

How Effective are the Current Initiatives in Dealing with Homelessness in Malaysia?

Nor Amalina Mohd Adib¹, Zaliha Hj. Hussin² & Yarina Ahmad³

^{1,2&3}Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam, Selangor
amalinamohdadib@yahoo.com, drzaliha@salam.uitm.edu.my & yarina@salam.uitm.edu.my

Abstract

Homelessness is a social issue that has become a concern in many countries including Malaysia. Homelessness can be regarded as a complex issue that has a connection with other social problems such as drug distribution, human trafficking, prostitution and many others. It is observed in some countries are facing the growing number of the homeless population. The rising number of the homeless population in Malaysia ponders more questions to the problem, as well as to the initiatives undertaken by the relevant agencies in combatting with this issue effectively. The objective of this paper is to identify how effective are the current initiatives in dealing with homelessness in Malaysia; are there more towards short term or either long term or it can be both. This paper reviews relevant literatures pertaining to initiatives in dealing with homelessness in Malaysia through preliminary reports, interviews and observation that have been written by several articles. This paper concludes that the existing initiatives undertaken by relevant parties, including the government, NGOs and individual level are more towards short term efforts. In order to effectively deal with homelessness, Malaysia should have comprehensive policies, laws and implement longer term initiatives such as in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Keywords: *homelessness, initiatives, effective*

HOMELESSNESS IN MALAYSIA

Homelessness in Malaysia is similar to the global trend of homelessness as it is not a new issue as it has already existed for decades, and it is the correspondence with the global trend (Homeless World Cup Organisation, 2016). The homeless population in a certain country does not depend on the level of development. In fact, the percentage of the homeless population indirectly represents whether the government's policy is comprehensive and actions taken are adequately serious and effective.

In Malaysia, the homelessness issue is governed under the Social Welfare Department (*JKM*). However, with regards to this issue, there are numerous agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like PERTIWI Soup Kitchen, Kechara Soup Kitchen (KSK), *Dapur Jalanan*, Need to Feed the Need (NFN), Kaseh4U and others which are providing aid and support in helping the homeless. These agencies act as mediators between the government and homeless.

Homeless people consist of women, men, children or families and they are not only among Malaysians but are also among the immigrants from Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Cambodia and others. (Ghee & Raja Omar, 2015). According to Foong and Ho (2010), there is no accurate figure or number of the homeless population in Malaysia as there are limited empirical in-depth researches undertaken to address this issue. However, there are surveys conducted by NGOs and those conducted by *Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL)*. It was reported that the number of homeless people has increased from 600 in the year 2014 to 2,000 people in the year 2015 (Irsyad, 2016). Meanwhile, a survey conducted by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) stated that there are approximately 1,400 homeless people in the Kuala Lumpur area (Rusenko, 2014). According to a survey conducted by Kechara Soup Kitchen, there were around 1,500 homeless people residing on the streets of Kuala Lumpur as of 2014 (Kong, 2014).

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN ASSISTING THE HOMELESS IN MALAYSIA

Public in Malaysia is concerned with the rising number of homeless people, especially in Kuala Lumpur, and are curious on the initiatives taken by the government authority in dealing with this problem (Foong & Ho, 2010; Food Not Bombs, 2014). This problem has been highlighted frequently by the media, nevertheless, there are several initiatives taken by the government in addressing the homelessness issue in Malaysia.

Ops Qaseh

Ops Qaseh was introduced in July 2014 under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (The Star, 2014). *Ops Qaseh* is large scale operations that assists in the placement of the homeless into shelters and eliminates begging syndicates which are participated by many homeless people (Shagar, 2014). *Ops Qaseh* acts as a channel in placing homeless people at *Desa Bina Diri (DBD)* temporarily. The operation of *Ops Qaseh* has been extensively criticised by people, especially among the NGOs as they misunderstand the motives behind the establishment of *Ops Qaseh*. The true intention of *Ops Qaseh* is to assist the homeless and to help them through the provision of assistance and aids.

