

SURVEY ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION OF MALAYSIA'S MRT PROJECT WITH REFERENCE TO ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT: Public participation plays a very important role to ensure the process of developing a country has support from the citizen as well as letting the citizen know on the development which might affect them later on. Public participation has been used in various matters and is widely known as a requirement in regulation, internationally and domestically. However, this paper focuses on the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process and it concentrates on public participation process in EIA. This study is carried out to identify why there is a need for improvement in public participation of EIA process. The study uses the MRT project in Malaysia as its case study. The study leads to identify the level of public understanding and level of public participation in EIA process.

KEYWORDS: *Public Participation; Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); MRT Malaysia*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Public participation plays a very important role to ensure the process of developing a country has support from the citizen as well as letting the citizen know on the development which might affect them later. This issue has been faced widely all over the world especially in developed country. The public also have rights to support or go against the proposed development [1]. Furthermore, according to [2], the public participation and consultation from expertise, it is a major factor to achieve any goals in the process of planning the

development especially in environmental impact assessment (EIA). Besides that, public participation has been interpreted by other researcher as a base to reduce the conflict and promoting the transparency for the government in improving the interest and value of the public participation in EIA [3]. As cited in Hartley and Wood [4] mentioned that “EIA is not EIA without consultation and participation.” It shows public have their opinions and views regarding the development that influences the decision to participate in the public participation that will be implemented.

There are many issues related to the environmental issue arising from development activities undertaken in the country in pursuing the development. There has limitation of public participation mechanism in the current system [5]. Thus, these issues are the problem for them in achieving the goals of public participation.

1.1 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is the process of planning and management tool for sustainable development that assessing the possibility of consequences from a proposed development [6]. In addition, “EIA is a guideline in the process of public participation to ensure the rights and liabilities of the stakeholder in terms of protection and sustainability of environmental are fulfilled” [7].

Public participation as cited by [8] where he states that the public participation is “the process by which public concerns, needs, and values are incorporated into governmental and corporate decision making”. While, according to [9] in Malaysia, EIA process is regulated by section 34A of Environmental Quality Act 1974, the Environmental Quality (Prescribed Activities) (Environmental Impact Assessment) Order 1987 made under authority of the above section 34A, and the relevant ‘EIA Guidelines’ 34. This section specifies the legal requirement due to EIA which are described in Order 1987. In this section the public participation is required as it is one of the procedures in EIA.

1.2 Literature Review

The government or authorize party need to provide avenue, information and empower the public to make decisions as individual or in a group [10]. If not the process of involvement by the public is impractical and time-consuming. Furthermore, it will lead to pre-judgment of the process such as the process is just to complete the requirement [1]. Secondly, the transparency in the process and the integrity are also criteria that been expected by the public, however this aspect is very subjective and requires a highly ethical person to achieve those criteria [11]. Ronald [12] stated on the right type of people involved in the public participation and been threat respectfully in the process. Stakeholder theory is used to recognise individuals who are able to participate in the public participation process especially in this environmental impact assessment (EIA) study. Besides that, [10] also stated the priorities are given to participants during discussion period and the process is reviewed and evaluated to improve practice are also aspect that want by the public in the process of public participation. Lastly, referring to [11] also stated communication is a crucial factor in achieving the objectives and having efficient progress throughout the process. It able to give opportunity to the parties involved to voice out their opinion and suggestion. The distribution of the information will be more comprehensive and adequate.

Public participation is an enforcement process that involves many procedures and parties, which means it is not free from challenges and constraints due to the comprehensive public participation process [1]. According to [13], the challenges and issues from ten years ago remain until today even though there are many researchers that have discussed on the barrier of public participation.

There are many barriers that could lead to issues and challenges to the public participation in EIA. Furthermore, according to [14] has mentioned on three main barriers that could lead to all barrier in the process of public participation. He stated that individuality refers to the single person who cares on environmental issues at their surroundings. This may refer to the knowledge of the public, public's attitude towards environmental issues and the organisation that is involved in the environmental program. In addition, this barrier also

could include the responsibility from authorities, developers, public, proponents and government or it can be mentioned as a responsibility of the stakeholder. It can include the provision of information, execution of participation method, access to the information, transparency of the administrator and also the completeness of the data. Practicality, the practice that occurs in the public participation process may be due to a time constraint and the information provided by the proponent or consultant is not adequate towards environmentally related activities [14].

