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Joseph Ko Tee Hock
Department of Statistics
koteehock@gmail.com

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SUMMARY

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OBJECTIVE

2.1 A Note on Socioeconomic Indicators from Census Data in Sarawak

INTRODUCTION

In Sarawak, as in the other states of Malaysia, there has been in recent years a burgeoning awareness and interest on how the socioeconomic status of respective ethnic groups have changed through time. While there is always a demonstrable need for more appropriate, comprehensive and accurate data to study such changes, our knowledge could be significantly advanced by more effective and exhaustive analysis of data that are already available, but often remain grossly underutilized if not completely unknown to researchers. Socioeconomic analysts are generally reluctant to make innovative exploitation of existing, sometimes scattered or incomplete data. With various methodological improvements and developments in recent census data collection, published results provide invaluable raw material for studying socioeconomic pattern and change.

DATA SOURCE

It is this paper's objective, therefore, to study the socioeconomic status of respective ethnic groups in Sarawak by mainly using published statistics from the 1970 and 1980 population censuses. Since this is only a summary note, methodological details on definitions and concepts together with their related limitations, already published in the respective reports, will not be repeated here. For comparative purposes, without venturing into details of comparability problems, published figures from earlier censuses conducted in 1939, 1947 and 1960 have also utilized; wherever figures are extracted from other non-census sources, such sources are appropriately footnoted in the respective tables.

OBJECTIVE

Statistical users are often unaware or uncertain as to what and where figures are available. This is understandable, especially if the required figures are available in different reports, at times not available or accessible, and in different tables. Certain indicators require calculations from different

tables, a task which some users find too adventurous, especially at the sight of voluminous reports. Moreover, methodological intricacies in terms of coverage, concepts, definitions and limitations characterize statistical tables as areas many fear to thread. Finally, operationalizing theoretical terms into calculable statistics is a task not many analysts like to attempt.

This paper attempts to bring together, from different sources and tables, pertinent statistics for operationalizing theoretical indicators so that such indicators, with intercensal and inter-ethnic comparisons, are readily available at a glance.

The choice of variables or indicators in any socioeconomic research is dependent not only on the availability of data but also on the analytical preference of the analyst. This naturally leads to the scope of the study which, on the basis of the census data, in this case is limited to the following seven socioeconomic concerns, from which various major and sub-indicators are derived and presented:

- (1) Population distribution, urban concentration, annual growth, dependency ratio and number of children born.
- (2) Education in terms of school attendance and literacy.
- (3) Possession of specified household items.
- (4) Poverty in terms of incidence, percent among poor and selectivity index.
- (5) Internal migration by reasons and propensity to move.
- (6) Distribution of each ethnic group's economically active population by usual industry.
- (7) Labour force in terms of unemployment, employment status and occupational distribution.

Socioeconomic indicators for each of the above main areas have been calculated and tabulated in the four statistical tables attached. Comparative figures are available for all the seven major ethnic groups in Sarawak; and, for various indicators, intercensal figures have been presented also for inter-temporal comparison purposes.

INDICATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

Without attempting to present detail analysis for each of the socioeconomic concerns, this note is written with the objective of presenting various socioeconomic indicators for quick referencing and comparative purposes only. However, the following paragraphs will highlight some of the major patterns and trends evident from the statistics in the accompanying tables. Researchers and analyst could, of course, continue these highlights with further studies, be it in terms of more indepth analysis on data tabulated in this note or in terms of expanding the current statistical base with additional data.

POPULATION

Structurally, the Sarawak population continues to be mainly composed of indigenous ethnic groups, who together made up 69 percent of the state population in 1980; this represents a drop from the 74 percent share four decades ago, because of relative increases in importance from the Chinese and "Others" ethnic groups. Within the indigenous groups, the Malays shows evident increases, with other groups declining or remaining relatively constant in their compositional importance; the biggest single ethnic group i.e. the Iban, showed a steady decline in importance from its 35 percent high in 1947 to only 30 percent in 1980. This decline is related to its relatively lower rate of population growth; like the Chinese, it grew by 2.7 percent per annum between 1970 and 1980, as compared with the Malay's 3.5 percent and Melanau's 3.4 percent respectively. In fact, the Iban and Chinese have the lowest mean number of children born to ever-married women in the young cohort of aged 25 – 29. But, as would be expected with increasing levels of socioeconomic development in the seventies, there were declines for all ethnic groups, especially so for the younger cohorts, in the number of children born.

