

Empowering Economic Well-being and Social through Community Enhancement Project

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Abstract

Yayasan Sejahtera is a Non-Government Organization (NGO) working on poverty eradication and community development for poor and low-income households in Malaysia. Yayasan Sejahtera has carried out several community projects and one of them is Community Enhancement Program. This project focused on empowering their economic well-being (income) and social (education and relationship between communities) aspects. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine how far this project has achieved the goals and the impact on the changes in the lives of the participants after being fully involved in the project. This is a quantitative study using a survey form. Data was gathered from 66 respondents (40 adults and 26 youths) from PPR Sg Bonus and were analyzed using SPSS. Results depict that all participants showed a high level of satisfaction in terms of the content of the course, technical guidance, teaching, and monitoring during the course by the officers. In terms of participation, their involvement in the project was found to be at a highly satisfactory level. From the perspective of living standards and quality of life, participants intend to grow their economic activities by expanding their businesses to attain a higher degree of asset ownership and health care.

Keywords: Participation, Social Capital, Community Development, Urban Poverty, Non-Profit Organization

Introduction

Since the beginning of the epidemic, COVID-19 has caused Malaysia's GDP growth to fall by at least 3.1%, and its effects will be felt most among its urban poor. At least 3.8% of urban Malaysians struggle to maintain the minimum income necessary for a healthy and reasonable lifestyle. This is a serious issue considering that about 77% of Malaysians dwell in urban

settings. The urban poverty in the Klang Valley has been attributed to the growing rural migration of low-income and low-skilled populations, as well as the influx of foreign labourers. With a household income of less than RM 4,850, the B40 category, notably in Kuala Lumpur, struggles to pay the cost of living. The COVID-19 epidemic has resulted in an economic loss that impedes the urban poor's access to basic utilities, healthcare, and child education, and its effects are felt most in groups that lack employment opportunities due to low education, low skills and large families. Several Non-Government Organization has implemented various poverty alleviation programs that focus on programs towards transforming the severely poor into a society that can generate sufficient income to cover the cost of living and subsequently be able to free from the shackles of poverty. Among the NGOs that are actively involved in eradicating poverty is Yayasan Sejahtera.

Yayasan Sejahtera is a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) established on 4th September 2009, working on poverty eradication and community development for poor and low-income households in Malaysia. They were designed as a platform for Government Linked Companies (GLCs), Government Linked Investment Companies (GLICs) and corporate Malaysia to converge and deliver on sustainable development goals through corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects. Yayasan Sejahtera has carried out several community projects and one of them is Community Enhancement Program. The program is one of the core programs that have been planned and implemented by Yayasan Sejahtera in the PPR Sg Bonus area, Kuala Lumpur. The duration of this project is two years, beginning from August 2016 to August 2018. The program aims to reduce urban poverty and improve the quality of life for the poor and their families in Kuala Lumpur's PPR Sungai Bonus. The targeted group that is focused on this project are adults, youth, and children from the poor and listed under the poor families of PPR Sg. Bonus. This project is focused on empowering their economic well-being (income) and social (education and relationship between communities) aspects. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine how far this project has achieved the goals and the impact on the changes in the lives of the participants after being fully involved in the project.

Literature Review

Malaysia has experienced economic growth since the 1960s. Malaysia's ability to produce high-tech services in the knowledge-based economy and compete globally has evolved from its modest origins as an agricultural-based economy (Yigitcanlar & Sarimin, 2015; Boori et al., 2015). This drives urban expansion as more enterprises and sectors invest in Malaysia, hence shifting land use and enhancing urban amenities. Naturally, people migrate to the cities for greener pastures (Rashid et al., 2017). Klang Valley consists of the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Gombak, Petaling, Klang, and Hulu Langat in Malaysia (Rashid & Ishak, 2009). It is located roughly in the centre of the West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Klang Valley has been recognised as one of Malaysia's regions with the most rapid growth (Rashid, 2017). Rapid urbanization is desirable for a developed country as it can stimulate economic and physical development, offer various job and educational opportunities, as well as better infrastructures among others (Rashid & Rehmani, 2014). However, excessive urban growth has social and economic impacts, such as a lack of health awareness, healthy food, land and infrastructure inaccessibility, an inadequate learning environment, and a high crime rate (Mayan & Nor, 2017; Siwar et al., 2016; Fowler et al., 2009).

