

# PERSPECTIVE

RESEARCHERS AT ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE ANALYSE CURRENT EVENTS

**Singapore** | 13 May 2020

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## **Overcoming the Odds and Filling the Gaps: Malaysian Civil Society Responses to COVID-19**

Serina Rahman\*<sup>1</sup>

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- To counter the spread of COVID-19, the Malaysian government implemented a series of Movement Control Orders (MCOs) which restricted travel and shuttered businesses. This had an unprecedented impact on marginalised communities, including many rural and urban poor.
- About 94.8 percent of households earning less than RM2,000 a month and 71 percent of the self-employed have only enough savings for one month's expenses. In a special survey on COVID-19 impacts, 46.6 percent of the self-employed interviewed by the Malaysian Department of Statistics lost their jobs. Of those who retained their jobs, 94.8 percent suffered a reduction in income, and 35.5 percent reported a 90 percent reduction in income. Promised government aid to the poor either did not reach those in the greatest need or took time to be approved and disbursed.
- Civil society organisations responded swiftly to calls for help when savings dried up and the promised assistance did not materialise. Directives to channel aid and food to the Welfare Department for centralised distribution were ignored and NGOs maintained that they could not stand by as people starved.
- In a snapshot of aid collected and disbursed, three NGO joint initiatives raised a total of RM1,619,846.87 benefiting at least 52,543 individuals or households within the MCO period. This illustrates the ability of NGOs to raise funds and reach those in dire need due to their flexibility and experience with these communities.
- In order to better deal with national crises and pandemics, the Malaysian government needs to work in partnership with NGOs to tap their agility and understanding of myriad impoverished communities and broad networks on the ground.

*\* Serina Rahman is Visiting Fellow at the Malaysia Studies Programme, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.*

## INTRODUCTION

Civil society and non-government organisations (NGOs) in Malaysia have often had to fill the gaps when government institutions come out short. In recent years, their voice, reach, and ability to mobilise funds and people have undeniably become stronger. This can be seen in their role in the 14<sup>th</sup> General Elections and their responses to myriad disasters such as the Kelantan floods of 2014 and the Pasir Gudang pollution events of 2019, to name a few.

In 2020, as the country reeled from an unexpected change in government, the simultaneous arrival of COVID-19 and a global pandemic pushed the country into a state of emergency. As the necessary but unprecedented Movement Control Order (MCO) was announced to contain the virus and prevent widespread infection, a number of NGOs, individuals and civil society groups have responded to help where they can.

## COVID-19 AND MALAYSIA

As the world watched numbers of those infected with COVID-19 in Wuhan in China rise, three Chinese tourists who had arrived in Malaysia by bus from Singapore were found to have the virus on 25 January 2020. Malaysia imposed a ban on visitors from Hubei province two days later, but by 29 January, a total of 7 Chinese visitors were tested positive. The first local to contract the virus was reported on 4 February 2020, said to have been infected in Singapore. But as numbers began to increase, a cluster was traced to a *tabligh* (Islamic missionary) gathering between 27 February and 1 March at a Sri Petaling mosque in Kuala Lumpur. This cluster eventually led to five generations of infections “that involved 40,000 people”.<sup>2</sup>

In response to the surge in numbers, Malaysia closed its borders on 18 March 2020 for the first phase of the Movement Control Order (MCO), meant to last until 31 March 2020. As the numbers of cases increased, however, the MCO was extended (as shown in Figure 1 below), and in some areas where there were spikes in infections, Enhanced Movement Control Orders (EMCO) were enforced, preventing everyone from leaving their homes, and testing on all residents was conducted.

MCO restrictions entailed movement limits to within 10 km from one’s home, with only one member of the household allowed to leave for food, medicine or emergencies. Only one person was allowed in a car at a time, and only businesses that provide essential services were allowed to operate. While larger supermarkets and some restaurants (for take-out and delivery only) were allowed to open, pop-up morning markets and food stalls were ordered shut.

