Establishing the Connection between Project Governance and Poverty Alleviation

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ABSTRACT--*Poverty alleviation is an integrated and continuous efforts conducted to reduce and further eliminate incident of poverty in the country through many approaches including the execution of programmes and projects related to poverty alleviation. Project governance is identified as a management system which can be utilized to ensure the effectiveness and the attainment of poverty alleviation projects. While project governance could contribute to the effective delivery of poverty alleviation programmes and projects, it is crucial to investigate the relevant elements of project governance in the context of poverty alleviation programmes and how they are connected. This study was conducted with the aim to identify project governance elements that applicable to poverty alleviation hence, explore the connection between project governance and poverty alleviation which could be found in the literature. This paper focuses on papers from journal articles, international reports, related books and government documents. The keywords included "project governance", "governance" and "poverty alleviation". Literature materials were selected to reflect the purpose of the study from key words search in the online databases and reviewed to find the connection between these two research areas.From the literatures, several definitions, elements and issues of project governance and poverty alleviation in Malaysia were discovered. This paper identifies several elements which act as a bridge in connecting project governance and poverty alleviation including effective delivery system, decision making, transparency, accountability, stakeholder management, governance structure and trust.The combination of these project governance elements in the context of poverty alleviation programs will pave the way for the development of project governance frameworks which subsequently contribute to the successful execution of poverty alleviation projects as well as the achievement of projects outcomes.The connection of project governance and poverty alleviation was established and this could be a success factor for poverty alleviation initiatives.*

Keywords--*Project Governance; Governance; Poverty Alleviation; Public Project*

I. INTRODUCTION

The development journey of Malaysia for the past 61 years has seen many programmes and projects executed by the government to enhance the socio-economic and the people quality of life. The programmes and projects are translated from the five-year development plan charted by the government and implemented by the government machinery system through various ministries/departments/agencies which spur the economic and social growth of

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the country. However, while there are numerous progresses in physical infrastructures and job opportunities, inequality and unevenness in the context of poverty and social exclusions in both rural and urban areas are still exist (Dawood & Leng, 2016). Furthermore, although the policies and initiatives directed to poverty alleviation, income disparity has become wider in recent years (Mohamed & Xavier, 2015).

Generally, poverty in Malaysia is defined as income poverty and measured by poverty line income (PLI) which differentiates between poor households and non-poor households. Poverty can be divided into two main categories namely absolute poverty and relative poverty. Absolute poverty (or hard-core poverty) is measured by the minimum income needed to purchase a minimum food basket and other basic necessities like clothing and shelter while relative poverty is related to the minimum sum of income required to sustain the basic standard of living in the society in which they live (Ariffin, 1994; Nair, 2010; Siwar, 2002). Poverty alleviation projects such as people housing project, rural water and electricity projects, small farmer agriculture project and income generation for the poor project are initiated, funded and implemented by the government. While Malaysia has recorded remarkable reduction in poverty incident from 6.0% in 2002 to 0.4% in 2016 (EPU, 2017b), there are many weaknesses in public projects including poverty alleviation projects such as no careful attentions on project formulation, lack of monitoring/supervision by the responsible parties as well as lack of coordination between the agencies involved which contribute to the project failure (National Audit Department, 2017).

Despite other external factors such as economic and political factors, the main factor that underlying the successful execution of public projects is how the public projects are formulated, planned, implemented, monitored and evaluated by the related parties. Generally, a public project is project that is funded by a government and is intended to be owned or operated by the government. Most public projects relate to work that a government does to fulfil a public purpose and commonly they include physical projects such as infrastructure works, public building construction, housing and schools as well as non-physical projects such as information technology (IT) projects, income generating for the poor projects and local community development projects. As the public projects are frequently comes under public scrutiny, there are elements of transparency and accountability that must be applied by the personnel that involve in the process of delivering efficient and effective public projects. Hence, this is where the ‘project governance’ term comes into the picture.