In terms of age-dependency ratio, it is the lowest among the Chinese and Others, and highest among the Bidayuh and Other Indigenous. The Bidayuh, like the Melanau and Iban, also have a sex ratio which reflects more females than males in their population structure; this could be partly due to some of their males working outside Sarawak (e.g. Brunei).

Following the tide of socioeconomic development, an increasing proportion of the Sarawak population found themselves flowing into urban and urbanized

areas. In 1980, 35.4 percent of the State population is so based, as compared with only 25.9 percent twenty years ago in 1960. Among the local ethnic groups, the Chinese, Malays and Bidayuh are the most urbanized groups, experiencing the benefits and problems of urban growth. The single biggest ethnic group, i.e. the Iban, however, together with the Melanau and Other Indigenous groups, continue to be rural-based; only 8.1 percent of the Iban were found in urban/urbanized areas in 1980. (Table 1)

EDUCATION

Between 1970 and 1980, the percentage of school attendance for aged 5 and over rose from 48 percent to 61 percent. Attendances are highest among the Chinese and Malays, and lowest among the Iban and Other Indigenous; in terms of school attainment, these latter two ethnic groups also have the highest level of population (aged 10 – 14) who has never been to school; in fact, the Iban alone accounted for 55.8 percent of such population. (Table 2)

With relatively lower school attendance and higher “no schooling” attainment, the Iban also has the lowest literacy rate of 35 percent; this compares with the Chinese 74 percent and the Malays 62 percent. Furthermore, in terms of ability to converse in Bahasa Malaysia and English, the Iban also have relatively lower percentage of 38 percent and 22 percent, respectively; the Chinese corresponding percentages are 47 and 44 respectively.

POSSESSION OF HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

The 1980 census figures on possession of household items provide a rough indicator of the level of material well – being of households. The positive relationship between the level of urbanization and the extent of ownership of selected household items is partly highlighted by the fact that urbanized ethnic groups like the Chinese and Malays possessed more items like television sets than, say, the Iban households which are more rural based. Conversely larger percentages of the Iban households possessed items like boats which are related to riverine and water transport in rural areas. (Table 2)

Besides providing a rough measure of material well-being, possession of household items can also highlight other aspects of the household's pattern and standard of living. Socially and politically, it can show the venues for

exposure, interaction and communication with the wider society through items like the telephone, newspaper and radio. Economically, it can, for example, indicate the means and ease of transport and also the livelihood of home-economic activities through item like sewing machines.

POVERTY

Based on published figures in Table 3, the incidence of poverty in Sarawak is declined from 56.6 percent in 1976 to 47.7 percent in 1979, and more recently to 31.3 percent in 1982. What is notable, however, is the disparity in how poverty affects different ethnic groups through time, the incidence being highest among the Bidayuh (64.9 percent) and lowest among the Chinese (8.5 percent). In 1976, the Iban and Bidayuh made up 56.6 percent of the total poor in Sarawak, and this percentage increased to 75.0 in 1982; these are the only two ethnic groups whose percentage share of total poor is more than their corresponding percentage share of total population i.e. with selectivity indices beyond unity.

INTERNAL MIGRATION

Nearly one-sixth or 17.2 percent of the Sarawak population were involved in inter-district mobility within the State as at the 1980 Population Census. This represented a drop in propensity to move when compared with the 18.9 percent in 1970; among the major ethnic groups, only the Melanau, Iban and Others registered increases in rates, while all the other groups showed declines. Together with the Chinese, the Melanau and Iban also have the highest percentage of population who were involved in inter-district migration. Most of these moves have social reasons, the main one being "follow family", reflecting grouped rather than individual migration; this is especially so for the Malays. Job and related reasons (highest among the Melanau) accounted for 28 percent of total moves, while 13 percent of the migrants moved because of marriages. An interesting feature of Sarawak migration is the high percentages of persons who moved because of "education"; for example, 20 percent of the "Other Indigenous" movers were so motivated due possibly to the absence of schools near their residencies in rural areas. Interesting also, is the high percentage of Iban migrants who engaged inter-district moves because of "marriages".