

# Social Citizenship: Rights, Participation and Responsibilities of Young People

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## Abstract

People often expressed contrasting and ambivalent ideas and feelings about their incorporation in a society; on the one hand, everyone is an equal member of a society; but on the other hand, some members express indifference towards this notion. This research will focus on how Malaysian young people make sense of these seemingly contradictory ideas and practices and how their negotiations and resolutions relate to their social citizenship in Malaysian multi-ethnic society. In order to highlight processes of negotiations and resolutions, this research will look at social, political and civil rights under the banner of social citizenship examining young people's perceptions and experiences of citizenship. These aspects will provide the framework for discussing how various notions including those of rights as citizens are interconnected and embedded with motives that contribute to and constitute political, social and civil rights that lead to democratic rights, participation and responsibility.

**Keywords:** Social citizenship, Rights, Participation, Responsibilities, Sense of belonging

## 1. Introduction

The ideal concept of a united nation is to mobilize people behind a vision of a single nation guided by common values and symbols. It is a big task to help everyone in this nation to fully understand the correct concept of being a citizen. Nation leaders come and go with personal 'tagline' to keep the country in mobile. The economic development of a new nation is based on a framework for the future which spells hope of progress and prosperity (Delanty and Patrick 2002). The amalgamation of a desired Malaysia is the coming together of people with their own uniqueness and assets in forming a multi-ethnic, multi-cultured and multi-lingual country. For the amalgamation to be a success, to get an advantage from the society, members must be prepared to show a spirit of give and take for our nation is designed to serve not only one part of the territory or one section of the community but for all citizens of Malaysia, regardless of race, colour or creed. This is the spirit that will make Malaysian and development within Malaysia a success. It should be a pride that this multi-ethnic nation is able to sustain peace and to live harmoniously, united and with mutual understanding.

These recent years have been crucial for Malaysia in its metamorphosis stage of becoming a fully developed nation in the year 2020. As a developing nation striving towards achieving Vision 2020, there is a need to consolidate a sense of responsibility and sense of direction in accordance with this envisaged scenario. Thus being future leaders, young people of Malaysia stand on a crucial platform in the country's effort to achieve the status of a fully developed country in less than ten years. Malaysia's development plan, known as Vision 2020, aims to develop all aspects of the country including national unity, social cohesion, economy, social justice, political stability, system of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values and national pride and confidence. These aspects that have existed for the past forty years or so benefit well and stand in line with T. H. Marshall's (1950) definitions of the civil, social and political elements of citizenship. He asserted members of the society be given full exercise in their

civil and political rights, enjoy an appropriate standard of living, and utilize fully the civil and political rights they are entitled to as citizens.

## 2. Rights, Participation and Responsibilities of Young People

Dynamic, zests, loud, energetic, reckless, creativity, hip hop and fun, rebellious yet naive befittingly describe young people of the Y generation. Young people in Malaysia between the age group 15 to 34 in Malaysia is approximately 9.75 million and they are around 42.5% of the total population (Doraisamy 2002). More and more young people are now getting much aware of their rights and responsibilities as a citizen of the nation. This has led many to voluntarily participate in events held both by the government and NGOs. Support and encouragement from government bodies such as Ministry of Youth and Sports, Malaysian Young people Council, National Research Center for Young people, departments and agencies, to name a few, have worked zealously to empower young people to participate actively and effectively in the building of multi-racial Malaysia and in communities where they live in. They also hope to increase the participation of young people in Malaysia through trainings, advocacy and exposure programs. Given the right event and situation to the right young people that possess the right attitude can make things work. Thus it is only appropriate to suggest that the stakeholders have created the necessary condition and have provided the opportunity for young people to participate and subsequently execute their rights and responsibilities fair and well.

