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The Experience of Malaysian Youth Council in Implementing Malaysian Youth Policy 2015-2035

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Abstract

Malaysian Youth Council (MBM) is an important stakeholder in Malaysia youth development representing the NGO sector and being recognized by the Government under Section 49, Youth Organizations and Youth Development Act 2007. One of the main functions of MBM is to plan and implement youth development based on DBM as its foundation so that DBM does not just remain as a written statement without being practiced. MBM leaders as the main stakeholders of national youth development to understand the concepts contained in the DBM, especially PYD which is the main pillar of the DBM which to understand how to approach today's youth to prepare them for a more challenging future and coordinate all programs and youth development activities towards achieving the key goals and agendas of DBM. Thus, this writing attempts to unravel the question: 1. What is the Malaysian Youth Policy (DBM) according to the MBM Leadership perspective and; 2. To what extent has the MBM leadership implemented the DBM agenda in its programs and activities? Due to middle ground and critical approach, the challenges faced by MBM are not implemented or discussed thoroughly by the relevant agencies. Therefore the youth development issues do not get pressure from outside to be taken to the next level. This study found that the MBM leadership sees DBM as one of the government's ways to ensure the well-being of youth, especially in terms of economy, education and social welfare. It is also found in this study that MBM leadership has expected DBM to take care of the survival of youth organizations. MBM basically welcoming the implementation of DBM based on the establishment of bureaus under the MBM working committee based on nine youth priority areas in DBM. Although by principle the MBM leadership understands and uses DBM as a guide in annual program planning during the leadership retreat, the MBM leadership still struggles to decide on selecting and organizing programs that need to be implemented, in priority and systematically. The MBM leadership has implemented PYD through its programs and activities, but not systematically, strategically and in depth. MBM should emphasize long-term planned programs based on DBM, and reduce ad-hoc programs by the request of ministries or other stakeholders.

Keyword: Positive Youth Development, Malaysian Youth Council, Malaysian Youth Policy, Leadership, Youth Development.

Introduction

The discussions on National Youth Policy (DBN) have started since 1967 when it was first proposed by MBM (Malaysian Youth Council, 1990). After various forms of discussion and presentation, DBN was launched in 1985. A few years later, the government felt that the level of understanding and appreciation of DBN was still low. Thus, after taking into account the views of all parties during the session of the National Youth Consultative Council (MPBN), the secretariat of MPBN has proposed that DBN be reviewed and replaced with the National Youth Development Policy (DPBN).

DPBN states that the definition of youth in Malaysia is young people aged 15-40 years while the focus for youth development programs and activities is on young people aged 18 to 25 years (Youth Development Division, 1997). The Malaysian Government is committed to focusing on youth development programs by allocating funds such as RM 738 million (\$ USD 227 million) in 2013 National Budget. Apart from that, in the statement of the 2015 Budget Consultative Council, it was also emphasized that youth will be the main force of the country's economy (Prime Minister Office of Malaysia, 2014). This statement clearly shows that the Malaysian government recognizes Malaysian youth.

The Malaysian Youth Policy (DBM) 2015-2035 which is the third revised edition comes with more comprehensive and gives a new definition of youth covering those aged 15 to 30 years as the main concept of DBM to ensure the continuity of the future leadership of the country. Apart from that, DBM also contains three other main concepts including Holistic and guided by the Federal Constitution and Rukun Negara; Futuristic, Relevant and Current; and Across Implementers and Generations (Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia, 2015). DBM is clearly a document that explains the importance of the philosophy of youth development to stakeholders to highlight the potential of youth as the main pillar of the country's strategic development in the future.

Youths aged 15-30 years are estimated around 9.1 million or 30 percent of the total population of Malaysia (Norshafawati, 2014). It illustrates how Malaysia has valuable assets and its potential should be highlighted. The government through the Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia (KBS) as a key stakeholder in the country's development has and is making efforts to highlight the talents and potentials of youth including popularizing Positive Youth Development (PYD) approaches (Haslinda et al., 2012) as one of the key concepts of DBM 2015-2035.

