In general, there has been significant improvements made in the overall school attendance of the Orang Asli. When in 1994, there were 13,200 Orang Asli children enrolled in primary school, by 2003 the number had risen to 23,807, an increase of 45 per cent. Similarly, while there were 2,694 Orang Asli students in secondary school in 1994, by 2003 their number had increased to 6,675 – an increase of 56.9 per cent.

However, the actual number of years an Orang Asli remains in school leaves much to be desired. Studies done by the JHEOA and by independent consultants all reveal that the dropout rate among the Orang Asli schoolchildren, at all levels, is disproportionately high compared to the national average. It is found that for every 100 Orang Asli children entering Primary 1, only about 6 will be expected to reach Form 5 eleven years later. That is, 94 per cent would have dropped out by then.

The dropout rate is also high between the transition from Primary 6 to Form 1. In 2003, of the 3,333 Orang Asli schoolchildren who finished Standard 6, only 1,869 continued into Form 1. That is, a total of 1,464 (43.9 per cent) had dropped out after primary school. This accounts for the lower enrolment numbers at the secondary level.

However, merely attending school is not fully indicative of educational attainment. Pass rates among Orang Asli schoolchildren have not been too encouraging, though it has been increasing over the years. For example, Lim (1997: 45) comments that, the percentage of passes among Orang Asli schoolchildren taking the SRP (Primary 6) exam in 1990-1992 was between 43 to 59 per cent, compared to 69 to 78 per cent at the national level. Similarly, for the 1993-1995 period, the proportion of Orang Asli passing the SPM (Secondary 5) exams was 51 to 54 per cent, compared to 66-67 per cent nationally. While the pass rate is expected to the higher in recent years, it is not expected to be significantly higher since many Orang Asli students would have dropped out prior to these public examinations.

Usual Reasons Given for Dropping Out
So why do Orang Asli drop out of school? Many reasons have been proffered as to why Orang Asli schoolchildren drop out of school, especially at the primary level. Very recently, in an attempt to explain why 2,304 (44.6 per cent) of the 5,168 Orang Asli studying in primary schools in Pahang from 2000 to 2004 did not continue to Form 1, the State Health, Social Welfare and Orang Asli Affairs Committee chairman
Datuk Ishak Muhammad, citing a study by a local group, said that it was mainly due to boredom and laziness (The Star 14.1.2006).

“The children are not interested in studying and are fed up with being scolded by teachers,” he added. According to him, the study also said the children would prefer to help their parents at work or were embarrassed to go to school in towns.

Ishak said that concerted efforts were needed from all parties to educate and create awareness on the importance of education among indigenous people. Among the programmes earmarked were motivational courses for heads of families and women folk, tuition, educational aid, transportation and accommodation for those in remote areas, and scholarships, he added. Ishak also said the Education Ministry had built hostels for Orang Asli students in SK Betau, SK Kuala Koyan and SK Permatang Keledang in Kuala Lipis, SM Tengku Kudin and SM Koyan in Raub, and SM Sultan Ahmad Shah in Cameron Highlands (The Star 14.1.2006, 26.1.2006).

The reasons of the state minister above are not very different frequently given by those in authority, and even some academics, whenever they are asked to explain the poor staying-power of Orang Asli in schools. To further attest the government’s role in providing all the encouragement and facilities to help stem the dropout phenomenon, statistics such as those given in the Table 4 below are often displayed as proof of the government’s concerted effort in this matter.

The insinuation is that all that is needed in terms of infrastructure, motivation, financial support and trained personnel have been fulfilled and if the dropout remains high, the fault must lie at the feet of the Orang Asli schoolchildren themselves and/or their parents.

