

Non-Governmental Organisations and Sustainable Community Development

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Alternative healthcare, community development, social justice, and education are all areas where non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are increasingly being recognised or promoted, but these efforts are hampered by government inefficiency and resource constraints. However, the statement of non-profit organisations is more complicated than simply comparing them to the government, as they may also suffer from a lack of resources and ineffective management, just like the government. Meanwhile, NGOs are generally defined by four characteristics: they are voluntary, non-partisan, non-profit, and non-criminal. According to Salamon and Anheier, seven distinct characteristics were used to categorise and differentiate NGOs. The seven characteristics are as follows: (1) formal (officially registered and governed); (2) private (having a separate organisation from the government); (3) non-profit distributing (different from the objectives of establishing a business organisation); (4) self-governing (privately managed); (5) voluntary (worked voluntarily); (6) non-religious (not motivated by preaching); and (7) non-political (not involved in promoting candidates in elections). These characteristics are particularly useful for identifying and differentiating NGOs from other organisations.

Keywords: non-governmental organisations (NGOs) ; sustainable community development ; programme development

1. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Except for political parties and private organisations, the term non-governmental organisations (NGOs) refers to nearly all organisations that are not sponsored by the government. The organisation must be entirely voluntary and must operate within the confines of the laws of the country in which it operates. NGOs are competently run organisations that seek to alleviate human suffering and promote the development of poor countries ^[1] through a variety of methods, including funding projects, assisting in the provision of services, and building capacity ^[2].

As identified by Stromquist ^[3], NGOs perform three primary functions: (i) providing direct services such as providing shelter and aid, caring for unfortunate welfare; (ii) providing educational services such as initiating educational awareness and encouraging critical analysis on the social environment; (iii) defending public policy such as advocating for corruption prevention or no smoking policy. Baccaro ^[2] demonstrates how certain NGOs can promote the organisation and empowerment of the poor, particularly women, through training for group members, awareness-raising, and other social services, among other methods. The ability to gain control socially, politically, economically, and psychologically, according to Zimmerman and Rappaport ^[4], is defined as the ability of an individual to gain control through access to information, knowledge, and skills; making decisions; and individual self-efficacy, community participation, and perceived control.

Over time, NGOs seek to promote sustainable community development through capacity-building and empowerment activities. Langran ^[5] defined capacity building as the process by which NGOs enable community development. NGOs are frequently formed to help people develop their capabilities. Additionally, NGOs are commended for promoting community autonomy and empowerment by assisting community groups and facilitating participatory processes ^[6].

2. The Concept of Community Development

A community is a well-defined social unit, for example, a group or association of people who share common needs, interests, functions, and values. Moreover, community development is a process in which agencies assist community members in identifying and taking collective action on issues that matter to them. Community development empowers residents and strengthens and connects communities ^[7]. Community development has grown to be one of the most powerful social forces in the process of deliberate and effective change ^[8].

According to the United Nations ^[9], community development is a process in which citizens work alongside government officials to improve the economic, social, and cultural conditions of the entire society, enabling them to contribute fully to

national progress and integrate these communities into national life. Jones ^[10] coined the term “community development,” which encompasses community participation, empowerment, and capacity. As a result, there are two primary facets to the community development process. To begin, participation by individuals in the effort to improve their standard of living as much as possible through their initiative. Second, providing technical and social services in a manner that fosters initiative, self-reliance, and mutual understanding ^[11].

According to Pearce ^[12], a community development strategy should incorporate three critical components: unified empowerment, unified leadership, and revolutionising through discourse. Rural and urban communities should be involved in all stages of the development process, including need assessment, planning, and implementation. Community development can be used for a variety of purposes, including (1) improving health; (2) improving education; (3) improving recreation and housing; (4) developing community leaders; (5) motivating communities to organise community-based plans to solve their problems; (6) strengthening local communities’ capacities to identify their incomes and interests; (7) establishing clear support among the community; and (8) enhancing operational community grunt.

Meanwhile, sustainable community development offers new challenges to a society that demands more attention and collaboration from various parties. It is an integration of two major concepts, namely, sustainable development and sustainable community. Here, communities are expected to be able to live in an environment that is sustainable and socially sustainable, including economic as well. In other words, a sustainable community adapts continuously to meet its residents’ social and economic needs while preserving the environment’s capacity to support them ^[13]. Therefore, NGOs have to mobilise communities to become self-sufficient. It assists communities in discovering their potential and in relying on their resources to achieve their goals which eventually contribute toward sustainable community development ^[14].

3. The Relationship between NGOs and Community Development

According to William ^[15], the following six functions of NGOs are critical to community development: (1) infrastructure development and operation; (2) support for innovation, demonstration, and pilot projects; (3) facilitation of communication (NGOs can facilitate communication upward from people to the government and downward from the government to the people); (4) technical assistance and training; (5) research, monitoring, and evaluation; and (6) advocacy (NGOs play roles from advocates for the poor to implementers of government programmes).

NGOs play an important role in community development by assisting communities in developing their social, capital, and human resources; enhancing knowledge and skills; encouraging people to take part in activities; and acting as a link between communities and systems. Involvement in these activities will result in their strengthening, which will be achieved as a result of community development ^[16]. Ultimately, this results in long-term, environmentally friendly community development ^[14].

4. NGOs in Malaysia

According to Tumin & Norhadi ^[17], the activities of NGOs in Malaysia before and following the declaration of independence for Tanah Melayu in 1957 can be understood through the lens of specific themes. These themes include communalism, welfarism, universalism, as well as cooperative and confrontational modes of thought. During the colonial period, for example, the establishment of NGOs to represent the interests of the major races, namely Malay, Chinese, and Indian, was heavily influenced by racism or communalism. Additionally, as was customary for the immigrant community at the time, welfare NGOs were established to address issues exacerbated by migration from the country of origin (China and India) to Malaya.

This is not to say that the two themes of understanding NGOs have ceased to be prominent following the declaration of independence. Even before 1969, the issue of racism was frequently and loudly raised, both by political party leaders and non-governmental organisation leaders. However, following independence, it was discovered that in addition to the establishment of organisations to protect similar NGOs, beginning in the 1970s, non-communalistic and universalistic issues such as consumerism, environmentalism, and feminism became the focus of NGO activity ^[17].

The process of strong community development among Malaysians is generally successful, with the government spearheading these energies to ensure political stability and justice, as well as socioeconomic peace. Malaysia frequently serves as a model for other countries in terms of community relations, owing to Malaysia’s success in fostering harmony among diverse ethnic groups. The majority of these successes are the result of collaborative efforts between various stakeholders, including NGOs.

Until September 2021, there are currently 82,675 NGOs registered in Malaysia. The state of Selangor has the highest number of NGOs, and the state with the lowest number of NGOs is the Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan, which has only 270 NGOs. According to the category, the Welfare category has the highest number of NGOs in Malaysia with 27,109 NGOs, while the Safety category has the lowest number of NGOs with only 658 NGOs.

Since NGOs, like political parties, government bodies, the media, and certain figures can influence policymaking, some NGOs may have divergent or conflicting goals of struggle and values. Confrontational relations between NGOs and the government frequently occur when there are disagreements or conflicts of opinion on an issue for which NGOs advocate, such as some human rights and environmental issues.

Nonetheless, numerous NGOs have developed cooperative and collaborative relationships with the government to bring attention to a particular issue. Typically, representatives from such NGOs are invited to serve on advisory councils alongside representatives from other sectors, such as higher education institutions, the media, and the private sector. The preceding discussion demonstrates that NGOs will continue to have a place in Malaysia's government and society in the future.

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