

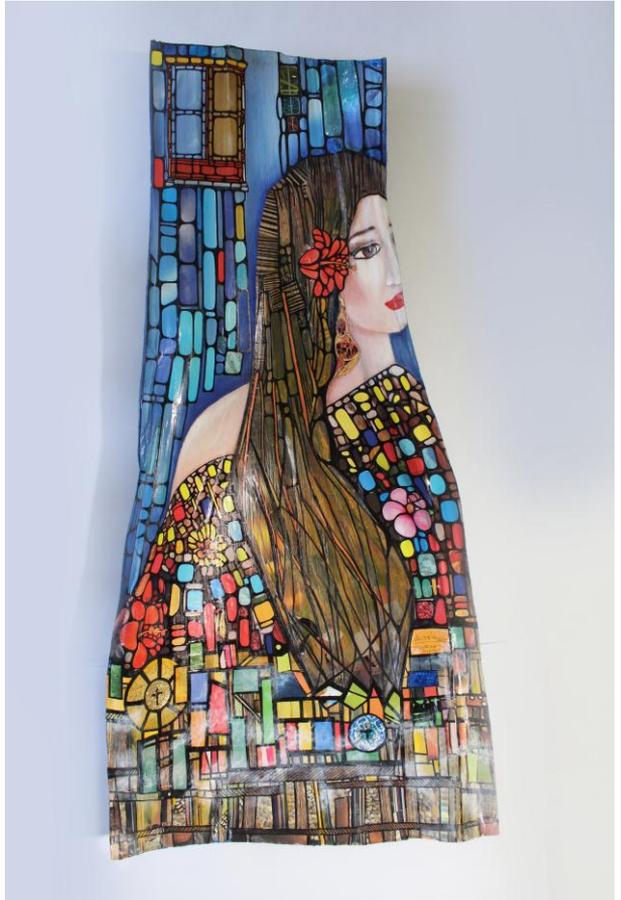
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Poverty, women's empowerment and social entrepreneurship among B40 urban women in Malaysia

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Abstract

The current study investigates the level of awareness and intention on social entrepreneurship among B40 women in urban areas. Data are obtained through set structured interview items and analyzed with the assistance of Atlas.ti 8. The initial main finding indicates that B40 urban women have no indicative understanding of social entrepreneurship even after layman terms and contexts are applied. In conclusion, as long as B40 urban women believe that they are generating a positive return to society, social entrepreneurship is possible. It is noted that social entrepreneurship can be in major community development projects as well as health care.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Awareness, Malaysia, Women's Empowerment.

Pobreza, empoderamiento de las mujeres y emprendimiento social entre las mujeres urbanas b40 en Malasia

Resumen

El presente estudio investiga el nivel de conciencia e intención sobre el emprendimiento social entre las mujeres B40 en áreas urbanas. Los datos se obtienen a través de un conjunto de ítems de entrevistas estructuradas y se analizan con la ayuda de Atlasti 8. El hallazgo principal inicial indica que las mujeres urbanas B40 no tienen una comprensión indicativa del emprendimiento social incluso después de que se aplican los términos y contextos de los laicos. En conclusión, siempre que las mujeres urbanas B40 creen que están generando un retorno positivo para la sociedad, el emprendimiento social es posible. Se observa que el emprendimiento social puede estar en los principales proyectos de desarrollo de la comunidad, así como en el cuidado de la salud.

Palabras clave: Conciencia empresarial, Malasia, empoderamiento de la mujer.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the problem

This research focuses on investigating the understanding of B40 urban women on social entrepreneurship. Although numerous initiatives were made to enhance women's participation in socio-economic sector, statistic revealed that the poverty rate and

empowerment effort among women remains at a concerning level. This may be due to little emphasis was put for its penetration among the targeted population, which one of it is B40 urban women.

1.2 Significance of the study

The current study contributes to the aspects of conceptual, empirical and practical contribution. In terms of conceptual contribution, this study provides empirical evidence on the relationship between B40 urban women and their common understanding of social entrepreneurship. It also refines the readily available literature by studying the relationship between women and social entrepreneurship. In terms of empirical evidence, this study focuses on not yet explored population which is B40 urban women in Malaysia, which leads to a deeper understanding of the world of women and social entrepreneurship. Lastly, for practical contribution, this study provides guidelines for policymakers that will assist them in making a better decision and acting efficiently in solving the urban poverty among B40 women via social entrepreneurship efforts.

