

## Social Inclusion Facet among Refugee Communities in Refugee Community Settlement Scheme, Kinarut, Papar, Sabah

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### Abstract

Almost 100,000 people, mostly Muslims flee their homeland due to war between the independence-sought Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the government. They were allowed to stay and work in Sabah by the ruling government. A settlement scheme was built to manage them. Documentation was provided to record their presence. Provision of fishing boats and nets, and trading equipment to help them meet end needs. In the early days, refugee children were allowed to attend national schools. Some refugees have assimilated with the locals through marriages. However, after 5 decades, they still face arrest, incarceration, and deportation. The objective of this study is to analyse the degree of social inclusion experienced by the refugees living in the Refugee Community Settlement Scheme, Kinarut, Papar, Sabah from the perspective of access and participation. This study employs a qualitative research design and engaged a purposive sampling. 39 respondents participated through administered questionnaires. Findings were analysed using the Theory of Social Inclusion by Gidley et al. (2010). Findings reveal that refugees living in the scheme experienced a degree of social inclusion of access and participation but with restriction. Notably, after 5 decades in Sabah, these refugees and their descendants are partially included. Unable to go anywhere, refusing to return to their so-called homeland, and incapable of escalating their human potential, refugees are stranded in Sabah. A holistic approach backed with strong political will, and civic awareness among the local people, together with the support of the NGOs is needed to work out refugee issues in Sabah.

**Keywords:** Access, Participation, Social Inclusion, Refugees, and Sabah.

### Introduction

The Filipino refugees who entered Sabah in the 1970s were mostly Muslims. Almost 100,000 people fled (Kassim, 2009) when a civil war erupted between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) which sought independence in the Southern Philippines (Shim et al., 2014). The then Chief Minister of Sabah permitted their stay in Sabah

based on humanitarian grounds (Kassim, 2009). They were protected and provided with necessities. The refugees were allowed to work. Enrolling in primary and secondary mainstream education was also allowed for the refugee children. Three types of documents are recognized for the refugees. First is the “Kad Jabatan Ketua Menteri” famously known as “Kad Burung-Burung” possibly because of the bird’s images imprinted on the document. “Kad Burung-Burung” was issued by the Settlement Unit, Sabah Chief Minister’s Department. Second is the “Sijil Banci PPKP” which was issued by the Federal Special Task Force (FSTF), Ministry of Home Affairs. The third is the IMM13 document was issued by the Immigration Department (Shim et al., 2014).

Sabah has been daunted by the issue of refugees since the 1970s when groups of Filipinos entered Sabah due to the civil war that erupted in the Southern Philippines. The situation had been worsened when a big migration of economic migrants illegally from the Philippines started to engulf Sabah in the 1980s (Shim et al., 2014) (Kassim, 2009). Since the economic migrant was also from the Philippines, it posits a crucial issue as it is hard to distinguish between the migrant who is a refugee and an economic migrant. The crime was associated with the migrants, although there are no official statistics differentiating crimes involving refugees and economic migrants, the locals consider them the same and resented them.

The war refugees entered Sabah with permission to stay by the then Chief Minister of Sabah (Shim et al., 2014). They were given shelter and permitted to work. Their welfare was taken with due consideration. Refugee Settlement Schemes were erected and developed to ease the management of refugees. They were given aid and tools such as land to farm, fishing boats and nets, and trading equipment to help them meet end needs for their daily lives. They were not allowed to be repatriated without their willingness, and they were to meet certain rules for them to stay in Sabah. It is claimed that they were meant to be integrated with the locals although no specific policy was articulated for the intention. However, literature showed that the refugees had been assimilating with locals through marriages (Kassim, 2009). Before the amendment of the National Education Policy in 2002, refugees were able to further their studies up until higher institutions thus making them educated and able to hold better positions in the workplace. Marriages with locals, economic stability and various accommodations provided to the refugees may be the factors contributing to their resistance to returning to their home country, especially the younger generation as they no longer knew the Philippines as their home country.