Figure 1 – Timeline of COVID-19 events in Malaysia.

25 Jan 2020	•First COVID-19 infections detected (in tourists from China)
27 Jan 2020	•Ban on visitors from Hubei province
30 Jan / 1 Feb	•Sabah & Sarawak ban all visitors from China •Malaysians and residents who have travelled through China placed on quarantine
4 Feb 2020	•First local infection (Malaysian who attended a meeting in Singapore)
27 Feb - 1 Mar	•Tabligh meeting at Sri Petaling mosque: cluster that lead to 5 generations of infections and EMCO in first 3 areas (Simpang Renggam, Sungai Lui and Menara City One)
17 Mar 2020	•673 cases positive for COVID-19: 32% linked to Sri Petaling cluster
18 Mar 2020	•Malaysia closes all borders • <b>MCO Phase 1</b> - restrictions on travel, work and businesses
27 Mar 2020	•First EMCO in Simpang Renggam, Johor (complete lockdown) •More EMCO areas have since been announced as numbers spike in myriad specific locations
28 Mar 2020	•NGOs advised to send food & aid to Welfare Dept (JKM) for distribution
1 Apr 2020	• <b>MCO extended into Phase 2</b>
2 Apr 2020	•New guidelines on NGO distribution of aid released
15 Apr 2020	• <b>MCO extended into Phase 3</b>
29 Apr 2020	• <b>MCO extended into Phase 4</b> - initially until 12 May 2020
4 May 2020	• <b>Conditional Movement Restriction Order (CMCO) - Phase 5</b> - easing of some restrictions for gradual economic recovery until 9 June 2020

Source: Author's observation of unfolding events

Under the recently announced CMCO period (beginning 4 May), businesses are allowed to open under strict guidelines ensuring social distancing at the office, frequent disinfection of common areas and the expectation that employers would foot the bill should an employee get infected with COVID-19. The CMCO began while the country was still in MCO Phase 4, ending on 12 May 2020 but this has now been declared the beginning of Phase 5, with all previous laws and restrictions declared null and void.<sup>3</sup>

## MCO IMPACTS ON MALAYSIA'S POOREST

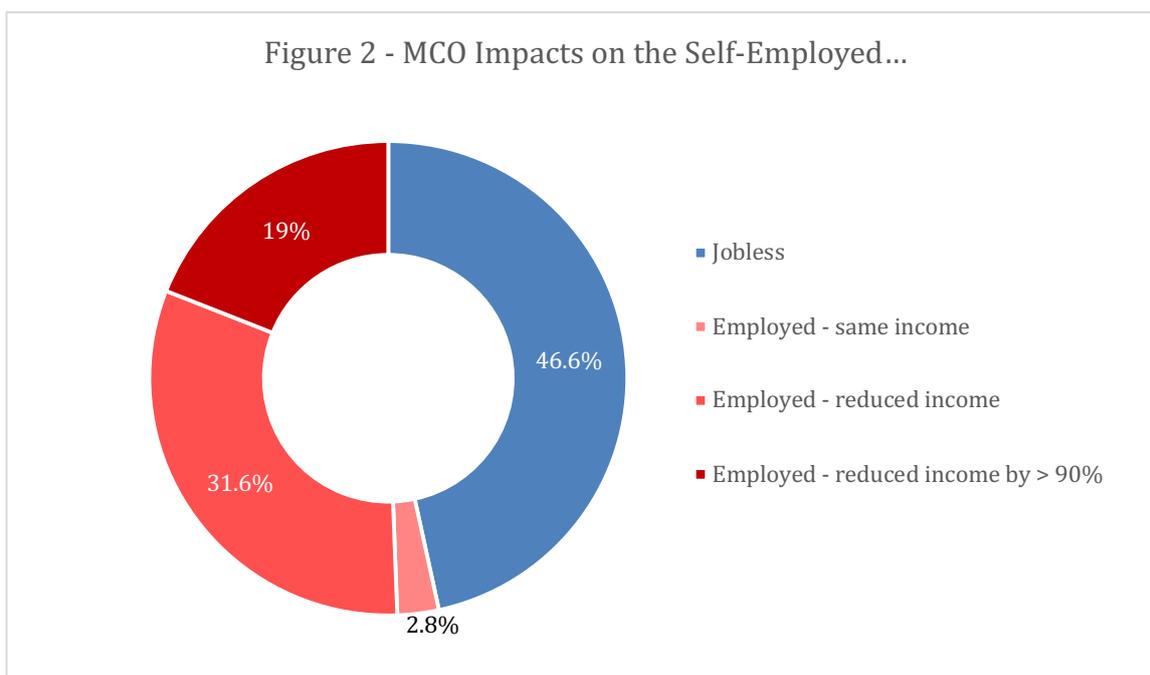
While MCO restrictions were necessary, there seemed little consideration of its impacts on the rural and urban poor, indigenous people, migrants, refugees and other marginalised communities. Announcements of aid to the poor did not translate into swift disbursements on the ground.<sup>4</sup>

