

The National Social Policy: Generator of a First Class Society

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to analyse the significance of the National Social Policy (NSP) towards achieving and generating a first class society in a first class nation. NSP focuses on noble values and morality, which plays a pivotal role in the establishment of progressive society. A first class society is a term used by the author to define an excellent society who practices noble values in their life while sustaining rapid economic development. A first class society would not only focus on the 'hardware' but also the 'software', which includes cultural appreciation and spiritual principles. The government has conducted various programmes to enhance economic development and the protection of the environment whilst providing a lot of opportunities to individuals to be involved in enhancing their life through economic affairs. However development is crippled if it is not considered holistically. Focusing on the economy solely creates an imbalance on other elements of development. Human character and personality become fragile and are unable to perceive and receive growth. It is a fact that this nation comprises various ethnic communities with a variety of values, norms, culture and practices in accordance to their respective beliefs. They also differ politically, economically and socially. The tendency towards conflict has and will always be an impending factor in relation to peace and harmony, which has been shared throughout the years but alas, not permanent. Therefore, this article focuses on the development of the NSP through various strategies and to strengthen its activities in order to achieve its agenda and goals towards building a first class society.

Introduction

"Building On Past Achievements Towards Greater Success", the theme of the Budget which was tabled in Parliament on 10 September 2004 clearly shows the initiatives of the government under the leadership of Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to raise the standard of living of the people and at the same time enjoy prosperity in a harmonious environment; to reinforce the position of society in a first class nation: a first class society.

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The term first class is used as a definition for excellent or outstanding society that possesses elements such as being united, clean, moral, tolerant, progressive, caring, just, ethical, having a strong basis in religious and spiritual values, confident. This mentality is in line with development of infrastructure and economy, which is a first class national development. In fact, the nation is already at the threshold of the 2nd Phase of Vision 2020 towards the formation of a developed nation. Such efforts are in tandem with the objective of instilling the culture of high performance when RM7.6 billion was allocated to the social sector under the RM28.3 billion development expenditure. However, efforts in achieving that objective will only be fruitful if social development combined with a spiritual quality network are further enhanced by the National Social Policy.

The National Social Policy (NSP)

The NSP which was launched on August 19, 2003 is based on the Constitution, Rukunegara and Vision 2020 is a timely wanting. This is due to the many reports on social ills in society as highlighted by the mass media. Societal problems are nothing new to this country but of late reports on it has reached an acute chronic level. This raises the question of whether the well being of Malaysian society and the quality of life has yet to achieve an encouraging level. At the same time, the nation does not lack people who possess good moral values, and a high level of humanitarian values as seen during the recent presentation of the Young Humanitarian Awards. What is evident however is that the NSP is the best mechanism in producing individuals who are confident, have good moral values, are considerate, courteous, just, competitive and dynamic. It will also have the ability to create a nation that is progressive and secure, and thus the emergence of an outstanding nation.

Generally social and negative elements are correlated in human interaction when in actual fact the social development network should appropriately be interpreted as a relationship between an individual with his family or with the community where he resides, in an environment that is friendly, healthy, harmonious and where a firm consensus exist based on the rules of moral living. In such an environment, the reality is members of a society will be able to achieve satisfaction in their lifestyle to the extent of achieving a first class society status. Excellence in its actual sense, is not only having first class amenities complete with basic needs and services but one that embraces the various good facets of life including spiritual and cultural appreciation in a pleasing capacity. This is in line with social policy which is defined as:

"...Development policy which is based on the good values and upgrading of human efforts in order to achieve unity and social stability, national security and prosperous Malaysian society which is progressive and steadfast".

It is clear that the NSP is aimed at the formation of a society that is apt, with wholesome attributes, balanced economically and socially, geared towards a first class society that possesses an honorable personality, is considerate, caring, just and progressive. These characteristics fulfill four main principles, which form the pillars of the policy, namely:

- i. Ensuring the basic needs of the individual, family and community are fulfilled
- ii. Life long development and reinforcement of mankind
- iii. Develop and reinforce a social support and service system
- iv. Generate a multi-sector synergy

All four objectives ensure the people of this country continue to enjoy a prosperous life irrespective of religion, race, culture and gender. In fact several strategies have been drawn to ensure that this policy attains stability and its objectives achieved.

