

Influence of Local Leadership in Poverty Eradication in the State of Terengganu, Malaysia

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Abstract: Challenges in rural communities call for awareness of community leaders in overcoming these challenges. One of these challenges is the government's endeavour to ensure that the rural community development is parallel to the country's development, hence a credible, effective community leader is needed to achieve the country's development aspiration. This study was conducted in four rural communities in the state of Terengganu, Malaysia to identify the role played by local community leaders. These communities were selected based on their excellent achievement in community development programmes and contests. The objectives of this research are identifying the role of leaders in bringing success for every development programme and ascertaining the community leadership characteristics that can bring positively impact a community. The data for this study were obtained from observations and interviews with 40 informants who comprised of chairpersons and members of the villages development and safety committee (J3K) as well as local residents. The findings showed that effective community leadership plays a significant role as an agent of change and has the ability to positively impact the development of rural community. Besides that community leader's practise of effective leadership style is perceived to bring changes among the community in the social, economic and cultural aspects as well as changes in the way of thinking among rural communities. In this regard, leadership in these four communities is viewed to manifests the change into better leadership that can inspire other community leaders.

Key words: Rural community, leader, leadership, development, rural development

INTRODUCTION

The policy for rural development aims to create a progressive, knowledgeable society in the rural areas in addition to developing an advanced and secure place for them to live. The 10th Malaysia Plan (RMK10) showed that 30.3% of the overall rural communities still receive government financial support and aids (Anonymous, 2012). In this regard, the government's aim is to develop social economic growth in rural communities in aspects including physical development, economic development, social and human capital development and this responsibility has been entrusted to community leaders as agents of government transformation. Many efforts should be and have been implemented to develop rural areas in line with the government's aspiration to develop rural areas to be advanced, attractive and comparable to urban areas (The Economic Planning Unit, 2014).

To achieve the ideals and aspirations of rural development goals, development projects have been

carefully planned to fulfil the goal of successful transformation of rural communities in terms of economic, social, infrastructure and human capital. Furthermore, rural development programmes should be more efficient in the process of transforming rural communities so that they are on par with the urban community. Enhancement of program implementation strategy is necessary to ensure that any development program that has been designed and implemented will provide effective impact on rural communities. Moreover, to accelerate the process of rural development, the government look at the roles of community leader as essential aspect government as they are the catalysts in the process of developing rural communities in terms of quality of life and well-being of society. In this light, leadership and community development very closely. One of the key for the success of the development of rural communities is the presence of an effective leader. Without the presence of community leaders, it will be very difficult too implement all of the programmes planned by the government smoothly.

In a real context, success is influenced by the leadership role in the local community. For instance, successes obtained by Kg Guntong Luar, Kg Kayu Kelat, Kg Rawai and Kg Banggol Katong were due to the influence of strong leadership among the villagers.

Therefore, community leaders should ensure that the on-going rural development programmes have significant impacts on society. Cooperation, commitment and good relationships among community leaders and government agencies can help facilitate the communities. It is apparent that active involvement of community leaders, community members and government agencies is crucial in implementing the development projects and programmes in a particular area. Based on this, this study will explain good features of the influences of leadership in rural community development among the rural communities in the state of Terengganu in helping to tackle community problems. Thus, the objectives of this study are identifying the role of leaders in bringing success for every development programme and ascertaining the leadership style that can bring positive impact to the community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in the state of Terengganu using the qualitative phenomenological approach to address the issues raised in the study. 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 as the study area, the data were collected from interviews and observations. The use of different data gathering techniques provides an advantage to this study because the technique analyse triangulation view more precisely. In the meantime, interview was the main method for collecting information from the informants. This technique was used to understand the role played by community leaders as agents of transformation in rural development. Interviews session held with community leaders and the local community which probed on daily activities, the role of leaders, leadership styles and methods used to manage the affairs of the community such as meetings, gatherings and also the relationship between local communities and related external agencies.

In this study, the researchers have identified the appropriate informants to clarify questions that have been raised. Consequently, a total of 40 informants, comprised of community leaders (J3K) locals and officials in the

relevant government agencies. In addition, relevant documents were analysed to obtain further data for analysis. The researchers evaluated several relevant documents that were considered as appropriate and may be used as evidence. Once the data were 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.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The roles of a leader: The success or failure of a community depends on the role of a leader and how the organisation is directed, administered and managed efficiently (Scheffert, 2007). Furthermore, the nature, value and behaviour determine the effectiveness of a credible leadership role in implementing community development programmes. Basically, community leaders should actively play their roles by engaging in any activity or program. Meanwhile, the goal of their participation is to take care the community and their role in programme planning should start from the lower level, right up until to the stage of implementation and monitoring. In the rural context, active participation of community leaders is claimed to determine the direction of a programme and ensure the success of a program development, particularly in aspects related to the economy. Subsequently, this study found that successful leaders play a good role as.

