




THE EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL ASSETS CONDITION AMONG URBAN FARMERS OF THE COMMUNITY GARDEN IN KLANG VALLEY, MALAYSIA



 Milah Zainal¹

 Rosmiza M. Z.²⁺

¹Department Professional Development & Continuing Education, Faculty of Educational Studies, University Putra Malaysia.

Email: masterptv3@gmail.com Tel: +60136090265

²Geography Program, Center for Research in Development, Social and Environment, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Email: miza@ukm.edu.my Tel: +60192723112



(+ Corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

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Social assets have been focus of interest in considerable social science academic circles in recent years. Development of community garden is needed in order to provide a well-being among urban communities through utilizing their social assets in terms of togetherness and relationship concerns. It's seen as the motivational and adhesive forces for communitarian work that benefit in agriculture development in urban areas. However, previous studies that looked at social assets issues are still lacking in Malaysia especially among urban farmers. Therefore, this study explores the condition of social assets that built and utilized positively among urban farmers in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The data collected through in-depth interviews with eight urban farmers and analyzed using thematic analysis. The interviews revealed that urban farmers in Klang Valley, Malaysia has been a good social asset include family members support, extension agents relationship, participation of group members and broad of networking. The social assets provide them a motivating and gluing force for agricultural activities in terms of knowledge sharing, input and materials access, support community garden development, enhance motivations, technology transfer and adoptions, build cooperation and encourage good agricultural practice. This study recommends that empowering of social asset should be an important consideration among community members in development of urban community garden in Malaysia.

Contribution/ Originality: The contribution of this study is finding that the urban community garden project should be sustainable through reinforcement of social assets. Urban farmers need to develop various networks to generate knowledge that can improve comprehension of society members and idea exchange in regards to urban agriculture empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Agricultural sector is the main catalyst for the socioeconomic integrity of the rural population (Jabil, Rosmiza, & Norsuhana, 2018). Nowadays, community garden had replaced important agriculture activities for urban residents in Malaysia. Based on Statistic of Department of Agriculture (DOA), the total of urban community garden in Malaysia has been increased due to intervention of the local government in Urban Agriculture Programme (Zaidi, Sarmila, Rosmiza, & Hamzah, 2019). Community garden have highly benefits value for urban residents in

terms of economic, social, health and environment aspect (Ramaloo, Choong, Siwar, & Isahak, 2018; Shafa, Halmi, & Nur, 2018). The community gardens provide to the community well-being and social sustainability through strategic food planning to improve food safety and nutritional food intake. However, urban farmers facing with constraints related to urban agriculture are access and/or availability of land and water, lack of information about market demands, marketing of product, plant disease control and nutrient management (Razak & Roff, 2007). Nowadays, both urban farmers and local government especially Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries have been planning how to make urban community garden become more sustainable and profitable.

In addition, development of urban agriculture sectors has been linked to broad of individual or organization surrounding their community to improve farmers' skill, knowledge and optimizing the utilization of existing local resources. Hence, it needs to integrate all the activities in agriculture sectors based on their social assets. For example, connection between farmers with extension service has been enhancing agriculture techniques in order to improve cultivation and it would affect productivity. Through farmers' group activity, extension agents introduced good agriculture practice in order to improve farmers' productivity. The need for sustainability of the community garden is to ensure the benefits are on an ongoing basis, which requires the involvement and cooperation of the community. The success of the urban community garden project, the local community is encouraged to work with relevant organizations and agencies in planning the filling of such community gardens either together or according to their respective individual plots, as well as self-managing concepts and types of crops that can eaten or ornamental plants or maintenance or a combination of them (Haliza, 2018; Yusoff, Mohd, & Tukiman, 2017). It can be concluded how the social assets had important role in development of agriculture, especially in urban community garden.

Social assets had been declared as a result of a process of social and economic organization such as trust, reciprocity, informational and economic exchange, formal and informal group's activities. Improving social assets condition in the community will improve collective action, as well as social and economic condition (Williams & Durrance, 2008). Stone (2003) defined social asset as the extent and nature of relationships people have with others, the relationships people have with their communities, and relationships between people and various services, institutions and systems. It is also a concept that can be used to understand the linkages between communities or institutions that will increase social collaboration through coordination and cooperation to reach social goals. A research by Williams and Durrance (2008) showed that agriculture sectors has been linked to social asset using indicators, such as network and membership (where the people link to) and social trust (how member organization can trust each other) (Gayatri, Sumarjono, & Satmoko, 2018).