Even amongst Malaysian working adults (MWA), the impacts of the MCO were severe. A 2018 study by the Counselling and Credit Management Agency (AKPK, 2018) found that two out of ten MWAs had no savings over the six months prior to the study, with more than 50 percent of those about to retire still servicing house and car loans. Based on 2016 figures,

those with household incomes of less than RM2,000 spent 94.8 percent of that income on consumption items. Residual income post-expenses (before tax and compulsory savings payments) was RM76 per month (Khazanah Research Institute, 2018).

However, three out of ten MWAs (28 percent) still needed to borrow to buy essential goods (AKPK, 2018). Only 5.37 percent of MWAs had enough savings to cover three months' expenses; this was 70 percent of those earning less than RM2,000. With many jobs terminated or enforced no-pay leave, many did not have enough savings to last an extended MCO period. Based on the absolute poverty line of RM2,000 Welsh & Cheng (2020) determined that 8.8 percent of the country (more than 680,000 households or 2.5 million people) live below the poverty line.<sup>5</sup> This includes the hardcore poor who earn less than RM1,000 a month, and for whom the inability to earn a daily wage throughout the MCO period had severe effects on their food and health security.<sup>6</sup>

A special survey conducted by the Malaysian Department of Statistics on COVID-19 impacts indicates that of the 168,182 people surveyed, 82.7 percent of private employees have enough savings for two months' expenses only. As shown in Figure 2 below, of those who remained employed throughout the MCO period, 94.8 percent reported that they had an income reduction. For 35.5 percent, the reduction in income was more than 90 percent (Department of Statistics, 2020).<sup>7</sup>



Adapted from information provided in: Department of Statistics, Malaysia. 2020. Special Survey on the “Effect of COVID-19 on Economy and Individual” (Round 1). Government of Malaysia, Putrajaya. Total survey respondents = 168,182. Self-employed (own-account worker) = 11.7% of all respondents (19,677 individuals). The survey is only representative of those who responded and cannot be extrapolated fully to the wider population. The survey had 89.3% Bumiputera (Malays and East Malaysian indigenous people) responses compared to 7.3% Chinese, 2.7% Indian and 0.6% other races. This may also skew the results if extrapolated to the wider population.

Many reports repeat the fact that the self-employed are the most vulnerable and least resilient to economic shocks. The Department of Statistics (2020) found that 71 percent of the self-employed surveyed only had enough savings to cover one month's expenses.<sup>8</sup>

Informal employment, where employees are not subject to national legislation, suffer low incomes and are not entitled to social protection, makes up 39 percent of overall employment or 5.628 million individuals in Malaysia (World Bank, 2019). As a result of COVID-19, 21.9 percent of agricultural workers, 33 percent of fisheries workers, 35.4 percent of F&B service workers and 11.8 percent of construction workers interviewed lost their jobs; 46.6 percent of the self-employed in the survey were now jobless.<sup>9</sup> Of the self-employed, 50.4 percent are not financially ready for total lockdown (Department of Statistics, 2020). MCO restrictions meant that many who were self-employed lost their source of income, as well as venues to buy cheaper produce when pop-up markets closed and travel for non-essential purposes was banned.

