

Benchmarking Best Practices in Youth Associations in Malaysia: A Case Study

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ABSTRAK

Berdasarkan kepada premis ke signifikan persatuan belia dalam pembangunan kapasiti belia, satu kajian telah dijalankan bagi mengenal pasti 'praktis terbaik' dalam kerja pembangunan belia dalam kalangan persatuan belia di Malaysia. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kajian kes dengan menganalisis satu persatuan belia yang menerima anugerah Persatuan Belia Terbaik di negara ini bagi tahun 2004. Data di kumpul melalui temu bual secara mendalam, analisis dokumen, dan kaedah pemerhatian. Data dianalisis menggunakan kaedah statistik kualitatif. Sembilan penggerak utama—merupakan praktis terbaik yang memacu kemajuan dan impak yang dihasratkan oleh persatuan—dikenal pasti: (1) persekitaran yang menyokong kapasiti dan keperluan belia untuk pembangunan, (2) program berasas-keperluan yang mantap yang menarik minat ahli dan komuniti umum, (3) sokongan kuat daripada masyarakat, (4) jaringan mantap dan pendekatan kolaboratif dengan kerajaan dan agensi bukan kerajaan yang terlibat dalam kerja belia, (5) komitmen ahli melalui penglibatan mereka di dalam kerja belia, (6) pemimpin yang komited serta cekap dan ahli jawatankuasa yang berkongsi matlamat dan arah tuju, (7) pentadbiran yang cekap berserta kedapatan infrastruktur yang menyokong, (8) pengawasan dan penilaian berterusan terhadap program dan aktiviti, dan (9) peruntukan kewangan mapan. Implikasi kajian dan cabaran masa depan turut dibincangkan.

ABSTRACT

Acknowledging the significance of youth associations in capacity-building of Malaysian youths, a research was conducted to identify "best practices" in youth development work among the youth associations in Malaysia. This was a case study which analyzed a particular youth association that received the Best "Youth" Association national award in 2004. The data were gathered through in-depth interviews, document reviews and analysis, and observations. The data were analyzed using qualitative statistical methods. Nine key enablers – defined best practices that facilitate the desired progress and impact accomplished by the association – were identified: (1) environment that supports youth development needs and capacities, (2) sound, integrated need-based program that attracts members and the broader community, (3) strong support of the community, (4) strong linkage and partnership/collaborative approach with government and non-governmental agencies on youth work, (5) commitment of the members through their engagement in youth work, (6) committed and competent leaders and committee members who share objectives and directions, (7) reliable administration coupled with availability of supportive infrastructure, (8) continuous monitoring and evaluation of programs and activities, and (9) sustainable funding. Implications of the findings and future challenges were discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In response to the evolving and changing needs and problems of youths in Malaysia, the government has implemented and has a policy to continue to put into practice progressive youth policies and programs to ensure that youths participate and contribute effectively in community and national development. In addition to the institutionalized training on youth development, the youth associations provide a platform for the government to pursue the agenda of capacity-building of the youths for community and national development at the grassroots level.

In an effort to streamline and mobilize the youths and their association's potential as partners in nation building, the government introduced a National Youth Policy which was later replaced with the Youth Development Policy (YDP) in 1997. Although the revised policy maintained the definition of youth as those between the 15 and 40 age-group, the development and implementation of strategies and activities of youth development was targeted more towards youths between the ages of 18 and 25 years. One of the six broad strategies specified in the YDP is unleashing the potentials of youth associations i.e. to empower the youth organization to become an agent of change and as provider of continuing education programs. The effectiveness and sustainability of the youth associations as a delivery system of youth development, education and training, however, has been a central issue in the context of national capacity-building of the youth.

In the year 2005, there were about 8,000 registered youth associations in the country. Sadly, it is reported that only about 30% are considered active (*Utusan Malaysia Online* 13 January 2005) and this state of affairs is worrying to government. Therefore, the Ministry of Youth and Sports allocated the sum of RM10 million in the Eighth Malaysia Plan to rejuvenate the inactive registered youth associations.