National Social Policy and Vision 2020

The NSP which is the brainchild of the former Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is closely linked to Vision 2020. In order to create a progressive nation, Dr. Mahathir had outlined a number of matters which are deemed to enable Malaysia to become a first class nation with its own mould and not to emulate and follow the steps by countries such as Japan, United Kingdom even United States of America. He avers that Malaysia is not only known for its economic progress but also achieved fame in all other aspects: political, social, spiritual and culture. This means that by 2020, every individual in the community will possess self-confidence which is bound by ethical and moral values that are apt, thus enabling its people to live a life of tolerance, courtesy, be just and equitable, always progressive and prosperous. Dr. Mahathir outlined 9 challenges towards the formation of a first class community: excellent society under the said vision namely:

- i. To create a community that is united in sharing the same objectives, in contact with each other based on equal rights and justice.
- ii. To form a society that is free, steadfast, with a high level of self-confidence, proud of achievements and daring in facing challenges, endeavoring to achieve excellence and be respected by other countries.
- iii. To expand a matured democratic country, practice ideal democratic understandings based on discussions and concurrence, making it an example for other developing nations to emulate.
- iv. To form a community that possesses strong moral and ethical values whereby the composition of society is made up of steadfast religious and spiritual values based on strong positive character.
- v. Create a community that is matured, tolerant and liberal with each and every citizen regardless of their difference in belief and descendant free to practice their tradition, religious beliefs and culture without affecting their loyalty to the country.
- vi. Create a society that is scientific and progressive in nature, being highly innovative and far-sighted; to become a society that not only benefits or uses technology but also contributes towards the creation of a scientifically and technologically civilized future.
- vii. Create a society that is caring and loving, a social system that gives priority to the community than the individual self, with the emphasis on welfare and a strong family system and not emphasizing on the nation or the individual.
- viii. Guarantee the formation of a community that is just in the fields of economy by distributing the nation's wealth equally without any preference to any particular race.
- ix. Establish a prosperous community with a competitive economy, firmly resilient, dynamic and ingenious in facing changes.

All nine challenges mentioned above are directly related to social development, as economic development is not the sole objective of Vision 2020. The social agenda sealed under the NSP may be deemed as the bridge towards the realization of its achievement under this vision.

The National Social Policy: Spurs Overall Prosperity

Continuous and rapid development occurs in a nation due to the environment created by the government to enable the community to be given the opportunity to be involved in various types of economic activities. However, development will not be enjoyed fully if it is not comprehensive. An imbalance in development such as one that focuses only on the economy in total will result in the creation of problems in other areas in the convulsion of peace and prosperity of the community. The behaviour and personality of the society will be weakened and fail to balance the absorption of progress. In addition, the population composition in Malaysia consists of various ethnic groups that possess their own tradition, culture, standards and values, and with present differences in social standing, economy and politics. Hence, the tendency towards a conflict that threatens prosperity, harmony and the spirit of sharing being enjoyed all this while is something that is no longer avoidable or rather not permanent.

The adjustment of these values does not come as a shock as it has been seen as early as the 1950s as evidenced in the writings of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the *Straits Times* during the end of the 1940s and early 1950s. In the beginning the values that existed in the convulsion of the community network were modified without losing the original values of the said community. However, development continues as if sidestepping the formation of cultural values on the individual's personality causing them to be immature. During the UMNO general Assembly of 1993, Dr Mahathir had stated that if cultural values were appropriately modified, performance would then vary. This proves that one's ability relies on the values brought by the said individual, which will thus assist in the development of the economy.

The Malaysian community is generally said to be fettered by an inferiority complex, moral and values are related to the attitude of each individual, in particular tolerance. The formation of oneself relies on the ability to adapt to current needs including differing interpretation on the actual requirements of a religion in respect of values, attitudes that will result in the community lagging continuously.

