

# RURAL YOUTH LOCAL CHAMPIONS SUPPORT FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND PROGRAM

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## **RURAL YOUTH LOCAL CHAMPIONS SUPPORT FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND PROGRAM**

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### **Abstract**

Rural youth development must be exposed to the genuine intents and goals of the country's rural development direction in guiding the rural youth. As a result, this study seeks to find Local Champions (LC) support for rural development policies through the Rural Business Champions (RBC) lens. This study uses parallel mixed methods. The findings show that the LC technique and the Rural Development Master Plan should be promoted to the youth who agreed the most. However, all the mean scores are high, and RBC supported all programs to enhance LC among the rural youth. Interviews revealed a need for programs that develop passion and drive among rural youth and an emphasis on implementing entrepreneurial knowledge. Thus, this study found that the local youth participating in local champion policies and programs need to be exposed to knowledge, passion, and mentor by being included in local champions practices.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, local champion, rural youth, rural planning

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## INTRODUCTION

Rural development is one aspect of national planning that aims to achieve sustainable development by improving the quality of life of local communities (Md Sharif & Tuan Lonik, 2017). Rural development has become a concern worldwide because of the enormous gap between urban and rural developments (Kamarudin et al., 2012; Manggat, 2018; Rashid et al., 2021). Demographic trends do not give hope for rural areas in an advanced economy (Tuomas et al., 2016). However, it should carry the causes of rural development due to high poverty rates, low productivity, lack of economic and social infrastructure, and the market (Zeinab et al., 2016). Most studies have found that development rates for small enterprises in rural areas are lower because it exposed them to a more excellent range of challenges than urban areas due to the constrained environment (Fabeil et al., 2017). This is even more worrying as unemployment is more pronounced in rural areas than in urban areas (Galvão et al., 2020).

In Malaysia, the rural population is predicted to gradually decline over the next few years, reaching around 7 million in 2030 (Rashid et al., 2021). The Government of Malaysia made various measures and approaches to increase rural development since the country's independence in 1957 through to the 1990s (Fatimah & Mad Nasir, 1997; Alex, 1980; Manggat, 2018). Therefore, Malaysia's government intends to promote rural regions into economic hubs, enhance rural livelihoods and living conditions, and close the gap in life quality between urban and rural residents (Rashid et al., 2021). One of the rural development programs is Local Champion (LC). The movement of the rural population is due to an increase in out-migration, particularly of youth (Ismail et al., 2021; Rashid et al., 2021). Thus, the LC program is vital in producing more rural youth that venture into entrepreneurship, businesses, and others to increase their income and development.

Youth are the pillar of the country in the future and have a positive impact on the development of rural communities (Zeinab et al., 2016; Omar et al., 2017). The Malaysian government has introduced entrepreneurship programs, especially in rural areas, as a job opportunity for the youth (Zeinab et al., 2016). However, to provide LC, they need to have a noble intention and aim for the country's rural development direction to guide other youth in rural areas. Thus, this study aims to identify Local Champions (LC) support for the government's policy on rural development based on Rural Business Champions (RBC). RBC is the winner of a Business Plan competition organised by the Kementerian Pembangunan Luar Bandar (KPLB) and a successful LC. Therefore, this study required their views to see the support and importance of rural development policies and program in producing more LC youth.

## **RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND YOUTH LOCAL CHAMPIONS**

Rural assets and resources (agricultural, entrepreneurial, business, and tourist) should be further developed to avoid rural populations from encountering impediments or difficulties in meeting their demands due to global urbanization challenges (Rashid et al., 2021). As suggested in the literature, among the gaps between urban and rural development are the development of agro-based entrepreneurs (Siti Aisyah et al., 2015), and the development of a Smart ICT point to reduce the digital gaps (Zurinah et al., 2016). Urban areas are frequently equated with appropriate facilities or core infrastructure, in contrast to rural communities, which continue to be constrained by restricted and insufficient infrastructure (Manggat, 2018).

