

## **Penghulus and Ketua Kampongs:**

### **Relevancy and Challenges in Brunei Darussalam**

Sub-Theme: Strengthening Local Administration and Decentralisation

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#### **Abstract**

The institutions of Penghulu (head of sub-district or Mukim) and Ketua Kampong (head of a village) are an important part of Brunei Darussalam's administrative structure, officially seen as the 'eyes, ears and mouth' of the government. However, due to the advancement of information communication technologies (ICTs) as well as the rise of a large bureaucratic state, are these institutions still relevant in this small absolute monarchy? What are the challenges faced by the Penghulus and Ketua Kampongs in this modern age and what do the youth think of them? Is it still necessary for the government to increase the financial benefits of Penghulus and Ketua Kampongs in order to attract younger, educated generation to fill up vacancies for those positions? This paper attempts to provide a preliminary investigation on these under-research issues in Brunei Darussalam as well as providing an insight into the local administration of a small rentier state in Southeast Asia.

#### **Introduction**

The institutions of Penghulu and Ketua Kampongs (KKs), as leaders of villages and sub-districts (Mukims) are a common social-administrative feature in the Malay Archipelago and their role in modern governance is under-researched. Formally institutionalised by the British and Dutch colonisers, Penghulus and KKs contributions in Malaysia and Indonesia were significant in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century as they ensured peaceful administration of the state as the local headmen were allowed to continue leading their respective villages (Cheema, 1979; Kratoska, 1984; Tsuboi, 2004; Wan Rabiah, Kushairi, Suharto and Hasnan, 2015). However, as these countries gained independence, a new 'democratic' political-administrative system was adopted, focusing more on political parties and members of those parties who compete to gain political power and authority if they win state elections. Amidst these changes, the roles of the Penghulus and KKs seemed insignificant although they continued to be salaried government officers in those countries.

The situation in Brunei Darussalam (henceforth, Brunei) is somewhat similar. Research on the roles of Penghulu and KKs in modern independent Brunei are lacking. Seen as the lowest level of government's administration at the village level, the only accessible literature on

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Penghulus and KKs in Brunei is an undergraduate thesis written in the Malay language by Hamdillah (2001). In his thesis, Hamdillah (2001) reported that during the reign of the 28<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Brunei (reigned 1950-1957), those given peerage (titles) by the Sultan automatically becomes KKs and lower ranked nobles known as Pengirans, were also appointed as KKs. Generalisation by Hamdillah (2001) needs to be further investigated as in this decade, Penghulus and KKs are not necessarily given peerage or titles by the Sultan; the selection process has changed whereby village heads are now elected by the people of the villages and in the recent policy change in 2015 (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2015), emphasis has been placed on ‘younger’ and ‘educated’ villagers to be eligible for election.

Penghulus, head of several villages (sub-district) or Mukims, a position initially created by the British Resident in 1931 to help collect poll tax in Brunei then (Carey, 1932), were appointed based on their track record as KK and under the new 2015 policy, new Penghulus also have to stand for election, to be voted by the villagers of the sub-district. The election of KKs and Penghulus are the only form of ‘democratic’ election in Brunei, one of the few remaining absolute monarchies in the world.

### **Local Governance Institutions in Brunei Darussalam**

With an area of 5,765 sq km, a population of over 422,000 people and a population density of just 73 people per sq km (See Table 1), Brunei is a small country with a small population; therefore it is not surprising that the state and government practised a centralised system of government. The country is ruled by a Sultan, who holds ‘supreme executive authority’ (Prime Minister’s Office, 2004) and he is assisted by Cabinet Ministers who he appoint for a five year term. There is no local government in Brunei per se, but the District Offices (DOs) has been mandated to oversee the Penghulus and KKs institutions in Brunei and in general the welfare of the people living in the districts. The DOs are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) and derive their budget from the Ministry.