1.3 Research objectives

The main aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the awareness and intention regarding social entrepreneurship among B40 urban women. In particular, the research objectives are defined as follows:

- I. To investigate a common understanding of B40 urban women on social entrepreneurship.
- II. To ascertain whether social entrepreneurship can be considered as one way to reduce poverty among B40 urban women.

1.4 Research questions

Based on the research objectives, research questions are deduced as the following:

- I. What is/are the common understanding(s) of B40 urban women about social entrepreneurship?
- II. Can social entrepreneurship be considered as one way to reduce poverty among B40 urban women?

1.5 Delimitation of study

At the time this paper is being produced, the findings are yet to be finalized due its on-going research stage. However, it does not mean that this paper should not discuss particular specific discussions, which are found so far from this study. Still, once the research is completed, perhaps more conclusive remarks can be deliberated to the scientific communities, policy-makers and public. Another problem is

due to financial, time and resource constrain. The study only concentrated on Klang Valley, an urban area that is known to have a high rate of urban poverty. Coupled together with the nature of the qualitative study, the data may not be extrapolated to other population. Yet, the findings may be able to provide a neat context on the subject-matter. Finally, since the study does not employ any specific theoretical framework due to its explorative approach, it may delimit its context too. To conciliate this matter, the study provides a conceptual, empirical and practical contribution that was built from the previous literature, which gave certain assertive comprehension about women, social entrepreneurship and poverty reduction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Urban poverty

Urban poverty has been a critical issue over decades. It is often associated with the mushrooming of the urban population and acts as a contributing factor to various problems such as crime, health deterioration, and social issues (Ahmed et al., 2016). According to the World Bank, poverty refers to two conditions: (a) lack of resources to meet the physical and fundamental needs for survival (ie. absolute poverty) and (b) lack of resources to achieve a standard of living in the community (ie. relative poverty). Both conditions appear to be a major obstacle in optimizing human resources for socio-economic development of the nation. In Malaysia, poverty is referred to as

Bottom 40 (B40), indicated by the household with a mean of the monthly income of RM3, 860 (Eleventh Malaysia Plan, YEAR). The 2010 statistic shows that there are 2.7 million Malaysian households categorized under the B40 category with 56 percent experiencing urban poverty. Although a study by Ahmed et al. (2016) revealed that there was a downward trend in urban poverty incidences for the past four decades, they also acknowledged that Malaysia is expecting a boom of urban population, which leads to an increase of urban poverty if not followed by appropriate action. In facing such issue, innumerable initiatives are developed with a purpose to improve socio-economic wellbeing of B40 community. This includes micro financing, public service delivery, grassroots innovation, and technological support. Apart from these, social entrepreneurship is recognized to be the most prominent potential tool to alleviate poverty.

2.2 Social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is defined as either non-profits or blend for-profit goals with generating a positive return to society. It typically attempts to further associate social, cultural, and environmental goals with the voluntary sector in areas such as poverty alleviation, health care and community development. Social entrepreneurship is considered the current model to reduce world poverty, especially for developing and low-income countries. This includes Malaysia, Tanzania and Pakistan. However, social entrepreneurship differs from business entrepreneurship to a certain extent. According to Elebrashi

(2013), social entrepreneurship is a mean for social development through economically sustainable and viable model which focuses more on public wealth instead of private ones. He also emphasized how social entrepreneurship is vital as it develops new social institutions, leading to social movements, resources mobilization and impact sustainability. This means that unlike Schumpeter's entrepreneurship theory which focuses on economic growth, social entrepreneurship focuses on a more holistic and long-run approach by improving the socio-economic wellbeing and initiating ways to sustain the social change (Dumbu, 2014; Faisal et al., 2016; Udanoh & Zouria, 2018).

Apart from the different approach, social entrepreneurship shares similar roles with business entrepreneurship. This includes providing job opportunity, enhancing economic growth and innovation, promoting products and service quality also boosting productivity which leads to economic flexibility, social benefit as well as environmental profit in the community (Hisrich et al., 2007). Kazmi et al. (2016) explained this further by stating how social entrepreneurship helps in widening access to financial sources, promoting the use of social innovations to reduce social problems, granting people sense of empowerment which contributes to income creation for the poor. This indicates that social entrepreneurship has not just contributed in financial terms, but also enhances social inclusion, allowing the poor to participate in economic activities and freeing them from the poverty trap. This is also supported by several other kinds of literature involving cases of various regions around the

