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Determinants Of Food Banks' Sustainability: The Case Of Kuala Lumpur

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Abstract

Food Banks, be it private centres, government agencies, or independent groups, are essential in the effort to enhance food security in Malaysia. In recent economic instability, more and more Malaysian citizens were forced into poverty. Natural disasters and emergencies also sometimes force people to desperately gain access to food supply. Both of these conditions warrant the establishments of food banks in effort to provide aid to these people. Nevertheless, the concept of food bank is quite new in Malaysia, and not many people really aware about the concepts and operations of food banks. Whereas, in European countries, the concepts and operations of food banks is common, and continously improvised to increase its efficiency and effetiveness. Therefore, this research intent to discover the definition of food banks, especially from the perspective of food banks operators themselves. In addition, the researcher hopes to conduct sustainability analysis (by qualitative approach) on the food banks current operations, as well as proposing recommendations to improve aspects of food bank's practices in the future. Said intentions will be achieved by completing these research objectives; (i) to define the sustainability of Malaysia's food banks, (ii) to explore the benefits and challenges of Malaysia's food banks, (iii) to explore future opportunities and recommendations to improve Malaysia's food banks management and operations, and (iv) to propose a model of Determinants of Malaysia's Food Bank Sustainability. The derived information will provide a glimpse of the future for food bank initiatives, thus determining its sustainability and its way forward in navigating through today's numerous issues and challenges.

1 Introduction

The demand for food, which is a basic human requirement, is now a global concern as the world's population rises. The development of technology, research, and development have made it possible for economies all over the world to produce enough food to meet demand. Nevertheless, there is still a global food crisis, particularly issue regarding food insecurity. The number of people going hungry and suffering from food insecurity had been gradually rising between 2014 and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis has pushed those rising rates even higher and has also exacerbated all forms of malnutrition, particularly in children. The war in Ukraine is further disrupting global food supply chains and creating the biggest global food crisis.

The rising problem of food insecurity is not unique to Malaysia. Malaysia scored modestly for hunger (Global Hunger Index, 2020), with a small increase in the hunger index from 10.9 in 2014 to 12.5 in 2022, which is probably indicative of an increase in food insecurity brought on by the pandemic. This has come to the pledge of Sustainable Development Goal 2 about creating a world free of hunger by 2030 (United Nation, 2015).

Nevertheless, Malaysia is also dealing with high food wastage. According to Chien Bong et al. (2017), the average Malaysian family produces between 0.5kg and 0.8kg of food waste every day. 63.1 percent of all solid waste components are made up of food waste (Karim Ghani et al. (2013). This has come to the development of Sustainable Development Goal 12, which is Responsible Consumption and Production, that hope to hold a commitment to halve food waste at the retail and consumer level and to reduce food loss across supply chains. Hence, one of the strategies to implement food redistribution activities is whereby surplus food to be channelled to food banks.

1.1 Food Banks in Malaysia

Food banks can be seen as a good initiative in reducing food waste and, at the same time, also helping those in need. In Malaysia, The Ministry of Domestic Trade and Cost of Living (KPDN) has introduced the Food Bank Malaysia (PFBM) program as part of its 'Initiatif Peduli Rakyat' initiative to assist the less fortunate obtain food, thereby indirectly reducing the cost of living (Ministry of Domestic Trade and Cost of Living, 2022). The program's objective is to collect surplus food that is still consumable from supermarkets, manufacturers, food entrepreneurs, hotels, and corporations in order to preserve it. The collected food will be distributed to designated target groups, including poor and disabled families, welfare homes, food aid centres, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and disadvantaged university students.

Besides that, there are several food banks that operates as a Non-Government Organization (NGO). For instance, Yayasan Food Bank Malaysia (YFBM) is non-profit and non-government organization (NGO) that was established on 7 January 2019 and registered under the Legal Affairs Division of the Prime Minister Department under the Act of Trustee (Incorporation) 1952 [Act 258]. Over 2 million households in Malaysia have benefited from the approximately 3,266 metric tonnes of leftover food that Yayasan Food Bank Malaysia has saved and distributed since its founding in 2019. (Yayasan Food Bank Malaysia, 2022). Plus, various food assistance programs are also available in Malaysia to help the poor and people in need. Food assistance programs are delivered through formal and informal channels by the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or personal donations. These programs are almost similar to food bank in terms of objectives, but they are run on a smaller scale. For example, "soup kitchen" is a place or organization that provides free meals, often in the form of hot soup and other simple dishes, to individuals who are in need, particularly those experiencing homelessness or food insecurity. Some of the examples are Kechara Soup Kitchen, PERTIWI Soup Kitchen, and Pit Stop Community Café.