Government transformation agent: As a grassroots level leader appointed by the government, the community leaders from the J3K should be a liaison to the community and act as the government's eyes and ears at the community level. Therefore, community leaders can be characterised as an intermediate agency between the people and government and this relationship is bound by trust of the community and the excellent service of the community leadership as illustrated by the development projects developed through a number of agencies such as KEMAS, KETARA, Agriculture Department, district office, Terengganu State government. Such projects require the commitment of the community leadership so that the project in their area can be managed and supervised effectively. The results also showed the success achieved by the community such as Kg Kayu Kelat is the result of effort and determination of their leaders who always want to bring changes and transformations to their communities, especially in terms of socio-economic development. This is because as

agents of change they are the ones who have to constantly look for and develop ways to develop their communities. Hence, effective leaders should carry out their duties as an effective agent of transformation.

Catalyse and push factor: In assessing the role of community leaders as an important channel for the success of the programs of rural development, it can be claimed that community leadership is a motivating factor which catalyses rural transformation success. Therefore, success is dependent on their efforts to mobilise other community members at the grassroots level. As catalysts, leaders should double their efforts and research to encourage people to research together to develop their communities. This can be shown through their relationships with rural development agencies such as KEMAS, KETARA, Agriculture Department, district office, Terengganu State government and several government agencies and private organisations to facilitate the process of development in their area.

The findings of this study indicate that the rural communities have benefited from the development of basic facilities and services provided by the government. Community leadership in the rural area has also served as a motivating factor in optimising the opportunities provided by the government to develop local resources available for the benefits of the population. Consequently, the involvement of local communities in social and economic activities generated by the leadership through effective communication process have appeared to be successful.

In this regard, the process of effective communication practiced by the leadership of villages development and safety committee (J3K) enables it to act as an agent of change at the grassroots level to act as an intermediary in the process of information sharing between the government and villagers. Furthermore, it also acts as a catalyst for development. Hence, administrators should strengthen the collaboration among the residents and create a harmonious cooperation with the government. The study's findings provide evidences that J3Ks are capable to fulfil the aspiration to bring changes in the village which is in line with its position in the development team. Based on this study, it was found that the J3K institution plays a well needed and significant role in the context of rural development

Project supervisor: The implementation of development projects requires the cooperation and coordination of all parties including government agencies, local communities and local leaders. The success of

some projects and rural development programmes in Kg Guntong Luar, Kg Kayu Kelat, Kg Rawai and Kg Banggol Katong are the result of good management and supervision of the local leadership (J3K) in the area. They often monitor, evaluate projects or programs and take immediate actions if a project or programme is facing problems. It is also an advantage as they are closer to the projects of development in order to assess the effectiveness of their projects or programs towards having positive impacts to the socio-economic growth of the community.

Inherently, the ability of local leaders as "supervisor" of development projects of their area, enables them to give maximum effort in overseeing the success of a project or program. Furthermore, their participation in monitoring indirectly help facilitate projects and programme and they can be whistle-blowers if the project or programme implemented is not running well.

Providing safe environment: In the meantime, safety is an important issue in rural areas as it is an important indicator that gauges the level of the community's wellbeing, hence, true to its name, the major responsibility for leaders of the village development and security committee (J3K) is to ensure the safety of the community. In this regard, protecting a safe environment from all threats is one of the responsibilities of the J3K's local leadership. For instance, the establishment of the voluntary patrol scheme (SRS) under the administration of J3K security bureau in the research areas has established security and stability in these respective areas. Consequently, voluntary patrol scheme (SRS) which was established in every village play a crucial role in helping the security forces, especially the police to maintain peace and order in the local areas. Voluntary patrol scheme (SRS) is executed as one of the steps that can help maintain security to support the police in an effort to reduce the crime rate. The establishment of voluntary patrol scheme (SRS) in each village involved in this study has largely been successful in reducing the crime rate in these respective areas and helped improved the villager's safety. Moreover, the results of the interviews conducted found that the locals feel very comfortable and safe as there is good security in their local area which is headed by their own village heads.

Reference and advisor: Community leadership also play the important role as advisory committee member and as reference for the government agencies and relevant parties. Some of the agencies that played a significant role in the development of the four communities in this study

were KEMAS (Community Development Agency) district office (Setiu, Besut, Marang, Kuala Terengganu) KETARA, Department of Health, the local town council, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA) the welfare department, local NGOs and the local politicians. In this regard, linking the community members to the government agencies and other relevant parties that helped facilitate the process of community development is very important.

This is because any community development effort would need some kind of external help and intervention, to supplement the efforts of the community members themselves.

Community leadership characteristics: This study found that leaders who demonstrate an outstanding characteristics to contribute to rural community development.

