

**GOVERNMENT SUPPORT TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL  
VOLUNTEERING PARTICIPATION**  
(Sokongan Kerajaan Terhadap Penglibatan Sukarelawan Alam Sekitar)

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**ABSTRACT**

Environmental volunteering is a form of unpaid helping behaviour that benefits the environment and a prosocial action that need support from government to ensure the objectives of environmental volunteerism reach its goal. Volunteerism has been a key of the global environmental movement by mobilizing communities in the world to help address environmental problems as protecting the environment is the responsibility of everyone in the community. NGOs act as bridge that linked the government support and the communities. This study is a mixed study that explored the government support towards environmental volunteering participation by analysing the data from verbatim responses of 10 individuals and questionnaire answered by 119 respondents that have participated in environmental volunteering activities. The results reveal that there are two elements of the government support towards environmental volunteering participation in Malaysia which is through incentives and education. The mean for this analysis is 6.95 with standard deviation of 2.404. The findings of the study indicate that environmental volunteerism should be a requirement in environmental education as it is seen as an encouragement for environmental conservation practices and volunteerism.

**Keywords:** Environmental volunteerism; government support; environmental volunteering participation; Muslim volunteers

## **ABSTRAK**

*Kesukarelawan alam sekitar adalah satu bentuk tingkah laku tolong menolong tanpa dibayar yang memberi manfaat kepada alam sekitar. Kesukarelawan alam sekitar ialah tindakan prososial yang memerlukan sokongan daripada kerajaan untuk memastikan objektif kesukarelawan alam sekitar mencapai matlamatnya. Kesukarelawan telah menjadi kunci kepada gerakan alam sekitar global dengan menggerakkan komuniti dunia untuk membantu menangani masalah alam sekitar kerana melindungi alam sekitar adalah tanggungjawab semua individu dalam komuniti. NGO bertindak sebagai jambatan yang menghubungkan sokongan kerajaan dan masyarakat. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah campuran untuk menerokai sokongan kerajaan terhadap penyertaan kesukarelawan alam sekitar dengan menganalisis data dari respons verbatim dari 10 individu dan soal selidik dijawab oleh 119 responden yang telah mengambil bahagian dalam aktiviti sukarelawan alam sekitar. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat dua elemen sokongan kerajaan terhadap penyertaan sukarelawan alam sekitar di Malaysia iaitu melalui insentif dan pendidikan. Purata untuk analisis ini ialah 6.95 dengan sisihan piawai 2.404. Penemuan kajian menunjukkan bahawa kesukarelawan alam sekitar harus menjadi syarat dalam pendidikan alam sekitar kerana dilihat sebagai dorongan untuk amalan pemeliharaan alam sekitar dan kesukarelawan.*

**Kata kunci:** *Kesukarelawan alam sekitar; sokongan kerajaan; penyertaan sukarelawan alam sekitar; sukarelawan Muslim*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The balance between human and physical development is an important aspect of the development process to achieve sustainable development. Sustainable development is based on the concept of development which socio-economic in line with ecological control and concept of needs which redistribution of resources to make sure the quality of life for all. Lastly, the concept of future generations that emphasizes the possibility of long term usage of resources to ensure the quality of life for future generations (Klarin 2018). The core of the sustainable development concept implies the balance between three pillars of sustainability which are environmental, social and economic sustainability. Complete sustainable development is accomplished through a balance between these three pillars (Klarin 2018). According to Nurul Hidayah, Haryati and Seow (2013) community sustainability remains dependent on environmental sustainability. Activities carried out by humans without including the impact on the environment will result in deterioration in the quality of the environment and will affect the well-being of the people.

There are five types of environmental volunteering i.e environmental activists, education, monitoring, restoration and sustainable living (Measham & Barnett 2008; Woosnam et al. 2019). The awareness of the importance of environmental protection has been promoted at national and international levels. Such efforts signify that the public has taken this issue seriously. The community began to mobilize environmental protections as environmentalists. Environmentalists group such as GreenPeace (well known for organizing protest and form of direct actions), World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Friends of Earth (lobbying as preferred action) (Tranter 2010) acts as check and balance agent for the government as well as the general public. The existence of these groups was also influenced by the role of the United Nations (UN) under the United Nations Environment Program. As a result, for example, environmental activists have took initiative to save the environment and crisis prevention methods despite high risks by doing demonstrations, blocking whale hunting, criticizing Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on climate change and other issues related to the environment.