PYD is a strength-based model and asset-based approach that considers youth as an asset, changing from the traditional approach of the deficit model (Lerner, 2007) which focuses on youth problems. Earlier, Benson (1997) had introduced 40 Development Assets which is a conceptual model of socialization experience for all youth consisting of internal assets and ecological assets. This concept was adapted and developed by a group of UPM researchers (Azimi & Zanariah, 2007) according to the context of local culture before being adapted by DBM into 48 Malaysian Youth Welfare Assets. The more assets owned by the youth, the more prosperous they are in achieving the goal of becoming youths who have 8Cs, namely Caring,

Competent, Character, Confident, Cooperation, Considerate, Competitive and at the same time provide a positive Contribution in society and develop the country. These 48 assets are also used as the main basis of the DBM effectiveness evaluation mechanism (Haslinda et al., 2016).

Apart from KBS which is the part of the Government, Malaysian Youth Council (MBM) is an important stakeholder in youth development representing the NGO sector and being recognized by the Government under Section 49, Youth Organizations and Youth Development Act 2007 (Government of Malaysia, 2007).

The role of Malaysian Youth Council

MBM acts as an intermediary medium for channelling the voice of youth in grassroots to the government. This is outlined in the Youth Organizations and Youth Development Act, known as Act 668, which stated MBM as the parent body of youth organizations at the national level. In line with the clauses explained in the act, MBM also represents the voice of youth in various national platforms related to youth and national development policies such as the Annual Budget Consultation Council, National Unity Consultative Council, National Social Council, Committee to Promote Understanding and Harmony Among Religious Believers (JKMPKA), The National Youth Consultative Council (MPBN), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Implementation Committee under the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) and most recently the National Transformation Secretariat 2050.

Through the involvement in MPBN, observers in the Malaysian Youth Parliament and the SDGs through the EPU planning unit, MBM performs its duties in disseminating information on youth organization issues as well as those directly related to youth development. Through joint engagement with these government agencies, MBM has submitted opinions on youth development and organizations matters.

MBM also plays a role in strengthening the principles of voluntarism and democracy in the youth movement. Therefore, MBM is actively running a rejuvenated volunteer program through the 1Malaysia Youth Volunteer Community or Malaysian Youth Volunteer Community (MYVOC). MYVOC is managed with an emphasis on the skill specialization of the volunteers. This coincides with the need from time to time that requires trained and skilled volunteers in one field to assist on the ground.

In addition, the roles played by MBM that mention above, one of the main functions of MBM is to plan and implement youth development (Haslinda et al., 2012) based on DBM as its foundation (Asnarulkhadi, 2009) so that DBM does not just remain as a written statement (Azimi, 2002) without being practiced. This observation focuses on the views and understanding of the MBM leadership on the development aspirations of the National youth, DBM and the aspirations of KBS, in an effort to develop youth. An in-depth study of the understanding and experience of the top leadership of MBM if not explored or immersed will result in a continuous and significant gap between the great aspirations of DBM and the understanding and practice of MBM leadership.

Methodology

This study have used triangulation to get the data, there are three major approach that have been used towards it. The first approach is Participant Observation which involve majority of the MBM important leadership, second approach is In-Depth Interview which involved important key informant (KBS leadership, current and former MBM leadership) and the last approach is document analysis which involved all policy and document that guided MBM all this year (the main document used is DBM). DBM is an important which contain futuristic guiding document to prepare the youth generation until 2035 in facing the bitter challenges on the future. Therefore, it is very appropriate for MBM leaders as the main stakeholders of national youth development to understand the concepts contained in the DBM, especially PYD which is the main pillar of the DBM which to understand how to approach today's youth to prepare them for a more challenging future and coordinate all programs and youth development activities towards achieving the key goals and agendas of DBM. These writing attempts to unravel the question

1. What is the Malaysian Youth Policy (DBM) according to the MBM Leadership perspective?
2. To what extent has the MBM leadership implemented the DBM agenda in its programs and activities?

MBM as the Parent Organization

As the parent body of Malaysian youth organizations, MBM operates based on the voice of the youth, the implementing body and evaluator of the country's social and economic policies. Thus, the goals of MBM enshrined in the MBM constitution must be seen broadly from the lens of the youth of today and the youth of the future. One of the contents in the MBM constitution is to develop and encourage youth activities as well as the work by voluntary in youth organizations through joint efforts (MBM Constitution, 2007).

