

# **UTHM STUDENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN POST-FLOOD HUMANITARIAN MISSION AT BATU PAHAT, JOHOR: SISPA (SISWA SISWI PERTAHANAN AWAM), MALAYSIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The flood disaster that took place in Batu Pahat (2013) has drawn a significant public attention as the natural disaster affected large areas and required much effort to restore the original conditions. As a main institution of higher education in Batu Pahat, it is the social responsibility of Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) to assist flood victims, especially by providing manpower for the humanitarian mission. One of the voluntary bodies under Malaysia National Disaster Management Agency (NADMA) is SISPA, which is a part of the University's extra-curricular units. This article discusses the positive impact of involving university students in humanitarian mission, specifically related to this flood disaster. The impact is based on two aspects, namely the social aspect and self-development aspect. The social aspect involves the contribution towards the flood victims, and the self-development aspect for the students' soft skills cultivation. The discussion covers three main activities of the mission: general restoration, disaster relief supply distribution and post traumatic psychological support for young flood victims. In general, both flood victims and UTHM students have benefited from the humanitarian mission as discussed in this article. The mission helped to alleviate the flood victims' physical and psychological needs, and facilitated a more efficient restoration process of the affected areas. On the other hand, the students who gave a helping hand via SISPA gained various experience and social skills, grooming them to be more socially responsible adults and be prepared for any voluntary public services whenever required.

**Keywords:** Humanitarian mission, post-flood restoration, extra-curricular activities, university students, soft skills.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The flood disaster that took place in Batu Pahat has drawn a significant public attention as the natural disaster affected large areas and required much effort to restore the original conditions. As a main institution of higher education in Batu Pahat, it is the social responsibility of Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) to assist flood victims, especially by providing manpower for the humanitarian mission (Abdullah & Ng, 2014).

One of the voluntary bodies is Siswa Siswi Pertahanan Awam Malaysia (SISPA), which is part of the University's extra-curricular units. SISPA students can involve in post disaster activities through connection with Malaysia National Disaster Management Agency (NADMA) under Jabatan

Pertahanan Awam Malaysia (JPAM). Therefore, the students are automatically registered as JPAM volunteer members, which allowed them to receive proper uniforms, as shown in Figure 1.1, and training for humanitarian or any other disaster related missions.



Figure 1.1: SISPA volunteer student in proper uniform.

The coordination of the students is actuated from collaboration of the universities with local JPAM office to identify the targeted area for the humanitarian program. The identification process is determined by level of risk and type of situation since the students are limited to a certain level of risk.

### **Problem statement**

The students that involve in humanitarian mission will gain various benefit and positive impact towards their self-improvement. The impact is based on two aspects, namely the social aspect and self-development aspect. The social aspect involves the contribution towards the flood victims, and the self-development aspect for the students' soft skills cultivation. The discussion covers three main activities of the mission: general restoration, disaster relief supply distribution and post traumatic psychological support for young flood victims.

### **Area of study**

Batu Pahat is a part of the western area in Johor, Malaysia. Flood usually occur annually on early of the year especially during rainy season. In the Batu Pahat district, there are six (6) main areas with flood problem; Parit Sulong, Simpang Kiri, Sri Gading, Sri Medan, Ayer Hitam and Chaah, as shown in Figure 1.2. Average flood depth is around 0.5m and the maximum depth occurs in Chaah area is 2m. The annual flood in the affected areas caused great disturbance to the respective residents. The affected areas are mostly filled with debris and damaged infrastructure as shown in Figure 1.3.