Project governance is essential to ensure the successful delivery of projects particularly in the context of public projects. The subject has been widely debated for the last two decades in the academic literature as it seems that the application of project governance in each phase of project management could contribute significant impact to the project success. Generally, project governance looks on how the elements of governance can enhance project overall performance not only in terms of cost, quality and time but also other factors such as stakeholders and user’s satisfaction, project sustainability as well as impact achievement. Muller (2009) defines project governance as “a value system, responsibilities, processes and policies that allow projects to achieve organisational objectives and foster implementation that is in the best interest of all stakeholders, internal and external and the corporation itself”. The studies of project governance have covered many areas or types of project including infrastructure project, mega (multi-billion) project, information technology project and manufacturing project where there are many project governance elements have been identified which then translated into the project governance frameworks.

The application of project governance elements is expected to contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of project (Ruuska, Ahola, Artto, Locatelli, & Mancini, 2011), enhance the project value and at the same time minimise the risk of project failure. Klakegg, Williams, & Shiferaw (2016) suggest that new elements of project governance are needed to complete the formal governance frameworks of the project as well as address the weaknesses in the system and in human abilities. While there are many governance elements that are applicable in poverty alleviation can be found in literature, there are no literature which connect directly between project governance elements and poverty alleviation in the context of public sector poverty alleviation programme. Therefore, a thorough literature review is conducted to link project governance and poverty alleviation where the identification of project governance elements that applicable to poverty alleviation is the ultimate aim of this paper. Hence, to address the aim of this research, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: What are the definition and elements in project governance and poverty alleviation which can be found in the literature?

RQ2: How project governance is connected to poverty alleviation in the context of project environment?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Governance

World Bank (2003) defines governance as the way how public policy is shaped by the authorities which include public officials and institutions in order to provide public goods and services to the people while UNDP (1997) views governance as the process by the authority in exercising economic, political and administrative aspects of a country where citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences through various mechanisms and institutions. There is a high tendency of each organisation defines governance from their own perspective as reflected in these two definitions above since it can clearly reflect the organisation functions and objectives. Therefore, from the context of public sector, good governance is where the authority exercises its power through the effective formulation of public policies and efficient implementation of programmes and projects for the benefit of the people.

Governance is crucial aspect in charting development journey of a country. While other aspects such as economic and social policies, macroeconomics indicators and trade are equally crucial, the policy making in these aspects will be compromised if the governance is poor (Kaufmann, 2005). However, to attain good governance in administering the country, it needs a clear understanding on the elements of governance. McGrath & Whitty (2015) identify six elements associated with governance namely direct and control, decision making and system, structure and processes, accountability, regulation as well as behaviour. On the other hand, (Gisselquist, 2012) concludes three important elements from various literatures for basic understanding on governance which are the process, power to be exercised and managing collective affairs of a community while Monteduro, Hinna, & Moi (2016) believe that elements of accountability, transparency, citizen involvement, ethical conduct, integrity, stewardship, efficiency as well as leadership are among the elements of governance found in many literatures and these eight elements could be practised in every area of management through each level of organisation hence will benefit the stakeholders.

Governance also can be assumed as ‘rule’ where it is the act of exercising authority, implemented by ‘rulers’ who are people with power in organisation and within ‘a given set of rules’ which is the public order (World Bank, 2010). This is in line with Rhodes (1997) where he relates governance to government which represents a broader and alternative concept of administering. From the above elements, it is clear that governance is about governing a country (or an organisation) based on power provided through the processes which have controlled structure and regulation and it includes decision making. Governance is always related in developing a country (or an organisation) by utilising resources and promoting good values and behaviours to achieve the objectives. In a nutshell, governance is code of conduct that should be embraced in any organisation. While it could be directly or indirectly written in the organisation’s charter, it intends to promote good values in order to drive the country (or an organisation) forward.