The effort by the Malaysian government to improve the socio-economic status of rural areas is to intensify their involvement in programs such as homestays, handicraft making, and indigenous processed foods (Fabeil et al., 2017). However, empirical studies on entrepreneurship programs and their development in rural areas are still lacking (Galvão et al., 2020). Rashid et al. (2021) stated that the development criteria of a modern rural village should include strengthening local businesses, education, health and welfare, technology engagement, and food security; all of which are required components of the modern rural approach. Contemporary studies on youth's disposition, options, and intentions for rural life present contradictory results (Tuomas et al., 2016).

Most youth believe they can affect small changes at the community level in the Malaysian context, while just a minority believe the contrary (Samsuddin et al., 2018). In most developing countries, including Malaysia, youth living in rural areas are involved with local natural resource-based jobs (Zeinab et al., 2016; Tuomas et al., 2016; Md Sharif & Tuan Lonik, 2017). The strategy adopted by the Government of Malaysia to eradicate poverty is modernization to increase efficiency, productivity, production, and returns to farmers and fishers (Alex, 1980; Rozhan, 2017). The rural development policy was introduced again with the National Development Policy (DPN) in 1991 (Zurinah et al., 2016) to achieve a national standard, social justice, values, ethics and morality, political stability, quality of life, government administration, and economic excellence. The 11th Malaysia Plan (RMK-11), which the Malaysian government began, has devoted a sizable budget to improve and upgrade existing basic facilities in rural regions to ensure the rural people's well-being (Unit Perancang Ekonomi, 2015).

Based on the policy's core in rural youth development, the government has set a public policy statement for the Core 5: the empowerment of high, knowledgeable, skilful, patriotic, creative, innovative, and enjoy sustainable income through entrepreneurship (Ministry of Rural Development, 2019). One strategy developed in this policy is to strengthen the youth in business and

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entrepreneurship. Hence, the government aspires to develop rural youth by creating business opportunities and engaging in entrepreneurial activities.

### FRAMEWORK RURAL YOUTH SUPPORT FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT.

This research focuses on aspects of rural development such as support for government policies and programs, and the issues and challenges faced to focus on local youth involved with the local champion program. The framework for this investigation is summarised in Figure 1.

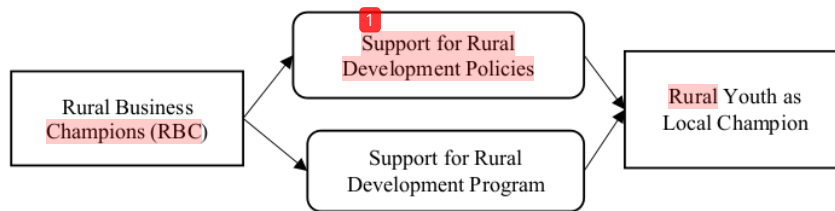


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Five indicators were identified to be evaluated to obtain RBC's support for rural development policy. First, the local champion development approach is needed for rural youth development to local champion development programs. According to Muhamamd Zulhafizi and Zurinah (2021), several measures that the government is actively implementing are to increase and expand the role and capacity of entrepreneurship training institutions, strengthen the cooperative sector and provide assistance to the Small and Medium Industry (SME) sector in terms of finance, needs, guidance. etc., to increase its contribution to the economy to the level of 40% by 2015. Second, Local champions (LC) need to understand the philosophy and policy of rural development.

Furthermore, Jalaluddin (2015) explained that Malaysia does not lack local wisdom for sustainable development such as Vision 2020, transformation of the New Economic Model (NEM), 1Malaysia Concept, Bandar Selamat program, Sustainable Village, Prosperous Community, 1Malaysia Community, and global planning and development philosophy by Jabatan Perancangan Bandar dan Desa (JPBD) (2011). Thus, LC development needs to understand the philosophy and policies of rural development, understand the Rural Development Master Plan, adopt the new Model of rural economic transformation, enhance the dissemination of information on rural development policies, programs, and activities.