In light of the pressing issue of inactivity and unsustainability among many of the youth associations in the country, it is imperative to

learn from the experiences of a successful association which has been recognized as the best youth association, in the country. One such is the Youth Association of Sungai Gulang-Gulang in Kuala Selangor which received a national award as Best Youth Association, in 2004. In addition, there have not been many empirical studies which examined "best practices" in particular in youth development among the youth associations, except for three studies by Azimi and Turiman (1994), Azimi *et al.* (2002), and Saifuddin (2000) all of which focused on certain factors that contribute to a successful youth association.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this research was to examine the "best practices" of youth development of youth associations in Malaysia. The research details the case of the Youth Association of Sungai Gulang-Gulang, situated in the rural area of Kuala Selangor District, Selangor, which won the best youth association national award in 2004. The study specifically attempted to identify the key enablers – best practices – that contributed to the success and sustainability of the Sungai Gulang-Gulang Youth Association. The findings of this case study validated some of the facilitating factors of successful and sustainable youth associations observed in past studies.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The need to develop "best" youth development practices among the youth associations is becoming considerably more vital because youth associations are expected to play a greater role in community and national development. Best practices may be described as optimum ways of performing work to achieve high performance, according to Ramabadron *et al.* (1997) and Bassi and Cheney (1997). Although there is no single "best practice", as the word best is not best *per se* to everyone, "best" practices are those that have been shown to produce superior results, selected by a systematic process and judged as

exemplary, good, or successfully demonstrated, as argued by Jarrar and Zairi (2000).

Geringer *et al.* (2002), asserted that best practices are those that facilitate effectiveness within specific organizational and societal contexts that an organization operates. Some "best" practices may be unique to an organization's societal and organizational contextual factors, while others may not be so unique as to preclude their utility and applicability elsewhere. This conception of "best practices" underscores that there are three categories of best practices: context-free, context-specific, and context-dependent. Context free best practices are generally applicable and effective across different organizations or situations, regardless of societal and organizational contextual factors. Context-specific best practices refer to practices found to be effective in one organization or setting and might be transferred successfully to another organization or situation with a similar contextual background. Context-dependent best practices imply that the societal and organizational conditions are so important that the best practices cannot be effectively replicated in other organizations.

Drawing on the above arguments, the present study focused on the context-specific best practices that the youth association in this case-study adopted. The study, nevertheless, does not rule out the possibility of applicability and utility of the identified best practices across situations with a similar contextual background.

There are two ways of benchmarking best practices, one, is to identify a common denominator across different organizations which are related to organizational success and effectiveness. This method would yield 'proven' best practice and this could be context-free best practices – a good practice that has been determined to be the best approach for many organizations. The other is using a case study approach – the method employed in the present study. This method would yield 'good' practice: method, procedure or process that has been implemented and has improved the

performance of an organization (and satisfying some element of stakeholders' need) and substantiated by data collected from the organization (Jarrar and Zairi 2000). The case study approach is useful in identifying context-specific and context-dependent best practices.

While the practice of awarding, the annual the best youth association in the country has been going on for the past eighteen years, a systematic empirical study on the successful or exemplary youth association is lacking. The few related studies conducted in this area are those by Azimi and Turiman (1994), Saifuddin (2000), and Azimi *et al.* (2002). In their exploratory qualitative study of factors that contribute towards the sustainability of youth organizations, Azimi and Turiman (1994) identified twelve key determinants: (1) supportive infrastructure, (2) proactive leadership, (3) clear agenda of development for both members and the community at large, (4) development and training program based on problems and needs, (5) good organizational structure with clear division of tasks and focus, (6) sharing of training experiences among members and community at large, (7) stable financial support, (8) economic and spiritual development concerns, (9) support and active participation from members and the community at large, (10) continuous monitoring of programs and activities, (11) strong linkage with development agencies, and (12) recognition and continuous motivation. Some of these factors were also observed in a small survey conducted by Saifuddin (2000).

