RESIDENT'S TRUST AND PARTICIPATION IN THE LOCALISATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) IN MALAYSIA

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1. INTRODUCTION

The local government is seen as a suitable governance entity in intensifying further the United Nations SDGs programs to the community. Using the bottom-up approach, the resident associations will enable the community to participate with the local government in dealing with local issues that affect their neighbourhood. Hence, the local government must improve its responsibility to gain trust for the continuation of resident participation. Trust is necessary for creating the conditions of good government and being a prerequisite for a representative form of governance (Bhakta, 2010). Moreover, the absence of trust can lead to a lack of democratic participation, reduced willingness to get engaged in other civic activities, and broader problems of governmental legitimacy (Downe, Cowell, Chen, & Morgan, 2013). A decrease in the public trust for the government occurs when there is a lack of participation during governance processes, decreasing the unity of the society and the ability to overcome common issues (Makorere, 2012). Accordingly, this paper aims to provide a literature review on SDGs implementation through grassroots collaboration and to discover the link between residents' trust and participation in supporting the LA21 and SDGs related program implementation in Malaysia. Based on the literature analysis, this study also proposes the conceptual framework on the relationship between trust and resident participation in implementing SDGs in Malaysia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, Malaysia has taken the initiative to support Local Agenda 21 (LA21). It emphasises the involvement and role of local governments in implementing sustainable development in their territorial jurisdiction. LA21 objectives require local governments to consult with the local community, minority groups, business, and industrial organisations to create a shared vision for future sustainable development and to develop integrated local environmental plans, policies, and programs to achieve sustainable development (Sustainable Development Features, 2020). In 2015, with the United Nations (UN) commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Malaysia also refreshed its pledge towards the agenda 2030. The SDGs were implemented at the national level, and as stipulated in the Malaysia Voluntary National Review (VNR) for SDGs progress, a similar process will be replicated at the state and local levels. As a result, as of 2021, two local governments have presented their maiden Voluntary Local Review (VLR) on SDGs achievement at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) of the United Nations. Having sustainable development as its crux, both LA21 and SDGs share a similar vision and mission to improve the quality of life of the present and future communities. Furthermore, localisation

of the LA21 and SDGs is essential in ensuring both agendas reach the target groups.

2.1 The Localisation of the SDGs

Localisation refers to how the SDGs as a global agenda are manifested at the local level and includes engagement with local governments and other stakeholders at the sub-national level (UNDESA, n.d). It is a process of defining, implementing, and monitoring strategies at the local level for achieving global, national, and sub-national sustainable development goals and targets (UCLG, 2019). In carrying out the duty to localise the SDGs, the local governmental authorities will have a critical role in implementing the SDGs and ensuring multi-stakeholders inclusivity. It is understood that each country will have different governmental structures at the local level, i.e., local authorities or local government, provincial or regional government, or municipalities. Whatever the structure would be, the localisation of the SDGs is to be carried out by the lowest governmental entity closest to the community. The local government is familiar with the localities, delivers a wide range of public services, designs a local development plan, and is more prone to take integrated approaches in realising the SDGs. To begin these sustainability programs, the local government's initiatives towards SDGs are prerequisites and must include its appointed and elected officials.

Strong leadership and decentralization of the SDGs at the local level are thus required to achieve the localisation objectives. Moreover, to localizing the SDGs, similar and additional challenges also exist in Southeast Asia countries. Lack of local governance system, lack of financial resources, lack of SDGs experts, low participation from the local authorities, absence of SDGs legal framework, and lack of data need to be observed (Morita et al., 2020). It might serve as a standard issue that may affect the localization efforts. However, despite visible SDGs governance at the national level, SDG discussions at the state and local government levels are almost non-existent (Economic Planning Unit, 2017; Khoo & Tan, 2019). There is also limited empirical evidence from past literature and official reports regarding Malaysia's progress in SDGs localization. The only available literature on SDGs localization within Malaysia's perspective is Khoo and Tan's (2019) work and Rahman and Yusof's (2020). Hence, more discussion and reporting on the SDGs' localization accomplishment in the country is needed. As proposed by literature on SDGs and the UCLG reports, localization of the SDGs at the sub-national and local levels is vital to ensure its effective implementation and support the national progress and reporting measures. Overall, the localisation of SDGs requires the participation and partnership of various stakeholders. In line with the SDGs mantra of "leaving no one behind," the initiative for localisation should involve the most critical groups of stakeholders, the residents of the localities. Continuous engagement and partnership are the only way to bring the vision and mission to reality. Therefore, the discussion on the localisation of the SDGs will be incomplete without exposure to the residents' participation. The conceptual framework of the resident association participation, trust, and SDGs localisation are shown in Figure 1.
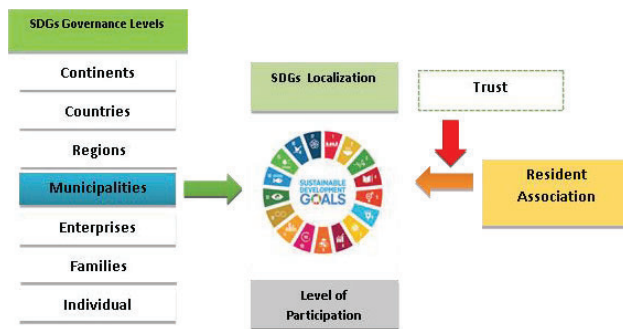
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Figure 1: Resident Association Participation of SDGs Localisation
Source: Arnstein's Levels of Participation (1969), Social Exchange Theory and Structural preconditions for
sustainable development – a multilevel view by Schwaninger (2015)