The study also identified the support of RBC winners towards programs related to economic sector improvement that have been implemented and

proposed to create more LCs among rural youths. There are six rural LC development programs and activities identified are The Rural Business Challenge (RBC) (Zubir, 2020); The Model of Sustainable Rural Development (Ibrahim, 2015); The "Gerakan Desa Wawasan" (GDW), and "Gerakan Daya Wawasan" (KPLB); The global iconic people who contributed to the community should be exposed to youth (Boldureanu et al., 2020); 1M4U (Institute Social Malaysia), Volunteer programs by NGOs such as "Yayasan Salam" and "Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa" (Muhammad Ismail, 2015; Sinar Harian, 2017). RBC winners evaluated all items as a form of initiative that helps stakeholders focus on LC development among rural youth.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses parallel mixed methods. The study sample comprised Rural Business Challenge (RBC) winners from 2013 to 2016. Data was collected through a survey of the RBC winners provided by the KPLB. The entire list of winners provided had 137 people. However, this study could only collect 30 RBC winners as a sample study because there were several constraints in obtaining a sample for this study; among which are the factors of time, distance, and commitment of the sample to their careers. Based on a population size of 137, assuming an estimated RBC winners of 50% with a 90% confidence interval, we calculated a required sample size of 30 respondent with 13.36% margin of error.

We conducted a field study to get data from the sample respondents from 21 April 2018 to 14 July 2018. The questionnaire items for this study were divided into three sections: demographics, policy support for rural development, and program support for rural development. The items of this study have been validated by five experts in the field of rural development policy. Cronbach's alpha values were used to demonstrate the questionnaire's reliability for this item:

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha value

Questionnaire Instrument	Item	Cronbach Alpha Value ( $\alpha$ )
Support for rural development policy	5	0.783
Support for rural development programs	6	0.819

Based on the Cronbach alpha score (Bond & Fox, 2015), the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.7 is good and acceptable, while 0.8 and above is very good and practical with a high level of consistency. Thus, the Cronbach's alpha value in this study based on Table 1 shows a high value and understood by the respondents. The results presented in this paper were analysed using a descriptive statistical analysis aided by the computer software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Meanwhile, interviews were conducted with three respondents out of the 30 people.

## RESULTS

The results are based on the objective of this study which is to identify the support of Local Champions (LC) towards government policy on rural development. Hence, this study sets out a discussion that shows that rural development needs to develop more LC among rural youth. The second objective is to see the respondents' support for programs implemented in the rural development policy as the need to produce more LC in Malaysia.

### Respondents' Support for Rural Development Policy Requirements

Respondents' support towards the rural development policy is based on five identified items, as shown in Table 2 below. The result shows that most respondents agreed (82.8%) that the LC development approach is needed for rural youth development programs. Meanwhile, only 17.2% of the respondents disagreed. This decision also offers the same results for the indicator that the Rural Development Master plan is to be explained to the group of local champions. However, the results show a high level of agreement on the rural development policy in the LC program.

Most of the respondents strongly agreed with the philosophy of rural development in Malaysia where the youth should understand the development programs of local champions, with the support of 75.9%. At the same time, the rest agreed (20.7%), and only 1% was neutral. Furthermore, the youth need to practice the new rural economic transformation model, showing the difference supported by RBC. The percentage of 34.5% strongly agreed to deliver the highest support, 27.6% agreed, and 27.6% were neutral, while those who disagreed and strongly disagreed were 6.9% and 3.4%, respectively. Lastly, information on agency policies, programs, and activities for youth development is necessary to accelerate the local champion's fast process. This item shows that the percentage of strongly agreed is higher than 75.6%. In contrast, the rest of the respondents agreed with 20.7% and only 3.4% disagreed. The number of mean scores shows all high items are over 4.0 and above.

**Table 2:** Support for rural development policy

Support for Rural Development Policy	Percentage (%)					Mean	St.D
	SD	D	N	A	SA		
1 The local champion development approach is needed for rural youth development to LC development programs.	-	-	-	17.2	82.8	4.83	0.384
2 The youth should understand the	-	-	3.4	20.7	75.9	4.72	0.528

	philosophy of rural development in Malaysia for the development programs of LC.							
3	The Rural Development master plan should be explained to the group of LC.	-	-	-	17.2	82.8	4.83	0.384
4	The youth need to practice the new Model of rural economic transformation.	3.4	6.9	27.6	27.6	34.5	4.59	0.733
5	Information on agency policies, programs and activities for youth development is necessary to accelerate the LC fast process.	-	3.4	-	20.7	75.9	4.69	0.660

\*Note: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), St.D (Standard Deviation).

