Article

Exploring Sustainability in Social Welfare Non-Governmental Organisations

Ruzaini Ijon[1,2,*], Azlinda Azman[2] & Paramjit Singh Jamir Singh[2]

[1]Department of General Studies, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, 16300 Bachok, Kelantan, Malaysia
[2]Social Work Programme, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Minden, Penang, Malaysia

[*]Corresponding Author: ruzaini@umk.edu.my

Abstract: Non-governmental organisations are acknowledged for their contributions by playing a vital role in promoting social justice and human rights, advocating for marginalised groups, and empowering them to voice their concerns. NGOs collaborate with both the government and private sector. NGOs enable communities to engage in decision-making processes. Additionally, they often work on the ground, providing direct support and resources to communities in need, thereby addressing immediate needs and working towards long-term solutions. They are critical in achieving sustainable development goals, like improving health and eradicating poverty. Despite the advantages, there is uncertainty because aspects of their sustainability have yet to be thoroughly studied, especially in the Malaysian context. This study was therefore carried out to evaluate the study objectives and determine whether the interview questions were appropriate. This study used an entirely qualitative method. Two staff members from one social welfare NGO were interviewed. The results reveal that the interview questions were appropriate for the study objectives, with some corrections needed. The corrections required were primarily in the wording and clarity of the questions, but overall, the qualitative method effectively gathered relevant information from the staff.

Keywords: Non-governmental organisations; voluntary welfare organisations; sustainable services; financial viability; sustainability

Introduction

NGOs that work towards improving the well-being and quality of life of individuals and communities. They address social issues such as poverty, inequality, healthcare, education, and other basic needs. These NGOs often provide services, support, and resources to vulnerable and disadvantaged populations, advocating for their rights and working towards social justice (Wathen, 2020). NGOs' development initiatives in developing countries have played a significant role in social welfare. The perception of social welfare has shifted from being solely a necessity to being regarded as a fundamental right. Their efforts in promoting social welfare have been acknowledged through their roles as advocates for the impoverished, providers of alternative development strategies, and facilitators of widespread engagement. Furthermore, they have been characterised as economically advantageous and effective in providing social goods and services (DeLuca-Acconi, 2017; Kenzhetayeva & Aliyeva, 2022; Amagoh, 2015).

NGOs can facilitate social inclusion by empowering and mobilising the community. The significance of NGOs in generating social value is well acknowledged. NGOs progressively assume control over the implementation of social services and deserve praise for their flexibility as change agents because they can respond to the needs of civil society without interference from bureaucratic governmental structures. They

engage in all aspects of society, from delivering services to shaping policies, which encompasses overseeing governmental and private sector activities. In addition, NGOs act as a collective representation of the community, enabling active participation in decision-making that impacts their welfare and aspirations in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Malaysia is home to various NGOs, each characterised by distinct origins and complex organisational frameworks. The Malaysian government provides social services to fulfil basic needs. NGOs oversee and address public concerns and serve marginalised communities. The country's progress depends on the government, NGOs, and the business sector working together to ensure long-lasting growth that benefits the entire population. NGOs are essential in local communities as they possess the expertise and skills to provide necessary services. NGOs must continue to exist and play an active role in the society. In Malaysia, NGOs must ensure their capacity to implement their programmes and maintain the viability of their organisations. Although NGO studies have been conducted on various topics, their constraints arise due to differences in their historical development, organisational structure, activities, and the population they serve. This paper aims to highlight NGOs' crucial role in filling gaps in social services and advocating for policy changes to address systemic issues. The qualitative method used in this study allowed for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perspectives of social welfare NGO (SWNGO) staff, providing valuable insights into their work, namely the challenges faced by their organisations and the strategies they employ to address them. By interviewing staff members from one SWNGO, the study sought to identify patterns in these challenges and strategies. Another goal of this study was to improve the interview questions given to participants. We investigated three primary areas by focusing on research questions. These were:

i. Sustainable aspects of services. (e.g., What are sustainable practices based on your experience in this organisation?
ii. Challenges in ensuring the sustainability of services. (e.g., What are the challenges for this organisation in delivering services for target groups?
iii. Strategies to ensure the sustainability of services. (e.g., What strategies have been taken to ensure the sustainability of client services?

