

## THE LOCAL LEADERS STRATEGY TO EMPOWERING RURAL YOUTH IN MALAYSIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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**Abstract.** Future success and excellence depend on the ability of today's youth in building their personality, knowledge acquisition, skill building and excellent leadership. The government's effort to empower the youths require commitment and support from the local authorities to ensure that they can contribute to the society. This research was local conducted in 4 rural communities in Terengganu to examine the extents of the authorities' direct and indirect support to the youths. The study has adopted qualitative observation with the phenomenology approach which is deemed suitable to the issue under study. Interviews, observation and document analysis were conducted to obtain the relevant information. 60 respondents were directly involved in this research, they are the chairperson for the Village Development and Safety Committee (MPKK), MPKK committee members, chairperson of the local youth association, local youth, officers from government agencies and local residents. The data for research were analysed using the ATLAS.ti software. The study findings show that strong community leadership can provide support in every angle to ensure the success of the local youths. Furthermore, they are able to help the youth face challenges and focus on achieving success.

**Key words:** qualitative study, rural community, leadership, empowering youth.

**Introduction.** Malaysian youths are the major stakeholders of the country. They are the most important human capital assets in Malaysia's efforts to achieve its aspiration to become a developed nation. The contributions of youths to the national development should be taken seriously and they should be considered as an ally with great potential in the development of a region and the nation in general [1]. Undoubtedly, the presence of youths is an important determinant of Malaysia's efforts in achieving its aspiration to become a developed nation which is driven by an innovation-based revolutionary economy. In this regard, various strategies should be employed to ensure that the programs and activities being carried out can uncover the potential and the talents of youths, as well as to encourage more youths to be engaged in enrichment activities such as the Malaysian youth development program, encouraging the establishment of youth associations and so on. All of these are intended to fill the gaps of knowledge, skills required by the youths.

In regard to the government's efforts to develop the potential of youths, in [2] explained that empowerment requires a new strategy and approach to increase the socialization of the youths in the local communities. One of these approaches include making youths accountable in the local community so that they can play a more significant role in their community. In [3] mentioned that youth development program should be planned based the local needs and demands. In this light, local leaders play a challenging roles as the main driver in expanding the potential of every youth and prepare them to become future leads leaders. This raise questions on whether the local leaders are helping the youth in their community.

Unfortunately, the potential of youths, especially in the rural areas, is not appreciated by leaders and local residents [4]. In fact, most youths in the rural areas are excluded from local development programs. Recognizing this, village leaders with the aspiration to succeed should realize that every youth has great potential in their respective area of interests and this can be used as a catalyst to accelerate the development process. If the local leaders put their trusts on the youths, they will bring strong ideas, energy and characters [5]. Consequently, leaders should help youths to build their confidence and develop their potential to contribute towards the development of the nation.

However, the main question which is the main focus for this study is how the MPKK leadership could help the youths in the locality to increase the function, potential and skills among the youths. Furthermore, this study also focuses on the actions taken by the community leaders (MPKK) to empower the youths, especially in the rural in line with the government's aspiration. The study will explore the role played by rural community leaders in empowering youths in their areas.

**Literature review.** The village development and safety committee or MPKK is a leadership institution in the village level which was established as part of the government's efforts to develop the rural areas. The establishment of MPKK aims to develop a space and provide opportunities for the locals to be involved in the development in the village level. MPKK is a body which acts as an agent of change and is an important medium between the government and the villagers [6]. MPKK leadership in the village also support the efforts to increase the opportunities given to the participation local residents in community and economic activities conducted by the MPKK leader and the government with the local existing local resources for the benefit of the villagers through efficient communication process.

Efficient communication practiced by the MPKK leadership in the village enables MPKK to act as an agent of change in the grassroots level, as the medium in the process of information exchanges between the government and the villagers, as a catalyst for development and as successful managers of villagers who can strengthen the bond between the villagers and establish a harmonious collaborative environment with the government [7]. This community development concept refers to the social process involving the government's and the local' endeavour to improve the community economics, social and cultural livelihood to improve the community position in line with the country's and

enable the community to fully contribute to the country's development. The establishment of MPKK is part of the government development mechanism in rural areas. This is related to the assumption that the accomplishment of developmental goal depends on a productive and functioning organisation [8]. On the other hand, the MPKK leader might not be able to fulfil the specified roles and responsibilities if they lack dynamism, selfishness, dishonesty, lack of commitment, lack of knowledge, and lack of cooperation with other organisations could jeopardise the MPKK capability as the catalyst for rural development [9]. In this regard, the MPKK is an important leadership institution in the grass root level which is the foremost contributor for rural development.

In [1] claimed that most community members are aware that youths are the catalyst for a country's progress. In this regard, they represent the reality of the future society as the community's belief system, values, attitudes and behaviour will be influenced by them. Youths are also expected to be capable of determining future trends in the development of the society and the nation. Furthermore, youths play an inherent role in country's development [10] one of these responsibilities is to pass down the cultural heritages, social norms and political affiliation to the future generation [11]. Consequently, youths are perceived as the backbone of social development, human capital development, and socio-economic activities [4]. This indicates that scholars are aware of youth's role in the development of the community. In this light, [4, 11], explained that youths play significant roles in leadership and community activities, for instance, making crucial decision in developing a work plan, arranging meeting and executing community projects. This indicates the crucial role played that youth. In [12] mentioned that youth participation can bring positive changes to the behaviours and attitudes in addition to bringing positive benefits to the community.

