

Youth Unemployment Alleviation via Social Entrepreneurial Ventures in Creative Fashion Industry: A Conceptual Paper

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ABSTRACT

Poverty issues may not be the major agenda to tackle in Brunei Darussalam however, the unemployment rate among youths in the sultanate has been on the rise particularly, in comparison to the other ASEAN regions. Literature agrees that one of the causes of poverty is due to the people being unemployed in the labour market. As a result, venturing into the entrepreneurial activities rather than over relying on the government jobs has become the most highlighted recommendation to alleviate unemployment and thus, poverty. Amidst the decline in oil prices, the sector which has fuelled the country's economy for the past 85 years, Brunei has therefore been forced to put diversification into strategies. The creative fashion industry is said to bring a bright prospect thus, the purpose of this study is to conceptualise on the youth unemployment alleviation via the social entrepreneurial ventures in the creative fashion industry. This effort will initially require the participation of the unemployed living in Brunei Muara and if necessary, the research will also need the other stakeholders to be involved especially, the government agencies, to ensure in the gaining of a broader perspective.

Keywords: *poverty, unemployment, diversification, social entrepreneurial ventures, creative fashion industry*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The poverty issues in particular, may not be covered in the current 9th National Development Plan (2007-2012) of Brunei Darussalam, that is also formulated in line with the objectives of "Wawasan Brunei 2035", or "Brunei Vision 2035", in an effort to stimulate the country's economic growth. In a brief elaboration, Brunei Vision 2035 aims to turn Brunei Darussalam into a nation that is widely recognised for these three important remarks:

- the accomplishments of its well-educated and highly-skilled people as measured by the highest international standard;

- quality of life that is among the top 10 nations in the world; and
- dynamic and sustainable economy with income per capita within the top countries in the world.

(Source: Website of Brunei Embassy)

However, despite the emphasis to improve the standard of living of the people to further advance the quality and good image of the sultanate, Thelwell (2017) has claimed that while there is no reported poverty line in Brunei Darussalam, it does not simply translate that poverty in the country is not non-existent because the concern lies in the

very small level of poverty that to this date, still remains unsolved.

In response to that, while there are various reasons as to why poverty exists such that for instance, in a recent study by Mod Nor et al. (2020), it was concluded that poverty also equals to the single parent households as they are the sole breadwinner for the family upon a divorce or the passing of their spouses (Isahak et al. 2009) and that, they will need to solely support their children, leading to the financial hardships (Md Nor et al., 2019; Cook & Natalier, 2014). The major highlight that can be grasped is that, by not having a sustainable income, one may be living in a poverty and following that, Hooghe et al. (2010) have recommended for the future research to take the role of unemployment more strongly into consideration. Indeed, Singh (2018) has argued that unemployment is also considered as the main reason for poverty and the statement is further supported by Azalahu et al. (2013) as they have stressed that unemployment causes poverty to the extent that it reduces the nation's socio-economic processes because these unemployed people may endanger lives and properties in the society and raise the cost of governance.

The situation is no different to Brunei Darussalam because unfortunately, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) 2019 country report, Brunei has the highest youth unemployment rate among the ASEAN nations and this raises some troubling questions with regards to the economic health of the country and its dependence on the oil and gas sector (Khan, 2020) - the youths aged from 15 to 24 years old which constitute 28.4% among the unemployed in total (Bakar, 2019). In general, it is unfortunate that the unemployment rate in the sultanate has increased from 8.86% in 2019 to 9.12% in 2020 (Plecher, 2020).

One reason as to why the unemployment rate among youths is increasing is due to the fact that these people have the mind-set of relying more on the

government jobs and because of this exaggerate reliance, it has created a culture of risk aversion towards the employability among them (Khan, 2020; Singh, 2018). It is not even surprising because in a study by Low et al. (2013), it was found that only 19% of the young Bruneians have the mind-set of wanting to become entrepreneurs whereas 67% of them prefer to work as the government employees. Yet, be it as it may, the minister at the Prime Minister's Office and Minister of Finance and Economy II, still urges for the locals to venture into the entrepreneurship programmes and make use of the existing platforms including programmes carried out by DARE and LiveWIRE Brunei (Mahmud, 2020).

With that encouragement, the locals especially the youths, may tap into the creative fashion industry to be the entrepreneurs working in the field not only because the government has made it a priority to diversity the industry amidst the recent decline in oil prices (Thelwell, 2017) but also because, the creative fashion industry can help to fight poverty as the United Nations also believes that the particular industry will lead the emergence of so many of the developing economies (McIlwaine, 2012). Moreover, the creative fashion industry in the country is said to be slowly but steadily on the rise in the nation (BruDirect, 2019) making the opportunities to be huge.

