

Towards Enhancing Youth Participation in Muslim-Majority Countries: The Case of Youth-Adult Partnership in Malaysia

Steven Eric Krauss

Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

With the right support from adults and opportunities for participation, young people can be social, political and economic assets for communities. In many Muslim-majority countries, however, youth demographic bulges, lack of educational opportunities and political instability have left large numbers of youth under-involved, with insufficient opportunities for meaningful participation. This state of affairs undermines the potential of young people to thrive and contribute to their societies, resulting in an untapped resource for their respective countries. A growing body of research indicates that meaningful youth involvement in community organisations, through participation in governance and decision-making, has great benefit for youth and community development. Building on recent quantitative and case study research from Malaysia, the current paper puts forward youth-adult partnership as a potential strategy for enhancing positive, meaningful youth participation in community development efforts for Muslim-majority countries. Findings from two recent quantitative studies indicate that youth-adult partnership has the potential to enhance young people's experiences in community organisations by strengthening their personal agency, sense of empowerment, leadership competence and feelings of connectedness to their communities. Case study results further demonstrate how effective youth-adult partnership can bring about social change and economic development to marginalised communities. The paper concludes with broad suggestions for infusing youth-adult partnership into youth and community organisations to enhance community development efforts in Muslim-majority countries.

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E-mail address:

lateef@upm.edu.my

INTRODUCTION

Nearly 85% of the world's youth currently reside in developing countries (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2014). This statistic points to a phenomenon known as 'youth bulge', a demographic transition where a country moves from high to low fertility and mortality rates resulting in a large proportion of youth and a rapid rate of growth in the working-age population (Beehner, 2007). Large populations of disengaged, undervalued youth have often been a source of great civil unrest and have historically been associated with revolutions, political activism and war (Hart, Atkins, Markey, & Youniss, 2004). To avoid repeating this history, the present-day youth bulge found in many developing nations is driving new calls for more structured and meaningful participation by young people in activities associated with learning, nation building and civic development (United Nations Development Programme, 2014). Participation in the form of decision-making, planning, mutual consultation and self-directed learning in schools and out-of-school programmes can facilitate the acquisition of critical competencies that youth need to thrive as individuals and citizens (DFID-CSO Youth Working Group, 2010).

Nowhere is the youth bulge of greater concern than in Muslim-majority countries (Assaad, 2011). Although the 'Muslim world' spans over 50 nations from diverse geographic locations, cultures and histories, the majority of predominantly Muslim countries face similar challenges in their

efforts to develop. There are many contested reasons for this, most of which are beyond the scope of this paper. One fundamental issue that most Muslim nations continue to grapple with is how to meet the developmental needs of large youth populations given the numerous economic, political and social challenges these countries face. Scholars have emphasised that youth bulges can be a boon for a nation's social and economic well-being if the country is able to harness the collective human capital of its youth through adequate educational and economic opportunities. On the other hand, population bulges can result in social upheaval if young people are not afforded sufficient support and opportunities to participate meaningfully in economic, political and community life.

In many Muslim-majority countries, challenges faced by educational systems and high unemployment converge to limit social and economic opportunity, cited often by youth from those countries as the greatest problem their nations face (Amr & Marshall, 2008). Gross inequality in education systems within most Muslim countries has resulted in the preparation of only a small minority of youth with the adequate skills to meet the demand of labour markets (UNDP, 2016). This has had deleterious effects on overall human development in those countries, contributing to stubbornly high rates of poverty and income inequality (Altwaijri, 2014; Amr & Marshall, 2008). With about half the population across the Muslim world in their twenties or younger, an enormous effort is

needed to create large-scale economic and social opportunities “to keep youth satisfied, inspired and hopeful, instead of disgruntled and resentful, in a fast changing world where it is easier and easier for the disadvantaged segments of the world to feel the lack of opportunity and inequality on a daily basis” (Amr & Marshall, 2008, p. 8). Coupled with population trends and a repressed civil society, under-representation of young people in economic and community life has created conditions ripe for tension, further fanned by a lack of political reform. Politically, socially and economically disenfranchised, young people have found an outlet for their resulting frustration and hopelessness in social protest, rather than constructive community and nation building activities (UNDP, 2016).

The abovementioned socio-demographic reality gave birth to the well-known ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings that have since made a profound mark on the contemporary Middle East. The ‘Arab Spring’ was, or has been, predominantly youth-led, and formal and informal youth movements continue to play a major role in the events reshaping the region (Cole, 2014). According to Halaseh, “Traditional protagonists are no longer the only main actors in the regional political arena; rather a paradigm shift is unfolding, whereby young Arabs – the majority of the population – are increasingly realizing an empowered and influential role in all the various aspects of public life” (2012, p. 254).

