

Neighbourhood Watch (Rukun Tetangga) in the West Coast of Sabah: An analysis in the Context of Ethnic Relations

Budi Anto Mohd Tamring, Bernadette Tobi, Yusten Karulus,
Mohd Sohaimi Esa

Pusat Penataran Ilmu dan Bahasa, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), 88400 Kota Kinabalu,
Sabah, Malaysia

Email: budi@ums.edu.my, bernadette@ums.edu.my, yusten@ums.edu.my,
msohaimi@ums.edu.my

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Abstract

There are various activities and programs that have been implemented by the government to ensure the continuity of inter-racial harmony in Malaysia. Among the programs that remain and continue until today is the implementation of the Rukun Tetangga Area (Neighbourhood Watch Area) program. Initially, the goal of Rukun Tetangga was to ensure the safety of the community but it has gradually undergone changes to the implementation or organization of various programs that seek cooperation and interaction among members of the community. The existence of Rukun Tetangga plays a big role in maintaining good relations between the various races and belief of the community in a settlement area. This study uses quantitative methods involving a total of 357 respondents in the districts of Penampang and Kota Kinabalu to explain how the relationship of various ethnic and beliefs in the Rukun Tetangga area involved. The results of the study found that the relationship between race and religion in the area of RukunTetangga is good and has initiated and improved interactions among the various ethnic and beliefs community.

Keywords: Racial Relations, Neighbourhood Watch, Rukun Tetangga, Sabah

Introduction

Malaysia is rich in the cultural identity of its people. Malaysia is not just the Malays, Chinese and Indians but it involves an array of ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak. A diversity of races or religions may lead to bloody conflicts or tensions if not properly managed. Many conflicts around the world are triggered by racial and religious factors. Malaysia's May 13, 1969 ethnic conflict had claimed many lives. Racial conflict had taught the society that differences need to be seen as something that needs to be managed to ensure that tensions and disputes do not occur. The Malaysian government has become more persistent in conducting programs and

activities to ensure that inter-racial harmony is preserved since the May 13 conflict. Among the programs that have a significant impact on socialization in the neighbourhood is the Rukun Tetangga program.

Rukun Tetangga (Neighbourhood Watch) was introduced in 1975 following the enforcement of the Necessary Regulations on Rukun Tetangga. This scheme was established under the Necessary Regulations (Rukun Tetangga) in the Emergency Ordinance 1969 (Department of National Unity and National Integration, 2020). Initially, Rukun Tetangga was to ensure security in their respective residential areas where the local community aged 18 to 55 were required to carry out patrol duties at night. However, in 1983 the government made amendments by emphasizing the concept of neighborhood in the local community. In 2000, amendments were again made to provide more space for the development of society as a whole towards creating national unity (Mohd Sohaimi Esa, Dayu Sansalu & Budi Anto Mohd Tamring, 2011: 184).

There were several subsequent amendments made to establish or maintain harmonious relations within the society and to meet current needs. Thus, the neighbourhood Rukun Tetangga plays an important role to ensure social cohesion is practiced in Malaysia (Mohd Syarifudin Abdullah, Mohd Mahadee Ismail, Mansor Mohd Noor, 2013: 72). There are reports stating that residents' associations, NGOs and Rukun Tetangga are the backbone of unity (Bernama, 2019). Therefore, this paper will discuss the relationships in the neighborhood area, especially in the West Coast of Sabah in the context of inter-racial and inter-religion relations. The use of the acronyms KRT and RT will be used repeatedly in this article where the abbreviation KTR means Rukun Tetangga Area (Neighbourhood Watch Area) and the abbreviation RT means Rukun Tetangga (Neighbourhood).

