

## **Governance and Youth Development: Experiences of the Village Development and Security Committees**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Youth is the main driving force of development. They should be given the opportunity to voice their opinions and engaged in policy making decisions. As one of the stakeholders, they need to be involved in governance at some levels of the nation's administration, not only to meet the needs of development in accordance with their wishes but also to prepare them as future leaders of the country. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the extent of the opportunity to engage youth in decision-making processes at the grassroots level of the Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK) and also the awareness of JKKK members on youth's involvement in decision-making. Data was gathered by distributing 752 questionnaires to JKKK in Peninsular Malaysia. Descriptive statistics were used to report on the findings. The findings show a moderate involvement of youth in JKKK and high levels of awareness among the respondents regarding the need for youth involvement in decision-making.*

**Keywords:** *governance, Village Development and Security Committee, youth, decision-making*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Currently, about half of the 30.7 million populations in Malaysia comprise of youth since the Youth Societies and Development Act 2007 defined youth as those between 15 to 40 years old. This youth bulge constitutes a challenge and opportunity for the nation's development. As an aspiring middle-income country with the vision of achieving developed nation's status in 2020, every person is an economic and social capital that must participate extensively to achieve the goal. Besides, involvement in governance activities will also help youth exercise their citizenship rights and duties while grooming them to become effective leaders.

The Village Development and Security Committee or JKKK, is a structure created by the Federal Government to improve the living standards and quality of life in the rural areas. As such, JKKK is considered as an agent of development at the grassroots level and acts as a liaison between the village community and government agencies. As the closest agent to the community, it is the easiest vehicle for youth to be involved in the decision-making process at the community level by being part of the committee member of JKKK or participating in activities held by JKKK. It is hoped that by interacting with adult experienced in decision-making and engaging in multitude of political, economic and social issues, youth will benefit by contributing ideas and solutions. Typically the committee comprises of six to fifteen members including the Chairman and Secretary.

The objective of this paper is to determine the extent of youth participation in the JKKK's governance structure and the awareness levels of the JKKK members on the need for youth involvement in decision-making.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The term governance has evolved as a new process of governing. The concern is to achieve efficiency through creating conditions for ordered rule and collective decision-making and action that includes the public and private sectors (Stoker, 1998). According to Peters and Pierre (1998), the goal of governance is to maintain public sector

resources under some political control while crafting strategies to sustain government's ability to act in the new and challenging decentralized managerial environment where decisions on resource allocation and service delivery are made nearer to the point of delivery.

According to Somerville (2011), governance aims to shape collectivities (interests, groups, localities) and represent them in different arenas. Shaping here has a broad context that includes participation by citizens and political entities to influence the form or content of a collectivity. Representation means any process where an individual or group of people acts on behalf of population.

“Good governance”, a normative concept that denotes the act of governance, can also be called collaborative governance since it brings about multiple stakeholders together formally in common forums with public agencies to participate in decision-making (Ansell & Gash, 2007). It implies that non-state actors or stakeholders will have real responsibility and opportunity to determine policy outcomes. These stakeholders; citizens or concerned parties or organized groups; must participate actively to develop and oversee the implementation of policies. Thus, good governance has principles such as participation, transparent decision-making process, the rule of law, responsiveness, accountability and effectiveness.

According to theorist Henrik Bang, the trend towards governance network is to bring officials and lay people together in policy formation that respond not on structures but on issues. By responding to one's own interest to take action, new political identities are developed into 'expert citizens' and 'everyday makers' (Bang, 2004). The best way to implement the principles of good governance is to apply it at the local level (Steden, Caem & Boutellier, 2011).

According to *The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond* (1997), the active engagement of youth in society and decision-making is crucial to their development (World Youth Report, 2003; Busseri, Rose-Krasnor, Willoughby & Chalmers, 2006; Vromen & Collin, 2010). Youth are entitled to express their views especially in matters pertaining to themselves and to be taken seriously. Scholars argue that the number of youth in decision-making structures must be increased to facilitate democracy and safeguard

the interest of young people (Harris, Wyn & Younes, 2007; Asante, 2012). Failure to recognize youth's contribution will impact their daily existence and may be ineffective to promote the well-being of a large segment of the population.