\*Score mean: 1.00-2.33(Low); 2.34-3.66 (Medium); 3.67-5.00 (High)

The high score means of 4.83 offers support from RBC about needs and planning from rural development policy which are highly recommended to develop LC among rural youth. Result of interviews also show knowledge on the development of rural entrepreneurs:

*"..Sometimes these youths do not believe by just giving explanations and theories, but they believe more when we bring them ourselves to the processing plant area." (Informant 2)*

However, Informant 3 also commented on the term of entrepreneur of knowledge to:

*"..I once sent some participants and also follow -up staff from the program (entrepreneur program that has been organized) to get more knowledge and training." (Informant 3)*

Therefore, it can be concluded that knowledge needs to be in line with practical knowledge that focuses on entrepreneurship, government policy, and rural development.



### Support for Local Champions Development Programs

Table 3 shows the support from RBC towards rural development programs in developing LC among rural youth. This result shows six items to discuss. First, the Rural Business Challenge (RBC) program can produce successful local LC had respondents who strongly agreed with a higher percentage of 65.5%, followed by agreed with 20.7%, while neutral and disagreed with 6.9%. Second, the Model of Sustainable Rural Development through cooperation is beneficial in building socio-economic rural youth. The results show that the respondents strongly agreed with 34.5%, agreed with 27.6%, and neutral with 27.6%. Other than that, the results show support by disagreeing and strongly disagreeing with 6.9% and 3.4%, respectively.

Third, the "Gerakan Desa Wawasan" (GDW) and "Gerakan Daya Wawasan" are still necessary as the basis for rural youth development, showing the higher result of strongly agreed with 48.3%, followed by neutral and agreed with 24.1% and 21.7%, respectively. At the same time, some of them disagreed and strongly disagreed with 3.4%. Fourth, global iconic people who contributed to the community, such as Princess Diana and Muhammad Yunus, should be exposed to the youth. The higher percentage strongly agreed (48.3%), followed by those who agreed with 27.6%, while the rest showed that 17.2% were neutral and 6.9% strongly agreed. In addition to having an influential mentor or icon, RBC as a mentor also has constraints to play a role to rural youth:

*"maybe because the entrepreneurs themselves (experts/mentors), as I am busy running the business, at the same time want to help them as well. Ideally, if I see... entrepreneurs who want to be involved in programs with the youth need to be stable before training others. If entrepreneurs are not stable, how to train people. We are like that..." (Informant 1)*

**Table 3:** Support for rural development programs

	Support for rural development programs	Frequency and Percentage (%)					Mean	St.D
		SD	D	N	A	SA		
1	The Rural Business Challenge (RBC) program can produce a successful LC.	-	2 6.9	2 6.9	6 20.7	19 65.5	4.45	0.910
2	The Model of Sustainable Rural Development through cooperative is very effective in building socio-economic rural youth.	1 3.4	2 6.9	8 27.6	8 27.6	10 34.5	3.83	1.104

3	The "Gerakan Desa Wawasan" (GDW) and "Gerakan Daya Wawasan" are still necessary as the basis for rural youth development.	1 3.4	1 3.4	7 24.1	6 20.7	14 48.3	4.07	1.100
4	The global iconic people who contributed to the community, such as Princess Diana and Muhammad Yunus, should be exposed to youth.	2 6.9	-	5 17.2	8 27.6	14 48.3	4.10	1.145
5	IM4U Program can create a LC among the rural youth.	1 3.4	2 6.9	10 34.5	8 27.6	8 27.6	3.69	1.072
6	Volunteer programs by NGOs such as "Yayasan Salam" and "Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa" should be exposed for the development of the rural youth champion.	1 3.4	-	4 13.8	10 34.5	14 48.3	4.24	0.951

\*Note: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), St.D (Standard Deviation).

\*Score mean: 1.00-2.33(Low); 2.34-3.66 (Medium); 3.67-5.00 (High)

Fifth, the support toward the IM4U Program that can create a local champion among the rural youth got a different result with a higher percentage of neutral at 34.5%, followed by strongly agreed and agreed with 27.6%. Meanwhile, the rest disagreed and strongly disagreed with 6.9% and 3.4%, respectively. The last item is support for volunteer programs by NGOs, such as "Yayasan Salam" and "Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa", should be exposed for the rural youth champion's development, showed the majority strongly agreed with 48.3%, followed by 34.5% who agreed.