There are many different types of organizational structures and ways of working for NGOs and youth councils around the world. Not surprisingly, the role of national youth councils in other countries will be different from the MBM. One of the notable differences is that MBM is recognized in the act, this means the existence and existence of MBM cannot be denied.

MBM adopts a contested executive post structure, the highest council as 'auditor', the affiliate bodies as member and the secretariat as the 'executing hand'. One of the initial assumptions that can be made about why this structure was implemented is that it was in accordance with the norms and the way a democratic structure functioned at that time. This is due to the adaptation of the structure of the World Assembly of Youth, as MBM formerly started as a branch of WAY (Fawzi, 1980).

The secretariat plays a role as a compass to the MBM and the staffs are considered as a youth worker. Thus, apart from performing program tasks, the secretariat needs to carry out office management tasks as well as information and data management. Therefore, there are requirements where specific areas of work, specified in work procedures, terms of service or 'handbook'. This document act like an organizational guideline. At the same time, it also helps in explaining the need to understand the principles of the organization, thus giving space for creativity to the secretariat and working committee members in the implementation of daily tasks and program management.

MBM Secretariat is headed by the Secretary General who wins the post or by appointed. The duties of the Secretary General under the MBM Constitution are (i) directly responsible to the President, (ii) report to the President all actions taken in relation to the administration of the office, (iii) obtain approval from the President regarding the recruitment of officers and members of headquarters (Secretariat) as well as their dismissal (iii) responsible for the perfection of the meeting.

As an organization, the complex structures and entities of MBM that shelter different youth organizations need to be taken into account in this study. MBM, like other organizations, also goes through a process of adjustment and transition of leadership and functions. The functions of the secretariat office and the functions of the working committee are also not static, and often change according to the demands of the youth development program and the needs of the current community.

From an internal point of view, the frequently changing functions need to be based on a strong purpose. As discussed by Nga (2010), political pressure is indeed a factor in the tendency to change the direction of youth organizations in Malaysia. The latest approach of MBM which is seen as very broad means that the direction and type of activities chosen are also not in-depth. MBM has implemented various programs in the form of social problem solving, public relations and awareness, as well as cooperation programs. However, due to the excessive scope of functions, it provides limited space in terms of sustainable and focused implementation. This element can lead to a decline in quality of program implementation (Lauxman et al., 2021).

This is closely related to the political pressure and funding received by MBM, which can affect the potential and reputation of MBM as a body that working hard to bring the voice of youth from various organizations. Each organization under MBM also has a specific importance and purpose for its members. Thus, the complex structure MBM gives more different nuances in explaining the type of approach chosen by MBM. The approach chosen by MBM is safer and is considered to be a middle ground, as MBM is more likely to maintain its existing position and continue to provide space for the affiliates to be equally involved in youth development programs. MBM also being critical about government policies, however, often takes the path of diplomacy in resolving difference's opinion in private. Among the MBM's diplomatic approaches are closed-door meetings with the relevant ministries and the submission of memorandum of recommendations. Due to such an approach, the challenges faced by MBM are like a proposal accepted, but not implemented or discussed thoroughly by the relevant agencies. Because the meeting or proposal is closed, it does not get outside coverage, therefore the issues discussed do not get pressure from outside to be taken to the next level.

Findings and Discussion

MBM Leadership Perspective on Malaysian Youth Policy (DBM)

The MBM leadership sees DBM as one of the government's ways to ensure the well-being of young people, especially in terms of economy, education and social welfare. Therefore, MBM leadership also has expectations for the function of the DBM itself. One of the expectations of MBM leaders towards DBM is, DBM should take care of the survival of youth organizations. This expectation of DBM is closely related to the interests of the national youth organizations that are under the auspices of MBM. These national youth organizations have branches at the

state level, and small branches up to the district and area levels. These small and single organizations are joined by young people who mostly choose to join youth organizations to express their political will. Therefore, if DBM is seen as a threat to the movement, this clearly shows a clash in achieving common goals.