Literature Review

Sabah has long been referred by many leaders in Malaysia as a state with a high tolerance population. Several studies by previous researchers stated in the article entitled Racial Relations in Sabah: A Preliminary Observation (2020), shows that race or ethnic relations in Sabah are indeed good (Budi Anto Mohd Tamring & Saidatul Nornis Hj. Mahali, 2020). Previous studies had also indicated that goodwill between the people in Sabah is respectable and never had there been a conflict or dispute between the races. Results of several previous studies had also found that the level of tolerance of the population in Sabah is high and racial prejudice is low (Sabihah Osman, 2007; Budi Anto Mohd Tamring, 2008; Chua Bee Seok, Jasmine Adela Mutang & Lailawati Madlan. 2016).

Goodwills among the ethnic groups in Sabah are translated into various forms of relationships including family ties through the indigenous community cultural ritual known as mikorot. Mikorot is a ritual of drinking blood to establish family relationships such as being 'siblings' with other individuals without involving marriage. Mikorot can be performed between individuals of different races or religions. Although mikorot rituals is almost unheard of today, the practice which started in Sabah since ancient times shows that the indigenous people in Sabah have a high level of ethnic tolerance because they can accept someone of different cultures and religions to be part of their family through cultural ritual (Budi Anto Mohd Tamring, 2018; Budi Anto Mohd Tamring, Bernadette Tobi & Romzi Ationg, 2020). In another context, the goodwill among the communities in Sabah are admirable by looking at the

practice of intermarriages. Intermarriages create a generation who are more receptive, as well as being a sign of a harmonious society or a society with high tolerance (Suraya Sintang, Budi Anto Mohd Tamring & Khadijah Mohd Hambali, 2016; Sharifah Darmia Sharif Adam, 2019; Budi Anto Mohd Tamring & Saidatul Nornis Mahali 2020). The people in Sabah who are seen to have good ethnic relations are also said to have a high tolerance to different beliefs. Studies show their acceptance and accommodation recorded the highest response in the willingness of believers from various religions deal with differences and conflicts harmoniously (Suraya Sintang, Budi Anto Mohd Tamring, Nur Farhana Abdul Rahman, Siti Aidah Hj. Lukin & Halina Sendera Mohd. Yakin, 2019) .

As mentioned above, goodwills among various races in Sabah are mentioned in several previous studies, in general, these sums that the community in Sabah interact well and harmoniously. This has been around for a long time and is influenced by various factors and not only due to intermarriages (Budi Anto Mohd Tamring, 2009; Budi Anto Mohd Tamring, Bernadette Tobi & Mohd Sohaimi Esa, 2020).

Therefore, this study once again tries to explain the relationship of the communities in Sabah but focuses on the neighborhood. This is due to Rukun Tetangga implementation of various programs that initiate cooperation and involvement of the local community which of course also create goodwill between the residents. If the racial relationships in Sabah are indeed good, and the implementation of the rukun tetangga program supports it, then goodwill is also present among the people in the Rukun Tetangga area.

There have been several previous studies on Rukun Tetangga in Malaysia. In Sabah, a study on Rukun Tetangga was made by Norwahidah Zinalibdin (2016) which entitled The Meaning of Peace of the Malaysian Community in the Voluntary Patrol Scheme Program: A case study of KRT Taman Putera Jaya, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Based on the results of the study, it was found that RT had emphasize the meaning of security in the community as to prevent criminal activities and address public safety issues. It helped the community understand the problems encountered daily and is manifested through the people active involvement in community safety voluntary program. Study data were obtained from 10 informants through in-depth interview sessions and informal group discussions. The results of the study found that the meaning of security as understood by the community in Sabah is not only external or physical aspects, but also psychological and emotional aspects that are also influenced by locality and culture. While a study by Mohd Sohaimi Esa, Budi Anto Mohd Tamring, Yusten Karulus, Mohd Azri Ibrahim, Dayu Sansalu, Siti Aidah Hj. Lokin & Sharifah Darmia Sharif Adam (2019) entitled Rukun Tetangga in the Context of Social Integration in the West Coast of Sabah: A Preliminary Survey explained how KRT activities create goodwill in a society. The study used interview method by focusing on KRT leaders in the West Coast of Sabah. The results of the study stated that the KRT activities implemented were able to create social cohesion in the society.