But as the day goes by, since the 1970s, the management of the refugees has been in limbo. Firstly, the settlement scheme has been congested with other than refugees such as illegal migrants and even the locals (Liew, 2022). Moreover, there are no basic amenities such as electricity and water supply which is due to documentation issues arising from the service delivery. The inhabitants in the settlement scheme rely on water provided by a private company which is costly, and electricity from the generators. Some even tap water and electricity illegally. Sanitation and garbage management were also bad. Secondly, refugees’ documentation, is unsettled since their inception in Sabah and worsens these days. *Kad Burung-Burung*, *Sijil Banci*, and IMM13 (Shim et al., 2014) are the documents recognized for them. But still, they face arrest, incarceration, and deportation (Kunapalan et al., 2020) by enforcement agencies from time to time making them restless. Moreover, the issuance of IMM13 for the children of the IMM13 holder being stopped since 2013 (Mohd Sanusi, 2020)

makes the children undocumented and aggravates their situations. With restricted documentation, the refugees were only allowed to work in the blue-collar setting (Kassim, 2009), unable to attend mainstream education and limited access to health services due to cost issues. Thirdly, the inexistence of a legal framework (Munir-Asen (2018), Ayode Ahmad et al (2016), Kassim (2009), and related policies for the management of refugees in Malaysia. With their number reported to be increasing since the 1970s, and without political will and commitment which translated into a robust policy will eventually affect the social setting of the country.

Therefore, based on the premise that refugees in Sabah faced exclusionary situations such as limited access to water and electricity, sanitation and garbage management issues, documentation problems which lead to limited access to education and health to facing arrest, incarceration and deportation, and the inexistence of legal framework to uphold their basic human rights and dignity. At the same time, refugees in Sabah faced inclusionary situations such as the provision of a settlement scheme and permission to work, given aid and tools to help them meet end needs for their daily lives, and were not allowed to be repatriated without their willingness. Thus, this study aims to analyse the degree of social inclusion experienced by the refugees living in the scheme from the perspective of access and participation.

### **Definition of Terms**

For this study's purposes, these definitions of terms, terminology, and concepts by Gidley et al. (2010) are used:

Social Inclusion – refers to enabling access to resources and opportunities, participation in key community activities, and empowerment to maximize the potential of individual human beings.

Access – refers to increasing the access of vulnerable groups to resources and opportunities according to their basic human rights.

Participation – refers to enabling the full participation of vulnerable groups in the society they live with respect for their human dignity.

### **Literature Review**

Initially, the management of refugees in Sabah was handled by the UNHCR and International Red Cross together with the assistance of the Sabah state government. The year 1976 saw the establishment of the Settlement Unit under the Chief Minister's department which is responsible for overseeing the welfare of refugees. It is reported that there were 32 settlement schemes throughout Sabah but only five which were built on the state's land were gazetted. The locations of the schemes are in Telipok, Kota Kinabalu; Kinarut, Papar; Kampung Bahagia, Sandakan; Kampung Selamat, Semporna; and Kampung Hidayat, Tawau.

According to Shim et al (2014), the registration of these refugees was initially conducted by the Settlement Unit and later in 1987 was assisted by Sabah's Institute Development Studies (IDS). According to Kassim (2009), the refugee population made up 3.82 per cent of the Sabah population of 2.997 million in 2008. This number is relatively small due to for the

last 30 years many of the pioneer refugees have died, some have returned to their homeland, some have attained Malaysia Permanent Resident, some children born in Sabah were unable to get the birth certificate, and some had experienced social and spatial mobility whereby they had moved to Peninsula because of getting good jobs and getting married with the locals.

In 1989, the management of refugees in the settlement scheme was handed over from the Settlement Unit, Chief Minister's Department to Federal Special Task Force (FSTF) under the Ministry of Home Affairs following the *Arahan Majlis Keselamatan Negara (MKN) No. 16*. The Filipino Islamic refugees were given special treatment as to exemption under Passport Act 1966, permitted to stay and work in Sabah and Federal Territory of Labuan, cannot be expelled unless convicted with a crime, cannot be repatriated to origin country unwillingly, cannot be prevented from returning to the country of origin but loses his or her refugee status once returned, cannot be prevented to resettled in a third country, and for refugees who had stayed for more than 15 years, they were allowed to apply for Entry Permit which once approved they will later be given Permanent Resident status (Shim et al., 2014).

