

# Empowering Community Out of Poverty: A Case of Kampong Bolkiah Community Development Centre, Brunei Darussalam



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**Abstract** The study explored the initiatives made by Kampong Bolkiah Community Development Centre (KBCDC) in its effort to empower the community to improve their livelihood through entrepreneurial activities in Brunei Darussalam. A qualitative approach was used and data was collected through an in-depth interview with the founder of KBCDC. The results found that by designing programs based on their needs, enhancing their entrepreneurial skills and matching them with serious and motivated buyers are the important factors. The findings are an important indicator to policy-makers and development practitioners. The future study should consider unraveling the influential factors of community participation in KBCDC to improve their livelihood.

## 1 Introduction

Brunei Darussalam (herein ‘Brunei’), a small Islamic country, with a land area of 5765 km<sup>2</sup>, located on the Northwest of Borneo Island, is home to 433,283 people. The oil and gas sector is the backbone of Brunei’s economy, accounting for 67.7% of GDP and 95.6% of total exports. Therefore, its citizens enjoy a high level of quality of life with free education and healthcare and no income tax. Like any other country, Brunei is committed towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its national vision, *Wawasan Brunei 2035* (Brunei Vision 2035). Under *Wawasan Brunei 2035*, Brunei aspires to be recognised for its educated, highly skilled and accomplished people, with a high quality of life and a dynamic, sustainable economy (Wawasan Brunei, n.d.). It harnesses Brunei’s development strategies and policies while incorporating sustainable development perspectives.

Despite this economic advantage, poverty in Brunei remains an ongoing issue. With Brunei having no recorded poverty line, it is difficult to assess the current poverty percentage. There are multifarious government organisations established

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with the aim to help address this issue. For instance, Monthly Welfare Assistance (BKB) is provided through the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports (MCYS) which is designed to act as a supplement to protect the target groups from poverty and ease their hardship until they receive a sufficient source of income and become economically independent. Brunei's *zakat* (alms) system, under Ministry of Religious Affairs, provides funds for the Muslims in need. Giving *zakat* is a religious obligation where Muslims whose wealth sits above the minimum threshold are obligated to pay 2.5% of their collective assets. *Zakat* fund is also used to fund enrichment programs to empower eligible *zakat* recipients. In addition to government agencies, various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also play a role in poverty alleviation, for instance, Kampong Bolkiah Community Development Centre (KBCDC).

The issue of poverty should consider manoeuvring under the basis of the paraphernalia of economic opportunities in line with the aim of Wawasan Brunei 2035, as such being in congruous with the Integrated Plan of Action on Poverty Eradication that was brought together by the Special Committee on Poverty Issues as they navigate through to achieve a reduction in dependency on welfare assistance by fortifying self-reliance with capacity building for employment and entrepreneurship (Ministry of Finance and Economy, 2020). The establishment of KBCDC is basically to give better opportunities for people and their socio-economic livelihood, and to help them get out of poverty lines, and reduce the dependency on welfare assistance. Therefore, the main objective of this chapter is to explore the initiatives made by KBCDC in its efforts to empower the community to improve their livelihood through entrepreneurial activities in Brunei Darussalam. For the rest of this chapter, the role of KBCDC will be explained in its efforts towards poverty alleviation through their community empowerment program. This is followed by exploring its motivations, initiatives, challenges and future directions. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

## 2 Entrepreneurship in Community Development

The idea and practice of setting up a community development has evolved over the past decades into a familiar discipline of interest to both practitioners and academics (Kleiner et al., 2004). The decision to have Community Development by practitioners has a proclivity to arise consequently because of economic, social and physical enhancement in a community (Phillips & Pittman, 2008). There are myriads of ways to construct a community development in order to refine the living standards of rural communities to achieve a sustainable baseline for development (Hameed et al., 2016). It is also important to identify what the community is good at in terms of their skills and resources. For instance, *Program Satu Kampung Satu Produk* (literally One Village One Product) was introduced in Brunei where small and medium enterprises (SMEs) will exhibit their products in their respective villages on a particular day which includes food, handicrafts and traditional herbs. The

activity also provided the entrepreneurs with the opportunity to market their products. In light of this initiative, artisan entrepreneurship should be explored.

