

# Modernity on the Move? Orang Talang Mamak and Reception for the Indigenous Communities Empowerment Project in Indragiri Hulu, Riau

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## Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas resepsi orang Talang Mamak terhadap modernisasi dan pembangunan melalui program pemberdayaan komunitas adat terpencil di Indragiri Hulu Propinsi Riau. Penulis berargumen bahwa niat baik pemerintah untuk memodernisasi komunitas adat terpencil sebagai bagian dari upaya untuk memajukan mereka, tidak sepenuhnya terealisasi sebagaimana diharapkan. Tulisan ini menggunakan metodologi kualitatif. Sumber data diperoleh melalui penelitian lapangan dengan pendekatan antropologi. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan wawancara mendalam dengan individu Talang Mamak yang dipilih secara purposif. Tulisan ini menunjukkan bahwa Talang Mamak memiliki resepsi yang beragam terhadap program pemberdayaan komunitas adat terpencil. Mereka menyambut program tersebut sambil bersikap kritis dan sebagian menolak. Sebagian mereka melihat pendidikan sebagai cara memperbaiki keadaan karena menyadari bahwa sumber daya mereka rendah. Mereka berharap pemerintah melakukan sesuatu untuk meningkatkan kondisi ekonomi mereka. Orang Talang Mamak memerlukan negara untuk pemulihan ekosistem ekonomi, sosial dan budaya yang mengalami kerusakan sebagai akibat hadirnya perusahaan yang beroperasi di sekitarnya lingkungan hidup mereka.

**Kata kunci:** Talang Mamak, Masyarakat Adat, Modernitas

## Abstract

*This article examines orang Talang Mamak's reception of modernization and development through the empowerment program of remote indigenous communities in Indragiri Hulu Province of Riau. The authors contend that the government's efforts to modernize and advance remote indigenous communities have not yielded the expected results. This writing uses qualitative methodology. We obtain research data sources through an anthropological approach to field research. We collect data by conducting in-depth interviews and observations with member of Talang Mamak communities. This writing indicates that Talang Mamak has a diverse reception for the empowerment program for remote indigenous communities. They welcomed the program while being critical and partly rejecting it. Some of them see education as a way to improve the situation because they understand that their resources are limited. They expect the government to do something to improve their economic conditions. The Mamak Talang people need the country to restore the economic, social, and cultural ecosystems that have suffered damage as a result of companies operating around their living environment.*

**Keywords:** Talang Mamak, Indigenous Community, Modernity

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## INTRODUCTION

This article examines the Orang Talang Mamak's receptions to modernization through the Indigenous Communities Empowerment Project in Indragiri Hulu, Riau. We argue that while the government aims to modernize and advance remote indigenous

communities, its good intentions may not always align with expectations. According to Tania Muray Li (2001, 2003) good intentions of empowerment often suffer from a twist in their realization. This article explores the relationship between the empowerment project's performance and the Talang Mamak customary community's response to the government's modernization agenda (Ansor & Masyhur, 2013; Tyson, 2008, 2010).

The empowerment program for remote indigenous communities has been on the national agenda of the Department of Social Affairs since the 1970s (Budiman, 2005). The aim of the program is to strengthen marginal customary communities and the fulfillment of their social rights in all aspects of life so that they can live properly both physically, spiritually, and socially and can play an active role in development (Hamidy, 1991; Leonard Y. Andaya, 2008; Suparlan, 1993). The marginal indigenous communities are defined as sociocultural groups that are local and dispersed and lack or have not been engaged in social, economic, or political networks and services (Prasojo, 2015). According to Presidential decree number 111/1999, which is one of the legal umbrellas of this programme, the remote indigenous community is characterized by several things, namely: (1) relatively small, closed, and homogeneous communities; (2) its social organization is focused on relations of affinity (formal and dense with customary norms); (3) generally geographically and socioculturally isolated from the wider population; (4) generally still living in subsistence economic systems (hunting and fishing, migrant fishermen, subsists, and a combination of them); (5) its equipment and technology are simple; (6) dependence on the relatively high local habitat and natural resources; and (7) limited access to basic social services.

