

PROGRAM REPORT : GROUP SUSTAINABILITY

AMU3248 ATS3248 APG4248 Field methods in Anthropology and International Development (FMA) 2026

Programme Title	Student Research Projects – AMU3248 ATS3248 APG4248 Field methods in Anthropology and International Development Discussion Topic: Waste Management
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2. Background

The Field Methods in Anthropology and International Development (FMA) 2026 is an annual collaborative programme between Monash University Australia (MUA), Monash University Malaysia (MUM), and the South East Asia Community Observatory (SEACO). Each year, SEACO at Monash University Malaysia hosts approximately 40 to 45 students from Monash University Australia and Monash University Malaysia to participate in the programme.

For the FMA 2026 programme, a total of 29 students from Monash University Australia (MUA) and 11 students from Monash University Malaysia (MUM) participated. The programme was led by two Academic Coordinators, Professor Narelle Warren and Dr Stefan Bächtold, with the support of 12 SEACO staff members who served as facilitators and field coordinators to ensure the smooth implementation of all fieldwork activities.

SEACO served as the programme implementation partner by providing coordination and logistical support for fieldwork activities, participant recruitment, data collection, and community and stakeholder engagement throughout the programme.

Participants were invited to take part in the research because they were existing SEACO participants and members of the Segamat community. The project aimed to gather community perspectives and experiences on several key research themes, including:

1. Human and non-human relationships (animals, environments, and objects)
2. Household structure and everyday life management in Malaysia
3. Sustainability, the environment, and climate change
4. Community engagement: understanding voices and representation
5. Religion and cosmology
6. Traditional medicine practices

Participation in the study involved either a focus group discussion (FGD) or an in-depth interview, each lasting approximately one to two hours and focusing on one of the designated research themes. Each FGD consisted of 7 to 10 participants and was conducted during either a morning or afternoon session. In-depth interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed time and location that was convenient for the participants.

Data collection was carried out between 12 July 2026 and 15 July 2026. During the discussions and interviews, participants shared their perspectives on their communities, social and cultural practices, personal beliefs, and, where relevant, information about objects or places of significance related to the research topics. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time before data analysis commenced on 16 July 2026.

3. Objectives

The academic programme comprising the units AMU3248, ATS3248, and APG4248 is a strategic initiative aimed at developing a new generation of researchers equipped with skills in anthropological field methods and international development. Through this programme, Monash University students are provided with the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom in real and dynamic community settings, thereby bridging the gap between academic learning and empirical practice.

The programme ensures that learning extends beyond theoretical concepts by providing students with hands-on field experience while contributing to the development of a broader research ecosystem.

The primary objective of the programme is to provide students with practical experience in research methods through fieldwork.

4. Activities During the Sessions

4.1 Community and Expert Sessions: Common Activities

The community and expert sessions in Felda Medoi, Sungai Segamat, Bekok, and the Segamat District Health Office and District Office followed a structured approach using interactive activities and semi-structured discussions. The community sessions included three main activities:

Agree/Disagree, Community Mapping, and Household Mapping, followed by semi-structured

interviews. The expert sessions used the **Agree/Disagree** activity as a starting point for discussion, followed by semi-structured discussions with the officers.

Activity 1: Agree/Disagree

Participants were shown 11 photographs of different waste items and asked to indicate whether they considered each item to be waste. Pink stickers represented "waste", while green stickers represented "not waste". The activity was followed by a discussion to understand the reasons behind the participants' choices.

Activity 2: Community Mapping

Participants worked in small groups to map important locations within their community, including common meeting points, rubbish bin locations, and, where applicable, areas used for agricultural waste disposal.

Activity 3: Household Mapping

Participants drew their homes and surrounding areas, including nearby landmarks such as neighbouring houses, shops, and farms. They also identified household waste disposal locations and areas where waste commonly accumulated.

During the mapping activities, students asked follow-up questions based on the information shown on the maps. This allowed them to obtain additional details about participants' waste management practices and the conditions within their communities.

A semi-structured interview was conducted after the activities. The discussion focused on four main areas: **agricultural waste management, household waste storage and disposal, environmental conditions and challenges, and personal practices and awareness related to reusable items, composting, and recycling.**

4.2 Session 1: Community of Felda Medoi

The session was conducted at Balai Raya Felda Medoi, Segamat, from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM with 10 Malay participants aged between 29 and 62 years. It began with an icebreaker introducing the FMA programme and the focus of the discussion, followed by verbal consent and collection of demographic information.

The three common activities and semi-structured interview described above were then conducted. Particular attention was given to agricultural waste management, especially practices related to palm oil activities.

The session provided students with an introduction to community-based fieldwork and an opportunity to understand waste management practices from the perspective of a rural agricultural community.

4.3 Session 2: Community of Sungai Segamat

The second community session was conducted at the SEACO Office, Segamat, from 2:30 PM to 4:30 PM, with nine Malay participants aged between 33 and 62 years.

The same three interactive activities and semi-structured interviews were conducted. The discussion explored household waste practices, agricultural waste, environmental concerns, and participants' awareness of reuse, composting, and recycling.

As the second community session, this activity allowed students to apply the fieldwork methods with greater familiarity and compare waste management practices with those observed in the Sg Segamat community.

4.4 Session 3: One-to-One Session with Mr. Siva, Chaah

The one-to-one session with Mr. Siva, aged 53, was conducted at Achi Gold Agriculture Farm, Chaah, from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM.

Unlike the community sessions, this session focused on **direct observation and an in-depth discussion** of agricultural waste management. Mr. Siva showed the students the farm's sheltered composting beds, where coconut scraps, leaves, fruit peels, and animal manure were processed into organic fertiliser and compost.

