

## Rural Youth Sustainable Livelihood: Some Preliminary Results

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**Abstract:** This study attempts to examine the rural youth sustainable livelihood phenomena in Malaysia. The results presented in the present study were the preliminary data which gained through the pre-test process. The pre-test was conducted among 30 rural youths in Kuala Besut, Terengganu. Out of 6 capitals studied, 3 of them recorded high levels of mean scores while the other 3 capitals recorded a moderate level of mean scores. The human capital recorded the highest mean score, however yet the strength possessed in human capital cannot assist them to strengthen their financial capital as this capital recorded the lowest mean score. Though results discussed only demonstrate the preliminary findings, however yet the results are expected to portray a possible prediction of what actual data would be.

**Key words:** Youth, sustainable livelihood, rural community, rural development

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### INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, efforts on rural development have continuously been taken place. To achieve a successful rural development strategy, 2 stages of rural development transformation and evolution had been set. The 1st stage involved a period of 38 years (1957-1994) whereby, through this period, 2 policies had been set namely pre new economy policy and new economy policy. Under these policies focus were heavily placed on providing basic infrastructure, agriculture development based on main commodities, equity development, combating poverty, land and regional development and dissemination of subsidy. The 2nd stage which is still ongoing, will involve a period of 27 years (1994-2020) and is founded upon the new philosophy and policy on rural development which accentuate on achieving the status of developed state in 2020. Under this stage, policies such as National Development and National Vision Policy have been established where by the focus are on balanced development, human resource development, regionalization of land development authorities, a better quality of life, achieving sustainable development to combat poverty within the lower income group, developing attractive, developed and profitable rural areas and focus of rural development on marginal groups. The impact of decades of rural development programs

implemented can already be seen within the rural community, however yet do these impacts have impinged the rural community sustainable livelihood? A sustainable livelihood realigns our way of thinking about the objectives, scope and priorities for development with the ultimate aim of reducing poverty. This present study, focuses on the sustainable livelihood level of the rural youth community based on the Pentagon developed by Department of International Development. An additional capital the cultural capital is being tested and included into the existing model as this capital is proven to be crucial in measuring community sustainable livelihood. To have a study on sustainable livelihood among rural youth community in Malaysia is important as it can be a catalyst to improve the understanding of livelihoods, particularly the livelihoods of the young people.

**What is sustainable livelihood?** The Bruntland Commission on environment and development was responsible in introducing the concept of sustainable livelihood, by that time it was accentuated, as a medium to associate socioeconomic and ecological considerations in a cohesive, policy-relevant structure. Realizing its importance, in 1992, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) has developed and widened the scope of sustainable livelihood whereby by that time, effort was placed on poverty eradication.

Moreover, it emphasizes that sustainable livelihoods is able to integrate factors that allows policies to address development, sustainable resource management and poverty eradication simultaneously. There are various understandings on what is sustainable livelihood. However, among the famous definition of sustainable livelihood was from Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway who defined sustainable livelihood as:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: A livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term

**The Pentagon model:** The issue of sustainable livelihood has gained a wide attraction from scholars across the globe while a number of local and international bodies are investing their money in investigating the factors that might influence the sustainable livelihood of the community. Via the studies and investments made, various models and theories have been constructed and among the established one is the pentagon model. The pentagon was initiated by DFID (1999) and it aims to develop information related to people's assets to be presented visually, thereby bringing to life important inter-relationships between the various assets. The pentagon consists of 5 capitals namely.

**Human capital:** It can be understood as the skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health which can assist the community to fulfill and accomplish their livelihood strategies. Within the household level, human capital refers to the quantity and quality of labor available and it varies according to household size, skill levels, leadership potential and health status, etc. Education and health status are always associated with a stronger human capital and by having this, it will help them to overcome poverty which has been the primary livelihood objective by a majority of the community.

**Social capital:** Within the scope of pentagon, social capital can be understood as the social resources that people depend on to fulfill their livelihood objectives. In simple terms, social capital refers to the relationship forged between and amongst individuals and groups in the community leading to support and groups strengthening. The social capital can be constructed

through vertical networks (patron/client) or horizontal networks (among individuals with similar interests) which construct people's reliability and strength to cooperate and enhance the opportunity for them to involve in various institutions, such as political or civic bodies. Then, social capital can be constructed via membership of more more formalized group that typically involves loyalty to commonly accepted rules, norms and sanctions. Social capital also can be constructed through relationships of trust, reciprocity and exchanges that embolden co-operation which can minimize the transaction costs and may offer the basis for informal safety nets amongst the poor. Abundance of social capital leads to better community spirit and cooperation.