Thus, the objective of this research is to conceptualise on the youth unemployment alleviation via the social entrepreneurial ventures in the creative fashion industry.

Therefore the research questions would be:

1. Are the unemployed youths willing to endeavour into the creative fashion entrepreneurship and stop relying on the government jobs?
2. Can the creative fashion industry help to solve the unemployment issues leading to poverty?

This effort will be tedious and time consuming as the data collection by means of interviews will not only involve the unemployed youths in Brunei Darussalam but if necessary, other local stakeholders as well (governments, non-governments and local society) within a one-year period of time, at the very least.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Poverty as a Result of Unemployment

Today, unemployment and poverty constitute major challenges facing mankind across the globe and the issue is non-exceptional for both the developing nations such as Africa (Olotu et al., 2015) as well as the most developed societies like Western Europe and America (Ageyba, 2015). Olotu et al. (2015) have described unemployment as a situation of no job for employable people in the economy and that, unemployment and poverty are considered as a complex phenomenon and they should be examined not only by the individual regions of a country, but also by the individual existing conditions (Olotu et al., 2015; Sileika & Bekeryte, 2013).

According to the United Nations publications (Borode, 2011, p.149), over one billion people in the world, especially in the developing nations, have lived in unacceptable conditions of poverty. The most tragic is the fact that youths within the age bracket of 14 to 50 year old are the worst hit (Ajaegbu, 2012). In a study by Olotu et al. (2015), it was concluded that unemployment leads to poverty and they both constitute threats to the national economy. This has been further supported by Sileika & Bekeryte (2013) as they found that in the evaluation of the concepts encountered in the relationship between unemployment and poverty problems, it can be summarised that the higher unemployment rate means that there

are more unemployed people who may find themselves below the poverty line.

Similarly, Wahyuningsih et al. (2020) and Cahayani (2017) have recently conducted a study in Indonesia and it was concluded that the unemployment rate in the country is high and this certainly translates to the fact that, the higher the unemployment rate means the higher the poverty rate as the unemployed individuals have only nil income. Moreover, Addabo et al. (2011) also added that the higher unemployment rate in both Italy and Spain is also contributing to the higher poverty rate. Therefore, it can be understood that there is a positive relationship between unemployment and poverty as this particular issue can be found in several countries as well.

As a consequence, the effects of unemployment and poverty have multi-variance consequences on youths, economic, social and political developments of a nation leading to youth restiveness and personal society and national insecurity (Efe, 2014). As highlighted by Anho (2013) and Nwaosa et al. (2013), some of the effects include;

- Social unrest;
- Threat to life (individual and national);
- Economic wastage and acute reduction in the nation's Gross Domestic Products (GDP) and Personal/National Income;
- Lack of foreign investment in a country or in particular region; and
- Committal of other crimes.

Hence, in order to solve the poverty issue as a result of the unemployment, Olotu et al. (2015, p.1) have suggested that "entrepreneurship should be encouraged as this will also reduce unemployment and contribute to a sustainable economic development". Thurik et al. (2008),

Oladunjoye et al. (2011) and Chidiebere et al. (2014) have also shared the same view.

Entrepreneurial Ventures over Reliance on Government Jobs

Young people who are involved in the entrepreneurial activities play an important socio-economic role and according to Lez'er et al. (2019, p.1), "the younger generation contributes to the rapid development of small and medium-sized businesses, formation of a sustainable middle class, creation of new jobs and reduction of unemployment, which has a beneficial effect on the economy of the state as a whole". Oseifuah (2010, p.167) defines youth entrepreneurship as "young people from 15 to 35 years old who recognise an opportunity to create value or wealth in an existing or new enterprise, irrespective of the sector". Consequently, youth entrepreneurship should become one of the priority directions of youth policy as these entrepreneurs offer a viable and proven pathway to the economic growth and both the personal and societal fulfilment (Lez'er et al., 2019; Geldhof et al., 2014; Green, 2013). This has been further supported by Katongole et al. (2014) and Langevang et al. (2012) as they claimed that youth entrepreneurship is a promising field for unemployment and poverty alleviation thus, its promotion can be a way to solve the youth unemployment crisis especially for the majority of people in the developing world.

