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The Involvement of Youth in the Top Management of Co-operatives

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Study on youth involvement has received enormous attention by researchers and practitioners over the decades. Evidently, past research revealed that youth plays a significant role in determining the success of the programmes and policy executed by the government. Youth involvement in co-operatives in Malaysia has been a feature which is hardly given the recognition it deserves. They tend to see co-operatives as uninteresting organisations, and only a few take advantages of co-operative opportunities. Hence, it affects the role of youth in the co-operative movement. On the other hand, their involvement in co-operatives is still unsatisfactory. As reported, there were only 205 youth co-operatives with 25,202 memberships. Therefore, the significance of this study lies in examining the factors that lead to the participation of youth in co-operatives and to describe the types of involvement. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected via a questionnaire distributed among the sample of respondents who are the Board of Directors (BOD) or currently working as a manager in a co-operative. Purposive sampling technique was employed and 300 respondents were pre-determined. The result shows that interest contributed to the highest factor that leads to youth participation in co-operatives. Apart from that, the leadership contributed to the highest factor that leads to the youth involvement in top management in co-operative.

Introduction

The youth of today are the citizens of the future upon whom the continuity of development depends. Therefore, the development of youth potential is vital in determining the success of Malaysia's socio-economic development (Samsudin, 2007). Hence it is by no coincidence that we are seeing an increasing proportion of youths involved in the co-operative arena in recent years. Youths bring with them passion, enthusiasm and creativity that will serve to add energy and new perspectives to the co-operative movement. As such, getting more youths involved in co-operatives is a crucial step in making them ready for the advancement of the co-operative movement within the years ahead. Young co-operators currently represent a supply of potential strength, a succeeding generation of co-operators, and also the future leaders of co-operatives. To enable them to build upon the traditions and successes of the co-operative movement, of its leaders, their predecessors, they need to be inspired to interact with the movement while they're still young.

Under the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016-2020), the thrust of youth development is to provide youths with the necessary skills to increase their participation and contribution to nation-building, as well as develop their leadership qualities and inculcate positive values among them. The aim is to nurture and develop a generation of youths, who are not only educated, skilled, disciplined, and imbued with leadership qualities but also possess high moral values.

Malaysia does not have a specific policy for youth in the co-operative sector. However, co-operatives can be defined as one of the 'Youth Bodies' through which the programmes and activities of the National Youth Policy and youth related activities can be implemented. Co-operatives therefore should and are expected to play an active and important role in achieving the objectives of the National Youth Policy.

Although data on the exact age profile of co-operative members is not available, a large number of members were observed to be between the ages of 20 and 40, i.e., what could be defined as youth. Some of the credit and multipurpose co-operatives have also set up a 'Youth Wing' which plans and organises activities for its youth membership. Among some of the programmes carried out are leadership seminars, vocational and technical courses to equip members with skills for income generating activities, entrepreneurship programmes etc. Thus co-operatives do contribute significantly in the development of youth in Malaysia.

Background of the Study

Malaysia uses the age criteria to define youth. The government defines youth as those between the ages of 15 and 40. The Malaysian Youth Council, the umbrella body of youth organisations also uses the 15-40 age criteria to define youths. About 46% of the country's population is in the 15–40 years old category and classified as youth (Department of Statistics, 2015). In the context of youth development programming, the Malaysian youth age range of 15 to 40 years is divided into two segments: 15 to 25 years for fundamental youth development such as character building and value development, professional and vocational skills and competencies; and the segment of 26 to 40 years, which is mainly targeted for leadership development initiatives and experiences (Kwan Meng, 2012; Hamzah, 2005).

Co-operatives have a social as well as economic objective. Co-operative principles stress the role of co-operatives in the community. The mainstreaming of youths into the co-operative movement not only adds new impetus to the whole movement but also addresses one of the pressing issues in the co-operative movement — aging membership and leadership. There is a need for co-operatives to work on recruiting youth members on boards, from whom potential successors will be identified and groomed to take over leadership roles from their current leaders as successors of their respective co-operatives, so as to ensure continuity and succession of co-operatives.

The co-operative movement in Malaysia began in 1922 with the introduction of credit co-operatives into the country by the British. Today however co-operatives are multipurpose in nature, involved in all types of activities (Hayati et al., 2008). Credit co-operatives however remain the backbone of the movement. As at 2016 there were 13,428 in the country with 7.1 million members, share capital of RM13.9 billion and RM130.7 billion in assets. Of these, 2,376 are school co-operatives (Malaysian Co-operative Societies Commission, 2016). Excluding these, the co-operative sector has more than 5 million members or about 46% of the national population above the age of 20. A large proportion of the 5 million co-operative memberships is believed to be youth.