The empowerment of indigenous peoples is the responsibility of the State to promote social well-being (Porath, 2002, 2010, 2013). The program explicitly violates the state's commitment to at least three strategic issues related to minority issues. These include respect for human and citizen rights as enshrined in the Constitution, respect for global commitments, specifically the United Nations Declaration, the Summit on Social Development, and the conventions of the International Labour Conference on Indigenous People, which Indonesia has not yet activated, as well as the preservation of the wise values of indigent peoples (Nurkhoiron, 2005). The activities under this program's framework include (1) housing, settlement, and environment planning programs, which fall into the categories of upgrading (institutes) and relocating communities to other areas (exsitu), (2) providing assistance packages, and (3) providing guidance and counseling (Bakar & Ghofur, 2017; Isjoni, 2001).

As of 2004, there were 205.029 family heads or about 1.1 million people classified as remote indigenous communities across Indonesia, spread over 211 districts, 807 districts and 2328 villages in 27 provinces (Budiman, 2005). The indigenous community empowerment program has targeted four areas: Bengkalis, Indragiri Hulu, Indragiri Hilir, and Pelalawan. According to Bupati Indragiri Hulu, Thamsir Rahman, the construction of the remote aboriginal community of Talang Mamak in Indragiri Hulu is an effort to improve the fulfillment of basic human needs, including, among other things, sand, food, housing, health, education, religion, employment, a sense of safety, and participation in development.

The Talang Mamak indigenous community is one of the subjects of the empowerment of the indigenous communities in Riau, besides the Suku Sakai, Suku Akit, Suku Anak Rawa, and Suku Bonai (Ansor et al., 2023; Ansor & Masyhur, 2023; Hamidy, 1991). They are categorized as remote indigenous peoples because of their relatively backward socio-cultural and economic conditions (Azhar et al., 2008; Kristina, 2023). Consequently, the purpose of empowerment is to elevate individuals from the era of modernity. The Act No. 6 of 1974 on Social Welfare, specifically Article 4, Paragraph 1(d) of the Act, outlines the government's responsibility to develop and promote social welfare for the advancement of civilization, humanity, and disaster relief. However, the interpretation of such laws often follows a materialistic approach. The measurement of a materialist or authoritarian nature determines the distinction between civilized and non-civilized societies (Porath, 2002). A society's physical appearance serves as a gauge of its development. Such an understanding often marginalizes the wealth of local intelligence and wisdom (Kang, 2003).

In fact, humanism is a key factor in the construction and development of remote indigenous communities' cultures. However, the Talang Mamak community is a part of the broader society of citizens, who have long upheld a set of values and traditions that guide their way of life, granting them the right to equal treatment in establishing and enhancing their cultural identity and standard of living. For that reason, the following adjective explores the reception of the Talang Mamak people against the modernization project that the country demands. The aim is to get an overview of theThe aim is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the intricacy of the Talang Mamak people's response to the modernization project, which the government referWe need to conduct studies on how indigenous peoples respond to modernization, which the government refers to as the "rule of civilization." Our goal is to provide the Riau government with policy formulations that not only adapt to the authenticity of their cultural values, but also serve as an effective strategy to enhance their quality on par with other ethnic groups in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

The research uses qualitative techniques with a socio-anthropological approach. We conduct field observations and in-depth interviews with the selected Talang Mamak people (Marvasti, 2004). The research is conducted in Rakit Kulim, Indragiri Hulu, with a focus on four villages: Talang Sei Limau, Talang Sei Parit, Talang Gedabu, and Talang Perigi. We selected the four villages as research locations due to the significant Talang Mamak indigenous population residing there. Additionally, the villages host the empowerment program for remote Aboriginal communities within the Talang Mamak tribe, which receives funding from both the district and province governments, as well as national budgets through APBN (Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Negara). The villages partially implement some of the World Bank's aid programs aimed at empowering indigenous peoples in Riau. These empowerment projects serve as a strategic socio-political and policy context, examining how Talang Mamak indigenous communities respond to the imposed modernization agenda.

