

Tailor measures to needs of poor children

By [NORHASLINDA JAMAUDIN](#) - November 17, 2021 @ 12:10am



The Covid-19 pandemic has elevated levels of child poverty, and measures must be tailored to tackle them. -NSTP file pic

IN the 2022 Budget, the government is committed to ensure the survival of the people as the nation goes into a post-pandemic footing.

However, the greatest challenge faced by the government is to improve the standard of living, which has deteriorated due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The challenges are more pronounced for low-income families, women and children. It should be noted that a family with an income just above a poverty threshold is still poor and in need of assistance.

Many children from B40 families are vulnerable to poverty and deprivation, and their needs are more likely to remain unmet due to a lack of funds.

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Official estimates published in the National Voluntary Report (2021) stated that 16.4 per cent of B40 families live with children and dependents 18 years old and below. Since nearly 5.6 per cent of households (405,441) live below the poverty line, we can assume that thousands more children are being deprived socially and materially due to these conditions.

Studies on child poverty reveal that poor children face inadequate bedrooms, inability of parents to provide proper healthcare, higher rates of school dropouts, lack of electronic devices, limited Internet access and a lack of nutritious food.

In Malaysia, the percentage of children under 5 with impaired growth increased from 17.7 per cent in 2015 to 21.8 per cent in 2019, and the prevalence of underweight children increased from 12.4 per cent in 2015 to 14.1 per cent in 2019.

There are also questions about bereaved children – children who have lost a parent, parents and guardians.

In many cases, the eldest sibling is the "sole guardian" and shoulders responsibilities at a very young age. There are a few who live with relatives whose income fall below the poverty line.

Addressing these needs is critical to ensure everyone is protected and provided for.

The 2022 Budget has had this situation in mind with the government allocating nearly RM25 million to Yayasan Keluarga Malaysia for the welfare, education and future of orphans.

The programmes are according to age groups.

This includes an early schooling assistance programme, daily milk programme for poor students as part of the Supplementary Meal Plan, a community feeding programme for children from urban poor families aged 1 to 6, a malnutrition rehabilitation programme and a mother's milk bank.

These initiatives are in line with the National Plan of Action for Nutrition of Malaysia (2016-2025). In order to provide even greater support to families with children, targeted measures are incorporated through the tax system. The 2022 Budget provides income tax exemptions of up to RM3,000 for nursery and kindergarten fees and tax relief for purchases of handphones, computers and tablets.

This is important since children are considered to be deprived if they do not possess the proper electronic devices for online learning.

We are seeing positive policy response in tackling the needs of children but the concern is more on the way to ensure effective implementation.

In the country, the pandemic is responsible for the rise in child poverty and I believe protection for children needs to be strengthened and broadened since they are multidimensionally poor.

While the current social protection plan addresses the basic issues regarding the growth, stunting and underweight problems of children, it does not adequately address the other deprivations faced by poor children.

This is grounded on the fact that children suffer poverty differently from adults, something which has been long recognised in developed countries, such as New Zealand, United Kingdom and the United States.


The governments in these countries have developed measures to address the needs of children from poor households.


It can be agreed that the government here is responding to the needs of children, but, more preventive and reactive intervention strategies need to be for-mulated to address these needs from a multidimensional perspective.


Perhaps more targeted approaches could be initiated in the future in support of the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, as well.


The writer is an assistant professor at the Department of Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia


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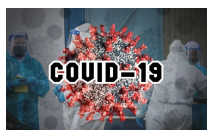
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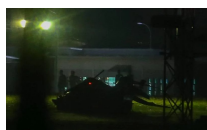
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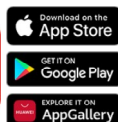


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