In countries like Tunisia, for example, youth-led civil society organisations, many

formed via social media, played key roles in the transition to more democratic processes and institutions (Cole, 2014). In other nations that lacked the institutions to accommodate new social actors such as youth, political participation took the shape of strikes, demonstrations, protests and violence (Halaseh, 2012). In both cases, the Arab Spring showed that young people in majority Muslim countries are a formidable force with the potential to play a major role in effecting societal change. They yearn for greater empowerment and constructive roles in society that will allow them to not only meet their economic needs, but participate in the shaping of their countries’ collective social and political futures (UNDP, 2016).

Youth Development in Muslim Countries through Community and Civic Participation: Youth-Adult Partnership as Core Strategy

Youth development scholars have pointed out that meaningful youth participation in community institutions, when structured, supported and done well, contributes to social justice, youth development and nation building (Zeldin et al., 2014). Together, these goals reflect principles germane to civil society where members are valued, have useful roles to play, are realising individual potential and are working in cooperation towards common goals. Research has shown that across cultures, youth voice on behalf of self and others is an important precursor to competence, identity formation and social trust in youth (Arnett, 2002; Flanagan, Martinez, &

Cumsille, 2010; Peterson, 2000). This body of research has linked youth participation to outcomes of relevance to developing nations such as social and leadership competence, psychological empowerment and improved relationships with adults and peers within youth communities (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Evans, 2007; Krauss, et al., 2014; Larson & Angus, 2011; Mitra, 2004; Zeldin, 2004; Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, & Maton, 1999).

Among the different forms that youth participation can take (see Wong, Zimmerman & Parker, 2010), there is growing consensus among youth researchers and practitioners that meaningful youth participation begins with relationships that are developmental in nature, where young people are encouraged to play a central role in their own learning and development. Young people engage when learning is tied to active participation in discovery and inquiry, when they are challenged to fact find, interpret and make sense of phenomena that are relevant to their lives and of interest to them (Larson & Rusk, 2010; Rogoff, 2003). Developmental relationships are tailored for this. They differ from the 'prescriptive relationships' that characterise the majority of modern youth programmes and school settings. Prescriptive relationships tend to be adult-dictated, depriving youth of the opportunity to give input on decisions that affect their lives. In such relationships, control lies almost entirely with adults so that power rarely shifts to youth, causing these relationships to often decline over time (Li & Julian, 2012). This often results

in young people becoming disinterested and ultimately disconnected from organisations and communities.

Conversely, researchers have recently identified 'youth-adult partnership' as an optimal form of developmental relationship. Youth-adult partnership is characterised by youth and adults collaborating in decision-making activities such as visioning, programme planning, evaluation and continuous programme improvement (Camino, 2000; Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Norman, 2001). Youth-adult partnership can occur in schools between teachers and students, in youth organisations between youth workers and youth and on community boards, NGOs and other civil society entities. Whatever the setting, youth-adult partnership is realised by adults providing supportive guidance and platforms for youth to have a 'voice' in the decision-making process (Zeldin, Krauss, Kim, Collura, & Abdullah, 2016), resulting in a spirit of collective action and accountability. In this way, partnership occurs through mutual decision-making and shared teaching, learning and reflection by youth and adults (Camino, 2000).

Many Muslim-majority countries are struggling to meet the developmental needs of their sizable youth populations. As young Muslims in these countries transition into adulthood, many fail to have meaningful participatory experiences with adults that form the building blocks of thriving communities. Although community itself defines the ethos of many Muslim-majority cultures, youth participation in

formal community and youth organisations remains low. Research from select Muslim countries has reported low levels of youth civic engagement, particularly during the secondary school years (Etra, Prakash, Graham, & Perold, 2008; Malaysian Institute for Research in Youth Development, 2011). The rhetoric from policy-makers that pitch youth as ‘partners in development’ seldom matches the extent of opportunity afforded to youth to make meaningful contributions to their communities. Most educational and youth development initiatives seem insufficient at best, evidenced by youth pleas for programmes that are more relevant, engaging and substantive.

Study Aim

The current paper drew on secondary data from three recent studies conducted in Muslim-majority Malaysia. The aim was to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative findings to position youth-adult partnership as a promising strategy for enhancing youth experiences of participation in school and community-based youth organisations. I chose to highlight Malaysia given that it is one of the only Muslim-majority countries where empirical and case study data pertaining to youth-adult partnership exists. In so doing, I first set out to establish the importance of agency, empowerment and community connectedness as three critical attributes that youth need in order to play more substantive roles in youth and community programmes. I then drew on the work of Li and Julian (2012) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) to posit

developmental relationships as the active ingredient of effective youth participation. After introducing youth-adult partnership as an optimal form of developmental relationship, I present findings from two recent quantitative studies of Malaysian youth in community and school settings that showed significant links between the practice of youth-adult partnership and important youth development outcomes. I then present qualitative findings from a case study of the Youth and Sports Association of Gaya Island, Sabah, to highlight how youth-adult partnership works in practice to empower marginalised Muslim communities for social action and community development. I conclude the paper with recommendations and considerations for the implementation of youth-adult partnership in community-based organisations.