Literature Review

NGOs face numerous challenges, including defining tasks and services that align with specific objectives, determining realistic output quantities and costs, evaluating fundraising methods, maintaining timely payments, and conducting social welfare service audits. Partnerships with relevant agencies are crucial for addressing limited resources, high staff turnover, and new service needs (Maboya & McKay, 2019). Unpredictable funding policies can impact NGOs and service recipients, and there needs to be more recognition of the value NGOs can bring to specific settings and regions. Clear funding guidelines, institutional capacity, resources, and poorly managed funds from donors further complicate the challenges. Lack of familiarity with government policies, good governance, effective management, and competition between NGOs contribute to the complex landscape in which they operate, hindering their development and improvement of services. (Farouk & Wing, 2019). Furthermore, a study by Mafa and Kang'ethe (2020) indicated that most NGOs' operations encountered significant financial difficulties and a lack of resources. Financial constraints significantly impacted their operations and programmes, as they could lead to the layoff of several employees to reduce administrative expenses.

Leadership plays a significant role in shaping the strategic direction of NGOs. Influential leaders can provide direction, inspire staff, mobilise resources, and promote shared values, all of which are crucial in determining the strategic direction of an organisation (Hailey, 2006; Bartram et al., 2017). However, there are concerns about certain leadership styles, such as paternalistic founder leaders or charismatic autocrats, who may dominate organisations, be unaccountable, and fail to adapt to changing circumstances. Despite these concerns, research suggests that good leadership is significant in the NGO sector (Hailey, 2006).

Some researchers noted the importance of cooperation and partnerships in achieving social missions. Social welfare NGOs (SWNGOs) partner with government bodies, civil society organisations, businesses, trade unions, and the media. Conferences, roundtables, surveys, and awareness campaigns are just a few

initiatives and gatherings that foster social partnerships. This cooperation and collaboration aim to address social problems and promote all-round social development (Waniak-Michalak, 2014).

The key benefits of cooperation and partnership between SWNGOs include increased social capital, improved social networking and sharing of mutual benefits, collective action, leadership development, and income generation. These partnerships can also lead to increased community awareness, problem assessment capacities, participation, and the mobilisation of local resources. NGOs can ensure the active involvement of their members in carrying out their objectives by fostering self-reliance and sustainability, building linkages with grassroots organisations, and involving local partners in programme design and implementation. They should also limit their roles to support and facilitation, allowing citizens to dictate the agenda and evolve civil society or organisations that suit their contexts and concerns. NGOs should prioritise participatory design and implementation, align their practices with local realities, and promote bottom-up learning. Additionally, NGOs should establish closer proximity to disadvantaged groups and communities to facilitate grassroots participation (David & Banks, 2012).

NGOs are crucial and irreplaceable in guaranteeing the sustainable provision of services in areas with limited resources. They focus on doing things that are good for the environment, giving community members power, working with different groups, closely watching and judging their effects, and supporting policies that support long-term goals. These are vital for helping local skills grow, providing appropriate services for different cultures, and ultimately improving these communities in the long run. In summary, it can be stated that a consensus regarding the definition of sustainability needs to be improved among NGOs and that there is no universally accepted definition of the term (Fifka et al., 2016).

Research Design
This study employed a case study as preliminary research. Due to the lack of extensive research on the subject, particularly in a local setting, we used a qualitative case study methodology as a research framework to thoroughly and comprehensively investigate individual experiences inside the relevant organisations (Yin, 2017). The study employed qualitative methods, namely in-depth interviews, to fully comprehend the various obstacles encountered within organisations. Prior studies have used qualitative methodologies, including structured, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews, to gather study data. The studies conducted by Bromideh (2011), Wesarat et al. (2013), Akatay et al. (2017), Mpofu & Govender (2022), Zaharrudin & Zakaria (2021) and Zaharrudin & Zakaria (2022) utilised qualitative interviews to investigate, comprehend, and obtain valuable insights from the practical standpoint of the organisations under study.

1. Sample
The sample included two informants, consisting of staff members from the same SWNGO, who were selected based on purposive sampling. This SWNGO was selected from the list the Social Welfare Department of Penang provided. The sample for the study was selected from Penang State. The two informants were the chairman and vice chairman of the selected SWNGO. Their organisation has been in operation for more than five years. This study was conducted at the informants' residence, and they completed an informed consent form to participate in this study. The informants, the chairman and vice chairman, were willing to participate and completed an informed consent form. The chairman, Sarimah, founded PSK1 and is a senior citizen with prior experience as an educator. The vice chairman, Hasmah, is a businesswoman passionate about charity work and has been involved with PSK1 since 2013.

