

APPRAISING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN MALAYSIA BASED ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT VALUES

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Abstract: Good governance is vital in advocating sustainable development. As a value-laden term, good governance is derived from characteristics that are valued by stakeholders. This study includes five characteristics of good governance, i.e. participation, consensus orientation, responsiveness, equity and accountability. The study implies that, to establish good governance in sustainable development, the governors should anticipate public values and their contexts.

KEYWORDS: Good governance, sustainable development values, sustainability, public, governors

Introduction

The quest for sustainable development, which improves well-being and quality of life, begins with the process of evaluating, selecting and establishing particular values (Zurina *et al.*, 2011; De Vries & Peterson 2009). Hedlund-de Witt (2011) emphasises that values are essential in designing and supporting a sustainable development path. Research shows that values and beliefs are strong predictors of policy opinion and policy support (Shworm *et al.*, 2010; Milbrath, 1984). Clarification of and information about the values people hold regarding development could provide direction for policymakers trying to find solutions to current problems and to advance development policy and management.

Governance, like the concept of sustainable development, has been defined in diverse ways. The UNDP (1997) defines governance as the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a society's affairs while the WHAT Governance Programme (2002) defines governance as the framework of social and economic systems, legal and political structures within which humanity organises itself. Regardless of the various definitions, governance may be referred to as the process of interaction between non-state actors to organise societies. Good governance, which is a value-laden term, is defined as a mode or model of governance that

leads to social and economic results sought by citizens (Plumptre and Graham, 1999).

Values are enduring concepts of worth; they are formed out of the social processes of dialogue and debate and influenced by the social, cultural, historical and geographical relationships between society and individual (O'Brien, 2003). They are constructed between individuals and institutions and are informed by ethical and moral judgements and by creating priorities in ideas and belief systems. All these values are practically and concretely realised in social action and organisation. The effects of values only become tangible, interpretable and contestable when one action framework encounters another; when more than one way of acting in and on the world is possible and a choice must be made (O'Brien & Guerrier, 1995).

The United Nations (UN, 1997) lists a number of characteristics of good governance, which includes participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, and strategic vision. Some of these characteristics are taken from values, e.g. the consensus orientation characteristic is built upon values like respect and tolerance; while others are themselves values, e.g. the accountability characteristic comes from the value of accountability. This list of characteristics varies among institutions, e.g. the European Union promotes its own characteristics of openness and

coherence along with the UN characteristics. These characteristics may also vary in priority level in regards to their ecological, social, economic and political contexts. For example, consensus orientation, which is projected less by governors in non-democratic countries, might be regarded by the public as more important than equity. On the other hand, in countries where the corruption among governors is endemic, the characteristic of accountability might be regarded as higher priority in comparison to strategic vision. Globally, trends like globalisation and decentralisation could also affect the hierarchies of good governance characteristics.

In Malaysia, the extensiveness of good governance is yet to be appraised. However the introduction of National Key Result Area (NKRA) may indicate that good governance has not been fully observed in this country and needs to be strengthened. This article is a post-analysis review of good governance practice, based on a study of public sustainable development values in Sepang, Selangor.

Methodology

Research area

Selangor, Malaysia, was selected for the research area owing to the rapid development process that has transformed this previously agriculture-based, rural area to semi-urban and urban areas, through the development of Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and W.P. Putrajaya. KLIA's operation is fully supported by highly-upgraded infrastructures and highways linking it to the major trading points (e.g. Klang Port) and Kuala Lumpur. When Sepang was mostly an agricultural area, rubber and palm plantations were its major commodities. In 2005, approximately 46.37 per cent of the total area was designated for agricultural activities (a loss of 96.56 per cent of the 2002 total agricultural area). This tremendous cutting back of agricultural land indicates the major transformation Sepang has been experiencing in recent years.

Sampling method and approach

A qualitative methodology was used to collect data through a series of in-depth interviews

and discussion groups to obtain in-depth understanding of the meanings and definitions people gave (O'Neill, 2001; Bernard, 2000; Williams & May, 1996; Tesch, 1990). In-depth interviews were conducted with the officers from the district and land office, the officer of the municipal council, the villages' chiefs and the village development officer to represent the governors' views. Interviews were conducted with former and present council members to represent the urban communities' views. Two in-depth discussion groups were also conducted involving the former and present villages' heads to gather their own development values and those of the villagers they represent. A group discussion mode was decided upon for these rural communities owing to their limited knowledge of the sustainable development concept.