In the literature, there has been an increased emphasis on local and handmade goods that are linked to the culture and tourism of a region (Ratten & Ferreira, 2017). According to Lounsbury and Glynn (2001), an artisan entrepreneur is a community who specialises on cultural forms of business ventures. This form of entrepreneurship is currently expanding. Most artisan entrepreneurs are in the clothing and food industries as they prefer to make their own products that are linked to their cultural heritage (Tregear, 2005). Therefore, its application in community development, in designing related programs to enhance their skills to produce and market their products, should be explored.

Many of these artisan entrepreneurs began as a hobby tied to their culture that not only incites interest but income as well. Most have turned this into a creative gamechanger by coalescing passion with marketing, resulting in a trend towards more cultural-based businesses that are clearly encouraging the tourism experience, including Brunei. However, the literature on artisan in the case of Brunei is still scarce and more coverage and studies on this should be done.

### **3 Methodology**

Qualitative method such as in-depth interviews is employed in this study and the respondent was asked key questions and probing questions, as well as throw-away questions. The interview guide covered themes such as motivation, strategies and challenges of empowering the community through entrepreneurial activities. The interview was performed face to face in English and lasted approximately 30–45 min. The interview was recorded, transcribed and analysed to identify main ideas and themes linked to the objective of this study. As stressed by Miles and Huberman (1994), the transcribed data were coded and scaled down to meaningful themes. This was further highlighted by Gioia et al. (2013) where the analysis developed on transcripts from interviews and data obtained were categorised into themes. Thematic analysis is also used in this study to analyse and organise the data. Due to the occasional use of Brunei-Malay terms, a list of translated Brunei-Malay terms is provided in the Appendix.

### **4 The Kampong Bolkih Community Development Centre**

The Kampong Bolkih Community Development Centre (herein ‘KBCDC’) is located in Kampong Bolkih, Kampong Ayer, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam. Translated, “Kampong Ayer” directly means “Water Village” and this centuries-old floating village consists of ten interconnected floating neighborhoods, housing close to 30,000 inhabitants through wooden bridges and walkways

(Jingwei, 2019). This scenic “Venice of the East” is the world’s largest floating village and it is located along the banks of the Brunei River.

KBCDC was founded in August 2020 by the Big BWN Project under the initiative of Yayasan Sultan Haji Hassanah Bolkiah’s (YSHHB) Ristaan Abadi. Big BWN Project emphasises on building platforms and projects for young entrepreneurs to build their brands whilst providing mass exposure for both up-and-starting businesses and established ones as well as providing a channel to connect with their customers. Under the YSHHB Foundation’s Project, this KBCDC will act as a platform to hold community and entrepreneurship projects for Kampong Bolkiah A & Kampong Bolkiah B of Kampong Ayer. The main objective of KBCDC is to give better opportunities for people and their socio-economic livelihood, and to help them get out of poverty lines, and not relying on government benefits. Over the next few years, they will be working with a lot of local and regional partners; conducting a lot of different activities, events, workshops, and more—all to create opportunities and to empower the local Kampong community, and to preserve culture and heritage. Since its opening, KBCDC has held various events and activities as summarised in Table 1.

## 5 Findings and Discussions

This section provides the findings from the interview with the founder of KBCDC. From the interviews, the following themes were extracted.

### 1. Overwhelming response

As most of the participants of KBCDC are women, Bolkiah Women’s Club was consequently established. The participants in the club produced their hand-made traditional and modern weaving and handicrafts as well as food and drinks. To get in touch with them, a WhatsApp hotline was created.

I created Bolkiah Women’s Club where I’ve got more than 30 women joined on our WhatsApp group. Recently in April 2021, I successfully registered 22 women on business from Kampong Bolkiah

### 2. Building relationships within the community

Community engagement is a strong value and fundamental practice. It is very important to build relationships with the local community as it will result in a profound impact on their base line especially in understanding their situations.