According to Kassim (2009), changes in the political power in Sabah started in the 1980s had very much affected the Filipino refugees. In the early '70s, the state's ruling was in the power of the Muslim majority party, which the then Chief Minister also publicly claimed ancestral to the Sulu Sultanate provided various accommodations to the refugees. The settlement scheme was provided with basic facilities such as roads, wooden huts, schools, and mosques. They were also assisted with employment such as plantation work and logging, as well as employment in the construction and service sectors. Land to farm vegetables, fruit trees, rubber, and rice was allocated. Those who resettled by the sea were provided with equipment for the fishing activity such as fishing boats and nets. Equipment for trading purposes was also provided for those who were in the urban area. A legal document was issued to them, and the children enjoyed national school up until secondary five. All these accommodations granted to the refugees were aimed at permanent settlement in the state, and far more for inclusion and assimilation purposes. It is a political move undertaken for political survival as the Muslim refugees later are expected to help strengthen the party's position.

When the state's ruling changed to the non-Muslim majority party in the mid-'80s, the assistance enjoyed by the refugees slowly receded. The influx of economic migrants from the Philippines in the 80s is a joint factor that contributed to the hostile treatment towards the refugees. Refugees were always misunderstood and regarded as illegal migrants. Because the refugees and the economic migrants were both Filipinos and some of the migrants were involved in criminal activities, resentment towards the refugees was inflicted. The refugees were also stereotyped as seizing job opportunities from the locals, as well as burdens the health and social services. When in fact they are doing the jobs that are abandoned by the locals which are the 4D jobs (dirty, dangerous, difficult, and demeaning). The refugees may not be qualified for professional employment since they are unable to get access to education due to their unavailability of legal documents. The percentage of foreign nationals utilizing public health services is relatively small as compared to the local populations, but it is the fact that these migrants defaulted their medical bills which may maybe due to the higher fees imposed on foreign nationals and that these migrants are financially incapacitated, that causes strains on the medical facilities.

Five decades have passed, and despite the special treatment articulated for the Filipino refugees, their status is still uncertain, confront resentment, and treated as equal to the illegal migrants, shrouded with fear of arrest, incarceration, and deportation. After almost five decades, they are still here, together with their offspring who no longer knew the Philippines as their home country. The issuance of IMM13 document by the Immigration department for the refugee's children was stopped in 2013 when the Sultan Sulu descendant's militia called the Royal Soldiers of the Sultanate of Sulu and North Borneo attacked Kampung Tanduo in Lahad Datu, Sabah (Sanusi, 2020). It was reported that many of the IMM13 holders had become a pimp to the militia. The privilege they once enjoyed to enrol in primary and secondary mainstream education was halted in 2002 when the National Education Act was amended. Birth certificates are now compulsory for enrolment (Kassim, 2009), thus, making mainstream education reserved for citizens only. Their only choice of education is through the Alternative Learning Centre (ALC) which is operated by the NGOs. Sadly, the ALC was only provisioning basic education which is to read, write, and count, apart from religious study for the children. Although some ALC provide skills education to the children, it is only meant for the mere survival of the children after they finished school. Future development for professionals' career is unlikely to be attained. They are doomed to remain impoverished and underprivilege.

## **Method**

This study employs a qualitative research design with a case study-bound approach. In qualitative research, participants are engaged and their perspectives heard, thus enabling the researcher to better comprehend the topic under investigation and to investigate it from a perspective that matters to the researcher (Creswell, 2013). Through the perspectives of participants, the researcher aims to determine the meaning of a phenomenon (Cresswell, 2009). A case study is a "qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes" (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Based on the feature of this study which is explanatory, and case study bound approaches, the researcher studied specifically the refugees living in the Refugee Settlement Scheme, located at Kinarut, Papar, Sabah. This study engaged a purposive sampling. It is the intentional selection of participants according to their attributes (Etikan et al., 2016). Participants whom the researcher believes would be most willing to participate in the study and have all the necessary skills and knowledge. 39 respondents participated in the data collection processes. Data collection was conducted through administered questionnaires.

