

# TRANSFORMING MOSQUE AS A DISASTER RELIEF CENTRE IN MALAYSIA ENVIRONMENT

\*Noor Azmi Mohd Zainol  
Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia  
Tel: +60192107172 Email: [noorazmi@upnm.edu.my](mailto:noorazmi@upnm.edu.my)

Khairul Nizam Taib  
Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia  
Tel: +60196273595 Email: [khairulnizam.taib@upnm.edu.my](mailto:khairulnizam.taib@upnm.edu.my)

Nadhirah Nordin  
Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia  
Tel: +60124836487 Email: [nadhirahnordin91@yahoo.com](mailto:nadhirahnordin91@yahoo.com)

Zahimi Zainol Abidin  
Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia  
Tel: +6016593525 Email: [zahimi@upnm.edu.my](mailto:zahimi@upnm.edu.my)

Rogis Baker  
Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia  
Tel: +60138117653 Email: [rogis@upnm.edu.my](mailto:rogis@upnm.edu.my)

Jessica Ong Hai Liaw  
Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia  
Tel: +60123976778 Email: [jessica@upnm.edu.my](mailto:jessica@upnm.edu.my)

## Abstract

The role and function of mosque as a disaster relief centre in managing disasters is a bit unfamiliar among Malaysians due to the society's perception that its sole function as a centre of worship. Most of disaster relief operations or humanitarian assistances were focused on other public facilities such as community councils, community centre, schools and etc. This perspective is somehow differs from the situation in other countries where the mosques are regards as a coordination centres of assistance during a disaster or emergency. The conformity role of mosques as a disaster management centre in a community is influenced by several factors such as coordination centre for disaster governance, adequate logistics support, compliance with Islamic practice, effective communicator, and psychological needs for disaster victims. However, such role or function has been given less attention by researchers, especially in Malaysia. Therefore, this study aims to propose a comprehensive guide in utilising the mosque as a community centre for disaster management in Malaysia. This exploratory study is conducted qualitatively by combining interviews, focus group discussions, observation and document analysis.

**Keywords:** mosque, community, disaster management, aid coordination centre

## Literature Review

Findings from previous studies show that a mosque is the best place for the recovery of disaster relief since the mosque is the closest place to the public (Binyamin, Bakhtiar, Mustafa & Abdul Rahman, 2011; Cheema et al., 2014). Cheema (2012) and Cheema et al. (2014) conducted a study on the functions of the mosque as a centre of response, relief and recovery during the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005. The study was conducted in three villages in the district of Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtukhwa Region, involving 92 respondents from all layers of the community such as Muslim and Christian religious leaders, women movement, academicians, government aid agencies, non-governmental organisations and the media. Cheema (2012) and Cheema et al. (2014) found out that the role and function of the mosque as a disaster management centre was influenced by several factors, namely coordination centre for disaster governance, logistics support, compliance with Islamic practice, information centre and psychological needs for disaster victims.

Findings from research by the Islamic Relief Indonesia (IRI) - United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and Climate Change and Disaster Management Institution of Nahdlatul Ulama (LPBI NU) – IRI UNOCHA LPBI NU (2011) in six provinces in Indonesia show that a mosque is a strategic location to serve as a community centre during disaster. The mosque has the capability to operate with existing facilities such as shelter, washrooms, storage of goods, and communication equipment. Binyamin et al. (2011) in their study also found out that the mosque has the most strategic location to be considered as a coordination centre during disaster. This argument is based on the finding that the mosque is capable of providing information and networking effectiveness to the community. The argument furthers that the mosque is also appropriate for coordinating community activities before, during and after disasters.

Study by Humaedi and Sakhiyya (2011) revealed that the mosque is a place that serves not only as a centre of worshipping, but as a public space for humanity activities. The mosque is a special place to enforce relationship between human and God Almighty (*hablumminallah*) and between mankind (*hablumminannas*). They suggested several key roles and functions of the mosque in disaster situation, which include providing accommodations and facilities, storage and distribution of logistics, rescue coordination centre, the management and the implementation of cooperation activities centre, and psychosocial therapy centre. Humaedi (2015) furthers that in his study at six locations in Indonesia involving 200 respondents (including 80 people through a series of eight focus group discussions) found out some important findings. Their study focused on the role of mosque in addressing the disaster with the religious and cultural diversity among the local communities. Findings of the study found out that in a disaster situation, there is an addition to the role of mosque from a place of worshipping alone to a community centre that provides aid regardless of religious belief, culture differences and societal diversity. As such collision occurs which includes harmonious tolerances between members of effected society, it will somehow indirectly unite the local communities and implement social responsibility amongst themselves.