The increase of of KRT members in Sabah indicates awareness of KRT in the community. Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (National Unity and Social Security), Datuk Dr Md Farid Bin Md Rafik said this increase was appropriate because KRT is important in fostering the spirit of national unity regardless of race, culture, religion and political ideology. The Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department stated that the current number of KRT members in Sabah has reached 1056. This clearly shows the importance and

much needed role of KRT in the society; it is not only to implement community programs but also important to keep peace (Clarence GD, 2019). The society awareness of public interest in maintaining the safety of the neighbourhood through Rukun Tetangga Club (KRT), indirectly creates harmony in their respective community areas (Abdul Rahemang Taiming, 2018).

Apart from Sabah, studies were also conducted in other states. A study by Mohd. Taib Hj. Dora, Izaidin Abd. Majid, Raja Roslan Raja Abd. Rahman, Norliah Kudus, Zawiah Hj. Mat & Noor Maslian Othman (2008) entitled *City as an Urban Social Diversity: A Case Study of Rukun Tetangga in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor* focused on the level of knowledge, perception and community acceptance of programs organized by Rukun Tetangga. The results shows that the level of knowledge, perception and acceptance of the community towards RT organised programs are generally high. This reveals that apart from high level acceptance of RT, the study respondents also have a high level of knowledge and good perception of RT. The results indicated the implementation of the Rukun Tetangga was fruitful and it achieved the objectives. The RT implemented also enhances harmony and this contributes to national integration.

There is a study by Hamidah Abu Bakar, (2014) entitled, "Rukun Tetangga Leadership: A Case Study in the Rukun Tetangga Area of Kampung Malaysia Raya, Cheras, Kuala Lumpur." The results found that less active KRTs are often associated with the failure of their chairmen as effective leaders. The study used questionnaires involving a total of 320 respondents consisting of young neighbors, female neighbors, neighbors and senior neighbors. The findings show that the RT chairman is a person of good character, behavior and understands his role and would go beyond his call of duty. The study also found that the RT chairman adopt a democratic leadership style to ensure unity is achieved. This is the most effective style to foster high satisfaction among its members and improve RT towards excellence.

Besides leadership, there are also studies related to gender issues in KRT. For example, *Community Acceptance of Rukun Tetangga Activities by Gender* by Ahmad Zaharuddin Sani Ahmad Sabri & Nur Syafiqah Huda Mohd Rashidi, 2016 in Kedah. Generally, the study looked at the community acceptance of RT including individual involvement in RT, leadership in RT, interaction between RT members and ensuring RT can be accepted by the community especially through gender acceptance and understanding of the population. A total of 1866 respondents were selected based on the list of registered Rukun Tetangga obtained from the Department of National Unity and National Integration (JPNIN). The findings of the study show that more men stated that the workload is not a barrier to doing KRT activities as compared to women. The same goes for the close relationship between respondents and residents. Although both male and female respondents were found to have a very close relationship with the association, the male respondents were found to be more prominent than the female respondents.

A study by Mohd Syariefudin Abdullah, Mansor Mohd Nor, Ahmad Rizal Mohd Yusof & Faridah Che Hussain (2017), entitled *Social Cohesion in Rukun Tetangga (Neighborhood Watch) in Hulu Langat, Selangor Malaysia*, is to see social unity in society, especially in the RT neighborhood. The study area involves Kajang, Ampang, Cheras, Beranang, Hulu Langat, Semenyih and Bangi. This study used the concept of social cohesion introduced by Jenson (1998) and Paul Bernard (2000). There were six dimensions used to measure social cohesion involving a total of 588

respondents. The results show that the social cohesion for each dimension measured had a positive and high value for all ethnic groups in the study.

