

Enhancing the Society's Social Capital Accumulation

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ABSTRACT

There are various social ills plaguing the society today (i.e. juvenile delinquency, crimes, murder, gangsterism, abandonment of the elderly, domestic violence, etc.). This can be attributed to various factors ranging from peer pressure, mental problems, poverty and marginalisation and eroding moral values. In a society that has experienced a rapid economic growth and a steady increase in the income per capita, it is thus an alarming factor if there is an increase in social problems and an increase in government expenditure to curb this problem. Social capital through effective networking is seen as an avenue to enhance positive social values and contribute towards a harmonious society. This research investigates the social problems in society, the total expenditure incurred by the government to eradicate these problems, the wealth of the society and to finally identify the new types of social capital in society.

Key words: Social capital; social problems; economic growth; government expenditure; income per capita

ABSTRAK

Terdapat pelbagai permasalahan sosial dalam masyarakat (jenayah juvana, jenayah, pembunuhan, gangsterisma, pengabaian warga emas, keganasan rumahtangga dan lain-lain). Keadaan ini disebabkan faktor yang berbeza-beza, daripada ketegangan rakan sebaya, masalah mental, kemiskinan, kepinggiran dan kehakisan nilai moral dalam masyarakat. Dalam sebuah negara yang telah mencapai pertumbuhan ekonomi yang pesat dan peningkatan dalam pendapatan per kapita penduduknya,

adalah memeranjatkan jika permasalahan sosial terus meningkat dan seterusnya meningkatkan perbelanjaan kerajaan untuk mengatasinya. Modal sosial melalui jaringan yang efektif dapat dilihat sebagai satu saluran untuk meningkatkan nilai sosial yang positif dan menyumbang kepada masyarakat yang harmonis. Penyelidikan ini mengkaji permasalahan sosial dalam masyarakat, jumlah perbelanjaan kerajaan untuk mengatasinya, jumlah kekayaan masyarakat dan akhirnya mengidentifikasi bentuk modal sosial baru dalam masyarakat.

Kata kunci: Modal sosial; masalah sosial; pertumbuhan ekonomi; perbelanjaan kerajaan; pendapatan per kapita

INTRODUCTION

Social capital is abstract and is difficult to be defined. Bullen & Onyx (1998), Putnam (1993) and Cohen & Prusak (2001) acknowledge that there is difficulty in defining social capital precisely due to the nature of social capital being intangible (Bullen & Onyx 1998) and difficult to be quantified. In general, social capital can be referred to institutions, networking relationship and norms that shape the number and quality of social interactions (in terms of quantity and quality) in a society (World Bank 1999). The World Development Report (2000) has stated that the level of social capital plays a significant role in development processes. Social capital is acknowledged as a new field of specialisation and as the fourth capital after physical capital, financial capital and human capital as the engine of economic growth (Woolcock et al. 2000; Coleman 1998; Woolcock 1998). Basically, social capital is simply a means of understanding the role of values and norms played in economic life.

The research was conducted in 2004/2005 in Selangor, Perak, Kedah, Kelantan, Johor, Sabah and Sarawak. It received funding from Intensified Research Priority Area (IRPA), Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, Malaysia (MOSTE). The research aimed to assess if the increased material wealth has led to a decline in the Malaysian society's social capital. The specific objectives of the research were, firstly, to investigate the overall public expenditure to finance social capital loss; secondly, to identify the various support systems (formal and informal) in society to further develop and maintain; and finally to recommend inputs to the present National Social Policy to arrest the social ills and increase the level of social capital.

A scheduled questionnaire was prepared to answer the research questions. The questionnaire was administered to the sample group of a pilot study, then analysed for any changes. As age group differentiation based on the first and second generation was difficult to be administered, the questions were modified and several other questions, which were difficult to be answered by the respondents, were re-phrased. Enumerators were employed and trained to conduct the interviews at the rural and urban areas of Selangor, Perak, Kedah, Kelantan, Johor, Sabah and Sarawak. The researchers supervised the first phase of the fieldwork. A total of 986 questionnaires were useable out of the 1000 questionnaires administered.

FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES OF THE RESPONDENTS

From a total of 986 respondents, there were 507 female respondents and the balance was male respondents. 61.5% were from the urban area, while the remaining 38.5% were from the rural area. 18.1% were from the above 51 years age group; meanwhile the remaining 81.9 were from below 51 years of age group. A majority of 28.8% had SPM education background, 16.8% with degrees, 15.9% with diplomas, 11.8 with PMR, and the balance either with primary schooling or no education.

Around 30% of the respondents had lived in their neighbourhood for 1-5 years, another 23% lived there for 11 – 20 years, and only 4% living there for more than 40 years and 7% living there for a year in that neighbourhood. A large number of respondents identified location as the main criteria of selecting their dwelling place (34.5%), followed by pricing (28.8%) and facilities (27.0%). A very small sample group chose type of neighbours and ethnic composition, heritage and aesthetic values as their top priority in selecting the neighbourhood. A total of 56.8% of the respondents said they had difficulty in believing other people, while 37.8% said they easily believed other people and the balance said they very easily believed other people.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

A majority of the sample group (27%) had an income of more than RM3001, 9.6% less than RM500, 18.2% RM501 to RM1000, 12.9% RM1001 to RM1500, 11.0% between RM15001 to RM2000 and 7.7% and 8.6%, respectively in the income brackets of RM2001 to RM2500 and RM2501 to RM3000. A total

of 58.1% of the respondents had 1 – 5 household size, 38% with 6 – 10 household size and the balance 11 – 15 household size.

When compared with the household size and the current Poverty Line Index (PLI), it is quite apparent this income is sufficient to sustain the family comfortably. The country's PLI is RM398 (2005) compared to RM272 (1977) for Peninsular Malaysia, RM503 (2005) compared to RM352 (1977) for Sabah and RM482 (2005) compared to RM304 (1977) for Sarawak. The overall PLI for Malaysia has increased to RM415 (2005) compared to RM294 in 1977. (RM9)

PUBLIC EXPENDITURE TO FINANCE SOCIAL CAPITAL LOSS

Table 1 illustrates the total allocation for social sector by the government. This expenditure, ranges from building, homes for the elderly, orphans, prisons, special centres for the juvenile delinquents, welfare services, education and training, etc. The total allocation has increased steadily over the years reflecting the government's recognition of giving importance to eradicate social ills in society.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS

The various formal support systems identified through the research were political organisations, cultural activities, religious associations, parent-teacher associations, etc. While a majority were somehow involved in formal activities, a substantial number of the respondents were happy to be associated with informal support systems, namely, relationship with

TABLE 1. Public expenditure allocation for social sector in RM1-RM8

Duration	Allocation(RM Million)	Change(%)
First Malaysia Plan, 1966- 1970	752.1	-
Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-1975	1,067.38	41.9
Third Malaysia Plan, 1976-1980	5,561.0	420.9
Fourth Malaysia Plan, 1981-1985	10,340.99	86.1
Fifth Malaysia Plan, 1986-1990	9,046.0	-12.5
Sixth Malaysia Plan, 1991-1995	14,780.0	63.4
Seventh Malaysia Plan, 1996-2000	31,284.0	111.6
Eighth Malaysia Plan, 2001-2005	69,377	121.8
Ninth Malaysia Plan, 2006-2010	86,869	25.21

Source: Various Malaysia Plans

brothers and sisters, parents, relatives, neighbours, friends and colleagues. These were reflected in the number of times spent visiting these informal groups and also who they sought in times of turbulence, be it economic, social or emotional. Their help was sought to resolve issues in finance, education, job and security and even in protecting their lives from fire, robbery and fatal accidents.

A total of 49.86% of the respondents were reported to be actively involved in various organisations, neighbourhood association, religious association, voluntary association, cultural association, and educational or political groups. The remaining 50.14% said they were not will to spend time for these activities due to lack of interest, and time. On an average around 30% of the respondents said they had interacted with foreign nationals, members from different levels of economic status, members from other religious groups, members from other ethnic groups and other age groups. Highest percentage of non-interaction is with the foreign nationals and differing economic status with 47% and 10% each. Nevertheless, when it came to visiting and having a good relationship with family members, it was reported that more than 90% visited their relatives, children friend or colleagues from once a week to one a year. This is reflected in Table 2.