2. Data Collection
The data was gathered through individual interviews using open-ended questions. Open-ended questions typically prompt participants to explain their life experiences in more detail and often offer diverse and extensive responses. The interviews were carried out in two stages. The first stage involved outlining the study's objectives, describing ethical considerations, and inquiring whether participants would be willing to fill out an informed consent form to confirm their voluntary participation in the interview sessions until the end of the study. During the second stage of our interviews, our main goal was to gain a more comprehensive

understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences related to our research topic. To achieve this, we explored specific themes and collected detailed information from the participants. This approach allowed us to gain a deeper insight into the nuances of their viewpoints and experiences. To ensure that the participants felt comfortable and could provide honest responses, we assured them of their anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study. We aimed to create a secure environment where participants could share their thoughts and feelings without fearing judgment or negative consequences. We took great care to maintain the participants' privacy and to ensure that their identities would not be revealed in any way.

3. Data Analysis
The informants were free to say as much or as little as they wished, and the researcher did not impose his ideas. The interviews were 45 to 90 minutes long and were digitally recorded. The interview transcripts were compiled and coded by the researcher. We used the thematic analysis method, and information from the data was analysed through several coding methods. The researcher would look for the main words in the transcript as an indicator giving meaning to the phenomenon studied so that it could be categorised and produce a new concept. The data encoding process consisted of three phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Findings and Discussion
This section will provide an overview of the research's findings consisting of the sustainable aspects of services, challenges in ensuring the sustainability of services and strategies to ensure the sustainability of services.

1. Sustainable Aspects of Services
This section has revealed one major theme: the organisation's sustainable practices.

Sustainable Practices in The Organisation
NGOs aim to achieve their social mission and maintain their organisations through sustainable practices, which include integrating business operations to generate income. As stated by both respondents in the passages below.

> *"Hmmm. That is for committee with the chairman to work harder. So, we must do like selling tickets for programmes, and inviting YBs (members of the Parliament). There's a lot to be done to get them to donate. So, we need to work harder to plant a lot more, sell at the mosques to generate money. Then there is a donation box. Wherever we go, we take the donation box."*
>
> (Sarimah, Woman, 70 years old)

> *"After venturing into (this field), we have to explore and learn. How does NGO X generate their income apart from collecting donations?"*
>
> (Hasmah, Woman, 52 years old)

All the participants in this study have indicated that NGOs understand sustainability, at least at the practice level. Participants in this research could express their opinions regarding what constitutes a sustainable SWNGO. All participants perceive sustainable SWNGO as skilled at securing funding by demonstrating the importance of income-generating activities. Examples of income-generating activities are organising events, selling products, and collecting donations. This finding aligns with Maqbool et al. (2019), who found that fundraising is essential for NGO sustainability because it helps organisations build their financial resources and increase their organisational capability. Non-profit organisations rely on voluntary donations from citizens, and fundraising techniques have been developed to promote donation behaviour. Improving organisational effectiveness and efficiency, meeting funders' expectations, and diversifying revenue sources are all ways to achieve financial sustainability. NGOs can ensure their long-term presence and achieve their missions by strategically encouraging donation behaviour.

2. Challenges in Ensuring the Sustainability of Services

Based on the data obtained, nine categories pertain to challenges ensuring sustainable services for the target group. The identified categories are leadership, service provision, financial viability, accountability, organisational capacity, infrastructure, legitimacy, public image, and legal environment.

Leadership and Administrative Roles

Effective leadership and administration play a crucial role in the success of SWNGOs. Leaders set the mission, develop strategies, maintain relationships, and motivate staff, while administrators manage internal operations, finances, fundraising, compliance, and human resources. Both roles require individuals with strong leadership skills, strategic thinking, and efficient management capabilities for optimal service delivery. Both passages below support this statement.

> *"Only the chairman takes action. All. The others all agree. Leave it to the chairman. The committee will usually agree to the chairman's suggestion. Huh. They will wait for instructions from the chairman. Right? Let's say someone wants to do it...like the university wants to do this convocation. We'll call on the committee to participate. I will tell him to do this and tell her to do that. Like that, lah. The decision is in the hands of the chairman. We do it (meeting) every 2 months. According to the constitution, there is a general meeting. All will be involved."*
>
> (Sarimah, Woman, 70 years old)