In other countries, especially developed countries, environmental volunteers are one of the actors who play a significant role in influencing the country's policies. The government's policies are designed to foster the value of volunteerism for the next generation in taking on the task of helping to protect the environment. In the Malaysian context, various efforts have been made to raise awareness and the importance of ethical behavior in environmental protection. Government concerns on environmental issues are embedded in national development plans and government policies as set out in the establishment of the National Environmental Policy in 2002. Voluntary volunteerism is indeed demanded by the nation as it reflects our identity and spirit as a citizen whom responsible.

Various issues such as natural disasters, environmental health threats, low education and social values have been eroded in recent years and clearly require cooperation between the government and the community especially youth volunteering as these groups are the largest population in Malaysia with the most youth in the category ages 15 to 30 reach 8.59 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2019). Recognizing this fact, the appreciation of youth for the spirit of volunteerism is seen today. In fact, Batson et al. (2002) and Wilson (2000) view that the spirit of volunteerism is also considered to be a core value for modern society especially among the younger generation. According to Pearce (1982) and Sloane & Probstl-Haider (2019), although the task of managing society is based on the work of government departments, a spirit of volunteerism is also needed to help the community and government to reduce the pressure or burden on the parties involved.

In promoting the spirit of volunteerism among the community, the United Nations (UN) has declared International Volunteer Day celebrated since 1985. This International Volunteer Day is celebrated to honor the contribution of volunteers and to raise awareness of the importance of volunteerism in people's lives. The environmental volunteers involved must understand the environmental issues that impact the local community and the biodiversity and loss of property. Today, many environmental-related activities can be done in schools and universities with the existence of clubs and associations in universities such as the Ekorelawan Club University of Malaysia (UKM), Environmental Club University of Science Malaysia (USM) and the SEA Turtle Research Unit (SEATRU) University Malaysia Terengganu. Moreover, NGOs also have participated and offered environmental volunteering programmes to be organized. There are 31 environmental voluntary organizations registered under the Malaysian Non-Governmental Environmental Organization (MENGO) in Malaysia so far (MENGO 2019). Among them is the Treat Every Environment Special (TrEES), Sahabat Alam Malaysia, Malaysian Nature Society and Green Earth Society. This paper will explore the government support given that lead to the individual participation as environmental volunteer.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Volunteering have the potential to help social and emotional development of individuals. Individual involvement in volunteer activities also depends on the background and personal experience of an individual (Fauziah, Aizan & Tharshini 2015). Individuals who have been involved in volunteer activities from an early age are noted to have a more open attitude to help improve the situation around them. The involvement of the Malaysian community in voluntary activities is pioneered by the young rather than the veteran. According to Siti Rabaah, Turiman and Azimi (2015), more young people comprising students, colleges and universities are involved in voluntary activities. For example, the expansion of volunteerism activities among universities students is reflected in the increase in volunteer programs especially community service and student devotion. Therefore, to ensure that volunteer activities are becoming more professional, the Ministry of Higher Education established the Volunteer Council of Universities Malaysia (MASKUM) in 2007. MASKUM acts as a planner, mentor and mentor for IPT students to undertake voluntary activities as well as helping instill the values of responsibility among students (Siti Rabaah, Turiman & Azimi 2015).

A study by Nesbit and Brudney (2013) examined the impact of the American Volunteer Act on the diversity of volunteers in current programs. The study found that it is difficult to increase the level of volunteerism among Americans due to the diversity of races and population growth each year. Therefore, it is a major challenge for the Act to create a future generation of volunteers. Therefore, employment-

related policies or regulations should be viewed positively so that employees have time to engage in volunteer work. Discussions of voluntary contexts changed through changes in globalization, technology, demographics and political drives leading to voluntary action as a form of civic responsibility and promoting democratic action (O'Brien et al. 2010). Smith (1999) has identified in his study that the main benefits of volunteering are economy and social capital. This study also examines the number of hours individuals spend doing volunteer work by converting them to their average salary as if they were employees.