Table 1: Brunei Darussalam’s Population Distribution (2016)

<b>District</b>	<b>Land Size / Sq Km</b>	<b>Population Density / Per Sq Km</b>	<b>No. Of People (%)</b>	<b>No. Of Mukims</b>
Brunei/Muar a	571 sq km	512	292,705 (69.3%)	18
Tutong	1,166 sq km	42	49,438 (11.7%)	8
Temburong	1,304 sq km	8	10,543 (2.5%)	5
Belait	2,724 sq km	26	69,992 (16.6%)	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,765 sq km</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>422,678 (100%)</b>	<b>39</b>

Sources: Preliminary Report: Population and Housing Census Update 2016, Department of Economic Planning and Development, Prime Minister’s Office; Ministry of Home Affairs

Although they are not considered as civil servants, Penghulus and KKs understood to be government officials (Ministry of Home Affairs, 1998; 2015) hence holds a certain social status in society. Currently, there are 39 Penghulus, 185 Ketua Kampongs and 10 Long House Chiefs (LHCs) positions available in the country although not all the positions are filled (See Table 2).

Table 2: Number of Penghulus, Ketua Kampongs and Long House Chiefs in Brunei Darussalam, January 2018

District	Penghulu		Ketua Kampongs		Long House Chiefs	
	Positions	Filled	Positions	Filled	Positions	Filled
<b>Brunei/Muara</b>	18	13	116	80	Nil	Nil
<b>Belait</b>	8	3	19	10	9	5
<b>Tutong</b>	8	7	32	24	1	0
<b>Temburong</b>	5	5	18	13	Nil	Nil
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Brunei Darussalam

The revival of the Legislative Council in 2004 indicates their significance in society when the quota for Penghulus and KKs were allocated 15 seats (7 for Brunei-Muara, 3 each for Belait and Tutong and 2 for Temburong District respectively). As Brunei is still under the State of Emergency, declared since 1962, the village heads are the only democratically elected representatives of the country (Mani, 1999; Damit, 2007; Case 2012), given the mandate to sit the country's appointed legislature. For the 2017 Legislative Council session, only 9 representatives from the villages and Mukims were appointed by the Sultan. Before one is recommended or is eligible to become KK or Penghulu, background checks will be made by government agencies before they are field as candidates.

Wealth from petroleum resources discovered since the late 1920s has made Brunei into one of the richest countries in the world (Fortune, 2017). The government has built an extensive welfare state where citizens' basic necessities are provided at minimal cost. Education and healthcare are provided almost free to all citizens, while basic necessities such as petrol, water, electricity, rice and sugar are subsidized by the government (Mahmud, 2017). Despite declining revenue due to lower petroleum prices, the government is committed to maintain the subsidies enjoyed by the citizens of the state (Hayat, 2018). There is no personal income tax in the country. The rise of the welfare state has created a large civil service; currently employing over 51,000 personnel (Public Service Department, 2018) and the public service permeate to every district of the country. To date, the public sector remains a popular choice for employment among Bruneians (Rosli, 2017).

As we live in the age of Information, Communication Technology (ICT), innovations in this sector has spur improvements made in many areas including public service delivery. Although the 2016 United Nations E-Government Survey has ranked Brunei 83<sup>rd</sup> out of 193

countries in its e-government services, highlighting more efforts to improve e-government services in the country, demands from the public for better e-government services are expected to rise in Brunei as Brunei's population has been identified as the world's 3<sup>rd</sup> largest users of social media. Over 86% of her population are active on social media, with facebook (92%) and Instagram (87%) being most popular social media platform used and Whats App (97%) as the country's most popular messaging application (Othman, 2017).

As Brunei has a large government bureaucracy and where the public can easily go to a government department to apply for certain services, it is pertinent to ask if the roles of Penghulus and KKs are still relevant in a small state like Brunei? The government has also increased in the salaries of the Penghulus and KKs, are these increases justified? As the population becomes more social media savvy, are these institutions changing to meet the needs of the people? As the government strive to improve productivity, efficiency and effectiveness in delivering public goods and services directly to the people, would the KKs and Penghulus become irrelevant in this modern era? If these institutions are important, what is the unique structure that is in existence in Brunei which allows the KKs and Penghulus remain important in society? These are some of the imperative questions that this paper aim to answer as the government has vacant positions that needs to be filled (See Table 2). Institutional theory would be an important theory for this research as it is examining,

*‘a relatively enduring collection of rules and organized practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources that are relatively invariant in the face of turnover individuals and relatively resilient to the idiosyncratic preferences and expectations of individuals and changing external circumstances’* (March and Oslen, 2006:3)

Indeed, as this theory focused on the elements of order and predictability, following the norms and values of society's culture and where changes are frown upon, the institutions of Penghulus and KKs which are in existence in the Malay Archipelago for centuries, provided a good example of applicability of this theory for this research. The term KKs and village heads will be used interchangeably as both terms have similar meanings.