1.2 Public Governance

While corporate governance is the reflection of accountability and transparency of company’s board of director and executed in order to maximise shareholders value, public governance is crucial as public sector seeks to translate policies and initiatives into set of programmes and projects in a way of satisfying its various stakeholders. OECD (2005) defines public governance as formal and informal arrangements that determine how public decisions are made and carried out in order to maintain a country’s constitutional values in the rapid movement of problems, actors and environments.

As the public community are the most important stakeholders to the public sector, it is vital for the public officials to be accountable and answerable towards any actions made to the public. Hence, as public governance is concerned on the country’s ability to serve its citizens as well as the way how public policies, programmes and projects are conducted, public resources are managed and regulatory authorities are exercised (DESA, 2007), it is also related to how the bureaucracy and red tape in public sector can be reduced since the former is a serious restraint in exercising good public governance (Kaufmann, 2005).

Public governance is closely associated to the development process of a country. For years, international organisations help the third world countries and developing countries in terms of infrastructure and social development through many funding and grants. Hence, it is important for the recipient countries to fully utilize the aid provided by the international organisations. The wastage and abuse of aid resources for example; using public resources for badly planned and implemented public investment projects by unaccountable public officials reflect the quality of public governance which will negatively affect development (World Bank, 1989). This situation is also related to corruption in public sector where good governance which include integrity, transparency and accountability will effectively reduce corruption (Kaufmann, 2005). Therefore, good public governance should promote good values particularly in the process of decision making and subsequently the execution of the decision which normally in the type of programmes and projects for the benefits of the people.

1.3 Project Governance

Project governance is a subset of governance. There are many literatures found with regards to the definition of project governance, its elements as well as the framework developed based on the elements. Renz (2007) defines project governance as a process-oriented arrangement by which an organisation is strategically directed, integratively managed and holistically organised in an entrepreneurial and ethically reflected conducts and in a way suitable to the multiple context of a project. Project governance is related to the process of decision making based on frameworks provided by the rules, protocols, relationships and structures for project development and implementation to achieve the intended objectives (Bekker, 2009) while Williams, Klakegg, Magnussen, & Glasspool (2010) view project governance as a set of principles and organised structure encompassing processes and guidelines established to ensure projects meet their purpose. These two definitions relate project governance as a management system based on rules and principles which enable project been executed to achieve objectives of the project itself as well as the objectives of the stakeholders. These definitions clearly show that project governance could be deliberated as a written set of rules or policies within structures of resources to be adhered by the project players. However, it is argued how the system or process should be flexible enough to cater the recurrence of changes which always occur in project and how the system or process could be adopt in different project settings.

In the context of public sector, project governance will ensure project objectives are met from the perspective of all stakeholders that directly or indirectly involve in the projects. Hence, project governance in public sector can be defined as a set of values and balance structure that reflects the ability of the organisation to select the best project that suits the organisation's objective, managed the project efficiently and ensure the project serves the intended stakeholders effectively.

1.3.1 Elements of Project Governance

It is essential to look on the elements of project governance as the elements are the backbone of the project governance framework. APM (2004) addresses four main elements of governance of project management namely portfolio direction effectiveness and efficiency, project sponsorship effectiveness and efficiency, project management effectiveness and efficiency and disclosure and reporting. Basically, project governance is about warranting the right projects are implemented rightly. Consistent with APM (2004) project governance elements, HM Treasury (2007) mentioned in its guidance note that there are four main elements of project governance which are programme direction, project ownership and sponsorship, ensuring the effectiveness of project management function as well as reporting and disclosure which include consulting with various stakeholders. These elements seem realistic in the context of public projects where it draws clear line between the elements involved. For example, programme direction is the first element that set the overall direction of the projects and aligns it with the main programme while project ownership and sponsorship connect the project with its parent organisation in order to ensure clear structure and hierarchy of the frameworks. In addition, the effectiveness of project management functions will ensure the project is executed according to the set of rules and procedures and reporting and disclosure will enable effective communication between all parties involved in the project. Nevertheless, some area needs to be further clarified as far as project governance is concerned which include stakeholders management, project duration, the issues of accountability and transparency, roles of all parties, approval process and intended outcomes.