> *"That's why we call for a meeting. Sarimah will divide tasks for us. For your information, we have a meeting next week. For us, we have a committee, a treasurer.. But sometimes a few of us did not attend the meeting. We still have to continue anyway. Those who live closer will usually attend. We will have a meeting and make a decision, including during the general meeting. Sometimes it is for event preparation, right? What do you say when there's an event? If anything is needed, Sarimah will call you later. But whatever it is, the chairman is important. If she's not around, we will have a problem. We do have new members, but it will not be the same without her. Sarimah is getting older, you know. But we can't have anyone like her. It's not possible. Maybe because she's been around for a long time. She has the experience. We're not capable like her."*
>
> (Hasmah, Woman, 52 years old)

All the informants admitted that the organisation depended on leadership to play a decisive administrative role. There were certain situations where the committee depended on the chairman to make decisions due to obstacles to conducting meetings due to logistical and age factors. Both informants in this study emphasise the significance of leadership roles in their organisations. Leaders ensure that the administration performs its functions and that every planned activity can be carried out correctly. This finding aligns with do Adro & Leitão (2020), who suggested the significance of good leadership in the NGO sector. Effective leaders can transform organisations by providing direction, inspiring staff, mobilising resources, and promoting shared values.

Service Provision

SWNGOs provide various services, including assistance for basic needs, healthcare, education, counselling, support for children and families, legal aid, advocacy, and community development. These organisations are essential in addressing social needs, promoting equality, and enhancing the quality of life for vulnerable populations. Here are some examples.

> *"Caring home, there are some who want to send their mothers here. Ha. But we don't have that. For such a service, we will need nurses. Some people made phone calls, asking us about this. They need someone to take care of their mother. It's difficult. For example, we don't have anyone to give her a bath, and we must attend courses to provide this service. Transportation is also a problem. We must rent one most of the time. That's essential for us."*
>
> (Sarimah, Woman, 70 years old)

"If we have a van, it would be easier. We can hire a driver. If we have a van, we can pick them up and bring them here. We can pick them up. Transportation is necessary."

(Hasmah, Woman, 52 years old)

According to informants, the organisation engages in various activities, as its membership includes older people and people with disabilities. Both informants acknowledged the need for services that meet current needs, requiring more skills and facilities. Expanding to caring services requires proper transportation and hiring a driver. This finding aligns with the studies by Özdamar et al. (2022), which show that NGOs have room to improve service offerings to meet the community's needs for a more positive impact. Effective and efficient support services are needed to address challenges faced by communities.

Financial Viability
Financial viability is crucial for the sustainability of SWNGOs. Diversified funding sources, efficient financial management, strategic fundraising, cost-effective operations, long-term financial planning, and impact measurement and reporting are key factors contributing to financial viability. By prioritising sound financial management, diversifying funding sources, and planning for the long term, NGOs can enhance their financial sustainability and continue positively impacting the communities they serve. Both passages below support this statement.

"It's not enough..2 ringgit a month. Ha. Not enough. The chairman forks out her own money sometimes. Sometimes from the committee members. We also received contributions during Hari Raya. Not just the Department of Social Welfare (DSW). We can write a letter and ask for funding from another party. We can try other places. This association needs funds. Otherwise, it is difficult for people who need help. DSW also wants to know what our activities are. Before this, I used to pay rent with my money, but not enough. Rent in Penang, you know lah. Ha. Report. We must give it to them every year. DSW and what's that, registration place. Registrar of Societies (ROS). We have to audit and give it to them before they give us the 5 thousand (funding)."

(Sarimah, Woman, 70 years old)

"Selling plants, membership fees. We (leaders) don't get any benefits. It's for our members. This year, we also failed to get five thousand from DSW. We are still not sure why. We are registered. But why can't we get it? They use online platforms. We have to send it. They use email. Maybe DSW saw that we are not active. Fund usually we received only from DSW. We didn't get it this year. Because there's no secretary (to handle the application and email). I see Sarimah keep spending her money. We are fortunate to have her. For me, being a chairman is not easy. Need money. We also don't have a patron."

(Hasmah, Woman, 52 years old)

According to the informants of this study, the resources to support the operation of this NGO are donations, product sales, and membership fees. Despite having various sources of funds, more is needed to cover the needs of its members. Additional sources of funding are needed, and reporting requirements must be maintained. This has led to a need for improved computer skills and the appointment of a secretary. The resources to support the operation of their organisation are donations, product sales, and membership fees. They faced financial difficulties and lacked resources, significantly impacting operations and programs. Hasmah has agreed that their organisation benefited from funding from DSW. She admitted that failure to comply with the fund's reporting procedures has led to the lack of funds. She acknowledges that the organisation heavily relies on personal funds from its chairman and expresses doubts about its survival. This study is in line with the findings of (Khieng & Dahles, 2014), which indicated that most NGOs' operations primarily relied on donors for financial viability, creating a dependency pattern that could compromise programmes and processes necessary for achieving the goals.