Some soup kitchen operators in Malaysia are concerned about their ability to continue feeding the poor and underprivileged at a time when donations from the public have slowed down as they too struggle with growing costs because of Malaysia's rising inflation (Palansamy, 2022). This may lead to operational disruption in preparing food for those in need as same amount as before. Yet, at some rubbish bins/landfills in some impoverished nations, it is really depressing to observe how edible meals are thrown away while young, healthy-looking children are scurrying to get a bigger piece of it to satisfy their empty stomach (Jereme, 2017). Additionally, studies about food bank programs and management in Malaysia are still limited. Previous studies mainly focused on the food retailers' motivation to donate surplus food (Saidatul Akma et al., 2021) and food banks as effective food waste management strategies (Lim et al., 2016).

1.2   About the Research

The study may contribute to the body of knowledge about food bank operation and management in Malaysia. It may provide an addition to the existing literature specifically topic of food bank sustainability. Besides looking from an academic perspective, the food bank initiative benefits those who are from lower socioeconomic status and poor groups in coping with the rising costs of living as well as to reduce food wastage in Malaysia in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger and Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production. By understanding the current food bank operation and management in Malaysia, it may become a guide for the government and relevant stakeholders in taking proactive actions for future improvement. Additionally, this study aims to propose a Model of Food Bank Sustainability that may become a guideline for existing or new food bank organizations to manage and operate a sustainable food bank. In a nutshell, the main aspects to be addressed by this research are:

(i) The definitions, types of food bank, and sustainability concept of food banks.

(ii) The benefits and challenges of experienced by Malaysia's food banks.

(iii) The opportunities and recommendations to improve Malaysia's food banks management and operations.

2 Literature Review

An 'independent food establishment' is defined as a restaurant owned by an individual or a private group where the restaurant's concept, menu, and experience are unique, and not a part of a chain or franchise restaurant operation. The characteristics of the independent restaurant are owned by one or more owners where they usually directly involved in the daily restaurant operation. This type of restaurant often faced so many obstacles in surviving in the market due to stiff competition, limited resources, and consumer dynamic, as well as market saturation. Due to COVID-19, some industries of the economy suffer greatly, such as transport, hospitality, and food and beverages (Siddiquei & Khan, 2020). These industries, however, are sensitive when it comes to natural hazards such as the COVID-19 pandemic and any economic downturns arising from it. The study found that in many nations, sit-in guests dropped to zero as governments around the globe implemented social distancing practices, limits on movement, and lockdowns. As of September 2020, United States of America (USA) announced a loss of $185 billion in sales revenue, and had predicted loss of over $240 billion by 2020. In addition, 10 percent of restaurants have either permanent or long-term shutdowns, some 3 million restaurant staff are unemployed, and 40 percent of restaurants in operation plan not to survive without relief packages, which are likely to lead to more closures of the restaurant (Shigihara, 2020). Shihigara also stated that large corporations (such as chain restaurants) are more capable than a small local, independent restaurant of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and COVID-19 mitigation acts. Independent restaurants, in particular, are poorly suited to afford or meet social-distance guidelines, to attract and maintain staff, and to continue to survive on long-term, unusual and inconsistent patronage.

