



# Economic Impact to Quality of Life of Agropolitan Participants in Malaysia

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## Abstract

Quality of Life (QOL) issues have increasingly been the area of attention in cities of newly developing countries including Malaysia. To improve QOL for people of absolute poverty in Malaysia, the Malaysian government have carried out a program known as Agropolitan in the East Coast Economic Region. The three Agropolitan project locations selected for this study are Batu 8 Lepar and Runchang in Pekan, Pahang and Gua Musang in Kelantan. This study carried out a field survey on 254 samples to investigate their experiences throughout the project. This study found that Agropolitan project had remarkably improved the QOL of participants

**Keywords:** quality of life; agropolitan; absolute poverty; government program

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<https://doi.org/10.21834/jabs.v3i8.278>

## 1.0 Introduction

Poverty is defined as a situation that shows disability from minimum income which is needed to fulfill necessities of food, clothes, shelter and basic infrastructure (Osman-Rani, 1995) from an economic point of view. This fascination with income is driven by humanitarian impulses—the desire for improvements in the global quality of life (Kenny, 2005). Furthermore, he states that income is surely the most common gauge for QOL, especially for economists. This world view of the essence of income can be justified by numerous studies linking income with other potential measures for (elements of) the quality of life. Even if income is not chosen for measurement of QOL, at first glance it appears that improving incomes will improve any QOL measurement chosen. Previous studies on measurement of QOL by Hicks & Streeten (1979), Drenowski (1974), Sen (1981), Dasgupta & Weale (1992) and Kakwani (1993) focused on three nexuses of approach which are life quality, basis needs and social indicators. However, the present study limits the discussion with the issue of income, satisfaction and individual perception of QOL upon joining the Agropolitan project.

## 2.0 Literature Review

East Coast Economic Region (ECER) covers vast areas in the whole state of Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang and some part of the eastern portion of Johor. The five key economic drivers who have been identified to support the socio-economic development in the region are Tourism, Oil, Gas and Petrochemicals, Manufacturing, Agriculture, and Education. These initiatives are outlined in the development of ECER master plan which will serve as a catalyst to achieve the status of developed regions by the year 2020. The vision of ECER is derived from three important features namely, distinctive, dynamic and competitive.

Poverty eradication programs have also been designed to achieve the goal of eradicating extreme poverty by 2010. This idea has been approved during the presentation of the master plan for ECER in May 2007. In this line, the Agropolitan project has been designed to involve the poor in agro and non-agro sectors in agricultural project of economic activity called Agropolitan.\*

### 2.1 Agropolitan project under ECER

ECER Agropolitan is an integrated rural development project with the ultimate goal to eradicate extreme poverty among the local people. The method of implementation will be divided into two; mainly relocation method and 'in situ'. It will be conducted in a sustainable way and integrated with three sectors which include agriculture, agro-based industries, and

\* **Agropolitan** approach is a strategy in restructuring rural area by adapting the appropriate urban idea to the rural environment based on agriculture (Algar, Ahmad, and Saad, 2012). The definitive approach of **Agropolitan** was coined by Friedman and Douglas, 1975. They defined **Agropolitan** as rural areas that have an effective population density of at least 200 people per square kilometer. A town of 10 to 25 thousand inhabitants would normally be found within a district. Moreover, district boundaries would be defined by a 'commuting' radius of (approximately one hour travel time by commonly available modes of transportation). Such dimension would yield an overall size of the population ranging from 50 to 159 thousand, of whom a majority would initially be engaged in farming (Friedman and Douglas, 1975:45). In Malaysia, its implementation has been modified by local development climate and political influences (Ahmad and Saad, 2011).

rural industries. This development was supported by the main growth centers of main economic activity, secondary economic and extra effort to support the growth of jobs and income for people. This project involved the direct participation of the agencies which include the government agency, private sector, universities, and NGOs. Thus, Agropolitan project not only aimed to improve the lives of the participants, but also to boost work opportunity and income for residents (ECERDC, 2012).