Winy and Rika (2015) on the other hands relates the selection of the mosque as shelters and logistics distribution in disaster management. They found out that the mosque is the most suitable place to be considered as the main centre in disaster management. The study of 50

should have a strategic plan to prepare for disasters, including the preparation in the pre-disaster stage, adaptive mosque design during the emergency response and the role of mosques during the post-disaster phase. In the phase of pre-disaster, Mosque administrators can organise program or training that related to disaster for nearby communities and data collection of communities living near mosques. While during the disaster response phase, mosques need to be structured according to the suitability of the disaster situation to facilitate the process of information being channeled, easy access to logistics, volunteers, medical services, food and trauma healing. Furthermore, after a disaster, the mosque is prepared as a location for trauma recovery, the implementation of empowerment programmes for the community economy, and the expansion of the mosque's disaster-response capabilities (Gunardi & Barliana, 2021). The mosque strategic plan as a disaster rescue centre is extremely beneficial in minimizing the risk of disasters.

Gunardi and Barliana (2021) argument has been fulfilled by Azhari et al. (2019), in a study on the use of mosques in tsunami disaster prevention in the Padang, Indonesia which highlighted the importance of religious institutions in influencing the Islamic community in Indonesia. The findings of the study offers that, there were 104 mosques identified in the tsunami prone area that were possible and safe for temporary evacuation, representing for 44.4% of the total mosques located in the zone which is 243 units of mosque. Water and sanitation, adequate area, safety, easy accessibility, resistant buildings or construction, and electricity are among the seven characteristics that have been highlighted as having the potential to be a temporary shelter for victims of the earthquake and tsunami crisis in Kota Padang, Indonesia (Hadi & Hadiguna, 2015). The majority of the population of Padang, Indonesia is a Muslim community. Apart from serving as a center for religious and social activities of the Muslim community in West Sumatera. Mosques are also an important place in disaster mitigation activities such as preparedness, early warning and as a place of evacuation.

Accumulated studies and observations are evidences in relation to various functions and roles of the mosque. The findings of these studies found some key elements such as coordination centre for disaster governance, adequate logistics support, compliance with Islamic practice, effective communicator and information, and psychological needs for disaster victims. This is parallel with the roles and functions of the mosque at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and companions tenure where the mosques serve as welfare centres and social activities, the lodge, and the headquarters of the military and hospital (Abdul Munir, 2012; Aminuddin, 2008; Spahic, 2014; Uddin & Rehman, 2014). By expanding the functions of the mosque from more than just a place of worship to a community development centre, it thus includes learning, social assistance and referral centres for national agencies and to establish a link with religious bodies and the local community (Hayder et al., 2018). This will empower the mosque as the epicentre of the community and a recognisable institution, whether for Muslims and non-Muslim communities.

Hanf, Hjern and Porter in 1978 have developed a bottom-up theory in which it emphasises on the involvement of local, regional and central planning, financing, and implementation of government programs and non-government. Quarantelli (1991) suggested that policy makers should seek the views of the executive and the community to analyse and make plans for disaster relief in the future in line with the philosophy of designing for the people, not for the government. Most governments are unable to cognizance the people views

Districts, Penang; and Hulu Perak District, Perak); petroleum processing plants and gas pipelines Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan); industrial chemicals (Petaling Jaya and Shah Alam, Selangor; and Bayan Baru, Southwest District, Penang).