However today, there is a decrease in the interest of young people to participate in the entrepreneurial activities or simply, the number of individuals engaged in the entrepreneurial behaviours still remains low (Lez'er et al., 2019; Geldhof et al., 2013). The major reason can be because these unemployed youths are over relying on the government jobs and this notion has also been revealed in the existing literature. For instance, Ramady (2013) has reported that citizens are often bias towards the government jobs which are perceived to be offering better salaries and job security and as a consequence, it results in the unemployment especially among youths

despite that in actually, there is a net increase in the jobs offered in the private sectors. It is unfortunate that these citizens choose to rather stay unemployed until they finally obtain the government jobs (Forstenlechner, 2010).

Furthermore, adding to what has been described by Ramady (2013) and Forstenlechner (2010), Fearnal (2015) has argued that the governments must create space for the youths and Dike (2009) further agrees on the idea that the governments should provide employment for the horde of the unemployed youths, making the youths to be dependent on the governments when it comes to joining the labour market. Yet, the emphasis that it is actually the governments that are required to provide jobs instead of the youths engaging in entrepreneurship is objected by Salami (2013) as the author believes that the governments only need to focus on galvanising a culture where the youths think of job creation away from the mindset of job seekers and that, the youths "must have a high level of creativity and innovation and the ability to think about the future" (p.26).

Accordingly, youths may have the desire to venture into entrepreneurship and hence, stay in business should they have the aspirations (Afutu-Kotey et al., 2017) as well as attitude, acceptance and knowledge on the field (Abdullah & Sulaiman, 2013) - and this is where the government mentoring support is to be put in place (Cahayani, 2017). To be precise, in a bid to increase the number of potential entrepreneurs, the governments should provide intensive and comprehensive entrepreneurship training that can help the youths to build skills and knowledge to start businesses, together with the capacity to spot opportunities, and reduce fear of failure, as what Umukoro & Okurame (2017) as well as Holienka et al. (2016) have recommended. In fact, in a study by Beeka & Rimmington (2011), it was found that entrepreneurship can survive in an environment with many constraints and that, young people have seen entrepreneurship as a viable career option for

them, provided that the governments are creating a better enabling environment for the enterprise development. As a result, these entrepreneurs will be creating employment in the economy (via the 'social entrepreneurship activities'), leading to the reduction of unemployment and so, poverty.

Unemployment and Poverty Alleviation

Through Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship has been defined by Zaefarian et al. (2015) as an activity that creates social value in a way that it is empowering the society particularly, it should help to improve the incomes of the people by creating employment opportunities along with also, putting innovativeness into practice to achieve better outcomes and solve insoluble problems – unemployment issues can be one of the problems to be addressed in this context. According to Najafizada & Cohen (2017), the most capable social entrepreneurs tend to be young and diligent and in addition to that, they also have the role and potential to improve the living conditions of a country.

In particular, in a study conducted by Dobeles (2012), it has been indicated that the solution to the increasing unemployment rate and poverty is less likely to come from the governments, market as well as non-governmental organisations but rather, it should be coming from the development of social entrepreneurship. However, Carraher et al. (2016) do not share the similar view as they have argued that the social entrepreneurship cannot completely cure the mass unemployment problems but still, the authors cannot deny that the social entrepreneurship is indeed capable to lessen the unemployment issues. Accordingly, a vast body of literature has acknowledged social entrepreneurship as an important tool to alleviate both the unemployment and poverty rates (Akhmetshin, 2018; Najafizada and Cohen, 2017; Yiu et al., 2014; Ogbojafor et al., 2011). For that reason, Tanchangya (2020) and Lateh et al. (2018) further added that this

correlation can be done through the creation of ventures which supposedly create various job opportunities and a consequence, it will reduce unemployment issues that are causing poverty.

In view of that, it is undeniable that the emergence of an entrepreneurial economy has gained critical importance in almost all sectors, including the fashion industry that certainly requires the innovation aspect (Unay & Zehir, 2012). To be precise, the social entrepreneurs are playing a role in the fashion industry in a sense that they are supporting the apparel manufacturing sector by also making use of the available resources to meet the taste of the local consumption of the domestically produced clothing (Lewis & Pringle, 2015). Unay and Zehir (2012) have stressed that entrepreneurship that applies the creative edge will be able to improve the business performance hence, it leads to a competitive advantage. Creative fashion businesses in return, have a great economic and social impact in their home states and across the world.