There are project governance elements that should be given proper concern according to Muller (2009), where by nurturing its environment, prioritising projects for best use of resources as well as identifying problematic projects accordingly; it will allow projects to be successful. He further pointed out that the steering group is the principle institution for project governance where it has ultimate responsibility for project success since its own the business matter and accountable to the stakeholders for achievement or failure of the project's intended outcome, objectives and benefits. The steering group drives the project forward through effective governance structure put in place. While the choice of governance structure depends on the context of the project (Musawir, Serra, Zwikael, & Ali, 2017), it must be flexible and generic enough to cover a wide range of possible scenarios and provide guidance to the project players (Müller et al., 2013).

Meanwhile Bekker (2009) in the opinion that project governance should be a tool for decision making while at the same time must promotes the element of self-governance. This is where an element of self-governance such as trust is essential in ensuring a good working relationship between the parties involved in the project. There are four elements of project governance which can be considered namely; project steering committee, cost and benefit management, project reviews and audits and ethical, responsible and conflict of interest (Bekker, 2009). These four elements clearly reflect the elements of decision making and self-governance (trust) that must be embedded in any project governance framework.

Guo, Chang-Richards, Wilkinson, & Li (2014) propose three basic mechanisms to be built into the project governance design namely control, flexibility and trust. These mechanisms are basically the combination of project governance structure and self-governance which is vital to remove elements of uncertainty and complexity that always exist in large scale projects (Guo et al., 2014). When the elements of uncertainty and complexity are clearly defined in the project, it will contribute to the project success.

On the other hand, some people mistaken and always associate the failure of public projects with corruption and abuse of power by the people involved in the projects. While some allegation might be true, there is also a high possibility of project failure because of the inability of the organisation and project players to understand the fundamental of project governance. The fundamental of project governance actually lies in the basic elements of project governance such as accountability and transparency which should be embraced in each phase of project cycle. These elements (accountability and transparency) come from the good ethics possessed by the project players. The ethics of governance reflects the integrity in line with relevant moral values, norms and rules (Lasthuizen, Huberts, & Heres, 2011). Therefore, good governance practised by the project players will contribute to the higher probability of project success while at the same time minimise the risks of corruption and abuse of power.

1.4 Poverty

There are numerous policies, initiatives, programmes and projects that have been implemented worldwide in order to alleviate and eliminate poverty but poverty still exist not only in least developed country but also in developing and developed countries. Generally, poverty is defined as the failure for any individual or households to comply to basic needs as measured by income or consumption (Siwar, 2002). This is related to anything needed for a basic life such as income, housing, job and employments, health and education. UNESCO (2002) defines income poverty as when a family's income fails to fulfil an income threshold which is differs among the countries. The income threshold is usually measured with respect to families and not the individual and is adjusted according to the number of persons in a family. In Malaysia, the national poverty line income (PLI) is calculated based on the World Bank standard and it differs in Peninsula Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. According to EPU (2017a), PLI per month for Peninsula Malaysia is RM970 (urban) and RM880 (rural), Sabah: RM1170 (urban) and RM1220 (rural) and Sarawak: RM1070 (urban) and RM940 (rural). The variances of PLI between regions in Malaysia reflect the differences particularly in terms cost of living, population as well as other socioeconomic indicators.

The 11th Malaysia Plan which was launched in 2015 has introduced a Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) for Malaysian context, which broadens the definition of poverty to include vulnerabilities in health, living standards, and education attainment. The MPI is different from the previous practice in Malaysia of measuring poverty which is based merely on the PLI where MPI measure factors of well-being beyond income. Based on EPU (2015), the MPI will complement the PLI in identifying the extent of poverty in the country. Four major dimensions of poverty under the MPI are income, education, health, and living standards and the government aims to measure the incidence and intensity of poverty as when a household meets at least 30% of the deprivation cut-offs.