The government often handles the issues of young people strategically i.e. by framing the participation in a progressive manner in order to convince the community of the government's efforts to promote good governance and to manifest their concern of the well-being of young people. Various bodies and councils are given the responsibilities to see to the needs of young peoples, among others. The National Young people Consultative Council (NYCC), formed in 1972, takes responsibility for young people policy formulation in Malaysia. The Malaysian Young people Council (MYC) is a non-governmental voluntary organization, formed in 1948 plays an active role in monitoring the implementation of the National Young people Policy as well as in the policy formulation process through the NYCC. It is the sole coordinating body for young people and student organizations in Malaysia. These participating organizations are voluntary and self-governing and they support democratic principles.

Society must instill a sense of citizenship in young people and help them realize their role in a democratic society and try to develop the sense of citizenship that is crucial in building an inclusive, participatory democracy. Young people must be made aware that they are a very important portion of the nation's development. Their sense of being and sense of belonging should be developed holistically to prove their worth and to enjoy this part of life to be young, possessing the right purpose, simultaneously building self-efficiency and proficiency. Their exposure to basic policies as a start and their participation in various organizations are initial preparation to be productive and responsible adults. These are achievable if they are given the opportunity to walk hand-in-hand with adults, for example, being active in organisations. Young people today are tomorrow's leaders and they are the ones who will determine the way forward for the nation's progress.

Kim Hak-Su (2002) highlighted that it was in 1996 that the nation took effort to include young people affair in its 7<sup>th</sup> Malaysian Plan. According to the plan, the thrust of young people development would be to provide young people with the necessary skills to increase their participation and contribution to nation-building, as well as to develop their leadership qualities and inculcate positive values among them. The plan aimed to nurture a generation of young people who are educated, skilled, disciplined and imbued with leadership qualities and simultaneously possess high moral values. The role of young people organizations is to be broadened, particularly to promote the spirit of voluntarism among them. Young people organizations are entrusted to mobilize young people to fulfill the objectives of national unity and economic and socio-political stability while concurrently preserving the cultural heritage and maintaining national security.

Several young people development programs have been implemented by the Government and stakeholders during the period of the Seventh Malaysia Plan from 1996 to 2001. Efforts have been made to strengthen the management and implementation capacity of public sector agencies responsible for young people development in order to ensure that programs are effectively implemented. Young people development programs listed under the Seventh Malaysia Plan includes leadership training, skills training, entrepreneurial development, healthy lifestyle programs, sports programs, cultural programs, and preventive and rehabilitative programs Kim Hak-Su (2002). An ongoing healthy lifestyle program is the Rakan Muda (Friends of the young) program that is aimed at providing options for young people to practice a healthy lifestyle and to utilize their free time productively.

Malaysia has ensured that it has upheld the social rights of its members by providing its members an appropriate standard of living according to the provision transcribed by Marshall (1950). This is proven with the programs

provided for by the authorities for young people for the past 30 to 40 years. With all the major provisions set up, it is up to the social groups to foster positive attitude and efforts to being fully incorporated into the larger society. Malaysia has an efficient health care system that extends to all areas of the country. The Government aims to ensure that all individuals attain and maintain a health status that will enable them to pursue a socially and economically productive life. The Government's main health care objective is to continually improve the quality of health care services provided to the general population in both urban and rural areas. The education system has been reformed to ensure the development of a highly educated, highly skilled and strongly motivated professional workforce. The Ministry of Education provides for a varied and comprehensive education that is expected to fulfill Malaysia's needs and promote national unity through cultural, social, economic and political development. Malaysians citizens who are residents in a constituency registration process and who have registered as voters are eligible to vote in an election. Young people are given the constitutional rights to vote and are subsequently expected to participate in the development of the country. The integration of young people participation at all levels of civil society organizations would strengthen young people leadership skills and experience. Furthermore, civil society organizations stand to benefit from the ideas, creativity and initiatives of young people, especially in areas of major their concern.

