

## Encouraging Voluntary Work Among Public Service Retirees: How Policy Intervention Can Help<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRAK

Kertas kerja ini merupakan sebahagian empirikal dan sebahagian lagi teoretikal. Ia menyarankan kesukarelaan boleh menjadi satu ciri yang kekal dalam masyarakat, jika terdapat polisi yang menggalakkan, memotivasikan dan menghargai nilai-nilai kerja sukarela dan seterusnya diperakui di dalam masyarakat. Bagi merealisasikan, satu pandangan pembangunan yang baru terhadap sumbangan populasi yang berumur perlu diwujudkan dalam intervensi polisi. Malaysia, sebagai salah sebuah negara yang sedang membangun di Asia, harus mengenal pasti sejumlah pesara yang sanggup dan komited sebagai pekerja sukarela yang berpotensi ke arah pembangunan yang berterusan dalam komuniti yang lebih luas.

### ABSTRACT

This paper is part empirical and part theoretical. It argues that for volunteerism to be a permanent feature in the society there must be a public policy that encourages, motivates and appreciates the value of volunteerism, and that it should be consciously acknowledged in the community. To be able to create this sense, a new developmental view on the contributive roles of the ageing population must be in place in the policy intervention. Malaysia, a rapidly industrializing country in the Asian region, must recognize the fact that a great number of willing and committed retirees could be tapped as potential volunteer workers for the continuing development of the broader community.

### INTRODUCTION

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said in his address during the Malaysian Strategic Outlook Conference 2005 that, "no group would be left behind as Malaysia progresses to become a developed nation in 2020" (*New Straits Times*, 3 February 2005). He added further that "our aim will be to develop an efficient and talented workforce and thus increase overall national productivity and

growth". The above statement coming from no less than the national leadership could be the basis upon which the promotion of voluntary work from the highly knowledgeable sector of the ageing population be a part of the national agenda. In another development, one of the leading radio stations in the country plugged in an interesting advertisement on volunteerism exhorting all Malaysians to take part in volunteer work to find more meaning

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in their life. The two scenarios provide the preface of this paper. It is based on the contention that voluntary work among retirees, or even among the younger age cohorts, will face an uphill battle when volunteerism is not promoted in the form of national policy, instruments or conventions that would spur the spirit or desire to render service to the society of which people are a part. But for this to happen, a few important points should be raised. The first concerns how the national government perceives the ageing population vis-a-vis their role and contribution in the country. The second concerns the readiness of the government to face an ageing population like Malaysia, and the third, over and above the two, pertains to the kind of framework or paradigm that best answers the needs and interests of the older population.

The objective of this paper is to provide a glimpse of volunteerism in Malaysia and how policy intervention initiatives could propel or create an environment where volunteerism becomes an ultimate landscape in the local community. Such social landscape is only possible when a new perspective that the human capacity for learning and growth continues well into later life provided incentives and opportunities are available (see parallel argument by Moody 1988).

The empirical findings of the paper were drawn from an exploratory study conducted in 2003 among 261 public service retirees in particular the Premier and the Managerial and Professional Groups who had retired between 1989 and 2000. Most of the retirees had once worked in the education service and claimed to possess expertise and skills which can be very useful in the local community. The purpose of the research was to come up with benchmark information of the status of public service retirees in Malaysia in as much as there has been no empirical study done about them and their propensity to engage in volunteerism. A mailed-survey questionnaire was sent to retirees based on the list provided by the Public Service Department.

## AGEING POPULATION IN MALAYSIA

Ageing means acknowledgement of finitude: of limited time, a limited span of organic life. It is a common knowledge that the improved economic status of Malaysia has correspondingly improved the longevity of the general population. In the same manner, the whole world is facing an ageing population and the number is still growing. Even in less developed countries, demographic consequence of longer life course is projected based on the U.N. Population Report:

The developing countries will also reach that stage (percentage of persons aged 60 years and over as the more developed regions did in 2000) over a much shorter period of time than that required by the more developed regions. In many cases, rapid population ageing will be taking place in countries where the level of economic development is still low (United Nations 2002:34).