2.2   Residents' Participation through Residents' Associations

In localising the SDGs, the resident association is one of the key stakeholder groups to ensure the success of the initiatives. Membered by the residents living in territory under the local government jurisdiction, the leadership of the resident association was democratically elected to manage the affairs and issues affected by the local community. As the connector between the local government and the residents, the residents' association will act as their member voices. The residents will also participate in local issues affecting their neighbourhood, such as the maintenance of the local environment, prevention of crime, anti-social behaviour, and housing management.

Various literature has discussed the resident and local government relationships, particularly in environmental function. The residents' associations and the local government has distinct roles in community leadership and brings mutual benefits. It strengthened the community and local government relationships, particularly in participative, interpretative, implementation, deliberative, and community-based planning for sustainable development (DOE, 2014). In the Malaysian context, a study by Zakaria, Noordin, and Syawal (2010) discovered that residents are satisfied with the environmental functions provided by the local government in the state of Kedah. It meant that both the service provider and the recipient needed a reciprocal relationship to ensure the success of any program in the local context.

However, in most cases, the government has neither worked with the resident association or other state actors (Muthee, 2003). There is an issue of trust between the local government and other stakeholders, especially when the latter is challenging the local government's role in providing essential services and accusing it of being ineffective and corrupt. Having no trust will impede the resident's meaningful participation and delay essential programs meant for the community at large; in this context are LA21 and SDGs related initiatives.

2.3   The Link between Trust and Participation

Distrust can damage the local government's reputation, resulting in a cynical public view of the government's political system. Prolonged distrust promotes the public to urge the government for a better administration or program (Diamond, 2007). Lack of trust from the public impairs the government's priorities quickly for allocating public resources to resolve public problems (Jung & Sung, 2012).

There is a general expectation of some future return in the social exchange theory when one person does another a favour. However, this behaviour must be oriented toward the end and only be achieved through interaction with other persons (Cook and Rice, 2003). In a study done by Bhakta (2010), participating people have a higher level of trust than non-participating. Residents who were involved or participated in the local government have a higher level of trust than the less involved residents. In addition, residents' participation in local government is an effective method to reduce the level of citizen distrust and to educate them about governmental activities (Berner et al., 2011).

According to Wang (2001), resident participation in local government promotes communication between government officers and residents, increases public support for local government goals, and develops public trust in government. Trust is an essential element to encourage the residents to be more involved in the activities or programs concerning their local area. The residents' level of trust for the local government has an impact on how often residents participate. Decreasing public trust for the government is when there is a lack of participation during governance processes (Makorere, 2012). As a result, citizens who dislike the local government are less likely to engage.

When there is mistrust, the commitment of interactions between one side and another is reduced (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In the participation theory, low levels of trust may eventually lead to low participation as citizens become reluctant to participate in other civic activities (Downe, Cowell, Chen, & Morgan, 2013; Makorere, 2012). If the residents do not trust their local government, they do not try to participate in the activities initiated by the local government. The declining trust in local government can impair the residents in active participation in the programs and activities.

3.   METHODOLOGY

The desk research was utilised to gather literature, published reports, and conference proceedings that were connected to the study field. The data were subsequently analysed using the content analysis technique. The study employed the terms localization, community, participation, trust which are related to SDGs implementation from SCOPUS and Google Scholar, two of the most popular search engines. There is a total of 15 articles were downloaded, screen, and used for the review.

4.   CONCLUSION

Despite apparent SDG governance at the national level, SDG debates are practically non-existent at the state and local government levels. In addition, empirical data from previous literature and government reports on Malaysia's progress in SDG localisation is sparse. As a result, more significant discussion and reporting on the country's progress toward achieving the SDGs is required. Localisation of the SDGs at the subnational and local levels is critical to successfully implement and support national progress and reporting measures. Hence, the engagement and collaboration of numerous stakeholders are required for the localisation of SDGs. The localisation of SDGs requires the participation and partnership of various stakeholders. There are initiatives to localise SDGs in Malaysia through various mechanisms. However, more active engagement with residents and institutionalisation of the programs is

needed. The local government should increase the level of trust of residents toward them. Distrust could decrease the motivation of residents' participation in the future.

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