

Social Capital in Youth Volunteerism

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ABSTRACT

The theoretical framework of social capital suggested that individuals bound together in dense social networks, infused with norms of reciprocity and trust, are better able and more inclined to act collectively for mutual benefit and social purposes as opposed to atomized individuals. The objective of social capital model is to improve and maintain the society well-being and economic efficiency. The idea is contemporary known as social capital by Robert Putnam (2000) as connections among individuals, social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. This notion is therefore seen as "sociological superglue" that holds society together. The effectiveness is strongly depends on structural phenomenon and a cultural phenomenon. Recently, volunteerism has flourished within youth which give beneficial effect to local communities. It is worth to scrutinize the elements of social capital within voluntarily activities. Thus, youth volunteerism is study, highlighted based on social capital model suggested by Putnam (2000). The study is to inspect factors that bind youth in society with the case study of Teach for the Needs (Malaysia) Berhad (TFTN).

Keywords: social capital, youth volunteerism, structural phenomenon, TFTN

Introduction

The concept of social capital has carefully been discussed based on the constructive theory from Pierre Bourdieu (1970), James Coleman (1988) and Robert Putnam (2000). Social capital is defined as the resource that stems social interactions, networks and network opportunities which take place in specific environments. Based on Putnam's concept, social capital has three components: 1) moral obligations and norms 2) social values (trust) and 3) social networks (voluntary associations) (Siisiäinen, 2000). This concept has been tested on different kind of interactions. First, from voluntary association of specific types; for example sports clubs and cultural associations. This is from the perspective of Putnam. Second, Bourdieu's approaches which scrutinize social capital as a resource in the social struggles that are carried out in different social arenas or fields (Siisiäinen, 2000). In the context of this study, it is aimed to apply basic concept of Putnam's social capital, and how it binds the structure in youth volunteerism in society. Further discussion in this essay are on social capital, youth volunteerism and the importance of volunteerism, and the case study on Teach for the Needs (Malaysia) Berhad.

Social Capital

The theory of social capital has been proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (1970) and James Coleman (1988) emphasized the importance of social ties and shared norm to improve and maintain the society well-being and economic efficiency. The theory has been expanded and simplified by Robert Putnam (2000) that defined it as "connection among individuals, social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them". The successful of using social capital in organization or society will require structural phenomenon (social networks such as solidarity between colleagues or trust) and a cultural phenomenon (kind of social norms than can ease and facilitate collaborative cooperation). This idea is to promote civil society to share ideas and activities (achieving common goal) in helping society at large, collectively and strategically. It can be achieved through the development of private goods and public goods. Putnam's concepts of social capital and trust are directed to questions about mechanisms that strengthen the integration of the values of society, and solidarity and togetherness, and that create consensus and sustain the stable development of society (moving equilibrium) (Siisiäinen, 2000).

Moral Obligations and Norms

The whole concept of Putnam's work is referred to from lengthy discussion cited by Siisiäinen (2000) and Putnam (2002). Putnam's concept of social capital expresses the sociological essence of communal vitality. A solution to the problem of common action and opportunism presuppose the development of voluntary collective action, and it is connected to the inherited social capital in the community. Forms of social capital are general moral resources of the community, and they can be divided into three main components: 1) trust (and more generally 'positive' values with respect to development); 2) social norms and obligations and 3) social networks of citizens' activity especially voluntary associations. Putnam's sociological traditions preserved many of the ideas of the sociology of integration. Concentrating on the concept of social capital and trust are directed to questions about mechanisms that strengthen the integration of the values of society, and solidarity and togetherness, and that create consensus and sustain the stable development of society (moving equilibrium) (Siisiäinen, 2000).

The theory also encouraged a horizontal network within the civic society that actively produces private goods and public goods. It is expected that the social integration within voluntary association is bonded with norms, visions, obligations or responsibilities. Next is the process to bridge all these networks by coordinating and cooperating all together to gain a common goal (Putnam, 2000). In Putnam's work, the study is concentrated to voluntary associations of a specific type, sports clubs and cultural associations (Siisiäinen, 2000). It is worth to note that other social voluntary organization for instance religious organization or youth clubs can be discuss in the same category.