The respondents representing the agency comprises of various levels of positions namely at the strategic, operational and tactical levels such as National Security Council (Majlis Keselamatan Negara (MKN)), Royal Malaysia Police (Polis Diraja Malaysia (PDRM)), Fire and Rescue Department (Jabatan Bomba dan Penyelamat Malaysia (JBPM)), Malaysia Civil Defence Force (Angkatan Pertahanan Awam Malaysia (APM)), Malaysia Volunteer Department (Jabatan Sukarelawan Malaysia (RELA)), Malaysian Armed Forces (Angkatan Tentera Malaysia (ATM)), Health Department (Jabatan Kesihatan), Department of Social Welfare (Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM)), District Office (Pejabat Daerah), and Department of National Unity and Integration (Jabatan Perpaduan Negara dan Integrasi Nasional (JPNIN)). They are experienced and directly involved in several disaster incidents which occurred in their respective localities. As for the focus group discussions, it focused on their respective areas of assignment, especially in terms of contributions, strengths and weaknesses of the role of mosque as a community centre in related incidents.

In addition, observation methods were also being used to identify awareness of mitigation activities and disaster preparation and readiness among the community at the study site. This method allows observations to be made on the effects of events in addition to gather information related to the attitudes and behaviors of study subjects (Chua, 2020; Creswell, 2012). In addition, this method has also been adapted from the experiences of several researchers working in the security forces whose directly involved in various operations related to disaster incidents. The experiences from these observations were used to describe the effects of disaster events that occurred as well as to gather information related to the attitudes and behaviors of the community in the area of disaster relief and preparation. In this study, the researchers had maximised the experiences involved in flood management in the state of Kelantan in November and December 2013 and 2014/2015 covered three areas of responsibility, namely the districts of Jeli, Tanah Merah and Gua Musang; as well as experience in the flood management in the state of Sarawak in 2007 and 2008 covering the Sri Aman Division, Lubok Antu, Betong and Saratok Districts. The systematic observation also conducted by researchers during massive flood in December 2021/January 2022 in Shah Alam Selangor and Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan. This method allows the researchers to observe a catastrophic event and to gather information on the attitudes and behaviours of disaster victims (Creswell, 2012; Najib et al., 2010; Othman, 2015).

## **Findings and Discussion**

Results of document review, observation, participant observation, interviews and focus group discussions had identified some important findings. The researchers concluded that the mosque institution is capable of functioned not only as a place of worshipping. In a disaster situation, the mosque could function as a coordination centre for disaster governance, adequate logistics support, compliance with Islamic practice, effective communicator and information, and psychological needs for disaster victims.

requires the victims to accept of any kind happens with the utmost appeasement. Early exposure on the subject of psychology at the primary school level in terms of knowledge should be given to all community members to learn the ways to protect themselves in the event of disasters as elaborated by studies by Hashim (2008), Gibson (2006), Asif et al., (2016) and Utaberta and Md Esa (2016).

The findings discussed above highlight and support the role of the mosque in disaster management. Some elements such as mosque as a disaster coordination centre, logistics management, compliance with sharia, and the effectiveness of communication and psychosocial show that a mosque is able to play a function not solely as a place of worship. Elements described will further highlight the functions of the mosque when applied in the context of the community in Malaysia. Consideration for these elements would make the functions of the mosque greater than the understood context of mosque by most communities in the country. Likewise, the bottom-up theory will provide a decision-making mechanism, starting with the community themselves to the local authorities, and decision-makers by response agencies to policy makers at the highest levels.

In addition, during the devastating floods at Klang Valley, Malaysia in December 2021, the importance of mosque as a community centre became clearer. The unexpected incident occurred in areas where floods are infrequent. The situation worsened as the water level increased to dangerously high levels in a short period of time. It was found that some victims had to get out of the house immediately and there are some victims were trapped on the road. At this time, it can be seen several mosques have been opened to serve as temporary evacuation centres for flood victims, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Although there is a school nearby that is used as a temporary evacuation center (PPS), but it does not have the capacity to accommodate many flood victims. Apart from that, the mosque was also used as a center for collecting relief supplies from various sources before distributing to flood victims.