This study will employ the Theory of Social Inclusion by Gidley et al (2010), to analyse and explain the degrees of social inclusion of refugees in Sabah. Literature discloses that there are broad interpretations and concepts of social inclusion and how it is measured and analysed. Social inclusion can be framed differently in various contexts depending on the objectives of the discourse. However, most discourse focuses on the aspects of access, participation, and empowerment as the critical factors to the success of social inclusion. According to Gidley et al. (2010), degrees of social inclusion may be understood from three perspectives which are access, participation, and empowerment. Access refers to the enablement and the increasing of access to opportunities that are essential to human beings such as economics, and

education. Participation refers to the enablement of participation of human beings in the key activities of the communities or societies they live in, with respect for their human dignity. Whereas empowerment refers to the enablement of the maximization of human being's potential. Literatures on social inclusion encompasses various contexts and dimensions from access to basic necessities as per human rights needs to the more complex perspectives of combating war, extremism, biases, and to the extent of achieving the maximization of human being potentials. The Theory of Social Inclusion by Gidley et al. (2010) establishes a construct on the assessment of social inclusion by analysing degrees of social inclusion from three aspects which are access, participation, and empowerment. Thus, the Theory of Social Inclusion by Gidley et al (2010), is deemed to be best suitable for this study's purposes in guiding the analysis of degrees of social inclusion of refugees in the Refugee Settlement Scheme, Kinarut, Papar, Sabah.

### Results and Discussion

In this study, respondents were given a questionnaire consisting of sections covering demography, social and economy. Social inclusion is analysed from two perspectives which are access and participation. Access refers to the respondent's ability to access basic needs concerning their human rights. Whereas participation refers to respondents' ability to fully participate in the key activities in the society they lived in. To better illustrate the data, access and participation will be discussed from socio-economic contexts.

#### Demography

Table 1

##### *Types of Respondent's Identification Document*

Types of Identification Document	Number of people
IMM13	8
Kad JKM	17
Sijil Banci PPKP	10
Did not mention types of Identification Document	4

Table 2

##### *Respondent's Sex*

Sex	Number of people
Male	12
Female	27

Of the 39 respondents being questioned, eight people hold the IMM13 identification documents, 17 people hold the Kad JKM, 10 people hold the Sijil Banci PPKP, and four people do not specify their type of identification documents (Table 1). 12 people are male and 27 people are female (Table 2).

Table 3

*Respondent's Birth Cohort*

Birth Cohort	Number of people
1980 – 1989	17
1990 – 1999	6
2000 – 2009	2
2010 above	0
Before 1980	13
Does not specify the year of birth	1

Table 4

*Respondent's Place Of Birth*

Place of birth	Number of people
Malaysia	28
Outside Malaysia	11

There were 17 people born between 1980 to 1989, 6 people were born between 1990 to 1999, two people were born between 2000 to 2009, and none were born from 2010 onwards. While 13 people were born before 1980 and one person does not specify the year of birth (Table 3). 28 people were born in Malaysia and 11 people were born outside Malaysia (Table 4). The duration of stay in the scheme is between 12 to 51 years.

Table 5

*Respondent's ethnicity*

Ethnicity	Number of people
Bajau	26
Bajau Suluk	2
Bajau Ubian	1
Filipino	1
Melayu Brunei	1
Suluk	4
Ubian	3
Does not specify ethnicity	1

There are 26 people of Bajau ethnicity, two people are Bajau Suluk, one person is Bajau Ubian, one person is Filipino, one person is Melayu Brunei, four people are Suluk, three people are Ubian, and one person did not state their ethnicity (Table 5).