## Research Methodology

This preliminary research on the roles of Penghulus and KKs was carried out using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The first part of the research involves carrying out a voluntary online survey with undergraduate and postgraduate students in a local university to gauge their understanding of their Penghulus and KKs and what views they have on them. Only local students were asked to fill in the survey as they would arguably understand the KKs and Penghulus structure better in Brunei. There were 155 students answered survey. The survey was opened for submission for a week, from 28th October 2017 before it was closed for analysis.

The answers from the survey formed parts of the semi-structured questions asked to the Penghulu and the six KKs who agreed to be interviewed for the research. All interviews were carried out in Brunei-Muara District and all interviews took place in the interviewees' houses. The interviews were carried out in three months, from December 2017 to February 2018. All the interviews lasted between one and two hours.

## **Findings 1**

### **Quantitative Data: Students Knowledge of their Penghulu and KK**

#### **Respondents Background**

Of the 155 students who responded, 72.25% of them were female students. Over half of the students (51.61%) were made up of those between the ages of 18-22 years of age, 66 (42.58%) of students were between the ages of 23 to 27 while only 2 respondents were below the age of 18 and 7 were above 28 years of age. Majority of the respondents (83.97%) were made up of undergraduate students, while only 3 of the postgraduate students were PhD students. 84.45% of the respondents were Malays and 12.9% were ethnic Chinese students. Majority of the respondents (77.41%) lived in Brunei-Muara district while Belait, Tutong and Temburong recorded 20 (12.9%), 14 (9.03%) and 1 respondent respectively.

#### **Understanding the Roles Between Ketua Kampong and Penghulu**

About 42% of the respondents said they know about the difference between KK and Penghulu, while another 38% said maybe. The only difference they know between the two positions is that, Penghulu is of higher rank than the KK and he manages a few villages. Although a majority of them (67%) know that they can vote for their Penghulu and KK, however, only 6 out of 155 respondents ever did so. In terms of meeting KK and Penghulu, majority (78%) of the students has met KK while only 36 respondents said they have met their Penghulu.

Majority of the students knows that KKs and Penghulu helps certify documents (92.9%), giving out dates (imported from the Middle East, given by the Sultan) during fasting month of Ramadhan (90.96%) and distributing old age pension (83.22%) however, they are less aware that the Penghulu and KKs should also help distribute government information (49.67%), collecting village data such as population and unemployment data (47.74%) and settle village disputes (35.48%).

Interms of maintenance of the villages, issues such as tall grasses, roads, unclear signage or drainage problems, 63 respondents or 40.64% of them said they would do nothing and only 27.09% of them would report to Talian Darussalam 123, the national call centre for public services complaints. Only 35 respondents will report to KK, 6 to Penghulu and 9 respondents will report on social media. Of the 9 respondents who reports on social media, what's app and facebook would be the platform for them to send their complaints.

#### **Relevancy of the Ketua Kampong and Penghulu in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

On the question if they believe Penghulus and KKs are still relevant in Brunei, 107 (69.03%) respondents believed that they are. As noted by respondent no. 142 noted,

*“Yes, of course. I do think the institution of Ketua Kampung and Penghulus are still relevant in the 21st century because they are part of our culture and to get rid of their existence would somehow alter our historical and cultural norms. Besides, having Penghulu and Ketua Kampung would make our lives easier because they play an important roles in our village by making the people in the village hidup aman damai [peace and harmony]”.*

Another practical respondent noted;