## **Conclusion**

The role of mosque will continue to be the center of knowledge and assistance, spiritually, culturally and physically for all kinds of societies. Mosque as a disaster management centre has been affected by several factors such as: coordination centre for disaster governance, adequate logistics support, compliances with Islamic practice, effective communicator and psychological needs for disaster victims. This is reliable with the role of the mosque at the tenure of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and the companions where the mosques function as centres of social activities such as welfare centres and social activities, the lodge, the headquarters of the military, and hospital. The mosque is able to serve as a community centre in disaster management if a detailed inventory planning is set. Elements such as coordination centre for disaster governance, adequate logistics support, Islamic practice compliance, effective communicator and psychological needs for disaster victims should be highlighted in the mosque planning, especially if the location of the mosque is in the area that is exposed to the disaster. The communities understanding in disaster management have to be given attention and enhanced in the early stages of schooling with the cooperation of the mosque management and plans of disaster preparedness activities.

- Cheema, A. R. (2012). Exploring the role of mosque in dealing with disasters: A case study of the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan. Tesis PhD. New Zealand: Massey University.
- Cheema, A. R, Scheyvens, R, Glavovic, B & Imran, M. (2014). Unnoticed but important: revealing the hidden contribution of community-based religious institution of the mosque in disasters. *Natural Hazards*, 71: 2207–2229.
- Creswell, J.W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conduct, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Chua, Y. P. (2020). *Mastering Research Method*. Kuala Lumpur: McGraw Hill.
- Gibson, M. (2006). *Order from chaos: Responding to traumatic event*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Gunardi, Y., & Barliana, M. S. (2021). Disaster Response Mosque: A Mosque as a Center for The Rescue of The Ummah. *Journal of Development and Integrated Engineering*, 1(1), 37-46.
- Hashim, F.Y. (2008). *Mosque dan Fungsi Komunikasi*. In M. Mohd Ismail & A.J. Kamarul, ed. *Fungsi dan Peranan Mosque dalam Masyarakat Hadhari*: 47-60. Skudai: Penerbit Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.
- Hayder, J.S.H., Mohammad, Y.M.R. & Utaberta, N. (2018). Transforming Mosques into a Containment Space during Natural Disasters; Browsing Through Recent Publications. *International Journal of Engineering & Technology*, 7 (3): 87-89.
- Hofmann, C. A. L., Roberts, J., Shoham, P. & Harvey, T. (2004). *Measuring the Impact of Humanitarian Aid. A Review of Current Practice*. HPG Research Report 17. ODI, London.
- Howlett, M., Ramesh, M., & Perl, A. (2003). *Studying Public Policy: Policy Cycles and Policy Subsystems* (3rd edition). Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Humaedi, M.A. & Sakhiyya, Z. (2011). *Studi Awal Potensi Peran Mosque dalam Situasi Bencana di Indonesia*. Jakarta: Islamic Relief Indonesia (IRI).
- Humaedi, M.A. (2015). *Penanganan Bencana Berbasis Perspektif Hubungan Antar Agama dan Kearifan Lokal*. *Analisa Journal of Social Science and Religion*, 22(2): 211-225.
- Hadi, W.Z., & Hadiguna, R.A, (2015). Model Kebijakan Penetapan Institusi Mosque Sebagai Shelter dalam Sistem Logistik Bencana di Kota Padang. *Jurnal Optimasi Sistem Industri*, 14(1), 16-30.

- Tierney, K.J., Lindell, M.K., & Perry, R.W. (2011). Facing the unexpected: Disaster preparedness and response in the United States. Washington, DC; Joseph Henry Press.
- Tucker, M.L., Powell, K.S., & Meyer, G.D. (1995). Qualitative research in business communication: A review and analysis. *Journal of Business Communication*, 34(4): 383-399.
- Uddin, U. & Rehman, B. (2014). Role of Mosque in Society: Issues and Challenges. Proceeding of the International Conference on Mosque, Zakat and Waqf (IMAF 2014). 1-2 December 2014, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA.
- Utaberta, N. & Md Esa, I. R. (2016). The role of the mosque in disaster management: Qualitative data specifically by informants based on their experiences. *Research Journal of Fisheries and HydroBiology*, 11(3): 158-164.
- Winny, H.Z., & Rika, H.A. 2015. *Model Kebijakan Penetapan Institusi Mosque sebagai Shelter dalam Sistem Logistik Bencana di Kota Padang*. *Jurnal Optimasi Sistem Industri*, 14(1): 16-32.
- Watanabe, N. (2017). what happened then? The Kumamoto earthquake and foreign survivors. *Disaster Recover Revital Rev*, 8, 16-23.