Accountability

SWNGOs must be accountable to stakeholders, including donors, recipients, and the public. They achieve this through transparent finance management, ethical standards, and effective reporting and monitoring. SWNGOs must utilize resources effectively and ethically to benefit the communities they serve. Here are some examples.

> *"Hmm. Here, the chairman is very important. Hmm.. She will know how much have we got today? How many toys? Also, the YB came to give that machine, he wanted to take pictures (small laugh). But it's okay. He said he wants to know the details of what we do. He asked to take pictures and everything. Yesterday he took pictures of two or three aunties who were sewing. He wants it like that. Ha. He gives aid. He wants to see we use it. We said we rented a house, and he came to see it. DSW also monitors."*

> *"They leave everything to the chairman (to make decisions). Hmm. They trust me. They don't know. It's okay for them if I make most of the decisions."*

> (Sarimah, Woman, 70 years old)

One informant in this study admitted that, apart from the monitoring from DSW and fund donors (people's representatives), the internal monitoring carried out was in the form of supervision only. Target group involvement in decision-making is through meetings. However, most of the time, the members depend on the chairman's decisions. Donors set targets only to meet reporting and monitoring requirements. This study aligns with the findings of (AbouAssi & Trent, 2016) that suggest certain NGOs tend to stay within their familiar areas of work and restrict their services to the same group of people. As a result, scholars and practitioners commonly observe that accountability is prioritised only in the relationships between NGOs and donors.

Organisational Capacity

SWNGOs need effective planning, management, and delivery of services, with strong leadership, skilled staff, adequate resources, efficient systems, and flexibility to adapt to changing needs. Improving their organisational capacity helps them achieve their goals more efficiently and serve beneficiaries better. Both passages below support this statement.

> *"Sure, they can all make the talcum powder (bedak sejuk). The committee members are also seniors, who are members too. They can do it. They can make the 'coq keria' too. they may not be good at running exhibitions, but they are good at producing products. They can sew aprons and such. We also don't know how many we will get from the sale. Not sure who will come and bought from us. Ha. Fortunately, we always bring a donation box with us, we also do lucky draws and all that."*

> (Sarimah, Woman, 70 years old)

> *"We don't know about that (planning). Because we didn't get it (funding). We improved what we missed. For the future, we move on. Even though it's slow. But it's Allah's decision. My hope is still on (the association). There is hope. Malays don't have many associations. Not many. Like me, I'm used to going for classes. Four times already. But my brain doesn't absorb it. IT, I went most of the time. I jot down notes, later, I made mistakes. Because of IT, for me, it's so fast. It changes constantly."*

> (Hasmah, Woman, 52 years old)

Both informants admitted that proper planning was needed to determine the direction of their organisation. Efforts to improve skills are focused on improving cooking, sewing and information technology skills. Also, no such measurements of performance were made. Instead, the focus is on the individual members and their current needs. This study aligns with the findings of Despard et al. (2018), which suggested that NGOs are particularly interested in increasing resource development capabilities. Most NGOs share the goal of increasing their awareness and obtaining access to new funding sources. Proposal writing guidance is also regarded to be necessary. Resource development is vital for NGOs because they must raise funding to maintain their operation.

Infrastructure

To support the growth of SWNGOs, a well-developed infrastructure is necessary. This infrastructure should provide them with widespread access to various resources such as education, training, and guidance from other entities. SWNGOs can generate revenue from local sources and also receive grants from funders. They work collaboratively with local entities to achieve common goals and share information through a network. Here is an example.

