

Regional Indigenous Sports Championship, Malaysia

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BACKGROUND

Sports in Asia have a key part in fostering social integration as well as the formation of national identities.¹ People frequently link their sense of national pride to how well their country's sports teams perform in international events, improving their country's status around the world.¹

Due to its size, Asia offers a wide variety of experiences in terms of racial and ethnic makeup, culture, religion, sociology, politics and economics.² Thus, it would be unwise and potentially harmful to try to generalise the Asian sporting experience from a single viewpoint.³

In a multicultural, multiethnic and multireligious nation like Malaysia, a shared passion for sports unites people regardless of their differences. This is consistent with the 1986 National Sports Policy put forth by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The main objective of the policy was to get more people to play local sports. This also applies to indigenous communities in Malaysia.³

Indigenous sports championships are much more than just physical contests; they are symbols of the diversity of cultures, customs and tenacity of indigenous populations around the world. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) seized the chance to hold a regional sports championship for the indigenous community in the Selangor and Kuala Lumpur areas of Malaysia due to the lack of sports facilities, expertise and services these regions may have. The six communities in the region competed in the regional sports championship competitions; specifically, Hulu Langat, Kuala Selangor, Kuala Langat, Gombak and Sepang are the villages that took part in this regional sports competition. Five different sports—futsal, netball, takraw, badminton, and pinching—were played by 76 indigenous athletes.

In partnership with Malaysia's Indigenous Development Department (JAKOA), UKM committed to preparing the venues for these games to meet their requirements.

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The closing celebration was planned and volunteers were recruited. UKM also set up all of the facilities, sporting equipment and prepared new rules that were appropriate for the situation. By granting equal opportunity to male and female competitors, the competition also promoted gender equality. This has the potential to subvert gender stereotypes and empower indigenous women and girls.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of holding the sporting event is to spark interest among the locals and create a stage on which to display their abilities, aptitude, and rivalry. The second is to connect the locals with the outside world and give them exposure to and experience in competitive sports.

CHALLENGES FACED AND LESSON LEARNT

The original proposal entailed the provision of facilities and the organisation of activities for the indigenous population at the regional level within the federal territories of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. One of the biggest challenges was creating effective communication channels to

avoid misunderstandings and disruptions due to community differences in language, culture, beliefs and sports knowledge. However, a translator and a community officer fluent in both languages helped us overcome communication issues. Given these towns' limited capacity and the fact that teams may have different athletic abilities or age levels, following laws and sports rules was another challenge. In a team setting, there is significant age diversity, ranging from individuals as young as 14 years old to those as old as 45 years old, as shown in [figure 1](#).

THE IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

The organisation of indigenous sports championships has the potential to draw participants and spectators from diverse backgrounds, encompassing a range of languages and beliefs. This is particularly significant inside indigenous communities, where linguistic diversity may hinder effective communication among individuals. This phenomenon presents prospects for cultural interchange, comprehension and fostering connections among various populations. Moreover, the presence of accomplished indigenous athletes and the occurrence of sporting events can function as exemplary figures for young individuals within the community, inspiring them to strive for their aspirations and surmount challenges. Moreover, the act of hosting championships has the potential to foster a profound sense of pride and fortitude



Figure 1 The supervisor and players of a diverse-age netball team.

in the midst of both past and present adversities. The competition serves as an important platform to highlight the exceptional athletic prowess of indigenous populations.

SUSTAINABILITY AND REPLICABILITY ELEMENTS

The established protocol outlines rules, regulations and instructions tailored to meet the specific requirements of the community. The UKM possesses extensive experience, comprehensive facilities and a proficient team to successfully organise the championship. This event is held on an annual basis, with a particular focus on indigenous individuals residing in the surrounding regional area. The forthcoming sports event at the national level is scheduled to take place in the end of the calendar year.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, hosting a sports championship for the indigenous community can

strengthen indigenous community bonds and foster domestic and international recognition by developing a common identity, inclusivity and a shared mission. Our aim was achieved by supporting a setting to both showcase their skills and suit their unique needs and capabilities.

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