Table 1
Educational Assistance for Orang Asli, 2001-2005 (RM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School uniforms</td>
<td>1,450,000</td>
<td>1,550,000</td>
<td>1,700,000</td>
<td>861,440</td>
<td>826,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>3,750,000</td>
<td>4,400,000</td>
<td>4,800,000</td>
<td>5,165,000</td>
<td>5,650,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School fees</td>
<td>1,385,000</td>
<td>1,470,000</td>
<td>2,656,970</td>
<td>3,105,000</td>
<td>3,245,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>1,150,000</td>
<td>1,250,000</td>
<td>1,400,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food rations</td>
<td>700,000</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>1,110,000</td>
<td>860,000</td>
<td>600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Allowances’</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>170,000</td>
<td>180,000</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships (IPT)</td>
<td>410,000</td>
<td>320,000</td>
<td>450,000</td>
<td>620,000</td>
<td>635,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8,995,000</td>
<td>9,960,000</td>
<td>12,296,970</td>
<td>10,761,440</td>
<td>11,206,640</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, a closer look at the trends in Orang Asli education funding assistance (and delivery) coupled with what is happening at the local level will reveal that there are very serious structural problems that have persistently plagued Orang Asli advancement in education. These ‘problems’ have not been given the weight and seriousness they warrant and in fact have been largely sidelined, causing obstacles to Orang Asli educational achievement.

**Structural Reasons for Dropping Out**

It is incorrect and unscientific to lay the blame for the high dropout rate among the Orang Asli solely on factors arising from the culture and attitudes of the Orang Asli, both the students and their parents. From my own personal observations, and from pronunciations by Orang Asli themselves through the media or at various fora (such as the one organised by Suhakam in 2005), it is clear that the reasons for the high dropout rate are multi-faceted and involves more structural rather than attitudinal reasons. These structural reasons can be broadly categorised as follows:

- Factors related to poverty
- Non-delivery of educational assistance
- Contrast in the Pedagogy and the Culture
- Gaps in attendance
- Imperfections in the system

**Factors Related to Poverty**

It is no coincidence that the Orang Asli should experience both a disproportionately high rate of poverty and a disproportionately high rate of school dropouts. The two are intimately related.

As any parent of schoolgoing children will know, it is not a cheap affair to send and keep a child in school, even if only the most basic of schooling needs are to be met. It has been estimated that, without any subsidy or other financial support, a parent would need RM100.00 to RM150.00 per schoolgoing child. With most families having several schoolgoing children at a time, sometimes as many as 4 or 5, Orang Asli parents would have to have a sizeable amount of funds at the start of the school year.

And this is where problem becomes more serious: the start of the school year follows the month of November/December which, because they are the wettest months of the year, are also the months when it is most difficult to get cash incomes. Rubber yield is usually low while collection and sale of forest produce, such as rattan, is both dangerous and not in demand.

Thus, January is a time when already poor Orang Asli are expected to spend a considerable amount of money for school expenses at a time when there is very little opportunities for cash incomes.

In the absence of any form of government subsidy or financial support, Orang Asli parents would also have to fork out recurring expenses such as school fees,
transportation, meal allowance and extra-curricular activity expenses. As such, there can be no under-stating how important the government subsidies mentioned in Table 1 are for the Orang Asli.

To illustrate the point, I can cite the case of the Semai community in Woh, Tapah where prior to 1993 no Orang Asli went to school from that area. However, a parent then was very keen for his child to attend school and asked the JHEOA to help with transport. The JHEOA agreed on the condition that there be more students in order to justify the cost of hiring a school van monthly. With this assurance, 18 children began school within a month. Clearly it was not a case of the ‘poor attitude’ of the parents towards education.

Similarly, in the Temuan community of Ulu Batu, Selangor, none in the community had ever been to school because of the costs involved, even though the school was about 7km from the village. However, because of publicity in the press, the JHEOA again agreed to arrange for transport and as a result several children, of varying ages, began to go school. And now that a private company has adopted the village, much of the children’s school needs are taken care of, thus ensuring that the children remain in school.

Clearly, then what is keeping many Orang Asli children from school is simply – poverty.

Non-Delivery of Educational Assistance

The educational assistance for the Orang Asli, through the JHEOA, showed a 24.5 percent increase from RM8,995,000.00 in 2001 to RM11,206,640.00. This increase closely approximates the increase in Orang Asli enrolment in both primary and secondary schools for the corresponding years. This would mean that in real terms there had been no increase in the allocation for Orang Asli educational assistance.

