



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Empowering Communities: The Role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) In Education and Welfare Development in Malaysia

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Aug 11 24, 2024 Accepted: Oct 11, 2024	Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Malaysia have always played a big role in shaping the nation's education and welfare. Despite the government's efforts to reduce social and economic disparities, numerous communities have endured decades of marginalisation. Emerging NGOs respond by providing critical services to marginalised populations. This study will examine the development and impact of NGOs in Malaysia, with a focus on their roles in the education and welfare sectors. The researchers will employ a qualitative multiple case study, concentrating on the leading NGOs that have made the most significant contributions to the sectors. The methods in data collection will use semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observation of NGO-led programs. It is expected that the findings will demonstrate the significant presence and influence of NGOs in reducing educational inequality, especially among the rural and marginalised communities. NGOs have effectively enhanced access to education and welfare services, and yet they persistently encounter issues related to financial sustainability and staff management. In the end, this study will contribute to the literature by providing an in-depth understanding of the role of NGOs in community development and recommends long-term partnership among stakeholders involved in Malaysian localities for the sustainability of NGO-driven initiatives within Malaysia.
Keywords Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) Community development Education Welfare	
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1. INTRODUCTION

The existent of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) has become increasingly crucial in addressing various social issues in Malaysia, particularly in the realms of education and welfare. The NGOs play a pivotal role in supplementing the efforts of the government and filling the gaps in service delivery. Despite the government's ongoing efforts and implementation of various initiatives aimed at enhancing the education and welfare, numerous challenges persist, particularly in effectively reaching out to disadvantaged communities. This is where NGOs have emerged as pivotal entities in tackling these critical issues (Lewis et al., 2020). Generally, NGOs have taken a significant role in social mobilisation and development where they often fill the gaps that left by governmental efforts (Sarjito et al., 2023). They operate as a vital connecting link between government initiatives and grassroots communities, playing a key role in promoting community involvement and empowerment of individuals.

These NGOs has operated across a diverse array of fields, including education, health care, social welfare, and economic empowerment initiatives (Abiddin, Ibrahim, & Abdul Aziz, 2022). Their unique capability to function independently and with a high degree of flexibility empowers them to effectively address and respond to specific needs present within the local community (Razak et al., 2023). Through their active engagement and targeted programs, NGOs can provide critical services that enhance the overall development of society, ensuring that no group is left behind in the pursuit of a better future. These efforts

contribute to a more equitable and inclusive Malaysia, fostering the growth and development of a resilient community that can adapt and thrive in the face of various challenges.

NGOs can be considered professionally staffed organisations that play a crucial role in community development by providing various kinds of services to the communities. They work towards reducing human suffering and improving the quality of life for all members of society. According to Abiddin et al. (2022), NGOs have an important role in promoting education and welfare, particularly in Malaysia. NGOs play a crucial role in enhancing the education and welfare systems by providing various programs and services to the community. These programs and services aim to empower individuals and communities, ultimately contributing to the overall development of the nation. They play an important role in community development because they provide resources and support to those in need (Emery & Flora, 2020). Therefore, understanding the historical development of NGOs is critical to assessing their long-term impact on the community and seeing how local society can take ownership of the changes made.

2. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have always played a major role in the growth of education and welfare in Malaysia, especially among underserved communities who do not benefit fully from government initiatives. Since independence, NGOs historical development in Malaysia has shown that these organisations have played a crucial role in addressing key socio-economic issues such as poverty, educational access, and healthcare services in rural areas (Haris et al., 2021).

In education, NGOs such as Teach for Malaysia and SOLS 24/7 have been able to close the education gap by sending volunteers to schools in rural areas and underperforming schools. These initiatives have significantly improved students' academic performance, and holistic education has empowered the entire community (Srinivas, 2022). Besides that, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also have successes in terms of providing education to refugee children as well as students with disabilities who are often neglected by the mainstream education system (Khairi et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, in the welfare sector, there are several NGOs offered medical aid, shelter for domestic violence victims, and various welfare programs, including MERCY Malaysia and Women's Shelter. This will ensure that the targeted groups' quality of life improves, and it plays a crucial role in promoting a healthy lifestyle (Ijon et al., 2023). The economic turmoil and soaring cost of living, along with the escalation of social challenges, make non-profits new important partners for governments to work on complex social issues (Haris et al., 2022).