Anjung Singgah

Anjung Singgah launched in April 2011 at *Jalan Hang Lekiu*, Kuala Lumpur. Many more *Anjung Singgah* in Johor, Penang and Sarawak. The establishment of *Anjung Singgah* is one of the initial steps that were taken by the government to address the homelessness issue in Malaysia by providing temporary shelters for them. The establishment of *Anjung Singgah* operates under and is in cooperation with the Ministry

of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) and with a non-governmental organisation named National Welfare Foundation (NWF).

This centre provides temporary shelters, employment referrals, welfare assistance, counseling and food. Besides that, there are several facilities that are provided by *Anjung Singgah* such as bathrooms, bunk beds, dining halls, lockers and family rooms for its residents. The homeless are allowed to stay up to a maximum two weeks at this centre.

Pusat Transit Gelandangan Kuala Lumpur

The *Pusat Transit Gelandangan Kuala Lumpur* is the following step in addressing the homelessness issue in Malaysia after the establishment of *Anjung Singgah*. The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) is responsible for operations and management for this centre. This centre was built with an expenditure of approximately RM3 million into a three-storey accommodation in a 1,319 square foot area at *Jalan Pahang Kuala Lumpur*. The establishment of this centre involves three main agencies which are the Malaysian Resources Corporation Bhd (MRCB), Kuala Lumpur City Hall (KLCH) and the Ministry of Federal Territory.

Desa Bina Diri

Desa Bina Diri (DBD) was established to provide care, protection and restoration to beggars as well as destitute. DBD aims to create individuals who are productive and skilled toward a positive attitude which can be integrated back into society. There are five locations of DBD, which include DBD Mersing, Johor, DBD Jerantut, Pahang, DBD Kuching, Sarawak, DBD Kota Kinabalu, Sabah and *Pusat Sehati Bina Diri* Sungai Buloh, Selangor. All DBDs were established by the Department of Social Welfare.

As mentioned earlier, there is a cooperation between *Ops Qaseh* and *Desa Bina Diri*, where the homeless who been saved under *Ops Qaseh* will be placed at DBD at least for six months before they are transferred to respective agencies such as the Department of Social Welfare, National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA) and many others.

These joint actions are intended to have some positive impact in reducing the number of homeless people. However, the issue of homelessness is a complex situation as it depends on the individual homeless, whether to cooperate with the agencies or to remain as homeless.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION INITIATIVES IN ASSISTING THE HOMELESS IN MALAYSIA

In Malaysia, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are very actively involved in providing helps and assistances to the homeless. Besides the government agencies, NGOs are also act as a medium channel between the public and government to voice out their needs, wants, opinions and others. In helping the homeless people, there are many NGOs which exist in Malaysia.

Pertubuhan Tindakan Wanita Islam (PERTIWI) Soup Kitchen

PERTIWI Soup Kitchen is a well recognised non-governmental organisation (NGO) that allocates and provides food aid services such as meals at various locations around Kuala Lumpur namely *Masjid India*, *Chow Kit* and *Kota Raya*. These NGOs provide help to the homeless as well as the poor. Around 550 to 700 packs of food are distributed each night, usually every Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday. PERTIWI Soup Kitchen was established and is managed by the *Pertubuhan Tindakan Wanita Islam (PERTIWI)* (PERTIWI, 2013). This soup kitchen also provides basic medical treatment as well as free haircuts for those who in need.

All those assistance that provided are more towards short term rather than long term. However, it is good to have short term aids in helping homeless people, but till when these soup kitchen want to provide daily supports and aids for homeless people.

Kechara Soup Kitchen (KSK)

Besides PERTIWI Soup Kitchen, Kechara Soup Kitchen is also among the top listed non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Malaysia. Kechara Soup Kitchen (KSK) has their own objective and motto that are focused on which is to provide food for the homeless on the streets and the urban poor through the implementation of their programme, "Hunger Knows No Barriers". Their motto is aligned with their mission, which is to feed anyone regardless of culture, race or religion. Besides providing food to the homeless, these NGOs also provide other services such as medical care, counseling and the provision of clothing, referrals for employment, accommodations and shelters. There are several hotspot areas in distributing food and services conducted by KSK to the homeless which are carried out at *Bukit Bintang*, *Jalan Ipoh*, *Chow Kit*, *Pudu Raya*, *Pudu Market*, *Masjid Jamek*, *Penang*, *Johor Bahru*, *Petaling Jaya*, *Sentul* and others. KSK usually distributes to the homeless from Monday to Friday. KSK is founded by His Eminence Tsem Rinpoche (KECHARA, 2010).