**Methodology.** This study was conducted using qualitative method with phenomenological approach. This study aims to evaluate of MPKK leaders supports towards youths either through youth or individual associations. The qualitative research method was implemented as it is believed to assist researchers to obtain more in-depth, accurate, clearer data to help researchers understand phenomena that occur in the real context and help answer the issues raised earlier in this article. In this study, 4 communities in the state of Terengganu were chosen as the location of the study. Selection of this study area is based on the objectives stated earlier. In fact, the selection of 4 outstanding communities in the state of Terengganu is in line with the wishes of the study which wish to assess in depth how the support of local leaders helped in empowering the youth especially in rural areas.

Data obtained in this study is through data collection techniques such as interview methods, observation methods and also analysis of some documents provided by informants. The use of different data collection techniques has been advantageous to this study as the triangulation technique is seen as more reliable data sources and researchers are able to evaluate and compare the data obtained during the study. Interviews were conducted on MPKK chairmen acting as community leaders, MPKK members, youth associations, youth, locals as well as officials from government and private agencies. A total of 60 informants have been involved and directly cooperated. Interviews were conducted on community leaders as well as local communities covering daily activities, leader roles, leadership styles used as well as methods of managing community affairs such as meetings, meetings as well as relationships between local communities and related external agencies. In this study, researchers have identified appropriate respondents to explain the raised questions. In addition, researchers have used technical analysis by analysing relevant documents. The researchers have evaluated some relevant documents that they think fit and can be proof. After data is collected, and compiled then analysed using the ATLAS.ti software. The software helps researchers to organise, analyse and create relationships among themes with themes.

**Results and discussion.** The results of the surveys and interviews conducted with MPKK chairmen, MPKK members and youths in 4 rural communities in the state of Terengganu show that the role of MPKK in assisting the youth through the association is significant with the achievement of youths in the study area. In fact, the results have shown that a successful MPKK leader does not exclude the contributions and capabilities of youth in their respective areas in assisting the local leadership from economic, social, educational and political aspects. They ensure that youth become a key driver in a development activity that is being held. The findings show that MPKK leaders play a role in assisting the youth as follows.

#### **Liaison between youth and relevant parties**

Youths need to support the leaders to building networks with external parties, including government and private agencies. Good community leaders are the ones who will help create such network. As observed in the study area, the MPKK leaders are directly involved in activities involving this group either in meetings and programmes. This is important to provide long-term support gives moral and motivation to them. In fact, the presence of local leaders shows their concern about the development process, especially the development of youth in their area. Informed young people interviewed have stated that their leaders have helped them with the help of donors, funds and support from outsiders, particularly in providing financial and training supports and helping them to communicate with stakeholders. Good cooperation and understanding between youth and local leaders in the study area foster positive relationships that make it easier for development processes to be organised smoothly. Here, in Studies area, local leaders and youth are active in building collaboration. (Fig. 1).

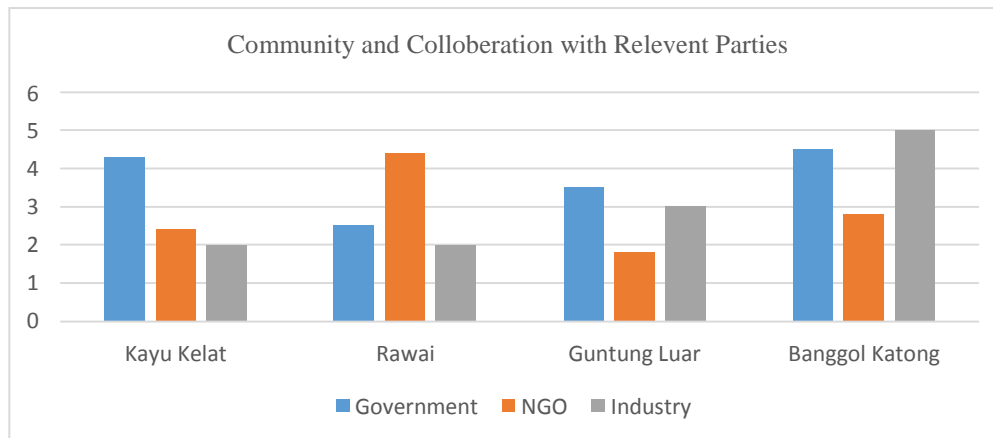


Fig. 1. The community collaboration among relevant parties

### Providing opportunities for responsibility

Youth advocates have long believed, and recent research has confirmed, that youth thrive when provided with developmentally appropriate opportunities for responsibility, leadership, initiative, and agency [13]. The previous approach focuses only on adults or parents who make decisions, discharging the responsibilities of holding programs and the only follow-up youth have passed [3]. Now, youths need to be mandated to join the decision-making process within a community [11]. Instead, these approaches recognise youths as major stakeholders in society as they possess knowledge, skills and ideas that make them important actors in developing prosperous communities [14].