One of the cited barriers that commonly known is to influence the participation result was poor public knowledge of planning [4]. According to [15-16], the barrier is related to the competence criterion. The technical term in the process was a crucial factor that stopping public to participate in the event. Technical language can cause miss understanding and might even influence comments or objection towards the public participation process problem till today [17]. This will lead to failure in discovered affected individuals in a full range. Theoretically, the public want the opportunity to voice out their point of view and get the clarification if the information given is not completed. Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) syndrome as in the [4, 18] also shows the lack of sensitivity towards the public participation in EIA. In term of the awareness and acknowledge on the public side also become the factors of the result of public participation today.

Failure to influence in the decision making also can be one of the reason that the public tend to entrust the authority. They believed that their impact of opinion is limited. Furthermore, it leads to an issue of lack of trust [1] and [19]. They also believed that their contribution has been manipulated and the process is just for procedures in order to meet the law planning requirements. Another issue that has been known widely is political influence which is a great challenge that cannot be denied in the public participation process or proposed development process [15].

In addition, poor execution of participation method can be considered as a failure to attract the public. It needs to be creative and attractive to attract public's involvement in the public participation programs so that it is more widely known by the public [20].

The objectives of public participation are a medium where public are able to raise their concern. Firstly, it is used to develop awareness of the stakeholders and at the same time to educate the public. Secondly, the stakeholder's perspective will obtain knowledge. Thirdly, the objective of the public participation to avoid and reduce conflicts in the future. Besides that, it uses to inform the output of discussion after taking into consideration of impact and the mitigation measures. In addition, it can provide high professionalism behavior in term of transparency and accountability in decision making, and lastly to build trust among the stakeholder, proponents and government institutions [13].

2.0 METHODOLOGY

To collect the information about the public participation in EIA situation, a convenience sampling method was conducted. The focus group was best chosen due to its nature and process which is believed to have provided the researchers the answer [14]. Sample size produced by [21] were used in obtaining the data of the study, the formula by Cochran stated a total of 384 respondents are valid for the research purpose. However, according to [22], only 10% from the expected respondents (400 respondents) were valid for the pilot study. For this study, 40 respondents participated in this paper. The project comprises the construction of a 51-km mass rapid transit line linking Sungai Buloh to Kajang line (SBK) (Figure 1).

The SBK line will traverses through Kuala Lumpur (KL) city centre and be integrated with the existing KTM Komuter, Ampang LRT Line and Kelana Jaya LRT Line. About 9.5 km of the SBK Line will be underground while another 41.5 km said to be elevated. The SBK Line will have 35 stations and 2 depots. The SBK Line crosses several local authorities. There are Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL), Majlis Perbandaran Kajang (MPKI), Majlis Bandaraya Shah Alam (MBSA), Majlis Perbandaran Selayang (MPS) and Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya (MBPJ) [23]. However, the pilot study only covers segment B1 (Jalan Sungai Buloh - Kota Damansara) (Figure 1).

2.1 The Unit Analysis and Population

The unit of analysis in this study is the residents of Kota Damansara, Selangor. They include residents, students, private sector, government sector and the public.

2.2 Questionnaire Administration

Data was collected through the structured questionnaire. The research was implemented during working hours and on weekends. Covering letter of guaranteeing confidentiality and informed consent for the research was given to each respondent during questionnaire session. The researcher then collected the questionnaires on the same day. For those who were unable to understand the questionnaire, assistance was given by the researcher. The population was first identified to location and age of respondent in order to get a variety of population and result. Besides that, this paper also used Arnstein's ladder of public participation in as the indicator for evaluating the level of public participation process and the understanding of public towards public participation.

2.3 Secondary Data

This paper is also based on secondary data collection such as journal, articles, books, and several online writing and primary data collection from quantitative method. A study was conducted at sensitive receptor line of the MRT project. The project is from Sungai Buloh to Kajang, however only segment B1 (Jalan Sungai Buloh - Kota Damansara) as the profiling summary in Figure 1 of the EIA consultant (ERE Consulting Group) was chosen as the case study.