In contrast, the rest were neutral and strongly disagreed with 13.8% and 3.4%, respectively. The high mean score of 4.45%, offers support from RBC as RBC is the best successful program to develop LC among rural youth. On the other hand, the lowest mean with 3.82% refers to the Model of Sustainable Rural **development effectively building socio-economic among the rural youth.** However, all the mean scores show a high score, and all the programs got support from RBC to develop more LC among the rural youth.

Nevertheless, most of the informants stated that there are challenges in educating rural youth because their passion and interest in entrepreneurship is lacking, as they explained:

*"..The process to recruit these youth is difficult...especially when we want to find and gather them to share (entrepreneurship program) with us.." (Informant 1)*

*"..I also have experience with entrepreneurs .. there are many genuine problems, some are problematic, and some are successful. And we are involved with the youth, especially in agriculture. Because agriculture is familiar with rural activities. we need to focus on their interest." (Informant 2)*

*"..what I see among these youths, something that we share easily..like when we share something that is not from him having passion, they are not motivated to do something. So little difficult actually.." (Informant 3)*

As can be seen, the critical challenge is to discover a more acceptable way to attract the youth in engaging in entrepreneurship.

## **DISCUSSION**

The best and most successful program to be implemented is the Rural Business Challenge (RBC). It also supported the assumption in a study by Galvo et al. (2020), which established that entrepreneurship might create jobs and economic development in urban and rural locations. Entrepreneurship is one of the main economic growth drivers in which it creates wealth, innovation, and use of technology and poverty reduction. It is also one of the economic strategies to maintain the country's competitiveness in enhancing globalization trends (Zeinab et al., 2016).

Based on the interviews, we found that several approaches carried out by the RBC winners towards local youths explained some issues and challenges that need to be coordinated with programs from the Government for rural development among local youths. The results are also supported by previous studies that found some need to introduce the LC program. For example, Noor et al. (2017) explained, the factors contributing to entrepreneurial activity are internal factors, such as personality traits, skills, and motivation. Next challenge, which is to create more experts or mentors, is one of the issues that need to be arranged well because the role of mentors inspires the youth to participate in entrepreneurial activities and local champion programs.

The third issue or challenge, which is the local youth mentality, is also supported by Jaafar et al. (2015), where small rural tourism business owners are low educated. Therefore, the results of their study found that some rural communities are less skilled in using ICT technology for conveniences, such as

making business capital transfers and others. Further to that, the fourth issue or challenge is that knowledge is vital for rural development modules or programs, primarily to generate a generation of LC. The findings of these concerns and challenges in terms of knowledge have significantly bolstered previous research that identified various aspects which necessitate the construction of a knowledge-based program (Jaafar et al., 2015; Noor et al., 2017).

The study results show that RBC plays an essential role as a leader and role model to rural youths to become LCs like them. Other than that, RBC also increases employment opportunities and the resilience of rural youths to improve their economic and living standards in rural areas. Furthermore, RBC's contribution to encouraging rural youths to choose entrepreneurs as their jobs is capable of achieving the government's target of producing more rural entrepreneurs by 2030.

### **CONCLUSION**

It was concluded that support for rural development policies and programs received encouraging approval from the RBC winners to produce more local champions (LCs) among rural youths. However, aspects of knowledge about these policies and programs need to be in line with the internal development of youth, such as motivation, and building a deep interest and desire for entrepreneurship and business. Rural development programs that produce an LC generation are very useful in helping rural communities to develop their areas while upgrading their lives and economic resources. However, disclosure of the program needs to be expanded and improved in terms of management.

The study results and the use of parallel mixed methods show the ability to answer the objectives of this study. Therefore, the researcher sees the need for mixed methods studies to evaluate the approach to plan rural development policies and programs. However, this study also has limitations that focus on the involvement of those who organise activities to produce a generation of LC among local youth only. Thus, it is proposed for future studies to examine more broadly the evaluation of the youth themselves. It is crucial to gain legitimacy more clearly on the needs to be focused on rural youth to engage in rural development activities. Besides that, it is essential to show the alignment between rural development policy and the targeted program that is RBC with the reality that must be taken to develop LC among local youth. Therefore, it is essential to plan strategies that the targeted parties and those who formulate policies and programs for rural development can achieve.

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