These factors were validated in a follow-up survey of sustainability among youth associations and as a result a model was suggested specifying the relationships of key factors affecting performance of youth associations (Azimi *et al.* 2002). The model postulated three thrust activities of a successful youth association, namely program development, spiritual development and economic developments. According to Azimi *et al.* (2002), youth resource development, financial resource management, and infrastructure development are critical input factors, while leadership, governance, and

networking are the critical support factors. In a study of best practices in project management, Loo (2003) noted that best practices do not emerge from a vacuum. Rather, an organizational culture must exist, which values and nurtures best practices.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using the case study approach. In-depth interviews, review and analysis of documents, and observation methods were employed in collecting data. The data were collected in the month of January 2005. All the interviews, document analysis, and observations were conducted entirely by the researchers. Prior to data collection, decisions were reached on the variables of the study, the interview protocol, interviewing technique, the documents to be analyzed, and things to observe.

The semi-structured interviews involving systematic probing procedure was first conducted on the first week of January 2005. The second interview was on the fourth week of January. The same respondents participated in the two interviews. The respondents were the chairman, secretary, treasurer, and two committee members, all of whom have been involved in the organization for at least ten years prior to the interviews. Both interviews lasted about two hours each. The semi-structured interviews revealed very useful and detailed information. The interviews focused on the following aspects: (1) program and activities, (2) organizational structure, leadership and management practices, (3) membership, (4) development and training of committee members, (5) financial resources, (6) achievement and impact, (7) strength of the association and unique features, and (8) constraints and challenges. Interviews with four members of the association who owned and operated economic projects were also conducted to learn about their perceptions and thoughts of their association and how the youth association has helped them in their project (particularly with regard to development and training) and the impact of the project on the community.

The project owner-cum-operator respondents were also interviewed twice, on the first and fourth week of January 2005. As an incentive, they were paid a small fee for participating in the research. All interviews were tape-recorded.

Minutes of meetings, annual reports, program proposals, photos, certificates and letters of acknowledgement and recognition, and reports especially prepared for presentation to the panel of jury during the evaluation for best youth association at the state and national levels, were the documents reviewed. The document analysis was found to be critical in arriving at details about the organization and its activities. Similarly, the observation method was useful in gathering facts on the activities and achievements accomplished by the Association. It enriched and verified the information obtained through both the in-depth interviews and document analysis.

The data were qualitatively analyzed based on the objective of the study, which was, facilitating factors and best practices of youth resource development identified based on the experience of The Youth Association of Sungai Gulang-Gulang. The first step in the data analysis was transcribing the notes taken during the interviews followed by identifying the themes related to an effective and successful youth association. Qualitatively, key enablers and lessons related to best practices were identified.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A discussion of the relevant organizational and program attributes of the Association is appropriate as it provides the context for interpreting the present analysis of "best practices".

Organizational and Program Profile of the Association

When the Association was initially formed, unity among the youths and between the youths and the community was the agenda of its movement, thus, economic-based project initiatives were not the priority. But over the

years, the role of the Association expanded to include not only income generating projects but also a provider of continuing education – at the community level. The responsibility to organize the Association and provide the link to the community during its formative years was the village leader. He was very supportive of the Association and served as an advisor, motivator and resource link. His endorsement was echoed with support and cooperation from the villagers and this enabled the first chairman of the Association to lead and manage the Association smoothly and successfully. After the first chairman's era, the Association was led by five different youth leaders and the Association continued to maintain good relationship with the various community leaders over the years. Further discussion on the organizational structure and programs and activities follow.

Organizational Structure

As at 2004, there were 344 male and 104 female members, and their age ranged from 16 to 40 years. About 52% of the members were between 31 to 40 years old, 24% were between 21-30 years, and about 9% in the 15-20 years age group. Associate membership made up about 14%, suggesting that the Association had the support of the elders even though they did not hold any administrative position in the Association.

In terms of organizational structure, the Association was headed by a president, assisted by a vice president and two deputies, secretary, treasurer, and supported by a 16 members committee comprising 9 males and 7 females and three advisors. All positions were for a two-year term, through democratic elections in an annual general meeting of the association. The chairman at the time of this study, the fifth chairman of the Association, was in his 30s and a secondary school teacher. Being a teacher, he is a strong proponent of life long education and is very much interested in youth work. His professional training helped him in managing the Association. He spent about three to four hours a week on the Association, mostly during weekends.

