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Abstract

Malaysia has undergone development transformation since the earliest years of its independence. Sustainable economic and social growth have transformed the country into a competitive and successful country. These changes have had a positive impact on the socio-economic state. The government is aware that the more comprehensive and integrated development between the city and the rural areas is important so that rural communities are not ignored and neglected in terms of economic, social and educational development. The study was conducted in selected rural communities in the state of Terengganu to assess the extent to which social capital elements empower local leaders in developing their area. Qualitative approaches were used to deeply understand the strategies of local leaders in strengthening the social capital elements in their respective areas. To ensure the goal of this study is achieved, 45 informants were selected to provide the information needed. The results of this study prove that the strategy of local leaders in empowering social capital makes their communities more successful.
Keywords: Leadership, Social Capital, Community, Rural Area.

Introduction

The living standard of people in Malaysia has undergone positive changes in the last 30 years. This has implicated directly on the development of rural areas and has a significant impact on poverty rates. In reality, poverty has declined in rural areas and developmental processes have been clearly seen through social and physical changes in rural areas in Malaysia (Balwi, 2005). However, the issue of rural development is still apparent in Malaysia (Shatar 2003; Roslan et al., 2010; Aizuddin et al., 2016). Issues on rural development have always draw attention from all levels of society including development officers and top-level policy makers. In fact, governments are always looking for mechanisms to help rural communities by introducing various policies and programs, such as the Rural Transformation Program, the National Blue Ocean Strategy and a number of other new programmes to ensure the achievement of rural development goals (Najib Razak, 2014). Recently, the Rural Development Policy as part of the National Transformation Plan 2050 (TN2050) was launched to provide more robust support to rural development.

The grassroots level, comprising community leaders and local communities should participate to ensure the success of the government's outlined plans. Every leader and citizen should understand the government's aspirations so that the goals of this policy could be achieved. Government-level development programmes always getting more attention by the through the presentation of the annual budget of the country. The educational aspect has been given priority as part of the New Economic Policy Pre-1957-1970. This is evident when community development and empowerment were highlighted as the first thrust in PIPLB and the 10th strategic approach in MBELB. Among the strategies identified in PIPLB are expanding training and skills in various levels, fields and opportunities and providing competent coaches and quality training. To develop rural human capital, many programmes have been implemented by the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (KKLW) including the implementation of village management and leadership training / courses to rural institution leaders under the Institute for Rural Development (INFRA), providing child care and nursery education programmes (TASKA) under KEMAS, providing skill training under the Malaysia Skills Certificate or Diploma under MARA and KEMAS, empowering rural human capital through non-formal education to rural communities and providing financial assistance to Orang Asli students under the Education Incentive Assistance Scheme (SBGP) to encourage Orang Asli communities to pursue higher education. This clearly shows that the community has to make use of every programme organized by the government by taking the opportunity and participate actively in all programs.

In order to drive the rural development process more effectively, social capital element has been identified as an important catalyst to accelerate the development process. According to Rahmah et al., (2016), social capital is one of the key elements in reducing incidence of poverty as it can affect individual income or household income in a country. Meanwhile, according to Putnam (2001), social capital has been proven as a potential source of regional economic growth and development. In fact, this study also believes that intact social capital will benefit all stakeholders.in this regard, community leaders, especially in the rural areas, believe that social capital such as networks, relationships and values should be developed as the programmes are conducted. Social capital strategy is crucial in helping local communities improve their socio-economic status and living standards. Consequently, local leaders such as of chiefs, village heads and chairman of J3K should realise the importance of this element in developing their area.

This article aims to provide an outlook from the perspective of a more dynamic rural development by strengthening social capital resources among rural communities in Malaysia. Awareness of the importance and contribution of this social capital is considered as important in establishing the economic and social development policies and strategies in the country. Balanced attention to the effects of social capital is expected to yield more favourable results in helping to improve the lives of rural communities. Therefore, this study will also examine the strategies implemented by local leaders in strengthening the social capital components in their respective areas.

Literature Review

Social Capital

Social capital is defined as social characteristics such as social networking, trustworthy and norms that can produce positive externalities and improve the competence of individuals or communities (Coleman, 1990; Fukuyama, 1999: Putnam, 2001). Social networks include engagement and individual relationships in specific associations, clubs or organizations. Reliability is a relationship between family, relatives, friends and acquaintances, culture and religion, meanwhile, the norms of life represent the practice, culture and general way of life demonstrated by a community or nation (Seligman, 1997). Social capital has already been widely discussed in previous studies and has had a positive impact on the economy and social development (Roslan, Russayani and Azam, 2010). In fact, social capital is one of the factors that can explain the differences in development levels by regions and communities, while Knack (2002) stated that social capital is able to influence the individual's ability to work together to achieve a goal.

