

Community Empowerment through the Mykasih Entrepreneurship Program towards Urban Poverty Alleviation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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Abstract: *This paper presents the level of empowerment gained by the urban poor minorities of My Kasih program participants towards urban poverty alleviation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. My Kasih is one of the few Non-governmental Organization focused to combat urban poverty issues in the country. This study was conducted at Kuala Lumpur urban squatters concentrated destination in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Mixed method approach was used where the quantitative outcome was compared with the qualitative data. In-depth interview which was used as the qualitative data collection method helped the researchers to justify the quantitative analysis which was done earlier. Descriptive statistics were utilized to obtain quantitative output. The results show that the community is not fully empowered and they are still dependent on outsiders' help. It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to existing literature within urban poverty and socio-economic wellbeing spectrum.*

Keywords: *Urban poverty, empowerment, Malaysian Indian community, mixed-method*

I. INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is defined as "building that which links individual strengths and competencies, natural healing systems and proactive behaviour in matters affecting social policy and social change" (Zimmerman and Rappaport, 1988). Another article (Guillory and Galindo, 1995) explains that empowerment is related to the ability to implement something by either individuals, groups or organizations. It is a measure of the ability of products or services that are useful to others. Somers (1997) claimed that empowerment is preparation and opportunity to make decisions and take actions that directly affect customers. Empowerment is one of the key elements discussed in community development. Empowerment is the redistribution of decision-making to drive change and is required in community life. There are three dimensions of empowerment, namely: 1) the development of a more positive feel and strong sense of self, 2) construction of knowledge and the ability to more critical understanding of social and political realities of the network, and 3) Culturing the resources and strategies, or more functional competency, to achieve personal and collective goal (Lee, 2001).

Manuscript published on 30 January 2019.

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Numerous critiques of the problematic concept of empowerment have been published and suggested that rural researchers need to adopt a more critical approach to the concept and to be more explicit about the processes they claim have facilitated empowerment. Empowerment process involves the creation of an opportunity to build the skills used to influence others, to participate in organizational decision-making and action to affect social change (Hardina, 2006). According Sengupta (2008), empowerment is a dynamic process, the development of freedom of choice and action as well as the ability to influence the behaviour and social organization. However, it is difficult to achieve because we tend to extravagance of the concept. According Asnarulkhadi and Aref (2009), empowerment through participation is an ongoing process by which people develop and use their ability to take action on shared problems and to achieve the expected requirements in an effort to bring some changes to the lives of others.

II. METHOD

This study employs a mixed method approach where qualitative data is triangulated with quantitative data. Respondents of this study are the low income minority people of the squatters area of Kuala Lumpur. The respondents are selected on one criteria which is their official participation in MyKasih programme which is conducted by MyKasih Foundation. In-depth interview was used as the qualitative data elicitation method and survey is utilized for quantitative approach. In terms of data analysis, thematic analysis (qualitative) and descriptive statistics (quantitative) were utilized.

III. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The level of attainment of Community Empowerment is measured by analyzing three dimensions which are economic empowerment, political empowerment and psychological empowerment. Table 1 below shows the level of attainment of community empowerment according to the above mentioned dimensions which are economic empowerment, political empowerment and psychological empowerment.

Table 1: Level of Attainment of Community Empowerment Among MyKasih Participants

Empowerment	Indicators	M	SD
Economic empowerment	1) I can manage my own business without the help outside.	2.73	.507
	2) I have the ability to become a business owner rather than an employee.		
	3) I am able to conduct assessments and make recommendations to improve the MyKasih Entrepreneurship Program.		
Political empowerment	1) I'd rather be a leader than a follower.	2.77	.487
	2) I can lead my family without assistance from the government.	2.75	.551
	3) I will be the head of the community without relying on outside parties anymore.	2.32	.586
Psychological empowerment	1) I can lead my family without MyKasih's assistance in future.	.252	.592
	2) I am able to make decisions without relying on others.	2.78	.493
		2.82	.494

A. Economic Empowerment

The first indicator of this dimension which is the participants' ability to manage their own business with outside intervention recorded a mean value of 2.73 which indicates the participants are still dependent on the MyKasih Program facilitators to manage their business. Majority of the participants are slow to learn how to manage their business by themselves. The second indicator of this dimension which is the participants' ability to become a business owner rather than an employee scored a mean value of 2.72 which shows that they are also slow to transform themselves as effective entrepreneur. Although, the MyKasih Programme prepares their participants well to become successful entrepreneurs, they are still slow in making the transformation which could be related to psychological empowerment. Lastly, the third indicator of this assessment which is the participants being able to conduct assessments and making recommendations to improve the My Kasih Entrepreneurship Program recorded a mean value of 2.77 which denotes that through the MyKasih Program, the participants acquire the ability to assess and recommend measures to improve particular sections of the Program itself for the benefit of future participants.

