

The World-View of Native on Empowerment in Poverty Development Programmes (PDP)

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Abstract: The main focus of this research is on the relationship between the perception of empowerment conceptualised by the administrative agents or the government (macro level structure) with the perception of empowerment constructed from the world-view of the native community itself (micro-level structure). This is a theoretical gap to be explored in this study. Accordingly, this study will use the interpretative approach using abductive logic based on idealist ontology and constructionist epistemology. This study was conducted in the Serian District, Sarawak, Malaysia and is one of the four districts that is under the administration of Samarahan Region. The population of this research are the participants of poverty programme who live in the rural areas. A total of 25 respondents were involved in this research using the non-probability sampling technique that includes quota sampling, purposive sampling and theoretical sampling. The size of this study's sample was achieved through continuous support toward measurement or criteria of theoretical saturation. Data in this study was collected by using the in-depth interview technique and informal group discussion. The findings show that the meaning of empowerment of native community refers to a process when individuals or a group is at the stage where they are capable of using their own ability, capability and self-capacity. In addition, it also involves their capability in understanding, interpreting problems that are faced and subsequently defining the needs as well as translating the meaning of these needs into the process of action through participation in the organisation itself.

Key words: Participation, empowerment, native, development, quality of life

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this study are to understand the meaning of empowerment of the native community in poverty programme according to the world-view of the community itself based on their own construction of reality, direction in conceptualising and giving meaning to their social world.

This is because previous studies clearly show that the ineffectiveness of a development programme in improving the quality of life of a community particularly in the rural areas is often linked to the attitude of the group of planners who fail to understand the life needs and aspirations of the target group as well as the reality of their social world (Sen, 1999; Van Wicklin, 2001). Apart from that the implementation of the objectives of a development programme typically highlights two things. Firstly, the planners are economists or those who have

received training in the discipline of economy and secondly is their tendency toward the construct approach of Rostow theory that is concerned with changes from the traditional to modernisation that is unilinear in nature without taking into consideration the suitability to a community particularly from the aspect of socio-culture and acceptance toward modernism (Lyndon *et al.*, 2012; Sanjaya *et al.*, 2007). The main focus of development programmes is the economic development plans that only prioritise economic growth and social change as a measure of development success (Sen, 1993).

Besides that the main reason this study is given attention is because of the lack of research being done on the native community particularly those that give focus on the concept of participation and empowerment from the perspective of their own world-view. This situation to a certain extent has resulted in an understanding and knowledge of needs and wants of the community that is

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not quite clear and often marginalised. In addition, needs and wants are two different concepts. Need is refer to the specific category of universal goal that is relevant to all humans in their effort to avoid themselves from destruction.

Meanwhile, wants or desires are obtained from something that is liked by the individual and cultural environment (Lavers, 2008). This situation subsequently has resulted in development programmes planned by the government to improve the quality of life of this community often times experiencing failure (Ngidang and Abdul, 1999; Ngidang, 2002). The effect of this is that the community has been portrayed by Western orientalist as a community that has cultural values of laziness, difficult to change, not having high ambitions, submitting to fate and having traditional characteristics that are considered an obstacle to development (Novel *et al.*, 2011; Berma, 2004). However, this portrayal in reality can be disputed.

Other factors that contribute to this research are theoretical. Research by economists, anthropologists, social psychologists and sociologists of the concept of participation and empowerment before this have often used different orientations and concepts (Lyndon *et al.*, 2012; Berma, 2004). Sociological and anthropological studies focus on the development construct methodology based on conflict oriented models and the equilibrium in the effort to look at the concept of participation and empowerment while economic studies emphasise economic growth and social changes based on the Rostow's construct methodology, 'Stages of economic growth' (Colin, 2004; Berma, 2004; Lyndon *et al.*, 2012). Social psychology research emphasise on the cognitive and emotional aspect to discuss the concept of participation and empowerment by using the environment of free will namely an environment where the social actors are determined to be free from poverty (Durlak and Isenberg, 2004). This research seeks to understand the meaning of empowerment based on interpretivist ontology namely the actors defining their reality under the social environment and practical barriers faced by them in their everyday life.