The interview was conducted on October 12-16, 2005, using the indepth interview technique with semi-structured questions (Mann, 2016). At the research site, eleven informants were interviewed, including representatives of indigenous leaders, religious leaders, village governments, members of the Village Representative Body (BPD, Badan Permusyawaratan Desa), and members of ordinary communities from the Talang Mamak community. We conducted the observations twice: once during the advocacy for the Talang Mamak community's problems on September 10, 2005, and again during the collection of field data and in-depth interviews with each research informant.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **A General Overview of the Orang Talang Mamak**

Indragiri Hulu is one of the districts in the province of Riau established under Act No. 12 of 1956, concerning the granting of autonomous district areas in the area of Central Sumatra, under the name Indragiri. Indragiri was then promoted to two districts, Indragiri Hulu and Indragiri Hilir, under Act No. 6 of 1965. Law No. 22 of 1999 re-promoted Hulu to Indragiri Hulu District and Kuantan Singingi District during the reformation of the Hulu district. Indragiri Hulu is a 4.5-hour drive from Pekanbaru and 230 km from the Riau Province capital. Nine districts in Indragiri Hulu will house a total population of approximately 450,000 by 2021.

The Talang Mamak community, located in the Indragiri district of Hulu, spans 14 villages across six districts: Kelayang, Siberida, Rakit Kulim, Batang Gasal, Rengat Barat, and Cinaku Batang. According to the Indragiri Hulu Department of Social Affairs, in 1992, the Talang Mamak community had 6,983 people. According to Suparlan, their population is approximately 5,154 (Suparlan, 1993, p. 513). This figure bears a striking resemblance to the 2000 census, which recorded 6,418 thousand individuals, or approximately 1,341 family heads. In the forest area, they live in clusters.

The focal point of the plantation is the meticulous planting of a field in a pattern of constant shifting. An informant, Noraya, stated that today's Talang Mamak customary society divides into three groups: adulterers, Christian synchs, and Islam (Noraya, 12/10/2005). Although the first two are known as the Old Step (Langkah Lama), the last, already Islamic, is known as the New Step (Langkah Baru) (Muntaza, 2022). This reality challenges the social construction that suggests the community is not religious or still believes in the mysterious powers found in large trees, rivers, stones, and similar objects.

The Talang Mamak family system is an important reference for determining who can connect and cooperate in various areas of social, economic, and family life. The Talang Mamak express their group affinities through farming activities, typically within settlement units inhabited by one or two family groups. The Talang Mamak people explain their affinity system not only by the existence of a marital or family bond but also by a blood bond. The principle of affinity among the Talang Mamak people undermines social activities, such as their tendency to live in groups based on the matrilineal system, as well as various forms of cooperation in subsistence activities.

In Talang Mamak society, personal choice is also an important factor, in addition to the principle of affinity, to determine a person's involvement in settlement and field activities, economic and social cooperation, and so on. A successful personal relationship between a Talang Mamak and an individual who is not a Talang Mamak can evolve into a kinship relationship, akin to a relationship between brothers and sisters. Someone who is not from the Talang Mamak community drinks as if they are at home, as their relationship is close and there are no more dividing gaps in their everyday engagement.

### **The Project of Modernity among Talang Mamak**

According to Isjoni, the Talang Mamak community's settlement conditions are comparable to those of other remote indigenous communities (Isjoni, 2001). First of all, their settlement patterns are widespread. The Talang Mamak people organize their lives into groups, with each group consisting of 5 to 10 houses. Generally, the Talang Mamak people are organized into core families and large families, each with related relationships. Second, the Talang Mamak's life follows a linear pattern, situating them within a specific government-sponsored community. Indeed, prior to the government's construction of this social settlement, the Talang Mamak tribe relied heavily on natural resources for subsistence.