Majority of the informants claimed that they could manage their own business without any outside intervention. They said that they rather be the owner of a business than a hired employee. They also claimed that they are able to conduct assessments and make appropriate recommendations to improve the MyKasih Entrepreneurship Programme.

"I rather become the owner of a business than an employee and I am confident that I can manage my own business without any assistance from others outside. I am able to conduct an assessment and make recommendations to improve the MyKasih Entrepreneurship Programme. I am confident that through participation in the MyKasih Entrepreneurship Programme I am able to manage my own business successfully without any outside intervention. However, I am not ready yet to conduct any assessment or make recommendations to improve the MyKasih Entrepreneurship Programme.

Now that I have better understanding, knowledge and skills, I can make my own decisions independently. I want to be an entrepreneur and not an employee anymore, I cannot do those assessments yet and neither can I make recommendations. Since, I am now able to make decisions on my own, I am sure that I can run my own business profitably. Furthermore, once I have become a business owner I do not think that I can go back to being a hired employee. Since I do not have sufficient knowledge and experience, I do not think I am able to conduct any assessment or make recommendations for improving the MyKasih Programme" (Informant 1, 45 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

"Like I said earlier, I know that my understanding, knowledge and skills for business have surely improved and with that I am able to make decisions independently especially in managing my business and I am not looking back after coming this far. I will always be a business owner, not an employee anymore. I cannot conduct assessments yet as I do not have the necessary expertise and neither can I make any recommendations for improving the MyKasih Programme. My understanding, knowledge and skills required for business have developed and that has given me enough confidence to make business decisions without any outside intervention. After this I do not think I could be an employee anymore. It should be a business owner. I am not able to conduct any assessments yet or make recommendations for improvement since I do not have the calibre." (Informant 6, 32 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

However, some of the respondents opined that they are still not too confident about managing business as they have not fully acquired the understanding, knowledge and skills required for doing so and as such they are not ready to become business owners. Similarly, they are not able to conduct assessments of any kind or make recommendations for improvement

“Since, I did not benefit much from this programme and my understanding of business, knowledge and skills have not improved very much, I cannot make a good business owner as I am not able to make decisions quickly. I will certainly, not be able to conduct assessments or make recommendations for improvement of the MyKasih Entrepreneur Programme” (Informant 7, 41 years old, Kuala Lumpur). “I am not so sure whether I can manage a business on my own since I did not really learn much from them. I know that I cannot make decisions independently since, my understanding, knowledge and skills for business have not developed sufficiently. I cannot conduct assessments or make recommendations for improvement of the MyKasih Entrepreneur Programme” (Informant 8, 50 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

Empowerment process outcome can able to provide platform for self-evaluation, independent managerial capacity and take pro-active action as preventive measure to face any shortcomings in future. The moment community empowerment process take place we can able is the transformation in terms of economic well-being and capacity building.

B. Political Empowerment

The first indicator of this dimension which is, the participants would rather be a leader than a follower which recorded a mean value of 2.75 denotes leadership plays a prominent role in any communal setting. This indicates a rather slow but healthy progression among the participants whereby they have the tendency to become leaders in their own community. The second indicator of this dimension which is the participants’ ability to lead their family without any assistance from the government scored a mean value of 2.32 denotes that despite all the exposure through the MyKasih Entrepreneurship Programme the participants are still dependent on the government for assistance to provide for their family and themselves. The third indicator of this dimension which is the participants’ ability to become the head of the community without relying on outside parties anymore that recorded a mean value of 2.52 denotes the Program participants still have a long way to go before becoming head of the community which could also be related to psychological empowerment.