The reason for this study is that NGOs are crucial in helping to fill the gaps of needs in the education and welfare sectors in Malaysia, particularly among marginalised groups that receive less attention from the government programs. For instance, NGOs such as Teach for Malaysia and MERCY Malaysia, have managed to increase access to good education and healthcare, but they still confront the obstacles of limited funds (Ahmad et al., 2024; Reza, 2022). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the strategic roles that NGOs play in bolstering the education and welfare sectors in Malaysia. This paper will also examine the difficulties and limitations that occur with NGOs and recommend ways to effectively use them to promote community well-being.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study aims to assess the role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the education and welfare sectors and their impact on community development in Malaysia. As to gain a deeper understanding of the role of NGOs in community development, particularly in the education and welfare sectors, this study will employ a qualitative approach. This approach is chosen because it allows researchers to explore the perspectives, experiences, and practices of NGOs within different social and cultural contexts (Abdullahi et al., 2021). The study will use a multiple case study approach as it allows for a detailed and comprehensive examination of the role of NGOs in a specific context. Two main NGOs that focus on the education and

welfare sectors will be identified to be the case of this study. The selection of the organisations is based on their significant contributions to the education and welfare sectors in Malaysia.

3.1 Data Collection Methods

Data will be collected through various methods to ensure triangulation and the accuracy of the research results. The methods that will be used are semi-structured interview, observation, and documents analysis. The interview to be conducted with the managers, project coordinators, and participants of the involved NGO program, including teachers, students, welfare aid recipients, and volunteers. By adopting the semi-structured interview, it will provide the flexibility to explore related topic based on the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Chumsukon, 2021).

This study will also collect and analysis documents, such as annual reports, impact reports, and news articles related to the NGO's education and welfare programs. The collection of these documents will provide an in-depth insight into the operations of NGOs as well as the challenges and successes they had (Masefield et al., 2020). Then, direct observations of the programs run by the NGOs will be conducted. This observation will allow researchers to understand the atmosphere of program implementation as well as the interaction between NGOs and the community. Through direct observation, researchers can identify the dynamic interactions between NGOs and the communities involved (Hassan et al., 2020). All these data collection methods will ensure triangulation that can enhance the reliability and validity of the research findings. Triangulation is also important to ensure that the findings of the study reflect the reality of NGOs program implementation in Malaysia.

3.2 Respondent Selection

The respondents will be selected through a purposive sampling technique. The respondents are those who are directly involved with NGOs programs, including program manager, teachers and facilitators, students or beneficiaries of education programs, and beneficiaries of welfare, provided by the NGOs. This technique will allow the researcher to select respondents who have in-depth knowledge of the issue discussed and able to provide meaningful insights on the impact of NGOs.

3.3 Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected will be analyzed using thematic analysis. The process involves the identification of key themes, categorization of the data into recurring themes, and triangulation as to increase the reliability of the data. The triangulation will be performed between the interviews data collected, documents, and observations.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Development of NGOs in Malaysia

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) refer to organisations that play a crucial role in community development by providing a deeper understanding of their meaning and role in effective development. NGOs work in almost all the areas concerned with education, health, welfare, environmental sustainability, and a full range of other social development programs (Lewis et al., 2020). Generally, individuals or groups initiate and propel NGOs, motivated by a shared desire to aid the community purely out of selflessness and without anticipating any reciprocation. NGOs, despite working autonomously and without the interference of any authority, are subject to all laws in the country. NGOs are non-profit organisations, which is one of their unique characteristics. Basically, all funds derived and received through donations in NGOs must be fully channeled towards the interest of the community, without benefiting any party, including individuals (Annuar & Ismail, 2023).

