`ORIGINAL ARTICLE`

THE ADEQUACY OF THE MALAYSIAN NATIONAL COMMUNITY POLICY: AN ENDEAVOUR TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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ABSTRACT – The National Community Policy was formulated by the Pakatan Harapan government to mold the people to take care of their shared properties, spaces and facilities. This policy is related to the community development activities where all the community members are urged to participate in improving their standard of living. This study employs the Model of Community Development, Diffusion Theory and Theory of Social Exclusion in order to provide a general framework for this study. Although this policy offers positive impacts to the community, the issues such as the inclusiveness in the definition of "community", awareness of the people towards the policy and the existence of foreigners in the housing areas may curb the effectiveness of the policy. Therefore, the present study seeks to determine the room for improvements and offer several recommendations in order to strengthen the feasibility of the Malaysian National Community Policy.

INTRODUCTION

National Community Policy aims in creating a competitive community, having a sense of unity and enabling ones live in harmony, prosperity and excellence (Prime Minister Office, 2019). Besides that, this policy is intended to prepare community that would be active in keeping its surroundings clean and safe, having high morals and civic-consciousness, and practicing a culture of mutual advice for the benefits of everyone. Among the prime movers of this policy is the Community Solidarity Secretariat office, which has been established in stages at all the 133 Program Perumahan Rakyat (PPR) or low-cost flat housing areas across the country. The first office was set up four months ago at the PPR Lembah Subang 2. The National Community Policy would focus on eight main clusters, including infrastructure and maintenance; cleanliness, environment and health; security; and education and skills. The other main clusters are caring for the marginalized groups (the disabled, single mothers, children, elderly and the poor); entrepreneurship and social business; social services; and sports and recreation. Rather than merely build houses, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government is intended to develop the community from various aspects including economic empowerment, social wellbeing, education and self-identity of members of the community (Malaymail, 2019).

The National Community Policy is not new because Singapore has established Community Development Council since 1997 to empower and foster ties and unity among the communities. In Malaysia, this policy was introduced as a result of a series of incidents in the PPR housing area. For instance, the case of a three-year-old child who died from the 17th floor of the PPR Kota Damansara after being left alone at home (Fairul Asmaini, 2018). Although this policy brings a lot of benefits to the community, there are some rooms for improvements to ensure the objectives of the policy can be achieved. Among the issues include are the inclusiveness of the terms "community" in the policy, the awareness of the community on the policy, and also the existence of foreigners in the community area which hampered the sustainable development goals. The structure of this article is as follows: first, a literature review of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is presented to portray the relationship between the Malaysian National Community Policy and SDGs. Second, several theories such as the Community Development Model, Diffusion Theory and Social Exclusion Theory are discussed. Third, analysis and discussion on the National Community Policy are presented. In this section, the adequacy of the National Community Policy is examined. To date, there are not many academic studies have investigated the adequacy of the National Community Policy in Malaysia. Therefore, this paper seeks to investigate whether the policy is adequate to meet the SDGs. Besides that, this paper also attempts to determine to what extent the policy is parallel to the stated theories. Finally, conclusions and suggestions for future lines of research are presented. This study will contribute to the existing literature by providing an analysis of the related literature with the stated theories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a set of objectives within a universal agreement to end poverty, protect all that makes the planet habitable, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and

prosperity, at present and in the future. The emergence of the goals can be understood in the context of and as a response to global problems emerging in the wake of globalization processes and increasing global interconnectedness (Glass and Newig, 2019).

The Goals were adopted by all member states of the United Nations formally in 2015, for the period 2016–2030 to address the overwhelming empirical and scientific evidence that the world needs a radically more sustainable approach. It is a continuation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which had taken place from 2000 to 2015 and consisted of eight international development goals. The first three goals covered poverty, education and gender equality; the next three goals addressed 'health outcomes' covering child mortality, maternal health and 'HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases'. The remaining two goals addressed environmental sustainability and global partnership for development. One of the differences between SDGs and MDG is the inclusiveness of countries in the world to get involved in achieving those goals. The SDGs are universal and apply to all countries, whereas the MDGs were intended for action in developing countries only (Morton, Pencheon and Squires, 2017).

The strategies highlighted in the National Community Policy are in line with the 11th Malaysia Plan, National Housing Policy 2.0, National Social Policy, 3rd National Physical Plan, New Urban Agenda of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration 2018 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Good quality stratified housing infrastructure is important to achieve a livable and sustainable environment (Ministry of Housing and Local Government). Of these 17 goals with 169 targets, target 11.1 of goal 11 focuses on ensuring access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums in 2030 with a view to make housing livable and sustainable. This leads to what constitutes a livable and sustainable housing (Lukuman et al., 2017). The process of formulating SDGs is very different from the MDGs. One of the fundamental changes brought by the SDGs is the principle of "no one is left behind" (Triatmanto, Natsir and Rachyunisngsih, 2018).