Table 1 presents the increasing number of the population in Malaysia from 1980 to 2000, in particular, the increasing number of older persons from 55 years old and beyond. Curiously enough, there is also a gradual shrinking of the younger cohorts (5-25 years old). Is Malaysia ready to face this challenge where the once called "baby boomers" have reached a distinctly crucial transition in their life?

Three or four decades ago the situation would have been different where life expectancy did not go beyond 65 (Table 2). In fact, the Human Development Index 2003 of Malaysia puts the overall life expectancy at 73.2. Today, Malaysia is confronted with issues related to the ageing population, whether or not the government is an "enabling force" that understands the situation of the elderly not as a "bundle of needs" but as a particular sector of the population that can offer productive roles in development. Three common prescriptions operate within the development agenda, namely, liberal, conservative and developmental view. The conventional liberal solution to the problems of old age is the

TABLE 1  
 Malaysian population by age group (1980, 1991, 2000)

Age Group	1980		1991		2000	
	N ('000)	Percent (%)	N ('000)	Percent (%)	N ('000)	Percent (%)
0-4	1,779.6	13.5	2344.6	12.8	2,612.7	11.2
5-9	1,782.8	13.6	2333.3	12.7	2,646.5	11.4
10-14	1,633.5	12.4	2030.9	11.0	2,491.8	10.7
15-19	1,493.5	11.4	1832.9	10.0	2,367.0	10.2
20-24	1,265.1	9.6	1682.8	9.2	2,087.2	9.0
25-29	1,058.4	8.1	1627.7	8.9	1,921.1	8.3
30-34	874.7	6.7	1469.1	8.0	1,800.2	7.7
35-39	671.3	5.1	1217.7	6.6	1,705.0	7.3
40-44	624.0	4.8	969.4	5.3	1,487.5	6.4
45-49	473.3	3.6	699.7	3.8	1,168.5	5.0
50-54	414.8	3.2	635.3	3.5	918.9	3.9
55-59	319.8	2.4	467.8	2.5	616.6	2.6
60-64	269.7	2.1	388.9	2.1	551.0	2.4
65-69	188.2	1.4	252.9	1.4	346.7	1.5
70-74	146.6	1.1	203.2	1.1	264.1	1.1
75+	140.6	1.0	223.6	1.2	286.5	1.2
Total	13,136.1	100.0	18,379.7	100.0	23,274.7	100.0

Source: Department of Statistics (1983, 1995, 2001)

TABLE 2  
 Life expectancy at birth of Malaysian by gender, 1957-1996

Year	Malay		Chinese		Indian		National Average	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1957	50.2	53.4	59.5	66.7	57.5	54.6	55.8	58.2
1966	61.3	62.5	66.2	71.2	62.5	61.9	63.1	66.0
1970	63.8	65.5	65.1	73.4	60.2	63.9	61.6	65.6
1980	66.5	68.9	68.0	74.0	62.1	67.0	66.4	70.5
1990	69.0	72.4	70.6	76.3	64.4	70.4	68.9	73.5
1996	68.8	72.7	71.9	77.6	65.0	72.8	69.3	74.0

Source: Ministry of National Unity and Social Development, 1999

expansion of the welfare state i.e. more services, more professional intervention, greater dependence on government. The conventional conservative solution is reliance on the private marketplace i.e. on production and consumption of goods and services mediated by the cash nexus of monetized transactions (Moody 1988). The third policy alternative views government as an enabling

force meaning it is neither getting the "government off our backs" nor expecting the government to provide all the desired services. The liberal and conservative prescriptions are mirrors of one another, each emphasizing a "monetized solution" to the ageing problem. Both view the ageing group as a structured dependency of old age and as object of government support. The alternative view

however perceives older persons as subjects who possess latent strengths and capacities and whose contributive roles to the community are vital in the development initiatives. This paper takes the position of the alternative view. That which acknowledges the positive contributions of the ageing population by virtue of their strengths and abilities as opposed to viewing them as "surplus" population, dependent and unproductive, would elevate the position of the ageing population in Malaysia.