*“Yes. They could help kementerian [ministries] with the collection of data for their research. Also, Bruneians in the 21st century still love their free kurma to be distributed through the ketua kg, no? Haha” (Respondent no.8)*

And respondent no.10, who had work attachment at a District Office before hence would have some insights on the workings of the Penghulu and KKs wrote;

*“Yes. Can't imagine how the village/mukim would be if there were no ketua kampung/penghulu. Not all people can see how hard they have been working for the sake of the village/mukim & its people. They often have to gather for meetings and discussions.”*

Of the 48 respondents (30.96%) respondents who said no and were unsure if their existence were still relevant, respondent no. 9 noted

*“(T)o be honest, no. Since the complains will be sent to the government and the responses pun lambat [late], its like complaining to the govt too, so no difference. I still don't get it why we have to get a stamp for our scholarship purposes to ketua kg.”*

The final question in the survey which asked the students to comment more on the institutions,

Respondent no.48 wrote,

*“Should create online platform for complaints & reporting events or any incidents, updated by the Penghulus/Ketua Kampongs... so that it is easy for people to view/update current events or issues of our Kampong & more convenience for us rather than have to go to their house to report, which sometimes they are not available... etc.”*

The data from the online survey shows that the students believed that the institutions of Penghulu and KK are important (nearly 70%) however, over half of them are not aware of the differences between the roles of Penghulus and KK besides understanding that Penghulu has a higher position than KK and Penghulu looks after a few villages. While students see their relevancy in this modern era however, only six of them ever voted for a KK before. More students have met and seen their KK compared to their Penghulu and this could be due to the fact that students needs to get his signature to confirm that the student is indeed a resident of the village if he/she has to apply for admission to enter university. If KK have done their



tasks, the students or villagers in general do not have to meet their Penghulu, therefore it is understandable if the students do not know their Penghulu.

## Findings 2

### Qualitative Data: Interviews with Ketua Kampongs and Penghulus

There were six KKS and one Penghulu who were interviewed in this research. The characteristics of the KK and Penghulu who were interviewed are outline in Table 3.

The Penghulu and KKS interviewed are all male as the Brunei government does not have provision to allow women to be village heads yet. Most of the KKS are in position for over 8 years and even the Penghulu used to be a KK before he was promoted as Penghulu (before the 2015 policy). The appointment of Penghulu was decided by District Office's, based on the Penghulu's track record as KK and recommendations given by Mukim Consultative Councils members.

Table 3: Characteristics of Interviewed Penghulu and Ketua Kampongs

Position	Age	Duration in Position (in Years)	Last employment before becoming Penghulu/KK	Estimate No. Of Population He Looks After
Penghulu	70	13	Army	15,000
KK1	62	9	Army	7,000
KK2	70	10	Teacher	4,960
KK3	58	8	Fire Brigade	4,320
KK4	68	12	Customs	11,000
KK5	68	8	Teacher	6,000
KK6	65	9	Prime Minister's Office	1,000

All the Penghulu and KKS believed that their tasks are manageable and the reason why they contested to become KK and Penghulu in the first place was due to their desire to help the community. All liked their job and if given the opportunity to serve again, they would like to continue to serve the community and village.

### Biggest Challenge: Delivering Cash (Welfare Assistance)

According to the Penghulu and KKS, the biggest challenge in their tasks is the delivery of welfare assistance (cash) to all registered welfare recipients in the village at the end of every month. The cash payment has to be collected from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS) in the morning and the KKS have to distribute the cash to the entitled recipients when they reach home. Village heads raised their concerns on this matter, as noted by KK5,

*"I take about B\$186,000 when its 'pension day' to be distributed to the elderly and those who entitled to have welfare assistance living in my village. Do you think it is safe?"*

*By right, the ministry should know that it is not safe and it is against government's Financial Regulation (F.R.) whereby not more than a certain amount of money should be taken by a government officer and yet despite us highlighting this matter repeatedly, it is still not solved. "*

Many villagers waited very early at the KK's house to get their pension (all citizens and permanent residents of the state who reach the age of 60 are given the non-contributory monthly allowance of B\$250) and while KK6 thinks it was helpful to him as he does not have to go to residents' houses, other KKs felt anxious when villagers queued at his house to get their pension, for fear of long queues and arguments ensued because of that. Some pensioners are patient and would wait for the KK to send the money to recipients' houses. KK has to return the payment slips to the MCYS once monies have been distributed and the efficiency in returning the payment slips to the Ministry is seen as KK's effectiveness in fulfilling his tasks as a village head.

