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**SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR OLDER PERSONS IN EMERGENCIES:
MALAYSIA PERSPECTIVE**

by

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1.   Malaysia – an Overview

Malaysia is an independent nation with a parliamentary constitutional monarchy and a federal government structure. The country lies in the heart of Southeast Asia and comprises thirteen states and three Federal Territories. The country has a total area of approximately 329,847 sq. km.

Malaysia is a developing country over 32.9 million people living in 15 states. Malaysia is on its way to cross the threshold into high income and developed country status over the coming years. The demographics of Malaysia are represented by the multiple ethnic groups comprise of 69.1% Malays and Bumiputeras (indigenous and native people), 23% Chinese, 6.9% Indians and 1% from other ethnic groups according to the 2018 Census.

Malaysia's population has increased from 29.34 million people in 2012 to 32.6 million in 2018. The total population comprises of about 7.73 million people (24.1%) below the age of 15 years, 22.29 million (69.6%) in the economically-productive age group of 15-64 years and 2.0 million (6.3%) elderly people aged 65 years and above.

In Malaysia, older persons are defined as those who are 60 years and above. The population of Malaysia is still relatively young compared to those in the developed countries, but changes in the age structure resulting from fertility decline and increased longevity are contributing towards the ageing of population. Malaysia will be in the category of aged nations with older persons constituting more than 15% of the population in 2035. It is projected that the number of older person will reach 3.2 million by 2020. According to Department of Statistic Malaysia (2018), average life expectancy is 73.2 years for male and 77.6 for female.

Ageing scenario in Malaysia
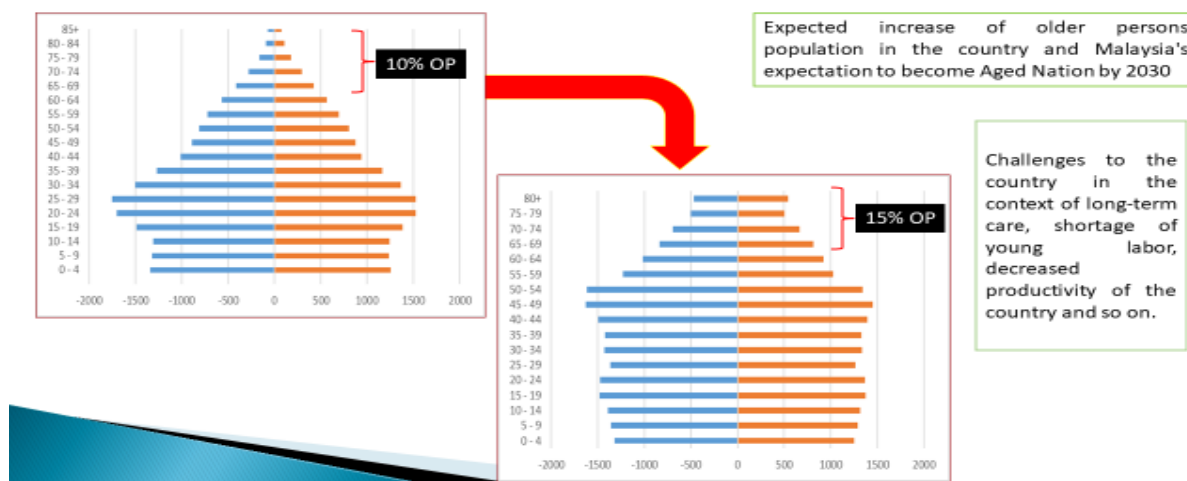
2. Introduction

The most devastating natural disaster experienced in Malaysia is flood. Floods happen nearly every year during the monsoon season. Malaysia has experienced series of floods since 1920s but the 2014 flood was considered to be a "tsunami like" disaster and was the most significant and largest recorded flood in the history of Malaysia hit hard on the state of Kelantan. The 2014 flood affected more than half a million people and the damage to infrastructure alone was estimated at $670 million U.S. dollars (RM2.851 billion). Areas that have never experienced floods before were also inundated and floodwater rose at an unprecedented level. Indeed, floods threaten lives, disrupt social and economic activities and destroy properties, causes distress and recovery can be costly both to individuals and the Government, and deterred new investments in the flood prone area. Besides floods, there are other natural disasters occurring in Malaysia as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1 : Malaysia Disaster Statistics 2015-2018 (as of 30th September 2018)