### 3. Social Citizenship and Young People

It takes a collective voice among all the communities on the character of the nation that they want to live in, and the respective rights and obligations within it to overcome the challenges of managing a diverse society, more so in a multiethnic one. What are the rights, participations and responsibilities of each and every citizen towards society, culture, economy, politics, social and the environment of our country? It is pertinent that these issues be contemplated on to uphold the country's sovereignty and the issue of citizenship should be refined in the hearts of everyone. Active citizenship is defined as the direct active role of its people, society and organization in the decision making process. It is an active social rights and collective responsibilities related to a sense of belonging and incorporation. This encompasses the concept of formal citizenship and democratic society from civil, politics, social and basic economy to a direct responsibility and cooperation.

Social citizenship is about human social relationship and social rights to live life of a civilised being according to standards prevailing in society and what it means to be a member of a particular society. It entails the rights, duties and obligations of its citizen. It is about the right to share in social heritage, to share in the economic welfare and security and to have connectivity to education and social services. Social groups have their sense of belonging and qualitative citizenship shaped by state policies as well as their own efforts at being fully incorporated into the larger society. The authority must ensure that it has upheld the social rights of its members by providing its members an appropriate standard of living. Without providing members of society an appropriate standard of living, they cannot fully utilize the civil and political rights they are entitled to as citizens. It is only when a society upholds the social rights of its members that they can be expected, by definition, to be virtuous and caring citizens (Norman and Kymlicka 2003).

The concept of citizenship is forwarded by the British sociologist, T.H. Marshall (1950) and, in particular, his 1949 essay, *Citizenship and Social Class*. Marshall divided citizenship into three strands: civil, political and social. This research is concerned with the final strand, *social citizenship*, established in the twentieth century. According to Marshall (1950), this encompassed a range of rights 'from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage'. Citizenship involves relationships that encompass social, economic and cultural positions, legal and institutional forms as well as identity and sense of belonging that influence certain aspects of human behaviour. Taking its definition as the rights and duties of citizenship concerned with the welfare of people as citizens, social citizenship consists of multiple dimensions that thrives in social, civil and political rights. It is therefore a strong bond between practice, rights and duties and later is embodied in law as status that comes in various forms depending on the type of community that exists. Social groups have their sense of belonging and qualitative citizenship shaped by state policies as well as their own efforts at being fully incorporated into the larger society.

In essence, citizenship justifies the existence of a person and gives the right to participate and be involved. It is the principle that governs relations between the state and its members. Citizenship consists of three elements – civil, political and social. The civil element comprised the rights necessary for individual freedom - liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought, the right to own property, to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice. The political element incorporated the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body. The social element tracked a spectrum from the right to share to the full in the social heritage to the right to live the life of a civilized being

according to the standards prevailing in society (Connors 2000). It is the fundamental element that defines rights, participation and responsibilities.

According to W. Norman and W. Kymlicka (2003), the nature of citizenship involves major components. They are legal status, identity and solidarity and civic virtue. Citizens need an appropriate standard of living and their social right should be upheld in the society to legalise the status of citizenship. Individual should possess feelings of sense of belonging to be able to build a caring and virtuous society and for the individual to feel truly a citizen. Civic virtue requires an individual to have rights and obligations to fulfill. Social groups have their sense of belonging and qualitative citizenship shaped by state policies as well as their own efforts at being fully incorporated into the larger society. They saw citizenship as a position attached to individual to a particular society, simultaneously attracting citizenship rights. It is considered as inclusion in society when a citizen agrees to take up the opportunities of employment offered to them upon agreeing to certain requirements.

Verma (2002) wrote that in Malaysia, the development of legal notion of citizenship was a key force in the process of nation building in Malaysia. Nation-building was achieved through reservations for Malays, preservation of the Malay language, and creation of the national culture in creating a national community in Malaysia which goes back to the notion of social contract previously mentioned. Accordingly it is felt that the constitution did not propose the idea of equal rights to all communities which erupted a peak communal hostility of May 13<sup>th</sup> 1969. This prompted the government to adopt a more decisive approach towards identifying the priorities of the country and meeting the needs of the Malay community. The implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) saw changes in the economy and society by also giving priority to racial balance and economic parity among ethnic communities. It is appropriate to say that the principles of citizenship in Malaysia reveal that a plural society composed of several separate segregated thriving cultures invite challenges that need extreme tolerance from all races to benefit peace and prosperity.