In another study, Mohd Syarifudin Abdullah, Mazdi Marzuki, Mohd Marzuqi Abdul Rahim, Muhammad Akramin Kamarul Zaman & Khairul Ghufan Kaspin (2020) entitled Establishment of Rukun Tetangga in Malaysia from an Islamic Perspective is the latest study on rukun tetangga. This study explains the history of the establishment of rukun tetangga, the function of rukun tetangga and the activities of rukun tetangga which are to promote unity from an Islamic perspective. Activities that promote unity are visiting neighbors, providing assistance, getting to know neighbors and common activities. The researchers in the study stated the importance of RT as a mechanism for uniting people of different ethnicities.

The previous studies above did not give much focus on ethnic relations or community relations in a neighborhood, especially in the state of Sabah. Although previous studies describe KRT activities that create good relations in the community, but the state of community relations in the neighborhood in Sabah is not highlighted. This is because studies on the neighbourhood is still insufficiently done in Sabah. Studies to understand the importance of neighbourhood are needed, to understand the relationship between races in an area. They are also important because in general population patterns in sub-urban or urban areas often show a large combination of races and religions. This multi-ethnic combination can lead to conflict and rivalry if not properly managed. This is because ethnic values will often become extreme when ethnocentrism emerge where each sees their own ethnic group as better than the other ethnic groups (Saidatul Nornis Hj. Mahali, 2013: 6). Although some previous studies have explained that racial relations in Sabah are good, but this study will once again prove the view whether this statement is true through a study that focuses on race relations in the RT area in the West Coast of Sabah.

Research Method

This study uses quantitative methods by using questionnaires as a data collection tool. A total of 357 respondents were selected for this study. The number of respondents in this study is higher than the number of respondents in Hamidah Abu Bakar 2014 study in Kuala Lumpur. Questionnaires were distributed to respondents by researchers and also with the help of appointed research assistants. The study area is on the west coast of Sabah but focused on the districts of Kota Kinabalu and Penampang. This is because this is the most developed district as compared to other areas. These areas have high population density in terms of settlement in the West Coast of Sabah. However, there are also respondents selected from areas other than Kota Kinabalu and Penampang. Most of the respondents live in the border area or the area adjacent to Penampang and Kota Kinabalu districts which is still in the West Coast area of Sabah.

Research Finding

Before describing the ethnic relations in research neighbourhood area, first the explanation of some aspects involved the background and demographics of the study area. There are 27 areas in the selected RT area. The 27 KRT were selected based on information provided by the Sabah State Unity and National Integration Department (Sabah National Unity and National Integration Department, 2018). Initially, there were 30 areas selected however, only 27 KRT areas were active whilst the other three areas were either inactive or had been

dissolved. Therefore, some study respondents were also selected from other areas apart from the 27 designated areas. All 27 KRTs selected are in Penampang and Kota Kinabalu districts as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Neighbourhood Watch Area (KRT) Research Area

KRT (Research Area)	
1. Taman Antarabangsa Likas	15. Tebobon
2. Taman Khidmat	16. Putatan
3. Taman Dixon Goodwill Committee	17. Penampang Proper
4. Taman Ceraf	18. Nossob Baru
5. Taman Jaya Diri	19. Bukit
6. Taman Malawa	20. Kolupis
7. Taman Putera Perdana	21. Terawi
8. Taman Keramat	22. Matambai
9. Damai	23. Inobong
10. Kepayan Ridge	24. Ramayah
11. Tanjung Aru	25. Taman Hiburan
12. Kg. Kionsom/Kobuni	26. Sarapung
13. Kg. Unggun Jaya	27. Nagasiba
14. Luyang	28. Lain-Lain

Furthermore, in terms of population demographics, the composition of the population in the areas of Kota Kinabalu and Penampang as shown in Table 2 shows a relatively high mixed-ethnic community involving local and foreign ethnic categories. This mixture may or may not form good relationships among the multi-ethnic community. For that reason, this study is very suitable to see the relationship between the multicultural community in the RT area involved.

Table 2

Population Composition of Research Area

Ethnic Group	District	
	Kota Kinabalu	Penampang
Malay	36918	6004
Kadazandusun	71335	43742
Bajau	74731	9422
Murut	2554	1429
Other natives	60512	13089
Chinese	96852	28636
Indian	2291	652
Others	5625	2085
Foreigners	112145	20854
Total	462963	125913

Source: Annual Sabah Statistics, 2014.