BELIEF AND RESPONSIBILITY IN SOCIETY

When asked the nature of the society's behaviour in their neighbourhood, the respondents' reply is noted in Table 3. A total of 52.7% said that the members of society were individualistic now, compared to 23% five years ago and they predict that the level of individualism will drop 10 years from now (34.2%). When asked if society members were racist, 34.8% said yes for the present compared to 28.1% five years ago and expected to improve in ten years time. When asked if they easily believed other, the no of respondents who said yes, dropped from 22.1% five years ago, to 18.8% in the present time to further improve to 8.2% in ten years time.

When asked who should be responsible for these groups: Caring for the Elderly, Caring for the Disabled, National Security and Harmony, Children/Teenager's Behaviour, Sustaining the Environment, Social Problems, the respondents largely agreed that it was the responsibility of the family, followed by the community, individual and government (Table 4). Exceptional case was for National Security and Harmony, Sustaining the Environment, and Social Problems whereby the government's responsibility took the lead.

TABLE 2. Respondents' frequency of visit (%)

Item	Missing Value	Not Related	Once a Week	Frequency of Visit (%)					Total
				Once a Month	Three times a Month	Twice a Year	Once a Year	Never	
Respondent visits children	1.6	72.5	7.3	4.7	4.6	3.4	4.5	1.4	100.0
Children visit respondent	1.7	73.1	7.8	7.0	5.4	1.9	1.5	1.5	100.0
Respondent visits Relatives	1.3	4.5	19.7	24.3	16.6	12.4	18.6	2.6	100.0
Respondent visits Neighbours	1.3	9.5	46.7	16.1	5.4	4.0	8.1	8.9	100.0
Neighbours visits Respondent	1.4	9.6	46.5	15.7	5.4	4.6	7.4	9.4	100.0
Respondent visits Friends	1.4	6.5	41.7	22.4	9.4	6.6	8.1	3.9	100.0
Respondent visits colleagues	1.6	30.9	21.6	17.4	7.3	4.4	7.6	9.1	100.0

Source: Research Findings

TABLE 3. Respondents' opinion on society's behaviour

Society's Behaviour Answer	Individualist			Racist			Easily Believes Others		
	Present (%)	5 years ago (%)	10 years from now (%)	Present (%)	5 years ago (%)	10 years from now (%)	Present (%)	5 years ago (%)	10 years from now (%)
Missing Value	1.2	1.5	1.2	1.6	1.7	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.7
Yes	52.7	23.0	34.2	34.8	28.1	20.4	18.8	22.1	8.2
No	23.3	42.1	53.4	27.6	38.6	58.6	30.6	42.3	57.1
Not Sure	22.7	33.4	11.2	36.0	31.5	19.4	48.9	33.8	33.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Research Findings

TABLE 4. Respondents' responsibility in society

Who's Responsibility	Responsibility (%)			
	Individual	Family	Community	Government
Caring for the Elderly	35.8	84.1	36.4	29.8
Caring for the Disabled	27.2	63.3	57.8	59.4
National Security and Harmony	45.9	29.1	62.1	85.6
Children/Teenager's Behaviour	44.2	86.6	50.7	34.4
Sustaining the Environment	64.3	38.0	76.7	63.7
Social Problems	55.7	51.2	68.1	73.4

Source: Research Findings

CONCLUSION

The respondents are all living in income group that is above the poverty line index. The level of trust in others is showing an improvement, and this is also reflected in the improving level of individualistic behaviour and racism reported by the respondents. The respondents are reliant on family ties, and had frequent visits to ensure that their family ties were well in place. In fact some of the respondents were also happy to just ensure a high neighbourly and friends visits compared to visiting their relatives. Respondents showed a tendency to participate in various organisations, nevertheless, the number of those not interested in these organisation

were almost on par. Those who were actively involved in organisations and also some who were not in any organisations reported in having received various benefits from these organisations, ranging from moral support, welfare aid to networking.

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