globe such as Tanzania, Pakistan Kazmi et al. (2016) and China (Naminse & Zhuang, 2018). A study by Mutarubukwa and Mazana (2017) who illustrated the role and process of social entrepreneurship in Tanzania. Through one email exchange and several interviews, it was found that the process of social entrepreneurship includes two stages which are idea creation and mission achievement. The first stage helps in reducing unemployment, dealing with inequalities and improving human rights while the second stage contributes to empowering vulnerable individuals also provisioning knowledge and skills. This study also revealed the challenges faced such as lack of financial support, recruitment issues, minimal utilization of resources and a high cost of living. However, no major emphasis is made related to the challenges and how it contributes to the economy.

Another study that focuses on the challenges faced by social entrepreneurs is done by (Kazmi et al., 2016). They investigated the challenges faced by social entrepreneurs in Pakistan and how it contributes to develop the nation's economy. This study highlighted that social entrepreneurship has a specific capacity to eliminate the causes of poverty by creating profit or non-profit ventures and constructing a framework of change that empowers individuals. However, this study did not specify further on the most prominent factor of social entrepreneurship that helps it to reduce poverty. This is later refined by Naminse and Zhuang (2018) who assessed the contribution of farm entrepreneurs in overcoming poverty in China. A survey involving 309 farmer entrepreneurship revealed that socio-cultural capability has the greatest influence on farmer entrepreneurship growth as

compared to knowledge capability and economic capability. This indicates that having a surrounding that encourages entrepreneurship serves as a stimulator of having a sustainable and bottom-up approach to alleviate poverty. However, this study took place in the rural area thus cannot be extrapolated to an urban area due to cultural differences.

2.3 Women participation

Although there are countless researches have been done involving social entrepreneurship, studies on women entrepreneurs have not been given enough light (Humbert, 2012). Previous literature emphasized that women participation is crucial in alleviating poverty. According to Alam et al. (2012), the involvement and empowerment of women in entrepreneurship enable them to escape the poverty trap and enhance the financial stability of the family, later contributing to the nation's economy. In addition, women entrepreneurs help to create vibrant economic activities, especially in the domestic arena. Several studies showed that women entrepreneurs have a vital role in alleviating poverty in different contexts. For instance, a case study involving 100 women entrepreneurs in Kenya done by Misango and Ongiti (2013) revealed the economic activities were similar in nature and it includes promoting tourism, export-trading and selling African artifacts, clothing and ornaments. Another similar study is done by (Aldajani and Marlow, 2013). This longitudinal study analyzed the relationship between women empowerment and entrepreneurship among Palestinian migrant women who are operating home-based enterprises in Amman, Jordan. Based on the semi-structured in-depth interviews with 43 women, it was found that women were

empowered through their home-based enterprise. Although most women entrepreneurs focus on home-based products, it does not mean that they are unable to be innovative and solving societal issues. Connor and Bentgoodley (2016) explored the social entrepreneurial work of local women in Zanzibar, Tanzania and how their social innovations address social problems and influence community sustainability. Interviews and participant observation revealed that the increase of government initiatives and support for entrepreneurial efforts encourages the entrepreneurial involvement. Furthermore, Fotheringham and Saunders (2014) investigated the effectiveness of social enterprise to reduce poverty among women. Based on literature synthesis, the study concludes that social enterprise might be the next great poverty-reduction movement. Both studies indicate that with proper help and support, women entrepreneurs can be as successful as men and permanently exit poverty (Haseeb, Hassan, Azam, & Suryanto, 2018).

2.4 Women's empowerment

Empowerment is an increase in power. Therefore, women's empowerment refers to women gaining control in various sectors. In the compound of their household, women's empowerment embraces the idea of contributing to the household income, making household decisions and having ownership of assets, equality in marriage, motherhood freedom and the right to contraception and safe abortion. In the socio-legal sector, women's empowerment is about having access to resources, like political and legal awareness (Ibrahim and

Alkire, 2007). Women's empowerment is about having a right of entry to education, gender awareness and also freedom of movement (Beteta, 2006).

