

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**REAZUL AHSAN:** I am Dr. Reazul Ahsan, a visiting scholar of MIT UTM Malaysian sustainable city program. I am presenting two stories of development induced displacement in Malaysia. One follows up with communities affected by a hydroelectric dam in East Malaysia. The other addresses an ongoing housing development project on the southern tip of peninsula Malaysia.

Malaysia is one of the world's fastest developing nations. Under its own militia program, the government [INAUDIBLE] be a developed country by 2025. Accordingly, federal and state governments are intensively investing in infrastructure development, especially in housing, energy, and manufacturing sectors. However, many national infrastructure development programs fail to consider indigenous poor and marginalized communities, who have very limited voice in planning these mega projects.

From 1980 to 1990, almost 10 million people were displaced in South Asia due to development projects, like hydroelectric dams. The process known as development induced displacement remains a global challenge for socially sustainable development planning. Sarawak, one of two Malaysian estates on the island of Borneo, is a real example of development induced displacement due to hydroelectric dams.

Sarawak is home to 2.37 million people, and its 27 indigenous ethnic communities speak 45 different languages. In Malaya, these indigenous groups are known as Orang Asli. Beginning in the year 1994, the Sarawak's government initiated the second largest hydroelectric dam in Asia. In the name of region wide economic development, the dam inundated 1,700 hectares of land in the interior zone of Bakun, and displaced more than 10,000 Orang Asli from their home and their land.

To learn more about those displaced communities, I journeyed to Bakun. These displaced indigenous communities have been relocated next to the Bintulu City on land allocated by the government, which is now known as Village [INAUDIBLE] Before the resettlement, indigenous communities harvested their everyday needs from river and forest in Bakun. But this new location is far from their source of livelihood.

Every week many displaced villagers make a long journey to Bakun to fish and get their food from the forest. Their government appointed village leader, Mr. [INAUDIBLE] said, that it was a completely new life for them after displacement. To him, the new home was a jungle far away from the river essential to their livelihood.

**SPEAKER:** It's very totally new to our people. It's totally new. Because they are used to the way of life. They're used to the way of-- how they do living in the old place. So when we moved to this new place, so can see that all the area here is jungle.

**REAZUL AHSAN:** As a part of the relocation, they also claimed compensation from the government.

**SPEAKER:** There is Bakun Development Committee, BDC. So we have a thick book that we pass to the government so that they can study about our land, how much do they compensate for land, and how much do they compensate for the garden, rubber, paper, and so on. And what about our house? And how are you going to compensate the house?

**REAZUL** However, the compensation wasn't enough to start fresh in their resettlement location.

**AHSAN:**

**SPEAKER:** It's [INAUDIBLE] for this, because they are using the government rate.

**REAZUL** I helped team group discussions with men and women in the indigenous community to understand the challenges

**AHSAN:** they faced since their relocation. [INAUDIBLE] interviews say the greatest challenge at the relocation site was, insufficient access to land to sustain them. At least one member of every family travels back to the dam areas for the daily intake needs, two hours there from the new location. This travel is costly, and also raises their daily living cost.

To compensate, some have started living semi-permanently in the dam area, collecting food under compromised living condition, while their families remain in the new settlement areas. [INAUDIBLE] is one of the indigenous people who moved to the dam area to minimize her family's living costs, and harvest the food from the rivers.

**SPEAKER:** Half an hour from here to their house.

**REAZUL** Back in the settlement area, some elders feel isolated and have no bond with the community since becoming

**AHSAN:** displaced. [INAUDIBLE] Is one of them.

**SPEAKER:** [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

**REAZUL** After being displaced for 16 years, the villagers now settle into normal daily routines, but they're still struggling

**AHSAN:** to subsist only on the new lands, and improve condition for the next generations. On the southernmost tip of peninsula Malaysia, and ongoing story of development induced displacement is unfolding. Iskander Malaysia, it is an old development authority in the state of Johor, is aiming to house three million people by 2025.

One of the region's largest new housing projects Country Garden in Danga Bay is being built in a variety of [INAUDIBLE] coastal areas between two rivers. Within an aim to accommodate about 9000 new residents, Country Garden is an eviction threat for the indigenous people living in Danga Bay area for hundreds of years. The project pushed them to the edge of the developing boundary, and left no other options for them but to displace.

Mr. [INAUDIBLE], director of Iskander Malaysia, knows about the indigenous history of Danga Bay.

**SPEAKER:** [INAUDIBLE] is also where we have the fisherman relation and we have the indigenous group, which call [INAUDIBLE]. The British used call them sea gypsy.

**REAZUL** In the questions of land right, [INAUDIBLE] says.

**AHSAN:**

**SPEAKER:** It's not enough to get [INAUDIBLE] So whether they like it or not, it's just a matter of time. This will have to relocated to [INAUDIBLE] the area.

**REAZUL** I asked him what alternatives are available.

**AHSAN:**

**SPEAKER:** The land there itself, is belong to third parties. So we only got two choice, is that [INAUDIBLE] the area, or we have to relocate them to other area. Is not that easy for us to [INAUDIBLE] It's a growing community, and maybe for start, 100 , 150 families is sufficient for to say there. But not as the community grow double or triple, we still have the [INAUDIBLE]. We also need to be realistic. We're not talking about 50 years ago, [INAUDIBLE] ago, where we have abundant of land on seafront.

**REAZUL** Indigenous community leader [INAUDIBLE] also says land right and displacement are longstanding issues.

**AHSAN:**

**SPEAKER:** [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

**REAZUL** To his community, the Country Garden project was unexpected.

**AHSAN:**

**SPEAKER:** [NON-ENGLSIH]

**REAZUL** They protested, and reported the land occupation to the police.

**AHSAN:**

**SPEAKER:** [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

**REAZUL** Mr. [INAUDIBLE] a leader among local fishermen, also suffered due to the reclamation process.

**AHSAN:**

**SPEAKER:** [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

**REAZUL** According to Dr. Colin G. Nicholas, director of Center for Orang Asli Concern, in Malaysia, resettlement or relocation can never be a solution for displaced indigenous communities.

**AHSAN:**

**COLIN** This first thing that happens in the resettlement scheme is you break down the social structure. Indigenous  
**NICHOLAS:** peoples are not interested in land, they are interested in their traditional land and their culture.

**REAZUL** Across the river from Danga Bay, Iskander Development Authority has produced an ecotourism development  
**AHSAN:** plan for Kompang [? Sona ?] Melayu, a village for traditional Malay people, known as Bumiputras. However, the authority has no corresponding development plan for the indigenous village in Danga Bay. Incorporating this community into Kompang [? Sona ?] Melayu plan, could prevent its displacement, and protect its indigenous culture and tradition. The village currently operates a Cultural Heritage Center, which villagers believe could be a launchpad for a similarly ecotourism development strategy. Recognizing the inevitability of development and displacement, communities often have generated ideas about how to mitigate the social impacts. Engaging in participatory planning with the indigenous community could sustain the land, livelihood, and culture for them, and for the following generations. Thank you.

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