However, non-governmental organizations are stepping up to the task and striving to reduce the poverty gap and eliminate its consequences. Yayasan Sejahtera is a non-profit organization in Malaysia that focuses on the elimination of poverty and community

development for low-income and vulnerable households. Focusing on community adoption and elevating the community in which it operates, Yayasan Sejahtera seeks to give a holistic approach to community development by addressing multiple groups which were adults, youth, and children, providing more complete support to those most in need.

Tackling multi-dimensional poverty issues in a community has proven to be a complex process, requiring dedicated and trained resources to tackle it one community at a time. For the past 3 years, Yayasan Hasanah has been piloting different community-based approaches with Yayasan Sejahtera and others, to develop a sustainable model of empowering and enabling vulnerable communities (Sejahtera, 2019). Participation is the most essential and crucial aspect of project implementation. Participation is a process in which community members make decisions regarding their problems, plan and implement development with critical thought, and benefit from activities and development programs (Ratnavarantha & Jomnonkwao, 2013). Participation is a medium that can help participants directly be involved in the development and understand the real needs of their community. To ensure sustainability in community development, the community must participate in all stages of the training program, including planning, implementation, and evaluation. This is because, through this procedure, we can build an independent community that engages in discussion, communication, and decision-making. When a community's requirements are identified, a sustainable development strategy can be executed.

In addition, the community involved in the development program has also gone through a learning process where it is useful for their life. In line with the Sg Bonus program's participants, their involvement is an initial step in bringing changes in their life. There are various aspects of changing living standards, whether in terms of economic, social, political or human aspects. Nevertheless, the goal of this community development needs to be clear where community development based on "goals as a process" can allow the community to go through the learning process as well as shape their capabilities. This is because the goal emphasizes human development more than the achievement of the development goal itself. In designing a program, the planned goals need to be clearer and more achievable among the program participants.

Methodology

A total of 66 Yayasan Sejahtera program participants from PPR Sg. Bonus was selected as the respondent of this study. The respondents are from various categories of which 40 respondents are adults, and 26 respondents are youth. The criteria for respondents in this study are i) adults (head of the family, under the B40 category who have a kiosk in PPR Sg. Bonus and adults who are not categorized under the B40 category and single mothers), ii) youth (aged between 18 and 24 years old, who are looking for job opportunities or aiming to further their education). The self-administered method was employed in the data collection process. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were used to achieve the objectives of this study. Four sections in this study need to be emphasized. Part A consists of the demographics of the participants, Part B covers the participation of participants in the project, Part C explains the human capital aspects of the participants and then Part D measures the standard of living and the quality of the project participants.

Results and Discussions

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic of adult livelihood in terms of age, gender, marital status, education level, number of households, main occupation and income before and after

participating in the project. The analysis portrayed that most project participants are women (90%) and have an age range between 41 to 50 years old (45%) where the age group is very productive in implementing and mobilizing a change. In addition to that, most respondents (65%) are Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) leavers and have a household size of between 4 to 6 people (75%). In terms of income, before getting involved in the project, 70% of the respondents had an income below the poverty line, which is RM1000 or less. After engaging with the project for almost two years, the number of respondents with an income below RM1000 decreased by 30%, indicating an inclination of program participants' income. Generally, the majority of the jobs performed by adult respondents consist of diverse economic activities such as food sales, clothes sales, services, and tailoring. Meanwhile, Table 2 showed half of the project participants of adult non-livelihood respondents are men (50%) and the rest are women. For the age category, 45% of respondents are in the age range between 41 to 50 years old and 60% of respondents are SPM leavers. The number of households of non-livelihood

participants is between 4-6 people per settlement residence. This showed the amount that is appropriate to the situation and the number of rooms in Sg. Bonus resident. Table 3 discussed the demographic of youth participants who participate in training related to career and personal development. It consists of the respondent's gender, age, education level and several households. Referring to the table, the youth respondents consisted of 61.5% males and 38.5% females. In terms of age category and education level, the respondents of this project are aged between 15 and 30 years old and most respondents are SPM leavers which is 80.8%. Most respondents have an average household of between 4 to 6 people per resident.