Table 3 shows neighbourhood population composition information obtained from respondents. In terms of combination of races, 89.9% mentioned that their neighbourhood is a combination of various ethnic groups. This indicates that a combination is in accordance with the composition of population is Kota Kinabalu and Penampang which shows a large combination of mixed ethnic groups.

Table 3

Mixed Ethnic Group Area

Answer Category	Total	Percentage
Yes	321	89.9
No	19	5.3
Not sure	17	4.8
Total	357	100.0

In terms of demographics based on faith composition, as shown in Table 4, it was found that the settlement areas of the respondents involved also showed a multi-faith society. 91.6% of the study respondents said their neighbourhood is a multi-faith society living side-by-side.

Table 4

Multi-faith Group Area

Answer Category	Total	Percentage
Yes	327	91.6
No	20	5.6
Not Sure	10	2.8
Total	357	100.0

In addition, a mixed class society (poor and wealthy) is found to be high in the respondents' neighbourhood. This is probably because most of the KRTs neighbourhoods involved are in the urban and town or areas close to the city center and towns. The respondents' housing areas present various types of settlement areas which involved village as well as modern settlement areas such as housing estates in urban and sub-urban areas. These type of settlements can directly involved residents with varying purchasing power or economic class. A total of 76.8% respondents stated that their settlement area is a mixture of poor and rich.

Table 5

Population with Mixed-Class (poor and wealthy)

Answer Category	Total	Percentage
Yes	274	76.8
No	49	13.7
Not Sure	34	9.5
Total	357	100.0

The above explanation on the composition of race and religion as well as status in the study area indirectly gives the impression that, community relations can be tense or there is competition due to high mixture of society. Many communities around the world also, face conflicts due to racial and religious differences. However, several previous studies prove that Sabah is a state with high tolerance population. That is why in the context of this study, the role of KRT will focus on the role of KRT in strengthening the relationship between the people of various races and religions in Sabah. In fact, there have been previous reports explaining that the neighborhood watch can increase the people's understanding of unity (Bernama, 2009).

Based on information obtained from the respondents of the study, it was found that KRT played an important role to further strengthen the relationship between the residents in the West Coast of Sabah. Table 6 shows that 79.6% of the respondents said that KRT activities strengthened the relationship between the people of various races, religions and classes in the study area. The findings of this study give the impression that the relationship between

various races and religions in Sabah which is said to be good before, improved and strengthened with the implementation of KRT activities. Locals will be directly involved in KRT activities as generally, the activities implemented include various programs that can attract the involvement of everyone from children, teenagers, adults and the elderly. KRT activities include patrol and other activities such as sports, *gotong-royong* (communal work), various festive programs as well as workshops or skills courses beneficial to residents.

Table 6

KRT Activities Strengthen Cooperation between Multi-ethnic, Multi-religion and Multi-social status

Answer Category	Total	Percentage
yes	284	79.6
no	30	8.4
not sure	43	12.0
Total	357	100.0

In the attempt to see how good racial relations are between the residents, it is necessary to see if there is any tendency to choose a particular race in the selection of KRT leaders in their neighbourhood. This is necessary as there was an exemplary KRT whose committee members shows the best example of unity of race and ethnicity as members of the committee were of various races comprising Malays, Chinese, Indians and Kadazan (Mohammad Ishak, 2017). The results of the study as shown in table 7 show that the issue of ethnic identity is not significant when it comes to the appointment of KRT leaders. Only 23.5% said the issue existed. This means that the issue of competition between multi-ethnic communities is low. In fact, 37.3% said they were not sure, meaning that ethnic issues were not significant to the respondents' neighbourhood because they were not even sure that the issue occurred. If the ethnic issue is significant, of course the majority of the community knows and is aware of the issue but instead there are more respondents who chose to say 'no' and 'not sure'. This indicates that inter-racial relations are generally good.