Previous studies found that youth became active participants in their community when they felt that they have good relationship with adult and they have a powerful voice in the decision-making (Borden & Serido, 2009). It is very important for the community to involve youth with the opportunities to become engage in their community and be part of the solution to problems and not the problem themselves. Individual youth and the community will benefit when youth are allowed to make decisions and take action for the betterment of community (Christens & Dolan, 2011). Furthermore, contact with high-resource or experienced adults will facilitate the exchange of information, skills and the transition to adult world (Sullivan & Larson, 2010). This experience will enhance youth development and promote sense of accomplishment (Lerner, 2002; Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger Messias & McLoughlin, 2006; Serido, Borden & Perkins, 2011; Blanchet-Cohen, Manolson & Shaw, 2014).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research uses quantitative approach. An exploratory survey technique using questionnaire has been adopted to investigate the awareness of the Village Development and Security Committees in Malaysia regarding the issue of youth development and governance. A number of 752 questionnaires were collected from the participants of JKKK trainings conducted from September to December 2014 by the Institute for Rural Advancement (INFRA), an institution established under the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***Profiles of Respondents***

From the 752 respondents of the Village Development and Security Committees, only 125 (16.6%) are in the youth category. The

respondents of the youth group are clustered between 31-40 years old (78.4%) and less in the 21-30 years old (17.6%). There were five respondents who are less than 21 years old. For the non-youth respondents, the distribution is as follows: 242 respondents (38.6%) are in the 41-50 years age group, 311 (49.6%) for the 51-60 years group and only 74 (11.8%) are 61 years old or more.

Table I shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents as youth and non-youth groups. The majority of respondents are males. There is a stipulation by the federal government that at least a member of the JKKK must be a female. Maybe this helps to garner the small representation of females as shown. The majority of non-youth respondents are JKKK's chairman while for the youth group the majority hold the post of Secretary. The others category includes vice-chairman, treasurer and member. The Chairman and Secretary of JKKK will receive monthly allowances while other members will only receive attendance allowances.

**Table 1:**

*Demography of Respondents*

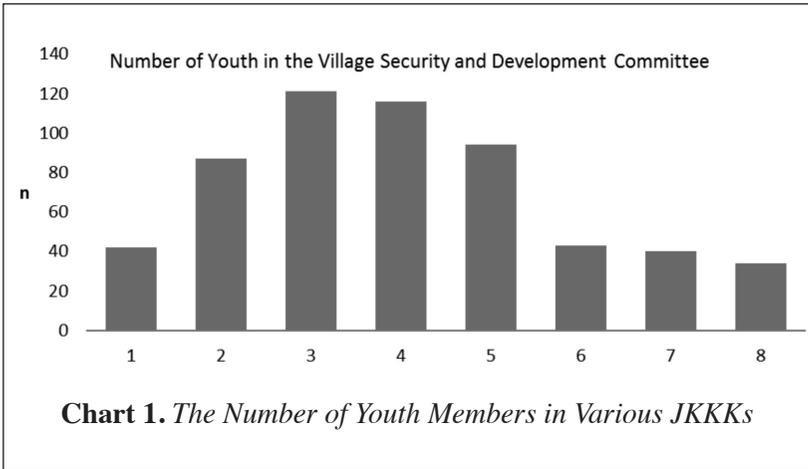
	JKKK Non-Youth Respondents		JKKK Youth Respondents	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	674	89.6	93	74.4
Female	78	10.4	32	25.6
<b>Designation</b>				
Chairman	390	62.2	30	24.0
Secretary	213	34.0	88	70.4
Others	24	3.8	7	5.6
<b>Experience</b>				
< 5 years	189	36.0	65	61.3
5 – 10 years	174	33.1	32	30.2
> than 10 years	162	30.9	9	8.5

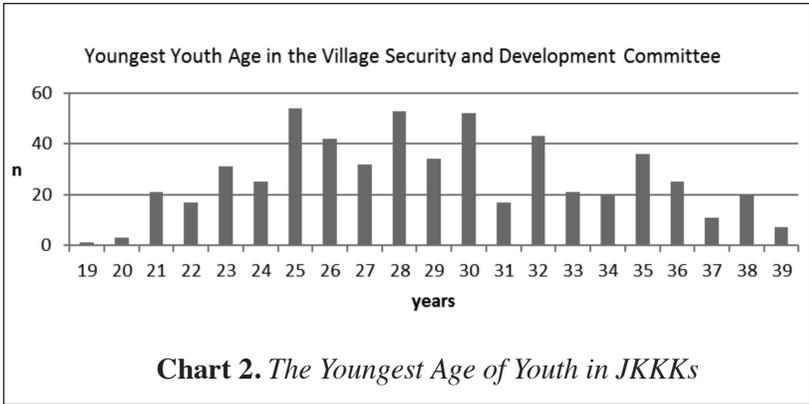
In addition, the majority of the youth group has only short-term experience as part of the JKKK while the distribution of the experience among the non-youth group is more balanced. Unsurprisingly, some enjoyed longer terms such as 20 to 25 years as a member or office bearer in the JKKK (n=48).