Model of Community Development

The concept of community development is explored in terms of community participation, community empowerment and community capacity (Singh, Timothy, & Dowling, 2003). Community development is viewed as the best way to build the capacity of community residents to engage with each other and find solutions to the issues that affect their community (Asnarulkhadi and Fariborz, 2009). According to Ploch (1976), community development is an active involvement of local communities to carry out programs that enhance the quality of their lives. Meanwhile, Hope (1980) saw the development of the community as a process. This process started by identifying the problems of the community involved in the problem-solving process. According to Hope, changes can be experienced by the people involved if the process is accompanied by all parties, whether the government, non-governmental bodies and society itself. CDA or Community Development Academy (1997) sees the development of this community as an involvement from all parties and agencies to achieve the same goal of improving the quality of the lives of the people involved. According to CDA, community development is a comprehensive and vigorous effort from all parties involved either directly or indirectly to achieve the goals and objectives that have been determined. Elements such as co-operation, tolerance and maximizing internal resource users are one of the things CDA emphasizes in achieving the stated goals.

The main purpose of community development is to improve the quality of life of the community in which it is located. Community development also helps the communities involved to become independent and have a high identity (Mohammad Shatar, 2003). Besides that, community development will be able to help society improve their social and economic conditions. If a society faces a problem, then the agency and the people involved will have to solve the problem and not just comment without any effort (Christenson, 1989). The Community Development Model that provides the emphasis on five key elements is believed to be able to help solve the problem. Among the five main convergences in this model are community leaders, local communities, community development, community development processes and community development outcomes (Mohammad Shatar, 2003).

Diffusion Theory

The process of adopting new innovations has been studied for over 30 years, and one of the most popular adoption models is described by Rogers in his book, Diffusion of Innovations (Ismail Sahin, 2006). Diffusion is the dispersion of information about innovations (or later, news) throughout a social system in a defined time period (Pamela, 2008). "An innovation is an idea, practice, or project that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption" (Rogers, 2003, p. 12). An innovation may have been invented a long time ago, but if individuals perceive it as new, then it may still be an innovation for them. Uncertainty is an important obstacle to the adoption of innovations. An innovation's consequence may create uncertainty. To reduce the uncertainty of adopting the innovation, individuals should be informed about its advantages and disadvantages to make them aware of all its consequences (Ismail Sahin, 2006). Diffusion Theory seeks to explain "the process by which an innovation or idea is communicated through certain channels over time, among the members of a social system" (Everett Rogers' book Diffusion of Innovations, 1969, p. 5)

Theory of Social Exclusion

Social exclusion refers to the state of multiple deprivation or lack of participation in key aspects of society (Hills et al., 2002). Exclusion relates to the mechanisms through which participation is hampered. Several barriers that may hamper participation are considered social norms and values, the legal system, administrative rules and procedures, and income distribution. Plummer (2000) identified several factors affecting the level of participation which are skills and knowledge, employment, education and literacy, cultural beliefs and practices, gender, social and political marginalization. Based on

the discussion above, it can be concluded that not all members of the community are willing to participate in the community development programs as they have different social norms and values and the existence of social marginalization in the community. Therefore, those groups of people will be apathy to any community programs carried out by the community.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Community Development Academy (1997) sees the development of this community as an involvement from all parties and agencies to achieve the same goal of improving the quality of the lives of the people involved. If a society faces a problem, then the agency and the people involved will have to solve the problem and not just comment without any effort (Christenson, 1989). Based on those statements, it is believed that community development requires the participation of all members of the community and the government to improve their standard of living. However, the Malaysian National Community Policy focuses only on low-cost flat housing areas in the city, excluding gated home communities in urban and rural areas. Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad opined that the National Community Policy for the urban community is in line with the Government's mission to become a developed nation (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 2019). In reality, communities in both urban and rural areas need to be improved in order to become a developed country.

According to data released by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) (2017), it is about 63 percent of the B40 households are in urban areas, living in high-density housing and facing multiple issues including non-conducive living conditions. It shows that the remaining 37 per cent of the B40 households are living in rural areas and demand government attention in order to uplift their standard of living. Kalinowski (2017) contended that rural communities are more likely to need creatively-derived social mechanisms (to varying degrees of institutionalization) of their own to compensate for lack of access to those available to mainstream populations, paving the way for these communities to gradually develop into micro-societies in their own right.

Besides, SDGs impacts must be felt where they are most needed, and that is on the individual, community and district levels, ensuring that no one is left behind. Localizing the 2030 Agenda and promoting ownership among various stakeholders is therefore paramount (EPU, 2017). The rural population is more prone to extreme poverty, famine, social exclusion, and environmental injustice, particularly in developing countries from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Modernization and rapid industrialization have caused the rural and urban poor becoming marginalized and lag behind in economic advancement Community development at rural areas will help increase economic activity and also enhance productivity in rural areas. Through community development villages are given an opportunity to have the best of both worlds - remain in a close-knit traditional society and have the advantage of pursuing economic advancement (Doris Padmini Selvaratnam and Poo Bee Tin, 2001). Based on the explanation above, it can be construed that the term and scope of ''Community' stated in the policy is inadequate as it is not encompassing all communities in Malaysia, especially the rural community. Since the National Community Policy is believed to focus more on the urban community, it will hinder the efforts of the government to achieve the SDGs. It is due to the fact that SDGs requires all parties, including the rural community, to hand in hand develop the country.