In 1969, the government first implemented its settlement program in Dusun Siambul and Dusun Talang Tanjung, a village not far from the Siambul settlement project, where they established five chapel houses for ten core families. However, the settlement's pilot project failed because it failed to pique the interest of the Talang Mamak placed in the settlement. But from 1979 to 1980, the government began to re-energize the construction of the Talang Mamak indigenous settlements. According to Isjoni (Isjoni, 2001), The Department of Social Affairs has built 514 housing units for the Talang Mamak community. Although some communities do not receive the share of the aid, due to differences in the allocation of housing built by the Department of Social Affairs with the number of heads of households who need housing.

This government-built indigenous housing architecture consists of a simple 6x5-meter house, a stage model with wood walls, board floors, and a zinc roof. The provision of facilities beyond the houses varies. For example, at the Talang Jerinjing residential site, the government built facilities such as officers' home offices, social halls, and customs halls. Furthermore, the government has guaranteed to provide kitchen utensils, seedlings for crops and poultry, agricultural tools, and agricultural guidance. Additionally, the associated agencies provided assistance in the form of refueling 1,5 meters for the government of the Indragiri Hulu district, constructing a simple school building with a teacher's house by the Department of National Education, manufacturing eight wells and eight drainage tanks by the Health Service, and providing skills guidance from the Ministry of Industry.

Table 1. Construction of the House of the Orang Talang Mamak

<b>Years</b>	<b>Site the Program (Village)</b>	<b>Family Heads</b>	<b>Individual</b>
1979/1980	Talang Jerinjing	77	361
1984/1985	Siambul	75	405



1988/1989	Anak Talang	100	464
1989/1990	Sungai Limau	75	305
1995/1996	Talang Lakat	75	405
1999/2000	Rantau Langsung	81	324
2001/2002	a. Sungai Limau	5	23
	b. Talang Perigi	10	57
	c. Talang Durian Cacar	10	61
	d. Talang Tujuh Buah Tangga	5	25

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Sources: Indragiri Hulu Social Welfare Office, 2001.

The housing program in the Sungai Limau, which was funded by the Marginal Society Resettlement Fund of 1989/1990 and completed in 1990/1991, consisted of housing facilities measuring 6x5 meters, with only office officer houses constructed in perfect condition. The government also constructed eight wells to meet the demand for drinking water and bathing facilities. The people of Talang Sungai Limau Village, on the other hand, prefer to swim in the river.

The educational facilities in the surrounding community settlements are still very attractive. The availability of educational facilities remains significantly lower than expected. Most members of the Talang Mamak community do not attend school. According to one of the activists familiar with the Talang Mamak community advocacy program, Johny Setiawan Mundung, this is due to the inadequate school facilities. Let's not have a primary high school or a public secondary school; as Mundung said, the primary school building alone is far from adequate. According to data from eight Talang Mamak villages in Kelayang, Indragiri Hulu, only five primary school buildings are available. There is neither a primary nor a public high school (Mundung, 2001, 74).

The World Bank constructed a primary school building in Sungai Limau Village. However, at the time of this research, the school did not have adequate teachers, both qualitatively and quantitatively. No teachers are willing to stay there. This presents a significant obstacle to the educational process in this region. Although it is mandatory for students to study in the village surrounding the school, another obstacle to education is the limited means of transportation that connects this area to other areas. According to several interviews conducted, this factor contributes to the reluctance of teachers from outside to settle in the village.

The Talang Mamak people's agricultural practices or migration are the most commonly used to explain their economic system. Isjoni characterizes the economic activities of the Talang Mamak people residing in the township as encompassing crops, fields, migrations, and what is commonly referred to as "fields." There are also settled fields, commonly referred to as shrimp fields (Isjoni, 2001). They move their plants once a year, either by slash and burn or by cutting, cutting, and burning, before planting again. However, the harvest is insufficient to sustain the family, so they must repeat the same activity every year. They also planted corn seeds, wells, tubes, pebbles, and other items in the fields where they had planted the peas. The distance from the farm to the village ranges from two to five kilometers.