The issue of environmental volunteering in Malaysia can be addressed through education. According to Shahrom, Muhammad Imran and Noor Ezlin (2015) conducted a study of environmental volunteers in Malaysia in the context of accepting and understanding students view of environmental education through volunteering activities aimed at promoting the good and improving the quality of human life besides facilitating students' understanding of the subject.

The study by Norshariani (2015) also touched on aspects of environmental education by discussing the development of Environmental Education globally, education in Malaysia formally and informally, the teaching and learning methods of Environmental Education that are applicable in the context of Indigenous people and the constraints they face in the pursuit of delivering Environmental Education in schools. Volunteerism action also can be develop through education thus the relevance of Environmental Education that regarded as an interdisciplinary field across all subject areas. This is also because it considers the environment holistically covering economic, political, historical and moral issues. Environmental education is also an instrument of the government to achieve the goals of sustainable development in terms of environment and community well-being. This is where the government's policy can be implemented at the grassroots level and act as a form of support towards environmental action.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Context of Study**

This study aims to explore the government support given that promotes people to join volunteerism activity and became environmental volunteers. This study is a qualitative study where semi structured interviews were used to obtain data from 10 environmental volunteers followed by quantitative research which the data was obtained from 119 environmental volunteers in Selangor who are in the age between 15 and 30 years old and a Muslim which bring to the total of 129 environmental volunteers participated in this study. Muslim were chosen in this study because

Muslim spirituality affects environmental sustainability and sustainable development in a multicultural and global context (Bensaid 2018). Thus, the integration of Islamic practice into environmental volunteering is relevant (Hancock 2019).

### **Study Participants**

The participants or respondents of the study were environmental volunteers who had been involved in volunteerism activities conducted by government, non-governmental organizations or organized by schools and higher education institutions in Malaysia. The environmental volunteers involved in this study were youth aged 15 to 30 years. This age group was chosen because they are active people and still have the capacity to perform environmental volunteer activities. 10 participants were interviewed which seven participants were volunteered at IPTA while one participant from NGO who was involved in organizing environmental volunteer activities and two participants were employed. Meanwhile, 119 participants from IPTA and schools around Selangor took part in answering questionnaire relating to environmental volunteering activities. The investigation was limited in sampling because this is a preliminary research and the participants involved were selected among youth in Selangor and must be involved with environmental volunteering. However, this preliminary research provides a new understanding about the reality of government support among youth in environmental volunteering.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

To obtain data through interviews, researcher contacted the participants in advance to explain the objectives of the research and request the permission to conduct interviews. The interviews were conducted based on the time most convenient for the participants. A letter of acknowledgement as a study participant was also signed by each participant. Next, this research also obtained the data through questionnaire that were build based on the theme of the interviews results. Researcher went to the environmental volunteering program that being held in Bangi, Selangor and asked the volunteers participating in that program to answer the questionnaire. Researcher also asked university students to answer this questionnaire and managed to obtain 119 participants to take part in answering this questionnaire.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Data were obtained from semi-structured interviews and questionnaire. The researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim after the completion of each interview. A set of questionnaire was developed based on the interview findings. The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed using SPSS software.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Two elements of support from the government can be categorized into incentives and education aspect. The verbatim of participants is given in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Two elements of support from the government

No	Theme	Subthemes	Verbatim Responses
1	Support from the government	Incentives	<p>“government help promote this volunteering by publicity since recently we have seen many volunteer ads and promotes to join volunteer.” (P1_132- 134)</p> <p>“I think the government with these under-government bodies supports the real cause as I said earlier, the program under the US Embassy and what the government is helping is kind of encouraging the US to initiate action near Malaysia. I mean, the US for the truth, ok US you can do this. That is one that I feel the government can help improve the environment. Because people know that our government is not capable of doing such things so allow other countries to do such things.” (P2_122-128).</p> <p>“I think that the government has donated a lot of money to certain organizations for these volunteer activities. For example, the program I joined that day, we didn't have to pay for anything. They will provide all the goods for three days and two nights. So, we are very grateful to the government for helping us.” (P3_151-156)</p> <p>"The government is very supportive of what I am doing, the program I am joining in, is receiving great response from the ministry as this application is immediately approved as it is difficult for us to see applications that should be developed by the ministry but only developed by NGOs, that wanted to help the community.” (p6_236-240)</p>