Youth involvement in co-operatives is also very important as they are the ranks of co-leaders for the co-operative movement in the future. If the co-operative movements does not provide planning plans to create new co-operative leaders today, co-operative movements face the problem of a lack of leaders who are successful in fulfilling the mission and vision of co-operatives in the future. From the observation, nearly 87% of the board and about 90% of the co-operatives' chairmen were above 40 years of age. Youth involvement in co-operative development is lacking. This leads to a situation of co-operatives being managed by the 'elderly' members, whose management styles, ideas, and values probably do not appeal to youth of today. The mismatch of co-operative activities and management style with youth needs and aspirations may be a contributory factor for the lack of youth integration and involvement in the co-operative movement. According to Mansor (2012), the co-operative movement needs to work towards forming a generation of co-operative leaders to ensure the continuity of the co-operative as an entity entrusted with the responsibility to enhance the socio-economic community and achieve its goals.

One of the objectives of the study is to:

- Identify the key factors affecting the involvement of youths in top management of co-operatives.

Methodology

This research uses quantitative methods and uses questionnaires as the data collection instrument. The questionnaire involves three divisions: namely respondents' profiles, motivation factors for youth involvement in co-operatives, and issues and suggestions. Respondents for

this study were youths aged between 18 and 40 who held positions in co-operatives as board of director or manager except for school co-operative.

As mentioned earlier, under the National Youth Policy, Malaysia defines youths as those between the ages of 15 and 40. However under the Co-operative Act, a person has to be 18 years of age to enable them to join a co-operative (except for school co-operatives where the minimum age for membership is 12 years), as such for the purpose of this study youth in co-operatives would cover those between the ages of 18 and 40.

Findings and Discussion

Demographic profile

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of 300 respondents that consists of 110 (36.6%) males and 190 (63.4%) females from youth participating in this study. The highest respondent age is within 31-35 years (31%). This was followed by a range of 26-30 years (30.3%), 36-40 years (26%) and 21-25 years (12.6%). The majority of the respondents are managers (60.3%). The rest are board of directors (41.7%). People holding positions of chairman, secretary, and treasurer were only 39 (13%) of the total number of respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles

Variable		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	110	36.6
	Female	190	63.4
Age	21-25	38	12.6
	26-30	91	30.4
	31-35	93	31.0
	36-40	78	26.0
	Manager	181	60.3
Position	Chairman	7	2.3
	Secretary	23	7.7
	Treasurer	9	3.0
	Board Members	80	26.7

Factors Influencing Participation in Co-operatives

Table 2 shows the mean score of the motivation factor of youth participation in the co-operative by position. Among these factors, interest factor shows the highest mean score for both positions. Meanwhile, the leadership factor gets the lowest mean score for Board of Director and knowledge gets the lowest mean score for manager.

Table 2: Mean Score for Motivation Factor of Youth Participation in the Co-operative by Position

Factor	Board of Director	Manager
Interest	4.01	3.85
Reward	3.79	3.80
Encouragement	3.60	3.63
Knowledge	3.65	3.57
Leadership	3.59	3.70

Factors Involved in top management of co-operative

Table 3 shows the results of correlation analysis among the five selected factors with youth involvement in the top management of co-operatives. It was found that leadership was the most influential factor in youth involvement in top management of co-operative, followed by interest.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis Between Factors

		Knowledge	Interest	Reward	Encouragement	Leadership	Involvement
Knowledge	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N						
Interest	Pearson Correlation	.452**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000					
	N	300					
Reward	Pearson Correlation	.402**	.663**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000				
	N	300	300				
Encouragement	Pearson Correlation	.453**	.642**	.638**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000			
	N	300	300	300			
Leadership	Pearson Correlation	.595**	.653**	.555**	.507**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		
	N	300	300	300	300		
Involvement	Pearson Correlation	.384**	.457**	.354**	.421**	.547**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	300	300	300	300	300	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In conclusion, based on the sample of the study, youth in the co-operative largely held the position of a co-operative manager, only 39 (13%) of the total number of respondents was chairman, secretary, and treasurer. Of the five motivational factors, interest is the main factor in pushing youths to join the co-operative. Once they are in the co-operative, leadership factor was the most influential factor in their involvement in the top management of co-operative.