In an interesting study by Merriam and Mazanah (2000), they stressed that perhaps ageing, as a natural life course pattern, cannot be understood in its totality without connecting it with the cultural values and beliefs of the society. This meant that understanding the ageing issues demands that they should always be seen in relation to the society's view of life, death, relationships with others and God, etc. This brings into focus the different perspectives between western values and eastern values within the context of ageing. Western values stress autonomy, independence and individualism while eastern values stress dependency, interdependency, cooperation, spirituality, filial piety, etc. The differences in values and their importance also affects the way ageing issues are understood in each social setting and orientation. This in return differentiates the way we perceive the older population in the family and community as well as the government's direction of policy intervention.

It is in this view of government as an enabler in the creation of a quality-of-life among the elderly that volunteerism and the promotion of self-reliant/self-help groups and lifelong learning initiatives should be appreciated. Looking at the how Malaysian elderly fares with the rest of the population is reflected in most national blueprints especially the various Malaysia Plans. For instance, while there was an emphasis on volunteerism among the youth in the Eighth Malaysia Plan (Eighth Malaysia Plan 2001: 557, 580, 582, 585) there was no explicit programme provided by the government whereby the potentials of retirees could be harnessed for their contribution to

society through voluntary service. While the Seventh and Eighth Malaysia Plans provided for the care of older persons, the emphasis was on health education, social, recreational and day-care centers for the needy and the invalid (p. 516). Besides leaving out the so-called older persons who are not "sick", the Plans did not cater to the elderly from 55 to 59 years old (see also National Policy for the Elderly 2002). The 55 to 59 years old cohort who is now considered retirees does not fall in any of the categories. What would then happen to this particular age cohort as far as participation in national development is concerned?

In Malaysia, volunteerism across the life course is promoted with the founding of Yayasan Salam Malaysia in 1997 ([www.salam.gov.my](http://www.salam.gov.my)), a local version of Peace Corps Volunteer Service in the United States. It aims to encourage Malaysians to take part in community activities by listing a wide range of non-governmental organisations that are in need of volunteer full-time or part-time workers to run their administrative, language, training, and social and educational programmes among others. It is noted that SALAM Malaysia as a volunteer service centre does not confine its service within the country, in fact it tries to position itself outside the country by sending highly motivated and qualified volunteers to selected countries like Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Timor Leste where care services are felt most needed.

### THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF VOLUNTEERISM

It is often asked why in certain communities, volunteerism seems to be an intrinsic value while in other communities it remains an elusive social act? Definitely, volunteerism does not exist in a vacuum; it is founded on the belief that the desire to help others, without expecting a return or reward, forms part of the moral and social responsibility in living within a human society by the very people who are actors in the everyday social drama. This shared belief has social and economic relevance reinforced by certain rituals, as seen in earlier subsistence economies or peasant

societies. It is argued that the transformation into cash economies has in most respects eroded commonly shared beliefs about people's understanding of their human environment. This has therefore also changed people's view about other people in the sense that private ownership of property and hitherto accumulation of it, takes its unprecedented role than say, desiring to help others first. When people are now viewed in economic terms, such desire to help others takes a backseat.

But how is it that in western and advanced countries where economies do not deter the unlimited accumulation of private property, or to put it simply, the capitalistic form of economy, people across ages have higher turnout for volunteering work (see Table 3)? How is it that the tenets of capitalism no longer contravene the desire to volunteer? It is surmised that the promotion of civil society revives the sense of concern towards others, and only when the level of civility, or civic consciousness is raised to the highest plane that the basic sense of human value is placed back in the forefront.

Penner (2004) has suggested that volunteerism has three important attributes that separates it from any other type of social action.

First, it is planned action; people think and weigh their options before they make the decision to volunteer. Second, it is a long-term behaviour; most people who volunteer continue this activity for an extended period of time (Independent Sector 1999; Penner and Finkelstein 1998). Third, as Allen Omoto and Mark Snyder (1995) have pointed out, volunteering involves "nonobligated" helping (Penner 2004).