Tinder (1995) asserted that nature of a tolerant society inclined its members to be attentive and open to form a relationship that is continuous and reliable. One should be tolerant of the ideas of others, so this argument usually runs because one's own ideas may be in error. There are times when the opinions of individuals are shaped by society and this can enhance the power of society even more because individuals consciously depend on society for moral guidance and inspiration. There is no community without communication and no communication without tolerance. He further assured that tolerance is a necessary condition for the disclosure of a being or a necessary condition of the realization of the person's essential being. A pluralistic nation like Malaysia needs an extremely organized and sensible society in order to be fruitfully tolerant. He believes one has to convince on the relations with one another while still making room in our world for people who disagree with us. Tolerance is crucial to the achievement of the right kind of community. Principled openness to others, even amid the risks inherent in freedom of speech, allows tolerance to be understood, not as detachment from others, but as attentiveness to them.

Thus, it should be a central focus that young people learn 'how to be responsible citizens' and understand their 'social responsibilities' as they will be responsible for the future of the nation. Their participation and feelings of sense of belonging are needed to achieve meaning of active citizenship and being an active citizen. Participation is about having the right, the means, the space, the opportunities, the support to participate and engage in activities to contribute to building a better society. It is the fundamental element of a democratic society to ensure the participation of young people. They must understand that with rights come responsibilities, and that they must act respectfully to others in order to get respect in return. The meaning of active citizenship is seen as a concept that extends to responsible for individuals, families, communities and society that can become a strong foundation towards the building of a nation. Marshall's proposal and ideas support the notion of social equality and justice through the growth of social rights and rights and responsibilities are central component of active participation (France 1998). Therefore, active citizenship can be defined from various dimensions.

In order to understand young adult's lived experience in regards to growing up amidst a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religion milieu, we have to begin to explore their experiences and to see how they are able to adapt and assimilate amidst society in their negotiations of sense of belonging and incorporation. This is an important aspect of identity formation, including its relation to the process of identifying a well knit relationship with the rest of the society with motives that contributes to the formation of social citizenship and a participatory democracy. This research will focus on how Malaysian young people make sense of these seemingly contradictory ideas and practices and how their negotiations and resolutions relate to their qualitative citizenship in a multi-ethnic society.

To highlight processes of negotiations and resolutions, this research attempts to identify how sense of belonging and incorporation is manifested among young peoples and to identify the extent young people are involved in the exercise of their rights, participation and responsibilities in the society.

#### 4. The Study

The research on which this paper is based comes from a study of the meanings of sense of belonging and incorporation in society. It attempted to identify how young people assimilate and integrate themselves in a pluralistic milieu and exercise their notion of citizenship that encompasses rights, participation and responsibilities. The purpose of this discussion is to use the social dynamics of the participants, with the help of the researcher, to stimulate them to reveal their underlying opinions, attitudes, and reasons towards issues of negotiation of sense of belonging and incorporation in the society. The discussion was conducted in a relaxed atmosphere to enable the participants to express themselves without any personal inhibitions and each discussion lasted for almost ninety minutes.

Focus group discussion is appropriate for this study as the researcher can probe and discuss at an in-depth level to get the participants' opinion. It is unique in that it is able to generate ideas based on the discussion of the group interaction. All participants for this research were selected through purposive sampling to ensure there is an element of homogeneity. A total of 6 focus group discussions were conducted. Two groups consist of Malays only, two groups Chinese, and two groups Indians. Each focus group consists of five to six young people whose age are between 18-24, with a combination of two males and three females or three males and two females. The participants were first and second year university students. The criteria of these participants were young university students aged 18 to 24 which make them homogeneous. This homogeneity should offer comfort to the participants to discuss freely without fear or prejudice. This is to ensure that the participants will give their honest opinion because their information will be a very rich data for the researcher. The respondents were identified through pseudonyms to respect and protect their identity.