Malaysian NGOs, like their old-age counterparts, began to flourish after Malaysia gained its independence; this was in tandem with major overhauls in the country's socio-political and economic development. The

Malaysian post-colonial environment, with its ethnic diversity and the current economic policies, could provide an excellent avenue for civil society organisations to develop (Kamaruddin & Rogers, 2020).

In the 1970s and early 1980s, government initiatives on poverty reduction and sustainable economic development in Malaysia led to a rise in welfare and development NGOs. The Second Malaysia Plan exemplifies the role of welfare organisations in providing charitable and rehabilitation aid to marginal groups, including orphans, the elderly, and those with disabilities (Shaary & Aaron, 2020). Meanwhile, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have begun to provide services to society. During this period, they have not solely concentrated on areas neglected by the government or mainstream services (Abiddin et al., 2022; Abiddin & Ro'is, 2023; Haris et al., 2021).

Over the last few decades, the number of NGOs in Malaysia has proliferated, and these NGOs now engage with a range of other important issues such as education, public health, environmental sustainability, and human rights struggles. NGOs are not only proliferating in Malaysia, but they also influence public policy reform, contribute to essential services, and are an antidote to the state apathy that protests other crucial issues that go unnoticed by the authorities highlighted (Ahmad et al., 2024).

NGOs in Malaysia appear to be following this development trajectory, along with the country's socio-political evolution and a stronger push for civic engagement to address some of the social problems. Despite challenges in engaging all levels of society, the increasing participation of the NGO points towards a deeper and more effective engagement with society (Hassan et al., 2020).

4.2 The Role of NGOs in Community Development in Malaysia

In Malaysia, community development seeks to enhance the quality of life for society through a comprehensive form of social, economic, educational and welfare development. The primary goal is to improve the local economy and community health, but also to maintain cultural connection (Rami et al., 2021). The concept of community development involves the collaboration of various parties, including the government, NGOs, the private sector, and the community itself, with the aim of creating a more balanced and sustainable well-being (Silverman & Patterson, 2021).

NGOs play an increasingly significant role in social campaigns, community projects, and various productive activities aimed at creating a more inclusive, prosperous, and advanced society. They help and support to the less fortunate, thereby contributing to Malaysia's development (Shaharudin et al., 2020). Recent studies have revealed that NGOs provide support through educational programs, social awareness campaigns, welfare support, and economic development, particularly in addressing challenges that the government may not always be able to solve (Ahmad et al., 2024; Hoque et al., 2022). This integrated initiative ensures that every layer of society has fair access to resources and opportunities, leading to the success of community development in Malaysia (Abiddin et al., 2022).

In community development across Malaysia, NGOs are there to address key social issues such as education inequality, healthcare accessibility, poverty alleviation, and environmental sustainability. By collaborating with government agencies and other stakeholders, NGOs implement initiatives that target underserved populations and promote sustainable development. A prominent example is Teach for Malaysia, an NGO dedicated to improving education access by recruiting and train young graduates to teach in high-need schools (Tee & Samuel, 2017). This initiative not only addresses education disparities but also empowers local communities by fostering a sense of social responsibility among the younger generation. NGOs in Malaysia often focus on marginalised communities, providing essential education and healthcare services to groups such as children, the elderly, and people with disabilities (Mahadzir & Hassan, 2021). Their efforts play a crucial role in promoting social inclusion and empowerment, ensuring that the most vulnerable populations are not left behind in the nation's development.

4.3 Education in Community Development

Education plays a vital role in the social and economic development of communities in Malaysia. It provides individuals with access to critical knowledge and skills, essential for success in today's competitive job market (Ogbodoakum et al., 2022). By promoting a greater understanding of the world, education kindles interest in addressing various social issues, thereby empowering individuals to contribute meaningfully to their communities (Shaturaev, 2021). It also fosters core values such as honesty, discipline, perseverance, and simplicity, which are crucial for building a cohesive and harmonious society. Education is a powerful tool that bridges cross-cultural divides and strengthens societal unity, extending opportunities for individuals to secure high-quality employment and contribute significantly to their local economies (Coelho & Menezes, 2021).