Table 6

*Respondent's Type and level of Education*

Type and Level of Education	Number of people	Level
Primary school	11	Standard 1–6
Secondary school	2	STPM
Village school	1	Standard 1
Madrasah	2	Standard 2–3
Primary school in the Philippines	1	Standard 2
Does not specify the type & level of education	22	-

They were 11 people attended primary school ranging from Standard 1 to 6, while one person attended primary school in the Philippines. One person attended village school at Standard 1, and 2 people attended Madrasah school at Standard 2 and 3. Two people attended primary school at STPM level, whereas 22 people did not specify their type and level of education (Table 6).

Table 7

*Respondent's Types of Job*

Type of Job	Number of people	Salary (RM)
Labour	8	40.00 – 1,500.00
Dishwasher	1	800.00
PPKK Teacher	1	1000.00
Kitchen Helper	1	600.00
Nanny	1	900.00
Housewife	7	-
Self-employed	1	35.00/day
Does not specify the type of job	19	-

Table 8

*Respondent's Types of Side Job*

Type of Side Job	Number of people	Salary (RM)
Gardening	1	6.00/kg
Business	2	300.00
Fisherman	1	10.00
House cleaner	1	300.00
Does not specify the type of side job	34	-

The majority of the respondents do not specify their type of job or side job. Labor is the most common job among the respondents with salary ranges from RM40.00 to RM1,500.00. Other jobs are dishwasher, teacher, kitchen helper, nanny, and self-employed (Table 7). Whereas gardening, doing business, fisherman, and house cleaner are side jobs that are specified by the respondents (Table 8).



**Social Inclusion from the Context of Social**

Table 9

*Results of Data Collected on Access from the Perspective of Social–Social Inclusion*

	<b>STRONGLY AGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>NOT AGREE</b>	<b>STRONGLY NOT AGREE</b>
1. I can mix with the local community.	12	27	0	0
2. I can set up a house (shelter) in any area other than the Settlement Scheme.	1	13	17	8
3. I can practice my religious beliefs.	8	26	3	0
4. I am free to move to my place/ house of worship.	10	29	0	0
5. I have access to food supplies.	9	29	0	1
6. I have access to a clean water supply.	6	27	3	1
7. I have access to electricity.	5	30	2	1
8. I have access to clothing supplies.	6	27	0	2
9. I have access to Housing as a shelter.	7	21	5	5
10. I have access to Health Services. (public/ private health).	6	27	4	2
11. I have access to Education. (formal/ alternative education).	21	6	6	6

Table 9 shows the results of data collected on access from a perspective of social–social inclusion. All respondent agrees that they can mix with the local community. 25 respondents disagree that they can build a house outside the scheme. Most of the respondents agree that they can practice their religious beliefs and that they can move freely to their house of worship. Most of the respondents also agree that they have access to food supplies, clean water, electricity, and clothing. Most of the respondents agree that they have access to housing as a shelter, health services and education. On the health services and education, it is noted that most respondents are more comfortable accessing private health care and private education services due to issues with financial and identification documents.

Table 10

*Results of Data Collected on Participation from the Perspective of Social–Social Inclusion*

	<b>STRONGLY AGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>NOT AGREE</b>	<b>STRONGLY NOT AGREE</b>
1. Government agencies came and gave me help (financial/ food/ equipment).	13	22	1	3
2. NGOs came and gave me help (financial/ food/ equipment).	10	24	2	3
3. The school takes into account my opinion regarding the education (formal/ alternative) that I follow.	7	24	5	7
4. I have attended feasts/ festivals organized by the local community. (wedding/ birthday/ holiday celebrations/Chinese New Year).	11	25	3	0
5. I respect the personal rights of others.	18	20	0	0
6. I help neighbours who are facing difficulties.	14	25	0	0

Table 10 shows the results of data collected on participation from a perspective of social–social inclusion. Most of the respondents agree that government agencies and NGOs came forward to provide help in terms of financial/ food/ equipment to them. 31 respondents agree that their opinion matters to the school they/their family are attending. While 36 respondents agree that they have attended feasts/ festivals such as weddings/ birthday/ holiday celebrations which were organized by the local community. 38 respondents agree that they respect others' rights. Meanwhile, all respondents agree that they came forward to help their neighbours who are in need.