Muslim Youth as Active Participants in Community: The Critical Attributes of Personal Agency, Psychological Empowerment and Community Connectedness

Although a youth bulge can be a potential boon for a nation, without educational, economic and social structures that intentionally work for youth, bulges can become socially and economically debilitating and even destructive. Large populations of young people left without proper support, opportunities and guidance can quickly turn into violent unrest, protest and revolt, rather than system-sustaining pro-civic activity (Hart et al., 2004). Boredom, frustration, a lack of skills and

optimism about the future and the belief that their lives have no purpose or meaning make up the 'perfect storm' that can lead to youth-led civil unrest. Particularly in religious countries, idle youth such as those found in much of the Muslim world are also prone to virulent strands of religion as an alternative force for social mobility (Beehner, 2007).

Many developing nations acknowledge youth as important contributors to economic and social growth. The UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017 report (2014) identified: 1) increased economic empowerment; 2) enhanced youth civic engagement, and participation in decision-making and political processes and institutions; and 3) strengthened youth engagement in resilience building as its three main thrusts. These goals correlate with a clear need for youth participation in economic development, greater decision-making in civic organisations and initiatives, and for building resilience for sustainable development.

Limited evidence suggests that Muslim-majority developing countries share these concerns (UNDP, 2014). In Malaysia, for example, the attributes of personal agency, psychological empowerment and community connectedness have become cross-cutting priorities, as evidenced in the country's Youth Development Action Plan and most recent National Youth Policy. Although agency and empowerment are sometimes used interchangeably to describe individuals' perceived sense of control, personal agency refers to beliefs about one's abilities in non-social environments and

the ability to set goals and organise one's actions to achieve them (Bandura, 2006; Larson & Angus, 2011). Psychological empowerment, however, denotes a sense of control in the sociopolitical realm or beliefs about one's abilities to influence social and political systems (Ozer & Schotland, 2011). Community connectedness refers to a young person's perceived sense of connection to community members, including peers and non-familial adults. It is believed that a common emphasis on the above three attributes will not only prepare Malaysian youth for productive economic roles, but will also allow youth to participate meaningfully in community development, social justice issues and global citizenship (Ahmad, Rahim, Pawanteh, & Ahmad, 2012; Hamzah, 2005; Krauss et al., 2014; Nga, 2009).

As a developmental outcome, agency provides youth with the motivation and sense of personal efficacy to contribute to the country's economic success and sustainability by relieving the burden of an over-burdened public sector. Countries like Malaysia are also beginning to embrace youth empowerment, with more people becoming aware that youth need to develop a sense of empowerment to have the confidence, courage and capacity to participate in civic change and entrepreneurial efforts that can help their country mature as a more democratic society. Finally, a strong sense of connection to the real communities and people where youth live, including families, non-familial adults and peers, is seen as vital to preserving the collectivist values and

cooperative culture that are central to most Muslim-dominated countries like Malaysia (Ramli, 2005). Community connectedness is also an important feature of multi-racial, multi-religious societies like Malaysia that rely on relationship-building across racial and religious divides. The lack of connectedness to not only one's own but also other communities within the country poses a risk to the country's social fabric.

Several studies have linked youth participation with the development of agency, empowerment and community connectedness (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Evans, 2007; Krauss et al., 2013; Larson & Angus, 2011; Mitra, 2004; Zeldin, 2004; Zimmerman et al., 1999). Youth participation is consistently looked to as a strategy for youth development and effective citizenry. Scholars assert that, across cultures, youth voice on behalf of self and others is an important precursor to competence, identity formation and social trust (Arnett, 2002; Flanagan, Martinez, & Cumsille, 2010; Peterson, 2000). Involving young people contributes to community building by expanding the effectiveness of community institutions, building instrumental and relationship-orientated networks and affording young people opportunities to share their experience and insight, thus giving them meaningful roles and a sense of purpose (Zeldin et al., 2016). In the United States, youth participation in community organising has produced community-level impacts such as new programmes, policy changes and

institution building activities, in addition to intergenerational and multicultural collaboration (Christens & Dolan, 2011).

For Muslim youth to be capable participants in the positive development of their respective nations, developing the attributes of agency, empowerment and community connectedness is critical. Research shows that youth participation is an effective vehicle for achieving these outcomes. So how best to facilitate participation? Decades of scholarship point to developmental relationships as a way to generate meaningful participation within a context of care and educative productivity.