Most literature on volunteerism underlines the salience of volunteer's willingness or desire to "give themselves" to others in need (e.g. Sorokin 1948; Wilson 2000). This involves selfless action and is mainly motivated to give their free service to people they feel so strongly about. In a

beautifully worded statement of Pitrim Sorokin (1948:57), "a society consisting of only thoroughly egoistic members could not survive; likewise, no peaceful or creative society could be made up of wholly egoistic members".

TABLE 3  
Percentage of people volunteering

Country	Percentage of people volunteering
Australia	32% of people over 18 years of age
Canada	27% of people over 15 years of age
Germany	34% of people over 18 years of age
Japan	25% of people over 18 years of age
United Kingdom	48% of people over 18 years of age
United States	44% of people over 18 years of age

Source: Penner, 2004

Tomy Koh, a prominent Singapore diplomat and scholar shared that one in 10 people did volunteer work in Singapore in 1994, while in America, 1 in 3 of the 80 million Americans "donate time to a cause ([www.salam.my](http://www.salam.my))". Penner (2004) provides an overview of people who volunteer in advanced countries in the world noting that of the six countries, the United Kingdom seems to volunteer the most with almost half of the population over 18 years of age actively sharing their time. It is interesting to note that in advanced countries, the high rate of volunteering among people is commendable. Table 3 shows that volunteering is not only confined within a particular age cohort but rather it cuts across the whole adult population. In the present study among volunteer retirees in Malaysia, of the 261 respondents surveyed, more than half were involved in some form of organized volunteering.

John Wilson (2000:219) suggests that: "education boosts volunteering because it heightens awareness of problems, increases empathy, and builds self-confidence". While some consider education as an important variable to raise the level of awareness towards volunteerism, others view the primary

responsibility of the transmitter of volunteerism in the society. It reckons the role of parents whose volunteerism emanates from their altruistic behavior that is learned and passed on to their children. Pancer and Pratt (1999), for example, argue that "generosity and altruistic behaviours are strongly influenced by the presence of a positive role model, more often the parent", as expounded in the socialization theory. This theory provides that the propensity of the children to engage in voluntary service is influenced by the parents' active involvement in voluntary work as well through the process of socialization (see also Park and Smith 2000 on the role of religious socialization of parents to the children). In social transmission theory, on the other hand, it assumes that the motivation to volunteer is randomly distributed, but the ability to do so is not. It focuses on the parents' role in bestowing resources on their children (Featherman and Hauser 1978 as cited in Mustillo *et al.* 2004). It points directly to the possibility that "parents do not transmit specific values and beliefs but, rather, access to social, cultural, and economic resources and position in the larger social structure (Moen *et al.* 1997). In other words, children received their early exposure and education to volunteering from the parents, either by motivating the children to engage in helping others or parents themselves are engaged in voluntary work and children simply follow where parents have left off. Other research has highlighted that early volunteering experience with religious institutions act as a significant force in promoting volunteering behaviour when people reach adulthood (Hodkison 1995; Wuthrow 1995; Wilson and Janoski 1995 as cited in Park and Smith 2000).

#### **WHY ENCOURAGE VOLUNTEERISM (AND PARTICIPATION) IN COMMUNITY SERVICE?**

There are several reasons why retirees are encouraged to volunteer and participate in community affairs. Firstly, research studies

have shown that retirement is a status transition from active working life to ageing; secondly, Malaysia is not immune to problems related to the changing economies of rapidly industrializing countries; thirdly, mapping of available human resources in the local community to answer community-related services; and, fourthly, volunteerism comes with hiring retirees to engage in selected jobs.