## **2.2 Objectives of Agropolitan ECER Project**

According to ECERDC (2011), ECER Agropolitan projects are implemented to address the poverty problem in the areas that have been identified. Among the main objectives of this project are to:

1. boost the economic level of more than 10,000 families from the hardcore poverty of in the region of ECER.
2. relocate 7,000 households out from poverty area.
3. boost participation of all households member.
4. increase household income from RM300 to RM1000-RM2000 monthly.
5. build competitive and self-reliant communities

## **2.3 Pekan Agropolitan**

Pekan Agropolitan project in South Pahang is implemented at three locations, namely Batu 8 in Lepar, Runchang and Tanjung Batu. The main economic activities in Batu 8 and Runchang are sheep-rearing while oil palm planting in Tanjung Batu. Secondary activities such as chicken-rearing and downstream livestock activities will provide additional income to the participants. The project is developed from 2009 to 2015, and the implementing agency is The Federal Land Development Agency (FELDA). The project is also progressing to become one of largest hubs for Doper Sheep in the Southeast Asian Region, with a target of 25,000 head by the year 2020. At Runchang, the pilot project of Pekan Agropolitan is significant in assisting indigenous people (Orang Asli) to earn a better income. In 2011, 102 Orang Asli participated in the project, and they were rearing 3,000 sheep in 35 APUs (Animal Production Units). In Tanjung Batu, 1300 hectares of land has been developed for oil palm plantation and supposed to be completed by the year 2012.

## **2.4 South Kelantan Agropolitan**

South Kelantan Agropolitan, project was carried out in Gua Musang and was designed to assist up to 3,000 hardcore poor. The development of the project consisted of resettlement of participants into new homes and the cultivation of 9,900 hectares of oil palm plantation since 2009. Oil palm is the primary crop while secondary crops included banana and cocoa. The implementing agency for this project is South Kelantan Development Authority (KESEDAR). In 2011, the project continued with the water treatment plant and 315 new houses were completed at the end of the year. The water treatment plant will deliver up to 5.9 million liters of water daily and will benefit South Kelantan Agropolitan as well as the surrounding communities. In 2012, an additional 315 participants and their families were expected to join the ten pioneering settlers who had moved in earlier. Constructions of

another 300 houses started in 2012. To date, 1,500 hectares of land has been developed for oil palm. In 2011, rehabilitation and replanting phase one of Renok Baru, Jeram Tekoh and Sungai Asap were expected to be completed in May 2012. A further 835 hectares were to be developed for oil palm in 2012. It involved more than 10,000 hardcore poor and gave benefits directly to over 60,000 people in the east coast region. In planning, the critical components of this project were the improvement of income agricultural project through the development of more than 14,000 hectares of farmland, increasing people's lives through the construction of 7,000 new housing units as well as improvement of existing 3000 units, and the provision of basic infrastructure. It is also empowered by activities to strengthen people's mindset through the continuous courses and training sessions.

Agropolitan participants were selected from the poor people database namely E-Kasih and E-Tegar. Its main economic activity is the plantation of oil palm. While secondary economic activity is the cocoa plant. Participants were given a monthly allowance of RM 750 to manage palm oil and RM 250 to plant cocoa. In sum, they get a monthly income of RM 1000. Each home is given the responsibility to cultivate and manage 300 cocoa trees at their own compound. In future, the project would further involve the participation of 1,600 families including the indigenous people to create 4,000 jobs and to boost household income from RM1, 000 to RM2, 000 in the first three years and up to RM5, 000 by the year 2019 (ECERDC, 2011).



(a) Community hall and futsal court



(b) Agropolitan land mark



(c) Clinic



(d) Mosque



(e) School



(f) Kindergarten

Figure 1: Facilities in Agropolitan Area.  
(Source: Author)