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Flood	46	95	80	75	296
Landslide	11	4	2	1	18
Earthquake	1	-	-	6	7
Storm	3	3	2	22	30
Fire	1	6	1	8	16
Mudflow	-	-	-	-	1
Toxic gas	-	-	-	1	2
Rabies (Sarawak)	-	-	12 fatalities		12 fatalities

Source : NADMA MALAYSIA.

3. The National Security Council (NSC)

The impact of natural disasters on the older persons is of concern due to the increasing number of older persons in Malaysia. Sharifah Norazizan et al (2018) showed that the older persons were hard hit by the 2014 flood. Based on findings from the FGDs conducted, there was no Standard Operating Procedure on flood relief for the older persons adopted by the NGOs. There is a clear need for SOPs to ensure proper guidelines and procedures in meeting the special needs of the older persons in times of disasters. Against this background, this paper looks into the social support for the older persons in times of disaster and to ensure their needs are met.
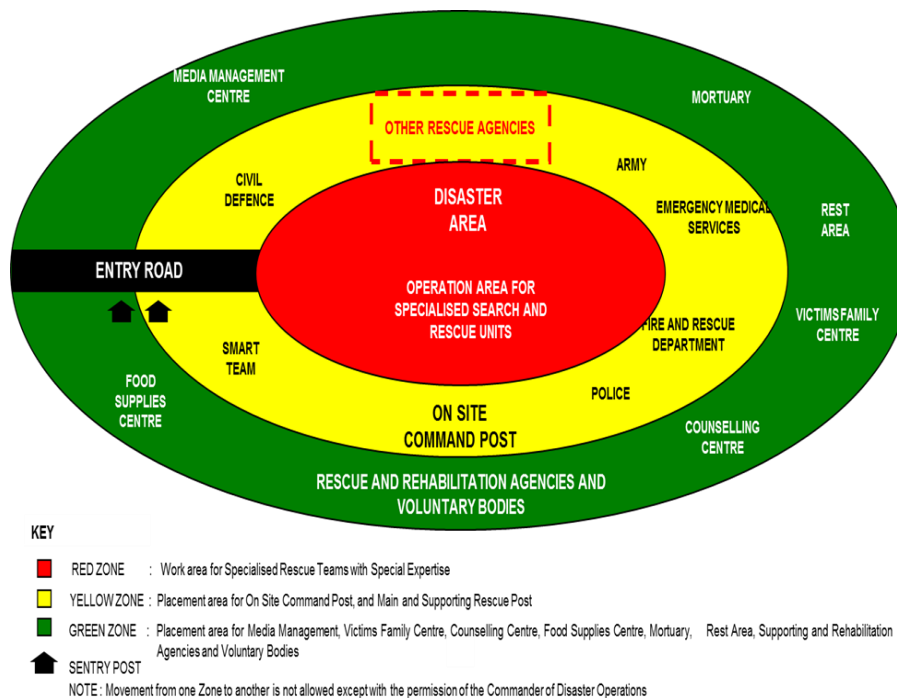
After the 2014 flood episode, the Cabinet considered the memorandum of the Prime Minister dated 26th August 2015 and agreed "the establishment of the National Disaster Management Agency (NADMA) under the Prime Minister's Department taking over the responsibility from the National Security Council." NADMA is dedicated to Disaster Risk Management (DRM) and/or other matters related to DRM. Under Directive No.20, all matters related to disasters are managed by the three-tier committees namely; the Centre for Disaster Management and Relief Committee (CDMRC) (chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister) at federal level, followed by the State Disaster Management and Relief Committee (SDMRC) (chaired by the Secretary of State); and the District Disaster Management and Relief Committee (DDMRC) (chaired by the District Officer) (Chan, 2012).