The impact of education on community development is undeniable. It equips people with the necessary knowledge and skills to engage in the development of their communities. A strong educational framework rooted in integrity helps develop individuals who are not only competitive in the labour market but also innovative and self-assured. These individuals are better prepared to face and overcome the complexities of a rapidly evolving world. Furthermore, education raises awareness about social and economic issues, motivating individuals to take an active role in community development projects, contributing to sustainable growth and development (Tyagi et al., 2021). Therefore, all stakeholders, such as educators, policymakers, and community leaders, must prioritise education as a key driver of community empowerment, fostering resilient, engaged citizens who contribute to holistic community development (Wamsler, 2020).

NGOs in Malaysia have been instrumental in addressing educational inequalities, particularly among marginalised populations. NGOs like Teach for Malaysia work to reduce education disparities by placing teachers in underperforming schools in rural areas (Tee & Samuel, 2017). This has led to improved academic performance for students in underserved regions. Similarly, organisations like SOLS 24/7 offer free education programs that focus on English literacy, digital skills, and soft skills development, targeting low-income communities (Tok et al., 2022). Additionally, NGO-led literacy programs for children with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds have significantly improved literacy rates, especially in regions like Sarawak and Perlis, benefiting more than 1,000 children (Reza, 2022).

NGOs also engage in policy advocacy, working closely with the Ministry of Education to push for reforms that address structural issues within the Malaysian education system. These efforts aim to ensure inclusive policies that benefit marginalised groups such as refugee children and students with disabilities. By partnering with government entities and the private sector, NGOs ensure the sustainability and scalability of their educational initiatives, contributing to long-term community development (Srinivas, 2022).

4.4 Welfare in Community Development

Welfare plays a crucial role in community development, particularly in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations. In Malaysia, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been instrumental in delivering essential welfare services that directly contribute to the upliftment and well-being of disadvantaged communities (Ijon et al., 2023). These organisations provide a wide range of services, including financial aid to support underprivileged individuals, rehabilitation programs for victims of domestic violence, and care facilities for the elderly and disabled. By offering these comprehensive services, NGOs play a pivotal role in ensuring that all community members have access to the resources and support necessary to improve their quality of life (Lewis et al., 2020).

Through the welfare initiatives, NGOs are helping create more inclusive communities where marginalised individuals are empowered and supported. In addition to addressing immediate needs, NGOs in Malaysia have also made a significant impact in broader welfare services, such as poverty alleviation, healthcare provision, and social protection. These organisations work with vulnerable groups, including orphans, single mothers, the elderly, and people with disabilities, to offer essential services that may otherwise be unavailable (Abd Razak, Ismail, & Basir, 2023). For instance, MERCY Malaysia has been a key player in

providing healthcare to underserved populations, especially in rural areas and during emergencies. Similarly, other NGOs manage shelters for victims of domestic violence, provide mental health counseling, and offer legal aid to those in need.

Moreover, welfare services such as food banks, orphanages, and rehabilitation centers for drug addicts and the homeless have been central to NGO efforts in Malaysia. These initiatives are driven by growing demands from both internal factors, such as economic instability, as well as external global challenges, such as the rising cost of living (Alaloul et al., 2021). NGOs have stepped in to fill gaps in government services, often collaborating with government agencies and religious organisations to deliver comprehensive welfare programs. By doing so, NGOs play a critical role in fostering community resilience and ensuring that no one is left behind in the nation's development efforts.