The idea of using social capital, albeit this network of colleagues will actively engage in specific community goals, they never have to sacrifice their personal mission. This community activism will be bonded and give a satisfied society with education, tolerance, welfare, under-controlled conflicts and economic prosperity. The goal of 'social capital, therefore, is to make the member of society in particular and the whole society in general to become healthier, safer, richer, and smarter collectively. This discussion is to emphasize on the current development of voluntary education activism known as Teach for the Needs (Malaysia) Berhad, (will be referred as TFTN) the 'how' TFTN's defines the moral obligation and norms.

Youth Volunteerism and the Importance of Volunteerism

Volunteerism is the act of giving without expecting any reward or return. The act can be seen in many social works. Social works is defined by UNESCO (2001) as, 'a discipline within human services. Its main goal is to assist individuals and families with their needs and solve their problems using multiple disciplined approaches'. Ban Ki-Moon (as cited in Anas Alam Faizli, 2012) on volunteerism as founded on the values of solidarity and mutual trust, volunteerism transcends all cultural, linguistic and geographic boundaries. By giving their time and skills without expectation of material reward, volunteers themselves are uplifted by a singular sense of purpose.

Mardhiyyah Sahri et al. (2013) stated the benefits of volunteerism as follows; based on a survey in the UK suggested that volunteering was worth up to 40 Billion Pounds per annum, making it the third largest contributor to the nation's Gross Domestic Product, in Canada 7.5 million out of 24 million aged 15 or above are volunteers. Mardhiyyah Sahri et al. (2013) also stated that voluntarism also creates job opportunities. The volunteering activities carried out through non-profit organizations in the USA have been estimated to be equivalent to 9 million full time jobs according to Independent Sector (2001). Anas Alam Faizli (2013) reported "a Eurobarometer study conducted in 2006 estimated that full-time equivalent volunteers total approximately 140 million globally, contributing USD 400 billion or 7% of world GDP. Together with full time employees working for the sector, they would form the ninth most populous country in the world.

Voluntary works can be done by many. The center focuses on youth volunteerism is based on the statements by Datuk Seri Hj. Mohamed Khaled Nordin, the Minister of Higher Education, there are currently 1.2 million students of Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia and they should be empowered to play their roles that would certainly contribute towards the development of the country. One of their roles is to build strong characters, idealism, skills and leadership qualities so as to become assets of the society. These characters could not be attained simply through hearing lectures in classes, but they should have an active

participation in social activities and volunteering programs that will help mould strong characters and valuable human capital for the country (Nordin, 2011).

There are real benefits in youth volunteerism and the primary mission is to educate the students. Students should be made aware to participate voluntarily in activities that can promote the enhancement of their social skills. Voluntary works should be treated as the platform to actually practice and acquire leadership, team work, managerial, communication, problem solving, critical thinking, awareness on contemporary issues and lifelong learning skill. In the Malaysian National Higher Education Strategic Plan: Laying The Foundation Beyond 2020 speech, the Prime Minister, highlighted the question of whether the quality of our education system has moved in tandem with its growth in quantity; whether the younger generation passing through the national education system is adequately equipped to thrive in an increasingly global and competitive environment. He also emphasized on the need to have an 'education revolution' to ensure that the aspirations to instill a new performance culture in the public and private sectors is not crippled by the inability to nurture a new kind of human capital that is equal to the tasks and challenges ahead (Mardhiyyah Sahri et al., 2013).

Mardhiyyah Sahri et al. (2013) further state that is in line with the National Policy on Education 1986 which highlighted that 'higher education provides people with an opportunity to reflect on the critical, social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity'. One of the tools to inculcate pro-social behavior in the students such that they would be inclined towards social and humanity issues is through volunteerism. Thus, there is a strong need to build this human capital and volunteerism is one of the medium to build such character. According to the United Nations Volunteer (2011), in their commonality as well as their complementarity, volunteering and social activism help promote social inclusion by providing opportunities for marginalised groups, such as poor women, to engage in participatory development processes. Volunteers serve as important reservoirs of knowledge for development programmes and can help ensure that development-related advocacy campaigns are relevant and legitimate. By participating in volunteering or social activism, or both, people can be empowered with the confidence, skills and knowledge necessary to effect change in their world.