For me I have a very good relationship with the people here and I don’t hate it and I enjoy working with the people here. Surprisingly they always make me feel like I belong. Very oddly, but when some of them saw me here, they would invite me to have a chat and light snacks with them. I have built such a great relationship to the point when they bumped into me they would greet me and even waved at me from their house when they saw me which is nice. Of course that was the first base for me because I mean I thought about it like I am an outsider you know and I don’t want to come in and intrude. So the best way I think that’s why I kind of succeeded compared with the others because I really involved

**Table 1** KBCDC activities

Date	Events
9 June 2021	<i>Kuih</i> order for Muara Maritime Services
8 May 2021	'Sponsor a <i>Baju Raya</i> ' drive—over 400 pcs (targeted 200 pieces) for underprivileged and low-income families at Kg. Bolkiah
28 April 2021	Distributed some donation items from @theimpianproject for underprivileged special needs families at Kg Bolkiah
Early April 2021	Joint leadership workshop with @sealentpb19 (led by Universiti Brunei Darussalam Discovery Year Community Outreach Programme, UBD DY COP, student)
9 April 2021	Marketing workshop with @agribiz.bn (led by UBD DY COP students)
2 April 2021	Basic Self-Defense workshop with @thepanthersguild
March 21	Hosted Zero Waste Activities with @zerowastebwn during school holiday
21 March 2021	<i>Gulingtangan</i> and traditional music workshop with @seri_laila_irama.bn and @kesturi.hijau (part of UBD DY COP students)
Early March 2021	Twenty successfully registered women owned small businesses (coincided with International Women's Day)
5 March 2021	<i>Ambuyat</i> session with Bolkiah Women's Club
19 February 2021	Hosted six sessions of @girls4girlsbrunei's Bolkiah circle
7 February 2021	Delivered second Bolkiah Donation Drive (collected during 3–5 February) (led by UBD DY COP students)
6 December 2020	Market on the River—Cultural Demo & Activities, <i>kuih</i> making, community vendors (in conjunction with Brunei December estival)
30 November 2020	Closing ceremony for Entrepreneurship Training Program; 15 local small businesses Hosted @bruneiansread's Travelling with Books for kids
29 November 2020	Bolkiah Mini Festival
22 November 2020	Let's Rewind—a forum on history and heritage of Brunei Darussalam
15 November 2020	Arts & Crafts Workshop—activities by Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD)'s Design & Creative Industries students
14 November 2020	Official launching of @balkish.official—(part of UBD students internship projects)
13 November 2020	Burgembira Night with @meatman.bn (part of UBD students internship projects)
10 November 2020	Engaged with Ta-Pow! for KBCDC's locally made food
8 November 2020	Hosted for Progresif's Buzzcut for Charity with @snips.ent and @barberku.bn
7 November 2020	<i>Kamayan</i> (a communal-style Filipino feast) feast with @arquilato_kusina
4 November 2020	Community Donation Drive—led by UBD DY student
1 November 2020	Breast Cancer Awareness with @hpcbrunei Delivered First Bolkiah Donation Drive (collected during 26–30 October)

(continued)

**Table 1** (continued)

Date	Events
23 October 2020	Basic First Aid course with @pulseline.nursing
11 October 2020	Youth Business Talk co-organised with @ybt.brunei for 50 youths
9 October 2020	Fun fitness Zumba—in support of breast cancer awareness month
3 October 2020	Greek Food on Brunei River
20 September 2020	<i>Santai</i> Sunday— <i>Penyaram</i> making, bag weaving, local products and food
17 September 2020	Zero Waste Activity with 30 kids of Kg. Bolkih during school term holiday—led by UBD DY students
5 September 2020	Seafood Saturday
30 August 2020	Hosted a <i>Mukun</i> party
22 August 2020	KBCDC held Open Day
10 August 2020	Organised an afternoon tea session; formed Kelab Wanita Bolkih (Bolkih Women's Club)
22 May 2020	Two-day "Sponsor a <i>Baju Raya</i> " drive
10 February 2020	Signed MOU with YSHHB to conduct community and entrepreneurship projects in Kg Bolkih A & Kg Bolkih B

Source: Author's own compilation from @bigbwnproject Instagram Account

in community as much as I could and I think they appreciated that. I have been doing community development for so long I know how to like connect with everyone.