Research findings show that the absence of work (both paid and unpaid) immediately after the mandatory retirement age creates a vacuum both in their social and personal life, depending of course on whether they are ready to leave the portals of their working place or the workplace being the center upon which social life revolves (Moen *et al.* 1997). For instance, Moen *et al.* (1997) demonstrated that retirement is a status transition of many economically productive workers from their working life to old age and it does not have to mean complete withdrawal from work in the sense that their unpaid work in the community provides that transition of their status as productive workers. More often than not, work connects people's personal and social well-being and, by working during retirement, though sometimes without remuneration, it could maintain the social and mental health of the people. It is argued that work boosts people's image and well-being. Friedmann and Havighurst (1954) developed a five-point typology of the meanings of work as: (1) a source of income, (2) a life routine structuring the use of time, (3) a source of personal status and identity, (4) a context for social interaction, and (5) a meaningful experience that can provide a sense of accomplishment (Moen and Fields 2002). Along the same line, Dr. Guy McKhann, professor of neurology and neuroscience at John Hopkins University School of Medicine argued that staying mentally and physically active in later years can also keep one younger. "When you continue to do new things, you're making connections in your brain and keeping it more dynamic. Recent studies have shown a relationship between sustained mental activity and delayed onset of Alzheimer's disease".

Secondly, Malaysia is not immune to the social problems associated with a rapidly industrializing country and having faced problems such as drug addiction, juvenile delinquency, domestic violence, etc., there are multifaceted ways where retirees could work as volunteers especially at the level of raising awareness or counseling. It is assumed that retirees' scope of understanding of the social problems and issues is something that has to be utilized in order to assist the national leadership in its fight against these problems.

By reading the newspapers, watching the TV, and/or hearing stories from friends, there is more than one way to alleviate the seemingly worsening social problems caused by relative deprivation, modernization and urbanization. Engaging in a meaningful community work could greatly help the government to minimize expenditures on personnel salary in social services, and instead redirect resources to other problems that need immediate assistance.

Thirdly, the potential of retirees to do work is not a far-fetched reality provided that proper mapping of their capacity is done. Job-matching is essential in identifying the retirees' interests in relation to available voluntary work that retirees could participate.

Fourthly, it concerns the extent Malaysia a variety of workers from other countries without looking into the possibility of hiring retirees to engage in selected job areas in the form of voluntary service or, maybe, in paid work.

But a note of caution is worth mentioning. Given the diverse nature of the ageing population, retirees who fall within the same category are a group of individuals with diverse needs and interests depending on their socio-demographic characteristics, economic situation, educational achievement, gender orientation, to name a few. Over and above all these, retirees have differing motivations for engaging in voluntary work in the community. It is assumed that when there is a high sense of volunteerism in the community, the people in that community also develop a high sense of civic consciousness, thus, creating a community of sensitive, concerned and

empowered individuals living a quality life. This augurs well for the state machinery indicating that it does not need to spend millions of dollars to initiate campaigns to sensitize the people, as the people themselves played that role.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The empirical data of this paper were taken from an exploratory study conducted in 2003 on volunteer retirees as potential resources for community development. The study attempted to determine the involvement of retirees in volunteerism, identify the relationship between their psycho-social variables towards altruism and volunteerism, and to ascertain their inherent potential for volunteerism. Most of the retirees were men and came from Peninsular Malaysia and Malays.

In this study, volunteerism is strongly viewed by volunteer retirees as reconnecting themselves to the community where they belong. As they experienced, prior to retirement, their time (and life) was focused on their work so much so that they seldom participated in community affairs. After retirement, with so much time at their disposal, they are more encouraged to share whatever expertise they could share to the community saying, "I want to give back to the community".

Table 4 shows the various areas or services that both volunteer and non-volunteer retirees were working before retirement, while Table 5 shows where they worked or volunteered at the time of the survey.

