fully especially if their parents do not force them – it is more so since everything is online now (they still have to pay expensively even for online)
- Parents (elders) only own handphone for daily use and for calls, no smartphones – unless they have elder daughters who could afford to have smartphones
- Students who have older sisters maybe can have their sisters to teach them at home
- Although there are many young mothers who are IT savvy in the village, they may not have interest to seriously understand online education and guide the children in online study
- Under AMANAH where friends help each other, those who are in business like owner of rubber estate could apply for the loan (from the accumulated money), e.g., RM 25,000 amount with RM 1,000 payment weekly for six months
- Villagers are not keen on long-term loans anymore, so they prefer short-termed like six months
- They can apply for loan, but they need to be discipline in terms of payment
- Suggestion for a course for the villagers to be financially smart and manage their financial better – e.g., personal finance management
- If the villagers can learn on how to manage their finance, they may be confident to invest for long-term like ASB, or save for long-term to go for Hajj

Women's development and Computer and IT literacy

- Medan Info Desa (MID) organised courses like baking and cooking once a month, through online in Google Meet
- MID is under the Ministry of Rural Area and Territory
- Women in the village usually conduct a programme called Infaq Ramadan, but it stopped due to Covid-19 (the last was in 2019) – else, it will be huge like a feast for the whole village, along with Raya celebration
 - There are seven small villages here – competing setting up tents at mosques, make lemang and sate and more menus, fully decorated, involving everyone in the village, in which some of them set up food stalls selling laksa, and more menus
- Not everyone was involved in the basic computer courses organised before this, even though there were several series on it
- Courses include Microsoft Word, in which the participants received money, food and certificate

INTERVIEW TWO
Respondent's Designation: Teacher

Socio-Economic Issues

- The job in the village is still traditional in nature
 - the villagers work in agriculture – farming and livestock
 - rubber tappers are still locals/villagers (not hired from outside)
- Most of the second generation of villagers have migrated
- Those who are self-employed (doing business) are growing in their businesses
- Compared to 16 years ago, there are so much difference
 - not many are living from hand to mouth doing village jobs anymore
 - others working in industry (factories) – traveling daily to Kulim, Sungai Petani and Seberang Perai
- The second generation are not well educated, not many are working for government, mostly are those working in private sectors (factories) and commuting
- Second generation means below 40 years old, aged 40s mostly have migrated out of the village
- Hard core poor is hard to find, only normal poor
- Even if the person is poor, at least they have property, a land to work on
 - If they have rubber estate, they can earn from that
 - It is just a matter of motivation to work on the land – that is the cause of limitation
- There are government departments who helped, but only halfway
 - After help is provided, then that is it, not seriously follow through
- “Cluster farming” project was once done by the Agriculture Department and hundreds of thousands of RM was spent, but it was abandoned halfway too
- The villagers probably see or more interested in the daily income jobs instead of a long-term income like agriculture that takes about four months to see the fruits of labour
 - This is the main reason why agriculture or cluster agriculture does not work here
 - Those who continuously work on it would succeed – no issues
- An example of one in age 40s, successful in growing durian, which has output once a year – he only waits for next year for the fruits, still single (no family) but very diligent in his durian farming, so he survives
- Problem with the second generation is that their life is not difficult, but their income is just enough
- None of the villagers are hard core poor with no food to eat or such
- The negative attitude is mostly from peer influence, but up to one stage, they will change, actually – when they want or need to change then they will work hard to develop themselves, we just do not know when
- There are a few who were drug addict, but when the time comes for them to get married, they start seriously working and all – until they feel the responsibility, they will have that awareness or realisation – they became fine when they get married and have their own family (having purpose in life)
- Although the youngsters prefer to work outside of village and commute daily, it is all because they want to be free and enjoy their life, but so far, they have not made life difficult for their parents, only naughty
 - If we can provide a place for them to conduct useful/beneficial activities, there should be no problem
- It is observed that these youngsters need a source of economy – when they do not have job opportunity that they like, they cannot work
 - To make them work on the rubber trees, they do not want
 - Need to find a mechanism to make them interested in certain work/job
 - To get them to continue the heritage of their parents, they rarely want
 - These are the reasons why they like to loiter
- There are a lot of work in the village, up to extend that people from Pattani came to the village to work in the rubber estate
 - The youngsters are just not interested in village work
 - They are not interested because they do not have commitment
- There is so much difference in lifestyle between those in their 30s and those in 40s
- Those with the negative attitude are usually those who do not continue their study after secondary level (SPM)
- Percentage of SPM leavers is not even 10%, about 100 people (out of total around 1,500 people in the village)
- Youngsters need new opportunities that lead to job opportunities, such as technical skill courses
- There are skill courses here, e.g., GIATMARA and Kolej Komuniti, but mostly participated by people outside of Baling – by right, the colleges are for the people in Baling
 - Either the courses offered are not suitable, or the village youngsters are not interested
 - Example, GIATMARA offers courses like mechanical etc., but these youngsters are not interested