> *"I don't know if you know NGO Y, have you heard of it? Most of the time they take in children born out of wedlock. They call themselves NGO Y. We work together. It means if someone gives assistance, they will ask if there are some for us too. They will recommend us. They will tell me and then we all go and receive this assistance... probably from an Australia. Muslims. They give one person 50 ringgit, a piece of batik. For men, it's sarong. They provided food at the mosque in Bagan Dalam. Recently, the neighborhood association in Bayan Baru also helped. They also provide food for us. That's it. Not many people. It's difficult to collaborate. It's hard for everyone. The neighborhood association helps us. They make something for the disabled. They set up tents and everything. They don't want to do it at the mosque. You can't dance at the mosque. The disabled like to dance. What they want, we do it. At the same time, we collect donations."*
>
> (Sarimah, Woman, 70 years old)

Sarimah mentioned that their organisation has collaborated with other NGOs, but the collaboration primarily focuses on sharing the donation resources that the community wishes to contribute. Additionally, they have programs for their members and generate income through donation collections. This study aligns with the findings of (Mitchell et al., 2015), who suggested that collaboration between NGOs and local community organisations contributes to improved outcomes in social projects by fostering self-reliance and sustainability. NGOs, with their grassroots linkages and participation in programme design and implementation, can better understand the specific needs of the target beneficiary population. Collaboration between NGOs and communities leads to more effective and empowering development approaches. With technical, institutional, financial, and logistical support, NGOs can produce better results and sustain services. This collaboration facilitates dialogue and negotiations, enhancing communities' and NGOs' collective assets and capabilities.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy is vital for SWNGOs as it determines their credibility, trustworthiness, and adherence to standards among the communities they serve and stakeholders such as donors, government agencies, and the public. It covers the organisation's legal status, transparent operations and financial management, accountability, and the ability to address social issues effectively. Demonstrating legitimacy is crucial for SWNGOs as it affects their capacity to secure funding, collaborate with other organisations, and gain support from the community. Both passages below support this statement.

> *"It's quite difficult, you know. It's hard for them (society) to recognise the existence of this association. Many people don't know about us. It's difficult. Hm. We registered with the DSW and the ROS. So, we have to do this, right? We were also featured in the newspaper once. The Newspaper. At that time, we were renting in Sungai Ara. The Newspaper came to take pictures of all the senior citizens doing their work. It was featured in the newspaper because we couldn't afford to pay the rent for the house. So, two or three people helped by giving a little money. They had read about us in the newspaper, so they are more confident, right? I don't think they know me either. Registration, you know. They recognized us. If we don't register, we can't receive donations. With registration, we can receive funding. If we don't register, we can't. After registration, we have an account number, a registration number. So, we can't just do things randomly. The Social Welfare Department won't recognize us."*
>
> (Sarimah, Woman, 70 years old)

> *"Yes, the ROS and the DSW. Some NGOs are not registered. I hope members can give suggestions on services provided by us. To make us look more credible. That's what I remember. Let's just say it like there's a place.*

Put up a banner. Right? Where can we get help? The association is already registered. How can we reach that level? How? It's hard to work. Because we don't have a secretary. I'm not saying I'm old, Sarimah is older. Over 70. I'm not yet 60. How? I don't know what to say."

(Hasmah, Woman, 52 years old)

Both informants acknowledged that their organisation is registered with the relevant authorities, namely the DSW and ROS. They believed the registration was important to gain access to funds and build community trust. Hasmah also emphasised the importance of members contributing to building community trust in the organisation. According to a recent study, the findings of Zhu et al. (2018) are confirmed, which suggests that managerial factors such as organisational legitimacy and board involvement can significantly impact an organisation's revenue and the number of revenue streams it generates. The study highlights that strong organisational legitimacy can help create a favourable impression of an organisation in the eyes of its stakeholders.

Public Image

A positive public image can help SWNGOs attract support, funding, and partnerships, while a negative image can make it harder to get these things. To build a positive public image, they need to be transparent and ethical and show that they are making a real difference in the communities they serve. Maintaining a good public image is critical for their long-term success and sustainability. Both passages below support this statement.

"He (the representative) gave us a sewing machine. The price was 3,000 ringgit. We asked for a sewing machine, and he gave us one. Because the committee members are not very active, and the other NGOs are all active. They can drive cars, do this and that. As senior citizens, we can't do this and that, it's a bit difficult. It's hard for us to compete with them. The competition for activities is not the same. Their activities are different from activities that senior citizens can do. They have vans and everything. We don't have anything. It's difficult for us to go anywhere."

(Sarimah, Woman, 70 years old)

"The YB has power because he is a YB. The others are just members. Because he is a member, he needs to give strong support. Members are enjoying benefits more than us. DSW has given monetary assistance to them. We use whatever helps we can get. Like the YB. He helped by giving a sewing machine. We told him about us, luckily he has a positive attitude to help us."