According to Welsh and Cheng (2020), the Malaysian Welfare Department (JKM) reports that more than 479,000 households (about 2 million individuals) receive assistance.<sup>10</sup> However, they estimate that about 8.2 million individuals are currently excluded from official aid. This exclusion is mainly because they are not registered with the agencies who disburse aid (such as the Inland Revenue Board (LHDN) and the Employees Provident Fund (EPF)), lack documents or come from marginalised communities such as the Orang Asli (indigenous people), migrants, stateless and refugees.

The federal government promised several aid packages, especially for the poor.<sup>11</sup> These came in forms that included moratoriums on loan payments<sup>12</sup> and low-cost home rental dues. Adjustments were also made to reduce compulsory EPF payments to 4 percent (from 7 to 11 percent employee contributions) to enable more cash-in-hand for low-income households and permission to withdraw up to RM500 from personal EPF accounts. One-off cash handouts for various groups were also announced. Many states also launched their own aid packages.<sup>13</sup>

However, many in the marginalised communities were unaware of what was available, were not able to or did not know how to access it. This is especially so in rural areas, where information, internet access and smartphones are not as easily available as in urban areas. With a new government in place, on-ground administrators and village heads were not yet appointed, thus local networks were also absent.

Some in-kind food aid that was distributed was reported to be worth far less in monetary value than announced,<sup>14</sup> while others were politicised with photos of politicians' faces and party insignia plastered on them.<sup>15</sup> Opposition politicians and their constituencies were excluded from discussions on the pandemic response<sup>16</sup> and aid distribution.<sup>17</sup>

## **NGO AID OBSTACLES**

NGOs, civil society groups, social workers and myriad individuals swung into action soon after MCO Phase 1 was declared. With aid either taking time to be approved and to reach the people, or was inaccessible, and as people ran out of food and savings, countless appeals for help surfaced.<sup>18</sup> Many of these NGOs had long served the communities that called out for aid, and had an established network of local coordinators who knew who needed help and in what form.

Across the country, NGOs quickly mobilised financial and in-kind aid, as well as cooked food packets for their wards. Most of this aid was sponsored by local businesses, foundations and expatriate communities.<sup>19</sup> Gerai OA and the Centre for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC), for example, tapped on the MyKasih cashless food aid programme,<sup>20</sup> where approved individuals are able to choose from a range of essential food items at partnering retail outlets. This overcame the need for far-flung communities to travel several hours to a bank to withdraw money, and reduced the need for delivery over rough terrain to send them aid. It also empowered the communities in their ability to decide what they needed based on their specific conditions and access to other sources of food.<sup>21</sup>

Others devised innovative ways of ensuring livelihoods while distributing food to others in need such as Yellow House KL, who bought Afghan bread cooked by refugee communities to distribute to the homeless in Kuala Lumpur,<sup>22</sup> and Kelab Alami Mukim Tanjung Kupang who raised funds to buy up fishermen's excess catch for distribution to the urban poor and homes in Johor Bahru.<sup>23</sup>

These efforts were done while abiding by MCO restrictions of travel within 10km, or in collaboration with agencies such as the Malaysian Red Crescent Society or under umbrella organisations such as the Iskandar Malaysia Social Heroes Network and the Makan Kongsi initiative by Bersih 2.0 and ENGAGE.<sup>24</sup>

However, on 28 March 2020, Defence Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob announced that NGOs would no longer be allowed to distribute food and other goods, but should send their aid and goods to the Welfare Department for centralised distribution by the army and RELA (The People's Volunteer Corps). While the intention behind this was to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and protect NGO workers, the directive was quickly admonished by NGOs and politicians such as Anwar Ibrahim.<sup>25</sup> Many were concerned that the order was a repeat of the situation during the 2014 Kelantan floods,<sup>26</sup> when aid sent through JKM was hijacked by political parties or redirected to those who were not on the NGOs' target recipient lists.<sup>27</sup>