Under the Malaysia disaster management structure, seven service themes were established including; (1) search and rescue, (2) health and medical services, (3) media, (4) support, (5) security control, (6) welfare, and (7) warnings and alerts. There are 79 agencies have been identified responsible for carrying out activities related to DRM both from a top-down and bottom-up perspective. This long list of agencies contained, among others, 38 federal agencies, 21 state agencies and 17 district agencies and 2 NGOs. These agencies might function on their own, and/or work together with other agencies to execute DRM projects at various levels.

Based on the findings by Noraini Omar et.al (2018), it became obvious that majority of the agencies (63 agencies) are involved in disaster response i.e. in the post-disaster phase in DMC. Activities in the response phase could include welfare (food and water), health and medication, and logistic and communication supports which requires preparation (such as in the preparedness phase). On the other hand, a total of 25 agencies are involved in preparedness (pre-disaster) and response (post-disaster) phases. It is worth to highlight that only NADMA, the Public Works Department (PWD) (at the federal, state and district level) and the Department of Irrigation and Drainage (DID) (also at the federal, state and district level) have involved in all five (5) phases of DMC. However,

measures taken by the PWD, DID, and MERCY were only in DMC, especially for reconstruction phase (on critical infrastructure such as road, retaining walls and public amenities) whereas no particular measures were taken by these agencies to reconstruct individual assets, such as dwellings.

NADMA established with the consolidation of the Disaster Management Division of the National Security Council, Post Flood Recovery Unit of the Prime Minister's Department and the Special Malaysia Disaster Assistance and Rescue Agency (SMART). NADMA is to perform the same disaster management function as those previously performed by the NSC. The discussion in this document will be on disaster management activities. Disaster management has consistently been a focus of Malaysia's development policy.

KEY

■ RED ZONE : Work area for Specialised Rescue Teams with Special Expertise
■ YELLOW ZONE : Placement area for On Site Command Post, and Main and Supporting Rescue Post
■ GREEN ZONE : Placement area for Media Management, Victims Family Centre, Counselling Centre, Food Supplies Centre, Mortuary, Rest Area, Supporting and Rehabilitation Agencies and Voluntary Bodies
▲ SENTRY POST
NOTE : Movement from one Zone to another is not allowed except with the permission of the Commander of Disaster Operations

4. Role and Responsibilities

The Special Malaysia Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team internationally known as SMART, is a disaster relief and rescue task force established under the National Security Council based on the approval of the Cabinet on May 18, 1994. The SMART task force is a United Nations INSARAG certified Heavy USAR (Urban Search and Rescue team) on June 2016. The team draws its members from Malaysian Armed Forces , Royal Malaysian Police and Fire and Rescue Department of Malaysia.

Under National Security Council Directive No.19 and Directive No.20, there are four main functions of SMART outlined by the Malaysian Government:

1. Act to perform search and rescue duties which the task is beyond the capabilities of existing rescue agencies.
2. Conduct search and rescue operations which it requires high expertise and sophisticated equipment.
3. Responsible in the event which is expected to be a major disaster and involving many victims.
4. Act to help in overseas disasters when directed to do so by the Prime Minister.

SMART is equipped with specialized skills and equipment to respond to any search and rescue operation in any major disaster on land which is beyond the capabilities of the existing principal emergency services Search and Rescue teams.

The Malaysian Meteorological Department provides information and warning on weather, sea conditions, seismicity and tsunamis. Special emphasis is given to heavy rainfall, strong wind and high waves, intense haze episodes and drought.

The Malaysia Social Welfare Department in disaster management is responsible for the following:

1. The provision and management of relief/evacuation centers and forward supply base.
2. The provision and distribution of relief assistance, which includes food, clothing and other essential items to the affected victims.
3. The registration of disaster victims for purposes of rehabilitation.
4. The provision of "post-trauma" counseling services to the affected victims.