COVID-19 impacts where and how individuals shop, and could well affect what individuals purchase and eat. For order-in or sit-down service, restaurants are almost uniformly closed, and those that remain open do so with shortened hours, a restricted menu option, and drive-thru/curb side pick-up options (Cranfield, 2020). In addition, the spread of coronavirus has significantly increase online consumption. Customers began to favour online ordering and food delivery services such as Food Panda and GrabFood, in effort to avoid social contact. Consumers prefer online food ordering via mobile apps, with delivery to their doors directly. This way, COVID-19 had actually created a major shift in the consumption behaviour of consumers (Ali et al, 2020). Madeira, Palrao & Mendes (2020) stated that restaurants were forced to either close or operate with many limitations, and in Portugal, only takeaway and delivery services were allowed. Most of the restaurants especially independent restaurants started to adapt and using takeaway

and delivery services to sustain their business under this current situation. However, after the slowdown number of COVID-19 cases, all the restaurants were allowed to operate like usual, only to comply with many Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs). For example, (i) to apply social distancing when queuing, dining, and using public facilities, (ii) using hand sanitizer frequently, (iii) wearing face mask in public places, (iv) registering body temperature before entering any premises, and (v) to declare any health condition which are risky.

2.1 Food Security, or Insecurity?

A study done by Prayogo et al. (2017) shows that food bank users were among homeless, single men without children, currently unemployed, and from an average income. Additionally, a greater proportion of food bank users experienced adverse life events, financial strain, and food insecurity. Meanwhile, study by Thompson, Smith, and Cummins (2018) found that the health and wellbeing challenges were encountered by those experiencing food insecurity both directly or indirectly. Similarly, Garthwaite, Collins, and Bambra (2015) also discovered that most of the food bank users were very low incomes coming from welfare benefits or insecure, poorly paid employment. However, food banks were also facing challenges including an increase in the number of clients, insufficient food donations, and insufficiently trained personnel to provide counselling and education to clients (Bazerghi, McKay, and Dunn, 2016).

Several studies suggested food banks as a potential to curb food wastage problems in Malaysia. Jereme et al. (2017) proposed households, restaurant owners and hotel food outlets to donate their edible food wastes to food banks, but the food banks should be established in residential and strategic areas for easy access for those who want to donate edible food. Besides that, the policymaker in Malaysia may also consider implementing the French approach by prohibiting supermarkets from discarding or destroying unsold food, which should instead be donated to charities and food banks (Ghafar, 2020).

3 Methodology

To address the research questions for the proposed study, qualitative research will be used by utilizing the interview approach. Due to the limited studies about food banks have been conducted from Malaysia context, the study is considered exploratory. Data collection will be conducted in a cross-sectional, non-contrived setting. The extent of interference by the researcher is expected to be minimal. The study will be focusing on gathering data from food banks located within Kuala Lumpur. Prior to the interview, the researcher will set an appointment with the potential respondent's agreement and time. Preferably the potential respondents are either the owner or representative from the management team of the food bank organization. The researcher plan to use personal interview approach by using semi-structured interview questions. During the

interview session, a list of interview questions as well as several probing questions will be utilized.

3.1   Population, Sampling and Unit of Analysis

The study will be conducted among the representatives of food bank or kitchen soup located in Kuala Lumpur area. The total number of registered food bank or soup kitchen organizations will be obtained from the Yayasan Food Bank Malaysia. The chosen respondents should be an organization that has operated continuously and actively year-round and meets the criteria of a sustainable organization. For this study, the screening criteria for the potential respondents will consists of certain criteria which includes; (1) cooperative, (2) language proficiency in Malay and/or English Language. The unit of analysis for this study will be the food bank organization, represented by the manager, founder, owner and/or assigned representative of the organization.

3.2   Instrumentation

There will be three instruments which will be used for this study; (i) audio recording apparatus, such as voice recorder or mobile phone with audio recording apps, (ii) list of interview question, and (iii) interview protocol. The List of Interview Questions will consist of two sections; Section A will focus on demographic questions, while Section B comprised of questions on food banks' sustainability. All of the questions in Section A and Section B are displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: List of Interview Questions

Section A: Demographic		
A1	What is your position in the food bank organization?	
A2	When was the food bank established?	
A3	Who are the main recipients of the food bank?	
A4	Who are the main contributors of the food bank?	
Section B: Food Bank Sustainability		
RO1	B1	What is the definition of food bank?
	B2	How would you define the concept of sustainability in food bank operation and management?
	B3	What types of food bank model being used?
	B4	What are the criteria that helps food bank to maintain sustainable?
RO2	B5	What are the benefits of food bank?
	B6	What are the challenges of food bank?
RO3	B7	What are the opportunities to improve Malaysia's food banks management and operations?
	B8	What are the recommendations to improve Malaysia's food banks management and operations?
RO4	Proposed Model of Food Bank Sustainability	