In fact, youth are often defined as young people who will inherit the country's leadership in the future [15]. Hence, youth should think about the responsibilities and roles they will bear and bear in the future. Given the obstacles that the current leaders of the country need to face are challenging, of course, the challenges that youths will face as they inherit the country's legacy.

Table. 1. Number of youth appointed as MPKK members

Community (Village)	Total Youth as Members	Total of MPKK Members
Kayu Kelat	3	15
Rawai	5	15
Guntung Luar	4	15
Banggol Katong	6	15

In one of the study sites, for example, more than 3 people/ youths have been appointed as members of the Village Development and Safety Committee (MPKK member). This projects a clear message that the presence of youths is needed in the current development of the village especially in rural areas. Their presence in this committee shows that youths are appreciated by local leaders. In some places in the village, youths are marginalised by local leaders. In fact, they see the presence of youths as immature and inexperienced. This misconception needs to be improved, as according to [10], youths are the prime mover in ensuring the development of an area of the community and the Malaysian government also encourages youths to be active in their respective areas. The action taken by the Kg Kayu Kelat leadership, Kg Guntung Luar is very good where youths should be given the opportunity to be involved in the affairs and administration of an organisation or a society.

### Youth empowerment

Recognising that youths are the ones who will steer the nation's future, local leaders in Kg Rawai and Kg Banggol Katong always strive to support them by providing skills and leadership training. These exercises include entrepreneurial training such as TUBE programs, and leadership programmes, such as self-management activities organised by the MPKK. In fact, previous research has shown that youth development programmes are increasingly focusing on youth empowerment and leadership, indicating a shift which often requires local leader and community to adopt new roles and practices [16]. In the study area, youth-adult sharing has succeeded in nurturing opportunities for youth and adults to get new ideas from youth. In this light, there is a need to work democratically over a period of time to deal with common issues. Similarly, youth-led initiatives provide youth with the opportunity to determine the concerns they want to go and to work towards the goals that they have been describing for themselves.

This presents a local leadership initiative to ensure that every citizen in their area fully benefit from this initiative. In this regard, without the initiative and support of the MPKK leadership, these youths are seen as inactive and could be involved in social problems. This kind of support is what the government expects from local leaders and MPKK, where they strive to help and pay attention to this group. Their authority and leadership skill should be utilised to ensure that youth, communities and countries benefit from it.

### Enhancing social capital

Youths are significant to the development of an area [5, 15]. The presence of youths in rural areas is acknowledged as to help increase productivity in the study area [17]. The interviews and observations in 4 outstanding communities in Terengganu have highlighted that local leadership should initiate measures to strengthen the participation of youths in their respective areas, as optimum youth participation ensures better rural development. Their energy, voice and ideas should not be marginalised, rather, they should be a guide in developing youth communities in their respective areas. In Kayu Kelat, for instance, various programmes and activities have been organised to facilitate youth development in the area.

Consequently, the programmes have been successful in increasing patriotism among youths in the area. These programmes include establishing voluntary patrol squad for youth to encourage youth to join the voluntary security services (RELA). In fact, the MPKK leaders in the area of study have succeeded in creating awareness among the youths on the negative aspects and values that should be avoided. The MPKK leaders have also collaborated with the police force to reduce social problems in their area. In this light, in order to reduce the problem among youths, the local leaders provide support for the programme conducted by the youth, as well as conducting programmes catered for them. Each of these programmes provide information about the culture, environment, sports, health, spirituality and social welfare

**Conclusion.** Youths nowadays have the great role and responsibility in generating development, promoting to empower their religion, race and the nation. Apart from contributing ideas, time and energy to create a higher level of achievement compared to previous leaders, youths are also required to build and develop their self-identity in terms of their morality, knowledge, personality, religious faith and piousness, worship to god, spiritual and physical attributes so that they can demonstrate a wholesome lifestyle that can become a good example to others. In this regard, there is a need to prioritise the development of highly capable youths in the country's development agenda as they are the ones who will inherit and lead the nation in the future. The human resource development as promoted by the government to be executed whole-heartedly by all parties. The lack of high enthusiasm may become a barrier in creating the next generation that is capable to face future challenges. Better and more excellent future success is highly dependent on today's generation ability for knowledge and skill acquisition and excellent leadership.

Besides that, youths could be an agent which can guide the community towards excellence and prosperity. Inherently, they need guidance from the older generation, however, at the same time, they also need to educate and guide themselves independently. They need to have internal aspiration to become leaders who are accountable for themselves, their peers, family and their race, religion and country. MPKK comprises of local leadership which has the closest connection to the youths. They play a significant role as the main the resources for the youths. In this regard, all of the activities and all youth related programmes conducted in the village and in the local level will be supervised directly by the MPKK. The MPKK is also responsible in collaborating and connecting the youth and act as a medium between the government and youths in the rural area. Thus, the MPKK should have the sufficient and up-to-date information and knowledge.

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