**Natural capital:** Refers to the natural resource stocks from which resource flows and services (e.g., nutrient cycling and erosion protection) needed for livelihoods can be gained. There are various resources that make up the natural capital from intangible public goods such as the atmosphere and biodiversity to divisible assets used directly for production (trees and land, etc.). Moreover, natural capital acts as the basis of human economic activity. Current climate has placed formidable challenges on the natural capital. Some of the obstacles on the livelihoods of the poor are the changing natural processes that destroy natural capital (e.g., fires that destroy forests, floods and earthquakes that destroy agricultural land). Other risks include the unplanned or immoral destruction of forest and loss of flora and fauna.

**Physical capital:** It refers to the basic infrastructure and producer goods required to support livelihoods. Infrastructure include the changes to the physical environment which aid people to fulfill their basic needs and to become productive. Producer refers to the tools and equipment that helps people to produce more. There are various important infrastructure and producer goods, however yet there are common basic infrastructure and producer goods that are vital in sustainable livelihood, namely; affordable transport, secured shelter and buildings, adequate water supply and sanitation, clean, affordable energy and access to information (communications).

**Financial capital:** It refers to financial capacity that people have in order to assist them in fulfilling their livelihood objectives. Financial capital consists of two main sources, namely; available stocks and regular inflows of money. Savings are the most common type of available stock and are the preferred type of financial capital as they are not producing liabilities and commonly

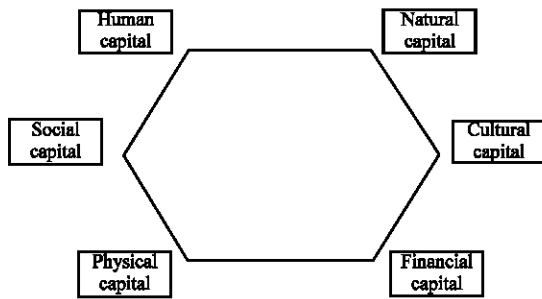


Fig. 1: The model of the current study

do not entail reliance on others. Savings can be in form of cash, bank deposits or liquid assets such as livestock and jewellery. Furthermore, financial resources also can be gained via financial agencies that offer credits. The 2nd source-regular inflows of money refers to pensions, grants or other transfers from the state and remittances.

**Cultural capital:** Although Pentagon has only 5 capitals, however this study did include the cultural capital as being a vital consideration in sustainable livelihood. Cultural capital can be understood as the non-financial social assets that accentuate on social mobility that exclude the economic means. It also can be referred as the forms of tacit and indigenous knowledge, both tangible and intangible which create value in a given society in relation to status and power. Education, intellect, style of speech, dress and even physical appearance are part of cultural capital (Fig. 1).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data presented in this study were the pre-test results of a study on rural youth sustainable livelihood. The study was quantitative in nature whereby a set of developed questionnaire was used as the main tool for collecting data. The questions included within the questionnaires were primarily based on 5 capitals suggested by the Pentagon developed by Department for International Development and an additional domain of cultural capital. For measuring the capitals, respondents were given an option of 5 Likert scale levels for each of the question asked where 1 represents strongly disagree, 2 represents disagree, 3 represents moderately agree, 4 represent agree and 5 represents strongly agree. The questions on the 6th capital-the cultural capital were based on the review of literature and past studies. The questionnaire was then validated via a series of instrument development meetings. For the pre-test process, it was conducted at Pengkalan Atap village in Kuala Besut, Terengganu where a total of 30 rural youth aged between 15-40 years old were chosen as the

respondents. To meet the purpose of the study, analyses such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were performed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the respondents demographic data, a huge majority of the respondents are male (86.7%) and the average age for the respondents was 26.4 years. It can be seen that a majority of the respondents possess a low level of education as only 2 of them were receiving a tertiary level of education. A total of 70% of the respondents were self-employed with the average of their monthly income was RM1,135.40 (roughly equal to USD340) far exceeded the poverty level set by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) which is RM720 (roughly equal to USD240). The respondents can be considered as the senior villagers as the mean score for the average for the duration for staying in the village was 21.2 years. On average, respondents have a total of 6 household members. Regarding the capitals studied, the mean score gained was categorized into 3 levels based on the calculation of 5 (maximum mean score)/3 (number of levels). The calculation has resulted in 3 levels namely low (mean score between 1.00-2.33), moderate (mean score between 2.34-3.67) and high (mean score between 3.68-5.00). Out of 6 capitals, the human capital recorded the highest mean score ( $M = 4.35$ ), followed by social capital ( $M = 3.74$ ) and physical capital ( $M = 3.74$ ). Further analysis employed has confirmed that financial capital has recorded the lowest mean score ( $M = 2.87$ ) (Table 1).