Through Creative Fashion Industry

According to Anasuyah and Anasuyah (2015), the fashion industry is a sub-sector of both the creative industries as well as the clothing and textiles industries and undeniably, the industry provides opportunities for innovation and creativity in the manufacturing, textiles and apparel accessories. In addition to that, the industry is also referred to as the informal sector and it has been perceived as the main solution to combat the unemployment issues leading to poverty and this has been proven in the case of Indonesia (Wahyuningsih, 2020). In their qualitative study, Hermanson et al. (2018) have claimed that the fashion industry is an interesting setting to be explored more on the topic. Brydges & Hrac (2019) further added that, as the industry continues to evolve in the wake of the global integration, digital transition and intensifying competition, it actually implies for the need of an on-going research on the area. Hence, this industry is said to be of important to be dug deeper into,

especially in trying to solve the unemployment issues, if possible.

As suggested by Hermanson et al. (2018), individuals may be able to quickly build their entrepreneurial ventures within the industry due to the easy accessibility of available unique resources. Brydges & Hrac (2019) and Todeschini et al. (2017) demonstrated that many entrepreneurs cum designers opt to build and run small local businesses that are environmentally sustainable to reduce its environmental impacts. This can be an area of interest in fashion for the unemployed to start with as the initial strategy. In addition, this resource-industry abound opportunities to innovative business models (Todeschini et al., 2017). Accordingly, the innovation aspect of entrepreneurship has gained a critical importance in the fashion industry and Unay & Zehir (2012) argued that the fashion field requires a high level of innovativeness and entrepreneurship to produce high performing firms to be able to gain a competitive advantage. Thus, creativity and innovation on both products and processes pose an important role on the entrepreneurial success especially in the fashion industry (Kabukcu, 2015). Thus, as another strategy to set up a creative fashion business, the unemployed should be taking note on both creativity and innovative aspects for the manufacturing and service operations before venturing into the industry to avoid unforeseen circumstances that may harm their careers (Lee & Hung 2014; Adom & Williams 2012).

As a consequence of having to have more entrepreneurs to join the labour market in the creative fashion industry, according to Amankwah et al. (2014, pp.144) "a vibrant fashion industry has the propensity of accommodating a huge workforce, employing everyone from design, illustration, graphic communication, marketing logistics, media, and consultancy among others". All of these related areas play a major role to bring the fashion products to the doorsteps of the final consumers and that, the industry is actually having the capacity to absorb and reduce a

number of the unemployed with the creation of numerous employment avenues along the value chain, via the social entrepreneurship activities. This has been supported by the claim that a burgeoning creative economy contributes significantly towards counteracting the high levels of unemployment especially when the people are aware of the advantages of the growth in the global market within the creative economy (Xabana, 2016). In fact, a study by Raihan (2010) in Bangladesh concluded that the fashion industry particularly, the handloom industry, has been seen as a bright prospect and this industry can help to reduce poverty by providing employment to a substantial part of the (rural) people as the industry is having a high demand for both the domestic and foreign markets. The same view has been shared by Wahyuningsih (2020) as it was highlighted that venturing into the informal sector simply means producing goods and services that are ready to be sold where jobs can be created in line with setting up of the enterprises and hence, lowering down the unemployment rate is certainly possible. As a result, it can be emphasised that the creative fashion industry with the social entrepreneurs working on it, is able to alleviate unemployment and thus, poverty.

3.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Unemployment has been seen to be one of the causes of poverty and that, according to the literature, the unemployed should not just rely on the government jobs but instead, they need to think further ahead - they need to venture into the entrepreneurial fields (social entrepreneurship in particular) to gain a sustainable income and thus, help the society to further improve the standard of living of a country. For this paper, one particular industry that is suggested to be the focus of social entrepreneurship is the creative fashion industry. For that reason, the potential fashion entrepreneurs can start with setting up a business that is environmentally sustainable apart from also, being creative and innovative to improve the business

performance. In view of that, today, there is an undeniably growing interest in the managerial and policy implications of entrepreneurship and innovation and this is rather a natural result for the shift towards a knowledge-based economy in the era of globalisation (Unay & Zehir, 2012). Accordingly, it is unfortunate that the study on the social entrepreneurship in the creative fashion industry to alleviate unemployment is still lacking, particularly for the Bruneian context. Hence, this present study represents an important and original contribution as it appears to be a valuable aid in understanding the social entrepreneurship and its impact on the creative fashion industry to alleviate unemployment and poverty. Following Hermanson et al. (2018) and Brydges & Hracs (2019), this research would embark on the quest towards the encouragement in the creative fashion industry in order to combat the unemployment issues via the social entrepreneurship, starting with interviewing the unemployed living in Brunei Muara – a district where the population is high compared to the three other districts in the sultanate. The research would also be assisted by some government agencies and other relevant stakeholders, if any. Through this research, theories could also be put into practice to evaluate their compatibility in real environment.

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