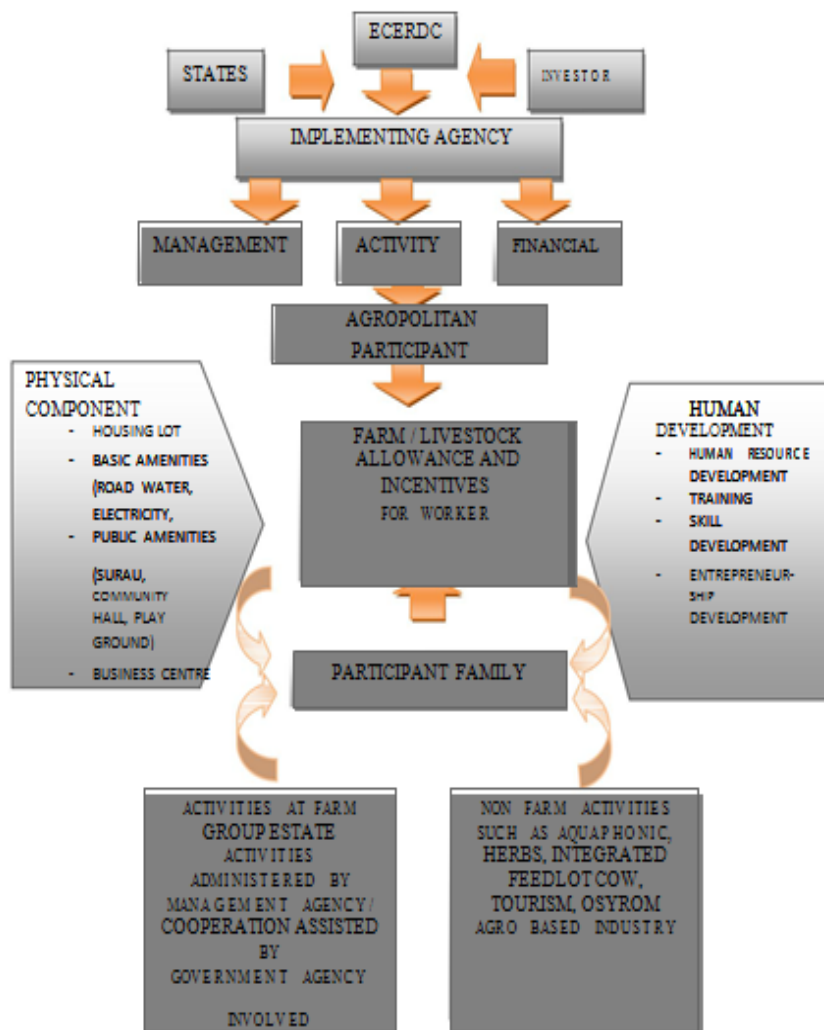


Figure 2: Agropolitan Mechanism in ECER.  
(Source: Author)

### 3.0 Methodology

In April to June 2012, a field survey using questionnaires was carried out with 254 Agropolitan participants from three Agropolitan project locations at Batu 8 Lepar and Runchang in Pekan, Pahang and Gua Musang in Kelantan to explore their experiences after joining the projects.

A structured questionnaire was administered to Agropolitan participant by proportional random selection. The target group was the head of the household and aged from 18 years old and above. In detail, 69% were male while the rest 31% were female. From marital status, it was found that 84.4 % were married followed by 5.4 % single, widows 6.2% and 4.1% was widowers. The objective measurement of QOL in this study is defined as income progress (economic settings) upon joining the project while the subjective measurement is based on their satisfaction expression and perception on how Agropolitan project has changed their life regarding life quality.

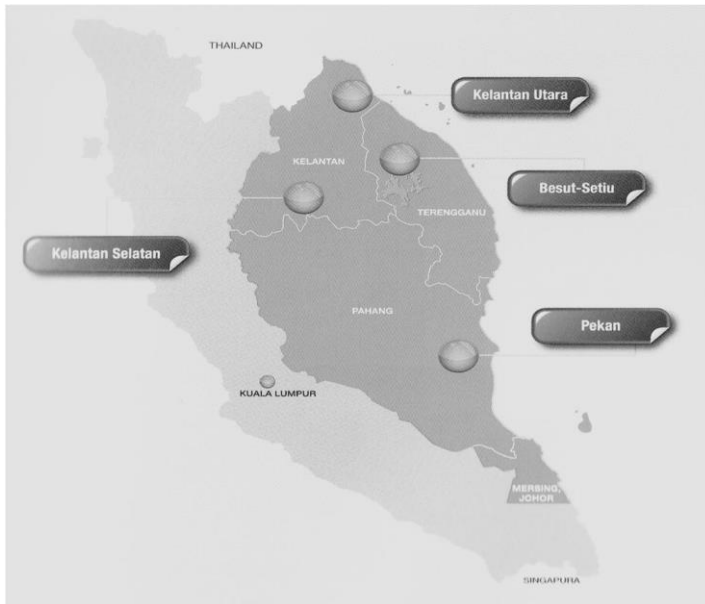


Figure 3: Location of Agropolitan Project under ECERDC.  
(Source: Author)

#### 4.0 Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the participants economic change in term of increasing income on a monthly basis before and after joining the Agropolitan project. Income group is classified into five categories. Income changes seen significant at income group below RM 300.00 which resulted in zero participants with income below RM 300.00. Meanwhile, income progress exists in three income group from RM 601 to RM 900 increased by 25%, income group from RM 901 to RM 1200 increased by 60% and income group between from RM 1201 to RM 1500 increased 3%. Income progressed from 3% to 60% in the other three more groups.