- Youngsters are still dependent on their parents
 - Parents could still provide them with their basic needs, that is why they are lazy
- It depends on age:
 - After school, youths tend to be lazy, choosy, and dependent on parents
 - From age 25 to 30, they are still choosy with opportunities given
 - After 30 years of age, they start to find jobs, up to extend that they are willing to travel/commute
- The era today is not like the old days – today, people are more towards grabbing opportunities
 - Agencies (e.g., Agriculture Department, RISDA) come to the village to provide opportunities, but they do not have funds to publicise and promote – they only have funds allocated by the government to run the programs
 - There is no program to create awareness and enliven the projects
 - For example: villagers are invited to attend an event at community hall, but there is no cost for food and beverages (refreshments)
 - Most program is conducted in mosque area, and they invite people from the agencies to join, and the mosque will work out the cost for food and refreshment – but until when should the mosque bear the costs?
 - Mosque may be able to manage once a year event, not monthly
- To create awareness is difficult, because it needs to be conducted personally, face-to-face
- We can only provide the platform by organising the event, but it is up to the community whether they have self-awareness to participate and be interested to join
 - As an example, there are variety of courses conducted at the MID, but the response is none (or low)
 - Mostly attended by people from outside
- If we could gather the whole Baling district, we can get around 30 or 40 to participate in the skill courses, and supposedly the community within the district grab that opportunity, but that did not happen
 - Because of that, the organiser had to open the seats to people outside of Baling to achieve their KPI
 - Even after a lot of promotion and publicity, they do not want to participate
- The time has changed; people of age 25 still do not know the direction of their life
- It is important to have career program for youngsters below 20s
 - Even schools rarely conduct the career program anymore
 - Back in the old days, every year we had Career Day program, Career Course, etc.
 - Need to get the youngsters to “see” the opportunities, even though they are still studying, so that when they leave school, they know where to go
- The youngsters could not see the wide opportunity for them to be self-employed
 - There are so many in Baling who are successful in online business – they could develop existing product to be something more successful
 - Example: ikan bilis garing (crunchy anchovies) – the owner is single and very successful
- The problem is not because of lack of facilities, because the town is near (Baling town) and the nearest big commercial area is five minutes away (Billion supermarket area)
- Another issue is not willing to try and take risks
 - Not wanting to try whether the idea can work or not
 - Negative thinking
 - If there is a product, instead of expanding the market wider, they just wait until people come to buy – not proactive, no initiative to upgrade the product in terms of packaging or such
 - Not daring to try
- Most of the successful villagers, they are not very good in academic, but they have the willingness and entrepreneurship skills
 - Youngsters mostly want to wait until they have a lot of capital only then they want to start – but this is wrong
- Example of successful entrepreneurs in Baling:
 - Bayu Hotel owner: Dato’ Ramli – he started from bicycle repair workshop, then grew into motorbike repair workshop, and then he ventured into second hand car sales, and eventually hotel – now he is venturing into real estate
 - A group of three teachers invested in a homestay by expanding the building with a modern style container-based block (cabin house), joint venture with the kayak recreation program centre nearby – when people come for kayak activities, they will rent the homestay at their place – everything managed via online, they started by having only kayak and lorry (for transportation to bring the guests to the kayak location)
- It is foreseen that the district could be developed for agriculture hub and agritourism (tourism in orchard) – the concept will be popular in the next five years