Influence: In reality, a leader's effective leadership and effective functioning lies in the way he uses his power to influence the behaviour of others, especially the people he leads (Stogdill, 1974). Hence, leadership is a process of influencing others to research with them. Influential leaders always on the ground, meet and ask about the problems faced by villagers and their influence will indirectly be stronger as they constantly communicate with the public. Some of the informants from among the local residents stated that they pay more attention and cooperation to their leader when the leader is always communicating and working with them. Thus, the community will show outstanding commitment to their leaders when a positive relationship exists and stronger leaders will be born as they have the support of the local community. Moreover, communication skills shape the character of an effective leader. This feature is also demonstrated by all of the J3K leaders in Kg Guntung Luar, Kg Kayu Kelat, Kg Rawai and Kg Guntong Luar.

These skills are evident through their commitment in the development efforts undertaken by the government in order to eradicate poverty. This is because they possess the ability to explain, deliver information and provide directions to influence the members of their community to accept development projects. As a result, the consistent information and guidance allow a very high level of awareness among members of the community to embrace change. The informants among community leaders also said they are not ashamed and afraid to get in touch with the relevant parties, especially in economic, social and infrastructures matters of their community.

Visionary: Warner believes that a successful leader, should be visionary and able to lead his followers in a transparent manner while creating an atmosphere that allows people themselves to follow the process of economic development. This process includes the ability to realise the vision to develop the village as well as demonstrate practiced principles, relationships and trust, cooperation, networking and understanding of strategy, charisma, sharing and teamwork. Inherently, the fundamental factor in the success of these villages is the local leaders who shown vision and an open mind. For example, community leaders in Kg Banggol Katong have a clear vision on how to bring development to their village. In this light, these leaders have positive minds and always willing to follow the wave of change. They are not only friendly but they are always looking for new ideas and they are also willing to help villagers improve their economic resources. Furthermore, some of the informants agreed that community leaders should not expect too much state aids but they should start developing their resources. Consequently, these leaders have succeeded due to their own efforts to grow and prosper. On the other hand, communities that only rely on the government hand-outs have been proven to not demonstrate the expected progress as their community leaders have failed to fulfil their responsibilities.

Commitment: According to Meyer *et al.* (2006) commitment can be observed through the positive impacts to the organisation and their willingness to sacrifice in order to achieve organisational goals, hence, to achieve development, strong commitment is needed from local leaders to bring development. J3K leaders in Kg Kayu Kelat, Kg Guntung Luar, Kg Rawai and Kg Guntong Luar have presented a very high commitment to the government effort in helping their community to develop.

They are earnestly working towards the success of programs run for the local communities and have high desire to succeed. This influenced the members of the group to support the goals set by the government. The informant explained that evokes pleasure to research persistently.

Skills and capabilities: Fiedler and Gracia (1987) described that a leader's leadership skills will determine the extent to which a person is able to operate and develop the vision, mission, goals and direction of the organisation. Therefore, J3K leaders must be selected based on their quality and ability to carry out their duties effectively. Based on the study conducted, the leaders elected in all of the four communities have demonstrated

the ability to lead their communities with distinctions of their achievements and records displayed. Their ability to supervise the programme by managing the people, holding committee meeting on a monthly basis and solving issues that are raised immediately have proved that they are able to become great leaders. However, their skills in handling some issues can be further enhanced. In this light, the government should provide a suitable platform to improve community leader's skills and to provide suitable channels to impart the right information to them. The government should also hold a leadership course or programme to improve J3K leadership skills more frequently to ensure that all rural community leaders are willing to face the challenge.

CONCLUSION

Rural communities in state of Terengganu has undergo changes. The development and progress in the rural areas, particularly in the state of Terengganu have shown positive outcomes due to the developmental efforts planned by the government. The success of this programme has been enjoyed by all walks of the society involved. The waves of development are seen as successful in narrowing the socio-economical gap between the rural and the urban areas. The movement transformation in the rural areas has made the rural areas developed, safe, comfortable and have equipped these areas with comprehensive facilities. In this light, the needs and priorities in the planning of rural development is one of the crucial measures being prioritised by the government in the effort of making the area special and unique.

The success of these rural development projects and programmes is headed by the community leaders which comprise of J3K leaders. They have played an excellent role in visualising the government's endeavour and executing the government's agenda. In general, the J3K leaders have given a good response for every changes planned by the government and become a good medium to channel the government's message to the public. In this light their role in spear-heading the waves of development is undeniable.

The J3K leaders in Kg. Guntung Luar, Kg Kayu Kelat, Kg Rawai and Kg Banggol Katong have played an excellent and effective roles in steering their community away from poverty and recession. They can be described as effective leaders as they are able to steer their village to succeed in various development programmes. Their active involvement is well received by the local community as their leadership styles enable them to influence the locals to get involved in the development process. Their strong influences over the local public have eased their attempts their role as rural development transformation agent. In this regard, it is easy to execute any development programme as there are unity and tolerance among the community leaders and the government. Such success is not an easy feat and it is a testament over how leadership can influence the execution of the government's development agenda.

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