### **Difficulties in Finding Assistance From Villagers For Events**

Penghulu and KKs find it difficult to get villagers to be part of their Village or Mukim Consultative Council and be active in attending meetings or preparing events for their villages' benefit. Penghulus and KKs are now expected to be active in village events as encouraged by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), the ministry which overlooks Mukims and villages across the country. As noted by KK4, this work is all 'voluntary work without pay' hence many are not attracted to it, therefore it is difficult to attract the retired or the youth to help organise events in the village. Furthermore, all interviewees highlighted that there is no funding for village events from the Ministry therefore KKs either have to seek sponsorships or pay with their own money in order to attract assistance from villagers when organizing events in their villages.

KK4 for example, also spends on envelopes when he distributes the old age pensions as it is respectful to do so and when a few of his poor villagers asked him for money, he will help them with small amount from his own pocket. It was also interesting to observe during the interview that there were bags of rice in the KK4's house and he explained that some villagers sent him the rice for him to distribute to those who needed it most in the village.

### **Approval for Welfare Assistance**

Another common challenge faced by the KKs and Penghulu is providing supporting letters for those who seek other welfare assistance. The KKs or Penghulu have to verify that the people are indeed eligible for welfare before they could stamp their approval; however, not all will get it as the final decision maker still rests with the Ministry. While interviewing KK5, this author witnessed a retired government servant, who would have received his employment pension, half of his last pay (probably over B\$2,000 every month until he passed away), asking the KK for avenues for extra welfare assistance as he has debts over the purchase of his cars. The KK tried to tell him that he may not be eligible for it due to him still receiving his employment pension but the pensioner did not take it well and the KK eventually advised him to seek further clarification from other government agencies. Being



the one to face the villagers can be difficult when requests for welfare assistance are turned down, more so the relevant ministries however, KKs and Penghulu would advise the residents to reapply again if there are merits to their requests.

### **Lack of Social Media Presence**

Of all the KKs and Penghulu interviewed, none of them seemed to maintain a website to update villagers of any events as they are not aware of how it can be done, however two are active on facebook to ensure village events are highlighted in that social media page. While all KKs and Penghulu are in a group chat with their Consultative Councils and District Office, however, information is still not received by their residents. KK3 mentioned that there are attempts by the District Office to help them improve their social media presence by enrolling them in workshops sponsored by the Ministry.

When asked if they believe that the role of KKs and Penghulu have been diminish with the introduction of the national call centre, Talian Darussalam (TD) 123, four of the KKs still believe that TD123 would not get the work done unless KKs interfere as they have 'direct line' to the respective departments, such as water, electricity or the National Disaster Management Centre, therefore to them, TD123 is still not as effective as they are.

### **Not In Favour of the 2015 Scheme of Service**

In terms of the salary review which was announced by the government in 2015, the Penghulu and KKs were not in favour of it as it will end their service when they reach the age of 70. KK6 revealed that about 67 KKs will be retired in 2018 and many are not happy as their means of income has been removed as village heads are forced to retire after 10 years of service.

The insistence of the government to have a minimum academic qualification of secondary school education is unpopular among the KKs and Penghulu since they believed that leadership in the village rests on the personality of the village head and his desire to make the village better, as an important criterion of being a village head. All those interviewed also asked why the minimum age of a village head starts at 45 years of age under the new scheme, highlighting that the government seemed only want to 'hire' retired security (army) personnel to be village heads but even then, if they are retired after 10 years, it might not be good for them as they will not have income security after that.

Penghulu and KKs also highlighted that the 2015 salary scheme which was announced by the previous Home Affairs minister is yet to be implemented and because of this they are sceptical of any salary increase during their tenure before their final retirement.