The continued emphasis on an economy that reflects materialistic values and developments that shows sophisticated infrastructure and an educational sector that stresses on academic achievements thereby resulting in social development that finds it difficult to go in line with the said transformation and the cavities that bind the culture and values is not in anyway to be considered as an appropriate transformation. Co-operation among the community becomes brittle, eroded and inclined to disintegrate if the society becomes individualistic in nature and is after material values only and which sets aside the values of compromising and co-operating as well as being considerate toward realizing the formation of an outstanding society namely a first class society.

NSP exhibits the importance of morality and values that are deemed to generate a progressive society. The community will only be successful if it practices progressive values. These values include respect to the elderly, the practise of good dress sense, proper behaviour and the practice of one's religion, responsible in marriage, family and work as well as having a firm moral attitude. Besides save guarding these values, society should be aware that it is important in facing threats from the West that is deemed to be having many unhealthy values as a result of setting aside traditional practices even though those values have brought success to them sometime ago. Changes also occur as there are groups that are unable to control their feelings and fail to absorb or instill values that enhance one's lifestyle. This occurs mainly among the "transitional society", being a society that is compelled to shift or migrate to a new place due to development. Its effects are enormous if they fail to adapt themselves to the living values in the new area which may not be parallel to their earlier practices. However, if the NSP is applied well, then the new environment will not be an obstacle to the said individual to continue living in prosperity.

Amongst the factors that attract social ills are firstly, a new environment which in fact is made up of a group of people considered as being "problematic" to the society to the extent that the new individual residing thereat feels that due to the pressure of life, that is the best way to continue with life. Secondly, this individual may be someone who is already involved in unhealthy activities and is capable of influencing the environment. This is a scenario that is contrary to the first factor whereby the environment causes the emergence of a new social movement. Thirdly, what is being done to cases of those who are still under the custody or control of the enforcement and fourthly what about those who are in prison due to the offences committed by them. The NSP is complete in nature. Amongst the steps to be taken is ensuring a quality neighborhood by practicing social work based on the objective of this policy. Members of the community should put aside the attitude of neglecting the group that is deemed as being along the lines of negative social movements but instead guide them by stressing on honorable values. The gap between ethnic groups may be avoided if they respectively develop social ethics with good community work values. This new group should appropriately be taught in particular to use the services provided by the government and this is evident under the said NSP strategy itself. This means, that the individual can be independent and control self-development without being bound solely to the environment. The community may join forces to ensure that social ills are overcome based on this policy, as the neighborhood is important in eroding this social problem.

Failure to discipline oneself and allowing oneself to be controlled by lust are among the factors causing changes in the community's willpower that easily imitates the lifestyle of others although the Malaysian community in general is said to be suffering from an inferiority complex, good values, morality and tolerant. Generally the Western threat on a community is perceived as serious as these unbecoming values can no longer be curbed moreover with the advancement in communication systems and the attitude of the community itself that idolizes the West, whereby their actions are always emulated by the local community.

"The wild ways of the West are quickly assimilated, but not the values and norms which have given strength to the West".

This does not mean that the act of emulating the West is not encouraged as the East has adopted several qualities from the West such as discipline and effective management sometime ago. On the contrary, today, teenagers are modeling practices that may affect the community. The Look East Policy implemented under the leadership of Dr Mahathir is a positive step towards producing a progressive Malaysian community, as stressed by the NSP. He perceives that the West had changed good values to bad and these changes are easily emulated and its implications can be devastating if all of the Western value systems are adopted without analyzing those that are suitable to the values of the Malaysian community. This does not mean that Western values are all entirely bad instead possibly there can be sharing but integration of cultures that can be accepted with proper care and not to prejudice the humanitarian values of a community.

Values that are community and family orientated as compared to an individual interest, to respect those with authority in particular the relationship between parents and children which is perceived as important so that the clash between human values and lustful demands may be avoided. NSP is the catalyst for strengthening these values and generating the production of an outstanding community, a first class society. The NSP may be further enhanced if organizational management and discipline is continuously stressed, as both are equally important for the Malaysian society to remain competitive in the globalization era.