1.5 Poverty Alleviation Programme

Poverty alleviation is an effort implemented by any organisation or civil society in combating poverty through various initiatives and programmes which ultimately will enhance the well-being of the poor people and get them through out of poverty. Poverty alleviation is closely related to economic growth of a country. A growing economy will increase national income and enable the government to allocate a sum of money for poverty alleviation initiatives. Developed and developing countries basically have proper allocation for poverty alleviation in respective annual budget while least developed countries are much depending on the international aid or donor to run its poverty alleviation initiatives.

Angelsen & Wunder (2003) define poverty alleviation as the blend of poverty reduction and poverty prevention. While the aim of poverty reduction is to move poor people beyond the poverty line, the poverty prevention aims to maintain a people minimum standard of living and surviving although they may live below the poverty line. However, the overall aim of poverty alleviation is to ensure the poor people move as well as sustain beyond the poverty line, thus poverty prevention should uphold the same essence while living in a minimum standard of living is universally acceptable.

Poverty alleviation involves heavily from the process of drafting the policy, engagement with the stakeholders, draw the arrangement of initiatives and programmes as well as ideating and selecting the best projects that can be implemented within overall budget provided and ensuring the projects are executed accordingly. However, the main challenge of this comes from the drafting process of policy itself where it is crucial to avoid inaccurate of identifying poverty and ensuring the policy is generally sustainable for a long period of time. In this context, Li, Su, & Liu (2016) suggest several areas where the policy improvement needs to be made. It consists of creating comprehensive assessment system in identifying the poor households, establishing the poverty monitoring system and dynamic modification mechanism which will offer better accuracy and efficiency in poverty alleviation programme.

Through the five-years development plan, the government has spent huge amount of money in planning and implementing various programmes and projects to alleviate poverty in Malaysia. From the introduction of the 1st Malaya Plan in 1957 until the implementation of the 11th Malaysia Plan (2016 – 2020), there are numerous programmes and projects which have benefited the poor people in Malaysia. While there is tremendous progress in terms of poverty alleviation efforts in Malaysia where the poverty incident has dropped significantly from 49.3% in 1970 to 0.4% in 2016, there are many issues surrounding the poverty alleviation programme which require such consideration in order for better improvement to be made in the future. (Harun & Jalil, 2015) have found two main weaknesses pertaining to poverty alleviation programme in Malaysia which are the inefficiency of delivery system to target group and silos mentality among government agencies. Inefficiency of delivery system is related to the existence of too many layers of bureaucracy before the assistances reach the target group and this situation led to the leakages thus delay the delivery process or in worst case scenario, the assistances do not reach the target group at all. There is also considerable evidence that only a part of poverty alleviation allocation actually benefits the poor since there is a huge bureaucracy in public service delivery and it also involves other expenses that need to be spent by the government (Jomo, 2004).

Thang & Baharuddin (2011) recommend that in order for poverty alleviation to be effectively executed, good governance and institutional change should be given priority especially by the government and not to postpone it to later stage which will negatively affect development sustainability. This view is in line with World Bank (2004) suggestion where the development policies and plans must be put together to suit each country particular incidents and needs of poverty alleviation programme. The policies and plans should be persevered and flexible enough to adapt with all the poverty alleviation programmes and projects so that they will remain relevant and consistent to the changing circumstances.