5. Challenges

Older persons are not only the least prepared for disasters but also they have the highest rate of disaster-related deaths. The number of disasters is on the rise. Older persons are more at risk during all phases of a disaster, from life-threatening challenges during evacuation to negative psychological consequences during the recovery period. The following are the challenges and responses to meet the needs of the older persons in the various phases of any disaster.

5.1 Challenges (Pre-Disaster)

The pre-disaster preparation will include identification of logistics matters, establishing the list of potential food supplier and also to determine the human

resources and training needed. This called for the disaster preparedness meetings. The pre-disaster part of the management is about the design of fulfilling of the safety, physiological and emotional need of the victims.

The activities in the logistics domain would be to identify possible premises to be converted as barrier free relief centres to persons with disabilities (PWD) and older persons, to identify the transportation needed and other support facilities. The premises identified ought to be a structurally sound building at a safe distance from potential disaster areas, and be equipped with basic amenities such as water, electricity and sanitation.

The supply of basic necessities and food is the utmost concern in any relief centres. At this juncture, it is crucial for the agency to enlist possible suppliers who would be able to provide the goods needed when disaster strike. The list should be updated accordingly. The list of other volunteer bodies who is known to be generous in contributions can also established.

Human capital and training is paramount. This include the identification of relief committees, the managers and the volunteers from both the organisations (such as the Red Crescent) and other entities. The work will have to be organized and synchronized. Training and disaster simulation such as the Community-Based Disaster Management (CBDM) must be carried out regularly.

5.2   Challenges (During Disaster)

The Department of Social Welfare commitment in managing the relief centres would be largely to coordinate and mobilize a task force of workers and volunteers to assist the documentation, food and basic necessities distribution and also to cater for the emotional needs of the victim, especially so in this discussion pertaining to the special needs of the older persons.

Some older persons are able bodied and some are frail. Special attention should be given to them to ease the process of registration and distributions of goods and foods at the centres. They should be made to feel comfortable and contented. Special efforts should be taken by both the workers and volunteers to cater to the needs of the older persons should they need special foods, accessibility support or to fulfil their religious needs.

Care for the older persons at the relief centres should be like the care provided in care centres. Body cleansing, medication, food intake and other rituals should be observed. This has to be carefully done since older persons have their own daily routines that they are familiar with and cannot be without. During this emergency, they might need medical and psychological support.

5.3   Challenges (Post Disaster)

The experience of facing disaster can be overwhelming. The older persons might feel hopeless for losing their belongings during the disaster, or feeling helpless in their physical situations. This is where the attention from the psychological support team can come in to provide soothing advice, guidance and other post-trauma counseling services to the older persons.

During the recovery phase, the related agencies such as Public Work Department can play a vital role to utilise their resources and expertise for creating desirable impacts to communities affected by disasters. This can be in the form of financial assistance, to repair affected houses and to rebuild the infrastructure such as roads, schools and public amenities that has been destroyed by the disaster.

6.   Way Forward

It is undeniable that the role of the NGO's and volunteers is more prominent during the response phase as compared to the preparation phase. The response phase demand a lot of energy, both physical and mental, thus a synergistic collaboration of all existing resources is critical. The way forward is to mobilize the community collaboration, together with NGO's and governmental agencies.

On the same note, to cater for the older persons special needs and problems, it is crucial to improve the coordination and strengthening on the existing Standard Operating Procedures within the various agencies. In a way, this will provide the guidelines for mainstreaming the assistance that can be offered to the older persons in disaster situations.

It is also good to consider disseminating information on existing assistance that can be provided by NADMA, prior to any disaster situations. By making the public aware of the facilities that is available, it could help the community to plan and help with the intervention, for example offering to help with the cooking and sanitation at the relief centres.

The management of natural disasters involve four phases: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. These phases must be well coordinated across all relevant agencies. The establishment of National Disaster Management Agency as the focal point is instrumental for appropriate disaster management. While many agencies focus on the response phase, the way forward would be for the agencies to utilise their resources and expertise for creating desirable impacts to communities affected by disasters during the recovery phase. More engagement with local communities is desired.

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