

**SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF RURAL
TRANSFORMATION PROJECTS ON RURAL
COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY IN THE N43
DARO CONSTITUENCY, SARAWAK**

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**ASIA e UNIVERSITY
2025**

SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF RURAL TRANSFORMATION
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A Thesis Submitted to Asia e University in
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Doctor of Business Administration

August 2025

ABSTRACT

This study examines the social impacts of Rural Transformation Projects (RTPs) implemented in Sarawak's N43 Daro Constituency from 2015 to 2024. Although these projects have greatly improved infrastructure in rural areas, no systematic Social Impact Assessment (SIA) has been conducted to measure their overall impact on community well-being. This study examines the social outcomes of RTPs in four key areas: livelihood, culture, physical infrastructure, and health. The study, based on the Capability Approach and Vanclay's Social Impact Assessment model, employs a cross-sectional, explanatory quantitative design. A structured questionnaire was provided to 369 respondents from six polling districts. The sample was directed using Krejcie and Morgan's algorithm and Raosoft's calculator to ensure statistical sufficiency. Cronbach's Alpha, KMO, and Bartlett's tests confirmed the reliability and validity of the data. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and descriptive statistics were used to investigate differences in perception between demographic groups. Research findings show that RTPs have had a significant positive impact in all four categories. Participants reported improved financial prospects, stronger cultural unity, greater access to infrastructure, and better health and sanitation outcomes. The observed data returned strong evidence against the null hypothesis, with 95% certainty that the RTPs were significantly impactful on the studied aspects. These data demonstrate the effectiveness of RTPs in improving the quality of life in rural areas. The study conceptualizes the operationalisation of Social Impact Assessment in a rural Malaysian context and broadens the application of the Capability Approach to state-driven development endeavors. It offers policymakers a validated framework for future rural planning. It methodologically proposes a structured Social Impact Assessment instrument appropriate for similar rural areas. Recommendations include incorporating Social Impact Assessment into project development, increasing the hospital workforce, and implementing youth-focused livelihood programs. The study concludes that incorporating Social Impact Assessment into rural development policy is crucial for achieving inclusive and sustainable outcomes. The findings show the positive effects of RTPs in rural Sarawak while highlighting the lack of crucial formal Social Impact Assessment mechanisms, the findings can be used as a guideline for future research within the same subject matter in other rural communities within and beyond Sarawak.

Keywords: Social impact assessment, rural transformation projects, livelihood impacts, cultural impacts, physical impacts, health impact

APPROVAL

This is to certify that this thesis conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, for the fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Business Administration.

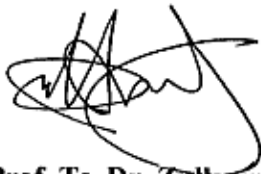
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Business Administration is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have completed this dissertation without the guidance and support of many individuals. First and foremost, I extend my sincere appreciation to Associate Professor Dr. Frank Kiong Samak Kim, whose patient supervision, guidance, and insightful suggestions greatly enhanced my work. I am also grateful to Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Noor Raihan Abdul Hamid, former Dean of the School of Management, and DBA Program Coordinator Dr. Khairul Nizam Mahmud for their support throughout this journey.

My heartfelt thanks also go to Associate Professor Dr. Junaidi @ Saudi B. Narani, then Resident of Mukah Division, for his continuous encouragement during the Field Validation Visit, as well as to Tuan Haji Latif Bin Coupon, General Manager of Tanjung Manis Port Authority, and Tuan Izuan Bin Haroni, Executive Secretary of SABERKAS, for their contributions. I am equally appreciative of the employees of Service Centre, N43 Daro, for their assistance with data collection, and to all respondents across the polling districts for their participation.

Lastly, I owe special gratitude to my wife, children, family, and friends for their patience, support, and encouragement. To all who, in one way or another, contributed to the completion of this dissertation, I extend my deepest thanks.

Thank you.

SAFIEE BIN AHMAD

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

%	Percentage
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
D	Disagree
Df	Degree of Freedom
DO	District Office
DOE	Department of Environment
DOSM	Department of Statistics Malaysia
DPR	Development Proposal Report
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EPD	Environment Protection Department
EPU	Economic Planning Unit
EQA	Environment Quality Act 1974
ETP	Economic Transformation Programme
F	Frequency
Felda	Federal Land Development Authority
FSR	Farming Systems Research
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDP	Gross National Product
GKS	Gaon Kalyan Samiti
GNI	Gross National Income
H ₀₂	Null Hypotheses
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRD	Integrated Rural Development

KMO	Kaiser Mayer-Olkin
MKRAs	Ministerial Key Result Areas
MNUSD	National Unity and Social Development
MSIA	Malaysian Association of Social Impact Assessment
N	Number of Respondents
NIMP	New Industrial Master Plan
NKRAs	National Key Result Areas
NREB	Natural Resources and Environment Board
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
p	Significant Value
PINTAS	Pelan Tindakan Sosial
PLA	Participatory Learning Action
PLI	Poverty Line Index
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRIs	Panchayati Raj Institutions
RISDA	Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority
RKS	Rogi Kalyan Samiti
RTC	Rural Transformation Centres
RTCs	Rural Transformation Centres
RTPs	Rural Transformation Projects
SA	Strongly Agree
SCIP	Societal values, Concerns, Interests and Perceptions
SCORE	Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy
SD	Strongly Disagree
SHGs	Self-Help Groups