Table 1

Socio-demographic of adult livelihood respondents (n = 20)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	2	10.0
	Female	18	90.0
Age group	31 - 40 years	5	25.0
	41 - 50 years	9	45.0
	51 - 60 years	4	20.0
	61 - 70 years	2	10.0
Educational level	PMR	7	35.0
	SPM	13	65.0
Number of households	1-3	5	25.0
	4-6	15	75.0
Salary before (MYR)	0-500	5	25.0
	501-1000	9	45.0
	1001-1500	5	25.0
	1501-2000	1	5.0
Salary after (MYR)	0-500	2	10.0
	501-1000	6	30.0
	1001-1500	7	35.0
	1501-2000	4	20.0
	2001-2500	1	5.0
	2501 and above	1	5.0

Table 2

Socio-demographic of adult non-livelihood respondents (n = 20)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	10	10.0
	Female	10	90.0
Age group	21- 30 years	1	5.0
	31 - 40 years	3	15.0
	41 - 50 years	9	45.0
	51 - 60 years	6	30.0
	61 - 70 years	1	5.0
Educational level	PMR	8	35.0
	SPM	12	65.0
Number of households	1-3	4	20.0
	4-6	4	70.0
	7-9	12	10.0

Table 3

Socio-demographic of youth respondents (n = 26)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	16	61.5
	Female	10	38.5
Age group	15 - 20 years	8	30.8
	21 - 26 years	17	65.4
	27 and above	1	3.8
Educational level	PMR	2	7.7
	SPM	21	80.8
	Diploma	2	7.7
	Bachelor's Degree	1	3.8
Number of households	1-3	6	30.0
	4-6	20	70.0

Tables 4 and 5 present the economic activities carried out by adult livelihood and non-livelihood participants in terms of training aspects and courses organized by selected organizations in collaboration with Yayasan Sejahtera. All the training provided is closely related to the economic activities carried out by the participants. All participants showed a high level of satisfaction in terms of the content of the course, technical guidance, teaching, and monitoring during the course by the officers. This is the beginning step in developing the human capital of participants, which can be supplemented periodically based on an individual's needs. In addition, it gives all participants the opportunity and space to develop their businesses independently.

Table 4

Economic activities, training, skills and social of adult livelihood respondents (n = 20)

Items	VU	U	N	S	VS
Entrepreneurship Mindset					
Content of the course/exercise	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Technical guidance courses and practical training provided	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Teaching and monitoring during the course by the officers	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Marketing one to one					
Content of the course/exercise	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Technical guidance courses and practical training provided	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Teaching and monitoring during the course by the officers	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Metaphysics					
Content of the course/exercise	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Technical guidance courses and practical training provided	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Teaching and monitoring during the course by the officers	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Business Plan Writing & Basic Account					
Content of the course/exercise	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Technical guidance courses and practical training provided	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Teaching and monitoring during the course by the officers	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%

Note: Very Satisfied=VS, Satisfied=S, Neutral=N, U=Unsatisfied, VU=Very Unsatisfied

Table 5

Economic activities, training, skills and social of adult non-livelihood respondents (n = 20)

Items	VU	U	N	S	VS
Entrepreneurship Mindset					
Content of the course/exercise	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Technical guidance courses and practical training provided	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
Teaching and monitoring during the course by the officers	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
Marketing one to one					
Content of the course/exercise	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Technical guidance courses and practical training provided	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Teaching and monitoring during the course by the officers	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%

Teaching and monitoring during the course by the officers

Metaphysics

Content of the course/exercise	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Technical guidance courses and practical training provided	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%

Teaching and monitoring during the course by the officers

Business Plan Writing & Basic Account

Content of the course/exercise	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Technical guidance courses and practical training provided	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%