The main committee meets once a month, on a regular basis, to plan, implement and monitor programs and activities. Inputs from various stakeholders including the advisors were sought during these meeting. One important feature of the composition of the main committee is that it comprised a mixed background of volunteers - government servants, workers in the private sector and self-employed business people - who are interested in youth work. This was one of the strengths of the Association. Eight members of the main committee were teachers and the rest were self-employed or had worked in the private sector. The self-employed business members brought in their experiences into the Association particularly in terms of implementing economic projects. One of them headed the economic bureau of the Association. In addition to their experience, working as a team was highly valued in the Association, as indicated by all the respondents.

The organization was structured into eight bureaus with each is headed by one of the committee members. The Association's set-up appears to be a flat structure and each bureau had a well defined responsibility and task. The bureaus were established around core themes in youth development work, and consistent with their goals and priorities. The bureaus are also relevant in the context of changes and progress occurring in the community. For instance, in 2002 the Association formed an Information Technology and Communication Bureau when the village was identified as one of the sites of the national project on Rural Information Port undertaken by the government to provide information technology to the rural area.

The Association has a clear shared objective, as stipulated in the organization's constitution. Its main objective was to impart good knowledge, positive attitude and to promote a healthy lifestyle among the youth through programs and activities which were organized or participated by the Association. The Association was guided by their motto "Progressive, Interesting and Profitable". The

philosophy behind this motto was each member should strive for emotional, intellectual, spiritual betterment, and physical development. This motto does not only appear in official documents but is mentioned frequently in speeches and talks by leaders, as indicated by the president and committee members.

Program and Activities

The Association has been active since its formation. Its programs and activities were well received and participated by its members and the community. The viability of the program and the visibility of the Association were perhaps attributed to the fact that it received strong support from the Village Security and Development Committee. The continued strong support from the Village Development Committee was ensured even when there were changes in leadership in the village leadership.

The programs and activities were designed to be appealing to members and the community, and strove towards providing equal opportunity for all to participate. The Association believes that all programs and activities must bring benefits to the members, the association and the community at large.

The Association had no problems in getting sponsorship for implementing programs and this indicates the support and the trust the Association got from the public. In addition to a fixed income from membership fees and rental from a shop house owned by the Association, it relied on sponsorships either in kind or financial support from individuals, groups and agencies. To ensure accountability and transparency, utilization of fund needed the approval of the main committee in their monthly meetings. Report on their financial standing were also presented in the monthly committee meetings and annual general meetings.

With regard to programs and activities, the Association actively pursued relevant programs towards improving all aspects of youth development. Programs implemented or participated in the Association are clustered

into social, academic, spiritual, and economic programs. Some of the programs were regularly conducted, such as tuition classes and computer literacy classes; while others were periodical or a one-time project, such as the Youth Carnival Day. The main intention of the non-economic programs was to create an environment that supports the youth development needs and capacities, particularly in the domain of identity and ability. It is hoped that through the activities e.g. "For the Youth and By the Youth", the village youths would imbibe a sense of safety, awareness, spirituality, high self-worth, a sense of responsibility and would experience quality relationships with peers and adults, and have a sense of hope or purpose for their future.

One important feature of the Association was the organization and/or participation in a range of attractive programs that are relevant to the youths and the community. In order to enhance a broad participation from the youths and support from the community, the Association worked on the principle of organizing integrated programs, which addressed social, psychological, spiritual, educational and economic needs of the youth. All the programs were determined and implemented in consultation with many of the stakeholders (youth and community representatives and the relevant agencies such as Ministry of Youth and Sport, Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry to mentioned a few). The consultation was done not only during the monthly committee meetings but also through informal survey or discussion with some youths to air their opinions on any proposed program. Another important aspect that guided the Association in designing a program was to focus on the community resources, in addition to issues and needs of the youths and the community.

The Association also adopted the idea of service-learning program. It is hoped that the youths would learn social and management skills through their participation in program implementation. Some programs were tailored for specific age groups while others were catered to various age groups. The

Association placed emphasis on wide participation of members and non-members when designing a program. It was also noted that monitoring of programs was done regularly during the monthly committee meetings. In most cases, post-mortem discussions were held to talk about lessons learnt from the implemented programs.