However, it is noted that the one single item that goes directly to help reduce the financial strain on Orang Asli parents – school uniforms – had its budget slashed by 43.4 per cent despite increasing annual enrolment figures. And this while school enrolment continued to increase and Orang Asli poverty remaining high at 76.9 per cent.

In fact, many Orang Asli parents have been complaining that subsidies for their children had been withdrawn since 2000.1 This was not an across the board withdrawal. In some districts, the Orang Asli parents were told that the financial allocations had not arrived yet even though the school year had well started. In other districts, it was back to normal.

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1 At the time, the JHEOA attributed this withdrawal of education subsidies (school uniforms, transport) to the financial crisis the country was experiencing then. However, it is to be noted that, despite the depressed economic situation then, the government had actually increased the education allocation for Orang Asli to RM100 million. This was to reflect the government’s realization of the important role that education plays in ‘integrating the Orang Asli into the national mainstream’.
Table 2
Dropout Rate from Primary 1 to Primary 6, 1980-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Admission</th>
<th>No. of registered students in Primary 1</th>
<th>Year completing Primary 6</th>
<th>No. of students completing Primary 6</th>
<th>No. of students dropping out</th>
<th>Dropout rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>2,304</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>1,650</td>
<td>71.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>2,416</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>1,633</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>2,729</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>1,785</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>2,868</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,868</td>
<td>65.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2,651</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1,052</td>
<td>1,599</td>
<td>60.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>2,879</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,124</td>
<td>1,755</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>2,942</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1,031</td>
<td>1,911</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>2,988</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1,217</td>
<td>1,771</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>2,881</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1,255</td>
<td>1,626</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>2,970</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1,466</td>
<td>1,404</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>3,078</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1,699</td>
<td>1,379</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>3,248</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1,679</td>
<td>1,569</td>
<td>48.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>3,202</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1,825</td>
<td>1,377</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>3,379</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2,264</td>
<td>1,115</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>3,128</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2,574</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>5,505</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3,144</td>
<td>2,361</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yet for many Orang Asli parents, they felt the pinch when they were told by the local JHEOA offices that much of the educational subsidies they were used to would not be forthcoming that year. Also, several transport contractors stopped ferrying Orang Asli children to school as they were told that the allocation for the year was not there, or not there yet.

The impact of the withdrawal of the education subsidies in 2000 can be dramatically demonstrated by looking at the Orang Asli dropout rates at the primary level given in Table 2. From a high of 71.6 per cent in 1985, we see that the rate of Orang Asli dropping out has been consistently declining over the years until it reached a commendable rate of 15.1 per cent in 1999.
If not anything else, this gradual decline in the dropout rate shows either the success of government programmes at keeping Orang Asli children in school or else that the attitudes of the Orang Asli parents had changed for the better, or a combination of both.

However, for the year 2000, there was a sudden upsurge in the dropout rate. From 15.1 per cent in the preceding year, it more than doubled to 42.9 per cent in 2000. Sadly, as we noted earlier, the dropout rate further increased to 43.9 per cent in 2003.

It is clearly evident that the sudden jump, and the continuing increase, in the dropout rate are directly related to the full or partial withdrawal of educational subsidies for some Orang Asli schoolchildren.

The stated policy of the government, through the JHEOA, is to grant financial assistance for education to Orang Asli children whose parents’ household income is RM405.00 or below – an income level which the majority of Orang Asli households fall below. Despite this stated base-line rule, the JHEOA often claims that there is not enough allocation in the budget (“tiada peruntukan”) whenever Orang Asli parents approach them for the educational assistance grants they have missed out on.

Sometimes, there is an allocation for such purposes but bureaucratic processes and less-diligent staff prevent the students from getting their approved assistance in cash or kind. To illustrate this point, I cite the case of a Mah Meri girl from Pulau Carey who entered Lower 6 in 2005. She was already two months into her school term and yet she still had none of the textbooks as promised by the local JHEOA office. In the end, she managed to get some donations and was able to buy the books herself. However, when the JHEOA officer found out about this, he asked for the receipt for the books (totalling RM255.00) saying that he would do the paperwork and reimburse her the amount. To date, ten months later, the amount is still not reimbursed. The worry is that if she had not been able to obtain outside financial help, she would still be without textbooks today.

