



▲ Many of the current houses in the Orang Asli villages are in very poor condition.

▼ Me together with one of the initiators and Semai people who participated in building houses.

► A newly built home by Teratak Semai project. The walls are done by the people themselves using crafts manship.



#### ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project is a bachelor graduation thesis about the voluntary housing project Teratak Semai in Peninsular Malaysia. The thesis presents a strategy for the Teratak Semai organization to pursue a sustainable livelihood for the indigenous Semai people who are disadvantaged in modern Malaysian society. The organization provides houses for the poorest of the tribe communities and relies fully on funding. So far 20 houses have been built using volunteers from outside of the village. This highly enhances intercultural awareness in a diverse, but often divided society of Malaysia.

The graduation thesis is highly applicable to the Hasselt Charter, because it is using an approach of strengthening human capitals of disadvantaged people through architecture.

## CREATING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD FOR THE SEMAI TRIBE THROUGH SELF-BUILT HOUSING

### BART VAN JOLE

**SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD**

The thesis contains a comprehensive literature review reflected on the village of Kampung Bt. 17 on the critical factors in constructing houses to obtain a sustainable livelihood.

Most of the factors of a sustainable livelihood, even to subject of housing, are outside the reach of the organization. Based on the literature, the legal status of the Orang Asli is very concerning since there is a major gap between policy and actual realisation. The priority of Semai is mostly their agricultural activities, since it's their only source of income. Also, a higher level of income would relate to sustainable livelihood, but is outside the scope of this research. Negative relations include main job, marital status and dependents.

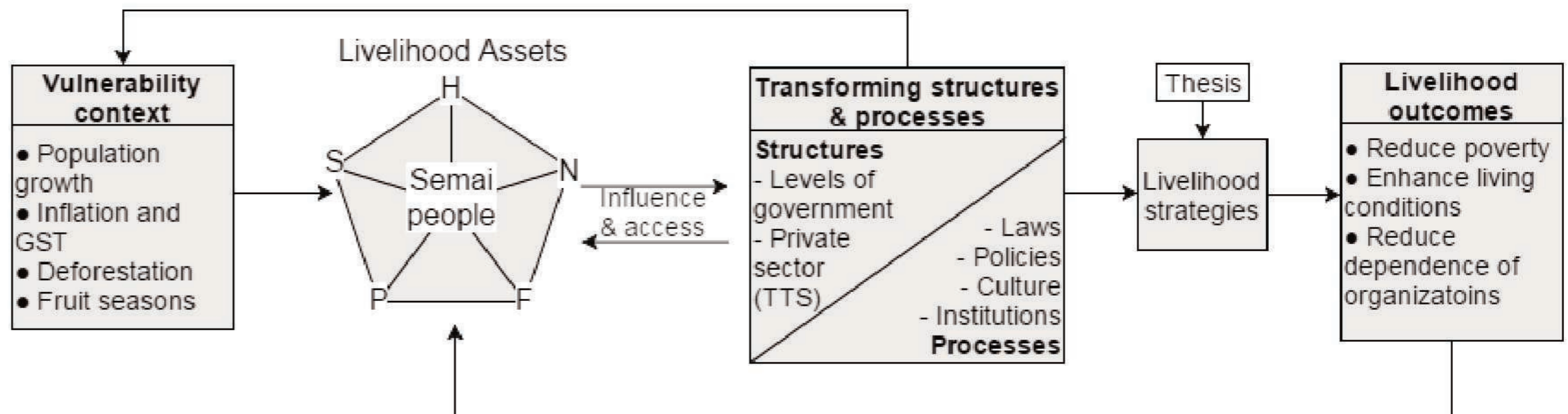
Literature does emphasise that in action of a Sustainable Livelihood the priority is to help the poorest of the community to prevent any environmental destruction. Since a higher level of education relates to sustainable livelihood, the high dropout rate of Orang Asli students is very concerning. The physical asset of sufficient sustainable housing would require participation and, by preference, provide simultaneous support to skill- and capacity-development.



◀ The beautiful but threatened surrounding of the Orang Asli villages.

▲ A Semai man and future owner of a Teratak Semai project house.

▼ The sustainable livelihood framework of Semai people.



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◀ A Semai man holding the durian fruit; a stinky but valuable product.

▲ Two volunteers constructing a house together with three Semai people; participation and knowledge sharing in action.

▶ A Teratak Semai volunteer communicating with Semai in their local language.



## PARTICIPATION

In order to pursue a sustainable livelihood for the Semai people, a participatory approach is recommended when constructing new houses for the poor.

Culturally Semai people are reserved, which resulted in a passive position of the owners during the project. Therefore, downward accountability through cultural appropriate communication is essential to clarify expectations of all actors. People are willing to participate, as long as it doesn't clash with their work and income. This means for an individual to participate, they have to weigh the cost of time, social costs and psychic costs.