Developmental Relationships

Human relationships are the critical ingredient of learning and human development. According to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004, p. 1), healthy development "depends on the quality and reliability of a child's relationships with the important people in his or her life, both within and outside the family." A human partner is uniquely qualified to provide experiences that are individualised to a child's unique personality style and that build on his or her own interests, capabilities and initiative, which shape the child's self-awareness and stimulate the growth of his or her heart and mind (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). By being an 'active ingredient,' relationships become the means through which critical learning processes occur and through which young

people acquire knowledge about the world, themselves and others.

The importance of relationships in learning and development continues throughout the individual's lifespan. Relationships have been found to be of central importance to early cognitive, social and personality development, as well as to show lasting influence on social skills, emotion regulation, conscience development, trust in others and general psychological well-being (Thompson, 2006). Developmental relationships help young people attain the psychological and social skills they need to achieve successful outcomes in the sphere of education, as well as in life (Search Institute, 2015). Young people can form these relationships with a variety of concerned adults including parents and family members, friends and peers, staff in schools and youth programmes and with caring adults in their neighbourhoods and communities (Search Institute, 2015).

What makes a relationship developmental, setting it apart from other forms of human interaction? Li and Julian (2012) posit that developmental relationships are characterised by “reciprocal human interactions that embody an enduring emotional attachment, progressively more complex patterns of joint activity, and a balance of power that gradually shifts from the developed person in favour of the developing person” (p. 157). As a way to conceptualise developmental relationships into definable categories, Li and Julian base their definition on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), who extended

the notion of relationships beyond mere emotional attachment. From this work, Li and Julian identified four core elements to development relationships i.e. attachment, progressive complexity, reciprocity and balance of power. Human interactions that follow this definition can be found in even the most fundamental of learning and developmental settings, interwoven as interdependent aspects of a singular experience.

Emotional attachment forms the basis of the learning relationship and provides the necessary trust and confidence in the adult. Young people want to be with adults that they have formed emotional connections with, those that are natural, positive and appropriate for the context. Ongoing frequent and joint activities between the adult and young person allows for further emotional bonding along with adult gauging of progress and competence, resulting in the adult adjusting his or her levels of support according to the young person's progress. Also known as scaffolding and fading, this process allows an adult to remove support gradually as the young person becomes more competent and confident in his or her abilities. As the activity advances, the young person then engages in more complex tasks with greater confidence, thereby reducing the need for adult support. Through this continuous process a gradual shift in the balance of power results, in favour of the young person becoming more autonomous (Li & Julian, 2012). At this point, the young person is more or less an independent actor within his or her environment, capable of

being a competent participant in whatever activities that are being carried out. The process results in substantive learning and independence through a transfer of knowledge and skill that is self-directed, motivational and empowering.

Youth-Adult Partnership as Empowering Developmental Relationship

Developmental relationships rely on caring, nurturing interactions between adults and youth and are educative, in that adults provide authentic opportunities for youth to make independent decisions and act on those decisions and give them the freedom to make and correct their mistakes. In the context of developmental relationships, adults do not dictate youth's decisions and choices, but rather adults facilitate and guide through a process called scaffolding and fading. For example, by allowing time and opportunity for students to make mistakes, a teacher committed to a developmental approach will engage his or her class in diagnosing and correcting the mistakes themselves (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1990; Li & Julian, 2012). Rather than controlling and dictating the learning process, the adults through mutual relationships of trust facilitate decision-making and discovery by allowing youth to arrive at destinations on their own. The combination of trusting, nurturing emotional bonds and adult support of youth voice in the decision-making process have been conceptualised as the core elements of youth-adult partnership (Zeldin

et al., 2014).

Youth-adult partnership works along the lines of youth voice in decision-making and caring relationships with adults who recognise the value in helping youth exercise their voice (Serido, Borden, & Perkins, 2011; Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013). Youth-adult partnership takes many forms in practice including youth and adults sitting on organisational governance committees, administering community projects together, making joint decisions about school policies, adult support of youth association activities and joint advocacy efforts on behalf of communities. Cross cutting these forms, however, is that youth-adult partnership subsumes many of the experiences that are engaging to young people: authentic decision-making, reciprocity, natural mentors and community connections. When the two components of youth voice and adult support are present, youth and adults collaborate as intergenerational partners, with interactions grounded in the principles of reciprocity, co-learning and shared control (Camino, 2005). Whether in school, community programmes, or other types of organisation, youth-adult partnership emphasises guided and supported youth participation as a way to help youth realise their rights and roles as citizens and promotes personal development through the process of attaining substantive knowledge and practical skills via experiential learning from experienced adult partners (Checkoway, 2011).