It was also clear that JKM did not have all the data and information necessary to reach the hardcore poor. Even though the department said that it would tap on army and RELA personnel, they did not have the flexibility and speed to attend to the many thousands calling for help. They were also hard-pressed to prove to those who provided that aid that it had reached its target recipients. Indeed, those who tried to call into the JKM hotline reported that when they could finally get through to an officer, they waited many days but were still unable to get aid.<sup>28</sup> NGOs refused to abide by the order and declared that they could not stand by and wait for the government to get organised while people starved.

By 2 April, the directive was retracted and NGOs were allowed to continue distributing food and aid subject to health and safety requirements and procedures. Later discussions with JKM officers made it clear that the reason for this was that the department was overwhelmed by requests for help. Not only did they not have the manpower but they also did not have the resources. NGOs were invited to contribute personnel, goods and financial aid to the department to help them meet the requests that had come in.<sup>29</sup> It was clear that the government should have discussed options with the NGOs with a view to work in partnership, so as to tap upon their understanding of impoverished communities.

While the numbers in Figure 3 below do not cover all the aid distributed during the MCO period, it is a snapshot of how much was disbursed by just a few NGO collaboratives in periods within the more than 50 days that restrictions have been in place. The figures also demonstrate the ability of these groups to not only quickly raise funds, but also to reach those in dire need. These amounts do not include payments for salaries as most of those involved in organising and distributing aid were unpaid volunteers. The NGOs involved emphasised that this was merely short-term relief.

Figure 3 – Snapshot of aid disbursed by selected NGO collaboratives

NGO fund or collaborative	NGO partners	Target groups	Total incurred or raised	Details of those reached	Period of fundraising & disbursement
<b>TaC-OA fund</b>	COAC, Raleigh KL and Impian Malaysia	Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia	RM353,730.87	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 6733 households</li> <li>▪ 33,159 individuals</li> <li>▪ In 189 villages</li> </ul>	30 March to 2 May
<b>Iskandar Malaysia Social Hero Foundation</b>	17 Iskandar Malaysia Social Hero Award (IMSHA) winners (NGOs and non-governmental individuals - NGIs)	Poor and needy across Johor Bahru	RM762,740	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2609 families reached with dry provisions</li> <li>▪ 33,568 meals</li> <li>▪ More than RM34,000 in cash handouts</li> </ul>	18 March to 10 April
<b>Makan Kongsi</b>	Bersih 2.0 and ENGAGE	Funds provided to NGOs for aid distribution	RM503,376	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 83 small grants given</li> <li>▪ 45 NGO recipients</li> <li>▪ 16,775 beneficiaries</li> </ul>	16 to 29 April

Information sourced from the following: TaC-OA closing report (<https://www.facebook.com/notes/center-for-orang-asli-concerns-coac/the-tac-oa-fund-has-served-its-objective-thank-you/3065567016820537/>), IMSHA Winners Network Awareness Report: NGOs/NGIs Aid during COVID-19 (18/3/2020 – 10/4/2020). (<https://view.joomag.com/imsha-winners-network-covid-19-aid-report/M0008693001586843868>) and Bersih 2.0 newsletter: Makan Kongsi update (<https://us4.campaign-archive.com/?u=7feb0ec6de7693c300cc6a484&id=48fc96f521>).

## WHAT NEXT?

With MCO restrictions now easing to allow the economy to recover, there is still much to be done by NGOs. Even as the government continues to announce, then retract, initiatives and plans, those who work on the ground continue to strive to narrow inequalities, provide access, amenities and aid to the poor, and work with government bodies and agencies regardless of political bickering at the top.