While the non-economic programs were mostly decided based on consultation with the youth and the community, the economic programs were determined based on individual interests and needs. Some of the income-generating projects were initiated by the youth members themselves and some were initiated by the Association. The Association encouraged the members to venture into business, expand existing business, or match business opportunities offered by the development agencies with relevant business interests of members. In both cases, the Association functions as a resource link.

As a provider of non-formal education, the Association actually conducted many informal, hands-on training and development activities and the youths were directly involved in the implementation of a program which thereafter developed their social and organizing skills. One of the most salient features of the training and development approach is the idea of 'serve and learn', and this seems to be widely practiced. The participants of the program, on the other hand, benefited from the programs in terms of social and cognitive development.

Although there was no proper instrument used in identifying development and training needs, one important positive feature of the Association's program was the selection of training subjects based on current issues and community needs which were identified during meetings and through informal surveys. Most of the programs were planned in consultation with the Village Security and Development Committee and the youths, and where appropriate with the relevant development agencies.

The Association kept track of training and development opportunities offered by the

relevant government agencies for its members, particularly for the committee members and potential committee members. Such training was meant to increase their managerial and facilitative skills in dealing with the youths. In addition to the institutionalized training, the Association also organized visit and study tours to relevant organizations and participated in study tours organized by other organizations. The Association also provided recommendation letters in support of members who needed to attend courses offered by other organizations including government agencies. Due to its status as a successful "model" youth association, the Association received numerous visitors with whom they exchanged experiences and learnt from each other about youth work. The visitors were also shown some of the economic projects managed and owned by the members of the Association. In a sense, the visits served as recognition to the members and this motivated them to be successful in their projects.

In terms of technical training related to economic projects undertaken by members of the Association, all basic technical courses were obtained from the relevant development agencies. While the Association played a minimal role here, it also helped members, who owned and operated projects, in identifying follow-up entrepreneurship courses. In addition to attending short-courses, the project owner-cum-operators also upgraded their technical knowledge through self-learning and visitation.

Best Practices

Having described the organizational and program profile of the Association, what are the practices that proved promising to the Association in order to effectively enact its role as a partner in community and national development and as a provider of continuing education for the youths? The present analysis has identified nine key enablers, seen as best practices contributing to the success of the Association. These are:

1. **Creation of an Environment that Support Youth Development Needs and Capacities**
The youth were provided with meaningful and real support and opportunities needed to develop their potential and to utilize their capacities for self-development and their contribution to the community through the programs and activities. They were also given opportunities to practice and expand on what they know and learn in meetings and the structured programs they participated. To ensure that this support and opportunity factor is met, the Association adhered to the idea that programs are based on needs of the members and the community.

Participative decision making is a well accepted mechanism that was in place to get the necessary input in designing programs at the Association's monthly committee meetings. The meetings were attended by the Association's advisors and, when necessary, officers from government and non-government agencies. Opinion of ordinary members was also sought through informal surveys or discussions. This practice was considered important by the committee members because it enhanced receptivity of the members and the community.

2. **Sound Integrated Programs and Activities that Attract Members and Community Support**

Another key to the success of the Association was program relevance in terms of addressing needs and having a positive impact on the youth and the community. The management of the Association viewed the youths in terms of their strengths and assets – and, not just their problems. The youths were viewed as a resource and, as such, they were actively engaged in planning, implementing and evaluating the programs. It is pertinent that instead of approaching youth development solely from a problem-based perspective, the Association supplemented its program with asset-based approach to youth development. In addition, the need-based development program principle was adopted; and, to ensure greater support from the members and the community, the Association implemented

diverse programs (instead of focusing on a particular type of program and placing less emphasis on the other types that were of interest to the Village Development Committee and community). Accordingly, the Association focused on a range of programs with the intention of producing a balanced outlook among the youths. The Association successfully integrated the concern of the community into its programs, particularly the need for better educational achievement and spiritual development among the young people, to prepare them for the challenges of a K-society, in addition to income generating programs.

The incumbent president's and the vice-president's background in education influenced their views on education as a tool to inculcate culture of change and progress. They stressed that all programs must implicitly or explicitly contain certain elements of training and development. This is explained through the emphasis on the "serve and learn" approach in youth development programs adopted by the Association. In short, a high value on project-based or experiential learning was placed on education within the integrated programs.