These aspects will provide the framework for discussing how various notions including those of identity, modes of relating and relatedness, are interconnected and embedded with motives that contribute to and constitute political, social and civil rights that lead to democratic participation and responsibility.

#### 5. Voices of Young People

Norman and Kymlicka (2003) contented that being virtuous and a caring citizen are duties encompassed in citizenship, and the motivations for these duties have to be fostered for most members of society. Therefore to expect such behaviors, members must be given a suitable standard of living and feel a sense of belonging, which are given by upholding social rights. Ensuring that these components are in place would allow an individual to be able to recognize their negotiations of belonging and incorporation in Malaysian society. All the young people respondents highlighted their daily interactions and transactions based on mutual understanding and mutual respect, striving together, united in spirit irrespective of differences, as citizens of this blessed land, pledging allegiance to one nation, defending the same Constitution, living under the same laws and holding on to the same values.

Malaysia has as much as possible, practiced and created a society or institution that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity that understands and values human rights and recognizes the dignity of every human being. This country often takes a serious stride in its effort to instill harmonious relationship among the plural races. Our past leaders have asserted that a developed nation should not have a society in which economic backwardness is identified with race. This nation should be a united nation, infused by strong moral and ethical values, imbued with democracy, liberal and tolerant, caring, economically just and equitable and with a competitive and dynamic economy. All races are able to celebrate their religions and festivals peacefully as claimed by the respondents:

Raja' *...from the culture and religion perspectives, one is free to practice and embrace them..'*

Priya...*we have freedom to have our own religion...'*

Kogi...*we don't have problem in celebrating any occasion in Malaysia...no one stop us from celebrating...'*

Gopal '*...we are free to observe our religion and cultural festival. That has been set in everyone's mind. No one will bother what you belief or what you want to wear or how you celebrate...'*

Malaysia has preserved the environment of freedom to pursue ideas and inventions to discover the larger world beyond the familiar as one Indian female respondent asserted:

Priya '*...we have freedom to do what to do, freedom of speech, freedom of action...so basically in this country we have the freedom to do..but under the law...*' , so we must know how to make use of it. *We must not go overboard...we have to obey the law...we have to consider sensitive issues*'

Radha '*...this is a very peaceful country...we can do whatever we want. That's why I feel this country is very peace...and we got freedom to do anything...*'

Liberty comes in the form speech, action, rights and obligations towards the country. It is also shaped in the form of a young nation that is made up of many religions, races, cultures and languages. Most of the respondents agreed that they are given the liberty to perform their obligation to vote, to have the right to education, to breathe clean air, etc. Nonetheless, it has its limits and no one can be absolved from the responsibility to safe guard the nation from any subversives or misunderstandings. Despite bearing the thoughts of having the rights to speak up, but the young people are still aware that it is their responsibility to be careful of what is being said;

Chong '*...free to express opinion but must not to go overboard... must not discuss about politics...*'

Lee '*...we speak...according to the law...must not discuss about religion...*'

Kuan '*...must not discuss about race...*'

In terms of potential dark clouds, the respondents were aware of what is said and discussed or discussion of sensitive issues should be carefully calibrated to not offend the sensibilities of other races. In order to build a closer relationship with other races, young peoples in this research were able to maintain good relations with each other without implicitly downgrading the others having aware of a shared responsibility for the sake of the nation. In order for young people to become active citizens, they need to be aware of their rights, responsibilities and the possibilities that exist in the society. They asserted;

Raja '*...there is a right to speak up...I feel every citizen in this country is given the right to speak up...but if one is vocal about something that can erupt the nation's safety, then appropriate action should be taken against the citizen...but everyone in this country is given the right to speak up...*'