**Social Inclusion from the Context of an Economy**

Table 11

*Results of Data Collected on Access from the Perspective of Economy–Social Inclusion*

	<b>STRONGLY AGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>NOT AGREE</b>	<b>STRONGLY NOT AGREE</b>
1. I can get a job.	3	17	11	5
2. I get an accident allowance while working.	2	14	9	9
3. I can run a business.	1	23	3	9
4. I can get certain skills to start working.	2	17	7	9
5. I can get certain licenses to start a business.	3	13	9	10

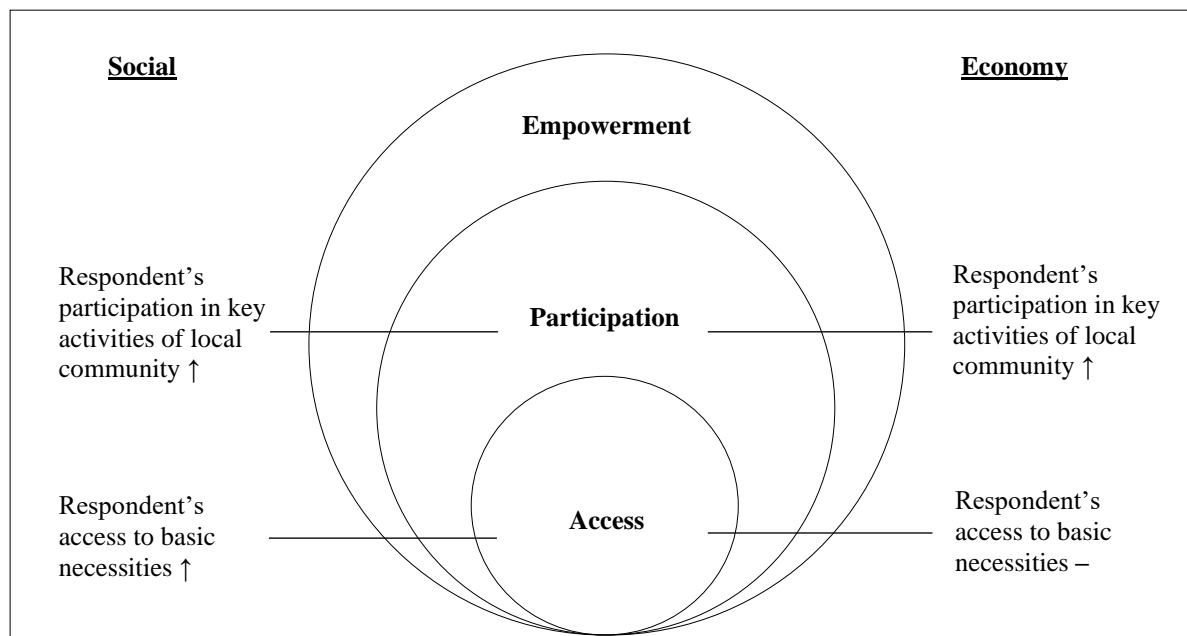
Table 11 shows the results of data collected on access from a perspective of economy–social inclusion. 20 respondents agree that they can get a job while 16 disagree. 18 respondents disagree that they can get accident allowances while working. 24 respondents agree that they can run a business but 19 respondents disagree that they can get certain licenses to start a business. Meanwhile, 19 respondents agree that they can get certain skills to start working,

Table 12

*Results of Data Collected on Participation from the Perspective of the Economy–Social Inclusion*

	<b>STRONGLY AGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>NOT AGREE</b>	<b>STRONGLY NOT AGREE</b>
1. I can work together with the local community.	24	14	0	1
2. I can do business with the local community.	23	5	7	4
3. The local community shared information about job opportunities with me.	29	2	3	4
4. The local community shared information about business opportunities with me.	22	2	10	5
5. Government agencies share information about employment opportunities with me.	17	4	8	10
6. The NGO shared information about business opportunities with me.	15	4	12	8

Table 12 shows the results of data collected on participation from a perspective of economy–social inclusion. 38 and 28 respondents respectively agree that they can work and do business with the local community. 31 and 24 respondents respectively agree that the local community shared information regarding jobs and business opportunities with them. While 21 respondents agree that government agencies shared information about employment opportunities with them, 20 respondents disagree that NGOs shared business opportunity information.