Table 1: Economic progress  
(Source: Author)

Income group				Notes
Before	%	After	%	
< 300	29%	< 300	0	After joining the Agropolitan project, it was found that there were no participants with income less than RM 300.00 monthly.
RM 301-600	64%	RM 301-600	6%	There was a decline of 58% among participants who were earning from RM 301 to RM 600 after joining the Agropolitan project.
RM601-900	5%	RM601-900	30%	Income of the participants has increased by 25%
RM901-1200	2%	RM901-1200	62%	Income of the participants has increased by 60%
RM1201-1500	0	RM1201-1500	3%	Income of the participants has increased by 3%
Total	100		100	

Thus, the implementation of Agropolitan Projects under ECERDC agencies was successful in increasing the income of participants and reduces poverty

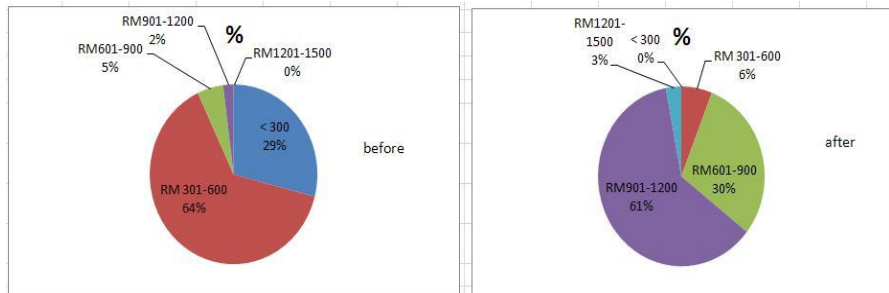


Figure 4: Income progress before and after joining Agropolitan Project  
(Source: Author)

#### 4.1 Participants' views of Agricultural Project on how it contributes their QOL

Participants' views in the contribution and the role of Agropolitan Project in transforming their lives were explored. Open-ended questions were asked to enable the participants to answer freely without being influenced by any options. The positive answers then were classified into several categories such as a change in income growth, quality of current life, farming activity, settlement and housing, economic stuff and poverty reduction. It is shown in figure 5 below.

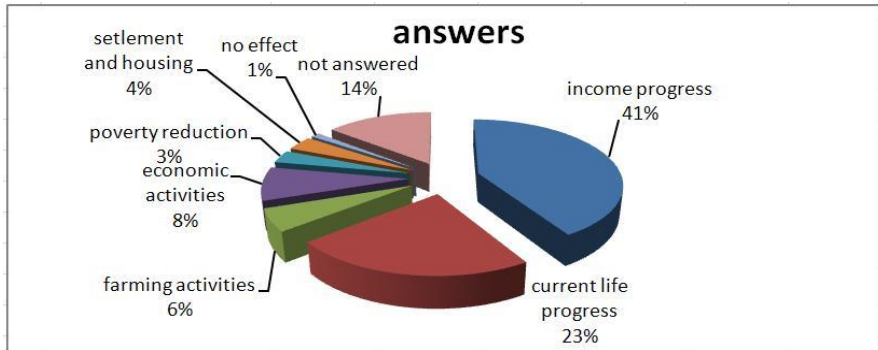


Figure 5: Category of participant's answer  
(Source: Author)

Answers by details from each category were then grouped in a common theme. Such answers as "Increase income level", "A more Guaranteed income", or "Improved income for each family" categorized as an answer for the class in regards to income. The same goes for an answer "Change people lifestyle", "An Easier life, comfortable" and "a better life, salary, now ok" categorized as answers regarding "current life". Answers which qualitatively different from each participant has later been explained in the next table

Table 2: QOL regarding income  
(Source: Author)

Q: What Agropolitan means to you regarding your life quality	Freq.	%
<b>A: Regarding income</b>		
Increase people income	57	23%
There is fixed job, fixed sources of income and better income	9	4.5
A more guaranteed income	5	2%
Fixed income	3	1.2%
A better income and a better life convenience	3	1.2%
A better income with a free land, fertilizer, pesticide	3	1.2%
There are an income source and upgrade life	2	0.8%
Improve income for each family	2	0.8%
Improve income and life convenience	2	0.8%
Improve income and change lifestyle	1	0.4%
Better income and increase life quality	2	0.8%
Improve income and reduce unemployment	1	0.4%
Increase income and enable me to run own business	1	0.4%
More work opportunity and improve income	1	0.4%
Increase member monthly income	1	0.4%
Increase income and better income	1	0.4%
Increase source of income upgrades life	1	0.4%
Upgrade life, fixed source of income	1	0.4%
Income increased, a comfortable life	1	0.4%