### 3. Designing programs based on the community needs

Engaging community members in problem-solving solutions to issues that affect them is very important. In KBCDC, a survey with the residents is normally held monthly in order to suggest the type of programs and trainings to be offered by KBCDC in the respective month.

I do survey with them and I try my best to have monthly hi-tea gathering. I usually give a survey form and ask them to fill in for them to help us. For example, tailoring workshop that we conducted today is based on their request. There will be a different workshop in the next 2 weeks. It could be entrepreneurship or weaving workshop. It depends on what they request.

Therefore, it is very important to involve community members in all activities—from identifying the relevant issues and making decisions about how to address them to evaluating and sharing the results with the community. Thus, the Entrepreneurship Training Programme reinforces and strengthens entrepreneurial competencies that involve diagnostics.

### 4. Outsourcing training

There are different engaging programs on vocational training, workshops and activities on community capacity building in order to develop their skills and

talents by implementing high value content with collaborations and partnerships from other organisations and stakeholders.

After they suggest, I will reach out to people because I'm obviously not experienced in a lot of things like I can't teach sewing. Previously, I had invited some from insurance companies to talk about financial management and investment. A few weeks back we had first aid and fire safety courses.

Execution on this notion is conceivable as some companies are integrating corporate social responsibility programs (CSR programs) into their business and aligning themselves with pressing social movements.

I engaged—because a lot of companies are doing CSR so I check to them so you know do you want to do—I provided with venue just come in and do it.

Trainers are not restricted to companies. Attachment students who have the skills and background are also welcome to give the training.

I have a lot of plans to do and currently I am waiting for new interns to apply. I encourage more university students to join us and create the impact especially in giving the training or conducting workshops.

#### 5. The use of social media and e-commerce platform 'Ta-Pow!'

BigBWNProject Instagram has attracted potential customers and these customers will reach KBCDC through Instagram. To date, it has 11,500 followers. This is very important as the unpredictability of income has always been a challenge for entrepreneurs.

People contacted me through our Instagram. They (including companies) follow our activities on Instagram and found out about Bolkiah Women's Club. There was a time, a company place an order of 550 pieces of door gift. The ladies get to earn and I'm very happy to support. It was during Hari Raya that they've made BND1000 (AUD1000).

The role of social media is not overlooked. To reach mass market in Brunei, for food entrepreneurs, they are included into the e-commerce platform Ta-pow! to boost their sales and get more potential customers and motivated buyers.

Most of them in food businesses I've put them on *Ta-pow!*. Some of them supply catering food to local companies. There is a local company which always uses our catering services. Some companies will order our local *kuih* (local snacks) as their corporate gift or door gift.

#### 6. Organising activities to promote local culture

Most of the activities at KBCDC are held every Sunday. For example, *Santai* Sunday event gives the public the opportunity to learn how to weave and make traditional snacks like *Penyaram*. Not only will it benefit the public where the skills will be passed down to the next generation, this will also help to showcase and market their products to the public.

#### 7. The businesses are registered

It is a requirement for businesses in Brunei to be registered. It is an achievement for KBCDC that most of the businesses are legally registered which entails that they are committed to run and sustain their businesses. As KBCDC provides

different ranges of programs, for instance financial management; this will enable and assist them should they face issues or challenges throughout their business operation or decide on expanding.

#### 8. Future planning

There are a lot of opportunities that can be utilised from KCBDC – for instance, domestic tourism where the locals or foreigners in Brunei could experience Kampong Ayer life, from the cuisines to the traditional games. Especially during this pandemic where outbound traveling is restricted, this opportunity should be grabbed.

As they are good in cooking, I would like to do weekend Kampong Ayer experience. For example, enjoying traditional local cuisine like *ambuyat* and then you could play Kampong game like *congkak*. I have seen other districts have done similar things. I mean not—to be honest I don't see anybody do it properly except like sunset walk which I feel too mainstream. We did Kampong market last time and I think this is a good idea.

#### 9. KBCDC Branding

I would also like to have a nice KBCDC branding and supply the products in Brunei's market. As a start, we could consider supplying the local foods to the local education institutions, for example their cafeteria. As we have Ta-Pow!, our delivery guys could deliver the food over on consignment basis.