Data analysis

The interviews and group discussions were analysed using thematic analysis to explore the main perspectives of the topic studied. Thematic analysis involves methodically reading through the verbatim transcripts and segmenting and coding the text into categories that highlight what the group discussed (Boyatzis, 1998; Aronson, 1994). The categories were derived from the issues raised by the participants. They were then assessed, compared and interpreted, and any similarities and differences were noted. The categories were combined and assigned to major themes that provide a framework to explain how the respondents value the development in their area.

Results and Discussion

In this study, public and governors' sustainable development values were identified. Both parties were found to similar theme values, i.e. identity, peace, freedom, environment and development, but different priorities, motives and contexts (Zurina *et al.*, 2011). For the public participants, the theme of identity can be linked to every other theme, which suggests that identity is the core theme of the participants' development values (Figure 1). It is linked to the theme of peace by the issue of foreigners (both themes

portray foreigners or foreign influences as a threat to well-being); to the themes of freedom and environment by the issue of outsiders (the process of developing and upgrading the present environment to attract outsiders as prospective investors degrades the rights and privileges of local people and their environment; and to the theme of development by the issue of negligence towards moved communities (both negligence towards their intention to practice their norms and negligence towards their jobless situation) (Zurina *et al.*, 2011).

The theme of development can also be linked to the themes of environment and freedom. The issue that links development to environment is the pollution resulting from heightened construction activities. The issue is also directly related to local people's rights and privileges in terms of public amenities inadequacy.

For the governors' participants, only four themes seem to be interrelated, i.e. identity, freedom, environment and development (Figure 2). The theme of peace appears not to have any significant relationship to any of the other themes. Unlike that of the public participants, the core theme of the governors' respondents is development because it can be linked to every other theme. It is related to the theme of identity by the issue of the reconstruction of traditional villages (the governors' participants indicated that they will safeguard the identity of traditional villages despite the massive reconstruction efforts); to the theme of freedom by the issues of right and privilege (relating to aborigines' land provision and individual lot development); and to the theme of environment by the issues of resources extraction and exploitation. A post-analysis review of this finding was conducted to evaluate the conduct of good governance in this study area. The analysis showed that five characters of good governance, i.e. participation, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity and accountability, are very relevant to the issues that were brought up.

In this study, it was discovered that discrepancies in priorities, motives and contexts were enlarged by ineffective communication, which aggravated the degrees of misunderstanding

and misperception. Communication in governance is realised by the public in the form of participation, while for the governors it is observed in the form of transparency. In this study, however, only participation has been specifically treated alone. Apart from participation, the characteristics of responsiveness and consensus orientation were evident as well. These characteristics indeed are very much related to participation, since both can occur only when participation is optimised. Participation is a prerequisite to consensus orientation and responsiveness since participation allows one party to convey their vision for development to other parties. That vision is then debated and discussed to reach a consensus agreement, which later will be responded to accordingly by customising the development to the needs and aspirations that benefit both parties.

The issues regarding consensus orientation in this study were evident under the theme of development. Public participants saw mega projects as the major flaws in development – they claimed that these projects benefit just a few while degrading many. The public participants favoured small-medium industries (SMIs) over large industries since they require only minimal skill and knowledge to operate. The governors' participants, however, believed that large-scale industries are more pertinent to human development in comparison with SMIs because large-scale industries can generate hundreds of both job opportunities for local people and business opportunities for local entrepreneurs. This example displays the lack of consensus about development orientation, both opinions backed by strong arguments from different perspectives. In such case, if only these arguments could be integrated, consensus orientation towards development might be resolved.

In regard to responsiveness, several related issues were evident: two issues under the theme of development, one under the theme of environment, another two under the theme of identity and one under the theme of peace. Under the development theme, the public participants pinpointed the absence of the governors' responsiveness as the main problem with the human development of local people. Under this theme, two related issues

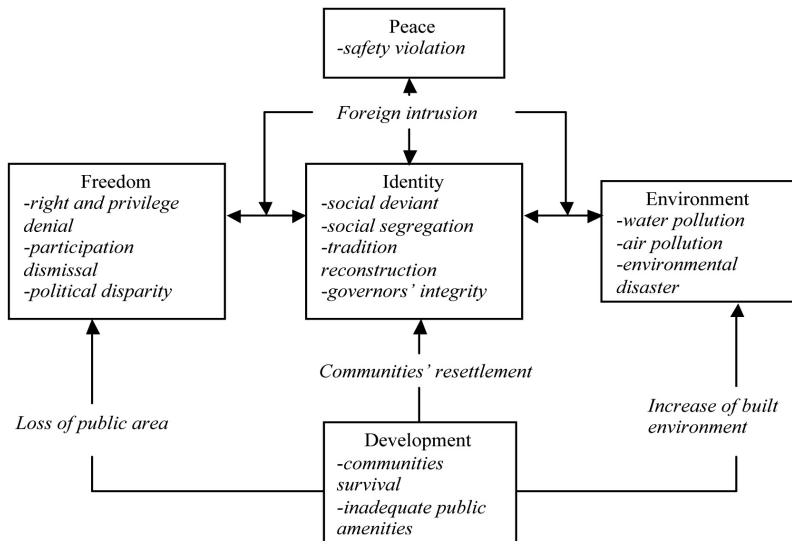


Figure 1: Public development values themes.