The Kechara soup kitchen highlighted that they want to provide a practical and structured solution in reducing the flow of homeless people who are living on the street as a part of their long term objectives- to open a Nurture Centre.

Dapur Jalanan

Mastura Mohd Rashid is the founder of *Dapur Jalanan (DJ)*. She is a 26 years of age and is a graduate from *Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM)*. *Dapur Jalanan* established *The Nasi Lemak Projek* in 2012. Dapur Jalanan is a volunteer-based soup kitchen service which operates every Sunday at *Jalan Panggong*, Kuala Lumpur. The volunteers of DJ are mostly higher education students from UIAM. Usually, around 200 to 250 packs of food and drinks are prepared to be distributed to the homeless.

By having participation from students as a young generation, it is good exposure for them to do charity work that indirectly can create awareness among them to be more grateful for their current life as compared with homeless people.

Need to Feed the Need (NFN)

Need to Feed the Need (NFN) was established in October 2013. NFN is a community-run initiative that aims to provide a meal to the unfortunate in Kuala Lumpur. NFN is not a registered non-governmental organisation (NGO), they are more towards a non-formal social group which helps the homeless. The NFN team provides packs of food to 450 people every week, usually on Thursday. They also have collaborated with other social groups such as Free Market, *Tamak Pahala* and Street Interview which provide a variety of material items for its street clients. Improving the living conditions of the poor and reducing the number of the homeless on the streets is their ultimate aim. Their concept in treating homeless people is via treating them as street clients. The core members of NFN are Daniaal Rauff, Mimi Liana Shahmi, Maz Mohamed, Naf Ameen, River Foo and Ave Hashim.

In developing a pleasant effort in helping homeless people, it is important to have a good connection and relationship with them. They might think that they are not suited to mingle around or be friend with normal life people. So, what the NFN do to treat homeless people as they street clients is quite good to build a good rapport.

JOM Bekpes!

The JOM Bekpes! programme provide meals early in the morning (breakfast) at around 6.00 a.m. JOM Bekpes! is the first breakfast soup kitchen in Malaysia. This programme has a collaboration effort between Institute Onn Ja'afar (IOJ) and Yayasan Chow Kit (YCK). The volunteers comprise local universities students, staff from IOJ and YCK as well as the general public. The IOJ's vision is to become Malaysia's

leading non-profit organisation by helping the vulnerable and poor. Meanwhile, their mission is to provide the poor and vulnerable with temporary relief from their suffering by providing education, medical, food and material aids. The distribution of free food and drinks are given to the homeless and unfortunate children in Chow Kit. This programme is held twice a month.

By having this programme, it will ensure that homeless people are not starving while waiting until the nights as most of the NGOs are providing meals for dinner. This paper believes that, the respond of this programme by homeless people is overwhelming.

Kaseh4U

Every Tuesday, Kaseh4U will provide and distribute food and drinks to the needy and homeless around Kuala Lumpur. The distributions of meals usually are held at *Medan Tuanku*, Kuala Lumpur. There are around 400 to 450 homeless and needy people who come to receive these aids and provisions. The distribution and allocation are usually held at night around 9.00 p.m. The Kaseh4U project was established in November 2013. The founder and co-founder of this project are a married couple. Normaliza Mahadi is the founder of Kaseh4U alongside her husband as the co-founder.

Fungates Superflow Foundation

Fungates Superflow Foundation (FSF) is a soup kitchen that is open to everyone by giving and providing daily lunches for the homeless and urban poor. This soup kitchen has a unique operating concept which is in a restaurant setting or food shelter. FSF soup kitchen has two locations that are currently in operation at Alor Setar and Jinjang, Kuala Lumpur.