National Audit Report which is published annually always reveals many issues and problems pertaining to the planning and implementation of public projects and this include projects under the poverty alleviation programme. Among the issues that been highlighted are inadequate planning and weaknesses in project implementation which contribute to the project cost and time overrun as well as the failure for the project to operate as planned (National Audit Department, 2017). Therefore, the government did not get value for money for the investment made and the objectives of the projects could not fully achieve. The issues and problems raised in this section could reflect the needs of project governance in poverty alleviation programme in Malaysia. The application of project governance in Malaysia's poverty alleviation programme will ensure smoothness implementation of poverty related public projects and thus enhance the probability of project success. Subsequently, this will be translated into better project outcome and impact; particularly in moving poor people beyond poverty line and ensure they are sustainable in a long term.

III. GOVERNANCE AND PROJECT GOVERNANCE IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMME

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1.6 Governance in Poverty Alleviation Programme

Good governance is widely viewed as an important component to poverty alleviation (World Bank, 2000) and the quality of governance at each level of government machinery is essential in ensuring effective poverty alleviation programme ADB (1999). However, the question arises on what type of governance that should be embraced in poverty alleviation agenda?

Grindle (2004) explains that good governance in poverty alleviation programme should touch all elements of the public sector which is from the rules set by the institution, the practice of decision making that determine the problems and solutions, the process of delivering to the target groups as well as the interface of officials and target groups in multiple channels. Similarly, Poverty Task Force (2002) has outlined seven good governance conditions for effective poverty alleviation in the context of government and international aid structure as follows:

i. Focusing poverty reduction resources and creating accountability in the use of public funds in the interests of the poor.

ii. Building national capacities for pro-poor policy formulation and implementation.

iii. Improving administration and private sector participation for better service delivery to the poor.

iv. Shifting decision making nearer to the poor and helping them to organise themselves.

v. Preventing corruption as it affects the poor most.

vi. Strengthening the rule of law with clearly pro-poor enforcement procedures.

vii. Involve a diversified range of stakeholders in a participatory way including NGOs in representing the poor.

These above arguments indicate the importance of legislatives and administrative sector to play their roles in poverty alleviation programme. While the effective law, rules and regulation are needed as a check and balance mechanism within government, the efficient implementation and monitoring of policies, programmes and projects will deliver better outcome in terms of poverty alleviation.

Nevertheless, in reality it is difficult to determine whether good governance in poverty alleviation programme could significantly reduce the poverty incident as well as decrease the inequality gap of a nation. Kwon & Kim (2014) proved that good governance is instrumental in reducing poverty but only applicable in middle income countries while there is no evidence to conclude that good governance contributes to poverty reduction in least developed countries. Though the statement was based on the research findings, it could not be generalised since there are significant differences among these countries. In the same research, Kwon & Kim (2014) concluded three main factors that affected the deliverables of good poverty alleviation policy in least developed countries namely lack of capacity to implement programmes, less capacity in highly bureaucratic institutions and incompetent public workers. These factors demonstrate the mantra of why good anti-poverty policy always failed to be translated into effective programmes and projects and it is not only applicable in least developed countries but also in developing countries such as Malaysia whereas a good model of poverty alleviation governance will lead to a better delivery of programmes and projects and subsequently contribute to the better outcomes to the poor people.

Nevertheless, good governance is prerequisite in ensuring effectiveness and efficiency of poverty alleviation programme. The governance of poverty alleviation programme covers the whole process of the programme which includes the policy making process, planning the long term, medium term and short term development plan, identification of the initiatives, programmes and projects, identification and classification of the poor people, overall structure of the government machinery related to the poverty alleviation as well as the project governance of the poverty alleviation projects itself. The general governance elements which are applicable in the context of poverty alleviation programme such as transparency, accountability, stakeholders participation and effective legal framework will enhance the outcomes of the overall poverty alleviation programme (Poverty Task Force, 2002; Siwar, 2002; World Bank, 2001).

1.7 Project Governance in Poverty Alleviation Programme

As defined in previous section, project governance in public sector is a set of values and balance structure that reflects the ability of the organisation to select the best project that suits the organisation's objective, managed the project efficiently and ensure the project serves the intended stakeholders effectively. Altering the definition and embrace it from the perspective of poverty alleviation, project governance is a management system which comprises a set of values and structure in delivering rights project to the right target groups through effective and efficient possible ways with the ultimate aim to propel the quality of life of the poor people and brings them out of poverty.