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"If we want to do this program, we will give you a proposal paper for a program that goes to the beach and the we will get the fund needed." (p8\_159-160)

"In my opinion, this government supports it by providing funds. A lot of funds for example those trees are not free. But it's actually a fund from the government itself. The tools that we have for such things as shovels, fertilizers, all come from government funds. Also, buses are from the government themselves." (P9\_142-148)

"Um ..both in terms of government and government policy, I can see, I can say very well. Because we see now that it is possible for NGO volunteers, but the government has not stopped us from doing such activities. For example, the Ministry of the Environment has a campaign to save our rivers, save mangroves. There you go. But the ads from these ministries is what drives these NGOs and even the ministry's fundraising fund to these NGOs to encourage them to do more volunteer work." (P10\_151-160)

Education "Getting started in this activity since school. It has to do with education,

programs at the school level, it is the government that makes me join." (P7\_55-57)

In addition, educators who educate foundation students like me." (P9\_142- 148)

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By analyzing the verbatim above, there are two elements of the government support towards environmental volunteering participation in Malaysia which is through incentives and education. The government support the environmental volunteerism activity by giving funds and help in promoting this kind of activities. Then, through environmental education, values related to environmental ethics should be appreciated by everyone. Values should be nurtured from the beginning through environmental education.



Through the questionnaire as shown in Figure 1, the highest mean is 7.95 (environmental awareness campaign) and the lowest is 6.54 (family recommendations) meanwhile “Get government support” placed second last with 6.95. For other social influences such as friend requests, teacher / lecturer / employer suggestions, organizers influence, the needs of participating clubs, study/work program needs and social media influence placed third, seventh, second, fourth, sixth and fifth, respectively.

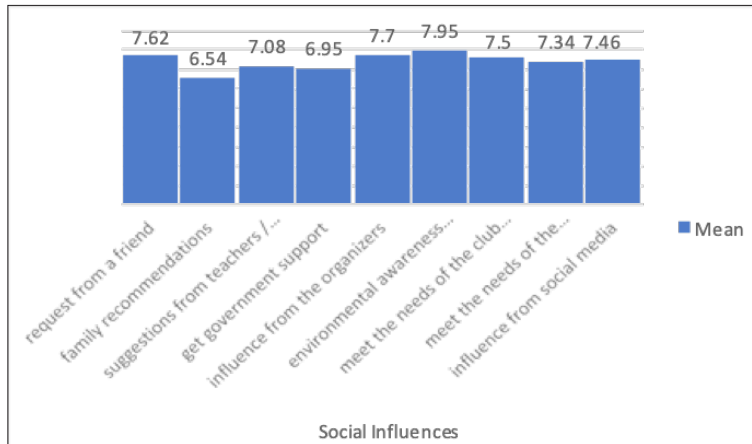


FIGURE 1 Social Influences in Environmental Volunteering Participation

## DISCUSSION

The role of government support in education in enhancing the involvement of environmental volunteers is seen to play a significant role. Formal education begins in school. Environmental Education in Malaysia today is based on the philosophy and objectives of Environmental Education set by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (Norshariani 2015). Here, environmental awareness can be nurtured from the very beginning. A person with high skills in environmental technology for example does not necessarily have a strong desire to preserve and conserve the environment (Fauziah, Aizan & Tharshini 2015). Environmental awareness campaign can be seen as one of the government effort as one of the respondents that have been interviewed says “government help promote this volunteering by publicity since recently we have seen many volunteer ads and promotes to join volunteer” (P1\_132-134).

