

# NGOs need proper coordination

**T**HE recent floods in some states are, without doubt, one of the worst natural disasters to have occurred in our country. With the advent of social media, the public had minute-by-minute updates of the situation, supported by images splashed all over the Internet. This created a nationwide sympathy, hence, the rush to send in aid to the flood victims.

I was fortunate to be involved in a post-flood medic relief team at Kampung Limau Kasturi in Gua Musang soon after the floodwaters receded, and what I have seen there requires our reassessment.

When we arrived in the town centre late that afternoon, we passed many four-wheel-drive vehicles proudly displaying their banners and flags. The convoys were seen exchanging notes with each other, probably to identify villages to which they would disperse their donations.

The next day, we journeyed to Kampung Limau Kasturi to set up a mobile clinic at the evacuation

centre in the village. What we saw shocked us. Piles and piles of donated clothes were strewn everywhere, wet and muddy. There were also packs of mineral water exposed to sun and rain. Boxes of instant noodles were stacked near the walls, unused and untouched.

When we ventured deep into the village to set up another mobile clinic and to offer vaccination, the village head showed us another makeshift collection centre for public donation. The scenario was similar — piles of second-hand clothes, boxes of instant noodles and instant coffee as well as bags of hotel amenities kits.

Several women were seen sifting through the piles of clothes looking for something that was not there — blankets to shield them from the cold of the night as most of them were sleeping in makeshift tents.

In the late afternoon, convoys of 4WDs were seen entering the village, with the passengers in sunglasses, snapping pictures of the destruction and of themselves.

The group parked at the village

centre, climbed on top of their vehicles and began shouting to the victims with the intention of distributing the goods. There was no introducing to the village head or the person in charge, or even trying to talk to the victims. They just wanted to complete their mission of distributing the goods in the shortest time possible.

The village head said most of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that entered the village did not communicate with the villagers. They were more interested in taking pictures as evidence that they were at the scene. Some of the goods donated were not suitable in the absence of electricity or cooking utensils.

Also, the piles of clothes, if not sorted out soon, will become a breeding ground for rats, exposing the already deprived villagers to diseases, the most worrying of which is leptospirosis. The plastic mineral water containers, which contain polyethylene terephthalate, is a potential carcinogenic element, especially if exposed to heat for a long time.

We were able to arrange the boxes of mineral water according to the date received and poured the ones received earlier into a closed container for washing and clean-

ing purposes. The villagers also said they were at loss over what to do with some of the donated goods such as instant noodles, small shaving kits, women's sanitary pads and 3-in-1 coffee sachets as they were not what was required at this stage of the post-flood period. Real necessities such as blankets, boots, cleaning products were lacking.

Unlike the volunteers from the Health Ministry and other governmental agencies, it was apparent that there was no coordination among the NGOs.

A governing body or a local council should be the command centre for all the NGOs coming into the flood-hit areas. A standard operating procedure (SOP) should include informing the command centre before arrival, goods intended for distribution, the liaison person for areas or even etiquette when entering villages. This will result in proper planning and coordination of the operation, not to mention reducing the risk of oversupplying unnecessary goods.

It is sad to see that many of the convoys acted more like "disaster tourists" rather than volunteers to ease the suffering of victims. It was disheartening to see them snapping pictures of the victims rather than talking to the victims.

For all the good intentions of the volunteers, it was tarnished by not recognising the flood victims as fellow human beings.

*A governing body or local council should serve as the command centre to coordinate and distribute donated goods for flood victims.*

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