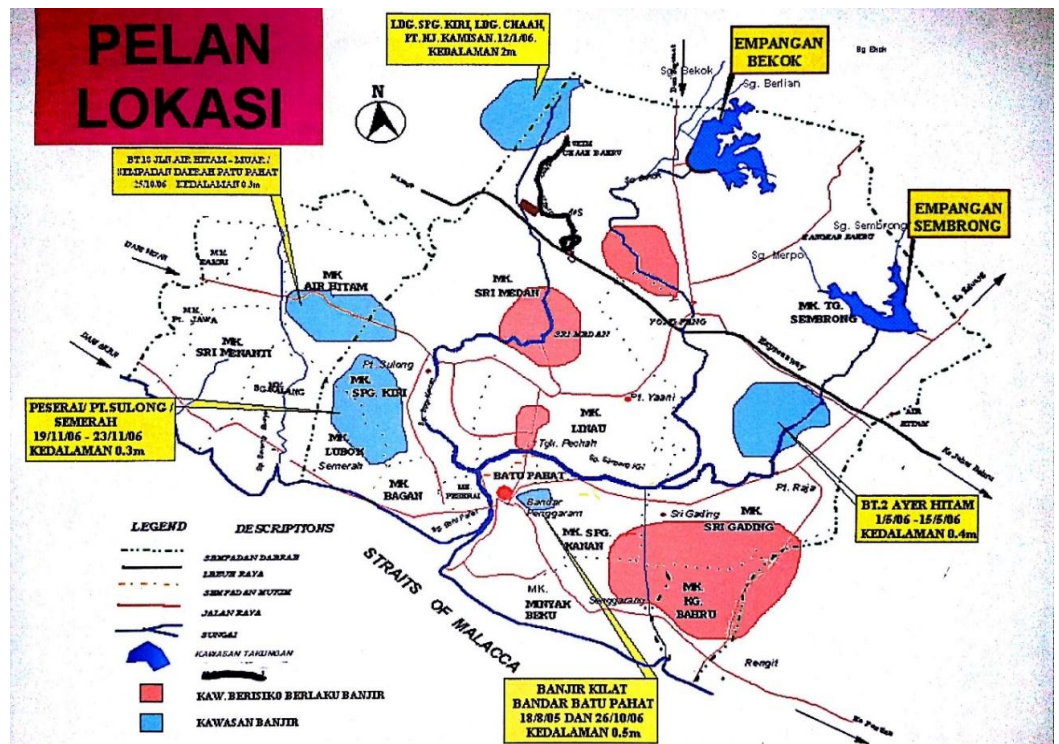


Figure 1.2: Batu Pahat Flood Area (JPS)



(a)

(b)

Figure 1.3: (a) Pile of debris in flood area, (b) Damaged house of the flood victim.

### Phase of humanitarian mission for flood disaster

There are three main phases when disaster occur, which are before disaster, during disaster and post disaster. In these three main phases, there are several activities that can be participated by students especially in low risk activity such as involving logistic and welfare.

Starting with the first phase (before disaster), most of the activities are related to preparing public with disaster education and equipment. There will be a series of training that is also participated by SISPA students to share knowledge related to flood disaster.

Next, in the second phase (during the flood), the main activities are rescue and evacuation mission. This is the most critical and dangerous part for an unprepared volunteer, therefore the rescue mission is done by the trained personnel. However, the SISPA students can involve at the evacuation centre to assist the operation such as logistic and welfare of the disaster victim.

In the final phase (post flood), the victims will return to their home and do the necessary cleaning and repairing of the infrastructure. Support aid including donation start to flow in and sufficient voluntary workforce are required to ensure all the victims are treated appropriately based on their needs. Thus, the role of the SISPA students are important which involve in general restoration work, disaster relief supply distribution and post traumatic psychological support for young flood victims.

#### General restoration work

In general, the restoration work consists of removal of debris and cleaning work in residential building including the surrounding area as shown in Figure 1.4. More workforce is required in rearranging home furniture especially large and fragile furniture. There are also some building repair works such as painting, repairing door and window, and clearing blocked drain.

During the restoration work, students can engage the residents to understand the real situation and their emotion during the disaster. This engagement could lead to better awareness among the students during the program. Better awareness encourages the student's initiative to join more social work in the future.

#### Disaster relief supply distribution work

The distribution work involves three (3) main activities, which are receiving supply from delivering truck, sorting and arranging supply in the collection centre, and distributing supply to the flood victim as shown in Figure 1.5.

Supply chain is started at district rehabilitant centre that are established based on the flood area size and the number of victims. Delivery truck for the supply will arrive at the district rehabilitant centre and require a huge number of volunteers to unload the truck and carry the supply into the centre for inventory checking. The supply items are then sorted based on the condition of victims in each location for further distribution. Then, the supply items are delivered to the collection centre at the specific locations. At the final collection centre, the volunteer students distribute the item to the victim accordingly. The students also supervise the distribution based on the inventory list to ensure an effective distribution.

The involvement of students throughout these distribution procedures makes them to appreciate and learn the value of resources since the students' background are coming from various family financial conditions. In addition, the student's soft skill such as leadership and teamwork are also developed from this activity.



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)



(g)



(h)

Figure 1.4: (a) Debris collection in flood area (b) Cleaning work in residential building

(c) Mud clearing in affected area (d) Mattress and cloth cleaning (e) Student carrying home electrical equipment (f) Furniture arrangement (g) Cleaning surrounding area (h) Student rearranging television



(a)

(b)



(c)

Figure 1.5: (a) Unloading supply truck into district rehabilitant center (b) Supply items sorted and arranged (c) Supply distribution to the receiving victims

### **Post traumatic psychological support**

During a disaster, children are the most affected because of the severe conditions. They are emotionally vulnerable especially when placed in a crowded rehabilitant centre because the place is uncomfortable and lack of physical facility. The psychological support is really needed to reduce the post traumatic effect. Thus, the role of the students is crucial to provide psychological support by accompanying the children to stabilised their emotion through the entertaining methods. This support also helps to reduce the burden of their parents as they are preoccupied with other activities.

Having interaction with the children may trigger a sense of appreciation for both parties to avoid the feeling of being isolated in a critical condition. These activities may remind the volunteer students of their childhood years and make them feeling fortunate for growing up without having gone through any disaster situations.

### **CONCLUSION**

The post flood humanitarian mission with SISPA volunteer students was successfully accomplished and satisfied both parties of volunteer students and the flood victims. The area of the flood was fully recovered and all the families had returned to their home. After three (3) years, it is seen that the program helps the affected areas to recover much faster compared with other areas that did not received aid from external parties.

In general, both flood victims and UTHM students have benefited from the humanitarian mission as discussed in this article. The mission helped to alleviate the flood victims' physical and psychological needs, and facilitated a more efficient restoration process of the affected areas. On the other hand, the students who gave a helping hand via SISPA gained various experience and social skills, grooming them to be more socially responsible adults and be prepared for any voluntary public services whenever required.

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