These values if fully practiced are capable of eradicating the social development problems of the country. For example, if a family at risk is given specific attention, this target group may be given full attention directly when counseling and visits are made to their places. It will fail if its existence is known but failure to interact due to the lack of resources or data whereas detailed data may be obtained from various resources such as the police who are often faced with such groups from a particular area or even schools that have an index on those who play truant or students who fail to be at school. Based on the advancement of technology, all these data may be stored and updated on a computer network system. Based on these data, the parties involved will be able to effectively make the NSP a success as the target group will be identified and be faced with the implementation of a specific programme, as the definition of the NSP is wide.

The NSP will fail if it does not gain support from the people. This is because the number of voluntary community is very low in comparison to the programmes planned in the lower division. This disrupts the interaction between the social worker and the target group as they are faced with many cases and plans that is beyond their capacity. If various agencies are given the responsibility jointly on the implementation of the NSP or commercialised with a certain reward, the ability of NSP to generate the development of a first class community may be achieved in the near future.

Coordination between various agencies at the grassroot level may be improved during the implementation of the program. Although it is successful at the upper level during the drafting and the forwarding of social problems, but if co-operation between the agencies involved fail, the objective to bring change will fail. NSP under Institut Sosial Malaysia, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWK) is able to lead various agencies to strengthen the efforts towards producing an excellent community because a capable leadership can produce co-operation and compromise between the parties involved so as to ensure the program for the target group is fully successful.

The establishment of the Social Referral Centre (PRS) in some Parliamentary constituencies is deemed a noble effort towards “zero social problems” especially its role as an early intervention centre, counseling and advisory centre and a bridge between the people and the authority. In fact, NSP is able to function effectively if further importance is given to community prosperity programs such as joint activities, instilling the togetherness spirit as can be observed in the *gotong-royong* and Rukun Tetangga Programs. Programs such as these require a new outlook that is able to attract teenagers as what has been done in the Rakan Muda Project. A Master Plan is essential, in order and a disciplined implementation with an ongoing observation to ensure that the community is aware of its importance.

It is also not contradictory to the values in Islam as the teachings of Islam ensure that all aspects of life are based on organisational and discipline with clear rules and regulation but it will only become effective and meaningful if one abides by it.

This shows that organizational management and discipline is the basic teachings of Islam. The formation of an advance culture in line with the dignity of the race and religion is seen to be able to produce a new Malaysian culture to master, be capable and competent in all fields ventured, and upheld by strong noble values. This is the key to enable the community of this country to become successful in the future, a community balanced in all social development areas.

This kind of social development also benefits the economic sector as value reformation with new skills, new approaches and modified values will make an individual more dynamic, a community that competes in a healthy manner and is able to build confidence and credibility. This clearly shows that social development has a reciprocal relationship with economic development and the equilibrium between the two is capable of realizing the development of a successful community. At the same time, the failure of development in this element will have implications on other sectors and an overall well-being will be hard to realize. Other than personal initiative or determination, work ethics is also deemed as the key to the success of an organization. This includes hardworking, discipline and responsible. In any event, value transformation is crucial in the process of change and adaptation. The performance of a community is also related to the value system that shapes the basis to their culture as stressed by NSP.

Besides, the joint network between various parties including governmental, non-governmental organizations, political parties that have their own think-tank groups (research team) may be improved and integrated to form one complete network. The effectiveness of the NSP can be further enhanced if administrative duties are distributed to smaller agencies so that these joint efforts are collective and effective in nature. Further, distribution to private organizations will ensure that this policy plays a very big role in transforming the community toward a successful life. The NSP needs to be traded, marketed and should have a marketing strategy. It can be done by introducing the “management method” with the present managers who are responsible for their agencies in business form, especially on the support and services systems.

The NSP should form a bridge between the government and the community to ensure that this policy may be absorbed through activities of various organizations. For example,

the Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah (YADIM) having activities in mosques can take part in introducing the social policy to its congregation. Problems may arise in disseminating it among non-Malays due to the lack of such activities. This is the same with clubs among the non-Malays which still relies on the old clubs, not only on its establishment but also on its activities. This distorts the unity and increases the involvement of the community in immoral activities. NSP intervention may or will help in reducing social problems among the non-Malays if cooperation exists between the government and these clubs.