The leadership of MBM basically welcomes the existing of DBM because it is seen to be able to mobilize the energy of all parties in ensuring youth development can continue to be implemented and become one of the important national agenda.

Preliminary findings show that MBM leadership understands the basics and content of DBM but the process of implementation is not done strategically and systematically. The MBM leadership understands the basics of DBM content as emphasized by the MBM President for the 2016-2018 session, "MBM raised this DBM as an example program of youth development commitment and it is admired and attracted by other countries" (Malaysian Youth Council, 2015). The PYD-based DBM foundation is highlighted through the types of programs implemented, for example MIB leadership training program, MYVOC volunteer training and consistent collaboration with foreign organizations and agencies. Non-strategic and non-systematic policy implementation refers to short-term and ad-hoc programs, which need a responsive to issues that require immediate action such as disaster relief missions, or invitations to implement youth programs in collaboration. Program duplication often occurs if programs need to run concurrently. This arises because each MBM committee has a different target group and program. In fact, for the invitation of cooperation, MBM has pressure to maintain its function and purpose as a youth platform, therefore the program must be implemented according to the time offered by the relevant agencies or ministries.

In addition, there is also confusion when talking about DBM in general within the mass society, which is mostly focused on the implementation of youth age limits. This is clear when there are youth representatives at the state level in the 101st MBM Supreme Council Session, most members of the coalition from a state level youth council do not agree with the DBM through the Town Hall session. However, all the youth leaders simply do not agree on the implementation of the age limit (Malaysian Youth Council, 2015). This is because, for members of youth organizations in Malaysia, they understand the impact in terms of the implementation of the age limit. Among the effects that have been experienced and seen by members of youth organizations during the previous youth policy changes are youth organizations at the branch level are mostly no longer active, due to sudden changes and lack of younger members at the branch and single youth organizations. Their experience during the previous policy transition period saw the struggles for a youth organization become stable. The existence of youth organizations in a society reflects the diversity and democratic balance of that society. It also shows the level of youth political involvement in a society.

Discussions and meetings on youth policy also revolved around the issue of age limits and only saw the involvement of MBM in the meeting just to give input on the issue of implementation. The suggestions and concerns raised by MBM did not get attention. One of MBM's concerns is the survival of youth organizations, this is because it will take longer than the 2018 proposal to promote and increase the consistent involvement of young people in youth organizations.

The issue of age limit has been discussed in youth studies and there is an opinion stating that the age limit of youth is only important for the use of the government to control the people through its policies. Thus, there will be changes in a way of receipt of financial assistance for education, health, and incentives for the welfare of youth.

Age limits that consist in DBM also influenced by the role of the media in explaining DBM in a limited way. In most media coverage on DBM, articles and coverage headline only focus on with the age limit lowering element. So, this has directly shifted the important discussion of youth development, as well as the discussion of important content such as the issues of education, and the level of economic among youth. More attention is shifting to 'cosmetic' issues such as age limits. The issue of the age limit also got the attention of the media because youth organizations are considered exclusive and only give priority to its members. This is clear because most young people are randomly unaware of the existence of MBM while they are not involved or exposed to volunteer activities and activism from the school level. Although the question of the presence of MBM has been discussed repeatedly by Haslinda et al (2012), the study is limited in viewing MBM as an independent structure without taking into consideration the external factors such as funding and the impact of dynamics power with ministries, as well as neoliberal agenda pressures from various corner.

Undeniable, political and policy agendas are inseparable. It would be a naive statement to separate discussions on policy without looking at political needs specifically. The involvement of political agendas to introduce popular policies should also be taken into account. The first reason by the ministry is to coordinate the age limit according to the international standard (Ministry of Youth Malaysia, 2015). MBM think the Ministry should look at the structural and political context of an exemplary country. Furlong (2013) discusses the importance for youth studies researchers to understand young people through a view that is not dominated by a purely westernized perspective. He commented further by stating the need to understand youth, and provide awareness of the challenges and progress of youth in improving the standard of living of youth in developing countries (Furlong, 2013). The organizational structure of foreign youth councils is clearly not the same as the organizational structure of MBM.