Insight to the work of Boech et al. (2009) on the impact of volunteering on social capital and community cohesion the case of Youth Action, draw synthesis of youth volunteering and youth work governed by nine principles:

- a) Youth participation
- b) Benefiting others
- c) Fun and rewarding
- d) Flexibility
- e) Support
- f) Recognition
- g) Progression and leadership
- h) Diverse and inclusive
- i) Developmental and educative

Research findings have shown that volunteering whilst studying at university provides opportunities for learning a wide range of different skills which in turn are useful for students' future employability, regardless of age or degree type. Thus, it can be said that volunteerism would not only benefit the students from an increased skills portfolio but also an enriched educational experience, increased social capital and deeper socio- political awareness. It would also inculcate a sense of responsibility in giving back to the society (Boesch et al., 2009).

The Case of Teach for the Needs (Malaysia) Berhad (TFTN)

Teach for the Needs (TFTN) was established on March 1, 2012 by a group of young volunteers as an online community whose name may have already well suggested its *raison d'être* (Anas Alam Faizli, 2013). Teach For The Needs (TFTN) holds the spirit of civil society at the core of its being. Ordinary citizens founded the organization as members of civil society, taking it upon themselves to fill in the current gaps within the national schooling system. TFTN is now joined by more than 30 Teacher-Ambassadors and 350 registered Volunteers with 5 Expansion Program, developing neglected and underprivileged pupils and orphans both academically and emotionally.

Shared Norm in TFTN

In the light of social capital, this study will highlight on the shared norms or shared ties among TFTN volunteers. The common goal as stated in TFTN's objectives as the *de facto* of social ties is to draw young volunteers throughout the nation, including those who are study abroad. Anas Alam Faizli (2013) explained the aim of TFTN is to provide an opportunity for primary school pupils, mostly those from less privileged households and orphanages, who are unable to afford commercial tuition like their fellow peers.

TFTN's aspirations encompass three major premises, thereby constructing the three needs and the S in Teach for the Needs.

The first pillar is premised on the belief that there is a need to provide an opportunity for the less fortunate pupils to experience an educational experience, at least partially similar to that of their more fortunate peers from privileged households. There are two major elements that TFTN has identified to help achieve the said "educational experience". The first is cognitive or IQ development via extra tuition classes. The second is EQ development via emotional interactions and relationship building with the pupils. Often households facing financial and familial issues fail to provide these two relevant aspects in a child's scholastic experience, to supplement formal education from attending schools.

The second premise is looking at TFTN as a training ground and opportunity for the young teacher volunteers under the TFTN banner to develop their pedagogic skills and confidence as well as to instil the benevolent spirit to help those in need, without expecting material returns. This stems from our belief that one of the reasons for education inequality in Malaysia is the over-commercialisation of education. Not only does this enlarge the growing lack of "emotional" input in the teaching profession as a social profession, it also essentially leaves behind pupils who cannot afford to pay for them.

Thirdly, the longer term and qualitative premise that TFTN aims to address is to challenge the stereotype amongst the Malaysian society, which fail to see that children from less fortunate households too have got potential. These children are often labelled as trouble-makers, lazy and unworthy of attention. However, TFTN believes these children may have actually been the product of oversight on the part of teachers and society, losing "hope" that they will make it.

TFTN has clearly defined the needs of young volunteer to participate in education activism based on its three premises. The call is meant to draw as many young people to actually be involved with under privilege students, to be with them in tutoring and facilitating in the subjects that they need to be monitor. This simple act promotes altruism among volunteers which only requires these young volunteers to be part of the kids' education journey. These young volunteers have shared their perception within the TFTN experiences in the book title "*Kami Ada Mimpi*". Saranya Balachandran (2013) describes her experience as "they (kids) were smart and all they needed was guidance and most of all, a boost to help them study."

Conclusion

The understanding on the theoretical concept of social capital and the nature of volunteerism will definitely give some light on the understanding of social ties to promote beneficial impact for local community in particular and nation in general. Having the real benefits, social capital is the best concept to empower voluntary associations based on the nature on community sociological behavior. The voluntary sector even has been regarded as the nation's third sector which gives direct impact the on economy thus results in community well-being. Increasing numbers of university students give the notions that giving youth directed and useful platform will accelerate education and skill enhancement processes. Social capital element which is share norms has been examined referring to the case of TFTN as a new voluntary association. Having noble objectives that support TFTN course ensures its movement in society, especially to promote education equality.

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