From the field interviews and expert interviews it can be concluded that financial contribution by the owner is not realistic. Contribution of material goods or physical, however, can be possible. A different expectation level and an overload of volunteers leads to reduction of participation in constructing. This confirms the importance of downward accountability

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KNOWLEDGE SHARING

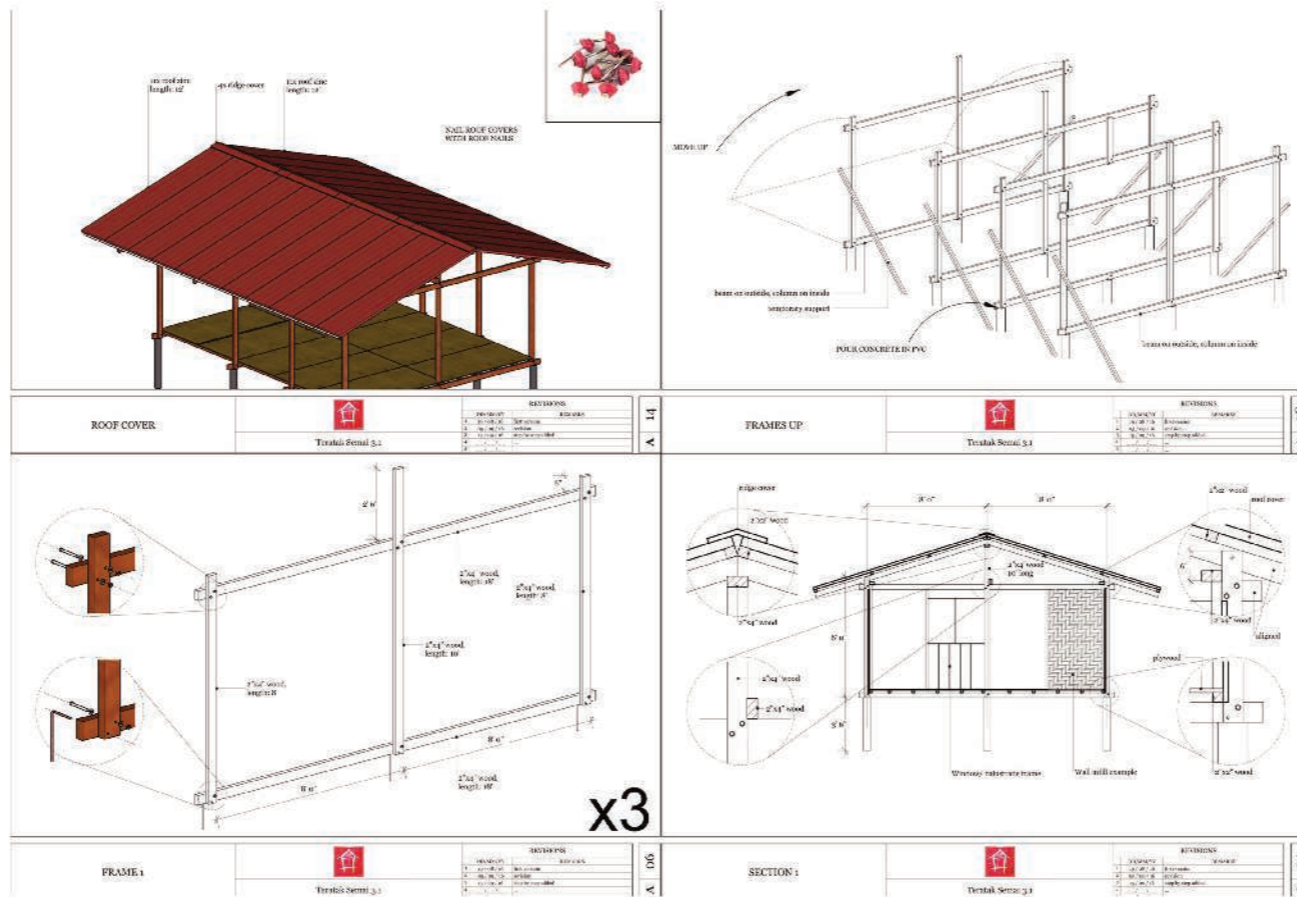
The suggested construction method is based on knowledge sharing instead of knowledge transfer. Many Semai are knowledgeable in local craftsmanship which is unfamiliar with non-Semai people. Their knowledge and skills can also be transferred to the volunteers. Therefore, the definition of knowledge and skills sharing is preferred.

A much known method of knowledge sharing is a instruction manual. This is well known in the west, but very little tested in developing countries. A manual has been tested and research the conclusion can be made that the Semai people are overall knowledgeable of building houses and are willing to participate, both in constructing their own house and in another family's house. Knowledge and skills transfer can take place by personal guidance with a basic building experience. The use of a manual independently by the people is unlikely. It can be used as a tool which follows after a vision that underlies the organization, but for it to succeed, a combination of activities, education and guidance is needed.

To enable Semai people to participate in construction, a manual is advised to use in combination with personal guidance with basic building experience. The manual can be reviewed on local habits and environment to improve the comprehension. Already finished units or scale models can be used as an example to visualise the end product. This will help the Semai people understand better the concept of the design.



- ◀ Me assessing the construction manual with a Semai man.
- ▶ Sheets from the instruction manual used in the experiments.
- ▲ The Semai are very familiar with making concrete.



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