An interview protocol was designed to aid the researcher in data collection. It serves as a structured set of guidelines or procedures that interviewers follow when conducting interviews with individuals or groups. This is done to ensure consistency and

standardization in the interviewing process, making it easier to gather relevant information, and to compare responses across different participants. The interview protocol is also created in ensuring the interview process stay within its course. Table 2 below demonstrate the interview protocol which will be used for this research.

Table 2: Interview Protocol

No.	Category	Item
1	Setting the appointment	Call the respondent. Introduce yourself, your affiliation, your intention. Wait for response. Upon agreement, negotiate date, time, and place for interview. Thank the respondent for willingness to cooperate.
2	Reminder	E-mail/WhatsApp/text message/call the respondent reminding of interview appointment 3 days before actual interview date.
3	Interview day	Arrive 10 minutes early to location. Check all equipment, tools, instruments for interview. Call respondents on time of interview. Proceed to interview location.
	Upon meeting	1) Greet and introduce yourself, control body language 2) Show approval letter from the university. 3) Get permission to start conduct the interview and to record the session.
4	Introductory statement	*Assalamualaikum w.b.t. Saya* (name) *pelajar PhD daripada* (place). *Pada hari ini* (day, date, time) *kita bertemu di* (place) *untuk sesi temubual seperti yang dijanjikan. Untuk makluman tuan/puan* (name)*, sesi temubual kita pada hari ini akan dirakamkan melalui perakam audio dan penganbilan nota sampingan. Walaubagaimanapun, semua maklumat yang dikumpul adalah sulit dan dirahsiakan, dan akan digunakan hanya untuk tujuan akademik semata-mata.*
5	Deliver consent letter	*Ini adalah surat mengumpul data, ditandatangan oleh saya* (name) *dan penyelia saya* (name). Hand over consent letter to respondent.
6	Deliver list of interview question.	*Ini adalah senarai soalan yang akan ditanya semasa temubual.* *Tuan/puan* (name) *boleh ambil masa untuk melihat senarai soalan ini dahulu.* Hand over list of question to respondent. Give respondent 1 to 2 minutes to inspect the document.
7	Start recording audio.	*Baik, boleh saya mula merakam?* (wait for approval). Start recording audio.
8	Start the interview. (To be used with List of Questions for Interview)	Start the interview. Ask all questions. Allow ample time to respondent to answer each question. Use prompt/probe questions when needed. Announce *'baiklah, kita ke soalan yang seterusnya…'* before proceeding to next question.
9	Observation	During interview, observe body gesture and facial expression for non-verbal clues. Take notes where appropriate.
10	End the interview.	Baiklah, terima kasih kepada tuan/puan (name) kerana sudi meluangkan masa untuk sesi temubual ini. Saya amat menghargai masa yang telah

		tuan/puan luangkan untuk berkongsi informasi ini, dan saya mewakili pihak universiti mengucapkan ribuan terima kasih.
11	Verification of transcripts	*Pihak kami akan menghantar transkrip temubual untuk tuan/puan* (name) *periksa. Seandainya berpuas hati dan bersetuju dengan kandungan transkrip, tuan/puan boleh menghantar semula transkrip yang telah ditandatangani kepada saya.* Exchange e-mail information.
12	End of interview protocol.	

3.3   Plan for Data Analysis

Firstly, the audio data will be transformed into transcript form. Next, the transcripts will be verified by the respondents to ensure the reliability and validity of the content. The verified transcripts will be entered into CAQDAS (Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software), preferably ATLAS.ti software. Population of food bank operators will be derived from Yayasan Food Bank Malaysia, whom will be filtered by a couple of screening questions. Thematic analysis will be used, enlisting available codes and themes, which will be presented into networks for better presentation of the findings. The findings of this study will be incorporated into the development of the Model of Food Bank Sustainability.

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