### PROMOTING ACTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE AGEING

Earlier it is mentioned how other countries have developed their sense of volunteerism among the people and, in a way, the role of the government is crucial in the promotion of volunteerism, be it for the retirees or the younger members of the society. Statistics in Malaysia already tell us that the signs of an increasing number in the ageing population demand a new social meaning and policy change towards ageing. In as much as there is

TABLE 4  
Percentage distribution of respondents by service at the time of retirement

Services	Volunteer (n=136) %	Non-Volunteer (n=125) %	Overall (N=261) %
Education	61.0	42.4	52.1
Police	5.1	11.2	8.0
Finance	1.5	4.0	2.7
Medical	1.5	6.4	3.8
Social/Welfare	3.7	4.8	4.2
Administrative	14.0	19.2	16.5
Engineering	1.5	2.4	1.9
Agriculture	2.2	3.2	2.7
Other	9.5	6.4	8.1

TABLE 5  
Percentage distribution of volunteer respondents by type of voluntary service preferred

Preferred Service	Volunteer (n=136) %	Non-Volunteer (n=125) %
Religious	34.6	28.8
Education	33.8	28.0
Social	22.1	18.4
Community	18.4	27.2
Welfare and societal benefit	20.6	29.6
Health	10.3	16.8
Political	7.4	5.6
Recreational	7.4	7.2
Work-related	5.1	10.4
Sports and service club	6.69	9.6
Youth and Culture	2.2	5.6

pervasive public opinion that retirees and, henceforth, the older population, are no longer useful after leaving the portals of public service, changing public perception is all the more pressing. How do we do this? The government should commence its campaign to promote active and productive ageing in Malaysia, which includes among others, a series of awareness, information and advocacy campaigns, research activities that focus on the welfare of the elderly, job-matching of industry/organization needs with elderly job needs, promotion of lifelong learning programs, a review of the national social policy for the elderly, to mention a few. Key players

in the promotion campaigns must cut across different sectors of the society including the education sector, civic groups, religious-based organizations, village-based and people-initiated groups, political parties and government-bodies concerned. For example, certain groups could pick up one programme and let it be its own flagship for promoting productive ageing e.g. in the area of life-long learning as observed among certain groups in Malaysia.

Productive ageing should not be construed within the purview of economics alone. This means that both the monetary and non-monetary transactions should constitute

the concept of productive ageing by virtue of the fact that being productive does not only mean engaging in waged employment rather it also means social productive roles such as engaging in voluntary work in both formal and informal organizations. It is reckoned that defining productive ageing within the purview of economics is definitely to recast its value within the domain of rural work roles thereby discounting equally productive work roles among the rural elderly. It is noticeable that the remuneration of productive roles that are rural-based is much lower compared to those performed in urban areas. Following the conceptual definition that productive ageing is a relative construct, it also has to be situated within a certain cultural context, in this case, the Malaysian eastern culture which primarily places importance to the values of interdependency as opposed to autonomy, cooperation as opposed to competition and personal and familial relationships as opposed to individualism. This implies that the type of rural work that the older persons could possibly be engaged in is basically informal. Informal volunteering includes the non-organizational help that people offer to friends and neighbors, from taking soup to a sick neighbor to baby-sitting for a friend.

*Awareness, Information and Advocacy Campaign*

The prevailing notion that older people can no longer perform productively and therefore of less relevant in the development of society must be tackled head on. This can be done by a series of sustainable awareness and advocacy campaigns on the role of retirees in particular, and the productive responsibilities of older Malaysians in general. This involves understanding the crucial support that retirees could contribute to the community. It is also about time to re-evaluate the commonly uttered jokes and anecdotes, prejudices and stereotypes addressed to the older adults, because by continuing its usage, it therefore sustains and strengthens their existence to the detriment of the elderly psyche.

Pertinent to the awareness and advocacy campaign on ageing is installing a

collaboration mechanism where the stakeholders of the programme, namely, non-government organisations, government bodies, religious and civic groups (e.g. Senior Citizens' Association) are well equipped with the right education on ageing issues.