Some NGO collaboratives now realise the strength and effectiveness of working together to reduce overlaps in aid distribution, share data and information, and pool fund-raising efforts. While some groups refuse to work with local authorities or government agencies, some collaboratives have made it a point to actively engage government agencies and emphasise that they share the same goals of providing assistance to the poor.

Some NGOs or individuals refused to abide by announced health and safety guidelines, jeopardising the work of those who did, and endangering their volunteers and the aid recipients. Many of these are newer groups with little experience and contacts on the ground, and who often randomly entered areas to disburse food to anyone that turned up, rather than specifically deliver to those in the most need.

Many NGOs are now moving away from aid distribution towards ensuring better humanitarian aid response for the long term. Those involved in the TaC-OA Fund for example, have switched gears to ensure that Orang Asli are registered for government aid, and many NGOs under the IMSHA umbrella have also been actively helping their wards register with the relevant government departments.

As the CMCO allowed businesses to open, long queues were observed at pawn shops across the country. While some were catching up with overdue payments, others were trying to find immediate cash relief.<sup>30</sup> With little cash in hand, many amongst the urban and rural poor struggle to restart micro-businesses. It will take time for many to be re-employed or to find work. Several SMEs announced permanent business closures during the MCO. At the same time, rural economies ground to a halt as fishermen and farmers lost access to markets and income from produce sales. Those with land began to grow crops and rear poultry for self-consumption instead of for trade.

As advised by the Director-General of Health, Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah, many businesses are holding back on restarting operations given the strict health and safety requirements needed. With borders closed, businesses in Johor and people who work in Singapore will continue to suffer financially in the short-term. Now with people released from travel restrictions, able to work and refusing to stay home, many more are at risk of infection.

While Malaysia's more than 2 million documented migrant workers may regain jobs when factories and plantations re-open, many undocumented migrants in Kuala Lumpur remain in detention centres. With borders closed, the conditions under which they have been detained may result in another wave of COVID-19 infections. The escalation of xenophobia that grew out of Rohingya refugee reactions to the EMCO around the Selayang wholesale market has not abated – this is an ongoing situation which may endanger other refugees in other parts of the country.<sup>31</sup>

Malaysian civil society has shown that it can mobilise to finance and provide aid to those most in need. Only when the government works with its people for all who live within the borders of the nation can it successfully conquer a pandemic such as COVID-19 and tread the pathway to economic recovery.

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<sup>1</sup> The author is grateful for the inputs and observations from Reita Rahim of Gerai OA and the Iskandar Malaysia Social Heroes Award (IMSHA) winners and coordinators (especially Edey Suresh) for this paper. She is also part of the IMSHA network, with extensive direct experience with poor communities on the ground.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to *Straits Times*, 27 March 2020. “Malaysia detects 5 generations of Covid-19 cases linked to mosque cluster.” <<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-detects-five-generations-of-covid-19-cases-linked-to-mosque-cluster>> (accessed 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020); and *Star Online*, 4 April 2020. “Police identify Covid-19 infection chain involving 40k people.” <<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2020/04/04/police-identify-covid-19-infection-chain-involving-40k-people>> (accessed 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Refer to media statement by Azmin Ali on Facebook: “Media Release - All parties must stand united in combatting COVID-19 and restarting the economy” <<https://www.facebook.com/MohamedAzminAli/posts/3062043253860000>> (accessed 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020) and *The Edge Markets*, 4 May 2020. “MCO4 null and void with commencement of CMCO today – Ismail Sabri.” <<https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/mco4-null-and-void-commencement-cmco-today-%E2%80%94-ismail-sabri>> (accessed 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Author’s observation of conditions amongst rural poor and personal communication with members of other NGOs between 18 and 31 March 2020 (names withheld).