Ali '*...be careful with what one says...we are multi racial...when we want to say anything or to throw opinion...one must think of others' feelings...other races...one must avoid any misunderstanding...*'

The synergic surrounding of a nation must be supportive to encourage creativity and innovation (M. Bakri Musa 2006) and at the same time respect for intellectual rights so that the citizens possess the incentives to pursue their ideas and inventions. This is an important aspect of personal development in preparing the nation towards k-economy. The various levels of citizenship points to one converging point – social cohesion (Milney and Mauzy 1998). This is a new contract where social cohesion leans upon some basic criteria such as empowerment, active participation and shared responsibility. And in trying to pursue their ambition to be a responsible and educated citizen the young people are aware of their limitations in their daily movements and practice, socially and culturally.

Raja '*...I don't feel less right to speak up...but many problems could rise...whatever we said, depends on how others interpret...what we said could be manipulated and people can turn against us...*'

Chong '*...we just make peace with everyone. Cause since our country is multicultural, so we don't bias on any culture or whatsoever. So even though our skin colour is different, but we can still speak the same language...so we maintain the relationship and we don't have to fight...*'

The government has always prioritizes on spending on education and this nation has the best education system amongst the developing countries. Former leaders were smart enough to educate its citizen through education and not through the arms of soldiers. This is a tradition of investing for the future. Young people are future generations that will colour the type of country to be built. Their minds should be shaped with the purpose of creating well rounded students who acquired the necessary skills and tools to compete in a globalised world. And

the government is doing just this to ensure education curriculum is transformed and teachers are re-trained to achieve academic excellence. The respondents in this research contented that their study environment in the university is good, being able to assimilate well between races;

Muthu '*...I feel free and safe studying in this university...so far no problem...hostel, college, friends and lecturers are fine...I don't find any racial problem in the university...*'

Samy '*...situation in college is perfect...perhaps those who are here are more matured...*'

Ahmad '*...I think we have good learning opportunities and surroundings... I am a MARA scholar...so those who qualify will be given scholarship or educational financial loan.*

Wong '*...we are able to study in peace, no disturbance...*'

Chow '*...we also get PTPTN financial loan...*'

All the Malay respondents admitted that they do form study groups that comprise all races and they did not feel any different. But while in discussion, they express their care as to what is said and done. There should not be any negative references aimed at any races, also expressing their respect for the other races. The second set of Chinese respondents also agreed that they have equal opportunity to study and they did not identify studying with other races a problem. They do have a mix group of all races in their study group discussion.

Wee '*... the majority race in this university is Malays. Therefore we study with the Malays as well as Indians.*

Karen '*...so far we did not encounter any problem getting along and studying with the other races. Even facilities are fine...no problem to mix with the other races...*'

The education system has been reformed to ensure the development of a highly educated, highly skilled and strongly motivated professional workforce. The Government has shown commitment in improving education base and sought innovative approaches to expand it and make it accessible to all. This strategy has resulted positively at all level of courses. In recent years, the Government has also promoted the establishment of public and private institutions of higher learning to fulfill Malaysia's desire to become a centre of educational excellence. and has also accorded high priority to education and hopes to create in Malaysia a regional education hub that is a centre for educational excellence.

Democracy works in a country when everyone participates and when everyone votes. It has taken firm roots in this nation ever since the country held its first general election in 1955. From those early days, citizens were given the responsibility of choosing a government to lead the country. They ought to have the right to vote and to have a say about the way in which their lives are governed and in which the country is being run, at the age at which society expects them to assume adult social responsibilities. Citizenship empowers young peoples to choose the government that sits in parliament. Right to vote is the same regardless of what colour or creed one is. The only thing that matters is citizenship. All the young people respondents in this research admit that they will execute their rights to vote when they reach their full ripe age to vote. Voting is one of the primary ways to exercise citizenship. Having been qualified to vote gives young individuals a stronger sense of belonging, because again like having a citizenship, it empowers one to choose the government that sits in parliament as the young respondents proudly replied:

Shanti: '*... Of course, that's our rights. And one vote makes a different...*'

Dinesh: '*...I will cast my vote...*'

To participate in choosing a government is their right to ensure that the citizens can exercise their voting rights and have their say in the running of the government and demand their rights. This is democracy, as all strata of society can exercise their right to vote, to have their voices heard and grievances attended to in the parliament. Participation in social activities is an important element of people's well-being and their ability to socialize with others. Being socially connected with other people and with social institutions, such as clubs and organizations, fosters social interaction, helps increase people's sense of belonging, and provides balance in people's lives. Social aspects encompass rights to live in a comfortable environment with good facilities and infrastructure and equal opportunities to have good education, health care, legal rights and clean air to breathe. Trust in others affects people's willingness to participate in social and economic activities and it can influence their openness to try new

things or enter into new situations. Levels of trust in others, therefore, influence the well-being of individuals and the community and can instill a strong sense of belonging to the society.

This research has shown that young people in Malaysia has a strong willingness to undertake certain social responsibilities that could preserve the sovereignty of their country. They realized that they need to take full responsibilities for their own actions and try to avoid any misdemeanor behaviour. The National Service Training Program, or *Program Latihan Khidmat Negara (PLKN)*, is Malaysia's national service program. It is an excellent program that tries to instill good values and sense of belonging to large sections of the young people population. It is a way to encourage friendship between young people of certain ages from different races and ethnic groups and address concerns pertaining to participation, responsibility and citizenship. Young people would learn tolerance and understanding through social mixing, and about duties and obligations by undertaking socially useful work (France 1998). This program is an example that young people are more than willing to be 'active citizens', and more programs of this kind should be implemented.

France (1998) asserted that to increase the social responsibility of the young, society should recognize their rights and responsibilities. Enforcing the young through compulsive programs is not enough to be active participants or citizens. Young people need a stake in the society and they should be given due recognition of their existence. Apart from the national service program enforced in Malaysia, the society needs to create more genuine platforms for young people to be involved because participation is a tool for strengthening young people so that they can take control of their own lives. The young people in this research are involved in the exercise of their rights, participation and responsibilities in the society but with cautious remarks in order to maintain the current peaceful condition that this country has enjoyed.

The young respondents generally felt that the government takes an interest in young people and their concerns. Nonetheless, the respondents lacked knowledge about government programs targeted specifically at young people, with the exception of *Rakan Muda* (Friends of the young). This lack of knowledge could be a reflection of a need to increase dissemination about young people programs and development. The young respondents showed a strong interest in politics and a desire to participate in voting. They also, however, identified barriers to their participation, such as being cautious of what is being said and done to dispel misunderstanding and unexpected racial tension. In general, they believe that they can make valuable contributions to society, can participate and can have many innovative ideas, but they need to be empowered as active agents for change by having their contributions sought out.

## 6. Conclusion

It is vital to recognise the importance of social values of young people to see to what extent they integrate within the society and realize their functions and positions. Young people are an integral part of society and their input and participation in their countries' governance is necessary to effect political and economic reform. Their willingness to assimilate and be part of the society is a sign that they are corresponding well to the government's efforts to encourage them to play a role in the development of the country. The government has taken steps and efforts to ensure that the young people population is given due attention so that their energies pass through the proper channel. Young people participation is a responsibility that has to be taken seriously by the young people themselves and by politicians and civil servants who should create conditions for young people participation.

Social cohesion brings the various dimension of social citizenship to a converging point. The sense of citizenship binds all Malaysians to a common destiny, a sense of citizenship that respects equality, to be treated the same way as one wants to be treated. And for that matter, citizenship is not merely about formal rights, but about participating in social life, feeling accepted and having a sense of belonging which can contribute to the integration of society. In its most developed form, it is a membership of a real society based on loyalty to a civilization commonly shared by various ethnicities. Its relationship is not only encompassed between the nation and its citizen, it is also extended to their active participation to make their presence a difference and to make their presence felt.

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