*Promotion of Research Activities on the Elderly*

There is no substitute to acknowledging the fact that, indeed, there is a missing link between what information we have at hand and the reality affecting the elderly. It therefore calls for an intensive research on the status of the elderly and what they can contribute to the ever-changing economic and social landscape of Malaysia. It is also very important to disaggregate data according to gender, class and ethnicity as each dimension could present a different situation with regard to volunteers and the ageing adults. As the Deputy Prime Minister and the country's prominent leaders have espoused, Malaysians across races and economic class should be able to enjoy the fruits of Malaysia's progress and, therefore, no one should be left out in the development process. If this statement rings true, then, a lot more should be done to change the scenario of our elderly population in the country. Malaysia cannot afford to ignore the fact that the elderly population's interests and needs must also be recognized before one can say that it is truly creating a caring society. The fact remains that the country's image as a caring society, one of the guiding slogans of then Prime Minister Tun Mahathir Mohamad, is reflective in the way society cares for the elderly, a vulnerable sector which gave their time, talent and resources during their younger years. It should be within this premise that the whole society should look at how this particular group's interest has been addressed in light of their conditions.

The founding of the Institute of Gerontology in Universiti Putra Malaysia in 2002 to engage in a multi-disciplinary research and extension services to the aged and the ageing population in Malaysia is a positive step towards understanding the status of the elderly. It is supposed that the formation of

more research-based organizations that look into the status of the elderly would give way to a more informed public in Malaysia.

#### *Institutionalising Volunteerism and Making it Visible*

It is already a known fact that there has to be a way of institutionalizing volunteerism in the community in particular, and the wider society in general. Institutionalizing volunteerism means that a formal structure, functions/responsibilities, role, and incentives among others, are well defined and delineated. It is surmised that with incentives given to volunteers, especially among the younger members, in the form of tax reduction or work promotion, it encourages wider and faster involvement of everyone in the community. A very good illustration is the Philippine experience, where volunteerism is institutionalized at the University level. The University of the Philippines (UP) established the *Ugnayan ng Pahinungod* [Oblation Corps] in 1998 in all UP branches throughout the country to promote volunteerism within the ranks of the faculty and staff, with the idea that volunteerism is only "effective if it is backed by policy at the university level". In order to promote it, faculty members are given certain incentives in the form of promotion points if they are involved in volunteer work. The attractive rank promotion feature in the programme has served 40,000 Filipinos which involved 4,500 volunteers (University of the Philippines 1998) to work on various programs, including Affirmative Action, Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation, Peer Counselling, EcoCamp, Coastal Resource Management, Cooperative and Livelihood projects, Agrarian Reform Communities and Farmer-Scientists.

In like manner, Malaysia could establish volunteer offices throughout the country especially in big cities and towns where there is a felt need for community service to be initiated. There should be an added value in volunteering, in particular if the bulk of the volunteers will come from the retirees, for example, some degree of monetary

remuneration to cover transportation and food needs while rendering their free service.

Creating an atmosphere of a participative and humane approach should also be part of the process in order to attract volunteer-workers. It should be remembered that one of the many motivating factors why people volunteer is because it gives them a sense of satisfaction in fulfilling the needs of others. It is not sufficient that volunteerism is institutionalized in the sense that a structure is well placed. It is also equally important that an organization is visible, which means that the society is aware of its existence and what it offers to others. Many of the retirees in the study, for example, asserted that they have no idea of what is going on in their community, more so, of what they could contribute. In other words, volunteerism could be developed through proper campaign and dissemination of its programme to attract more volunteers into the fold. The formation of Yayasan Salam Malaysia is a step towards that direction. With its clearly-defined structure and programmes however, it still needs a horde of committed volunteers to provide for the needy both within Malaysia and abroad.

#### *Programmes Drawing Retirees' Interests*

At the outset, it should be borne in mind that the elderly population is a heterogeneous group with diverse interests, needs and capacities. Using this as a benchmark, drawing a lifelong programme for the elderly must cater to these needs and capacities. It is likely that organizations in Malaysia can enlist the assistance from the retirees or draw their interests towards volunteerism where their interests are. For instance, in a recent study on volunteerism among retirees, it showed that retirees drew their interests on religious, social or community-based organizations. This in itself is a good indication for local leaders to tap the retirees in their own communities by encouraging them to serve in organizations of their own liking.