In context of community garden activities, social asset can exist with new forms of social relationship between urban farmers, local residents, government bodies, NGO, input seller and others stakeholders. Social asset incorporates the social resources on which individuals depend while seeking after their vocations, including social networks, membership in groups, relationships of trust and reciprocity and access to more institutions of society (Rakodi, 2002). However, previous studies that looked at social asset issues are still lacking in Malaysia especially in urban agriculture contexts. To ensure community gardens continue sustainable and progressive, comprehensive study of the social assets in community garden needs to be done. Based on consideration above mentioned, this study attempted to find out the condition of social asset among urban farmers in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *The Roles of Social Assets in Urban Community Garden*

Community gardens are not a new phenomenon in the urban landscape. Some of the earliest accounts of community gardens are from Detroit during the 1893 depression. The program allocated vacant land in the City to the unemployed for growing and selling food (Chalise, 2015). Urban community garden is a piece of private or public land planted with food by a group of people (community) collectively in the urban neighbourhood for their

daily use (Rateike, 2015). It involves with the cultivation of fruits, vegetables, flowers and herbs for own use and educational purposes. In Malaysia, community garden can potentially play in enhancing food security for urban residents has been investigated by Reza^a, Shamsudin^a, and Mohamed^a (2016). Their studies reported positive association between obtaining nutritionally adequate food and involvement in urban agriculture among 360 Malaysian households.

Implementation of community garden in Malaysia also aims to help households to reduce their expenditures on food through producing their own food. In social aspect community garden is also capable of gets along with family relationships when gardening activities are carried out together (Haliza, 2018) and provide leisure and recreational opportunities among urban residents (Hoornweg & Munro-Faure, 2008; Noriah, Rabiatul, & Mohd, 2018). It also generates income for urban and peri-urban farmers while at the same time acting as a social safety net for community development (Tiraieyaki & McLean, 2017). Urban residents can enjoy vegetables that are free from harmful chemicals and poisons, get organic food sources and ensure good handling and satisfaction with their own crop and minimize the negative effects on health (Golden, 2013). The establishment of community garden in urban neighborhoods, requires farmers to cooperate and produce public goods and commons that are beneficial for agricultural activities (Chalise, 2015).

It's because in urban areas, most of the community members have not agriculture background. In agricultural contexts, social assets such as networks and associations bring similar people together, agricultural communities inclusive (Putnam, 2000). In urban settings, mostly farmers have not a close-knit and intensive stock of social assets that leverage them to get on a collective work, compare than in rural areas where social asset is mostly used by the well-to-do rich farmers to 'get ahead' in their agriculture practices. Social asset is observed as an important element and inclusive in human's natural characteristics. Human is created not to be solitary, and if does not interact with other humans, they would interact involuntarily with their surroundings based on observation. Without social asset, humans needs and requirements cannot be fulfilled. This makes them as community asset that is naturally basic and in fact, characteristically natural and needs to be urgently attended.

In community development, social and economic benefits cannot be conceived in isolation from social bonds and trust leading improved equity in the society. Social asset among families and communities give a valuable way of gluing people's lives and fortifying social connections on an important part of sustaining families and promoting well-being the wider community (Stone, 2003). A research by Pogoy, Montalbo, Pañares, and Vasquez (2016) among women farmers showed that their husbands usually gave them the responsibility in preparing the land, mixing, harvesting, weeding, planting, applying fertilizers, spraying of pesticides, cultivating, and marketing of the farm produce. They had been helping their husbands but do more work in farming than their husbands do. They played a major role in agriculture activities both directly and indirectly, along with their household responsibilities and sociocultural obligations. In addition, their study showed that a broad of networking and associations has been improve their farm income by joining the farmers' group.

The group provided many activities that can improve income and farm management. Most of the farmers said they need to interact and communicate with co-farmers. Farmers also believed that the farmers' group will help them to get in touch with other stakeholder, government or private sectors, for instance. Moreover, respondents agreed that the government gave many services to improve their condition as well as extension agents would help to solve farmers' problem. Support and cooperation between government agencies is very important in enhancing capacity demand for agriculture products in the market (Rosmiza et al., 2015). Social trust may provide opportunities for farmers to access services, information and resources that will allow them to improve their capacities in these areas. Trust can create good relationship between individual or in a group. Close relationships among community members are also a factor that drives the community to be involved in survival community garden (Zaidi et al., 2019) and increasing demand for agricultural products (Rosmiza, Amriah, Rosniza, Jabil, & Mazdi, 2015). It is related to the positive bonds of emotions, beliefs, attitudes and commitments of community

members to the local community, as well as influencing it in daily life (Litt et al., 2011; Nicholas, Stephanie, & Madhavappallil, 2015).

The formation of such relationships among community members in terms of perception and development of the environment leads to increased involvement of community members to be with peers, participate in community activities both formal and informal, as well as holding neighborhood activities (Arnberger & Eder, 2012). In general, farmers that have broad of social network with corporate company, any organization provide them a opportunity to learn, improve agriculture knowledge, building skills and improving mastery of skills after engaging with them. This social asset is seen to have been successful in helping to build the existing capacity of the farming community (Sarmila, Zaimah, Lyndon, Hussain, & Awang, 2015).