In the context of schools, youth-adult partnership is shown to contribute to school

engagement, school attachment and civic engagement, outcomes strongly related to academic achievement (Mitra, 2009). Youth participation in school decision-making increases student voice in schools and offers a way to re-engage students who may be disengaged from the school community (Fielding, 2001; Levin, 2000). Young people can engage with teachers in initiatives either inside or outside of the classroom to do this, such as working together to address student apathy with academic subjects or coming together to agree on ground rules for the school. Participation also can increase youth attachment to schools, which in turn has been shown to correlate with improved academic outcomes (Mitra, 2004). When youth-adult partnership is used to engage young people in community projects, civic development increases, extending young people's beliefs that they can make a difference in their lives and the lives of others (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Kirshner, Strobel, & Fernandez, 2003; Mitra, 2004). Student voice initiatives also help young people to develop important civic competencies including greater tolerance for and relationships with others, respectfully and effectively questioning authority and engaging in public speaking (Mitra, 2009).

Youth-adult partnership also resonates with generational approaches to understanding contemporary youth. Adults have traditionally formed relationships with youth for the purpose of protecting, counselling and instructing young people (Hine, 1999; Hollingshead, 1949). Over the past 20 years, however, with the integration of youth and community

development perspectives into youth programming, the rationale for establishing strong intergenerational relationships has broadened. Scholars now focus on the importance of relationships as a vehicle through which youth can be active agents in their own development, the development of others and the development of the community (Krauss, Zeldin, & Dahalan, 2015; Zeldin, Larson, Camino, & O'Connor, 2005). Youth programmers, teachers, mentors, coaches, youth workers, religious teachers and community adults can all play these partnering roles with youth. Through their typology of youth-adult relationships, Wong et al. (2010) concluded that youth-adult partnership is optimal because the "shared control between youth and adults provides a social arrangement that may be ideal for both empowering youth and community development" (Zeldin et al., 2013, p. 109).

Youth-Adult Partnership in Malaysia: Evidence from the Field

Recent youth and education policy changes in Malaysia have resulted in significant investments in out-of-school time programmes to combat youth alienation and promote youth development (Krauss et al., 2013). Local and international youth and community programmes play a complementary role to the formal education system in promoting skill and competency acquisition through an array of experiential developmental and leadership opportunities (Hamzah, Tamam, Krauss, Hamsan, & Dahalan, 2011). Like the United States

and other countries, Malaysia has begun to focus on community and institutional engagement to enhance youth participation in schools and communities. Two types of programme are emphasised in meeting these goals: 1) co-curricular programmes operated by the Ministry of Education that are a mandated part of the school curriculum; and 2) community-based programmes and youth associations operated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports that are aimed at promoting leadership and entrepreneurial skills in addition to providing youth with opportunities to explore arts, music, religion and sport (Krauss et al., 2013). These significant investments are central to the overall progression of youth and community development in Malaysia.

Empirical evidence from mostly Western contexts indicates that youth participation in the form of youth-adult partnership, when supported by formal policy and practice structures, can become an important aid to youth and community development by helping youth acquire important developmental outcomes like agency, empowerment and community connectedness. However, to date, little is known about the practice of youth-adult partnership in Muslim-majority countries and its contribution to youth outcomes.

To explore the potential of youth-adult partnership in a Muslim-majority setting, I present findings from three recently conducted studies (Krauss et al., 2014; Krauss, Zeldin & Dahalan, 2015; Zeldin, Krauss, Kim, Collura, & Abdullah, 2016) in Malaysia. The findings

are summarised and presented to illustrate the potential of youth-adult partnership as a strategy for enhancing young people's experiences of participation in school and community-based youth organisations. Quantitative-based findings from two studies show significant associations between youth-adult partnership and several developmental outcomes including agency, empowerment, community connectedness, social trust, leadership competence and school engagement. Qualitative case study findings further point to youth-adult partnership as a rallying point for young people and adults within communities to work together on community action, advocacy and community education efforts. Combined, the findings provide a basis for more serious discussion and deliberation on the way forward for infusing youth-adult partnership into afterschool and community programmes.

Youth-Adult Partnership in Malaysian Afterschool and Community Programs

Findings from two recent quantitative-based studies conducted in Malaysia point to the potential of youth-adult partnership in cultivating youth developmental outcomes. The two studies sought to clarify the unique relationships between the two components of youth-adult partnership (youth voice and adult support) and several youth development outcomes.

In the first study, 299 youths aged 15 to 24 were sampled from six established afterschool and community programs from the greater Kuala Lumpur area to explore

the contribution of youth voice in decision-making and supportive adult relationships on the outcomes of empowerment, agency and community connections. Hierarchical regression results indicated that programme quality (youth voice, supportive adult relationships, safe environment and programme engagement) contributed to agency, empowerment and community connections beyond the contribution of family, school and religion. Additionally, the youth-adult partnership measures contributed substantially more variance than the other measures of programme quality on each outcome (see Krauss et al., 2014 for details). The findings from this inquiry replicated those found in previous interview and observational-orientated studies on the importance of youth program quality and youth-adult partnership in particular as a contributor to youth outcomes.