### **Definition of A Village Needs to be Highlighted**

KK3 also highlighted the need to review the definition of a village in terms of population size. This is to ensure more balanced tasks among village heads. Some village heads has more people living in his area, therefore, more responsibilities, while others have less, hence less responsibilities yet their salary are similar for every village heads. KKs are aware that

villagers do complain about them not being at home all the time when they have something for them to certify documents. As KK1 noted,

*“KKs are also humans with families and even though we are on call 27-7, we try our best to serve the village residents.”*

One of the KKs also noted that the Penghulu in his Mukim has fewer problems because all the KKs under him are all hard-working hence he does not face any difficulties in managing his Mukim. Only four of the KKs were opened to the idea of having an office with a secretary to help them manage the paperwork of the village however two other village heads feels having an office would impede their life as they would be expected to be in their ‘office’ during working hours. Noting that Penghulu and KKs are working 24 hours whenever villagers report something to them, having an office might not be important although all KKs feels having an assistant when giving out old age pension and writing formal letters to government departments would be helpful. Since there is no government officer who accompanies the KKs when they distribute the cash, families of the KKs will be the ones to help out when the pension is out.

## Discussion

From the students’ perspective, the institutions of Penghulus and KKs are still relevant in Brunei and the most visible tasks of the Penghulus and KKs for the students are their role in certifying documents, sending dates to villagers during fasting month and distribute old age pension. Although the students do not interact with their village heads as often, not active in village events, did not vote for village head (though this can be due to them not being exposed or informed of village election, which is normally held after every 10 years and voting age being 18 years and above), they still believed the institutions are important. This belief can be largely due to the students’ strong cultural identity, identifying the institutions as part of the country’s heritage.

This research made the assumption that the youth would be interested using social media to highlight village activities or issues that are needed to be rectified by the government; however, the data collected did not reflect this. Only 9 out of 155 youths would make a social media complaint if they see problems, reflecting the lack of the lack of empathy and interest of the youth on service improvement or maintenance within their villages.

The youth viewed the villager leaders as having only ‘certifying’ and distribution of welfare roles, just like another government agency when in reality their role is bigger as it encompasses the whole village. The institutions of Penghulus and KKs should then make more effort to engage the youth to participate in village activities. Brunei residential area is mostly made up of individual houses which can be far away from the village heads therefore, holding events can be difficult. There is no funding for village heads to do advertising although there are several villages taking the initiatives to use facebook to advertise events. KKs have to depend on his ‘younger’ and active Consultative Village members to spread news and events however, it is not easy to recruit members. With MOHA hoping to make One Village One Product (1K1P) initiative significant enough to contribute to the country’s

economy (Idris, 2017), Penghulus and KKs are expected to ensure their villages help achieve the Ministry's mission.

Although the KKs and Penghulus are also expected to get data especially in terms of unemployment, census and welfare matters, however it seemed administratively difficult as it does not seem that KKs or Penghulus do it and even if they did, the forms are not returned and they do not have assistants to help them compile the data.

Nearly 70% of the students believed that the institutions of KK and Penghulu are still relevant in 21<sup>st</sup> century Brunei despite advances in information technologies and decentralisation of state services in all the districts. Three most common reasons for students' belief that the village heads importance are due to, first, being representative of the village to the government, second, distribution of welfare services and third, being part of the country's local culture and identity. As the government continued to rely on Penghulus and KKs institutions as the 'eyes, ears, tongue, legs and arms' (Zailani, 2014), the salary review in 2015 highlighted the desire of the government to have more 'educated' leaders even at village level. Upon investigation, 'educated' only means the government seeks to have someone who has completed secondary school qualification rather than primary school which was what the older 2013 scheme of service has identified (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2013). It should not be unreasonable for the government to seek a better and higher qualified candidate as all Brunei citizens are given free education until university level for many decades and it is expected that Brunei can have better candidates to fill in the positions, with a slightly higher salary and bigger responsibilities. While the village heads interviewed were not in favour of 'increasing qualification' as well as reducing the age of village heads to 45 years old, however, as the country faces higher unemployment rate, the option of further reducing the age of eligibility should be considered as younger people may be energetic, driven and can have more dynamic ideas on how to improve village cooperation and activities since it was revealed by the Minister that despite having 40 openings for Penghulus and village heads in 2017, none of them were eligible to be forwarded as a candidate (Rokiah, 2017).