Karim (15/10/2005) asserts that the robbery of companies operating in their area of residence has rendered current farming economic activities "unfeasible due to land

exhaustion." Therefore, the economic activities that people still engage in today include fishing, rubber fishing, wood-cutting, and the development of household industries. The common way to hunt is to take a couple of dogs into the woods and bring a spear. Additionally, one can set traps for birds, either on the ground or on trees. You can also directly fish using lamps that shine like a light bulb, or use traps like funnel eyes and nets left in the water. Currently, some members of the Talang Mamak community are employed by palm companies operating in the vicinity of their settlements. Researchers have not found members of the Talang Mamak community who meet their economic needs by working as public officials in the government sector or private sectors in positions based on professionalism and educational competence.

### **A Half-hearted Modernization on the Move?**

The government's intention to modernize marginal societies through the empowerment and resettlement program for indigenous peoples is not as successful as planned (Ansor, 2023). According to the researchers' interviews with Nuraya, they discovered differences in public attitudes toward responding to the Talang Mamak people's settlement program. The first group positively supported the resettlement program. They greatly benefit from the government-built housing system. They get a more decent home. My interlocutor informed that, she thanks to the government-built housing, they are no longer vulnerable to flooding during heavy rains. She said that the non-curved house model on this land is somewhat unfamiliar (Nuraya, 12/10/2005).

In fact, the second group's evaluation of the Talang Mamak people's resettlement reflects the systematic "exclusion" of these people from their native values, beliefs, and traditions. It is given the concept of settlements built by the government based on the ecological and cosmological concepts of cities that make them as if they are not in their own neighborhood because the houses are built straight along one main street foothold, exactly the typology of modern villages.

Therefore, the public often responds coldly to the government's housing program. For example, the Talang Mamak community resettlement in Talang Jerinjing has only a few months left for the citizens, especially while their life insurance is still in place. According to the report of the Social Service of Indragiri Hulu, the residents left the settlement for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the social settlements they constructed did not align with their personal aspirations. They desired houses to be built within their homes, along the paths of their villages, and on high hills above their land. Secondly, the social settlement is situated on a lush, low plain, directly in the center of which flows the Great River, measuring 2-3 meters wide and 1.5 meters deep. Informants report that the river floods during periods of rainfall lasting 1-3 days, resulting in the death of the palawija plant. Moreover, with the frequency of the water flooding in the rain, the stone of the house made of wood became dirty, and the house was ruined. Thirdly, the housing's location lends itself to farming, a practice unfamiliar to the Talang Mamak indigenous people, who typically cultivate on dry land. Fourthly, there is no land available for them to cultivate or flood. This led them to return to their previous farmland in order to continue farming. According to Murray Li (2000, 2003) and Butet Manurung (2013), the failure of government programs on empowerment of indigenous

communities is often due to a lack of planning and accommodation to the communities' long-lived socio-cultural values.

Parsudi Suparlan (1993) using the location of Sakai's indigenous settlements as a case study, asserted that the failure of the settlement program can be attributed to the management program's focus and centralization on the comprehensive settlement program. This is why Suparlan justifies that, with this top-down model, the community's participation is wholehearted, not because of awareness of the program's importance, but because of a particular interest or to obtain the distribution of needs for free, as in the case of the Talang Jerinjing settlement. Moreover, the residents of the settlement perceive no benefit from their own housing program, despite their active participation.

Despite criticisms of the housing program, it's important to acknowledge that Talang Mamak entrepreneurs generally perceive significant benefits from it. In the future, researchers should focus on how the government will adapt the traditional values, ecological system, and cosmology of the Talang Mamak tribe, which they have been observing throughout their lives. Some scholars argue that ignoring the socio-cultural system of the indigenous communities in question cannot lead to modernization and empowerment (Agisthia Lestari, 2022; AS et al., 2020; Borchgrevink, 2002; Chou, 2016; Horne, 2014; Nakamura, 2015; Nystad, 2014; Prasojo, 2015).