A second study on youth-adult partnership in secondary, co-curricular afterschool programmes explored a mediational model that hypothesised pathways between the experience of youth-adult partnership (youth voice in decision-making, supportive adult relationships), the mediators programme safety and engagement and the developmental outcomes of youth empowerment (leadership competence, policy control) and community connectedness (community connections, school attachment). The purpose of the study was to better understand the different ways that the two components of youth-adult partnership, youth voice and adult support, contribute to different developmental

outcomes, and how programme quality mediates these relationships. Despite the prevalence of afterschool programmes globally, few prior studies had attempted to examine the pathways through which youth-adult partnership and programme quality predicted youth outcomes within actual programmes (see Zeldin et al., 2016 for details).

The study results shed light on how the two components of youth-adult partnership can operate differently, through different yet complementary pathways. First, youth voice in programme decision-making predicted both indicators of youth empowerment, while programme engagement mediated the associations between youth-adult partnership and empowerment. In contrast, programme safety mediated the associations between youth-adult partnership and community connectedness. From here, two clear patterns emerged; the active processes of youth voice and programme engagement were most strongly associated with the agency-orientated concepts of youth empowerment. In contrast, the more nurturing and relational components of supportive adults and feelings of safety were most strongly associated with community connectedness. The findings shed light on the different ways that youth voice and adult support lead to positive outcomes among youth, namely that youth voice and adult support provide both instrumental as well as socio-emotional contributions to young people's development.

Both of the above study findings are significant given Malaysia's concerns

with youth community disengagement and reported low empowerment scores on national indices (Malaysian Institute for Research in Youth Development, 2011). Furthermore, when compared with similar data from the United States and Portugal, the findings from Malaysia indicate that youth-adult partnership operating within the context of organised youth programmes predicted youth civic development across income groups (Zeldin, Gauley, Krauss, Kornbluh, & Collura, 2017). These cross-national results further support the universality of youth-adult partnership as an important strategy for enhancing community development.

Youth-Adult Partnership and Community Development: A Case Study of the Gaya Island Youth and Sports Association

In attempting to situate youth-adult partnership within an actual community setting in Malaysia, the author and two co-researchers carried out an exploratory qualitative case study with the Gaya Island Youth and Sports Association (BESUGA), based in Gaya Island, Sabah (see Krauss et al., 2015). Gaya Island is home to 10,000 low-income residents of traditional fishing villages that span the coast of the eastern and southern shores of the island. The residents of Gaya Island, being of predominantly Bajau Muslim decent, face systematic marginalisation and neglect due to their presumed status as illegal immigrants. This enduring stigma has left Gaya and its residents with few basic

services and infrastructure despite the majority of the population having been citizens of Malaysia who have lived in Sabah for several generations.

We used youth-adult partnership as a theoretical lens to understand how BESUGA became an agent of social change through an inclusive approach to working across three generations of residents (youth, emerging adults and adults) to provide community-based sports and education programmes to the young people and residents of Gaya Island. Of most relevance to the youth-adult partnership framework was how BESUGA spearheaded a campaign with adult residents, leaders and diverse stakeholders to bring water and electricity infrastructure to their island for the first time in its history. By creating an informal coalition of youth and adult entities to promote their cause, BESUGA lobbied their local government representatives to secure water and electricity for the villages of Gaya Island.

In the study, we identified three ways that BESUGA used youth-adult partnership to achieve its objectives and bring change to the community. First was through the provision of community programmes, where the association's leaders worked closely with the adult residents in the villages to provide youth development and community education programmes to youth and adult residents. These included sport tournaments, cultural events, community education programmes (e.g. environmental awareness, education) and classes in sewing, computer use, languages and others. This

function was critical for building community relationships, social capital and enhancing the skills of the population.

Second was the use of youth-adult partnership as an organising tool to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders to lobby the government for water and electricity. In so doing, BESUGA was able to enlist support from local university leaders, the state electric company officials, community leaders and state representatives. Taking advantage of a favourable political climate, the coalition of youth and adults succeeded in convincing the political leaders that Gaya Island was deserving of basic water and electricity infrastructure. The youth and adult coalition made the difference; prior adult-only attempts to convince the local politicians of the need for water and electricity on Gaya had been unsuccessful.