Food Not Bombs, Kuala Lumpur

Food Not Bombs Kuala Lumpur (FNBKL) was founded on April 4, 2001. The committees are among the individuals who actively participate with society by organising and preparing free food. They usually use the term “home free” rather than “homeless”. They distribute free food for homeless along the streets of Kuala Lumpur every weekend.

INDIVIDUAL AIDS IN HELPING HOMELESS PEOPLE IN MALAYSIA

For individual aids or sponsor, they usually attached themselves with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in helping the homeless. As they are not cognizant of how to get attached to the homeless, they commonly search for any NGO that can help them in distributing aid and assistance to them. According to Irsyad (2016), the operations of NGOs are run by corporate support as well as individual sponsor. All those supports usually become one of the main cores of their formation. All the

sponsors can provide many forms of assistance such as in terms of money, packs of meals, medication and others.

ARE THE INITIATIVES IN COMBATting HOMELESSNESS IN MALAYSIA SUFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE?

Based on the initiatives taken by the government authorities and NGOs above, there are several aspects in terms of time, target group, budget, location and social workers/volunteers to be considered. The question is, to what extent is these elements are appropriate and have been successful in the efforts to address the issue of homelessness.

The abundance of supports and assistance provided by various government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), communities, clubs, associations, students and individuals in helping the homeless people in Malaysia are more toward short term initiatives rather than long term measures. In fact, the situation worsens when there are several parties which keep blaming each other in addressing this issue such as between NGOs and government authorities. These initiatives, however, are still lacking in reducing the homeless population and the situation of homelessness are still not addressed appropriately. It is felt that these efforts are still inadequate and will worsen in the future. The initiatives taken by the government, such as the enforcement of *Ops Qaseh*, establishment of *Anjung Singgah* and many others only focus on short term implementation rather than long term. For example, according to the Penang Institute (2015), the establishment of *Anjung Singgah* is not categorised as a long term solution in preventing and combatting homelessness. The Penang Institute (2015) also mentions that the establishment of *Anjung Singgah* lack awareness of the complexities of homelessness or perhaps is lacking in terms of political will in creating changes to ease and restructure the issue as they are more focused towards short term implementation. Even though *Anjung Singgah* has provided holistic support in terms of shelter, counselling and others., but it is merely temporary. In fact, the residents are only given the opportunity to stay for two weeks, after that, they will go back to their normal lives, which is being homeless. On top of that, the homeless in Malaysia does not receive sufficient attention as there are no absolute or clear policies which binds and governs the homeless issue (Alhabshi & Manan, 2012).

In terms of NGOs' aids, they are doing noble acts in giving and providing support for the homeless people, poor and needy. However, their charity works have made the homeless lazier and are not interested in looking for jobs as claimed by the Federal Territories Minister, Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor (Chua, 2014). This is because they can easily obtain food without having to work. On top of that, they usually wait at the usual places to get packs of food and support from various NGOs. It

indirectly encourages more people to be a part of the homeless population. As a result, NGOs are moving more toward short term effectiveness rather than long term which have also resulted in the indirect increase of the homeless population in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

In Malaysia, there are no clear policies which govern the homeless yet as all the initiatives in addressing this issue highlight and are focused toward short term implementation rather than long term. Even though the number of homeless people cannot be eliminated easily until absolute zero, it can however be reduced in terms of number and seriousness. Any forms of assistance or initiatives taken should have other outlooks in terms of the consequences or impacts that will arise in the future. For example, the impacts of urbanisation period in Malaysia. During the urbanisation term, most people tend to migrate from rural to urban areas. According to Dufлот (2012), Kuala Lumpur shows the highest percentage of urbanisation in Malaysia, 100%. Most migrants are in search for better living conditions and access to various health services, potable water supply and better employment in terms of wages and others. There is a significant number of them who have succeeded and failed in obtaining a better life. For those people who have failed, they end on the streets as they do not have any temporary place to stay. In fact, the standard of living in urban areas, especially in Kuala Lumpur is quite high and expensive. It is not surprising if the number of people who live along the streets increase. From this, it can be concluded that urbanisation can bring about benefits in improving the living standards, but may result in long term negative impacts to the country. If there are no proper initiatives that cover short and long term implementations, it will lead to other negative waves, such as the increase in crime, social problems and others.

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