Income more guaranteed, life quality enhanced	1	0.4%
Improve income of Agropolitan member.	1	0.4%
Income increased, more comfortable life	1	0.4%
Good income and fix job	1	0.4%
A better income and given an insecticide freely	1	0.4%
Improve income, convenience, and future life	1	0.4%
Increase income got free insecticide	1	0.4%
Improve participant's income	1	0.4%
	<b>105</b>	<b>41.3%</b>

Table 2 expressed participants' opinion on the existing Agropolitan Projects. About 41.3% of participants in the Agropolitan project under ECER expressed positive changes regarding their income. Explained by the most answer increase people income, followed by there is fixed job, fixed sources of income and better income.

Agropolitan project also conceded has changed the lifestyle of the participant. It is described in Table 3.

Table 3: QOL in regards to current life convenience  
(Source: Author)

<b>Q: What Agropolitan means to you to in regards to your life quality</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>A: In regard to current life</b>		
Increase life quality	6	2.4%
There is seed supply, fertilizer, and insecticide which decrease expenses	6	2.4%
A more guaranteed life, easier life	4	2.4%
The participant life is easier and nicer	3	1.2%
Change people lifestyle	2	0.8%
Got house assistance, fertilizer, etc.	2	0.8%
A better life	1	0.4%
A better life, salary, now ok	1	0.4%
A more comfortable life and more life guaranteed	1	0.4%
An easier life, comfortable	1	0.4%
An easier life, have a new house	1	0.4%
An easier life, more guaranteed income	1	0.4%
A more guaranteed life, better income	1	0.4%
Easier life got free house	1	0.4%
Generate participant's income, assist poor people	1	0.4%
Situation changed due to new work and more spirit in life	1	0.4%
People can help us to achieve current progress	1	0.4%
Upgrade life	1	0.4%
Change future life	1	0.4%
Economic activity is more arranged, economical source better managed	1	0.4%
Give me a land to be utilized	1	0.4%
Enable income enhancement and free insecticide supply	1	0.4%
A better life fixed job	1	0.4%
A better comfort life and better life arrangement	1	0.4%

more stable life	1	0.4%
Able to boost development and better cooperation among farmer to develop a better	1	0.4%
livestock activity		
Participant life more assured	1	0.4%
Participant life and their income more assured	1	0.4%
More convenience for the people	1	0.4%
Able to change lifestyle and income improved	1	0.4%
Offer work opportunity and expenditure capability	1	0.4%
Improve life quality of rural people	1	0.4%
People with more technology know-how	1	0.4%
People happier	2	0.8%
People happier than before	1	0.4%
Increased income, improved facility	1	0.4%
More facility, local people happy with current improvement	1	0.4%
Income source more assured	1	0.4%
Improved convenience of people	1	0.4%
Upgrade lifestyle	1	0.4%
	<b>58</b>	<b>23%</b>

Table 3 displays the perceptions of participants to current life. Upon joining the Agropolitan Project, a participant expressed comfort, an easier life, more assured life, lifestyle upgrading, etc. Around 58 participants (23%) stated that their current life transformed positively by the existing Agropolitan Project

Table 4: QOL regarding farming activities  
(Source: Author)

<b>Q: What Agropolitan means to you to regarding your life quality</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>A: In regard to your farming activity</b>		
People life now is more focus on farming and livestock activity	1	0.4%
Able to upgrade the life within farming and livestock activity	1	0.4%
Given land and farming materials to be utilized	1	0.4%
Given land lots for farm to be utilized	1	0.4%
Given subsidy and extent farm area	1	0.4%
Supplied with free seeds and pesticides.	1	0.4%
People used to be busy in farming and livestock activities	1	0.4%
Given land lot, subsidy and insecticide freely	1	0.4%
Enable us to do farming activities	1	0.4%
Better farming, there is fixed income	1	0.4%
Farming is better managed, and better income	1	0.4%
Farming stuff is more managed by insecticide and fertilizer supply freely	1	0.4%
Plant is more manageable, and there is monthly income assurance	1	0.4%
We do not need to go forest like before anymore	1	0.4%
	<b>14</b>	<b>5.5%</b>

Regarding farming activities, it was found that the response given was similar in percentage for all the items which were 0.4%. Statements received are such given land, pesticides and better farm. Answer such as 'we do not need to go to forest anymore' was also found. It may be answered by indigenous people who use to go to forest for the search of any nature resources to be sold.