SIA	Social Impacts Assessment
Sig.	Significant Level
Std. D	Standard Deviation
U	Undecided
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USA	United States of America
USAID	US Agency for International Development
VHNSCs	Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committees
YB	Yang Berhormat

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the study by discussing the background, research gap, objectives, conceptual framework, scope, significance, and research hypotheses. It addresses the context of Sarawak's Rural Transformation Projects (RTPs), as well as the significance of completing a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) for development projects in rural Malaysia in general, and Sarawak in particular.

1.1 Background of the Study

Malaysian policymakers follow a mixed economic system concept that combines free market principles with significant government involvement in rural development. Over the last several decades, Malaysian development has been defined in a socioeconomic context to integrate social policies with economic growth objectives. In the context of rural development, several government programs, notably the construction of Rural Transformation Projects, have aimed to improve the living conditions of people, particularly in more remote locations. Rural transformation in Malaysia transitions communities from focusing mainly on agricultural activities towards more diverse activities; this is more significant in Sarawak due to its larger land mass, resulting in more fragmented rural communities, which causes a rift in the speed of penetration in rural change when compared to West Malaysia (Sim, 2011).

Sarawak, historically one of the least developed states, has experienced multiple developmental "waves," beginning with the Politics of Development in the 1980s and continuing with industrialisation efforts through the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE). Despite significant improvements in infrastructure, household

incomes, and poverty reduction, rural-urban gaps remain in many areas. The N43 Daro Constituency in Sarawak is one such location that has benefited from a huge number of RTPs in the state (Sarawak Impact, 2022). Between 2015 and 2024, the Sarawak government implemented more than 300 RTPs in the N43 Daro constituency. Thus, the present study chose Daro as its main study area due to its being a keen focus area of rural transformation programs focus especially in regards to infrastructure development and improved access to technology. These projects seek to improve infrastructure, increase livelihoods, and minimise rural-urban inequities. However, despite the scope and investment, the evaluation of their social benefits is still anecdotal. The lack of a rigorous Social Impact Assessment hinders our understanding of how these initiatives affected local populations' daily life, cultural practices, and general well-being. Thus, the study aims to address these shortcomings by providing insights through research to expand the knowledge and understanding of these aforementioned facets.

1.1.1 Social Impact Assessment

The process of predicting, evaluating, reflecting on, and managing the intended and unintended consequences on the human environment of interventions (policies, plans, programmes, projects, and other social activities) and social change processes to create a more sustainable biophysical and human environment is known as social impact analysis (Vanclay, 2003).

In other contexts, a social impact study can be understood as a framework that embodies all human impacts, including aesthetic impacts, archaeological impacts, community impacts, cultural impacts, demographic impacts, development impacts, economic and fiscal impacts, gender assessment, health impacts, indigenous rights,

infrastructural impacts, intuitional impacts, political impacts, poverty assessment, psychological impacts, resource issues, tourism impacts, and others.

In 2001, the Federal Ministry of National Unity and Social Development (MNUSD) conducted research for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The study's goal was to create Pelan Tindakan Sosial (PINTAS) and mandate social impact assessment for specific programs, initiatives, and development activities done by both the government and private sector.

Nonetheless, in October 2002, the Deputy Prime Minister announced that "planners of future development projects will be required to submit social impact assessment reports and environmental impact assessment reports for plans to be considered for approval" (The Star, Oct 15, 2002), adding that the decision would be implemented with Cabinet approval. Specifically, the Deputy Prime Minister stated, "It was not enough to hold developers accountable for the environment. They must also be held accountable for any potential human and social problems that may occur" (The Star, *ibid*).

Under contemporary federalism, none of the foregoing applies to Sarawak unless officially ratified by the state legislature. Nonetheless, Sarawak, like the Peninsula, is experiencing an increase in awareness of the negative unintended repercussions of development initiatives and procedures. Similar concerns have been raised concerning the adequacy and quality of current SIA techniques. The slightly different institutional and legal environment, however, necessitates a distinct study, rather than simply adopting the conclusions of the Social Impact Assessment Study. The administration has always been concerned about social issues, particularly in light of the rapid development required to realise Vision 2020. Various development projects, particularly those of a mega scale and in settled built areas, will ultimately result in

severe social consequences. Social impact assessment is one of the most successful methods for avoiding, controlling, and managing social repercussions of development projects. Social impact assessment will be highly effective provided precise mechanisms for execution are in place. However, in Malaysia, social impact assessment is used in a variety of development planning and decision-making systems, including Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Development Proposal Report (DPR), and Development Plans in Malaysia (Abdullah, 2010).