- If this happens, it will create more economic opportunities, and creative ones like jungle lodging
- The culture of “bringing down others” or sabotaging because of jealousy still exists, instead of the culture of healthy competition

Education Issues and Demographics

- In terms of gadget, they are still sharing among siblings within the same household, causing difficulty when following through the online learning, especially for primary school students
 - Parents cannot afford to provide one device for each child
- The students could not attend online classes, but they complete all the given homework – smart but poor, can only depend on the textbooks and exercises, they cannot respond online
 - It is difficult to see their potential via online
 - They could not participate in group discussion or activities because not having the device
 - Only when meeting them personally, we will know that the student is poor and has difficulties
- Those who want to study, they can still follow through the subjects; those who do not have interest, they are at loss
 - The portion of those who do not want to follow the study is higher
 - The percentage of weak students is high
 - The most affected is those who started their early education (Standard 1) via online, never went to school in the first year – government new initiative is in having special stream for students who need to catch up with the basic learning skills
- Schools and teachers are all outside of the village
- Computer use in school:
 - For primary level, the IT class slot is borrowed from another subject (30 minutes) – not focused
 - More on exploring Chromebook, insufficient time for computer subject
 - Only 30 minutes for the subject, in which most of the time are taken up just for accessing Chromebook – technical issue
- Schools are not focused on skill-based subjects; too much time allocated for core subjects even though there are no more exams
- There is a change in approach in schools, to focus more on skill-based, but it is still tied to the timetable, and the outcome is yet to be observed
- Early awareness is important:
 - For primary, fun education could be more effective than drill exercises – “bring fun to learning”
- 1,560 households
- Approximately more than 2,000 residents
- Average 2 children per household
- Most children are primary school students
- One class for each standard, not more than 30 students per class – 30 students x 6 standards = 180 students per school

INTERVIEW THREE

Respondent’s Designation: Secretary Surau (resident village), Secretary JPKK (outside village), freelance job

Social and Economic Issues

- Economic is static, not fluctuating – because mostly rubber tapping – pandemic or not, it is still the same
 - But the issue now is the price of rubber is low, so the power of purchasing is less, up to extend that it is difficult to get food to eat
 - The wages are also less
 - If they get RM 2, divided by two with the owner, one person will get RM 1
 - On the other side, the price of sugar, etc, are going up
- Job:
 - From food to mouth (kais pagi makan pagi), enough to survive only
 - Some has problem to pay for fees for children’s schooling – so they will ask for help
 - The AJK will get the funding from a few NGOs, for money – they will get the supply for uniforms, books, etc.
 - Cooperation from shops selling books and uniforms – only a little discount, but most of the time they pay full
- Demographic:
 - Around five villages under one qariah
 - Each village is divided into more localities (smaller villages)

- Average around 2,000 people in the villages
- Common issues:
 - Ketum addiction, drug addiction, about 1% of the population, around the age of 20's-50's
 - Gambling, because the town is only five minutes away, and now they can gamble via online
 - So, pandemic living with the addicts
- Youth:
 - They want to work, so most of them have worked outside of the village
 - Some are still in the village, not wanting to leave their parents
 - In terms of further education, the AJK have assembled the youths to send them to IKBN and IKM to learn skill-based courses – last month they have brought five youths, but only one went through the interview
 - The issue here is because parents are reluctant when it comes to spending on the initial one-off cost of registration, RM 800 usually, for uniform and things to start as a student at the institute, even though their children are qualified to get MARA loan or other funding after they have joined the institute, because all of them are from B40 households
 - Competition with other races (i.e., Chinese, Indians) because they are also eligible to join the institutes
 - The AJK have done the same method as Chinese by grouping the potential students to join the institutes, but the Malays would run away because they are just not interested
- If a university would like to do research, then there is an opportunity here to investigate how to “culturise” these youth, to make them move ahead instead of being left behind in the job market
- Support in terms of youth development is less whole – instead of having 10 agencies with 10 ideas, it is suggested that we have one specific model
 - Example: one type of industry to be implemented in the village
- One thing for sure, the people need account management skills
 - They do not know how to handle/manage their money, especially when given funds
 - Example: one agency gave the farmer-sellers RM 10,000 each – when they follow up, all the money has been utilised – when they investigated, they concluded that “the people is given the money but never being taught on how to manage it”
 - Example: one villager received funding of RM 20,000 under Agropreneur Muda (Young Agropreneur) program – After some time, he asked whether there is more to come, because all he received has been fully spent
 - There is no turnover of money; totally fail when it comes to financial management
- If possible, create one successful project until the end, projecting the target for 10 years, for example