There are eight clusters embedded in the National Community policy: Infrastructure and maintenance, health, environment and cleanliness, safety, education and skills, concern towards children, elderly, persons with disabilities, women, single mothers and the indigent, entrepreneurship, social services and sports and creation. All the determined clusters are relevant and pertinent to the rural community as they also need to be empowered in order to improve their standard of living. Cluster related to education and skills, for instance, is able to help the rural community, especially the young generation to get access to education. Besides, health, environment and cleanliness are also essential for the rural community. In terms of health, the lower percentage of water, sanitation and hygiene are the root causes of diarrhea and cholera (Zion et al., 2015) and these problems exist in rural area. For instance, Beluran is one of the districts in Sabah and the cases of Cholera were reported in 2011. Hence, there is a need for the policy makers to include the rural community in the policy in order to enhance the rural community to collaborate and manage their health.

In addition, Mohd Roslan (2019) claimed that there is no collaboration between the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and the Rural Development Ministry. Mohd Roslan (2019) highlighted that The Rural Development Ministry has also implemented a 2018-2013 Rural Development Plan and this plan is supposedly becoming part of the National Community Policy. It should be the basis of the national community to be regarded as non-localities, but also apply to age, location, ethnicity, religion, trust and employment. There are various forms of community, namely community in the form of association (association), the territorial unit (unit area), a community of interest, and legal community. Therefore, there is a need to create a comprehensive National Community Policy in order to cater to all forms of community. In realizing the aspirations, the rural community should also be enhanced and classified in its economic structure.

The Minister of Housing and Local Government has also mentioned that local authorities through local councilors will organize a campaign in educating and elevating awareness of this policy among the community. According to Diffusion Theory, the potential adopters need to be communicated and educated about a new thing introduced by the government. However, since Malaysian local councilors are not being elected during General Election, therefore, not all people recognize and to be influenced by them (Mohd Rozaimy, 2017). This situation will hinder the process of disseminating information on this policy. As a result, people will remain uncertain and unclear about this policy and this situation will make people resist to accept the new initiative which introduced by the government.

According to Wan Noor Hayati (2018), it is about 70 residential units in the Poor Housing Project (PPRT) of Lembah Subang 1, are inhabited by foreigners. In addition, Faizul Azli et al. (2019) in their study found that the majority of the respondents which represent 99% agreed that there is a presence of foreigners rent in their housing area. Nur Farhana et al. (2019) in their study found that some of the owners are subletting their units to foreign workers at a much higher price. Based on the above statements, it is believed that some PPR owners are illegally renting their houses to foreigners. This situation not only lead towards social issues (Bernama, 2018), but the group of a foreigner will be apathy and less likely to participate in the community development programs. This situation can be related to the Theory of Social Exclusion whereby, according to Plummer (2000), there are several factors affecting the level of participation which are skills and knowledge, employment, education and literacy, cultural beliefs and practices, gender, social and political marginalization. Since they are the minority in the community, it can prevent them from fully participating in the economic, social, and political life of the society in which they live.

CONCLUSION

The empowerment of rural communities that are pro-poor and sustainable requires systematic planning in order to avoid the effects of culture shock. Culture shock can be reduced in a planned manner through social adjustments between the problems and the real needs of the poor in the rural development program goals and objectives. Evaluation and monitoring objective and are required to determine the achievement of goals and predict the chances of a culture shock as early as possible (Santosa, 2014). It shows that the philosophy and principals of Malaysian community development programs concentrate mainly on upgrading living standards and tackling poverty, especially among rural Malays. It is assumed by the government that by providing basic amenities and other social programs, people could cooperatively contribute by participating in those activities towards achieving the community goals which lead to economic growth and national progress (Asnarulkhadi and Fariborz, 2009).

The Malaysian National Community Policy is very crucial in order to build the spirit of unity, and prosperity among the citizens. Besides that, this policy will be able to create a community that would be active in keeping their surroundings clean and safe, having high morals and civic-consciousness, and practicing a culture of mutual advice for the benefit of everyone. In fact, the National Community Policy can be enhanced by including all types of community in the policy. The standard of living in both urban and rural areas needs to be improved so that they can live in harmony and able to help the government to become a developed country. Besides that, the Malaysian local councilors need to always visible to the local people and disseminating information about the policy. The management of PPR also needs to monitor the existence of foreigners in PPR flats and take action against those owners who subletting their houses to foreigners. The inclusion of different actors, for example, in the drafting of policy proposals, is deemed to yield more effective results on the basis of mutual earning (Newig et al., 2018; increased legitimacy and the bundling of resources (Newig et al., 2018; Verweij et al., 2013).

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