3. **Strong Support of the Community**

Embarking on program-focused and relationship-focused initiatives towards an effective youth-adult partnership environment is another key enabler. The Association considered youth and adult partnership as part of its objectives. It was a practice of the Association not to use a program strategy only but also community strategy to youth work. Establishing and sustaining good relationships with the institutions at the grassroots and the community at large was an obvious practice. The mechanisms in place, particularly through regular meetings, do not only create a sense of belonging but it also provided opportunities for the youths to develop a relationship with a caring adult connected to the program and with the community. It is noticed that the Association is fortunate to have a development-receptive community, and this facilitates in implementing programs for the youth. As an

outcome of the relationship-focused program, the Association obtained a strong and continuous support of the community. The atmosphere of mutual respect among the youth Association, the Village Development Committee and the community at large was clearly evident.

4. Strong Linkage Partnership Approach to Youth Work with Governmental and Non-governmental Agencies

The practice of collaborative planning with relevant government and non-government agencies which were responsible for youth development proved to be a beneficial approach to youth development work. The Association emphasized partnership and collaboration with other agencies in order to provide more opportunities and support for young people, as is evident from the fact that most of its programs with the Village Development Committee and/or government agencies are collaborative. More importantly, it has been responsive to the opportunities created by the government for social and economic development. The Association was able to achieve the desired impacts of the youth development programs because it made partnerships an organizational priority.

The active involvement of relevant officers in related development agencies through mechanisms such as regular participation in meetings and program implementation as well visits to the project site enhanced the capacity of the Association to deliver effectively the development programs for the youths. The participation of the officers was not limited to technical and social know how, but occasionally they were also invited to officially open or close a program. The meaningful participation of many stakeholders is a manifestation of the viability and progressiveness of the Association. Frequent formal and informal contact and interaction with development workers further promote good interpersonal relations and, in turn, further develop strong commitment from the officers of the participating development agencies.

The leaders of the Association have been effective in playing their role as a resource link. They linked the members/programs to the related development agencies for guidance and support. The Association not only welcomed any form of help from government or non-government agencies, it also actively pursued opportunities for collaborative work. Consequently, the members and the villagers have high regard for the Association and they have full faith in the sincerity of the Association's intentions.

5. Support and Commitment of the Members Through Their Active Engagement

Youth engagement in program planning and evaluation is highly visible in the Association, as evident in the minutes of meetings. The Association received strong support from its members and the community because they saw the benefits or they anticipated positive impacts from the programs. The programs offer development/enrichment opportunities such as skill building and service learning activities. The existing communication system such as the regular monthly meetings effectively allows the involvement of its members in determining and setting expectations from participation. The members are viewed as a resource, contributors and leaders in their program rather than consumers or recipients of services. In this way, the members become actors rather than recipients. The Association encouraged its members to work together to determine, develop and give leadership to the program. Accordingly, it is not a surprise to find that most of the members have a sense of pride of their Association and its accomplishments.

Support and commitment of the members came not only because the programs are beneficial and that they can make meaningful contribution, but the fact that the Association recognized their participation and contribution it further enhanced their commitment towards the Association. It has been a practice that a certificate was given to

those who had successfully completed a program organized by the Association. The practice of giving a certificate or letter of appreciation to the members who had shown excellent performance is highly valued. The certificate was found useful by most of the members either for job seeking purposes or to apply for government aids or development/training programs.

6. Committed, Competent Leaders and Committee Members who Share Objectives and Directions

Any organization must have a critical mass in order to function effectively. This is the case of the Youth Association of Sungai Gulang-Gulang. The critical mass has the proper attitude and knowledge of youth work. The presence of well received and effective leaders who strongly advocate youth participation and non-formal education in youth development is clearly a key enabler. The leaders being government servants have been exposed to many courses and training which are applicable in managing the Association. As youth leaders they had also attended several training programs specifically related to youth work. A strong team comprising members having mixed but complementing backgrounds and experiences are the strength of the Association.

The willingness of the key leaders to commit time and energy to the Association and their ability to lead are widely recognized as a major success factor. Not only the key leaders were very much interested in youth work but it is reckoned that the committee members themselves exuded enthusiasm and commitment and therefore were selected and supported by the community. When the leadership in youth work is openly accepted by the members and the community, the activities will have the benefit of both moral and material support from the community and grassroots institutions.