Previous literatures found the linkages between governance and poverty alleviation as discussed in the previous section. The proximate literature that was found is the works of Renz (2007) which has contribute particularly in understanding the linkages between corporate governance, project management and development (non-profit NGO). On the other hand, there are several literatures that explain governance in the context of poverty alleviation which touch on some issues pertaining to delivery or distribution system of the assistances. Among the scholar is Siwar (2002) where he explained that effective delivery system is crucial as the attainment of outcomes of poverty alleviation projects and programmes depends on effective delivery system put in place by the authorities. This includes good planning and implementation capability and efficient use of resources, consistent monitoring as well as effective impact assessment of the projects.

1.7.1 Elements of Project Governance in Poverty Alleviation Programme

Renz (2007) introduces project governance model which was structured from the implementation of many international NGO funded projects in Bangladesh. The model comprises of six main elements specifically system management, mission management, integrity management, extended stakeholder management, risk management and audit management. The project governance model developed by Renz (2007) is a solution in bridging the gap in terms of development projects and governance. The six main elements have been developed based on the corporate governance and project management framework. Hence, it is applicable in the development project specifically for self-structured organisation. However, several key governance aspects such as decision making, budget management and the functionality of project management throughout project cycle are not really emphasised where these aspects especially decision-making process are equally important with the six main elements derived by (Renz, 2007). Moreover, this project governance model was developed from the NGO (international donor/funder) perspective and it is dissimilar from the public sector perspective. Nevertheless, the six main elements in the project governance model are relevant in the context of poverty alleviation programme.

Siwar (2002) states that an effective delivery system is needed to ensure good governance in poverty alleviation programme. The author further emphasised that an effective delivery system for poverty alleviation programme revolving around a good planning and implementation capabilities, effectiveness of resources, consistent monitoring and effective impact assessment. These four elements are closely associated with project governance where there should be a chain of systematic procedures and principles in planning, development and implementation of poverty alleviation projects. The application of good project governance will ensure the projects are implemented, monitored and evaluated accordingly; thus, contribute to the attainment of overall poverty alleviation objectives.

Prior to the project implementation, project initiation and formulation should first take place. This is where the decision-making element is crucial since any flaw in the decision making will greatly affect the implementation process or the project outcome. Hence, the decision making process which decide which projects that should be selected, who are the target groups, how the project should be implemented as well as how the projects is operated is one of the project governance element in the context of poverty alleviation programme (Abednego & Ogunlana, 2006; Bekker, 2009; Bredillet, 2008; Garland, 2009; Grindle, 2004; Poverty Task Force, 2002). It is essential to note that decision making process will not end in the early phase of the project, but relevant for the whole cycle of project management. Generally, poverty alleviation projects need intervention from the government agencies from time to time due to few factors such as a sudden shift of poverty alleviation policies, demand from other parties (NGOs and political parties) and the change of target groups. Therefore, the process of decision making becomes crucial and through the application of good project governance, good and firm decisions should be made by the parties involved in order to ensure the final outcome of the projects will not be severely affected.

Subsequently, related to the decision-making process, transparency and accountability are essential elements which reflect the ability of the project's organisation to conduct all activities pertaining to the projects in openness and answerable to the stakeholders (Garland, 2009; Muller, 2009; Poverty Task Force, 2002; Siwar, 2002; UNDP, 1995). The parties involved in each phase of the project must embrace the transparency and accountability elements in every single decision and action taken. One of the ways to demonstrate the transparency and accountability is by actively engage with the stakeholders. In other words, stakeholder management throughout the poverty alleviation project is essential since engaging with stakeholders especially the target groups will improve the project performance due to the dynamic structure of poverty alleviation projects (HM Treasury, 2007; Poverty Task Force, 2002; Renz, 2007; Roxas & Ungson, 2011; Siwar, 2002; UNDP, 1995). The main stakeholder in poverty alleviation projects is the target group which is the direct beneficiaries of the projects. Continuous engagement with this group will optimise the projects' outcome and at the same time help government agencies in making crucial decisions with regards to the planning and development of the projects.

