



TAR UMT PR Students Narrate Worrying, Subpar Living Conditions Across Kampung Orang Asli Gurney



A safe and secure home provides a place of comfort, stability, and connection that goes beyond just shelter. For the Orang Asli community in Malaysia, it means having a space to call their own, living in harmony with nature, and being part of a supportive community that fosters community spirit through conversations, cultural celebrations and gatherings. A group of five passionate students hailing from Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology (TAR UMT) KL are aware that despite being an integral part of Malaysia's indigenous population, many Orang Asli communities struggle to secure safe homes as their lands are threatened by national development projects, and this issue remains overlooked, perpetuated across generations. They have stated that a lack of understanding between urban and rural communities is a significant part of the problem, as the Orang Asli communities are often left behind or forced to adapt to urban life rapidly, causing a sense of insecurity and driving them towards more urban sites.

To bridge the divide between the Orang Asli and urban communities, the aforementioned students were given a chance to witness the conditions of their living environment and walk in their shoes in Kampung Orang Asli Gurney, near Batang Kali, where Epic Homes successfully built 32 houses for the Orang Asli communities over the years. They observed that the Orang Asli village shared similarities with urban communities in terms of their modular homes' structure, use of sustainable materials, and challenges in accessing basic necessities. Despite these challenges, the Orang Asli community remained hopeful, upholding their unique cultures and homes and passing them down to future generations. During the students' tour, they also observed the joyful children at play, which was a testament to the resilience and spirit of the community in the face of adversities.

Munirah Wan Mohamad, Lead of Business Development and Partnership from Epic Homes, highlighted the homes built to go beyond providing shelter. She recounted how Epic Homes was founded in response to the dire living conditions of a native Orang Asli, Pak Cihong and his family, who were living in a dilapidated shack, similar to many more Orang Asli living conditions. This experience fuelled the founders' passion to help other homes and communities in similar situations, ultimately leading to the establishment of Epic Homes and providing more homes for the Orang Asli community.

Munirah added that providing Orang Asli communities with safe homes has a significant impact as it allows them to have aspirations and grow economically. It costs RM60,000 to build a safe and secure home for the Orang Asli community, and it takes more than just good intentions to achieve this goal. It takes understanding, time, and a range of resources, including funding, materials, and volunteers, to build and maintain homes that meet the unique needs and preferences of each family. Ultimately, she added that the foundation of a safe home starts through empathy and inclusivity.

Neglect and segregation only deepen the problem for the Orang Asli communities, where their hope is to feel a sense of belonging, stability, and permanence. By providing homes for those in need, Epic Homes is making a difference, but the challenge remains for society to understand and support the Orang Asli communities in securing safe homes and preserving their cultures.

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