The spirit of volunteerism is put into practice throughout the Association. They wanted to serve regardless of their position in the organization. Their involvement in the

Association and youth work is not motivated by personal and political gains. To support this point, one of the present committee members was a past president, and this somehow reflects the non existent of any leadership struggle within the Association's top leadership.

The organization and all its bureaus were clear about their goals and mission. All initiatives were undertaken in accordance with the motto "Progressive, Interesting and Profitable," and based on the philosophy that encouraged autonomy and the development of self-esteem. Each bureau had clear division of tasks and focus, and considered both the development and needs of members and the community at large in attaining sustainable development and complying with the vision of leaders at the state and national level as the goals and mission.

7. Reliable Administration Coupled with Availability of Supportive Infrastructure

The Association has a reliable administrative structure. It has its own office or "operational" space to serve as an administrative and documentation centre. Situated next to the office of the Village Development Committee within the same administrative complex, the Association effectively shared and utilized available facilities and resources with the Village Development Committee which readily facilitates the work of recording and presentation of relevant data for the members as well as visitors' perusal. The Association's physical environment is welcoming to young people, their families and visitors alike. At the same time, the physical proximity not only facilitates and improves coordination of activities of the Association and the Village Development Committee but also eased access to facilities for program implementation.

8. Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation of Activities

The practice of monthly committee meetings not only provided a platform for participatory decision making, but it also allowed for continuous monitoring and evaluation of

program implementation. Through the system of constant monitoring of programs, any weakness that arose from the programs were readily remedied. The practice of post-mortem discussion of completed programs was useful as it permitted the Association to identify lessons learned during the implementation of programs.

9. Sustainable Funding

Another key practice is making funds readily available to support program implementation on a sustainable basis. Although sponsorships from individuals, groups, and organization were readily available, the Association had its own constant source of income from small projects to ensure that administrative activities and implementation of core programs were not interrupted. Good interpersonal relationships with key individuals including politicians has enabled the Association to readily secure sponsorships. In fact, the leaders and committee members were proactive in seeking funds to support youth development programs.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Nine key enablers were identified from the "best practice" analysis of a "model" youth association – the case of the Youth Association of Sungai Gulang-Gulang. Considering the fact that the Association is situated in a rural area, the key enablers identified are readily applicable to other youth associations in other rural areas. This is because the contextual situations of many of the youth associations in rural areas are similar. Some of the identified – "best practices" seem generic organizational processes, for instance, partnership and collaborative planning, problem and need-based programs, good team work and strong leadership, and effective acquisition and utilization of resources. Thus, the identified practices are also applicable to youth associations in urban areas.

Nevertheless, the ability of youth associations to sustain their success depends on how the identified key enablers could be retained and improved. With the present

trend in media growth and globalization, youth associations face greater challenges to attract youth participation in youth development programs. Thus, it is very crucial for youth associations to be more innovative in its programs and activities. The programs must not only be perceived beneficial but should be seen as those which could highly impact the youths and community. A collaborative and partnership program with the appropriate agencies is no longer an option but a requisite as it will increase the availability of support and opportunity factors for the youths to meet their needs and further develop their capacities.

In order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of youth associations as a delivery system of non-formal education, leaders and/or workers who are involved in leading the youths must maintain a high degree of professionalism in their work and should adopt "best practices" in youth development work. In fact, the demand for professionalism in youth work is all the more pertinent when society becomes more educated and critical especially on issues like ethnic relations and human rights.

Another challenge is the availability of second-line leaders. Considerably, migration of educated and skillful rural youth to the urban areas will remain a common landscape in population distribution; hence, it is imperative that youth associations must ensure the availability of able second-line leaders who are willing to serve and understand the philosophy of youth development work.

While the present study pinpoints several "best practices" for wider adoption, quantitative indexes of success (key performance indicators) has not been well established. This gap in knowledge must be promptly addressed. Key performance indicators are useful in formulating the objectives of development programs and in monitoring and evaluating the impacts of youth development programs at both the individual and community levels.

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