Focusing on social capital is in line with Malaysia's economic development which main aims are to reduce the economic and income disparities between urban and rural areas as well as between ethnicities. Generally, these goals can be further divided into three major capital components - social capital, human capital, and physical capital. However, the recent role of social capital is more emphasized. Efforts towards increasing social capital are evident through the steady social capital development that will increase the mobilization of community resources and will enhance the spirit of unity among the people. It also facilitates the full involvement of every Malaysian citizen in the Economic Transformation Program. Furthermore, the development of a steady social capital can make the society more competitive, dynamic, proactive, and has a great resilience in the face of any political crisis or economic crisis (Prime Minister's Department, 2014).

It is understandable that social capital encompasses aspects of networking, relationships, value sharing and common norms in a society which is capable of mobilising more resources to improve the well-being of. Uphoff (2000) divides social capital into two categories: structural social capital and cognitive social capital. The first category covers various forms of organizations, associations, procedures, rules, roles and various types of networking in the community. The second category covers the aspects of behaviour, values, norms, beliefs and partnerships.

Social capital is a fundamental element that is abstract and subjective because it involves interaction and social networking (Leana & Buren, 1999). It can be developed through the application of social values, moral and religious values applied in the work ethic and social ethics. Generally there are three forms of social capital networks that exist in a society. First, networks within the same community (homogenous) such as family, ethnicity and religion. This network can create a sense of bonding (social capital) among fellow members of the group. Second, networking in different communities (heterogeneous) with ethnic, regional and socio-economic differences. This type of network can bridge social capital towards cooperation and unity among experts. The third network is a hierarchical-based network taking into account the social

standing, class and influence of power. These types of nets can build a "linking social capital" in different social strata (Cote & Healy, 2002).

Community and Rural Leaders

The Malaysian rural communities comprise of people from a rich culture and way of life. The rural communities are the most important communities since Malaysia's independence. The government has offered various facilities for rural communities to enhance their economic, social, infrastructure, education and community knowledge which is in line with country's development aspirations (Razak, 2014). The development of a rural community involves the process of reorganising and reorienting its economic and social system (Freddie et al., 2013). This means that development not only involves the increase in income and production, but also takes into account the changes in social institutions, administrative structures, public opinion, customs and beliefs (Husin, 1982). The advancement of rural communities can be measured or shown by the eradication of poverty (Ricketts, 2008), the lack of unemployment (Wendy, 2014) and narrowing of inequality (Sabran, 2003). Moreover, community development through economic, social, educational, health and basic infrastructure in rural areas is seen as helping the communities involved to be self-reliant, have high identity and have mutual cooperation.

Community leaders are important individuals at the grass-root level in rural Malaysia (Aizuddin et al., 2016). They are the leaders appointed to represent the local community and to implement local development programs. In addition, they become the voice to deliver the hearts of the local community to stakeholders. To help the community develop their community in a better direction, the active role of leaders in government-appointed societies such as village headmen, chairman of the Village Development and Security Committee (J3K), J3K secretary, youth chairman and religious leader are urgently needed. They serve as the foremost person driving and giving a clearer picture of the direction of their community. Their role as a government transformation agency and responsible for government programmes and also listening and delivering community needs to the government.

Community leaders in the communities involved should be able to determine the direction of their community and also identify future issues (Daley & Avant, 2013). In addition, great community leaders need to have a clear strategy and framework to bring encourage collaboration among local communities where they can help each other, share their vision and be responsible for good and mutual progress. This clearly shows that the role of leadership is very significant and needed in driving the development of rural communities on the right track (Daley & Avant, 2013; Andrew, 2014).

The Village Development and Security Committee (J3K)

The Village Development and Security Committee or simply, 'J3K' is a village-level leadership institution created when the country's government is working hard to develop rural areas. J3K is established as an administrative institution under the supervision of the local community leaders. The J3K is chaired by the village chief or the local community. It is established to create space and provide opportunities for people to engage in the development process at the village level. J3K is also a body that acts as an agent of change and as an important link between the government

and the villagers with 12 members in the committee. The involvement of local residents in community and economic activities is generated by J3K leadership through an effective communication process. In this right, effective management process practiced by the village's J3K leaders enabled them to act as change agents at the grassroots level and as an intermediary in the process of information.ti sharing between the government and the villagers. They can also be the catalysts for development by strengthening the community-based collaboration and create a harmonious atmosphere of cooperation between the local community and the government.

Methodology
This study was conducted in the State of Terengganu. It employed the qualitative method, and the phenomenological research approach was applied to address the issues raised in the study. In this regard, the use of qualitative methods can help researchers to obtain more accurate data, and help researchers to understand phenomena that occur in the real context (Creswell, 2013). Four communities in the state were chosen for data collection and the data were collected from interviews and observations. The use of different data gathering techniques provides an advantage to this study because the technique could triangulate views more precisely. In the meantime, interview was used as the main method for collecting information from the informants. This technique was chosen as it helps the researcher to gain more understanding on the role played by community leaders as agents of transformation in rural development and gives an opportunity for the researcher to directly observe the number of issues or events related to the research problem. Moreover, this could help to obtain a clear and accurate picture of an issue and to avoid the falsification of information by informants during the interview process.