Business Activities Projects

- Those who run small business of food stalls, they open in the morning and close at 11AM, because there is no demand to be opened the whole day
- Growing vegetables, a bit, then sell in Baling town, because the villagers buy everything in town
- Even for cows, they purchase them from outside
- If they sell to the local villagers, they may end up giving free because of sympathy
- Long-term issues:
 - Example of one food stall opened near to another food stall – it is opened after 11AM to avoid competing with the next stall, but only temporarily opened because there is no demand, less customers, problem with finding cooks
 - Village customers do not really eat outside after 11AM, unless only for snacks – they mostly eat one meal a day

Education Issues

- Parents in the village do not have high education, hence they children will be dropping out in study
- Children/students need handphone especially for the online classes, but some teachers do not conduct online classes
 - When the students joined the online class for half an hour, after that will be more on surfing the Internet (browse other things instead of the online learning) since they already have the phone in their hand during that period – since the parents are not very IT literate, they are not aware of this or do not know what to do
 - The wasted the Internet, costing the parents on the Internet access
 - It is not possible to have extra classes or tuition
- Now that there is no particular exam for end of primary school, no particular assessment since pandemic, it is more common to be left behind in studies
 - To get to good schools or boarding schools, it is said that 80 percent seats are for B40, but the opportunity is less
 - Even if the village children get 6As in their exam, the teachers will again weigh the results and assess in terms of attendance, and their parents background – qualification on paper does not determine the final decision, because of

worry on whether the parents can afford any expenses during the boarding school life, or whether the students can be responsible and discipline when they get into the boarding school

- In the past, the academic results are not the determinant
 - Once a person passed the Form 3 SRP level, they went straight into tapping rubber trees
 - Compared to his friends who are successful in academic and continued their studies, the one tapping rubber is more successful
 - People had other choices if they could not enter universities
 - Those who went to universities end up full of debts when graduated because they were given loans to study
 - Example: to study medicine costs half a million to one million of debts (depending on local or abroad universities), up to extend that the parents would ask before signing approval “Are you really sure you want to study?”

INTERVIEW FOUR

Main Respondent’s Designation: Pengerusi JPKK

Supporting Respondent’s Designation: Youth

Economic and Social Issues

- Most villagers are rubber tappers and farmers; they are dependent on the agriculture product
- With the recent rainy weather, there is difficulty in getting income from rubber product
- Crops issues with wildlife attack – wild boar and monkeys
- Crops were not fenced, so it does not cost much to grow farm – there was no need for the fences
 - Now, because of logging by outsiders, and abandoned land being explored by villagers, the wildlife come out from the forest and disturb the crops
- Cost of fencing is depending on the area size – costs thousands of RM if two to three acres
 - Cannot be a normal or wired fence; they must be stronger than that
 - If it is an electric fence, it will require solar system for the electric energy – costly
- Not many activities since pandemic
- There is no funding for building community hall or field – initiative could be made for the youth here on this