Teaching and monitoring during the course by the officers

Note: Very Satisfied=VS, Satisfied=S, Neutral=N, U=Unsatisfied, VU=Very Unsatisfied

Table 6 discusses the training and skills received by youth respondents in Sg Bonus PPR. The evaluation of this skill course and training is seen in terms of the content of the course/training, technical guidance, teaching, and monitoring by the officers involved. Overall, all participants were satisfied and committed to the training. This shows that they have an interest in improving the quality of their careers and lives. The included courses and training are also relevant to the student's preparation for the professional world and the formation of their personalities.

Table 6
Training activities and skills of youth respondents (n = 26)

Items	VU	U	N	S	VS
Career talk					
Content of the course/exercise	0%	0%	0%	57.7%	42.3%
Technical guidance courses and practical training provided	0%	0%	0%	42.3%	57.7%
Teaching and monitoring during the course by the officers	0%	0%	0%	38.5%	61.5%
Mind Training Motivation					
Content of the course/exercise	0%	0%	0%	57.7%	42.3%
Technical guidance courses and practical training provided	0%	0%	0%	42.3%	57.7%
Teaching and monitoring during the course by the officers	0%	0%	0%	38.5%	61.5%
Facilitator Courses					
Content of the course/exercise	0%	0%	0%	50.0%	50.0%

Technical guidance courses and practical training provided	0%	0%	0%	50.0%	50.0%
Teaching and monitoring during the course by the officers	0%	0%	0%	50.0%	50.0%
Resume Writing					
Content of the course/exercise	0%	0%	0%	50.0%	50.0%
Technical guidance courses and practical training provided	0%	0%	0%	50.0%	50.0%
Teaching and monitoring during the course by the officers	0%	0%	0%	50.0%	50.0%

Note: Very Satisfied=VS, Satisfied=S, Neutral=N, U=Unsatisfied, VU=Very Unsatisfied

Tables 7 and 8 display the involvement of livelihood and non-livelihood participants in the community. Their involvement includes decision-making in the project, the contribution of ideas, and discussions between participants and external parties. The analysis shows that their involvement in the project is at a very satisfactory level. The commitment given by the participants increases the quality of their work. Comprehensive involvement in a program or activity will create a sense of community belonging to the project or activity.

Table 7

Participation in the community of adult livelihood respondents (n = 20)

Items	Yes	No
Participation		
Do you participate in decision-making at the community level?	100%	0%
Do you participate in giving suggestions to other members of your neighbourhood?	100%	0%
Do you participate in decision-making with other members of your neighbourhood?	100%	0%
Do you participate in giving suggestions to other community members from different races in your neighbourhood?	100%	0%
Do you participate in decision-making with other community members from different races in your neighbourhood?	100%	0%
Do you participate in giving suggestions to outsiders (ex: volunteers, researchers) in your neighbourhood?	100%	0%
Do you participate in decision-making with outsiders (ex: volunteers, researchers) in your neighbourhood?	100%	0%
Do you participate in giving suggestions to the Yayasan Sejahtera officer?	100%	0%
Do you participate in decision-making with the Yayasan Sejahtera officer?	100%	0%
Do you participate in giving suggestions to government officers (except Yayasan Sejahtera) in your neighbourhood?	100%	0%
Do you participate in decision-making with government officers (except Yayasan Sejahtera) in your neighbourhood?	100%	0%

Table 8

Participation in the community of adult non-livelihood respondents (n = 20)

Items	Yes	No
Participation		
Do you participate in decision-making at the community level?	100%	0%
Do you participate in giving suggestions to other members of your neighbourhood?	100%	0%
Do you participate in decision-making with other members of your neighbourhood?	100%	0%
Do you participate in giving suggestions to other community members from different races in your neighbourhood?	100%	0%
Do you participate in decision-making with other community members from different races in your neighbourhood?	100%	0%
Do you participate in giving suggestions to outsiders (ex: volunteers, researchers) in your neighbourhood?	100%	0%
Do you participate in decision-making with outsiders (ex: volunteers, researchers) in your neighbourhood?	100%	0%
Do you participate in giving suggestions to the Yayasan Sejahtera officer?	100%	0%
Do you participate in decision-making with the Yayasan Sejahtera officer?	100%	0%
Do you participate in giving suggestions to government officers (except Yayasan Sejahtera) in your neighbourhood?	100%	0%
Do you participate in decision-making with government officers (except Yayasan Sejahtera) in your neighbourhood?	100%	0%