(Hasmah, Woman, 52 years old)

Both informants in this study acknowledged the involvement of elected representatives in providing services to the community. They see the people's representative as having resources to benefit their organisation and as influential individuals. Sarimah admitted to their organisation's struggle to compete due to its demographics and a lack of resources such as equipment and vehicles. This study confirms the findings of Roger et al. (2013), which highlight that it is important for NGOs to be aware of how the public perceives them. A negative perception can harm an NGO's reputation, making it less attractive to potential donors, volunteers, and beneficiaries. On the other hand, a positive perception can enhance an NGO's reputation and make it more appealing to these groups.

Legal Environment

SWNGOs are responsible for adhering to legislative regulations governing their organization and the services they provide to their community. They must comprehend the legal framework, which includes registration protocols, legal structures, regulatory frameworks, permissible funding sources, financial compliance, and operational concerns. They must keep up to date with any changes in the legal landscape. Both passages below support this statement.

"So far we are free to do activities. Maybe not much. Because we are not competing with other associations, right? That NGO X, they are also having difficulties. Hmm. Maybe they are not registered. They don't have a

registration number. They don't want to accept it. I don't know. They are not registered. They say it's difficult to register. I know we have to register because we can get into trouble if we don't register."

(Sarimah, Woman, 70 years old)

"There is a lot of freedom. There are no restrictions to our activities so far. We bring our registration proof to the mosque (event), including from the ROS. At least we can priority and consideration. Some are kind enough to provide free space. Example from Organisation A, very nice people. They say they want to gain rewards as well by doing good to us. They donate money. They said untie can have this is business space. That's how we got it. We can come and sell products. Like at Organisation A, these elderly people can come and sell talcum powder. But toys are limited. Because there are not many members can produce it. If there are more toys, they can make more money. Now we have the sewing machine, but we haven't started yet."

(Hasmah, Woman, 52 years old)

The two participants in this study have acknowledged that their organisation is free to conduct its activities within the community. As a result, the organisation receives reduced sales booth fees, donations, and opportunities to sell goods. Both informants also recognise the need to follow regulations to secure funds in the environment. This study supports the conclusions of Othman & Ali (2012) about the regulation of non-profit organisations, which have been controversial and remain unresolved. Some individuals argue that NGOs should be entrusted with managing their affairs. This necessitates the requirement for efficient oversight and a well-structured internal control system. Proper management in an organisation is dependent on adequate supervision and a robust internal control system. It is recommended to have external regulation and oversight to address any unresolved issues and ensure accountability within the non-profit sector.

3. Strategies to Ensure the Sustainability of Services
The SWNGOs' responses to different issues to ensure the sustainability of services. This includes planning for the future and proactive measures implemented to overcome those obstacles. The study found that NGOs employ a range of strategies to ensure the sustainability of their services. These strategies include promoting effective leadership roles, diversifying funding sources, and collaborating with other organisations. Additionally, the study highlighted the importance of continuously evaluating and adapting these strategies to effectively address evolving challenges in the social environment.

Promoting Effective Leadership Roles
The success of SWNGOs heavily relies on effective leadership. This includes young and educated individuals who can guide the organization towards its goals and manage resources efficiently. They bring new and innovative perspectives and understand the needs of the people they serve. Here is an example.

"My hope is for the children to come and help. Right now it's not many. Because this association is important. There are many benefits to be gained from the association. This is my opinion. There is no cronyism. For me, it's better to go to NGO Z. Those who usually do everything are educated. They are influential people. Like us, we don't have that. There is Sarimah, a retired teacher. If there are capable and good people who can come, they can help us. We need help from all the youngsters."

(Hasmah, Woman, 52 years old)

A suggestion made by one informant is that community involvement, which includes family members, is important. She added that NGO leaders must possess strong leadership skills and educational qualifications. Leaders should operate in a participatory and ethical manner while maintaining professionalism. The success and growth of any organisation depend largely on the active involvement of younger generations. Organisations must recognise the potential of youthful talent and provide them with opportunities to contribute to the organisation's progress. These findings align with Bartram et al. (2017), who found that effective leadership is as important as other functions, such as recruitment and selection, occupational health and safety, training and development, reward management, and ethical practice, which are critical in the NGO sector.

Diversifying Source of Income

To ensure sustainability, SWNGOs can diversify their income streams with traditional and innovative strategies. These include individual donations, grant funding, corporate partnerships, social enterprises, crowdfunding, impact investing, fee-for-service and membership programs. Performing regular evaluations can assist in identifying and making necessary adjustments. Here are some examples.