2.4 Analysis

The study used descriptive method of data analysis with quantitative methods of data collection. The questionnaire emphasized on issues that had been raised. The questions were on the public's perspective on methods that had been conducted by the authorized parties, public awareness of EIA process, and public perception on public participation process event in EIA.

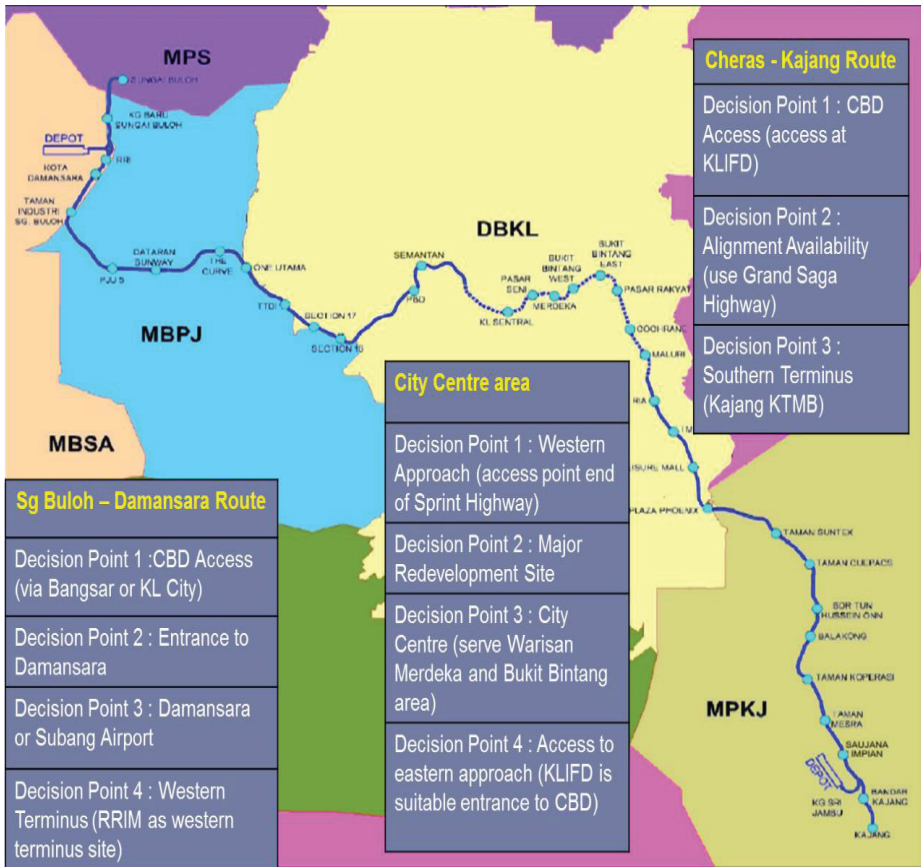


Figure 1: Route selection for MRT Sungai Buloh-Kajang Line [23]

3.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

For the finding on the statistic output of 40 respondents, only 25% from the total respondents have experienced on attending public participation. While another 75% of respondents have never experienced public participation in EIA.

For this study of Malaysia's MRT project, 87.5% of respondents, who participated in this study, did not attend to the event as shown in figure 2. The result implies that majority of respondents were not involved in the EIA process. Only 12.5% of public in Kota Damansara were involved in the public display conducted by the authorised party. Furthermore, based on Figure 2, only 25% of respondents were aware of the existence of public participation in EIA. While another 75% of respondents have little or no knowledge about it.

Based on Figure 2, 100% of respondents believed that their concern was on the surrounding environment or environmental issues. However, their actions behind it did not represent their concern.

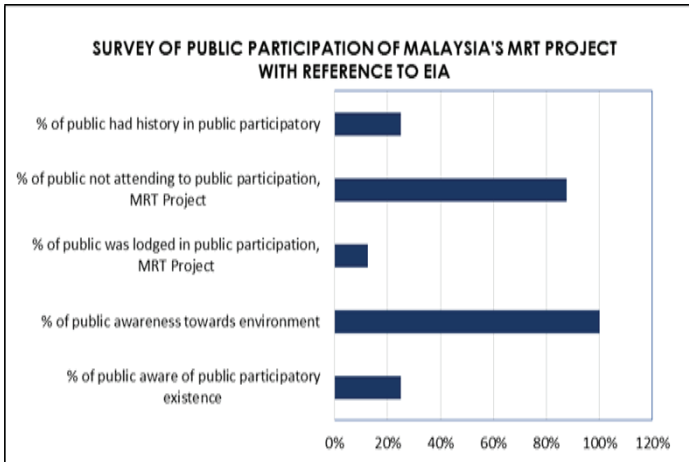


Figure 2: Survey of public participation of Malaysia's MRT project with reference to EIA