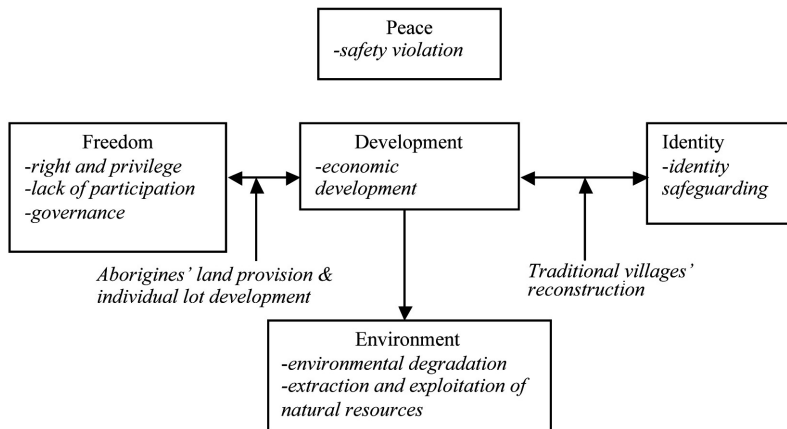


Figure 2: Governors' development values theme.

are moved communities and public areas. With regard to moved communities (communities that are moved from a particular area to allow the area to be developed), the public participants claimed that these communities are left unattended without proper training to empower their survival in the new environment. They felt that the government should provide proper and systematic training and planning to facilitate the communities in embracing new ways of generating income. Moved communities that were formerly dominated by fishermen and estate workers should be continuously and consistently trained to new skills. With regard to public areas, the public

participants were worried about development increases and the subsequent loss of public areas. They argued that large-scale development leaves too little public space to accommodate public facilities like schools, playgrounds, buildings of worship and cemeteries; and felt that governors should do more to anticipate the consequences of development, such as rises in population, which demand more facilities, and address them accordingly.

Under the theme of environment, responsiveness issues were highlighted in relation to the atmospheric pollution resulting from the quarry operations that are run by the government itself.

Quarry operations have become intensified owing to rising demand from the construction sectors. Together with the increasing amount of suspended particulate matter coming from the growing construction areas, the atmospheric pollution in this area is getting worse. The pollution is not confined to the quarry alone but is also transported to other areas. The public participants claimed that this situation affects their well-being very much. They wish measures to be taken to inhibit further deterioration.

The public participants also reckoned that the loosening of norms, culture and tradition under the theme of identity is the result of a lack of governor responsiveness (Zurina *et al.*, 2011). They claimed that the governors do not respond accordingly to the threats that are jeopardising local identity. In this study, the public participants perceived that the solidarity of local culture and tradition is loosening owing to foreign and outside influence. The three major sources of foreign influence according to the respondents are foreign students and workers (of the construction and manufacturing sectors), property purchasers, and tourists. The number of foreign students in this area has increased significantly owing to the rapid development of private colleges and universities both here and in adjacent areas. The population of foreign workers has become larger owing to the development of multi mega projects like KLIA, Cyberjaya and Putrajaya. Increasing incidents of socially-deviant behaviour among local teenagers are believed to be related to the indecent behaviour of foreign students and workers. If this situation is prolonged, it will definitely destruct the local norms and culture. With regard to property purchasers, the government has eased the procedures for buying property to enhance foreign investment, which has successfully attracted foreigners and outsiders to the area. However, the public respondents believed that, by owning property and staying, the foreigners will likely be able to penetrate deeper into local social settings, and transfer their foreign norms to local practice. The home-stay concept of tourism demonstrates similar implication. These modes of foreign existence are seen as destructive to local norms and culture.

The issue related to foreigners was also highlighted under the theme of peace. Still delegating this issue to the lack of responsiveness, the main concern of the public participants here was safety. They related the issues of violence and crime to foreign students and foreign workers: students specifically were frequently reported as being involved in alcohol-related incidents like reckless driving, street fighting, vandalism and sexual misconduct, while foreign workers were thought to be involved more in burglary and robbery. The public participants were obviously worried about their safety.