Research problem: A few leading sociologists such as Myrdal (1970), Sunkel (1973) and Frank (1974) have rejected the diffusionist, dualistic and integrated strategy because it is unsuited for inclusion in the economic modernisation plan of backward countries. Their criticism is related to the aspects of analysis and strategy that are difficult to understand. In addition, the explanation of the backwardness quality indicator is confusing because it is built from dualistic realism that is inaccurate and refers to

the re-transformation of history and the experience of Western modernisation and development in terms of the network and form in the developing countries. They take examples of cases that happened in Brazil, South Africa, India and Mexico where there is imbalance of development in terms of areas and the incidence of elements of manipulation of power structure of the stakeholders in their development plans. In addition, they also see there are attempts to break through the sectors of the backward society through implicit colonialisation and not based on specific needs of the locals namely referring to defending the status quo of the local population but more of fulfilling the demands and needs of the metropolitans, capitalists or investors in the effort to drive the economy of the rural sectors. This matter is also described at length by Sen (2002) through the statement that each person is best placed to find out for herself what the best life for her is and the concept of quality of life of the village society should be constructed by entering into the social actors' world and not based on the world-view and needs of the metropolitans and policy planners or the investors (Sen, 1993). This is because the responsibility of the metropolitans, the policy planners, administrators and investors is merely acting on the importance and interests of a few groups, organisations and individuals in the society (Sen, 1999; Lavers, 2008). Thus, to understand clearly the social reality of a society, the researcher or policy makers should enter the world of the village society and learn the skills used by this society in building and reconstructing the social reality of their lives (Blaikie, 2000; Scanlon, 2006).

By doing so, only then will clear and precise knowledge and understanding of the concept and social reality of the quality of life of the rural society can be acquired. This situation subsequently will help the policy makers and programme administrators to formulate a development plan that can fulfil the needs and aspirations of the target groups' world-view particularly in drawing up plans that concern the minority indigenous (Bumiputera) ethnics in Sarawak specifically. This is because based on the household income investigation (PPIS), on the whole the minority indigenous (Bumiputera) ethnics in Sarawak still record the highest level of hard-core poverty at 8.3% and almost a majority of them still live in the rural areas and maintain subsistence agriculture as the main occupation (Sarawak, 2008). Approximately 63.8% of this community's household is estimated to be below the hard-core poverty level calculated from household income of <RM480 (Sarawak, 2008).

Previous studies explicitly relate the issue of poverty among native community with the attitude and actions

of the native community itself who is considered lazy does not want to change, afraid of trying, lacking in self-confidence and difficult to accept change (Minos, 2000). There are also other studies that connect this issue with the policy of the development plans that are too forward namely beyond the thinking and life of the native community itself (Songan, 1993; Sim, 2001). Some studies also associate this problem with the effect of the action of acquisition of indigenous customary rights land by the state government for the purpose of development (Minos, 2000) and the high school drop-out rate (Berma, 2004) as well as the NEP (New Economic Policy or DEB) and NDP (New Development Policy) development policies that are biased between the intra-ethnics namely the indigenous minorities (Bumiputera Minoriti) and the Malays (Berma, 2004). Whatever the excuse given, the main source that brought to this problem needs to be investigated holistically and extensively so that it can give the room or opportunity and the perfect justice and not prejudiced to any party. One of them is by looking at whether the development plans implemented by the government and the responsible agencies are in line with the needs and aspirations of the world-view of the native community itself.

Indeed, many studies have been conducted in Malaysia related to issues of poverty and the effectiveness of the development plans under the New Economic Plan (NEP) which is quite synonymous with the two-pronged strategy, namely to eradicate poverty and restructure the society (Lyndon *et al.* 2012; Siwar and Chamhuri, 2006). In particular is the effort to address the issues of hard-core poverty existing among the indigenous people (Bumiputera), especially among the ethnic of Dayak in Sarawak (Sim, 2001; Richard and Jayum, 2004). These studies found that the failure of the development plans implemented by the Malaysian government on the rural community is not entirely due to inaction or indifference of the government in helping the poor (Colin, 2004). However in any of the cases before this, this crisis appears because of the main assumption that there exists a huge gap between the planners namely the government with the receivers of the development plan from the aspect of information access (Wan Zawawi, 2001; Ngidang and Abdul, 1999).