Another important element that drives the project forward is where effective governance structure put in place. Governance structure is an important platform that enable project can be carried out smoothly (Levie, Burke, & Lannon, 2017; Müller et al., 2013; Musawir et al., 2017) where it interrelates with other few elements such as stakeholder management and decision making. A good governance structure will permit good decision making and better stakeholder management and coordination in a project. A project governance structure should be built as flexible and generic enough to cover a wide range of possible scenarios and provide guidance to the project players

(Müller et al., 2013) while demonstrate the accountability which in turn will positively influence the overall project. This is directly applicable to poverty alleviation projects where a flexible governance structure will provide room for openness, transparency and accountability which is crucial in the context of poverty alleviation projects.

Related to that, trust among the stakeholders involved is a vital project governance element that should be encompassed in poverty alleviation programme. For example, Pinto, Slevin, & English (2009) believe trust will not only enhance the strength of relationship between parties involved in the project, but also solidify the partnering roles and mutual understandings as well as increase the willingness of various project stakeholders to cooperate in non-self-motivated ways for the successful of project deliverables. In terms of poverty alleviation, trust is a crucial element which indirectly connects between the government (as project provider) and the target group (as project beneficiary). There should be a high level of trust from the target group to the government in order to optimise the project benefits. However, since trust is about reliance with human strength, ability and integrity in conducting ethical decision making on behalf of the project owner/funder, it must be supported with effective governance structure which will create a perfect model of project governance.

IV. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This paper has reviewed the essence of governance; project governance elements; poverty and poverty alleviation literatures and ultimately draws a connection between project governance and poverty alleviation in the context of public sector. The connection between these two different streams of study is translated through the identification of several project governance elements which are suitable in the context of poverty alleviation programme.

The definitions of governance, public governance and project governance have been discussed and clear link between these three areas of research has been established. Generally, governance is how the power is exercised by people with power in organisation through process, principles, regulation-controlled structure. Public governance and project governance are subsets of governance where the emphasis is given to the project governance in the scope of public sector. On the other hand, poverty and poverty alleviation were defined with particular interest on the poverty issues in Malaysia.

Accordingly, several elements of project governance have been identified and linked to the poverty alleviation programme. While there are many elements of governance in poverty alleviation were found in the literatures, this paper has found project governance elements which are suitable for poverty alleviation programme. Effective delivery system is a crucial project governance element where good planning and implementation capabilities, effectiveness of resources, consistent monitoring and effective impact assessment (Siwar, 2002) form the sub-elements that reflect how good project governance could enhance the impact of poverty alleviation programme particularly in Malaysia.

Additionally, other project governance elements namely decision making, transparency, accountability, stakeholder management, governance structure and trust have been recognised as elements which are suitable enough to be applied in the poverty alleviation programme in Malaysia. These are the elements that could support the deliverables of poverty alleviation programmes and projects and at the same time contribute to the attainment of overall poverty alleviation objectives in Malaysia. A good project governance for poverty alleviation programme should be a blend of formal and informal elements of project governance as these are the elements that will form a project governance framework thus lead to the efficient project performance and effective project outcomes (Chen & Manley, 2014; Guo et al., 2014).

Nevertheless, it is noted the limitation of this paper where it is purely based on critical review of literature of the research topics. Therefore, further study is needed in order to verify the elements of project governance in poverty alleviation programme in Malaysia and to validate the connection between these two research areas (project governance and poverty alleviation) as well as to the extent of developing project governance framework applicable in the context of various poverty alleviation programmes and projects.

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