Third was BESUGA's role as a community educator. After approval was given to install electricity and water, BESUGA youth worked with local adults to devise strategies for educating the community about their new services. This required working with the state electric company, the village leaders (ketua kampung) and the adult residents. It also required a youth-led door-to-door effort to walk residents through the new processes of installation, payment and service of the electric and water utilities. The mass effort to educate the community could only be successful through cooperation between the youth and adults.

Through these three initiatives, BESUGA showed how youth-adult partnership can provide a platform for youth to play substantive leadership roles in community development and transformation efforts. The youth association's role gradually expanded over time by gaining the trust of adult community members, who, in turn, increasingly relied on BESUGA to lead development efforts. The youth association's inclusive and respectful approach to working with the adults facilitated an environment of partnership and cooperation that bolstered service provision to the community and advocacy efforts with outsiders. The adult leaders not only supported the efforts of BESUGA, but gave the youth leaders increasing voice and autonomy in making decisions on behalf of the community. By way of this process, the Gaya Island case study is a powerful example of how youth-adult partnership in low-income, Muslim communities can be leveraged for youth and community development as well as social change.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Using three recent studies from Malaysia as a starting point, the purpose of this paper was to introduce the potential of youth-adult partnership to address the need for more constructive and meaningful youth participation in Muslim-majority countries. The studies on youth-adult partnership presented in this paper illustrate the potential of youth-adult partnership within community and youth programmes as an

important ingredient in the effort to enhance the participatory experiences of youth in community and national development. Although research in this area is still nascent in Malaysia, the findings mirror previous work in the United States and other countries where youth-adult partnership has been used with success. For example, successful youth-adult partnership has taken the form of young people serving as members of municipal and organisational boards (Kirshner, O'Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2002; Sinclair, 2004), mobilising their peers and residents to take action on social and environmental justice issues (Chawla, 2002; Checkoway et al., 2003; Edwards, Johnson, McGillicuddy, 2002), taking active roles in community development by participating alongside adult residents in land-use planning processes (Knowles-Yanez, 2005; Tolman et al., 2001; Speak, 2000) and others.

While the quantitative findings have been previously reported in detail (see Krauss et al., 2014; Zeldin et al., 2016), the goal in this paper was to emphasise the critical role that purposeful working relationships between youth and non-familial adults who value youth voice play in community-based and afterschool programmes. Adult teachers, coaches, community leaders and youth workers play important roles in facilitating young people's development of leadership competence and agency, belief that they can make a difference in the sociopolitical sphere and sense of connectedness and belonging to their communities. The findings support

prior theory and research that point to the need for positive relationships with adults to help young people act affirmatively in their environments (Camino, 2005; Kirshner, 2007) and the importance of youth having authentic opportunities for decision-making. Prior research has shown that youth become active participants in their communities when they feel they have both a powerful voice in programme decision-making and supportive relationships with adult staff (Borden & Serido, 2009). This is significant for the vast populations of young people in Muslim-majority countries who feel alienated and cut-off from decision-making structures and processes, in which adults tend to dominate (Spencer & Aldouri, 2016).

Recent research in other culturally conservative Muslim-majority contexts indicate that youth-adult partnership, when infused into existing community structures, can make a difference in enhancing youth agency, empowerment and community connectedness. A recent study of youth-adult partnership in Nigerian school-based management committees (SBMC) explored how this occurs (Umar, Krauss, Abu Samah, & Abdul Hamid, 2017). The findings report that even in low-income, socially and culturally conservative communities in northern Nigeria, youth and adults can work collectively to administer local schools. In these local governance structures, young people as young as 12 years old are given equal voice and decision-making opportunity alongside community elders. In addition to fortifying adult-youth community bonds, the adults reported

having a newfound respect for the views and opinions of young people. Likewise, the youth felt a greater sense of belonging and ownership through their participation on the SBMCs. The authors emphasise the need to build authentic opportunities for youth involvement in existing local decision-making structures rather than creating a plethora of new programmes. Through capacity-building and training, existing community structures can change the way they work to allow young people more meaningful experiences as decision-makers and contributors. This approach provides great opportunity for Muslim-majority countries to create meaningful opportunities for youth participation by infusing youth-adult partnership into already existing school and community-based organisations.

It must be noted that the intention of this paper was not to generalise the findings to other Muslim countries, as each has its own unique social, political, demographic and cultural landscape that may or may not be conducive to youth-adult partnership. That said, youth-led social action supported by adults has been found to be an effective strategy for community development in marginalised communities (Ginwright & James, 2002; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). The Gaya Island case study presented in this paper extends this work, showing how youth-adult partnership can facilitate real, tangible social change in a completely unique type of marginalised setting. The evidence thus strengthens the possibility that as a general strategy, youth-adult partnership can be used virtually anywhere as long as

there is organisation and shared commitment by both youth and adults. More research into youth-adult partnership is needed in other Muslim-majority nations, especially those from the Middle East where traditional culture roles between youth and adults differ sharply than in Western countries.