Both parties are said to have different perceptions not only in terms of approach but also in terms of understanding of the concept of poverty itself (Wan Zawawi, 1998). The planners or the programme developers often use the symbolic approach that is more integrative and holistic in nature. It is based on observation and oriented on construct methodology that

are formed suited to the limits of the discipline to examine the aspects of process and directed on change (Siwar, 1985). On the other hand, the receivers of the development plans are said to use the approach based on their self-experience, needs and aspirations (Micro-level structure).

Nevertheless, in reality each has the same goal which is to eradicate poverty and improve the level of quality of life (Berma, 2004). This is among the main factors that contribute to this study being done which is to see whether these assumptions put forth are accurate or capable of explaining the dilemma that haunts the failure of the development plans implemented in the native community settlement areas in Sarawak all this while. In addition, the failure of the development plans is also linked with a few aspects such as emphasis on the top-down approach which is the concentration of power without the active participation of the community members limited understanding of the needs and aspirations of the plans' recipients, weak administrative structure, shallow and narrow understanding of the concept and measurement of poverty, marginalisation of knowledge, beliefs and social system of the target group and lastly, the aspect of participation and empowerment of the population (Itzhaky and York, 2000; Haris, 2004; Jones, 2003; Xu and Chow, 2006).

Background of the research area in brief: Serian District is located under the administration of Samarahan Region and is administered by a resident after Samarahan was officially made into a Region on 1 January 1987 (Sarawak, 2008). Each district is administered by a District Officer. Meanwhile, sub-districts are administered by administrative officers (Sarawak, 2008). Serian District is actually one of the four districts in the Samarahan Region, Sarawak (Fig. 1). In terms of its early historical establishment, Serian District was established in the year 1901 and was known as Sadong District. In February of 1955, it became known as Serian (upper Sadong) after Simunjan (lower Sadong) was separated and each was upgraded as a full district. Serian District covers an area of approximately 2,106 km² and is located about 64 km to the South of Kuching city or an hour's journey from Kuching city and it has one small sub-district, namely, the Tebedu sub-district which is the main entry point (International Border Crossing) for Malaysia/Indonesia (Sarawak, 2008). This Tebedu sub-district is located 43 km from Serian town. Serian district in general borders with Kuching Region in the North, Simunjan District in the East and West Kalimantan, Indonesia in the South. Serian district has a main city and 7 small towns that are the



Fig. 1: The study area

transaction centres of this district's population (Sarawak, 2008). The main city is known as Serian city and it is among one of the cities in Sarawak that has been selected to be in the 'Healthy Cities Programme' (Program Bandar Sejahtera) since, 2001. Local residents name this city as transit city (Sarawak, 2008). This is because of its position that is in the path of the Pan Borneo and Bandar Mutiara, Tebedu highway travel. The users of the highway usually stop whether to rest for a while buy handicrafts and food or fill their stomach as rations to continue their next journey. In actual fact, about 90% of the villages in the Serian District can be accessed through main roads which on the whole are tarmac or paved roads (Sarawak, 2008). However, there are also several villages which are still linked by laterite or gravel roads and river communication particularly for villages which are located far in the rural areas, such as in the areas of Mongkos, Kedup dan Tebedu zones as well as a few villages located near the Malaysia-Indonesia border. Most of these villages are also identified as not having proper basic facilities and limited in terms of access to information technology, transport and communication network, use of clean pipe water and electricity.