Source: Adapted from (Gidley et al., 2010)

Figure 1: Illustration view of summary of the findings

Figure 1 is the illustration view of the summary of the findings. Findings reveal that in the context of social, the degree of social inclusion that refugees in Papar’s refugee settlement scheme experienced is access up until participation. Most of the respondents agree that they had access to basic needs which concern their human rights. Having access to food, education, health service, clean water, housing, and electricity. They also have no problem mixing with local communities, practicing their religious beliefs and moving freely to their house of worship. Up until 2002, children of refugees were allowed to enroll in national primary schools before the National Education Policy was amended, which only allows children of the citizens to be enrolled. Literature shows that, in the early days, some refugee children had the opportunity to study up until higher institutions which allowed them to be in the white-collar setting with better pay. Financial and documentation are the problems faced by refugees in accessing health services and education. Refugees are considered as non-citizens thus they have to pay extra for government hospitals or clinics. Aggravated with documentation issues, and to avoid being questioned unnecessarily refugees opt for private clinics which the cost is more affordable. Refugees also opt for private schools since the children are no longer allowed for national schools. But with financial problems, many of these children left school and attended Alternative Learning Centres (ALC) which are run by NGOs. The ALCs only provide basic education known as 3M (*Membaca, Menulis, Mengira*) reading, writing, and counting, besides some religious study. Refugees living in the settlement scheme were not provided with tap water or electricity since this must be applied to the respective relevant

agency. Tap water and electricity were only allowed to be applied by the citizens. Thus, refugees gain access to clean water through private sources by paying. As for electricity, refugees were using genset to power their houses. But there were instances when some refugees tapped water and electricity illegally. The settlement scheme was managed by the Settlement Unit under the Chief Minister's office (JKM) with the help of Sabah's National Security Council (NSC). The NSC set up Pusat Pendidikan Alternatif (PPA) with a 4M curriculum (*membaca, menulis, mengira, mengaji*) for the refugee's children. They may attend this school until Standard 6. NGOs who wish to extend aid to the refugee communities are advised to do so through the NSC. This is to ensure the safety of the members so as to record the aid they received. Since these refugees are Muslims and of Bajau or Suluk ethnicity with a culture that is not far less than the locals, enables them to mix well with the local community thus attending feasts or festivals organized by the locals is a norm.

Findings also reveal that in the context of the economy, the degree of social inclusion that refugees in Papar's refugee settlement scheme experienced is participation with limited access. Refugees in Sabah are allowed to work in the blue-collar setting. Most of them work as labourers. Some refugees barely meet end needs but some also make good income using their skills as craftsmen. Documentation issues limit them from getting certain licenses to start businesses. Thus usually, they work privately and receive only cash as payment. They were also not allowed to open a bank account due to documentation issues. Being Muslims, and ethnic and culture that is similar to the local community allows them to work and do business with the locals.

## **Conclusion**

Malaysia is not a signor of the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol. Thus, making Malaysia with the absence of any legislative framework to manage refugees in the country. The management of refugees was classified under the directives of the National Security Council (NSC) called *Arahan Majlis Keselamatan Negara*. But these directives are classified documents which are not meant for public viewing and comments. And judging from the management of refugees in Malaysia these days, tons of improvements need to be made to the directives. Although Malaysia is not a member of any international treaty dealing with refugees, Malaysia is bound by its obligation under the Education for All (EFA) treaty which mandates all member countries to ensure the provision of education to children regardless of their nationality or documentation status. As a United Nations (UN) member, Malaysia also opts for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) initiatives. Under SDG 16, Malaysia is bound to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels". Malaysia is constantly under review with reports after reports are out on the performance of Malaysia in this treaty and initiatives. Thus, to signify its performance at the international level, Malaysia continues to ensure it is on par with the provision and standards, especially in the management of "refugees" in Malaysia.