Business Activities and Projects

- Small food stalls
- No small factories for small/village industry
- Some businesses are still surviving, some only survived for a short term
 - Short term: the most is 1 year
 - Some closed, then reopened
 - Because not all villagers have money to spend, unless it is durian season when people have a bit more to spend
- Employed workers work in town or in factories in Penang
 - Commuting daily: need to get ready from 4AM and standby to be picked up by factory van by 5AM
 - Around 10 to 15 people working in those factories

Youth and Education Issues

(Answer supported by the supporting respondent – youth)

- Mostly play handphone (game) at home
- Youth rarely go out because no specific place to hangout
- Mostly work just to get paid enough to buy phone prepaid – not serious in work
- They used to play football at the school field – now the school prohibits them to play there because of class break-in and theft incidents
- There are drug addicts in the village in their 20s and 30s – once tried, it is hard to leave
- Quite several theft cases but not so many, because of hard core poor
- Internet problem: The Internet connection is slow; if raining then the connection breaks
 - Teachers mostly stay in town – their Internet line has no issues
 - Main telecommunication line is Celcom
 - Mostly use prepaid service
- One household has about three children and above
 - 50 percent of the households have small children
 - Population of school-going children is about 50 percent

- There are about 100 students in the village school, because parents prefer to send their children to schools outside of the village
- There is no Internet centre in the village – the nearest is in Baling town
- All secondary schools are nearer to town, and in Bongor
- All children continue their study until secondary school – some qualified for boarding schools

INTERVIEW FIVE

Respondent's Designation: Retired AJK

Economic and Social Issues

- The situation is bad – after the pandemic, we have rainy season – affecting the rubber production
- Some villagers are working as rubber tappers, some work in factories but not many
- In terms of agriculture, because there is no funding, it does not really grow
 - Funds are required for building fences, and developing land
 - It is not easy to develop the youths to venture in agriculture, for example in vegetable farming, it cannot be done alone, it should be done in a group (cluster farming)
- Daily income especially for rubber tappers:
 - In a year, average that they could work on the rubber trees is only about 3 months, because of rain and unpredictable weather
 - Back in the old days, rubber tappers can work for six months
 - For the rest of the months, they would do small jobs, like being hired to cut grass, follow friends to do business, etc.
- Teachers' association and government bodies did come to the village to help, as well as a pharmacy agency that came to bring help during pandemic
- We need a sustainable economy, something that will last long:
 - Example: there are villagers who are interested in growing chicken and goats, then we need to monitor them until they are successful
 - As an example, if start from 10 goats that needs further breeding, then the livestock should last long-term, and in eventually it will contribute back to the zakat, etc.
 - Example: to grow chicken requires a huge area – as for now, five nests have been identified
 - In 2 months, the farmer could get 120 tones with profit of RM 60,000
 - The beauty part of it is that they do not use any artificial antibiotics or medicine for the chicken, only the traditional village way of growing them
 - Vegetables are compulsory because the daily production already has its receiver (buyer)
 - Examples: pineapples and cucumber will have one lorry trip to pick up the production
 - Hence, require cluster farming to meet the demand of daily pick-up
- Cluster farming needs to be developed in the village:
 - Requires guidance, e.g., how to care for the crops to avoid infection by bugs
 - Cluster farming is necessary to make the farmers feel empowered; if they work alone, they will become lazy
- In the past, under MARDI, they have implemented cluster farming at Bumbung 5 – they grew “sawi” and chillies 5 kg from each farm on daily basis, and those being transported by lorry
- Farming in polybags can also be done
- Need to go through the AJK to be successful – it is not easy to work on the projects alone
- Factory workers among the villagers are mostly working in Penang and Kulim
- The first and foremost, parents are the start of whether the youth and children becomes good or not – they should be enriched with knowledge of the religion
- There are mosques and suraus in the villages, it should not be difficult to organise weekly classes there and bring the children there to learn religion
 - It is better to invest in hiring qur'an teachers
 - Villagers who can teach qur'an are no longer interested to teach, hence the need to find and hire teachers from outside
 - Good example given is the Merbuk Mosque that was upgraded with offices, etc.
- We can investigate and compare 10 mosques around here and observe – each mosque would have approximately 200 residents around it, but the number of people who came to the mosque is only one line of saf