Only 16,171 consumers have been reported to enjoy 24 h electricity in Serian District consist of Serian/Tebedu road, Serian/Mongkos road, Serian/Mantung Marau road, Baki/Riih road, Ensengai road, Tebedu/Pangkalan Amo road, Kuching/Serian road and Serian/Sri Aman road (Sarawak, 2008).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Interpretive approach and abductive research strategy were chosen to be adapted in this research. This is because the interpretive approach and abductive research strategy see social reality socially as constructed by social actors. Accordingly in this research, the researcher needs to understand or grasps socially the world that has been interpreted in his attempt to understand the concept of participation and empowerment of the social actors. Originating from this, scientific knowledge should be obtained from the knowledge, experience, interpretation, action and reaction of the social actors in the world of the social actors themselves. According to abductive research strategy when the researcher enters the world of the social actors' life to grasp the social actors' knowledge, the social reality has indeed been constructed jointly by the researcher and social actors through a series of dialogues or narration. Therefore by using this methodology, the themes and categories of participation and empowerment of the native community in accordance to their own world-view have been explored and understood by the researcher. However, the use of logic that is utilised by the researcher to create or construct the categories of quality of life of the native community should be in line with the logic that has been used by the social actors to create typification in their daily lives.

In an effort to further explain this matter, the process of forming the construct of the social actors and their

world-view of the concept of participation and empowerment has been obtained from the reviews of the principles and theories contained in the three main traditions on the formation of ideal types; namely by Weber who stated that ideal types are the creation of social scientists. The second tradition based on Schutz's arguments and theoretical ideas state that ideal types are a combination of scientific construct and social actors' construct. Subsequently, the third tradition is based on arguments and opinions obtained from Giddens who argued that social scientists need to begin with daily typification but can use the technical concepts that already exist to help them in constructing ideal types. In this regard, it is necessary to test the validity of the scientific construct with the social actors to ensure that the scientific construct does not deviate too far from the social actors' construct. This process also involves a series of dialogues, especially between the researcher and the respondents. This study then uses Schutz's scientific construct review approach to review both the relationship between the scientific construct and the construct of the rural native community's social actors on the concept of participation and empowerment. Thus, this study uses Schutz's scientific construct review process as a principle or approach to make checks on the validity of the scientific construct.

The population of the study consists of participants of the poverty programme in the rural areas. Since, the researcher has the drawback or the inability to obtain the complete as well as detailed information on the names of the poverty programme recipients among the native community in the Serian District, thus the random method in selecting the respondents was adapted. Therefore, the non-probability sampling method consisting of quota sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling and theoretical sampling were used in this study. Purposive sampling was used at the early stage of the study to choose two types of poverty programme participants with various background or different demographic profiles. Through the result of the information and network of relationship, the researcher subsequently was successful in contacting and identifying the native people who are involved as participants of the poverty programme. This means that in actual fact snowball sampling was used directly in the process of selecting the respondents of this study. A total of 25 poverty programme participants have been selected in this study. The size of the study's sample was achieved through continuous support toward the measurement or criteria on theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation happens or occurs when there are no longer any new categories that emerge and there is no relevant data that can be discussed or act on the existing categories (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998; Corbin and Strauss, 1998).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The meaning of empowerment of native community in poverty programme: Empowerment according to the majority of the respondents in this study refers to a process when individuals or a group is at the stage where they are capable of using their own ability, capability and capacity. Apart from that, it also involves their capability in understanding, interpreting the problems faced and later defining the needs as well as translating this meaning of needs into a process of action through participation in the organisation itself (Fig. 2). The majority of the respondents in this study acknowledged that the main component of empowerment comprises the individuals' capability to get even more control in determining their life and their capability to generate ideas or constructs that can be shared with the practitioners in social research, community research and group research. This is stated by R1, 50 in his statement as follows:

I have been involved in the poverty programme namely the income enhancement programme for 2 years. What I want to raise here is not because I am angry with the government. Just that I feel what the government should do through the Department of Agriculture or other agencies is to bring us to discuss together with them in developing programmes or development projects that are suitable for us. I have a lot of ideas and opinions. But, the government does not give us the opportunity to discuss. Researchers do not merely want to be involved as participants only but have no power to express the ideas or constructs to implement. We if possible want that government to give many courses and training for us so that we can be independent and dare to make the own decisions in determining the lives as farmers

The same view was also expressed by R2, 45 in his statement as follows:

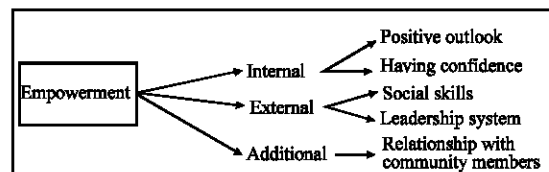


Fig. 2: Categories and themes of the meaning of empowerment of the rural Bidayuh community