> *"They sell flowers and plants, herbal plants, turmeric leaves, all these elderly people, they know about herbs and plants, they sell plants near the mosque, sometimes whenever there are events, they sell plants. They generate some allowance for themselves. Every Wednesday, they come to do sewing and cooking. They made cookies for Eid. Yes, they sewed those (toys). They only do what they know. These elderly people, if we ask them to sew a bear or something, they wouldn't know. The price is 15 ringgit if we sell it at the airport and 10 ringgit for our friends or other customers. The price is like that because we have to buy the foam. We have to support them. While they are doing this work, we have to report to the DSW (Social Welfare Department) from time to time about our activities."*

> (Sarimah, Woman, 70 years old)

> *"This is the service provided by us. They have money, they receive assistance from DSW sometimes from our help. They also work. We grow herbal plants, like pandan. We sell them at the university, and they sell well. They work on the planting technique. We teach them. Some are good at gardening, Sarimah herself is good at sewing. We teach them to make toys. The cat toys. Kids like that. They have members who are people with disabilities to help us in selling. Sometimes we have events at the university. We bring them along. We give them the opportunity. Even though they are disabled, they are skilled. They cannot move, but they can speak. They help in sales. Sometimes, people with disabilities are good at making ribbon flowers. And we also have courses. Sarimah usually brings us. We go to learn. Arrange flowers or something. People with disabilities also plant trees, we teach them. We use fertilizer. There are cooking classes. Sometimes we do it. Like Sarimah, sometimes she makes happy man chocolate cookies. Kids enjoy seeing that."*

> (Hasmah, Woman, 52 years old)

According to both informants, they conducted various income-generation activities, including agriculture, clothing, food produce and handicrafts. They also began selling their products at carnivals, mosques, airports, and government buildings. They learn new skills over time to explore alternative funding sources to mitigate the risks associated with resource dependence. This finding aligns with Despard et al. (2017), who found that more revenue sources are associated with a lower probability of financial vulnerability.

Establish Partnerships with Other Organisations

Effective collaborations are built on clear communication, mutual respect, and flexibility. Partnerships can be established through joint initiatives, policy collaboration, resource sharing, fundraising, and network building. Collaborating with others can increase impact, better access to resources, improved program effectiveness, shared learning, and increased visibility. Here are some examples.

> *"So, we have to do things like selling tickets or organizing events, so we can invite the YBs to come, they can give some donations. We have to work hard, plant more flowers and herbs, go sell at mosques, then we can have some money. We cannot depend solely on the crowd to give donations. But we do have a donation box. Wherever we go, we bring the donation box."*

> (Sarimah, Woman, 70 years old)

> *"Because we have ventured into this field, we have to observe, we have to learn. For example, from NGO Z, how they can make money, apart from collecting donations."*

> (Hasmah, Woman, 52 years old)

Both informants in the study recognised the importance of collaborating with related organisations such as government agencies, leaders, businesses, and other NGOs in their society. SWNGOs can collaborate with other entities to enhance their effectiveness in addressing social challenges by leveraging their resources

and expertise. Collaboration also offers the chance for them to acquire knowledge from other organisations. This discovery is consistent with Mitchell, O'Leary, & Gerard's (2015) research, which revealed that by working together, organisations may design and execute enduring solutions that effectively tackle the underlying causes of social problems. This has the potential to result in enduring societal transformation.

Conclusion

To summarise, this paper sought to discuss the SWNGO's sustainable aspects of services, challenges in ensuring the sustainability of services, and strategies to ensure the sustainability of services. The study found that all informants realised the importance of sustainability for SWNGOs to provide services to the community they serve as long as needed. This study confirmed previous research that NGOs had to take action to remain significant in society, such as improving financial viability, increasing organisational capacity, and developing the ability to achieve long-term impact. Nonetheless, these findings are inconclusive given that this is only a pilot study, so the saturation data still needs to be improved. The data obtained was only to test the three objectives of the study. Thus, this pilot study has several limitations. For example, its investigations were minor in scale, there were only a few participants, and the interview questions needed to be upgraded to suit the informants. This pilot study did, however, allow the researcher to practice interviewing techniques and make appropriate modifications based on the interviewing experience (Wijck & Harrison, 2013). Future studies should have a greater scope and use a proper list of questions, specifically more open questions aimed at eliciting as much information as possible from informants. Furthermore, the duration of the interviews should be precise and concise (not more than one hour). The results of this study will assist the researcher in exploring and preparing for an actual study on this topic.

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