Furthermore as members of Legislative Council can be appointed at the age of 21, and the youngest member in the current session, is a 29 years old female environmental activist (Hazair and Thien, 2018), there are possibilities of women and younger citizens who can be appointed or stand for village elections and made a difference in community. The current rules and regulation of Penghulus and KKs in Brunei does not allow it, though in neighbouring country, Malaysian state of Sarawak, female community leaders have been appointed (The Borneo Post, 2016).

It is clear that security concerns over the amount cash collected and to be distributed are a valid anxiety of village heads that needs to be address. Due to large amount of money to be distributed, there have been incidents where they have somehow miscalculated and any shortfall has to be borne by them. The policy of delegating elderly pensions and welfare assistance by the village heads was made by the previous Sultan and continued under the present Sultan, to ensure village heads are constantly aware of elderly well-beings and needs in their villages hence this policy cannot be changed until the Sultan decides otherwise.

Nevertheless, the options of having police presence and assistance when village heads collect and distribute the monies to the villagers are possible and should be studied.

The issue of rezoning of the village boundaries was highlighted. Indeed, a village head can easily monitor a small number of people but if it is a few thousands, it is physically difficult for him to do so. Although it was stated that a Penghulu position can be created for up to 4 villagers, however, this is still dependent on the number of villagers living in the area. From observation during the interviews, it is clear that village heads would like to see their Penghulu be more active in helping with village management and have more responsibilities. Data from MOHA (see Table 3) revealed that only 71% of Penghulu, 94% of KK and 50% of LHCs positions are filled therefore there are concerns that if 67 KKs are going to be retired in 2018, the KK or Penghulu 'acting' on the other village behalf will face problems when it comes to giving out the welfare assistance. KKs and Penghulu also revealed that there is less application from villagers to be KKs as it is not a 'popular' position to apply for. Although those who 'act' for the village head gets extra salary, amounting to half of the salary of a working village head, however, if the number of villagers are small, it would be easier for them to help but if it was a few thousands more, then it is not desirable for them to take on the additional or 'acting' tasks.

### **Limitations**

This paper did not manage to interview more Penghulus and seek their views on their roles and responsibilities and this is one area of research which should be further investigated. This paper also did not seek the views of Penghulus, KKs and Long House Chiefs from the three other different districts, especially the district which is physically separated from the main country, Temburong District. Their views might be different from those nearer to the capital where access to services is comparatively easier.

Involvement of the District Office (DO) or MOHA would important in the interviews; however, due to the lack of time, it was not possible. Research should also be made on why there are less people willing to stand as KKs or Penghulus. Similarly, the survey has to include a wider population, those who actually experienced in dealing with village heads and Penghulus as their views can be different from those of the youth who have less contact them.

A comparative study between the roles of the Penghulu and KKs in Brunei, in Borneo and in Southeast Asia should be undertaken to see how different jurisdiction managed their local communities and how countries can learn from each other. Studies by Wan Rabiah, et.al (2015) and Nor Razina and Faisal (2016) on Penghulu institutions in Perak, Kelantan and Riau as well as reports in Sarawak where Penghulu and Tuai Rumah who will be evaluated through performance indicators (The Borneo Post, 2017) have shown how the role of community leaders are still important and maintained by the governments in these countries.

### **Conclusion**

The literature on institutions of Penghulus and Ketua Kampongs in Brunei is still scarce and regionally, still limited. The youth believes the institutions are still important; a part of

society's identity despite advances in ICT and government service improvements in general. As they form the lowest level of government administration at the village level, more scrutiny on their roles and contributions needs to be highlighted as the government has made efforts to increase their salaries and seek villages cooperation to make villages economically sustainable in the future. There is a need to review their roles and responsibilities to make it clear, not only to the public but also amongst the Penghulus and the KKs themselves of their different tasks and responsibilities to ensure their continued its relevance in 21<sup>st</sup> century Brunei and beyond.

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