My life would be more meaningful if I am given the opportunity to empower myself with a few types of training and courses suitable to my needs and the resources that I have with me. If I am selected as the participant of the SPKR programme 1 day, I do not want to be only involved as a recipient of the programme but do not have the room and opportunity to express my own ideas and knowledge. This shows that I seem to be like an employee that works to realise the goals of the government and not my goals. I do not want to be like this, I wish I am given the opportunity to have power and highlight myself in whatever programme activities that are to be planned. I see the aspect of empowerment as very important in my life because I want to be independent and subsequently have the capability either directly or indirectly, specifically in working my land with commercial crops, such as palm oil and pepper. There is no use for the government to give many courses and training if I do not know how to apply them to develop myself

Meanwhile, R3, 35 also view empowerment not only focusing on potential that is available in resources that is material in nature, such as equipment, fertilisers, financial resources, production resources such as land and machines but also involves empowerment in the form of attitude and interaction skills with others. This is because attitude and interaction skills with others are the most important elements to start a business, find business partners and buyers as well as expanding the business. In addition, it is also used as a key resource to establish co-operation with the buyers, especially the wholesalers. According to R15, 26, even though the Federal Marketing Authority (FAMA) does help, the help and assistance given is very limited. In fact in a few situations, the wholesale price offered by FAMA is lower than the price offered by the middlemen, namely the wholesalers.

There are also some respondents who raised the aspect of social capital as an effort to empower the participants of the poverty programme. According to them, social capital refers to the norm, institution and social relationship that form the quality of the social interaction in the society that subsequently allows the community members in the community to research together among themselves. For example, R16, 37 is of the opinion that social capital should comprise of aspects such as social support, social relationship, skills and information. The aspects are important assets for an individual to continue to always be confident when dealing with the problems faced by them. Thus, R18, 60 has suggested that these aspects should be empowered

and given attention extensively within the poverty programme participants themselves to ensure the participants who completed the programme could at least be independent and then capable of increasing their income level toward a better direction.

This opinion of R25, 36 in general is also agreed upon by R22, 46 who pointed out that the aspects of empowerment of the participants should be multi-dimensional in nature and not only focused on one form only. This is because the concept of empowerment is a concept that refers to the capability to obtain more control and ability to develop collective strategies in improving their standard of living. Thus, R23, 58 subsequently hope that the concept of empowerment should be elucidated in detail and not limited only to the level of presence in meetings and implementation only. The concept of participation should be seen as a whole and comprises of various levels namely the levels of planning, implementation and evaluation as well as sharing of benefits. This is because even though they are actively involved in each programme organised, this does not mean that they have high level of empowerment. The same tone was also voiced by R15, 57 while emphasising how important changes are in the individual himself/herself that comprise aspects such as a more positive attitude toward life, having high level of confidence in solving problems and lastly having a high level of emotional control. The changes will in turn help the individual to be braver in facing risks particularly in the business field and planting of commercial crops such as palm oil. Based on this foundation, R18, 36 then suggested that the frequency of participation of the Bidayuh people at the level of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation should be improved and increased from time to time. This is because the higher the degree of participation of the participants at these levels, the higher is the level of the participants' empowerment. Nevertheless, the opinion of R18 is not shared by R19, 39. R19 is of the opinion that the participants' participation at the planning and evaluation level is something that is impossible and difficult to be realised. This is because most of the activities in the poverty programme have already been designed and determined by the government. For that reason, R21, 49 suggested that the participants' empowerment is enhanced by augmenting the leadership system in the community namely the leadership of the village heads. The weakness in the leadership system has resulted in the community members not having any ability to voice their needs and concerns to the superiors for getting specific attention in the development. The weakness in the leadership system at the village and community level has made it difficult for

them to find and identify the proper channels to voice their problems and requirements in the development. Therefore, the only way for them to voice their problems is through the visits of the State Assemblyman (Ahli Dewan Undangan Negeri or ADUN) and Member of Parliament whether during the election or a result of periodic visits by the State Assemblyman (ADUN) and member of Parliament while accompanied by government officers. Nevertheless, the use of this channel as the most effective mechanism is still doubtful. Meanwhile, R24, 43 suggested that the length of time for the participants involved in the poverty programme should be extended from the current 1-3 years in the future. This is because the longer the time length of the participants in the poverty programme, the higher is the individual's level of empowerment.