Government and community relationship networks also play a role in the successful management of the environment. The community-building component of the community function provides a useful way for government and organizations like NGOs, club university associations or neighborhood community to foster a sense of

community (Carpenter 2016). There are various environmental control methods that have been implemented including legal and non-legal methods. One of the best ways is through education which is one of the non-legal ways that can generate awareness and thus change the pattern of human interaction with the environment in producing more responsible individuals. Government initiatives to promote campaigns and programs such as volunteer activities can increase public awareness of the importance of caring for the environment and encourage the community especially youths to participate in environmental volunteering activities.

Social system like family, school and friends play certain roles in influencing youth to participate in volunteer service (Law et al. 2013). Parental encouragement can motivate children to engage in such activities. Parents are important as they provide the first context for socialisation and adult role models (Van Goethem 2014). When it comes to younger generation, family members especially parents constantly use norms to shape behaviour via role modelling or the provision of rules thus lead to the understanding the importance of environmental volunteering (Culiberg & Gambier 2016). In addition, majority of the young people attend school and universities. Therefore, the influence of the teacher or lecturers also plays a role. At school or university, there is a need to join environmental volunteer activities in the association club and in the study programs that need student to participate. The attitude of the school or university towards youth volunteers directly impact the future volunteer participation. Finally, friends influence each other to take part in youth volunteerism (Law et al. 2013). Friends are important because they share the same values, traits and social power that lead to their participation in the activities (Van Goethem et al. 2014). Within the field of environmental volunteering, peer pressure may be used to encourage and induce pro-environmental activities such as voluntary work through social contact and communication with other volunteers. Through positive peer pressure, it represents a way to influence the process of social norms leading to participation in environmental volunteerism. Meanwhile, through social media, social media posts can be more effective in impacting young people's environmental knowledge, attitudes and behaviors as they have grown up with the internet and have exposure to their smartphone, and are more likely to find information on their social media (Carpenter et al. 2016; Douglas et al. 2015). This simple yet successful approach will lead to a prompt understanding of an environmental incident and a timely response by various agencies, organizations and even government, so that new individuals can be turned into new volunteers (Arbatani, Labafi & Robati 2016).

Implementation at the national level requires good planning with the help of government policies that can have a positive impact as well as committed leaders and transparency of government. Malaysia needs to identify priorities and focus

on critical issues affecting social, environment and economic development. In this context, the goals of Quality Education (SDG 4) in sustainability education should be given attention. Appreciation and capacity building on issues of sustainability not only need to be formally disclosed at the school and university level but also need to extend beyond the formal and informal sectors of government and the public and the public. This can also be attributed to the strengthening of voluntary activities by the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) which is seen as an important asset in the success of this SDG (SDG support is quality education to the community). The unity of governments and volunteers in achieving the same goals for sustainable development should be positive. Social support and through role models can serve to reinforce social norms and inform individuals about their perceptions, effectiveness and behaviours while supporting pro-environmental activities such as volunteering.

Education is likely to play an important role, because higher education has been shown to be a prerequisite for environmental awareness (Binder & Blankenberg 2016). Through education, the activities carried out by the government are mostly under the Department of Environment (DOE) and Ministry of Education. The activities such as promoting environmental awareness through outdoor activities, environmental-themed contests, Sustainable Schools, Nature Heroes and Environmental Awareness Camps (KEKAS). For example through outdoor activities such as live animal experience, educators or volunteers articulated the value of the animal (values), specific beliefs for care (beliefs), threats to the animal (awareness of the impacts), and suitable activities that could be executed by an individual or group that leading into behavioural norms like volunteering (Caplow 2018).

Another examples includes the distribution of educational materials such as Green Era books, pamphlets, articles and guidelines on implementing environmental protection regulations that are distributed free to government departments, organizations, schools, higher education institutions and libraries. DOE also works with the mass media and the private sector to promote environmental awareness. The Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) also played a role in promoting environmental awareness to the public by publishing an estidotmy book with Utusan Malaysia (Norshariani 2015). Fang (2017) suggests that environmental education can help improve pro-environmental actions but does not automatically contribute to a shift in behavioral patterns meanwhile Smith et al. (2010) research found that high rates of volunteerism among universities in five countries: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States showed positive signs of educational institutions and governments efforts to promote volunteerism among students and youths.