Tables 10 and 11 present the standard of living and the quality of life measured after the participants engaged in training and the project. The results showed that all participants plan to increase their economic activities by increasing the business activities they run. This is likely due to their ability to own assets half of the participants can own vehicles and houses after engaging in the project. The participants suggest expanding their business is based on their ability to carry out economic activities to achieve a high standard of living.

Table 10

Standard of living and quality of life of adult livelihood respondents (n = 20)

Items	US	S
Standard of living and quality of life		
Is there an economic activity that you think can increase income in Project		
Sg. Bonus?	0%	100%
Vehicle ownership	50%	50%
Ownership of communication equipment	50%	50%
The ability to get a better education	50%	50%
Ability to obtain health care	50%	50%

Note: Satisfied=S, U=Unsatisfied

Table 11

Standard of living and quality of life of adult non-livelihood respondents (n=20)

Items	US	S
Standard of living and quality of life		
Is there an economic activity that you think can increase income in Project Sg. Bonus?	0%	100%
Vehicle ownership	50%	50%
Ownership of communication equipment	50%	50%
The ability to get a better education	50%	50%
Ability to obtain health care	50%	50%

Note: Satisfied=S, U=Unsatisfied

Table 12 displays the levels of knowledge before and after the course. The results of Table 12 indicate that the amount of knowledge of youth before and after participation in the program is equivalent, whereas the level of skill increases after joining the training and courses which eventually prepares the participants to be more confident to face the reality of the world.

Table 12

Level of knowledge and skills in activity involvement of youth respondents (n = 26)

Variables	VU	U	N	S	VS
Level of knowledge and skills					
Level of knowledge before the program	0%	57.7%	0%	42.3%	0%
Level of knowledge after the program	0%	57.7%	0%	42.3%	0%
Level of skill before the program	0%	57.7%	0%	42.3%	0%
Level of skill after the program	0%	0%	0%	57.7%	42.3%
Level of confidence	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%

Note: Very Satisfied=VS, Satisfied=S, Neutral=N, U=Unsatisfied, VU=Very Unsatisfied

Results and Discussions

Overall, the participants' involvement in development has a significant effect on their lives. As a result of their participation, they gain numerous benefits, including social learning throughout their lives. Social learning is an essential input that provides them with the confidence to design and execute future action plans. However, it should be highlighted that participation is a complex undertaking. Therefore, the participation that leads to empowerment must include meaningful and extensive involvement from the participants.

The formation of human capital in participants is one of the elements that occur during the community development process. Human capital exists in an individual and can be assessed in terms of educational possibilities, communication in the form of guidance and direction, interactions amongst community members and awareness of the importance of being role models to others. It encompasses a proactive mindset that always seeks improvement and change which might motivate an individual to adopt the concept of continuous learning and being independent. It is also a collection of an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities that may be used to implement changes that are beneficial to the individual, the business, and the

environment. The impact of human capital formed can be seen as empowerment while the community can work independently through their knowledge, skills and abilities.

From the perspective of living standards and quality of life, participants intend to grow their economic activities by expanding the businesses they operate to attain a higher degree of asset ownership and health care. Material and non-material assistance must be provided for self-generated activities. Participation is viewed as a process when it occurs in the context of community development. Community Enhancement Project Sg. Bonus must embark on a new phase that focuses on resource development and community organization development to create a medium for continuing community development. The community can expand its potential by learning to plan and devise strategies, make decisions, locate, and manage communal resources, and exercise leadership. A successful community that has elements of empowerment will easily achieve goals and enjoy the well-being of life.

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