The recommendation suggested by R13, 53 is also in line with the recommendation expressed by R14, 33. According to R14, the duration of time for the participants of the poverty programme who are allocated a year at the moment should be extended to at least 3 years to give ample opportunity for them to enhance their level of community knowledge and empowerment, especially in matters related to technical knowledge, suitability of land for a crop and the correct method of fertilisation and harvesting. This is because the level of understanding and acceptance of the participants of the cultivation of commercial crops is still at a moderate level and the majority of them still consider the crop as a minor crop and not as the main source of income. In addition, almost all of their farms' locations are far from their houses and the roads. This situation makes it difficult for them to market their crop yield. This situation has caused them to be obliged to sell their crop yield to the middlemen at a price offered which is far cheaper compared to the market price. Thus, R14 suggested that the farmers' knowledge of commercial crops and livestock should be assisted comprehensively by the responsible agencies. This is because the absence of a systematic monitoring and supervision has resulted in some of the activities of the poverty programme not successful in achieving its goals particularly those involving the use of modern technologies. R10, 44 also suggested that a social support programme should be developed continuously to enhance the level of empowerment of the poverty programme participants. Among them are such as cooking classes, sewing classes, vegetable growing classes and crafts classes.

Based on the feedback given by the respondents, it clearly shows that the theme of empowerment is a very important aspect in the life of the native community. The concept of empowerment that is meant by them is

more of the concept of individual empowerment. This is because, the elements put forth by them place even more focus on the aspects of individual potential, emotional control, knowledge about the society, efficiency in making decisions and solving problems, a more positive attitude toward life, having high confidence in solving problems, changes in attitudes and skills when interacting with others, appreciating help from others and so on. Accordingly, the theme of individual empowerment expressed by the native community as a whole can be divided into three main components consisting of individual internal empowerment, individual external empowerment and lastly individual additional empowerment. Among the characteristics found in the individual internal empowerment are such as a more positive attitude, having confidence and so on. Meanwhile, the characteristics found in the individual external empowerment are more toward social skills such as, having the potential to help others, learning how to accept help from others, having good relationship with others and being more considerate. Lastly, the additional empowerment theme involves the leadership system in the community and relationship of the community members with the larger and wider society such as having knowledge of their position and responsibility in the society.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study overall are consistent with the results of local studies conducted by Abdul Rahman (2006) and Ong who assumed that the aspects of participation and empowerment are the main yardstick that need to be given attention by the government in designing new plans that are comprehensive to overcome various issues and problems faced by the rural society in meeting the needs of their social life quality. This is because the aspect of participation is a process that enhances the individual's needs, personal development, self-awareness and to a certain extent self-satisfaction. In contrast, empowerment is a process when individuals or a group is at the stage where they are capable of using their own ability, capability and self-capacity in understanding, interpreting problems faced and subsequently defining the needs as well as translating the meaning of these needs to an action process namely through participation in the organisation. In this regard, Tanaka and Bhavsar (2008) in his research on the impact of the program Southern Sustainable Agriculture and Education (Southern SARE) programme and its relationship with quality of life suggests that the aspects of participation and empowerment need to be given

attention in understanding quality of life of the rural community compared to the emphasis on utility indicators, such as income, assets or properties and financial situation. This is to ensure that the concept of quality of life that is generated from a community is more comprehensive and represents the community itself. A few previous studies also found that the participation indicator is the direct determinant of quality of life of rural community (Lyons *et al.*, 2001; Durlak and Isenberg, 2004) and there is a significant relationship between the variable empowerment and the satisfaction of quality of material life, such as income and employment. This is because empowerment is linked as an aspect that represents the individual's feeling to improve his power for his own self-benefit without changing the social structure namely through action of participation in the form of making choices, influencing, making demands, negotiating and involving in the implementation of the development activities.

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