Their involvement in co-operatives is at a moderate level with roles as planners, engagements, and decision makers. It shows that the involvement of youth in the top management of co-operatives is still not encouraging.

Co-operatives have a social as well as an economic objective. Co-operative principles stress the role of co-operatives in the community. Youth and the social ills involving youth are an important component of the community. Youth are also the most productive human resource of any society. There is thus a need for greater engagement of youth in co-operatives which requires concerted effort on the part of all involved in co-operative development.

This study brings out the following:

- i) There is an obvious absence of youth involvement in the decision making process and management of co-operatives.

- ii) There seems to be a lack of motivation for youth to be involved with co-operatives. Currently youth are only passive members. Co-operative image and activities need to be changed to appeal to younger people. Incentives and structural support has to be provided to promote youth development through co-operatives.
- iii) There is an absence of direction for the role of youth in the co-operative movement. There are no youth policies or programmes for co-operatives to integrate youth development into its activities.
- iv) There is a lack of integration and networking co-operatives, youth bodies, and government departments and agencies dealing with youth issues. There is a need to foster more links with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and for co-operatives to become more active partners in the implementation of the National Youth Development Programmes.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the study and the preceding findings several recommendations can be made to bring about greater youth integration in co-operative development in Malaysia.

i. Development of quality leadership

The co-operative, in collaboration with the Apex Organisation (ANGKASA), Co-operative College of Malaysia (CCM) and Malaysian Co-operative Societies Commission (MCSC) should carry out an intensive promotional effort to educate youths about co-operatives, the role it can play and how it can benefit youth. It is important to educate youth, as often the reason for the indifference and apathy of youth members is ignorance. Youths must be encouraged and given the opportunity to assume leadership roles and be involved in co-operative decision making so that they can plan activities that can modernise and improve the co-operatives' image and appeal to other youth members.

This is particularly important today, when the increasing social ills among youths have become a national concern. Co-operatives, which emphasise the social and economic wellbeing of members, should adopt a proactive approach to help youth and to complement and supplement the efforts of the government and other NGOs in tackling social ills.

ii. Structural changes and organisational support

Youth co-operatives and youth in the co-operative sector in general have been left on their own without any clear direction or goals. If youth integration in co-operative development is to take place there must be priority given to this group and it must be accepted and endorsed by the regulatory authorities and the movement. They must define a policy for youth development. Secondly, to ensure youths are given due recognition in co-operatives, the law should be the source of strength. Two provisions are recommended to be provided for, either in the Act or bylaws.

- a) Establishing a youth wing in co-operatives at all levels. For all other co-operatives, there must be a legal provision or a directive from the MCSC for the establishment of a 'youth wing'. The youth wing should be managed by youth members of the co-operative and provision must be made for youth representation in the composition of board members of co-operatives. The youths have to be represented at all levels of the co-operative hierarchy.
- b) By establishing a 'youth wing', co-operatives will be able to include youth development programmes in their portfolios. As a group, co-operatives have a lot of resources that can be mobilised to form a synergistic force. The fact that co-operative members come from all walks of life with various skills and from numerous professions, shows co-operatives are equipped not only with the physical facilities

but also capabilities that can be mobilised and ploughed back into the movement. The youth wings should focus on:

- Developing leadership qualities among youths through leadership training programmes and youth involvement in the co-operatives' management.
- Instilling and developing entrepreneurial qualities among youths through the myriad co-operative activities such as retailing, cottage industry, services marketing etc.
- Providing skill training for income generating activities.
- Fostering links and networking with other youth bodies, NGOs and the Ministry of Youth and Sports and take a more active part in the National Youth Development Programmes.

iii. Developing better networking and linkages

For youth development and integration to take place, the youth wings of co-operatives should develop a closer relationship with other youth bodies and government agencies involved in youth issues. In this way, co-operatives could involve youth members in the National Youth Development Programmes more actively. This would help improve the image of co-operatives while promoting co-operatives among a broader spectrum of youth through their participation in youth activities. The apex organisation should take the lead in developing this networking to benefit the movement.