In the same manner, gender should also be accounted for when designing a programme in as much as women form part

of the greater majority of the elderly population in Malaysia. The literature shows that older women are active across the whole spectrum of volunteer service. Some studies suggest that there may be differing motivations when comparing older and younger women, with younger women more likely to cite gaining knowledge or advocacy as a motive. Older women may be more motivated by the traditional desire to give back to the community. One study on volunteers pointed out the difference in motivation between older women and men. The women gave dual reasons for volunteering, both altruism and socializing. The men described only altruism as a motive (Morrow-Howell and Mann 1999).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### *A Need for Policy-shift*

Statistics have shown that there is an increasing number of ageing population within the 55-75+ age cohorts since the 1980s. The Department of Statistics Malaysia found that the ageing population grew in number from 140,600 in 1980 to 286,500 in 2000 or an increase from 7.9 percent to 8.8 percent of the total population in Malaysia. Contrasting this to the longevity index, men have 71 years while women, 76. What does this imply? It implies that with the improved economic and health status of most Malaysians, there is a corresponding increase in their life expectancy. By leaving the public service at the age of 55/56, it amounts to wasting another 10-15 years of productivity of our valued human resource. The waste is so much more conspicuous when there are no tangible or concrete measures to utilize the bulk of committed retirees back into the mainstream of public service. If 55/56 as the mandatory age of retirement is to be maintained, a viable continuing education for the older adults must be put in place and this includes the promotion of volunteerism at the local, state and national level of governance.

Perhaps, it is also interesting to note the demographic change as far as the issue of average marital age is concerned and how it influences the status of retirees in the country. Generally, it is observed that, observation, as people's aspirations change caused by economic improvement, there is a change in outlook towards education and marriage. These days, men and women postpone marriage and family in favour of pursuing higher education or a career. Directly and indirectly, the delay in marriage affects the number of children who are still dependent in terms of daily sustenance, education or hospitalization after the parents' retirement. With parents out of work and dependent on the monthly pension, children's financial dependence itself causes tremendous stress and anxiety, assuming that retirees have not adequately planned the domestic budgeting and accompanied by the rising cost of basic commodities.

There are several international lessons that Malaysia could draw inspiration from when redesigning its social policy for the elderly such as the 1992 United Nations International Year of Volunteers, the 1982 World Assembly on Ageing in Vienna as well as incorporating those international issues that are relevant for Malaysia.

## CONSISTENCY IN OPERATIONALIZING

### DEFINITIONS: 55/56 OR 60?

Within the context of Malaysia, there has to be a more or less consistent application of terms and concepts that has something to do with the ageing population - the retirees - in particular. At present, there seems to be a glaring disparity regarding the application of the National Policy for the Elderly (NPE), for example, to the retirees in Malaysia in relation to the age qualification of the elderly. While the NPE, following the World Assembly on Ageing in 1982, adopted the cut-off age as 60 years old to be considered as elderly, Malaysia would have a considerable proportion of the population that are within the 55-59 age cohort

that would be left out in the policy agenda. This has implications to any lifelong education and whatever social security policy for retirement beneficiaries that the government may wish to conduct and develop in the near future. Even at this stage, with the current definition of an elderly person as applied in Malaysia, it automatically deprives 55/56-59 year-old retirees from being covered in the NPE. Inevitably, we would have in our midst a particular sector of the population that is consciously or unconsciously devoid of social policy protection.

In a similar vein, what differentiates retirees from the elderly or senior citizens? It is suggested that if Malaysia were to peg the retirement age of 55/56 for civil servants, the NPE and other national instruments should reconsider those whose age fall within 55/56-59. In the absence of any clear mandate from the relevant authorities, people within this age cohort will be in limbo and whose needs and interests are not well-taken care of by the mainstream society. In addition, it would be another stress in life having to think that after having contributed to the broader society during their most productive years of their working life, they are left to fend for themselves or, worse, considered as "surplus population" or as a "bundle of needs" (Moody 1988).

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