Table 7

Ethnic Identity as Factors in Selecting KRT Leaders

Answer Category	Jumlah	Peratusan
yes	84	23.5
no	140	39.2
not sure	133	37.3
Total	357	100.0

Similarly, the reaction of respondents when asked if religious identity is an important factor in the selection of KRT leaders in their area, only 24.6% stated that religious identity was an important factor while 40.6% said it was not important. The findings of this study also show that the issue of religious identity is not a relatively big issue in the election of KRT leaders in the respondents' neighbourhood. In fact, it was further strengthened when 34.7% respondents said they were not sure. By saying not sure, it illustrates that religious issue is significant in the election of KRT leaders. This directly gives the impression that the population in the study area has positive associations not only among members of different ethnics but also among different religions.

Table 8

Religion Identity Becomes a Factor in Selecting KRT Leaders

Answer Category	Total	Percentage
yes	88	24.6
no	145	40.6
not sure	124	34.7
Total	357	100.0

In the context of cooperation between KRT leaders, only 27.7% respondents said that there are problems in their neighbourhood area. Other respondents mentioned that there was no problem. There were also respondents who mentioned there was no problem of cooperation between the KRT leaders in their area. Respondents who said no and were unsure if there was any problem represented 72.3% of the total respondents. The findings indicate, that although there are cooperation problem between KRT leadership they do not pose any threats. Amongst the problems that arise include opinion differences between leaders and several other factors.

Table 9

Cooperation Problem in KRT Leadership

Answer Category	Total	Percentage
yes	99	27.7
no	130	36.4
not sure	128	35.9
Total	357	100.0

Other than that, cooperation between communities of various ethnicities, religions and status in the respondents' neighbourhood was also found to be good. As many as 33.1% respondents said there is no problem of cooperation between residents in their neighbourhood. While 36.4% said they were not sure. Both categories represent 69.5% respondents as a whole. Only 30.5% said there was a problem. Although the findings shows that there is a problem but the percentage is still small and the majority either say there is no problem or they are sure whether there is a problem of cooperation between the residents. Therefore, the problem of cooperation between residents does not cause big problems in society.

Table 10

Problem with Inter-Ethnic Cooperation, Religion and Class

Answer Category	Total	Percentage
Yes	109	30.5
No	118	33.1
Not Sure	130	36.4
Total	357	100.0

The usual problem that may arise in KRT is most likely the issue of residents' lack of participation in activities as most KRT activities are voluntary and the programs depend on fundings contributed by the residents. If viewed in terms of the duration of the respondents as shown in Table 11, 84.6% of the study respondents were found to be involved with RT and the percentage of these involvement is high although the duration of involvement varies. Only 15.4 were never involved in KRT. The high involvement rate of the study respondents on RT programs, gives the impression that the cooperation issue in the RT community area is not significant. Eventhough there are some problems of cooperation between residents, but these findings generally show that the relationship between residents in the study area is still good

and harmonious because the overall respondents also say they feel safe in their neighbourhood.

Table 11

Duration of being involved in KRT

Answer Category	Total	Percentage
Less than 1 year	65	18.2
1-5 years	158	44.3
6-10 years	56	15.7
11-15 years	15	4.2
16-20 years	8	2.2
Never involved	55	15.4
Total	357	100.0

Table 12 shows that 85.4% of respondents said they felt safe in their neighbourhood. Although their areas are populated by people of multi-racial, religion and socio-economic status, there are a few issues related to cooperation between residents but the issue does not worry them. In fact, the issue is not significant to the relationship between them. This is because the majority of them feel safe in their neighbourhood. This sense of security gives the impression that the people in the RT area have high trust in their neighbours and they are interdependent with each other even though they are of different cultures or religions. This is an indication of the harmonious state of society.