1.1.2 Rural Transformation Development

The word refers to the Malaysian government's transformation project, which involves rapid and substantial changes to meet specific goals within the context of Vision 2020 and the New Industrial Master Plan (NIMP 2030). The change began by tackling key concerns as specified by National Key Result Areas (NKRAs) and Ministerial Key Result Areas (MKRAs), to achieve a high-income economy, followed by a high level of prosperity and improved public services (Malaysia, 2010). The NIMP 2030 has a mission-based strategy, directing the nation and Sarawak toward technical advancement, sustainability, and deeper integration into the global value chain.

1.1.3 Rural Transformation Concepts

While the phrases rural transformation and rural change are prevalent in rural development literature, the phrase rural transformation development, or development as proposed for this title, is novel. A search on Google Scholar reveals that only one article defines "rural transformation development" as the swift and profound restructuring of rural areas, encompassing alterations in agricultural intensity, crop selection patterns, farmland, land productivity, farm income, labor and technological productivity, as well as significant enhancements in rural housing and socio-economic

conditions (Long et al., 2011). It emphasises material alterations, namely the evolution of economic activities associated with the means of production and the agrarian landscape.

A variety of concepts regarding rural transformation exist. Included are post-productivism, the novel rural development paradigm, contemporary reality, commodification of the countryside, and global and hybrid rural landscapes (Preston and Ibrahim Ngah, 2012). In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the word productivisme was specifically applied to advanced capitalist nations. The productivisme farming regime was "a commitment to an intensive, industrially driven, and expansionist agriculture with state support, primarily focused on output and enhanced productivity" (Wilson, 2001). This pertains to improving food security and attaining self-sufficiency (Mackay et al., 2009).

Post-productivism, which emerged in the 1980s, pertains to agricultural practices that revert to less intensive production methods, utilize fewer chemical inputs, employ fewer high-yielding varieties of plants and livestock, and prioritise environmental conservation and sustainable agriculture. The driving factors for the transformation encompass an increasing public consciousness regarding the harm inflicted by intensive agriculture, a transition in consumer preference towards organic products, apprehensions about the persistent expenses associated with subsidising rural overproduction, and pressures stemming from the neoliberal economy (Mackay et al., 2009).

Post-productivism has been associated with the diversification of rural economies, the growth of multifunctional rural areas, counter-urbanisation, and the establishment of small-scale agricultural firms and farmers' markets. The concept of commodification of the countryside highlights the growing commercialisation of non-

agricultural commodities, including rural culture, locations, and landscapes for tourist, leisure, and recreational activities.

Kay (2008) examined a related notion of the rural economy and society aimed at enhancing the diversity of rural enterprises in Latin America, referred to as new rurality. The modifications pertained to the neo-liberal transition in the developmental strategy of economic endeavors. The contemporary notion of rural transformation has shifted the discourse from a primary emphasis on agriculture to encompass a broader range of rural activities and environments. The descriptions of process changes illustrate the intricate interaction of local-global and endogenous-exogenous elements, which may pertain to the tactics of individuals and diverse entities in rural areas or external to them in reaction to these changes. The capability approach and social exchange theory offer complementary perspectives for understanding rural transformation in this context of rural transformation, these theories can help understand how individuals and communities respond to changes, adapt to new opportunities, and build resilience (Lai et al., 2020).

1.1.4 Implementation of Rural Transformation Projects in Sarawak

The Malaysian government has acknowledged the disparity between urban and rural regions and has consistently endeavoured to promote rural areas to mitigate rural poverty (Kamal, 2012). Consequently, the rural transformation project represents a governmental program aimed at the development of rural regions. The government asserts that these projects can enhance the standard of living. The initiatives concentrate on the development of fundamental infrastructure, including roads, dams, irrigation systems, and the construction of schools, residences, and factories (Jatarona, Aminah MD, Syuhaida, & Chai Chang, 2016). On 24 July 2020, a circular about the implementation of the rural transformation project was disseminated to state agencies

in Sarawak, primarily aimed at improving the management and execution of development projects inside the state. This resulted from the State Government Council meeting held on 20 February 2020 to empower state agencies as leaders in implementing rural transformation projects.

The primary aim of the rural transformation projects was to furnish rural areas with essential facilities and social amenities to enhance their quality of life. The expense of RTP implementation will be incurred by the state of Sarawak during each five-year Malaysia Plan. The execution of the rural transformation project occurs via collaboration or 'Gotong-Royong' or by the designated Contractor.

The components of the Rural Transformation Project in Sarawak are determined by the guidelines.

- (1) Infrastructure, including roads, bridges, wharves, jetties, pavements, drainage systems, retaining walls, gabions, floodgates, waterfronts, septic tanks, parking spaces, and associated amenities.
- (2) The structure comprises Balai Raya, Rumah Adat, dewan, mosques, churches, houses of worship, schools, kindergartens, libraries, markets, resthouses, administrative buildings, Parish Centre, clinics, and other associated developments.
- (3) Utilities encompass water supply infrastructure, energy provision, street lighting, water pipe systems, elevated water tanks, ground storage tanks, and other associated utility facilities.
- (4) Sports facilities encompass the construction of the sports and recreation complex, football field, courts, and diverse athletic amenities.
- (5) Site Preparation (for longhouse, site of worship, burial ground, etc.)