#### 10. The involvement of the other community

KBCDC has its own limitations in terms of its capacity. Thus, it is very important for the public and other organisations to get involved through their CSR programs to support such initiatives.

I'm hoping for community to come and join us because at the end of the day like we want to encourage people to be involved, to try to contribute to them back, because in the fact that we are part of Kampong Ayer and it is part of Brunei's identity and sadly we start to lose that. We encourage people to come back to Kampong Ayer and do things and interact with community here, learn different skills from community itself and see how we can work together.

## 6 Challenges

From the interview, there are a few challenges identified as follows:

Firstly, in terms of mindset. The biggest challenge was to change the mindset of the locals from the community and to gain their confidence to do activities with KBCDC and join programs offered by KBCDC as many are still very reserved.

There are some who are very hardworking and committed to joining all our programs and trainings, and some are only on an occasional basis. There has always been a problem of preferring and relying on government assistance.

Sometimes there are situations where once you help you will open that door so people keep on asking so many things. They can actually put in the effort to get these things and do yourself.



Secondly, accessibility by water taxi (*Perahu Tambang*). Water taxi is a kind of speed boat made of wood to commute people from point A to point B, along the river in Brunei. Due to the discouraging number of people using water taxi, the availability of water taxi is rare and the price can be very expensive.

I did a few events where people outside of Kampong Ayer came. I have to liaise with the water taxi driver and they tend to overcharge which I don't like.

People still can drive to KBCDC. However, it means that the visitor will miss the whole experience of riding the water taxi and enjoying the magnificent scenery along Brunei River to KBCDC.

## 7 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has shown that NGOs do play a role in poverty alleviation through the provision of community empowerment program at community development centre in order to empower the village residents to improve their livelihood. Proposed programs should be designed based on community needs which enable them to enhance their entrepreneurial skills. Another important factor is to assist and match them with serious and motivated buyers in order for them to be able to sell their products. In today's digital age, the strong influence of social media should not be underestimated. It could be seen that potential buyers and companies that wish to help the village residents by contributing in the empowerment program found them through the social media. Therefore, all activities should continue to be posted on social media to reach the mass market and grab more opportunities. Despite the increasing number of the community, the number of men joining KBCDC is still lacking. More survey with the men should be done in order to devise strategies to attract them to participate and be more involved with KBCDC.

The village residents are the important artisan entrepreneurs of Brunei as they continue to produce local products such as hand-made traditional and modern weaving and handicraft as well as local or national foods. Their entrepreneurial activities and interests have been linked and tied to their culture in which they choose to use as a source of income. Thus, these initiatives and efforts should continue and eventually will contribute to the tourism industry should KBCDC wish to expand their portfolio to inbound or domestic tourism. The collaboration and support from other agencies are important to help assist and improve the programs and overcome challenges KBCDC is currently facing.

At this stage, the progress of the community empowerment programs at KBCDC shows to benefit the poor. Policy-makers and development thinkers must realise the fact that establishing the empowerment program at community level by NGOs play a pivotal role in realising the fruit of development equitably and effectively so that the village residents can be independent and less reliant on welfare assistance. The village residents, especially the men, should utilise the centre in further enhancing

their skills and training for entrepreneurship, technical and vocational education and culture. Local terms are used in the name of activities.

As this study focuses on the founder of KBCDC, future study should engage the participants of KBCDC to find out the influential factors of their participation in KBCDC and what the issues and challenges are being faced while they are in the program. The findings are an important indicator to policy-makers and development practitioners.

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## Appendix

### List of Brunei-Malay Terms

Ambuyat	The sticky national dish of Brunei, made with sago palm tree starch that gets cooked into a substance similar to glue
Baju Raya	A traditional Malay costume for both men and women worn during the Eid festival
Congkak	A traditional mancala game of Malay
Gulingtangan	A traditional Bruneian musical instrument
Kuih	Snack
Mukun	A cultural performance
Penyaram	A traditional cake
Perahu Tambang	Water taxi
Santai	Relax
Ta-Pow	Take-away

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