In situations where Orang Asli students do not have access to outside financial help, such non-delivery of educational assistance will result in them falling behind in their schoolwork or, worse, dropping out of school to avoid the shame of not being able to afford the books.

The provision of hostel accommodation is also another form of education assistance given to Orang Asli. Such facilities are especially important for Orang Asli students who have to move to the bigger towns in order to attend secondary school. Without assistance in board and lodging, it is inevitable that these students will be forced to drop out of school.

I cite the case of an intelligent Semai girl who applied for a place in the JHEOA hostel in Tapah but was told it was full. So too was the regular government hostel (for both Orang Asli and Malay students). As an interim measure, she was forced to stay in a construction site kongsi, where her father had taken up temporary work two months previously – precisely to earn some cash to send his two children to school (another is in primary school nearer to the village). The father sadly notes that once his job ends, she will have to end her schooling as well.
Contrast in the Pedagogy and Culture

The national system of education is one where the government, the teachers, and in the case of the Orang Asli, the JHEOA, determine the nature, content and administration of the school system. In some schools, the parents play a role as well. And for the most part, the responsibility of educating the students are tasked to the teachers.

This is in contrast to the traditional Orang Asli system where the learning process and method is multi-faceted and holistic. Through their indigenous language, a child is taught to be polite, considerate and amicable. Through their arts and crafts, the child learns that with creativity and effort, unlimited utility can be gained. Through songs and rituals, the child is reminded of the other world. And through its legends and folklore, pride and identity are instilled in being a member of the community. There is no fixed curriculum or syllabus, nor timetable for learning. Learning is treated merely as a process to be a good Orang Asli; not to compete in the award of a certificate.

The village is the schoolhouse, and the teachers are the child’s parents, siblings, uncles, aunties, grandparents, cousins, and neighbours. From the elders, the Orang Asli child learns about the riches of the environment, and how it will forever protect them as long they reciprocate the relationship. The usefulness of the products of the forest – for fuel, medicines, food, building materials, crafts, and for peace of mind – are continually shown to the child. The child itself is encouraged to use the forest as its playground. That the forest is a living entity, with a soul and spirituality of its own is also imparted to the child. Remove this dominion and you remove the very basis of the fabric of Orang Asli society. The child believes in all this because the parents themselves believe in it.

The national school system reduces all this to a fixed curriculum, salaried practitioners, and a rigid *modus operandi*. For an Orang Asli child entering the school system for the first time, he is thrust into a new environment and has to deal with new people with differing cultures and values. This comes as a shock to them. Some may be able to adapt, others may simply choose to withdraw.

An Orang Asli child who is not accustomed to being beaten or scolded, for example, will be fearful of returning to school if such action is committed against the child. Sometimes an innocent threat is enough to cause an Orang Asli to stay away from school. I once came across two Orang Asli primary schoolboys who stayed away from school for the first week because their name tags were not ready. Their headmistress had told the students at an assembly that the wearing of the name tags was compulsory and that those who did not wear them would not be allowed in school. As it turned out, they did not have their name tags because the supplier had run out of raw materials.

Orang Asli first-year schoolers are also generally ‘slower’ than the other students primarily because they do not have the exposure that the others got. For example, not all Orang Asli children have the opportunity to attend kindergarten, and therefore are not able to read and write when they enter Primary 1, let alone be conversant in Malay. Nor do they have the advantage of access to all sorts of educational toys or TV programmes during their preschool years. This puts them at a great disadvantage compared to other students and can sometimes be the reason for them being ‘left
behind’ in the academic progress. It is certainly not a level playing field for all Orang Asli schoolchildren in Primary 1.

Orang Asli schoolchildren are also frequently bullied or ridiculed as a consequence of the prejudice and ignorance of their origins and their culture. Most Orang Asli children are able to cope, but a significant number choose to leave school, usually in the early years, in order to avoid having to face such distressing behaviour from their non-Orang Asli peers. That is, they choose to apply the “flee-rather-than-fight” value of their fore-fathers – one that has allowed the survival of their communities in the wake of violent attacks and encroachments on them in the past.