An extremely low level of education significantly influences the number of Talang Mamak people who participate in decent employment opportunities to meet their financial needs. The informants interviewed expressed concerns about the educational portrayal of the Talang Mamak indigenous community. For example, the Talang Mamak customary community's educational conditions are prevalent in the Bukit Tigapuluh National Park area. According to Tabrani Rab, the lack of educational facilities in the Talang Mamak community, especially those who live in Bukit Tigapuluh National Park, is the main cause of low literacy. Despite the establishment of new schools in eastern Sumatra, the lack of demand for them stems from the perception that education cannot address their economic problems (Rab, 2002, p. 15). It is important to keep in mind that Talang Mamak's lack of educational facilities is not an internal problem. This is because the construction of the facility is not entirely the responsibility of the indigenous people of Talang Mamak, but rather of the government and other private institutions.

The research sites lack adequate educational facilities. Karim informs us that he applied for the construction of a school in Talang Parit River Village during the 1992–1995 years, following the establishment of an emergency school by him and the community. Karim also set up emergency schools in Talang Limau Village, using the rotan and wood from the forest to cover the teachers' expenses (Karim, 15/10/2005). The World Bank has built a primary school in Limau River Village as a result of Karim's pioneering work. However, the school's learning activity has not reached its maximum yet. According to interviews with informants, this was due, among other things, to the school's lack of adequate teaching staff and the distance from the school's location to the residents' settlements, while no means of transport could connect the two locations. Moreover, the community's customary values, within certain limits, are perceived as



less compatible with the school's learning system. An informant informed the researchers that the school's curriculum did not impart any knowledge that they believed would significantly enhance their economic circumstances.

Overall, the Talang Mamak people rarely receive formal education, which results in a low literacy rate, particularly among adults. Contrary to the government's long-held belief, the Talang Mamak people, particularly those residing in indigenous areas, don't attend school due to a lack of knowledge about the value of education or economic constraints. Instead, their beliefs and life perspectives also play a significant role. Indeed, to a certain extent, customary norms appear to influence their views and preferences on education. An informant living in the village of Rakit Kulim, for example, told the researchers that the reason people reject education is because the conventional education system leads their citizens away from their native values and traditionalism. Tabrani Rab demonstrates that Talang Mamak has an animist belief system, and education is considered forcing them to embrace certain religions in order to abandon their beliefs and culture (Masyhur, 2014; Rab, 2002, p. 15).

Karim asserts that education won't jeopardize the sustainability and authenticity of the Talang Mamak Society's customary traditions. When we interviewed, Karim said, "Children who have graduated from primary school, primary high school, or high school, I think he himself will follow the traditions or customs of the Talang Mamak." (Karim, 15/10/2005). Rahmadi, an activist for the Yarsi Foundation, described the interest of the Talang Mamak community in education as "very impressive." He based his view on monitoring children's interest in studying in the Traditional Talang Mamak Community Settlement in Dusun Tuo Datai Village, Rantau Langsat, Indragiri Hulu in Bukit Tigapuluh National Park Territory for English lessons.

Rahmadi shares his observations about the learning activities at "Sanggar Belajar Datai." Despite the school's leafy surroundings, open walls, and five study benches, the students' enthusiasm to engage in learning activities remains unaffected. The accompanying program, "Sanggar Belajar Datai," has been running for two years. Now, it has been available up to fourth grade, with a total of about 76 students. They're from Dusun Tebrau, Datai, and Melenai. Only approximately 25-30 students, aged 7-14, are actively involved. The fluctuation in the number of students at this school is influenced by the busy periods of the local population, particularly those engaged in farming or burning activities. During the gardening season, most children are busy helping their parents open their fields, thus affecting the number of students who can actively study. Interestingly, the school maintains a regular schedule for its learning activities despite its informal nature. Monday and Tuesday taught counting, while Wednesday and Saturday taught writing and English from eight to ten in the morning.