Funds and incentives given can be seen as a form of reward. Rewards are more effective in encouraging pro environmental actions like volunteerism than sanctions because rewards are associated with positive affect and attitudes that support behavioural changes (Steg & Vleg 2009). However, when rewards had their own advantages, people would attribute their behaviour change to the reward, not to their personal, biospheric and altruism values. As a result, rewards tend to have short term effect for as long the reward is in place. In addition, rewards will be effective only if they are successful in making pro environmental behaviour more attractive than environmentally harmful options (Steg & Vleg 2009).

Apart from direct material benefits provided to participants, good policies by the government regarding environmental conservation programmes that involved volunteering must be empowered by effective enforcement. Through a study by Grillos et al. (2019) found that the Payment for Ecosystem Service (PES) method, which is a form of environmental conservation program, has a positive impact on environmental values and belief that government involvement in such programs is appropriate. Thus, incentives and information can influence human perceptions and values therefore subsequent policy intervention by the government is important (Grillos et al. 2019).

The government roles to increase the environmental volunteering participation is much needed. Participation by the society is an essential component of achieving sustainable development together with governments and non-governmental organizations sharing responsibilities, planning, managing, implement and monitor the environment as outlined in Principle 22 of the Local Agenda 21 (LA21) Rio de Janeiro 1992 that requires a community of people that is a citizen and governments to play an important role in environmental management and development (Hassan 2012). The government should recognize the appropriate manner to enable the effective involvement of various parties in achieving sustainable development. Local community participation in decision making is very important in contributing new ideas, information, analysis and solutions to problems but also contributes to basic knowledge and information in deciding which decisions or actions to take (Choo et al. 2017)

The role of the government in increasing volunteer participation compared to other social influences is that the government helps in promoting environmental volunteerism. For example, the Ministry of the Environment is campaigning to save the river, Earth Hour and organizing “Friends of Environment” program. With these campaigns, related programs can be implemented and through such programs, environmental volunteers can be increased. In addition, the government also contributes financially to organizations such as environmental NGOs to encourage more volunteer participation. According to one of the volunteers interviewed, the

beginning of his involvement in environmental volunteer activities began at the school level where education played a key role in influencing his involvement. The government has introduced environmental elements in education in Malaysia and therefore, the role of the government in increasing the number of environmental volunteers cannot be overlooked. For other social influences such as friend requests, family suggestions, teacher / lecturer / employer suggestions, organizers influence, environmental awareness campaigns, the needs of participating clubs, study program needs and social media influence if seen from another side was also influenced by the government.

For improvement, the government needs to increase the campaign on environmental volunteers especially among youth as they can influence peers and local communities (Garst, Browne & Bialeschki 2011). Youth have their own role and importance in the development of society and the nation. According to Nesbit (2017), youth volunteers were selected because recent research has shown that veterans are less likely than non-veterans to volunteer. Youth as current and future leaders must move towards more positive and effective maturity, ability and motivation in building a stronger commitment to love for the environment (Mcdougale, Greenspan & Handy 2011). The spirit of volunteerism is one of the core values that must be present and is important to inculcate among the younger generation as this group will lead the future. Volunteering engagements offer youth opportunities to develop their own potentials such as communication skills, problem solving, collaboration and helping to develop career opportunities as well as fostering awareness of the value of God's creation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Environmental management and conservation implemented in the context of sustainable development underpinned economic development, social development and environmental protection. Realizing this, the government has created a National Environmental Policy that has taken into account the merger of these three pillars. Volunteer activities can be incorporated into the social development aspect. The National Environmental Policy aims to continue economic, social and cultural development and improve the quality of life of Malaysians through environmental well-being and sustainable development. Among the elements of the government's attention are education and environmental awareness. Incentives also can be done with proper research need to be done. Through this effort, the government has clearly provided a platform through the government of the state to help nurture volunteerism among the individual community. Volunteerism is universal and strengthens civic engagement, social inclusion, solidarity and ownership. Volunteerism is a powerful mechanism that opens pathways for greater participation of people in the environmental sustainability in the communities. Government should play certain roles to empower environmental volunteerism.

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