<sup>5</sup> The national poverty rate is calculated as households that fall under the 60 percent household income median (about 3 million households in 2016). However this figure is distorted as a result of the high household incomes figures in Kuala Lumpur (at times twice that of incomes in other states). Between 1995 and 2016, the calculated poverty rate fell but the number of poor households increased as a result of population growth (Khazanah Research Institute, 2018). While the official poverty line is RM920 per household, this is an unrealistic figure in light of actual costs, and the absolute poverty line of RM2000 is often used in economic calculations (Welsh & Cheng, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Also refer to Rahman, S. 1 April 2020. “COVID-19 in Malaysia: Pandemic Impacts on the Poor”. ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute Commentary. <<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/media/commentaries/covid19-in-malaysia-pandemic-impacts-on-the-poor/>>

<sup>7</sup> This survey by the Department of Statistics, Malaysia was conducted online between 23-31 March 2020 and included both quantitative and qualitative questions on respondents' personal opinions on economy, employment and spending patterns. The accompanying report can be found at this link:

[https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cone&menu\\_id=a0dyT2d5UmFMNEZJVTImL0k5cFJNZz09](https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cone&menu_id=a0dyT2d5UmFMNEZJVTImL0k5cFJNZz09)

<sup>8</sup> In 2018, of the 55.2 percent of women in the labour force, 20 percent are self-employed (about 119,000 individuals) compared to 19 percent of men who are in the labour force (World Bank Group. 2019. Breaking Barriers: Toward Better Economic Opportunities for Women in Malaysia. The Malaysia Development Experience Series, Kuala Lumpur).

<sup>9</sup> According to the Department of Statistics, Malaysia, more than 610,000 people are now unemployed, and the unemployment rate at 3.9% (Kanyakumari, D. 8 May 2020. "Malaysia unemployment rate at highest in a decade: Statistics department," *Channel News Asia*.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/malaysia-unemployment-rate-highest-in-decade-covid-19-mco-12715022>

<sup>10</sup> According to Welsh & Cheng, 2020, this does not include in-kind aid, and the focus is on those who fall into the bottom 40 percent (B40) instead of those in real dire need.

<sup>11</sup> Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin's speech on this Prihatin Rakyat Economic Stimulus Package can be found at the Prime Minister's Office website: <https://www.pmo.gov.my/2020/03/speech-text-prihatin-esp/>

<sup>12</sup> This resulted in some subsequent confusion as announcements seemed to retract the offer, requiring accrued interest payment, then subsequently reinstate the moratorium. Refer to: New Straits Times, 1 May 2020. Bank Negara, banks face backlash over alleged moratorium u-turn".

<https://www.nst.com.my/business/2020/05/589031/bank-negara-banks-face-backlash-over-alleged-moratorium-u-turn>

<sup>13</sup> In the second of a series of special surveys to assess COVID-19 impacts (conducted between 10-24<sup>th</sup> April or Phases 2 & 3 of the MCO and released on 6 May 2020), the Department of Statistics reported that of the 41,386 respondents (skewed heavily to Bumpiteras at 90.3%), 96.8% received benefits from the Prihatin Economic Stimulus Package. 68.2% of this figure received 3 types of aid. Of those surveyed, 87.7% of the respondents were satisfied with the economic assistance. This survey was conducted online and publicised widely through social media. As such, it would not reach the hardcore poor or the marginalised communities that may not have been able to receive aid and is hence not necessarily truly representative of all conditions on the ground. More information on this report can be found at the Department of Statistics, Malaysia Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/StatsMalaysia/>

<sup>14</sup> Durie Rainer Fong. 31 March 2020. "MACC to probe claims on Covid-19 food aid as reps explain 'below RM100' packages". *Free Malaysia Today*.

<https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2020/03/31/macc-to-probe-claims-on-covid-19-food-aid-as-rep-explains-below-rm100-packages/>

<sup>15</sup> Bersih 2.0 Press statement. Covid-19 gifts raise questions of accountability and power abuse. 1 April 2020. <https://www.bersih.org/bersih-2-0-press-statement-1-april-2020-covid-19-gifts-raise-questions-of-accountability-and-power-abuse/> (accessed 5 Apr 2020).