4.5 Challenges in NGOs Initiatives

Based on a previous study, it was identified that there are some challenges for NGOs to implement their programs effectively in Malaysia. Amplify Strategies noted financial hurdles as one of the top obstacles, particularly in attempts to connect with remote populations and maintain essential services (Abiddin et al., 2022). Limited financial resources pose enduring challenges for NGOs in retaining their education and welfare programs; thus, they heavily depend on both private donors and government funding that may occasionally be less (Naderi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, NGOs tend to exhaust formal institutional resources as they struggle to foster diverse socio-economic communities hence resulting in heavy reliance on external financial resources (Ijon et al., 2021). Managing volunteers is another major challenge NGOs must deal with in human resource management, apart from financial restrictions. This can disturb the flow of the functioning of these programs as no NGO Program work on a long-term basis and are totally dependent upon volunteer labor which is, in most cases of limited time and commitment (Ilyas et al., 2020). Studies show that NGOs need to reconsider their workforce management approach because current lack of volunteering commitment end-up forcing them into more innovative and strategic ways for strengthening the program and bringing about its efficient working (Ijon et al., 2021).

Previous studies also identified many opportunities for NGOs works to improve the effectiveness in community development, albeit significant challenges remain. One such possibility is that of leveraging collaboration between NGOs, the government and the private sector. Through the introduction and implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities to the corporate sector, NGOs can get both financial help as well as a larger volunteer group (Brzustewicz et al., 2021). In addition, experts counsel that NGOs should focus on how practical their programs are. The ability of NGOs to maintain transparency and accountability in their operations also goes a long way to convince donors that they would support them. When this is established, it builds confidence on the publics that make it possible for an NGO program to be successful.

4.6 Strategic Involvement of NGOs

Previous studies have consistently emphasised the critical role of community involvement in enhancing the effectiveness of initiatives implemented by NGOs. The extent to which NGOs foster and encourage community involvement and participation determines the overall success of their education and welfare programs (Haris et al., 2022). However, a comprehensive review of this issue suggests that the most successful NGO response is to engage community members by establishing and building upon these programs in their own already existing local actions (Gnych et al., 2020).

Active community participation in the decision-making process, particularly during program planning and execution, also helps build greater community buy-in into the outcomes of those programs (Samaddaret al., 2021). Community engagement offers a dual solution; it provides individuals with the tools to solve homelessness in the immediate and uplifts their agency to address future challenges. Therefore, it may be possible for this research to propose that NGOs should prioritise and intensify community involvement

throughout all stages of program implementation to meet the long-term success and sustainability of their interventions (Ijon et al., 2021).

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the role of NGOs is central to the progress of many ASEAN member countries, especially in Malaysia, and most notably in education and welfare. Through various programs, NGOs have had a positive and significant impact on how local communities are able to progress economically as well as socially. They have excellent data and statistics that prove their interventions have a real impact. Community members who benefit from what they do become significantly better off. Supporting these NGOs and their work is crucial to achieving the community change we want across Malaysia.

Generally, this study will point out the critical importance of NGOs in relation to community development theory towards the end. Furthermore, NGOs not only cater to immediate needs but also function as agents of social change, working to build social capital and promote inclusivity and empowerment of individuals in marginalised communities. This underscores the importance of stakeholder partnerships, in particular between NGOs, government bodies, and private enterprises, to deliver sustainable development results. These insights are part of a growing conversation about whether civil society organisations really help or hurt entities trying to foster truly community-led development.

Practically, this much-needed collaboration between NGOs and governments or private sector will be required to rise above some of the financial and operational constraints they face. Moreover, it emphasises the pivotal role of community engagement in NGO-led program design and delivery. More community engagement would lead to a sustainable model, and NGOs could also leverage this initiative for greater benefits in the long run. Therefore, this research has valid input and proposes a few implied suggestions to the policymakers, stakeholders, and community leaders so that they can improve their sustainability practices for sustainable development, which in turn enable them to continue playing a vital role in uplifting the communities by promoting equitable access to the learning and welfare services.

In order to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of community development across all Malaysian states, more research is now required to address this field. NGOs need enhanced collaboration, strategic funding, and community-driven approaches to fully realise their potential in fostering a more inclusive and empowered society.

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