Human capital has emerged as the strongest capital possessed by the rural youth which depicts its potential strength to significantly contribute towards rural youth sustainable livelihood. Rural youth within this context are seen as those who have the knowledge and skills in certain tasks particularly on fisheries related industry (e.g., fishing and entrepreneurship). However, this strength is not fully manipulated by the rural youth, particularly in money generating activities as the financial capital only recorded the lowest mean score. Supposedly with the strength they have in human capital, it can assist them in constructing a better financial capital.

Another capital that recorded a high level of mean score is the social capital. Doubtlessly, the strength of this capital can be supported by a positive social relationship that occurs between the rural youth and the community surrounding them. To have such finding is not surprising particularly in rural setting as findings on local studies by Yassin *et al.* (2011), Ramli *et al.* (2013) and Shaffril *et al.* (2011) have demonstrated a similar finding. Shaffril *et al.* (2011) in their study have clarified, such strong social relationship exists as a result of active

Table 1: The capitals studied

Capitals	Mean score	SD
Human	4.35	0.53
Social	3.74	0.33
Natural	3.19	0.66
Physical	3.74	0.61
Financial	2.87	0.61
Cultural	3.57	0.62

involvement of the rural community on social activities such as gotong-royong (mutual cooperation), local organizations, merewang and religious activities.

Physical capital is another capital that recorded a high level of mean score. In the current setting, development of rural areas have been the focus of the government and has resulted in their demand of basic infrastructure are fulfilled. The infrastructure and basic facilities such as electricity, clean water, telecommunication, police station, ICT centres, government agencies and post office in current study area are satisfactory and Yassin *et al.* (2011) have explained that most of the rural community are satisfied with the physical capital provided as such capital are adequate in number, provide satisfactory services and near to their homes.

Cultural capital recorded a moderate level of mean score and this is not surprising as within the rural areas, the old ways of doing things are still practiced by the youth. In Malaysia, the rural community are highly attached to the local customs and foods. In Kuala Besut for example, local language is widely spoken by the locals traditional food, such as satar and keropok lekor are highly demanded by both local people and tourists while traditional games such as Wau is still played.

Natural capital is another capital that recorded a moderate level of mean score. Majority of rural areas in Malaysia are still green and a large portion of agriculture activities in Malaysia are conducted in the rural areas. Within the scope of this study, though Kuala Besut is equipped with adequate infrastructure and facilities, they are still surrounded by the green environment and this is resulted by the well-planned strategy on the rural development placed on this area. Furthermore, as Kuala Besut is located near to the shore, the rural youth are provided access to the natural resources such as fish, shrimps and crabs. Unfortunately, compared to the beaches in neighbouring areas such as Kuala Terengganu not too many beaches in Kuala Besut can be made as a tourist attractions due to its conditions as some part of the shore areas over there are eroded.

## CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates the pre-test results of a study on rural youth sustainable livelihood. The analyses were run on 30 rural youths and this has become the major limitation as the results might portary a different

view if a bigger sample size is involved. Obviously, a total of 30 respondents is far too small to claim universal validity and not fit to be considered as generally valid. However, yet even with this small numbers at least, it provides an earlier prediction on where actually the rural youth stand in terms of their livelihood sustainability. As can be deduced from the pre-test findings, the rural youth have yet to capitalzie on their human and social capitals to further enhance their livelihoods. Toward this end, the research team is currently collecting a bigger sample size (300 respondents) in 12 selected villages in rural areas across the country. Future data gained from the bigger sample size would be more representatives and provide a clearer picture on the rural youth sustainable livelihood. Furthermore to extend the research findings, the research team will apply the photovoice method. The evolution of research methods has added some alternatives to data collection method which currently is not limited to the verbal and textual world only. Photovoice enables the visual cues to stimulate participant responses in research interviews. By including visual information in research practices researchers can stimulate the evolution of other processes of understanding in their effort to get a greater data on human consciousness (Harper, 2002). The photovoice will represent the qualitative part of the study and will be conducted at selected rural areas in Malaysia. It is a hope that data from the bigger study will extend the available knowledge and understandings on rural youth sustainable livelihood which can enable scholars to construct new disciplines, cultures and theories.

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