3. METHODS

Qualitative research design were used to explore the residents' views and experiences about social assets on their well-being. Based on Mayring (2014) the cross-cases analysis was utilizing a qualitative content analysis to navigate the case study data. The purposive sampling method was used to determine the research subject based on certain characteristics. It involves (a) engaged in community farming activities on full-time basis, (b) achieved production consistently at least three years, and (c) earning extra income for their community garden. The researchers have interviewed eight participants. The point of data saturation determined the number of participants. The study reached saturation when no new themes emerged from the analysis of data collections (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For confidentiality purposes, the participants' original names have been substituted with the pseudonym.

To address the research objective, the researcher used the multi-method data collection. A primary method of data collection through semi-structured interview in order to explore their feelings and experience involved in community farming. By semi-structured interviews, which enable researchers to explore participant's social assets on a deeper level. Also, participant's viewpoints are more likely to be expressed in an openly designed interview situation (Flick, 2009). This means that we allow individuals to self-assess their lives without having to make assumptions by researcher.

Another method that was also used as a triangulation was the observations and document analysis known as the multi-method approach of data to ensure the data is valid and reliable (Yin, 2013). The interview was conducted in January until March 2019. Interviews were one and half hours in length and were digitally recorded. The inductive category formation process was used to answer the objective of this study. Audio files were transcribed serving as the primary data source. Researchers conduct data analysis by developing themes for each data that is ready to be transcribed. Subsequent data were analyzed and assigned codes, categories and sub themes to develop the main themes. The researcher continues the same process for the rest of the transcripts and compares the segments of the data for each research question and coded them. Sometimes, the researcher comes across a piece of data which is relevant but not related to the research questions of the study; in these cases, the researcher labelled them with question marks them as "related?" to later decide about them and the process of data analysis.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Family Members Support

The study found that urban farmers have a good family members support. Family members helping them access required supplies and work together in activities that implemented. From the researcher's observation, there is a specialization in the distribution of work in the garden between urban farmers and family members that involved. A husband is usually responsible for work that consumes a lot of physical energy and his wife helps with less physical labor such as weeding and sowing. They need each other, which in turn can build closer relationships

with family members. The interviews revealed that family support helping of urban farmers in agriculture activities in term of physical and moral support.

"...He understood that if he went anywhere, he could buy the organic carrots at a cost of RM60 a pot, "this is yours, mom", he understood..." (Urban farmer 2).

"...Kids are attending school, there's no time to get involved, married children live alone, and only the wife can do the work she can like pull out the grass. She was able to pull out the grass only because her feet weren't strong. I bought a chair and put it on the porch so, she moved the sown vegetables while sitting there..." (Urban farmer 3).

"...Kids ...they love to communicate via whatsapp. They use powerful hand emoticons. So, they support it..." (Urban farmer 4).

4.2. Participation of Group Members

The study found that involvement of group member's in community garden is the most important among urban farmers. The large number of manpower in community garden will facilitate implementation of agricultural activities than being alone. It is because gardening requires a lot of attention and work. Through the community, various garden works can be shared among urban farmers. This means that urban farmers need the support from group members to handle the agricultural activities. From researcher's view, cooperation made during agricultural activities shows how the support of the group members is closely related to their lives as participants in community garden projects. In addition, they share social ties as they carry on community farming activities. Our findings align well with the results of a review conducted by [Eko, Belinda, and Rini \(2015\)](#) that the successfully of urban farming could not be separated from the high level of community participation. The communities utilize together the vacant land around their house to plant trees and vegetables that provide value-added economy. The interviews revealed that participation of group members helping of urban farmers in their agriculture activities.

"...Like friends who are gardeners. If anything goes wrong, they help clean the garden. They helped a lot. For example, when visitors from overseas are visiting, they are the ones who make this farm work..." (Urban farmer 1).

"...Just call your gang. The grass mower gang Mr. Kamis (garden community member) if he wanted some veggies I would give it to him, others who have helped in any way I never asked for money, I just give away I know it won't make me rich but it made them become much closer to us..." (Urban farmer 2)

"...Sometimes Mr. S (participant in the garden) will bring the unripe produce to his office, his office is in Shah Alam, Kuala Lumpur and he will bring it every time..." (Urban Farmer 3).

"...With friends, they would help in anything so it's fun, every day we get to meet here. If you want to strengthen the relationship, aaa...that's how. Every day we can meet here..." (Urban farmer 4)

"...When someone tells, we receive their views ...from friends actually, from there they say how to produce, how to grow this good fruit, fresh fatty vegetables, from there we learn..." (Urban Farmer 6).