In addition, as shown in the Figure 3, 75% of the total respondents believed that they were in a condition of not being involved in the participation of the event, as they believed that their understanding is less or having no knowledge at all. While the other 25% of the total respondents believed that they fall into information and placation. Meanwhile, there are no respondents who believed to have partnership and citizen control level in the decision making due to understanding and knowledge.

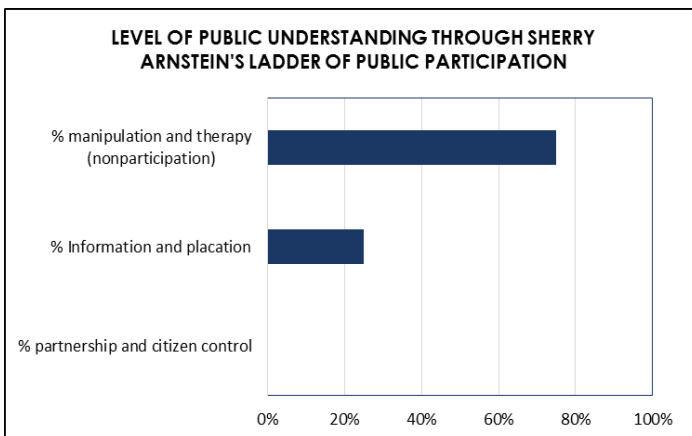


Figure 3: Level of public understanding

The result shows that there is a very low level of public participation culture in Malaysia. The respondents that have not attended stated their reasons on the project such as the residents were not informed of the development beforehand, did not understand the language (jargons), waste of time, nothing could be changed if they had even attended the event and too many political intervention. The result also implies on the awareness, attitude, not in my back yard (NIMBY) syndrome and lack of trust towards authorized parties. Besides that, the result showed that the marketing strategies were not comprehensive and interesting in informing the public on the event and the development of the project. Furthermore, the result indicated that the respondents believed that they were only allowed to participate in expressing their voice with less or no contribution towards the development.

The outcome in this study shows that Malaysia's public participation process and culture in participating in the development process is very low and the requirement for it as a regulation in Malaysia is not fully effective. The public actually have no or less knowledge about the public participation in EIA and believed that the process is just the formality to fulfill the requirements by laws [24]. Furthermore, the marketing strategies from authorized parties are not comprehensive in attracting the public. It also reveals that the objective of the public participation has not been completely achieved.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This paper investigates the level of public understanding and public awareness towards public participation especially in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). This study found that the public have low level of understanding regarding the public participation in EIA and also the process in Malaysia's EIA is at lowest level. This is shown by when more than half of the respondents were categorised as non-participation or manipulation and therapy stage. Besides that, it shows the public is not aware and have no idea of the development surrounding them before the development had been implemented. It also reveals that the public as a stakeholder do not know their right as a stakeholder in the country. Thus, it has not met the objective of public participation.

In addition, this study discovered that most respondents believed they have awareness on the environmental surrounding. However, the result shows that the public actually did not care about the environment; the mindset of public environmental awareness is just taking care of the wastes and participates in recycling campaigns.

Furthermore, this study discovered that the low level of involvement in public participation process was due to the unaware on the existence of the process itself. This shows that the public participation of EIA in Malaysia is not achieving the real objective and its original purpose.

In order to improve the program, the process needs an adjustment that is suitable and clear for the public. It all begins with the marketing strategy on how the authorities produce the program and informing the public on the event until the end of the process such as continuous advertisement through the medium of mass media such as in radio and television, so that the public are aware of the on-going phase of the development for better engagement and results in the public participation process. In addition, EIA process is unfamiliar and the public is unaware of this process, so by giving knowledge and awareness through mass media and education will help a lot. Furthermore, to have an effective public participation, EIA process is not just on giving a report but more importantly having the authority in determining the project's approval.

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