- Social issues started with lack of faith in religion
 - Children keep on asking for money from their parents, but parents never ask why, and this provision of money leads to social issues
- The village used to be very bright and spacious, but now it is full of bushes and dark – this is among the effect of social issues, in which people are not motivated to take care of environment
 - Need to conduct motivation talks
- A successful story: Ramli Motor could be successful thanks to the effort of the previous AJK in processing his application for fundings and getting the approval at the higher level – now, Ramli Motor owns a car sales shop
- There is a need to compete in business with other races, especially in curbing the issues of halal and haram
 - The villagers need to be informed and advised to ensure that they are concerned on the matter of halal and haram
 - Simple example: fish bought in Kuala Muda is only RM2 per kilogram, being sold in Baling at the price of RM 14 (halal and haram is not only about the ingredient of food, but also in financing)

Youth and Business Activities

- Less number of youths and lack of capital to run business
- If the youth is interested to be independent, they could venture in agriculture
 - They need to do needs assessment and understand the market demand
 - For fruits and vegetables, the AJK have helped in getting permit and other facilities at Pasar Tani for the youth, but they gave a lot of reasons – facilities are given but they do not want to take up the opportunity
 - Pumpkins, coconuts, papayas – there are markets for these at Pasar Tani
 - Delivery service of fruits and vegetables are provided by the association of the Pasar Tani
- There are no trainings in terms of economy for the youth – need to give talks, assemble them all, and call the respective agencies to give the talks, because the youths get no guidance

Education Issues

- There are no issues now, because the school is near, and the roads are easily accessed – it used to be read earth roads, now we have tarred road
- The economic situation here is not so bad that the children cannot be sent to school
- There is no hardcore poverty because there is always somebody in the village who will help out
 - If the parent does not have motorbike, then a neighbour with motorbike will give a ride to school
 - All households have motorbikes

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Historically the name Baling has originated from events mentioned in the story of Raja Bersiong (The Fanged King), a known and popular legend of Kedah, which was also recorded in the Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa. The ruthless vampire-like king was finally overrun by his subjects and subsequently threw his fangs in a place known as *Baling* (meaning *throw* in Malay); in Thai too language Ba-Taling means riverbank. Interestingly Baling hosted the leaders of the Malay Races Liberation and the British who met in 1955. Baling District is divided into eight mukims including Bakai, Baling town, Bongor, Kupang, Pulai, Siong, Tawar and Teloi Kanan. Baling has beautiful tourist attractions including Gunung Pulai; a 600-meter mountain located within this district; rising from the earth some 450 million years ago, while Gunung Baling is known to be one of the oldest formations of its kind in Malaysia

This study is a preliminary assessment of the general economic wellbeing of Baling. Some of the major issues highlighted by the participants during the interview are common issues in most villages worldwide including internet problem, finding new source of income and the need to connect with the right people who could develop the economic sector of the community in the villages. Other concerns include difficulties in business expansion; among the businesses currently functioning in the villages include motorbike workshop, groceries shops. It is almost consensus that food stalls in the villages survive just to make it sufficient for children's school pocket money, and inadequate for savings as the cost of materials is skyrocketing. The youth or the young adults are the most affected groups and many of them prefer helping parents in the village work. On the schools, the teachers are mostly senior teachers or retired sent from the town areas and the children in the school see them as foreigners. Accordingly, the respondent is of the view that there are limited interesting activities in schools of some villages.

7. REFERENCES

1. Need Assessment Study Conducted by Albukhari International University Malaysia
2. Jabatan Pengairan Dan Saliran Daerah Baling
3. Adam, Ramlah binti, Samuri, Abdul Hakim bin & Fadzil, Muslimin bin (2004). Sejarah Tingkatan 3. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. ISBN 983-62-8285-8.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, A.O.S. methodology, S.I, formal analysis, A.O.S, investigation, S.I. resources, S.I., original draft preparation, A.O.S., review and editing, S.I., discussion and conclusion, A.O.S., both authors have read and agreed to the publication of the manuscript.