4.3. Extension Agent's Relationship

The study found that the relationship between urban farmers and extension agent's plays a role in community garden. The ability to operate a community farming is due to the presence and support of extension agents who provide extension services to them. Good relationships and support from extension agents are very important to urban farmers because they are the main reference in matters pertaining to agriculture. The findings of this study are in line with the study conducted by [Calvet-Mir, March, Nordh, Pourias, and Cakovska \(2016\)](#) found that significant relationship between motivations that led farmers to venture into urban gardens and the benefits they received. [Ofuoku \(2012\)](#) found that the frequency of extension agents contacting and visiting farmers and the

availability of farmers for extension services could enhance farmers' understanding of agricultural practices to increase their agricultural productivity.

Therefore, urban farmers should be continued the relationship with the extension agent to carry out their garden activities smoothly and ultimately to achieve the desired well-being. The interviews revealed that extension agents helping of urban farmers in terms of motivation, problem solving, provide guidance on agricultural practices, provide market-related information and disseminate agricultural knowledge and skills.

"... I am very happy if the agricultural officer comes to visit my garden, Mr. S (agricultural officer) comes, he will visit our garden. Sometimes he asks what the problem is ... if there is a tree whose leaves are yellow, he will give poison and so on ..." (Urban Farmer 1).

"... In terms of the market, there is no problem, it 's really fun here, there are not enough vegetables if you continue to sell ... there are ... officers who come here, there are people who sometimes say where to sell, to whom to sell ..." (Urban Farmer 4).

"... shows how to grow vegetables, how to remove vegetable seedlings that are in the polybag ... there is a way ... cut the bottom ..." (Urban Farmer 5).

"... of course, I once participated in a course abroad organized by MPAJ (Majlis Perbandaran Ampang Jaya) and sent to Indonesia..there are many other places sometimes to Thailand to study there ..." (Urban Farmer 6).

"... definitely yes... they gave words of encouragement for us to continue because they have given a lot of help, it would be a pity if the land was left empty ..." (Urban Farmer 7).

4.4. Broad of Social Networks

The results found that majority of farmer interviewed reported that they have a broad of social networks. Most farmers say they need to interact and communicate with each other in order to build a strong network. Farmers also believe that other groups of farmers will help them to connect with other stakeholders, government or the private sector. One of the advantages of having a wide network is that individual farmers can connect and share new information and foster family spirit among farmers. In general, broad social networks can be seen through the willingness of informants to participate and collaborate on specific activities or programs organized. It gives individuals the opportunity to gain access to resources they may not have (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004).

Prior studies by Gayatri, Gasso-Tortajada, and Vaarst (2017) similarly show that farmers will have the opportunity to increase their income by interacting and communicating with farmers' groups. The more individuals participate in social activities, the more information is expected to be obtained and shared in achieving certain goals, thereby increasing the probability of successful collective action (Putnam, 2002). This study is in line with the findings of Jones (2012); Poulsen et al. (2014) and Nicholas et al. (2015) found that urban farmers have a wide range of relationships with outsiders - friends, co-workers and the general public who are aware of community farming activities in their area. Community farming can also create a wider and stronger community connection, which is often a challenge in the urban environment (Poulsen et al., 2014). The interviews revealed that broad of social network helping of urban farmers in terms of gain knowledge and skills in agricultural activities and obtain the necessary agricultural inputs.

"...I am the AJK (committee member), the chair of the block, the various AJKs. Community AJK, AJK SRS (Volunteer Patrol Scheme), and so on, I was active back then, while my husband was still alive. I went everywhere, for example joining Haji Atiff. Follow his community to the neighbourhood watch area (karwasan rukun tetangga/ KRT) to go anywhere..."(Urban Farmer 1).

"...If before I only knew those near my side in the community, here is Phase A, the surau is much further in Phase B. Now that we have this community garden, I know almost all of the people in this residential area..." (Urban Farmer 3)

"... We are in contact with outsiders to get input ... to get that seed, sometimes we don't have that seed ... they has seed so we take from them ... they have no seeds they take from us ... from different communities ... sometimes Pandan, sometimes Cheras, they don't have seeds so they come here ... "(Urban Farmer 5).
"...I have friends with other communities through facebook so sometimes I ask them where to find the seed, they send it by post and buy the cabbage seeds from the same person because we have a community garden group at Setiawan ..."(Urban Farmer 7).

5. CONCLUSION

It was concluded that urban farmer's in Klang Valley have a good sources of social assets through family members support, participation of group members, extension agents relationship and broad of social network. Research and Development (R&D) also needs to be strengthened in improving the effectiveness of the social assets surrounding them. Community of farmers need to be more proactively involved in associations or organizations that can influence their livelihoods in line with the goals set by the government in urban agriculture programs in Malaysia. In addition, government should be the medium of action in shaping the network, its beliefs and the like in urban agriculture. Indeed, the function of government is a key element in the upbringing of individual social assets. This is because quality social assets can ensure the survival of a community garden project in Malaysia.

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