The second reason stated for the change in age limit, is to provide opportunities for young people to be involved in leadership. It clearly sees that the roles of MBM as a leadership training field (Haslinda et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the accepted element of individualization in society, where young people do not need to move collectively to be accepted and recognized as a leader needs to be taken into account in discussing the question of young leadership. This is because society looks more at individual success and isolates collective factors in defining the 'success' and 'leadership ability' of the young person's individual.

The Malaysian Youth Council (MBM) Supreme Leaders Retreat held on 26 and 27 November 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand stated that MBM accepted DBM openly but conditionally. Three suggestions submitted by MBM by the acceptance of DBM during the retreat are; (i) Youth development matters fully under the Prime Minister's Department (JPM) or (ii) Youth Development Policy under JPM while activities and implementation under KBS or (iii) Establishing a statutory body eg: Malaysian Youth Commission (Malaysian Youth Council, 2015)

MBM's commitment in implementing DBM in the programs and activities

MBM basically welcoming the implementation of DBM based on the establishment of bureaus under the MBM working committee based on nine (9) youth priority areas in DBM (Malaysian Youth Council, 2016).

1 Youth 1 Skills (1B1K) is an MBM initiative in approaching and helping youths to get a second chance to build their lives by choosing technical and vocational fields (TVET) as their career. Since its inception in 2010, a total of 4,976 youths has been assisted through the 1B1K program to obtain training at government and private skills institutions.

Leadership training is the focus of MBM in producing youth leaders under 30 by 2018 with the establishment of the MiB 300 Squad. Similarly, the MYVOC establishment initiative focuses on the MBM volunteer and community movement.

In fact, the establishment of the National Federation of Youth Workers (FKPB) proves MBM's efforts in raising and recognizing youth workers in the country in line with the 9 priority areas outlined in the DBM, namely youth work professionalism.

Challenges of MBM as a Youth Organization

Undeniable, leadership is important because it will navigate the direction of an organization. Also clear in the data is the clash of personal goals and organizational goals among leaders. This becomes one of the main challenges to a youth organization especially when political parties, political leader, and individuals often use youth organizations for personal gain or political interests (Nga & King, 2006). It directly impacts the priority elements in the implementation of youth development programs.

Thus, although by principle the MBM leadership understands and uses DBM as a guide in annual program planning during the leadership retreat, the MBM leadership still struggles to decide on selecting and organizing programs that need to be implemented, in priority and systematically. This situation explains the tendency of MBM to implement programs in a kind of 'impromptu' and 'ad-hoc' (Camire et al., 2021). Nga (2010) in his study outlined the limitations of youth organizations in terms of funding. This is because youth organizations such as MBM receive funding assistance from the government, therefore indirectly there is an element of political control between sponsors and sponsors.

Conclusion and Suggestion

MBM leadership generally understands the content and basics of PYD-centric. Yet the discussion on DBM is limited to the age limit where this is seen as a threat to the survival of youth organizations in general. The influence of media coverage and the needs of certain politicians also influence and drive discussions about age limits. Thus, the MBM leadership should be more assertive without considering personal political interests in speaking out on behalf of the youth.

The MBM leadership has implemented PYD through its programs and activities, but not systematically, strategically and in depth. MBM should emphasize long-term planned programs based on DBM, and reduce ad-hoc programs by the request of ministries or other stakeholders. MBM should place a clear priority in choosing the type of activities and

programs implemented to ensure a deep impact and not just one-off programs. The implementation of ad-hoc and one-off programs affected more in financial, as well as positioning MBM as an organization that is not strong in its holdings. Although MBM implements programs based on the concept of PYD which works on the spirit of DBM, MBM leadership should show a clear stance in the implementation of the program (Gonzalez, et al., 2020). Thus, this paper shows the need of empirically study on the extent to which MBM and KBS drive youth development in Malaysia as strategic partners by making DBM a common reference point. Further study should cover the factors of whether MBM implements DBM, and discuss the actual function of DBM. Emphasis should also be given to the scope of youth policy, which not only involves youth activities, but also covers the level of youth well-being. Activists, researchers and government employees need to understand the challenges that exist in assessing the well-being of youth objectively.

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