As much as women's empowerment is seen as a necessity by today's standards, nevertheless, it is still a hotly debated topic in developing countries. Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) attribute this situation due to the lack of interpretation of the concept. Kazmi et al. (2016) find social cultural factors obstruct its existence. Many women cannot identify their capabilities easily, what more to empower themselves to better their situation. Women's empowerment implies the ability to strengthen their potential in the socio-economic sector, particularly in developing countries. According to Sen, the lack of money in households is an important factor impacting rural development. The fact that women have less control over money contributes to their low status, which further situates them in an under-privileged condition. Many studies have found that the income earning activities of women can improve not only their position in the household but also contribute to family welfare, particularly to food and children's education, as well as to the wider society. The UN Women declaration states: Empowering rural women is crucial for ending hunger and poverty. Denying women's rights and opportunities means denying their children and societies a better future. Undeniably, women's role in community development is relevant for the sustained survival of society. Women who work and earn income enhance not only their socio-economic standing in the household, but also affirm their presence in society.

2.5 Women, social entrepreneurship and cultural contexts

The effects of social entrepreneurship are unlikely to penetrate and reach the entire communities. A study involving 80 participants of microenterprises done by Ali and Ali (2013) found that there was a weak positive correlation between entrepreneurship development and poverty reduction. On the other hand, a survey involving 1,159 beneficiaries done by Ali and Ali (2013) illustrated government credit policies have no significant effect on the development of entrepreneurial activities in Nigeria. The findings also revealed that such programs did not satisfy the beneficiaries at a maximum level. Similarly, Alam et al. (2012) emphasized that women entrepreneurs in Malaysia struggle despite the support given. Furthermore, a study involving 50 women entrepreneurs in Penang, Malaysia by Alam et al. (2012) revealed that most of them rely more on family members as compared government institutions in facing business-related issues. This may be rooted in the minimal involvement of government institutions in charting the direction of their businesses. Although the findings revealed that respondents are aware of financial assistance provided by the government, little to no emphasis was made regarding the awareness level. As this study only covers 50 women entrepreneurs in Penang, the findings cannot be generalized to other population such as B40 women living in the urban area.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

The study employed a qualitative approach as it provides a better understanding of the phenomena in descriptive terms and narrative outputs that is appropriate for the research objectives. A cross-sectional descriptive study has conducted among B40 urban women to know their understanding of the relationship of poverty, social entrepreneurship and women's empowerment.

3.2 Research procedures

Ethical clearance of the International Islamic University Malaysia was used while official permission was taken from authorities namely Pusat Zakat Selangor and Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia. A pilot test was conducted on 5 interviewees to ensure the items in the structured interview items are clear and comprehensible. Necessary changes were made based on feedback and suggestions from the interviewees. The actual sample size for the study was 20 interviewees. For a matching convenience, purposive sampling was adopted, whose criteria fit the following aspects: (a) women, (b) Malaysian, (c) income level of less than RM3860 and (d) lives in Klang Valley. The interviewees were informed of the purpose of the interview and their participation in the study was completely voluntary. The structured interview was conducted by a well-trained research assistant. The obtained information was later analyzed with the assistance of Atlas.ti 8.

4. FINDING, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has set two research objectives. The subsequent deliberations have based the information as collected by the researchers. The first research objective (i.e. to investigate the common understanding of B40 urban women on social entrepreneurship) reveals that most women who involved in this study did not really know or comprehend about the meaning and context of social entrepreneurship. They are most frequent to understand entrepreneurship or entrepreneur, but the link of social to the term confused them. The second research objective (i.e. to ascertain whether social entrepreneurship can be considered as one way to reduce poverty among B40 urban women) notices a promising evidence that supports the idea for executing social entrepreneurial skills for women. Most of them felt that social entrepreneurship may bring goodness to them. In fact, evidence had indicated that some of them had routinely practiced social entrepreneurship in their lives. A Chinese lady who has a small plot of agricultural land in Kampung Cheras Baru sold her vegetables to her neighbors at reasonably minimal prices. A Malay village ustazah at Kampung Melayu Tambahan not only taught a proper Quranic recital but also became child-minder, with fees. An Indian female from Brickfields tailored customers' clothing, also taught sewing skills to those interested. These are real examples of ordinary social entrepreneurial skills. These interviewees may not realize that they are indeed practicing (and also able to practice) social entrepreneurship in their neighborhood. As

long as they are doing something worthwhile, they are considered socially and financially productive and become an asset to the country.

5. CONCLUSION

As long as B40 urban women believe that they are generating a positive return to society, social entrepreneurship is possible. It is noted that social entrepreneurship can be in major community development projects as well as health care. In so far, the study suggests applying social entrepreneurship as one way to reduce or even alleviate poverty, particularly among women poor, in urban settings in Malaysia.

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