Table 5: QOL regarding economic activity  
(Source: Author)

<b>Q: What Agropolitan means to you to regarding your life quality</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>A: Regarding economic activity</b>		
Our country economic increased	1	0.4%
Give us high profit of economic project	1	0.4%
Profitable economic activity	1	0.4%
Enlarge job opportunity	2	0.8%
Actualize economic source	1	0.4%
A system which assists people to have a stable income	1	0.4%
Economic sources which continuously available	1	0.4%
A good economical source, strong and permanent to upgrade life quality	12	4.7%
Local people can compete with others on livestock	1	0.4%
	<b>21</b>	<b>8.2%</b>

Table 5 expressed participants' opinions regarding economic activities. The majority of them agreed that Agropolitan is a 'good economical source, strong and permanent to upgrade QOL' with 4.7%, meanwhile 0.8% of them agreed that Agropolitan 'enhanced work opportunity.' Other items recorded similar percentage of 0.4%.

Table 6: QOL regarding poverty reduction  
(Source: Author)

<b>Q: What Agropolitan means to you to regarding your life quality</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>A: Regarding poverty reduction</b>		
Upgrade life and eliminate poverty on local people	3	1.2%
Eradicate poverty among local people	2	0.8%
Reducing poverty	1	0.4%
Reducing very poor people (core poverty)	1	0.4%
Boost income and reduce poor people	1	0.4%
	<b>8</b>	<b>3.1</b>

Table 6 illustrates participants' opinions regarding poverty reduction. Three (1.2%) participants regarded Agropolitan upgrades life and eliminate poverty on local people. Meanwhile two (0.8%) were in the opinion that Agropolitan helps to eradicate poverty among local people.

Table 7: QOL regarding housing and settlement  
(Source: Author)

Q: What Agropolitan means to you to regarding your life quality	Freq.	%
<b>A: Regarding settlement and housing</b>		
More settler stays here	1	0.4%
More participant involved and have a permanent source income	1	0.4%
A more comfortable life with current facility such as new house	1	0.4%
A new house	1	0.4%
A new and good house	2	0.8%
A bigger and beautiful house	1	0.4%
A good house	1	0.4%
Expand settlement area	1	0.4%
	9	3.5%

Table 7 shows participants' opinion regarding Agropolitan in regard to housing and settlement. The item 'having a new and good house' marked 0.8 %, while other item remained 0.4 % each.

Table 8: Satisfaction upon joining Agropolitan Project  
(Source: Author)

Q: Satisfaction upon joining Agropolitan Project	Freq.	%
Yes	251	98.8
No	3	1.2
	254	100

Regarding satisfaction towards Agropolitan Project, Table 8 elaborates the majority of them (98.8%) reported being satisfied with the project meanwhile 1.2% reported they were unsatisfi

## 5.0 Conclusion

This study measured the Quality of Life (QOL) of Agropolitan Project. Participants' quality of life regarding income progress, experiences and satisfaction were examined. This study has advantages in gathering the participants' statement on QOL according to their words and own idea by using open-ended survey questions. It is shown that Agropolitan project has been recognized both in qualitative or quantitative way as has breed positive impact on the participant's life. Qualitative evidence by participants in an open, positive affirmation while, quantitative assessment obtained by comparing participant economic responses before and after joining the Agropolitan project. Participants Satisfaction was also measured to value their general opinion on the project.

The limitations of this study are that it only measures income and the perception of the participant regarding Agropolitan Project. Further, it does not represent the overall evaluation of other elements of Life quality. Other broader aspects such as quality of the environment, personal safety, work and productive activity, feeling part of one's local community, material

well-being, relationship with family and friends and health as Rahman, Mittelhammer, Wandschneider (2010) studied can be looked into.

The lesson can be learned from this study is, it reveal the notion of in certain society class in the developing country, income as a set to fulfill basic needs still influence every aspect that seems as conditions that need to be fixed first before other life quality element held. The idea of 'Improve your economy and other come later' still seem unusually accepted.

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