Also, when Orang Asli children choose to remain at home during the harvest season, or during the fruit season – two most important periods in the lifecycle of traditional Orang Asli societies – they and their parents are chided for placing a low importance on education. Asking the children to go to school during this period is akin to ask Malay students to go to school during Hari Raya, or Chinese students during the Chinese New Year.

Furthermore, for families living in poverty, the fruit season and the harvesting period are about the only times when food is aplenty. Still, this practise (of skipping school to benefit from the bounty of nature) has generally been on the decline in most Orang Asli communities, yet it is still being cited as a reason for their ‘poor attitude’ towards the importance of education.

Cultural factors also come into play in areas such as curriculum content, relevance of subjects taught, indigenisation of teaching modules, medium of instruction, and acknowledgement of indigenous traditions and systems. The point to be stressed is that: on entering the national mainstream school system, the Orang Asli child is at an immediate cultural disadvantage compared to the other communities.

**Gaps in Attendance**

For Orang Asli schoolchildren who are academically weak to start with, missing out on classes for a stretch of time can push them further back academically such that it will be difficult for them to catch up with their non-Orang Asli classmates. This is especially so since most Orang Asli children do not have the benefit of additional tuition classes or can depend on their parents for such tuition.

And once they realize that they are too far behind in their studies, and without any chance of catching up with the rest, the probability of them dropping out of school is very high.

As mentioned in the preceding section, one such reason for skipping classes is when the school holidays do not coincide with the Orang Asli’s preferred time for such holidays – such as during the rice harvest or during the annual fruit season. While these events are applicable for the more traditional Orang Asli who still depend on the subsistence economy for most of their basic needs, and this number is on the decline, the Orang Asli schoolchildren from this sector represents a significant number of those Orang Asli dropping out of school early.
However, Orang Asli children experience breaks in their schooling (i.e. long absences from classes) for other, easily avoidable reasons. The most common is the non-availability or the removal of the transport services from their homes to the school. We have received numerous complaints from Orang Asli parents about irregular, or sometimes complete stoppages, of transport services that caused their children’s education to be affected.

Transport service contractors, for their part, complain that payments from the JHEOA are slow in coming, sometimes taking as long as 4 to 6 months. In some instances, these contractors have told Orang Asli parents that the JHEOA had withdrawn the allocations altogether.

However, even when there are allocations, the fault frequently lie with the transport contractors. I remember going to the Temuan village in Ulu Batu, Selangor before noon one day and saw the children busily finishing their homework before changing into their school uniforms. When I came back to this house a few hours later I was surprised to see the children in their normal clothes. When asked why, they said that their school van did not turn up again.

Then in the Chewong village in Kuala Gandah, Pahang, the old rickety bus owned by the transport contractor broke down. It was not repaired for four months, and neither was a replacement mode of transport sourced. So for four months (i.e. until the end of the 2005 school year), none of the children went to school. With all schoolgoing children having missed much of their lessons last year, it is not expected that any of them will have continued school this year. In fact, in a recent visit in June 2006, the bus had still not be repaired, or repaired sufficiently to be operational. And none of the Chewong children there attend school anymore.

Thus, while it is important to make sure Orang Asli children go to school, it is equally important to ensure that there are no breaks in their attendance such that they will be left behind academically. If this were to happen, the chances of the Orang Asli dropping out of school is increased.

**Imperfections in the system**

To a large extent, Orang Asli parents are left out of the education system. There may be some schools where they are part of the Parent-Teachers Associations (PTAs) but their impact in these bodies is invariably negligible. In communities where the dropout rate is highest, they are more likely to be not involved at all.

If parents are not directly involved, however cursorily, in their children’s education, it is difficult to see how their needs and aspirations can be advanced and realised. This is especially so if the teachers and the school do not regard the parents as important partners in the education process. They can also provide valuable feedback to ensure a safer and longer stay in school for their children.