Youth-adult partnership is yet to become an explicit strategy among youth and community development policy circles in Malaysia and most other Muslim-majority countries. However, recent macro-level policy initiatives indicate that there is a heightened awareness around the need for greater youth voice and participation in community life. In countries like Tunisia, for example, the new national Constitution explicitly calls for supporting youth to take on greater decision-making responsibilities by extending their participation in social, economic, cultural and political development (UNDP, 2014). Similarly, Malaysia's new National Youth Policy (2015) calls for formal youth participation within all leadership bodies representing community organisations and local councils by 2018. In these examples, one can see a growing need for strategies, best practices and promising approaches to build the capacity of community organisations to create a culture of intergenerational partnership.

In many Muslim-majority 'Arab Spring' countries, despite initial optimism, the social and political turmoil that began in 2011 has resulted in a regressive situation where efforts to move toward mainstreaming youth voice have become more difficult. In Egypt, for example, this

frustration felt by many youth has led to disengagement, apathy and a decrease in participation in social and political issues and processes, as well as an increased sense of disillusion (Spencer & Aldouri, 2016). These sentiments leave young people vulnerable to joining less legitimate pathways to redress their frustrations, such as through violent extremism and radical group membership. It is therefore essential for policy-makers to address the ensuing disengagement from society by policies that promote legitimate platforms for voice and participation. Capacity-building measures are fundamental in this regard, but no less so than constructive outlets for the skills learnt to be put to use in the broader society (Spencer & Aldouri, 2016).

Directions for Policy and Practice

The unprecedented scope of change and challenge facing many Muslim-majority communities today requires more broadly inclusive decision-making patterns that engage multiple stakeholders. The problems, issues and challenges these societies face are becoming more global and complex. To nurture an effective public voice, people from all walks of life, including youth, should be encouraged and motivated to exercise citizenship, which means taking responsibility for the common good and working together to define shared, win-win solutions for common problems that challenge community life (Mullahey, Susskind, & Checkoway, 1999). Towards this end and as a starting point for making youth participation and empowerment

through youth-adult partnership a reality in Muslim-majority countries, I draw on best practices from both Western and Asian countries to propose the following directions for practice and policy consideration. The recommendations are not listed in any particular order of importance.

- First, youth and adult relationships and interaction must intensify by ensuring greater adult involvement in youth programmes and educational initiatives. This can be integrated into related policies and/or addressed at the level of practice, but in the end, there must first be opportunities created for youth and adults to interact in meaningful ways.
- Adults must learn and understand how they can support youth voice and participation. Youth-adult partnership is grounded in both youth voice and adult support; therefore, getting adults to fully understand the importance of their partnering with youth as mentors, coaches, guides and other, is half the battle. Youth-adult partnership can occur in any place where youth and adults interact and have the opportunity to work together on common issues or activities.
- Youth voice is not just about opportunities to be critical. Youth voice is, first and foremost, about having real opportunities to make decisions and to pursue one's interests and passions. Adults must understand these different forms of youth voice and value them all within organisational settings.

- Youth must understand and appreciate the importance of working with adults, and realise that little can be achieved without them. Both parties must appreciate the idea that nation building requires effort from all sectors of society, young and old, and to create civil society, people have to work together.
- Issues of power have to be addressed at the outset. One of the greatest challenges to youth-adult partnership in practice is power. It requires adults to share it and youth to use it respectfully and responsibly. Different organisations deal with issues of power differently. For Muslim organisations and communities, especially those in countries where few are afforded any power, it can be a great challenge to persuade adults to share power with other adults, let alone youth. The emphasis should be on the well-being of the community at large, both now and for the future. Youth-adult partnership is one strategy to help organisations and communities get there by ensuring that young people are engaged both now and in the future.
- To do youth-adult partnership well, there must be a basic understanding of youth development processes. Although positive youth development (PYD) is well-known globally, there are still many countries that have yet to be exposed to it. Strategies like youth-adult partnership are an outgrowth of the PYD philosophy that when adults provide the right support and opportunities for tapping youth strengths, great things can happen. Therefore, youth and adults alike should understand what supports, opportunities and services young people need to thrive both by themselves and their communities, and how adults can help youth achieve them.
- Community relationships and networks can be mobilised to make up for the lack of resources available in lower-income settings. As evidenced by the youth association in Gaya Island, intergenerational partnerships and networks with community institutions, businesses and organisations can be a powerful support for youth development initiatives.
- One must not leave out the role of developmental relationships within families. Families form the foundation of society. Families can be great models for positive youth development and youth-adult partnership. For adults, practising developmental relationships in the home is a great way to start, and these lessons can be transferred over to organisational settings.

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