The National Family Policy, which will be launched under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, is also hoped to assist in reducing social problems. This will bring positive effects as the source of social problems generally begins at home. In fact, interaction between the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, with the Ministry of Education will enable the existence of a relationship with activities in schools, through the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). Traditionally, the PTA only acts to discuss on school problems. The PTA may generate a relationship between the government, school and parents and be responsible for over almost 3,000 students in each school. There are the community leaders in schools and which are capable of forming unity for the future of the races, religion and the nation. Issues that have gained attention before need to be revised so that spiritual values may be instilled among the community to change the community's aims in this country.

The role of another government agency under Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development is the Malaysia's Social Welfare Department (JKMM), which has a significant role in the realization of NSP. The inception and performance of a voluntary group such as the Briged Kebajikan Perdana (BKP), Jawatankuasa Kebajikan Kanak-Kanak Daerah (JKKD), Pasukan Pelindungan Kanak-Kanak (PPKK) and others may play important roles at the grassroot level to identify and plan programmes on an ad hoc or long-term basis to the target group. All these parties should be instilled with a voluntary spirit and a willingness to sacrifice a little bit of their time and energy to do good deeds to the community and country. This is because; there are voluntary bodies that conduct a particular activity for their personal gain. For example, visits by members of the community to far away places, programmes that do not involve the target group and others can be reduced and to give more attention to teenagers who will be the pillars of the nation.

Institutions under the JKMM who are directly involved in providing shelter and care services (for cases of neglected children, old people and the like) and shelter and rehabilitation (for criminal, sexual abuse cases, disable and others) needs to play a very sincere and committed role. This is to ensure that cases given shelter and rehabilitation will return to the community with high hopes, ambitions and aspirations. The Child Act 2001, which is implemented from August 1, 2002 is actually an important legislation towards child safety, dignity and self-identity. This Act considers the role of the community especially parents in the upbringing and development of children. This is due to factors identified by JKMM as parental or those caregivers which seem to cause neglect of children and those in their care. A child is not only an important part of a community, but is also the key to life, development and prosperity of a community. A child due to physical, mental and emotional problems needs protection, care, special help and others. Therefore, it is hoped that this Act will be able to protect children against neglect and abuse.

Basically, all government institutions responsible to provide welfare services whether through institutions or externally, should be based on the approach of social work, group work and community work. Social work principles should be up-held by every individual who wishes to be involved in assisting other people on a long-term basis. It is hoped that the NSP will give due emphasis to aspects mentioned earlier, so that the NSP objectives may be achieved and realized. The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development most certainly, needs the support from all Ministries towards achieving the aims as outlined. NSP will only be successful if :

- i. NSP can be implemented well so that its mechanism may become the practice icon of the parties involved.
- ii. Be directly involved in the implementation of the policy so that it will be effective and fruitful.
- iii. It should be used fully in activities at a lower level involving families, communities as well as individuals.
- iv. Community Service Centres should be made as a base for their activities.
- v. Conduct dialogues in bringing about goodness especially in meetings or gatherings and activities so that it will always be updated for the betterment of the community in the future.

Conclusion

NSP is important as it guarantees the community without being prejudicial towards ethnic and religion for a better living. It ensures that basic needs are met; continuous upgrading of spiritual values; enhances the social system whether it is support based or service base and generates synergy of the various sectors. Its strategy is clear. Its agenda is overall. Values that have been implemented and mentioned above are capable of restraining the community from falling into social problems and at the same time upgrading the community status towards excellence, a community that is strong, united, harmonious and caring, progressive and advanced, a first class community. If NSP is continuously enhanced and its agenda strengthened, hence, efforts in realising Vision 2020 and attempts towards a community that is confident, pivoted by strong moral values and ethics, considerate, well mannered, progressive, just and competitive, dynamic and possess ingenuity shall but surely manifest and metamorphosize the existing Malaysian community into a first class society.

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