I am reminded of an incident involving a JHEOA hostel in Ulu Kinta several years back where the Orang Asli parents were being told by their children that they were being exposed to pornographic videos by some of their teachers. There were also
allegations of abuse. Police reports were lodged – something the normally reticent Temiar are not accustomed to doing – and an investigation was promptly conducted by the JHEOA. Needless to say, the JHEOA investigation found no truth to the matter.\(^2\) And the parents were left with the dilemma of asking their children to drop out of school or to close their eyes as well.

Without formal involvement of the parents in the education of their children, and in decision-making positions as well, it is likely that shortcomings and failings will be allowed to exist and continue.

Sometime in 2005, I was in Pos Gedong, a large Semai settlement about an hour and a half via rough road from Bidor. There was a primary school there, complete with staff quarters. I woke up at about 8.00 am only to see the schoolchildren in the house I was staying still at the fireplace and in no hurry to go to school, which was a 10-minute walk away. When asked why they were not in school yet, their reply stumped me.

“No point going early,” one replied, “as the teachers only arrive at about 8.30 a.m. or 9 a.m. from Bidor.”

I was told all the teachers prefer to commute daily from Bidor despite there being very decent staff quarters available for them. Given the distance they have to travel each day, they regularly arrive late for school. On rainy days, they sometimes do not turn up. Yet these are the same teachers who are portrayed as making personal sacrifices for the Orang Asli children in their daily grind from Bidor town to the village school (\textit{New Straits Times}, 28 May 2006).

When asked why no one complained to the authorities concerned, the parent there just shrugged her shoulders. She feared repercussions on her children if she did so. Besides, she told me, she was not their employer.

All such imperfections in the delivery of the education good to the Orang Asli can be removed or reduced if it was mandatory for Orang Asli parents to be directly involved in the whole education process, \textit{with the ability to influence decisions as well}.

If this were to happen, one can think of some immediate benefits. For one, they would have access to more information about the various scholarship programmes of the government or of other charitable bodies that award special grants for educational assistance. They will also be able to see to it that the JHEOA ensures that the school uniforms, text books and other supplies arrive on time, and in the right quantity and sizes. They will also be able to keep a check on the way the hostels are run and managed, or check bullying in the schools, or simply to correct prejudices if and when they crop up.

\(^2\) Like the parents, I remain unconvinced of this result. More recently, in June 2006, in Pos Tenau, Perak, a school-teacher has been accused or raping a primary school student of his. Police reports were and medical checks done. However, the parents were asked to settle the matter outside of court, and to accept a monetary compensation from the teacher – prompting some Orang Asli to comment that the authorities are not serious with protecting their children in school, or in treating criminal cases in accordance with the law when it involves Orang Asli victims.
That is to say, they should be allowed to continue to bear the responsibility of educating their children – only this time as equal partners with the education professionals.

HAVING CONSIDERED ALL OF THE ABOVE, it is clear that the Orang Asli are once again losing out on education, as demonstrated by the high dropout rate.³

- There is also a need to recognise that the single most reason why Orang Asli children drop out of school is poverty.

  Withdrawal of educational assistance on a per capita basis will only mean more Orang Asli children being forced to stop schooling.

- Parents should also be allowed to be more involved in their children’s education and be allowed to take on a more proactive role.

- Some politicians have misconceptions and erroneous perceptions of the Orang Asli and the Orang Asli situation. They need to be kept accurately informed.

  Politicians and decision-makers should also be more discerning of the data and information they are fed with. And to take it upon themselves to verify the information themselves. And to consult the Orang Asli as well.

  Politicians should also realise that their own actions, or non-action, can sometimes be detrimental to the Orang Asli wellbeing.⁴

³ It should be emphasized that the statistics on Orang Asli school dropouts only include those children who actually attended school for at least one day. The statistics exclude those Orang Asli children who have never attended school at all. In some villages, this could be all of the children there!

⁴ For example, the Orang Asli in Pekan received their FELCRA dividends only in mid-January this year simply because the Deputy Prime Minister, who is also the Member of Parliament for the area, wanted to distribute them himself. The dividends are usually given out at the end of the year before the new school year begins so that parents can purchase the school needs of the children. It seems ironic therefore for the DPM to advise the Orang Asli on the importance of education and staying in school at the said function when delays in receiving such cash infusions are the main cause of Orang Asli children dropping out of school.