Tatung (42), the only volunteer to be an associate teacher for the last two years prior to the study, said that she had been teaching for "two years" at the school. What I find most delightful now is that children have a strong desire to learn English. I don't know why either." When the Community Conservation Team of Indonesia Warsi paid him a visit, he proceeded to teach them. Muhammad Yunus, the Field Coordinator for the Sumatera Tiger Conservancy Program and the program's facilitator, informed Tatung that the Batang Gansal chairman hired him as an accompanying teacher due

to his diverse skill set. In addition, he possesses a strong drive and a deep understanding of Talang Mamak culture.

Moh. Haryono, the Head of Taman Nasional Bukit Tiga Puluh, explains that the PKHS Foundation (Sumatera Tiger Rescue and Conservation) facilitates the field school with the long-term goal of enhancing the knowledge, skill, and courage of the Talang Mamak children. As a result, their self-confidence is growing, enabling them to compete in the outside world. In that way, they will be a brave generation, knowledgeable, and ready to compete. Furthermore, education is a fundamental right for all citizens. Haryono added that the field education program itself is still in a test phase due to its nature. Therefore, its existence should also be in line with the management of the national park. Moreover, after establishing the program, we will propose its construction into a permanent school to the local government.

The above exhibition depicts the interest of the Talang Mamak indigenous community in developing human resources. According to Tenas Effendy, the Talang Mamak people do not really reject progress, science, and technology, especially those that are not contrary to the basic values they cherish. The Talang Mamak community's indigenous environment became a milestone in the development of education due to the necessity of adapting to the long-established traditional system. A human resource development project that does not align with the values of society is almost inevitably doomed to failure " (Effendy, 2001, p. 23). According to Effendy, the Mamak Talang's weak human resources resulted in an attempt to develop an independent endeavor that was always stuck in the middle of the road or oppressed in unbalanced competition. As a result, others ignore or exploit many of the local resources or potential that they should be able to manage, constantly seeking opportunities to exploit or even "take away" them from the local community (Effendy, 2001, p. 23).

Nowadays, around the settlement area of the Talang Mamak towns, some large corporations of the community only become spectators of the exploitation of nature on the land that was once the location of their settlement. Karim informs us that due to a lack of adequate education, society is simply "becoming a pile" of enterprises (Karim, 15/10/2005). To date, there is no human resources Talang Mamak who have access to employment opportunities based on their skills and professionalism in both private companies and government sectors.

Coincidentally, the Talang Mamak community requires special attention to transform their lives into a productive economy. We must transform the traditional process they have been using into a process that guarantees the added value of their products without undervaluing their culture. Difficulties can arise when there is a collision between economic needs and cultural aspects that they have consistently accepted. To put it simply, we should view an economic approach to the remote indigenous communities of Talang Mamak as an attempt to sanctify them from a perspective that prioritizes achieving values. Initially, it's crucial to strike a balance between updating their customs and adhering to traditional beliefs when it comes to economic matters. Second, it's crucial to socialize and enlighten each member of their community about a new paradigm in their economic life, one that does not require

spending processes. Thirdly, it necessitates their economic empowerment within the framework of cultural values selected as productivity boosters.

The Talang Mamak elite's response to the government's economic empowerment program reveals their desire to compete with other members of society for a decent living. Most of the Talang Mamak community is still economically lagging behind. However, the empowerment experience of indigenous peoples, as done by the Malaysian and Thai governments, shows that these communities are able to balance the quality of their economic lives when they receive serious attention from the government, private, or other elements of society. This can provide valuable reflection material and experience for the government as it implements an empowerment program for the Talang Mamak indigenous community.

## **CONCLUSION**

The above exposure concludes that the Talang Mamak people's reaction to the empowerment program for remote indigenous communities is variable. Some of them realize that their resources are still low and see education as a way to improve them. They expect action from the government to improve economic conditions. This paper concludes that we should use the concept of holistic empowerment to make basic efforts to help the Talang Mamak people cope with their socio-economic and cultural problems. We need to position them as autonomous subjects, responsible for transforming their own communities. The government is necessary to facilitate such a radical transformation.

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