The discussion covered the management, reuse, and recycling of agricultural, food, animal, and coconut waste. It also explored composting practices, government support, collaboration with other farmers, packaging waste, environmental and community impacts, and challenges related to managing the agricultural waste, including distance, odour, leakage, and equipment.

The visit allowed students to observe sustainable waste management practices in a real agricultural setting and understand the practical challenges of applying these practices.

4.5 Session 4: Community of Bekok

The fourth community session was conducted at Bangunan Kwongsi, Bekok, from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM. Ten participants from Malay, Chinese, and Indian backgrounds took part, with ages ranging from 28 to 75 years.

Following the introduction to the FMA programme, verbal consent, and collection of demographic information, the participants completed the three common activities and semi-structured interview.

The session provided an opportunity to explore waste management practices within a multi-ethnic community, including household and agricultural waste disposal, environmental concerns, and personal practices related to reuse, composting, and recycling.

The session exposed students to participants from different age groups and ethnic backgrounds, highlighting the importance of adapting communication and engagement approaches to different community settings.

4.6 Session 5: Segamat District Health Office (PKD Segamat)

The expert session was conducted with five officers from the Segamat District Health Office (PKD Segamat) in the PKD Segamat Meeting Room from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM. The participants were aged between 35 and 42 years.

The session began with the results of the **Agree/Disagree activity**, which were used to facilitate further discussion. The officers shared their perspectives on the main causes of illness in Segamat, differences in health issues between areas, and broader environmental and health concerns affecting the local community. The discussion also explored health education provided to patients and areas where the local community may have limited health knowledge or awareness.

The session helped students understand environmental and waste-related issues from a public health perspective and recognise the connection between environmental conditions and community health.

4.7 Session 6: Segamat District Office

The expert session was conducted with four officers from the Segamat District Office at the Bilik Gerakan, Pejabat Daerah Segamat, from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM. The participants were aged between 35 and 56 years.

The discussion was initiated using the results of the **Agree/Disagree activity** as a starting point. The officers shared their perspectives on local waste management, the main factors contributing to waste-related issues, differences between areas, environmental concerns, and challenges faced by local authorities.

The session provided students with an institutional perspective on waste management and highlighted the importance of collaboration between communities, local authorities, and other stakeholders.

4.8 Field Visit

A field visit to Masjid Bandar Putra, Segamat, and Sungai Bantang, Bekok, was conducted on 15 July 2026 from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM.

The visit included observation of a clothes recycling point and the natural environment in Bekok. It provided students with an opportunity to relate the issues discussed during the fieldwork sessions to actual environmental conditions and community-based recycling practices.

The field visit complemented the interviews and discussions by providing students with direct observation of local environmental conditions and recycling practices.

5. Reflection

This program provided students with practical experience in anthropological fieldwork and community-based research. Participating in interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), interactive exercises, and site visits enabled students to translate theoretical concepts into real-world application.

Engaging directly with residents, local farmers, health officers, and administrative authorities through the field activities, discussions, interviews, and site visits provided students with a broader understanding of waste management and environmental challenges from different perspectives. The experience showed that waste management is not only about how waste is disposed of, but also about **how community members perceive and define waste**. These perceptions influence whether materials are considered waste, reused, recycled, or discarded, and are shaped by community awareness, daily practices, available facilities, environmental conditions, and the roles of different stakeholders.

The fieldwork sessions were conducted smoothly, with clear coordination among the group members and facilitators. Roles and responsibilities were well defined, and the sessions were implemented according to the planned activities and research objectives. The groups were well prepared and able to follow the fieldwork procedures effectively.

Communication and coordination throughout the sessions were clear and effective, which supported the smooth implementation of the planned activities. Overall, the fieldwork was conducted in an organised manner, with good coordination between the groups and facilitators.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Maintain Pre-fieldwork Zoom Meetings with Students

Continue organising a pre-fieldwork Zoom meeting with students before their arrival in Malaysia for next year's FGD. The meeting will provide an opportunity to introduce the fieldwork programme, explain the planned activities and schedule, understand students' preferences and expectations, and address any questions or concerns in advance. Early communication will help students feel more prepared and comfortable and allow the fieldwork team to make appropriate arrangements based on their needs and interests.

6.2 Finalising Group Topic Focus

The group topics should be finalised at least one month before the programme and prior to the first coordination meeting. This will allow the coordinator sufficient time to review the topics, plan the fieldwork requirements, and recruit suitable participants based on each group's research focus.

6.3 Allow Two Days for Proposal Preparation and Practice

Allocate two days for students to work on their research proposals before the actual fieldwork, as practised this year. This additional preparation time would allow students to develop and refine their proposals, prepare relevant interview questions, and practise their research approach with guidance from the facilitators. It would also help students gain a clearer understanding of their research objectives and feel more confident when conducting interviews and FGDs in the field.

Appendix: Photo of Fieldwork Activities



Figure 1: Session with Community of Felda Medoi



Figure 2: Session with Community of Felda Medoi - Mapping activity with participants



Figure 3: Session with Community of Sg Segamat



Figure 4: Session at Achi Gold Agriculture Farm



Figure 5: Session with Mr. Siva at Achi Gold Agriculture Farm - Students conducting the interview



Figure 6: Session with Community of Bekok



Figure 7: Session with Community of Bekok - Agree/Disagree activity with participants



Figure 8: Session with Community of Bekok - Students conduct interview



Figure 9: Session with Segamat District Health Officer



Figure 10: Session with Segamat District Health Officer - Agree/Disagree activity with participants



Figure 11: Session with Segamat District Officer



Figure 12: Session with Segamat District Officer - Agree/Disagree activity with participants



Figure 13: Session with Segamat District Officer - Students conduct interview



Figure 14: Field Visit to Masjid Bandar Putra, Segamat



Figure 15: Field Visit to Sungai Bantang, Bekok