Refugees who were allowed entry into Sabah in the 1970s were Muslims from the Southern Philippines. Their numbers were almost 100,000 people. War enraged between the independence-sought MORO National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the government forces the refugees to flee their home country. Back then the state's ruling under the power of the Muslim majority party assisted the entry of these refugees. They were allowed to stay and

work. The provision of documents to the refugees is to register and record their presence in the state. The documents provided vary from time to time but only 3 types were recognized these days which are IMM13 documents from the Immigration Department, Sijil Banci PPKP from the National Security Council, and the Kad JKM from the Sabah Chief's Minister Department. Settlement Schemes were created and constructed to accommodate and house these refugees. They were given aid such as fishing boats and nets, and trading equipment, besides being allowed to work in the blue-collar setting. In the early days, children of refugees may enrol in the national school, and some even went up to tertiary education. Refugees were also assimilating with the locals through marriages which is non-refutable since they share the same religion and culture not far less than the locals.

Findings in this study reveal that refugees living in the Settlement Scheme located at Kinarut, Papar, Sabah experienced a degree of social inclusion of access and participation but with restriction. Refugees had access to resources and opportunities according to their basic needs as humans. Basic needs such as food, clean water, electricity, and clothing can be obtained. Being non-citizen and having documentation problems prohibits them from applying for tap water and electricity from the relevant authorities. They resort to private water providers and genset power which cost them higher, and some resort to tapping water and electricity illegally. Refugees were categorized as non-citizens when visiting government clinics or hospitals. Thus, they must pay accordingly as a non-citizen. Visits to private clinics would not cost them as high as the government clinics, thus, most times they resort to private clinics when they need to get health services. Besides the cost being much lower than the government clinics, refugees resort to private clinics to avoid being questioned unnecessarily regarding their documentation. Since 2002, only citizens may enrol in national schools. Refugees resort to private schools, but due to financial problems, many children opt out of school. Alternative Learning Centers (ALC) run by NGOs provide only basic curriculum (read, write, count) for refugee children up until Standard 6 or 12 years old. Refugees are assimilating well with the local community; religion and shared culture facilitate the process. These refugees are well known for their craftsmanship; thus, some make good income from it, besides other jobs in the blue-collar setting. Complications in getting licenses compel them to work privately and only receive cash payment as opening a bank account is impossible for them.

Notably, after five decades in Sabah, these refugees and their descendants are partially included; experiencing a degree of social inclusion of access and participation with restriction. Unable to go anywhere, refusing to return to their so-called homeland, and incapable of escalating their human potential, refugees are stranded in Sabah. Although there is a political voice that wants these refugees to be sent back to the Philippines, no strong action has been seen. At the same time, no strong initiatives taken to solve the refugee problems. The stopped issuance of IMM13 documents to children of refugees would only aggravate the situation which leads to undocumented children or street children. A holistic approach backed with strong political will, and civic consciousness by the local people, together with the support of the NGOs is needed to work out refugee issues in Sabah.

### Limitation and Future Study

Due to time and resources constraints, only 39 respondents can be interviewed. The researcher had no direct control over the selection of the respondents and only relied on the *Ketua Skim* (Scheme Head). The list of respondent criteria is given to the *Ketua Skim*, who gathers all the potential respondents. Location-wise, the settlement scheme is the most convenient access due to its location nearer to the town and less densely populated than other settlement schemes. Future studies may focus on the comparisons of the degree of social inclusion experienced by refugees between 2 or 3 settlement schemes. The study also may focus on the political context rather than the socio-economic context.

### Research Contribution

The research contribution of this study lies in its analysis of social inclusion levels, focusing on access, and participation among refugees residing in the Refugee Community Settlement Scheme in Kinarut, Papar, Sabah. Primarily, no prior research, based on the authors' knowledge and comprehensive literature review, has explored the levels of social inclusion among refugees in Sabah. Grounded in the Theory of Social Inclusion (Gidley et al., 2010), this study expands current research on refugees in Sabah and their connection with the local community. By framing access and participation in the context of human rights, the study provides a deeper insight into the social inclusion experienced by refugees in Sabah. These refugees and their descendants are partially included; experiencing a degree of social inclusion of access and participation with restriction.

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