Co-operatives must keep up with current technology development; most youths now have very high levels of computer literacy. Dependence on ICT is also high. Therefore, co-operatives should take this opportunity to use ICT as a tool to attract youth to join co-operatives. Co-operatives should fully use social media facilities to share information on co-operative activities so that they can be accessed easily as most youths have social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Similarly with communication channels, co-operatives should make full use of WhatsApp applications or Telegram as communication channels as it becomes a trend for youth to communicate this way. Co-operatives should also develop apps that can collect information on co-operative activities so that they are easily accessible to members. The daily operations of the co-operative are also computerised so that it is safe, easy and fast.

iv. Concerted efforts by the (MCSC), ANGKASA and CCM

To achieve the objective of promoting youth in co-operative development there has to be a concerted and deliberate effort by various organisations involved in co-operative development. The three main players are the MCSC, CCM and ANGKASA.

a) Malaysian Co-operative Societies Commission (MCSC)

The MCSC, which is also the registrar of co-operatives, has the responsibility to translate the government's aspirations towards youth development into legislative provisions. It should formulate a "co-operative youth policy" with the objective of fostering greater integration of youths within and among co-operatives. The organisational structure of MCSC should reflect its support, commitment and priority for youth in co-operative development. A separate youth section should be established in the department to promote and provide direction and advisory services on youth programmes and to liaise with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Malaysian Youth Council to adapt and adopt the National Youth Development Programme for co-operatives. It should also propose the establishment of "Youth Wings" in all co-operatives and monitor its activities to ensure it meets the needs of the youth membership.

b) Co-operative College of Malaysia (CCM)

In line with a “Co-operative Youth Development Policy” recommended to be formulated by the MCSC and the Youth Development Programmes by ANGKASA, the CCM has to be given the responsibility to provide training specifically for youths alongside its normal programmes. The College has enough resources and facilities to develop a range of programmes for youth, focusing on developing leadership qualities, management and vocational skills, and entrepreneurial development. There should also be programmes focusing on physical, spiritual, social, and intellectual development.

To attract more youths into co-operatives, the College should also organise “international” programmes in the form of youth seminars, exchange programmes and workshops for the exchange of ideas and experiences and for developing linkages and networking with other co-operative youths around the world. The College already conducts an international “Certificate in Co-operative Management” programme. A similar programme targeted for ‘youth’ participants should also be included into its annual calendar of training programmes.

A ‘best youth participant’ award in term of study visits to other local and international co-operative youth organisations would provide a good motivation for greater youth involvement and development of youth leaders within the co-operative movement.

c) ANGKASA

The apex body of co-operatives (ANGKASA) has an important role to play in ensuring the effectiveness of the co-operative programmes. Because of its influence in the co-operative structure, ANGKASA has the opportunity to assess the available resources in the co-operative movement and organise them in the best manner which would bring about efficiency and effectiveness of the programmes. It is recommended that a “youth committee” which comprises of the youth representatives from co-operatives is established within ANGKASA to formulate a master plan for youth development for the entire movement. The master plan has to be in line with the youth policy to be formulated by the MCSC. The committee should monitor the implementation of the programmes at all levels and provide organisational and even financial support for youth programmes. Some of the programmes that can be included in the master plan are:

- i) Sports programmes, to promote fit and healthy co-operative youths as well as for fostering solidarity among youths in co-operatives.
- ii) Cultural programmes to inculcate the appreciation of cultural heritage among youth. The activities could include drama, traditional dances, and music.
- iii) Preventive programmes to help educate youth on social issues.

Co-operatives have a vital role to play in assisting youths in coping with the challenges facing them by providing counselling and spiritual guidance. Family development programmes should be organised with the aim of establishing strong and resilient families.

In general, youth involvement is important for the development and sustainability of co-operative movements. Co-operatives need to maximise the activities that can attract youth to become members and thus be involved in the highest management of the co-operative. Active youth involvement in co-operatives can make co-operatives an economic driver for the members and local communities. Later relationships between veterans and youths need to be enhanced so they get consensus and mutual respect in making decisions. In this way youth can contribute more ideas in co-operative activities and governance. Trust should be given to youths managing and administering co-operatives. In this way leadership can be inherited and the co-operative board members are always there and ready to administer the co-operative with integrity.

This study has shown there is an obvious need to revitalise youth in the co-operative movement. Youth are the most productive human resource and future leader of the country. Co-operatives, as community based organisations, with noble principles and values and resources at their disposal have the potential to promote youth development. This however requires deliberate and concerted effort by the various organisations involved in co-operative development.

The Authors

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