Majority of the informants declared that they rather be leaders than followers because they would make good leaders due to their poor background. They claimed that they could not live without assistance from the government because they needed financial resources at least for now until they can sustain on their own. They also said that they cannot head the community without relying on outside help. “I would rather be a leader than a follower but to be a good leader we need to have sufficient resources especially finances and that is why we need assistance from the government. I can somehow manage my family without outside help but what about the community? I cannot be head of the community without relying on government assistance or outside parties. I am confident that I can make a good leader because I know the community well and understand their needs and wants. However, leaders have their own family too and who is going to provide for them? Which means that leaders must have the financial support

and if they are not financially independent then, it will have to come from outside sources such as the government. Since we are poor, the resources must come from the government. If the government does not take care of us, who will?” (Informant 2, 38 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

“I think being a leader is better than being a follower because it takes a lot of courage to be a leader since it is a heavy responsibility but then, what good is a leader without money. I can take care of my family on my own but how am I to take care of the community without resources? For that, we depend on the government and it is their duty to provide for the poor. I must say that having participated in the MyKasih Programme I can be a better leader because my knowledge and skills have improved so much and I can make better decisions. I think I can lead my family and give them a normal life without any outside help anymore but I cannot do the same for the community without any external assistance. To lead the community, I definitely need help from the government because it is not easy to manage without funds” (Informant 4, 48 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

However, one of the respondents opined that he is still not too confident about being a leader because he thinks he is not even able to lead his own family and is dependent on outside assistance and as such, he feels that he is incapable of leading the community. He also noted that his financial constraint would be a handicap for him to become a leader, unless of course there are some outside help from the relevant public authorities.

“Since, I am not even able to lead my own family and dependent on outside assistance I feel that I am incapable of leading the community. Furthermore, my financial constraint would be a handicap for me to become a good leader, unless of course there are some outside help from the government agencies” (Informant 7, 41 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

Good governance with effective policy implementation can able to alleviate urban poverty. Taking lead is a pivotal role in transforming the entire communities’ direction. Leadership by example is the key elements for effective governance and political empowerment will pave the directions for capacity building and economic well-being.

C. Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment is expected to give a boost to the morale of the MyKasih program participants whereby the participants would be able to transform their mental strength from low self-esteem to positive mental attitude.

The first indicator of this dimension which is, the participants being able to lead their family without any assistance from the MyKasih Program in future that scored a mean value of 2.78 denotes the participants are still not able to stand on their own completely. Lastly, the third indicator of this dimension which is, the participants being able to make decision without relying on others that recorded a mean value of 2.82 denotes the majority of the participants are psychologically unprepared to take matters into their own hands for fear of making mistakes.

This indicates a deficiency in self-confidence among the participants of MyKasih Entrepreneurship Program. Majority of the key informants claimed they are confident that in future they can lead their family without any assistance from the MyKasih Entrepreneur Programme and that they are able to make decisions without relying on others.

“I am confident that I can lead my family without any assistance from the MyKasih Entrepreneur Programme in the future because I am able to make decisions without relying on others. I am very sure that soon I will be able to lead my family without any assistance from the MyKasih Entrepreneur Programme. I can say this with confidence because I am able to make decisions without relying on others. I think in future when I am ready to make decisions without relying on others, I will be able to take care of my own family without any help from the MyKasih people. I think I can lead my family and give them a normal life without any outside help anymore from the MyKasih Entrepreneurship Programme facilitators in future since I am able to make decisions without depending on others.” (Informant 3, 51 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

“I am able to make decisions independently and I am capable of leading my family hereafter without any assistance from the MyKasih Entrepreneurship Programme facilitators. The MyKasih Entrepreneurship Programme has given me enough confidence to make decisions regarding my family’s future without any outside intervention and I know that I can take care of them now” (Informant 6, 32 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

However, one of the respondents confessed that he is still not confident that one day he will be able to lead his own family and is dependent on outside assistance because he is incapable of making decisions independently.

“Since, I know that I am not even confident enough and dependent on outside assistance, I will not be able to lead my own family one day because I am incapable of making decisions independently” (Respondent 7, 41 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

IV.FINDINGS

In this paper we discussed “Mental rehearsal and fine tuning is fundamental for socio economically low audience. We need to give them the confidence in order to battle the real challenges any economic activity. They must realise they can successful if they are ready to take up the challenges. Decision making skills will give them confidence to face the reality.

V.CONCLUSION

The perception of the community is often neglected by the authorities making the community feel that they are not empowered. The community agreed that the outsiders especially the government always discuss with the community before any implementation of projects. According to the respondents, the discussions are considered as mere routine for the officers to show respect to the residents. The final decision on development projects will eventually be taken by the government. If this goes on, the community will feel detached from any community development projects initiated by the government. Thus, the

government should not just consult the community simply to meet the administrative procedures. They should respect the community’s ideas and give them opportunities to make decisions. By doing this, the community can learn by themselves and improve their status.

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