<sup>16</sup> The Malaysian Insight. 17 March 2020. "Opposition state governments not invited to Covid-19 meeting, says Pakatan". <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/229393> (accessed 30 Mar 2020).

<sup>17</sup> Alyaa Alhadjri. 20 April 2020. "MP says 750 Covid-19 food aid for Cheras poor undistributed after two weeks," *Malaysiakini*.

<https://m.malaysiakini.com/news/521712?fbclid=IwAR1TADKbhrkiur9C6ar9zxGssx-ioKU45dYOr4YLHd2A9B8CnejHcP7314> (accessed 29 Apr 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Many NGO volunteers and social workers reported stories of desperation, with mothers feeding babies diluted condensed milk, break-ins to steal food (but not high value items), shoplifting of

basic food items, people foraging along city roadsides for edible plants, and countless poor trying to sell of personal items and even motorbikes to be able to buy food for their children. Sources: myriad media articles and discussions with NGO representatives under the IMSHA platform between 18 March to 5 May 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Author's observation of NGO fundraising and personal communication with members of other NGOs between 18 March and 5 May 2020 (names withheld).

<sup>20</sup> Refer to the MyKasih Food Aid Programme: <http://www.mykasih.com.my/site/food-aid-programme/>

<sup>21</sup> Rural and marginalised communities are often deprived the luxury of choice and are forced to accept what a donor wants to distribute (at times not useful, irrelevant, inedible or unpalatable). Refer to Gerai OA (<https://www.facebook.com/geraioa>) and Centre for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC) (<https://www.facebook.com/centerfororangasliconcerns>) on Facebook

<sup>22</sup> Star Online, 1 April 2020. "NGOs unhappy over new rules for aid distribution."

<<https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2020/04/01/ngos-unhappy-over-new-rules-for-food-aid-distribution>> (accessed 5 Apr 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Kelab Alami's Big Fish Bailout initiative:

[https://kelabalami.weebly.com/store/p36/Sponsor\\_Fish\\_to\\_Feed\\_the\\_Needy.html](https://kelabalami.weebly.com/store/p36/Sponsor_Fish_to_Feed_the_Needy.html)

<sup>24</sup> Refer to IMSHA on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/socialheroawards> and the following report: IMSHA Winners Network Awareness Report: NGOs/NGIs Aid during COVID-19 (18/3/2020 – 10/4/2020). Social Hero Foundation (SHF) & Iskandar Malaysia Social Hero Awards (IMSHA). <<https://view.joomag.com/imsha-winners-network-covid-19-aid-report/M0008693001586843868>> and Bersih 2.0 newsletter: Makan Kongsi update <<https://us4.campaign-archive.com/?u=7feb0ec6de7693c300cc6a484&id=48fc96f521>>.

<sup>25</sup> Malay Mail, 30 Mar 2020. "Anwar: Review blanket ban on NGOs delivering aid, Welfare Dept can't do it alone." <<https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/03/30/anwar-review-blanket-ban-on-ngos-delivering-aid-welfare-dept-cant-do-it-alo/1851740>> (accessed 5 Apr 2020).

<sup>26</sup> Refer to: "CPPS Policy Fact Sheet: Malaysia's Flood Management." Centre of Public Policy Studies. <<http://cpps.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Malaysias-Flood-Management-Mechanism-Factsheet.pdf>> (accessed 20 Apr 2020).

<sup>27</sup> Personal communication, several NGO workers (names withheld) in discussions about the new ruling: 28 March to 5 April 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Star Online, 5 May 2020. "People make beeline for pawnshops."

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2020/05/05/people-make-beeline-for-pawnshops>

<sup>31</sup> This anger overshadows the contributions of many refugees to others in their own and other communities. Refer to: Alexandra Radu. 7 April 2020. "In pictures: Refugees giving back to coronavirus-hit Malaysia," Al-Jazeera. <<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/pictures-refugees-giving-coronavirus-hit-malaysia-200406111016378.html>> (accessed 1 May 2020).

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