

Universiti Malaya

Nikmatul Adha Nordin

【Subject of Research Project】

Alternative Food Network: Implementation of Chokubai in Malaysia

【Research Report】

This study investigates the feasibility of adopting community farming as a framework for community-driven social enterprises in urban Malaysia. Drawing inspiration from Japan's Chokubai model, which emphasises the direct sale of locally produced goods, the research explores its potential to enhance food security, economic empowerment, and social cohesion in urbanised areas.

The first phase of the study focused on understanding the Chokubai model in Japan through fieldwork conducted in Kanuma City (established by the Japan Agriculture Department) and Sakura City (community-based). Interviews with Chokubai operators and an in-depth discussion with the Japan Agriculture Department at the Tochigi District Council provided valuable insights into their business models and the challenges they face.

In the second phase, the study explored the potential for transforming Malaysia's existing community gardens into Chokubai-style enterprises. This involved roundtable discussions and a survey. Representatives from the Malaysian Cooperative Council, the Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority (FAMA), local authorities, and community garden leaders from Kuala Lumpur and Subang Jaya participated in the discussions. A Net-Map activity was conducted during these sessions to identify stakeholders who could influence the commercialization of community gardens. Participants also mapped out the types of support and resources available, which were categorised into three key linkages: (1) technical know-how, (2) financial support, and (3) basic infrastructure.

The findings revealed that while government agencies offer significant support and funding, the primary factor determining the sustainability of such initiatives is the active participation and commitment of the community itself. Challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and funding gaps were also identified but can be addressed through targeted government interventions.

A survey was conducted among 30 representatives from community garden associations to further explore perceptions of the Chokubai model and interest in commercialising gardening activities. Most respondents were supportive of the idea, although they highlighted obstacles such as operational and financial challenges, as well as environmental risks. Overcoming these barriers is essential for cooperatives to successfully commercialise crops and sustain long-term growth in community gardening.

In conclusion, adopting the Chokubai model within Malaysia's community gardens has the potential to significantly enhance their economic sustainability while promoting local food security. By directly connecting community gardeners with consumers, the model streamlines food supply chains, reduces costs, enhances freshness, and supports sustainable practices.

The study underscores strong support from community garden participants and local authorities for the Chokubai approach. However, limited infrastructure, financial constraints, and operational challenges remain critical issues. Stakeholder collaboration and targeted government interventions—particularly in technical training, infrastructure development, and financial support—are essential to fully realise the benefits of this model. With proper implementation, the Chokubai framework could transform urban agriculture in Malaysia, fostering community cohesion, empowering local producers, and advancing the nation's sustainable urban development goals.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

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Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.) Nikmatul Adha Nordin, & Yong Adilah. (2024). Alternative food network: Implementation of Chokubai in Kebun Komuniti Malaysia (Unpublished research report). Sumitomo Foundation.