### ***Governance in the JKKK***

The respondents were asked about the total number of JKKK members in their communities. Although the answer varies from six to 25, more than 85% respondents stated that they have 15 members in their committee. According to the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, a JKKK must have a minimum of six members, inclusive of Chairman, Vice-chairman, Secretary and at least three other members. As to the number of youth members, the answer varies from one to 15. The chart below shows the distribution of youth members in JKKKs is clustered around two to five person for most of the JKKKs.

In addition, the age of the youngest youth member varies from 19 to 39 years old. It could be seen from Chart 2 that many JKKK appointed young adults between the ages of 25 to 30 years (n=267) but a significant number appointed those aged 31 years or more (n=200). Only a few JKKK has young members less than 25 years old (n=98).





**Table 2:**

*Governance Issues of JKKKs*

Question	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Q1. Do youth hold the post of Chairman/Vice-Chairman in your JKKK?	160	21	592	79
Q2. Do youth hold the post of Secretary/Treasurer in your JKKK?	332	44	419	56
Q3. Is there a regulation to make the youth participation compulsory in your JKKK?	230	31	522	69
Q4. Is youth the majority in your JKKK?	173	23	579	77
Q5. Youth participation in JKKK can help increase the effectiveness of JKKK's activities?	659	88	93	12

The respondents' answers to various questions on governance of the JKKK can be seen from Table 2. From question one, it is obvious that the leadership of JKKK is controlled by non-youth since only one fifth of the JKKKs are led by youth. However, the position of Secretary/Treasurer held by youth and non-youth are almost balanced. Although no evidence was found regarding the mandate to enforce

youth participation as JKKK member, an interview with an officer of the Ministry of Rural and Regional development confirmed the ruling (Hamidi Zakaria, personal communication, 24 April 2014). However, it seems that most JKKK members and officials are not aware of this regulation since the majority responded negatively to the question (Q3). Surprisingly, about a fifth of the respondents acknowledged that the membership of their JKKK is widely held by youth rather than non-youth. The findings also show that an overwhelming majority of the respondents agreed that having youth members in the JKKK have an impact of improving the effectiveness of the activities implemented.

### ***Governance and Youth Development***

There are eight purposes of youth development as stated by the Youth Societies and Youth Development Act 2007 (YSYDA 2007), i.e. (i) youth knowledge development, (ii) youth attitude development, (iii) youth leadership and organisational development, (iv) youth vocational and entrepreneurial development, (v) inculcation of a healthy lifestyle in youth, (vi) facilities for social interaction for the youth, (vii) youth partnership in development and (viii) international relations and networking amongst the youth. Youth participation in JKKK that acts as a liaison agent between the community and the government would enable them to achieve a few of these goals including developing good attitudes, promoting leadership and social skills, empowering youth as partners in development through collaborative decision-making and programs implementations. This effort will not materialised if all stakeholders; youth, other members of the society, government machinery; are not in awareness or agreement with the objectives and do not work together to achieved them.

The awareness of the JKKK respondents of the role of JKKK as the local or grassroots governance structure was solicited through various questions. The majority of respondents from both groups know that youth must be involved in making decisions about economic issues for the purpose of youth development as shown by Table 3. The respondents were also asked about their involvement in decision-making processes at different levels. According to the youth group, they are more involved in decision-making about economic matters at the village level (84.8%) compared to district (49.6%), state (33.6%) or national (32%) levels.

**Table 3:***Youth Must Be Involved in Economic Decision-Making*

		Youth		Non-Youth	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	1.6	10	1.6
	Disagree	1	.8	18	2.9
	Not sure	4	3.2	25	4.0
	Agree	69	55.2	420	67.0
	Strongly agree	49	39.2	154	24.6
Mean		4.3		4.1	
S.D.		.719		.731	

Besides knowledge of youth's involvement in making decisions on economic issues, respondents were also queried about awareness of the necessity of youth's involvement in making decisions about social issues for the sake of youth development. The majority for both group expressed agreement with the statement (Table 4). When asked regarding actual experience, 113 (90.4%) of the youth group confirmed their involvement in the decision-making process of social issues at the village level. The number continue to decline when only 57.6% of the youth respondents were involved in decision-making regarding social matters at the district level, 41.5% at state level and 36.8% at national level.

The study is also interested to determine whether opportunities provided for youth to be involved in governance is sufficient. Based on Table 5, the findings shows that both groups agreed that the government has provided sufficient opportunities for youth to be able to participate in various decision-making processes regarding youth development. However, the non-youth group expressed higher agreement compared to the youth group. More than a quarter of the youth group (26%) answered negatively or not sure to the statement. This may be due to dissatisfaction or ignorance of the various opportunities provided and the issue must be deal with.