Interviews sessions were held with community leaders and the local community. Here, the researchers have identified a total of 45 informants to clarify the questions that have been raised. The informants consist of community leaders (J3K leaders), local residents and officials in the relevant government agencies. During the interviews, the informants were probed on their daily activities, the role of leaders in managing the affairs of the community such as meetings and gatherings as well as the relationship between local communities and related external agencies. In addition, relevant documents were analysed to obtain further data for analysis. The researchers have evaluated several relevant documents that were considered as appropriate to be used as evidence. Once the data have been collected, analysed and prepared, they were analysed using the ATLAS.ti software. The software has helped researchers to compile, analyse and make the connection between the themes.

Result and Discussion
Build Inter-Networking
To help the community develop their community in a better direction, government-appointed community leaders such as village headmen, chairman of the Village Development and Security Committee (J3K), J3K secretary, youth chairman and religious leaders should play an active role in the development programmes. They serve as the foremost party driving the programmes and provides clearer picture of each programme's direction to their community. Moreover, creating a network with outsiders is very important to ensure that their communities reach their

capabilities faster. This is because the local community might have limited existing skills and they require external support and expertise to help develop their area. One example is Kg Kayu Kelat, Besut which has worked with government agencies and received assistance in form of capital, fertilisers , seeds and private advisory services to strengthen the paddy and fish breeding industry in the area. Similarly, Kg Rawai, Marang is actively cooperating with private entities such as Yayasan Tenaga Nasional Berhad and the university in improving the quality of education for children and adolescents in the area. On the other hand, networking with outsiders is not easy as it requires constant commitment and perseverance to convince outsiders to contribute in rural development. Not surprisingly, these villages are recognised as successful villages because they have insightful leaders who can make use their best network of relationships.

Strengthening Relationship and Trust

Local leaders such as members of the J3K play an important roles as the government's agents of change and are responsible in the success of government development programmes. They also act as a channel to raise the concerns of local communities and the government. Community leaders involved need to be able to determine the direction of their communities and also identify the problems that lie ahead. This is important to further strengthen the relationship and trust between each other and to create a harmonious community. The lack of a strong relationship between the leader and the local community will make to hard to get the cooperation of the community to develop the village. This is because leaders just act as a facilitator but the members of the community, as a whole, are the one who are responsible to develop their village. Therefore, local learners should be o proactive local leaders and aware of local needs to influence members of the public to participate in the activities organized by the government and the private sector

To strengthen the relationship and trust among community, different programmes have been organised to foster relationships between them. In fact, the leaders are ready to accept whatever views given by their community members and try to find solutions together. It was observed that programmes organised by the J3K have shown positive support from the local community with the participation of more than 80% for each of the activities. Such cooperation can reduce disagreements and egoistic mind-set among the local community. In this regard, the leaders in Kg Banggol Katong, Kuala Terengganu and Kg Guntung, Setiu have managed to strengthen social capital in their area through strengthening their relationship with external parties.

Strengthening Value and Social Norms

Social norms will be instrumental in controlling behaviour of one society. Norm is defined as a set of rules that are expected to be followed by members of a society in a particular social entity. These norms are usually institutionalized and contain social sanctions that can prevent individuals from doing things that are socially unacceptable. Such collective rules are usually not written but they are understood by every member of society and determine the expected behavioural patterns in social relationships.

As shown by the examples of communities in the state of Terengganu, all four leaders have emphasised the social values in their communities. To ensure the continuity of these values, community members from all walks of life are taught to respect the elderly, the local culture and to practice the teaching of Islam. This indirectly, helps to discipline the society and reinforce good values among. Mutual respect among the community can be observed. In this light, local leaders play an important role in ensuring that community values are well maintained especially among teenagers and children as the future generation

Measuring Social Capital Achievement
According to Putnam (2001) social capital index can be measured through community participation in organizations or associations, the community involvement in the programmes, their participation in volunteering, and the evident of trust between individuals within a community. The development and success of social capital can be achieved if everyone in the community trust and practice tolerance towards each other and committed to their role and responsibilities in the community. This explains why the communities in Malaysia emphasize the principles of tolerance, cooperation and acceptance. Acceptance, especially in a multiracial society, is related to the level of trust and cooperation among members of a community. Consequently, integration and the process of national development could be achieved when there are trust and acceptance in the community. This is also related to the quality of our social capital. Strong social capital development can also make the society more competitive, dynamic, proactive, and have higher perseverance in the event of political or economic crises. As shown in this paper, these successful communities' attempts to strengthen social capital elements have had a positive impact towards the success of these communities.

Conclusion
As shown in successful communities such as Kg Kayu Kelat, Kg Guntung Luar, Kg Rawai and Kg Banggol Katong, their leaders recognise that progress cannot be achieved if there is no support from different parties, especially from the local community. Moreover, a good leader acts as a catalyst in the development of the business by bridging the local communities and external parties such as government agencies and private corporations. The elements embodied in social capital such as in social networks, relationships and value among the people are essential to the development of a rural area. Therefore, social capital empowerment is important for rural communities who want to succeed as this is one of the processes towards sustainable community development.

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