Table 12

Feeling Secured in RT Area

Answer Category	Total	Percentage
Yes	305	85.4
No	17	4.8
Not sure	35	9.8
Total	357	100.0

Research Discussion

As a whole, the findings of the study show that the relationship between the races in the respondents' neighbourhood is good. This finding is generally in line with the findings of previous studies on the commentable inter-racial relations in Sabah. In the context of this study, the race relationship is described in three contexts, namely the relationship between residents in the RT area, the relationship between residents and KRT leaders and the impact of the implementation of KRT activities on strengthening racial relations in residential areas.

Racial Relations in the RT Area

As mentioned before, the racial relations the respondents' neighbourhood were found to be either beyond ethnic or racial, religious or socioeconomic boundaries. Although the neighbourhood has a high percentage of mixed races, beliefs and socioeconomic status, they live harmoniously as neighbours. In fact, the respondents felt safe to live in their residential area. There is a sense of security in their neighbourhood despite being surrounded by neighbours of different races and religions. This is a sign of high trust and it shows the existence of interdependency. This finding is consistent with previous studies which stated that racial tolerance in Sabah is high and the communities also live in harmony.

The Roles of KRT Activities in Strengthening Community Relationship

Racial relations in the RT area are based on the respondents' feedback on KRT activities implemented in their neighbourhood. Respondents generally said that the KRT activities carried out further strengthen the relationship between the various races, religions and economic classes of the neighbourhood. The findings give the impression that, the implementation of KRT by the government is a good mechanism to create integration among the community and it should be continued and further developed in other settlement areas throughout Malaysia. The implementation of KRT activities in a neighbourhood will indirectly encourage residents to meet and interact because the activities carried out are mostly to maintain security and common interests. In fact, the majority of respondents in this study are involved with KRT. The scenario indicates that they have no problem to cooperate or do RT activities together regardless of races and religions.

The Community and the KRT Leadership

In the context of community relations with KRT leadership, it indicates good relations across races and religions. Although some respondents stated that there is a tendency to choose leaders based on race and religion, but the tendency is insignificant. This means that race and religion is not a big issue in the election of leaders in the West Coast of Sabah. This also reflects the multi-races and multi-religious community in the study area involved is unconcerned with the race and religion of their leaders. These findings can be interpreted that the most important thing is that the appointed leaders should be qualified in leading the KRT and are able to implement beneficial programs for the community. KRT leaders are voluntarily appointed leaders. The willingness of these appointed leaders to do voluntary work in managing and implementing various programs in their areas provides exemplary and moral value to the population. Therefore, the KRT leadership are respected because their duties and roles are done voluntarily. This could be one of the reasons why the residents do not question the race and religion in selecting the KRT leaders in their area. This could also be the influence of being highly tolerant.

Conclusion

The Rukun Tetangga (KRT) area which was implemented in 1975 until now, has been effective on the community. The findings of this study show that relationship between the population improves with the presence of KRT activities in the area. Although residents do have goodwill and live in harmony without KRT, but the implementation of KRT in an area becomes a mechanism or medium where the community establishes relationships in their daily activities, whilst maintaining harmony. Therefore, the implementation of KRT throughout Malaysia should be emphasized and encouraged by the government. In addition, to encourage the involvement of residents in KRT activities, both government and non-governmental organizations as well as sponsors whether individuals or local companies need to be directly involved to implement more activities and leave a positive impact on residents. The impact is not only in terms of security but also involves the economic interests of the locals.

This study provides a theoretical contribution by strengthening the understanding of social integration theory, which emphasizes the role of community institutions in fostering harmony and tolerance among ethnic groups. The findings indicate that the implementation of the Neighbourhood Watch (Rukun Tetangga) as a form of community surveillance serves not only for security purposes but also as a social mechanism that supports Durkheim's functionalism

theory regarding the importance of social institutions in maintaining societal stability. From a contextual perspective, this study is significant as it offers insights into the reality of ethnic relations in Sabah, which is unique due to its cultural and religious diversity. The results of this study add value to the existing literature by highlighting the role of Rukun Tetangga as an effective medium of social integration within the context of Malaysia's plural society, particularly in Sabah.

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