**Table 4:****Youth Must Be Involved in Decision-Making about Social Issues**

		Youth		Non-Youth	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Valid	Strongly disagree			2	.3
	Disagree	3	2.4	14	2.2
	Not sure	8	6.4	44	7.0
	Agree	64	51.2	399	63.6
	Strongly agree	50	40.0	168	26.8
	Mean	4.29		4.14	
	S.D.	.693		.660	

**Table 5:***Sufficient Opportunities from the Government for Youth Involvement In Decision-Making about Youth Development*

		Youth		Non-Youth	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	1.6	7	1.1
	Disagree	8	6.4	25	4.0
	Not sure	23	18.4	78	12.4
	Agree	68	54.4	381	60.8
	Strongly agree	24	19.2	136	21.7
	Mean	3.83		3.98	
	S.D.	.868		.776	

Besides the government, non-governmental organisations such as clubs, societies, voluntary, not-for profit or welfare organisations

set up by a group of citizens could also facilitate the governance agenda. NGOs are diverse groups with involvement in a wide-range of activities at local, national or international arena. This means NGOs could provide avenues for the ordinary citizens to be involved in decision-making on many aspects of life. When asked about the opportunities provided by NGOs for youth involvement in decision-making, both groups are in agreement as shown by Table 6. However, the result shows a lower mean for both groups compared to the question about opportunities provided by government. Only 67.2% of the youth group agree to the opportunities provided by NGOs compare to 73.6% agreement to the opportunities provided by the government. The trend is identical with the non-youth group. A total of 82.5% of the non-youth respondents agree with the opportunities provided by government but only 76.5% agree to the opportunities for youth decision-making provided by NGOs.

**Table 6:**

*NGOs Opportunities for Youth Involvement in Youth Development Decision-Making*

		Youth		Non-Youth	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Valid	Strongly disagree			5	.8
	Disagree	12	9.6	26	4.1
	Not sure	29	23.2	116	18.5
	Agree	58	46.4	380	60.6
	Strongly agree	26	20.8	100	15.9
	Mean	3.78		3.87	
	S.D.	.885		.752	

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Youth are under-represented in the governance of JKKK. It is timely for the federal government to establish the rule of membership of the

JKKK. Mandating the participation of youth in JKKK is not enough. They must represent the demography of the community. As such, at least 30 to 40% of the JKKK must constitute of youth. It has been argued that only an increase in the number of youth representatives in decision-making structures would improve in youth-related policies and ensure that the interest of youth will be better represented (Gyampo, 2015). In addition, the small representation of youth in some JKKKs would enable them to articulate some issues but they lacked the power of size to make significant impact (Faulkner, 2009).

Involving youth to partake in local decision-making has far-reaching implications for community capacity and civil society (Checkoway, Allison & Montoya, 2005). However, the skewed demographic of the youth members in the JKKK could diminish the effectiveness of harnessing the full potential of youth. Only few young adult has the opportunity to be part of JKKK. This means the youngest segment of youth i.e. those from 15 to 18 were excluded from the governance sphere and are unable to express their concerns. Many people; politician, bureaucrats, community leaders; are not convinced of the need to harness the involvement of young adults to garner inputs on strategies and actions to achieve better policy outcomes. Thus, denying the young youth the experience and representation they need (World Youth Report, 2003). Since the definition of youth in Malaysia represents a large and varied group, there is a critical need to have representatives from the young youth segment so that they do not feel socially isolated (Frank, 2006).

To successfully achieve the purposes of Youth Societies and Youth Development Act 2007 for youth's development, it is important that non-youth such as members of JKKK and other members of the community work closely in unity with youth. The challenges of today's political, economic and social issues are vastly different and very complex compared to two decades ago. Furthermore, the preferences and needs of youth are different than non-youth. Youth involvement in the decision-making process will not only empower them but also build leadership skills and develop leaders (Christen & Dolan, 2011). However, the success of this endeavour will also depend on other actors in the JKKK (namely non-youth resource person with power or authority) to help forge meaningful relationship, trust and

respect (Sullivan & Larson, 2010; Krauss, Collura, Zeldin, Ortega, Abdullah & Sulaiman, 2013). Without the commitment and support of non-youth members in JKKK, the voice of the youth members will lack influence and will be ineffective.

It is an encouraging sign when the majority of JKKK members are aware of the importance of youth involvement in decision-making processes. Nevertheless, even though only minorities (less 10%) of both groups expressed doubts and uncertainties regarding the role of youth in economic and social decision-making, the issue must be tackled urgently since the respondents represent an important segment of the local communities. If being part of the local governance does not help them understand the urgency to develop youth potential, then the achievement of the YSYDA 2007 goals could be compromised. It must also be noted that unlike most countries, youth defined in Malaysia is a large and diverse group equipped to participate in governance at all levels.

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