Besides these issues, it was also observed there was concern about equity and accountability among the public participants. In general, both these characteristics are intertwined in such a way that equity is possible only when accountability is realised. In this study, the public participants believed that governors should be accountable for ensuring that development is equitable to every stakeholder. The concern of public participants on this matter was pronounced under the theme value of freedom. The participants claimed that present development is neither equitable nor sustainable. Instead, it denies their rights and privileges (Zurina *et al.*, 2011), which they elaborated in a few scenarios. In the development of Pantai Bagan Lalang and the Sepang Gold Coast, local people's lands have been inappropriately reclaimed, rewarded and substituted. This is seen as manipulation of the local people's rights. Land that was previously reserved for natives can now be occupied by non-natives, outsiders and foreigners. Pantai Bagan Lalang, which once served as the traditional landing point for local fishermen, has been commercially developed into a more sophisticated recreational facility to accommodate the surrounding developments, especially the Sepang Gold Coast. The Sepang Gold Coast is a systematic, elite housing estate covering approximately 600 hectares. To attract investors, surrounding facilities have been lavishly upgraded and an open-market system has been put into practice to boost the financial climate. The public participants claimed that local people cannot afford the rising cost of living. They also claimed that the whole process

has resulted in the local people losing control of their homeland, cast aside in the development process as though they have become inferior to their successors and the outsiders and foreigners. Therefore the public participants brought to the fore questions concerning for whom development is carried out. These scenarios indeed reflect critically on the governors' accountability. The participants suggested that, if accountability is adequately observed, every stakeholder should benefit from the development process and not otherwise. The other issue related to accountability involves the integrity of the personnel involved in development, mentioned under the theme of identity. The respondents strongly believed that negative development consequences mostly result from lack of integrity of the people involved and includes disastrous acts of corruption and malpractice. According to the public respondents, the integrity of governors is vital to safeguarding development as well as identity. Disregarding the issues of equity and accountability, the public participants stressed that development should first cater to the well-being of local people before providing an environment that is conducive to outsiders and foreigners. Equity and accountability are themselves values, so the issues in this study are not about contradicting acquired values but whether they have been acquired in the first place.

After putting everything into perspective, it was asked whether good governance is realized in this country. Looking back at the definition of good governance as a mode of governance that leads to social and economic results sought by citizens, it obviously raises the questions of common good and common interests. Sagoff (1988) suggests that the counts of right and wrong, good and bad in the public domain are a conception of the good of society, not only for decision-makers. Development decisions should then involve the public in open and fair negotiation so that the decisions reached are within the public domain. Conceptions of good and bad apparently derive from the process of valuation that defines what is valued.

Tainter (2003) argues that sustainability is a matter of values and that we sustain what we value.

In this study, the public view on sustainability is more towards community continuity than other things. As mentioned before, the discrepancies in development values between the public and the governors in this study were initiated by differences in priorities, motives and contexts and, in a few examples, perceptions. To the public, any development initiatives that release disintegrative forces towards their already stable and comfortable living are unacceptable. In this study, it is noted that the public values identity highly in comparison with other values (priority), although current development practices seem to be eradicating that precious identity to no avail. The transformation of Sepang from a traditional, agricultural setting into a modern, commercial area is perceived by the public to deprive them more of their actual needs than it improves (motive). Apparently, the transformation has not been fully embraced by the majority of the public, who preferred the previous social setting (context). This creates tension between the new values imposed by the governors and those values the public would like to retain. Such conflicts have been described by Schwartz (1992) through an integrated structure of values. According to Schwartz, the integrated structure of values can be summarised into two orthogonal dimensions: the openness to change dimension opposing the conservative dimension, and the self-transcendence dimension opposing the self-enhancement dimension. In this study, public values can be categorised into the conservation dimension, which prioritises values like identity. In contrast, the governors promote values that support advancement and improvisation, which fit the criteria of the openness-to-change dimension.

This scenario depicts differences in what characteristics are valued by the public and by the governors. These differences result largely from the focus the governors put on development outputs rather than contexts. Tainter (2003) points out that sustainability should maintain the systemic contexts that produce the goods, services and amenities people need or value, at an acceptable cost, for as long as they are needed or valued (Tainter, 2001; Allen, Tainter & Hoekstra, 2003). Therefore, governors should first acquaint

themselves with the public needs and values, and manage the contexts rather than the outputs, if they really want to observe good governance and sustainable development.

Conclusion

In order to establish good governance in sustainable development, governors should anticipate public values and their contexts. They need to address the public's deepest concerns and treat such as guideposts when preparing their plans and policies. Both parties have to get reconnected and reconcile their aspirations, because only then can they decide on the characteristics they can mutually value, respect and uphold. The findings here presuppose that, if the governors advocate participation, consensus orientation, responsiveness, equity and accountability within governance, then good governance can be realised in this area.

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